

M.A. RESEARCH PROJECT

The Role And Challenges Of Kenyan Trade Unions In The Context Of Macro-Economic Reforms. ^h

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ABSTRACT

This research project was conducted with the understanding that the Trade Union movement in developing countries particularly in Africa is weak. There was therefore need to re-evaluate the role and challenges of the movement if there was to be improvement of vulnerable workers in the social process of production. The movement is viewed to be particularly susceptible to social, economic and political trends at the worldwide level, and more particularly, in developing countries. Initially as per their origin and formation, Trade Unions started as democratic and free organizations. They started as institutions for workers through which members articulated their needs. This was to jointly face the interests of capital as represented by strong employers who own the means of production. The Trade Union movement also ensured social political stability not only by facilitating social production but as a stakeholder in the industrial relations system.

The Trade Union movement was introduced in Africa by the Western capitalist nations as a way of ensuring a constant supply of labour for the European plantation Agriculture and other business ventures. With time, the movement became an important agent for social change in Africa and particularly in Kenya. During the struggle for political independence, the Trade Union movement provided a stepping-stone for leaders of workers, as they defended their rights. After independence, the same leaders and officials acquired political power and became political leaders. They therefore found themselves in a compromised position in handling workers' demands. This led to erosion of the quality of leadership in the Trade Union movement. In the years that followed political independence period the Trade Union movement is viewed to have declined until the introduction of multiparty democracy. This was a period when the developing world had to deal totalitarian leadership not only in Africa but in other developing countries. The Global trends of the 1990s transformed the world into a global village resulting to reduced formal employment and a rapid growth of an unstable informal sector.

Arising from the economic crises of the 1980's in developing countries and particularly in Africa, many states solicited financial assistance from International Lending and Financial Institutions, like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (IBRD -International Bank for Reconstruction and Development). These were capitalist institutions created by Western Nations for purposes of financing and furthering the interests of capital. Leaders of the Third World countries particularly Kenya found themselves at the crossroads of an escalating economic stagnation, and with a deficit in the balance of payments. This was resultant from diminishing investments from the capitalist Nations who had diverted their financial interests to the countries of Eastern Europe after the collapse of the Berlin wall in the mid 1980s. The study was therefore to analyze and evaluate the role and challenges of the Trade Union movement in Kenya in the context of macro-economic reforms.

Chapter One deals with identification of the purpose and the gap to be filled by the study. This is realized by the formulation of the research questions and objectives of the study. Efforts have been made to study and analyze the origin and

development of the Trade Union movement and the introduction and adoption of the structural adjustment programmes in Africa. In the chapter the Statement Of The Problem, The Objectives Of The Study, and the Justification/Rationale Of The Study are enumerated. In the chapter also the Scope and Limitation of the research study are analyzed.

Chapter Two reviews the ideals of the Trade Union movement. Existing studies on Trade Unionism are reviewed both in pre-colonial and post colonial Africa. Important selected themes are identified and discussed acknowledging the fact that Trade Unionism is not a personal but a social community action. Two theories; The Social Movement Theory and Resource Mobilization Theory have been related to the Trade Union movement and the study themes. A theoretical framework is derived in relation to the three hypothesis of the study. In Chapter Three, the research design of the project study is discussed. An Interview Guide and Checklist for Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) was used. The unstructured interviews and qualitative research was conducted at Nairobi, the capital city of Kenya. The key informant interviews were conducted on the General Secretaries of thirteen purposively selected Trade Unions which had their head offices in Nairobi. The focus group discussions were conducted in five groups of 10-15 purposively selected Trade Union members. The sample comprised 13 Trade Unions out of a population of 32 Trade Unions in Kenya.

The sample of population was purposively selected inline with the study's focus on policy and Trade Union nature of the institutions management issues that required to be analyzed. The information was collected, summarized and analyzed and thereafter interpreted for presentation of the results.

Chapter Four enumerates the Four major findings. The relationship of the Trade Unions to the Government is crucial to the success of the Trade Union movement. Social political and economic trends are significant in determining the growth, effectiveness and efficiency of the Trade Union movement. The Trade Union movement has had its period of glory. During the structural adjustment period the study reveals a significant decline in the strength of the Trade Union movement. This was happening at a time when there was need to deal with the challenges of globalization. Chapter five deals with the summary and recommendations of the study. The Trade Union movement is an important institution for the defending and articulating the rights of workers as well as a significant stakeholder in the industrial relations system.

The need for the Trade Union movement to play a central role in the social relations of production cannot be overemphasized. The need for review of labour legislation, strengthening of the union leadership, and financial management of the organizations is paramount to ensure that the Trade Union movement reverts to the original ideals for which it developed. This is a pre-condition for the workers movement to effectively face the challenges of the 21st century.