

Gender Politics and Trade Union Representation in Ghana

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Abstract The efforts of the Ghana Trades Union Congress (GTUC), the main labour movement in Ghana, to address union gender democracy for the past three decades have been criticised for focusing on reform to the detriment of structural transformation to deal with patriarchal union structures. The success of union gender democracy strategies depends on the presence of critical a core of women with sufficient consciousness to take advantage of the space generated. This paper examines the link between women trade union leaders' consciousness and the potential of their demands and visions for transforming union structures that disadvantage women. It notes the fact that women's position in union leadership serves to enhance consciousness, deepening their sense of union ownership and provides them with personal influence. The challenge is how this personal power can be transformed into group power.

Introduction

Union gender democracy is the concept largely used to describe the peculiar nature of women's gendered trade union membership and the adequacy of union provisions for women to voice their concerns (McBride, 2001, p. 26). Several studies have attempted to understand the complex interrelationship between women and men's positions in trade unions and the workplace. Writing in the early 1990s Briskin and McDermott deplored the paucity of attempts to examine how union policies and practices systematically discourage women's participation and keep them away from union leadership (1993, p. 330). Latter works addressed the failure of institutionalised gender democracy strategies to transform the male character of unions (Briskin & McDermott, 1993; Cook, Lorwin, & Daniels, 1992; Creese, 1999; Curtin, 1999; Graham, 2001; Deslippe, 2000). The conceptual and administrative flaws accounting for the limited success have also come under scrutiny (Curtin, 1999; Britwum, 2000; Costello & Stone, 2001; Graham, 2001; Deslippe, 2000; McBride, 2001 Britwum, 2007a). The general conclusion has been that trade

unions as social institutions reproduce social gender inequalities and require structural and organisational transformation if they are to be more responsive to the gender needs of their members (Britwum, 2007a).

The main labour movement in Ghana, the Ghana Trades Union Congress (GTUC) has been grappling with gender democracy for the past three decades using a three pronged strategy under the coordination of its Gender Desk. The strategies include the creation of women's self-organising units, the quota representation and special seats in union governing structures with constitutional amendments to secure legitimacy. These efforts notwithstanding levels of female participation and representation fail to increase at the rate the GTUC desires according to its stated objectives. Various studies have noted how the GTUC's attempts have focused on reform without a corresponding effort at organisational and structural transformation to deal with patriarchal union structures (Britwum, 2007a; Britwum, 2000; Graham, 2001). However the manner in which women members utilise the space created through gender democracy strategies to generate autonomy and power for influencing union priorities remains unclear.

Briskin and McDermott note that the transformatory potential of union gender democracy strategies lie in making the necessary connection between women workers' needs and trade union policy through the agency of a sufficient core of women trade unionists with the required consciousness to expand the space created (1993). This underscores the importance for understanding the impact of gender democracy strategies on women trade union leaders. Using information drawn from individual and group interviews conducted with female trade union leaders within the various women's structures of the GTUC¹ this paper examines the impact of gender democracy strategies on women trade union leaders' consciousness and their vision for utilising the space they occupy. Their goals for

¹ National unions affiliated to the GTUC as at September 2008 are: Construction and Building Materials Workers' Union, Communication Workers' Union, Ghana Mines Workers' Union, Ghana Private Road Transport Union, General Agricultural Workers' Union, General Transport, Petroleum and Chemical Workers' Union, Health Services Workers' Union, Local Government Workers' Union, Maritime and Dock Workers' Union, National Union of Seamen, Public Services Workers' Union, Public Utilities Workers' Union, Railway Enginemen's Union, Railway Workers' Union, Teachers' and Educational Workers' Union, Timber and Woodworkers' Union and the Union of Industry, Commerce and Finance Workers.

using the space to enhance union gender democracy are crucial for altering the dominant male character of the GTUC. The women leaders covered included National female office holders, Regional Women's Committee Executives, and Gender Desk Officers of selected national unions. The information is supplemented by views of national and local union leaders and trade union documents. The research was conducted in October, 2007 to June 2008 in 8 out of the 10 regions in Ghana.

Unions Dealing with Gender Democracy

Union gender democracy initiatives generally fall under two main forms namely separate organisation and promotional representation (Figure 1). Separate organisation involves the creation of women's autonomous bodies variously termed women's divisions, self-organisation or separate organs. It seeks to promote women's membership autonomy and independence from mainstream union structures (Figure 1). Unions also organise separate women-only events and activities like conferences, seminars that target only women (Cook, Lorwin, & Daniels, 1992; Costello & Stone, 2001). As an accepted institutional practice women only structures accompany changes to union rules and alterations in the processes and structures of political representation (McBride, 2001).

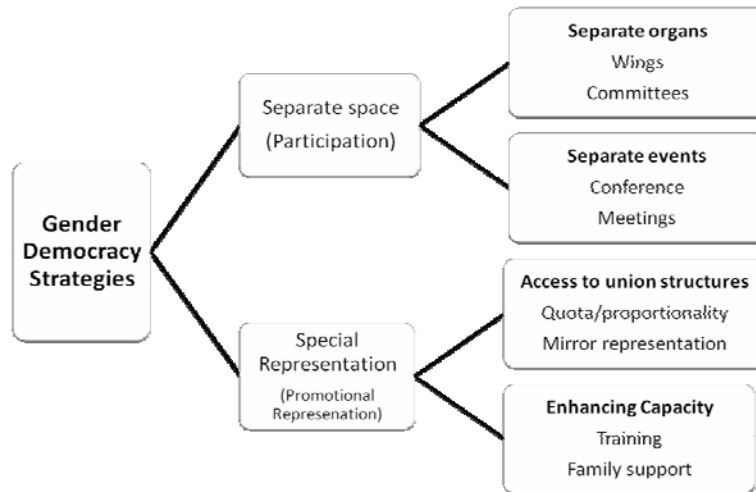


Figure 1 Union Gender Strategies and their relation to Mainstream Union Structures

Promotional or rights of representation involves attempt to integrate women into mainstream union structures through reserved seats in visible union positions, official or staff appointments or quota representation (Briskin & McDermott, 1993; Cook, Lorwin, & Daniels, 1992; Costello & Stone, 2001; Curtin, 1999; McBride, 2001). Special representation also takes the form of structured opportunities where union activities are oriented to create greater opportunity for women with family responsibilities to attend. This is done by adjusting the time for union functions or providing child-care support (See figure 1 above). While separate organisation focuses on women members as a group promotional representation targets individual women.

The positioning of women's separate organs in relation to mainstream union structures has been of central concern in many discussions on gender democracy. McBride, Briskin & McDermott, as well as Cook et al observe that the success of separate organising depends on the levels of decision making powers accorded them and the maintenance of a delicate balance between autonomy from and integration into union structures (1993; 1992; 2001). Other determinants of success are adequate union resources and the effective channelling of energies generated in separate spaces into representative structures. Autonomy is necessary for maintaining a radical

edge to women's organs; integration on the other hand provides access to union resources, promotes legitimacy and ensures that women's concerns are made part of the larger union agenda (Cook, Lorwin, & Daniels, 1992; Briskin & McDermott, 1993). In several instances autonomy has been achieved but weak integration into union structures limits the ability of women's separate organs to address gender inequality.

Several reasons have been identified as accounting for women's structures remaining on the fringes, not least is the question of power sites within trade unions that women's organs threaten. Women's collective action can undermine notions of union solidarity and bring to question the male norms of the full time male worker with no family obligations that underpin trade unions (Creese, 1999; Curtin, 1999). The determination of union concerns involves a selective process of inclusion and exclusion that calls for the formation of different micro solidarity sites. Curtin uses the notion of contingent solidarity to explain how various power blocs are able to mediate union structures for the pursuit of the limited interests to the detriment of minority groups (1999). Framing of claims is a fluid process of shifting solidarity and dominant groups quickly make concessions once they find that their interests are bound to up with minority groups. Minority groups like women trade union members can benefit only in situations where their concerns conflate with that of dominant union groups. But in most instances women lose out because their interests do not cohere with those of dominant male trade union leaders.

Examining union gender democracy

Evaluations of union gender democracy usually focus on the persistence of male dominance and conclude that unions are embedded with a system of power relations that lends support to the status quo by ordering union structures and operations to serve male interest (Costello & Stone, 2001; McBride, 2001; Creese, 1999; Deslippe, 2000; Curtin, 1999). McBride utilises Bachrach and Baratz's typology of power to explain how union power is maintained through the mobilisation bias and rules of the game to organise women's con-

cerns out of union agenda or neutralise women's ability to challenge male norms and reduce inequality (2001). Such a framework has been instrumental in explaining how union male dominance is maintained. However, it is inadequate for exploring the internal dynamics among women trade union members and how they intend to organise the space gender democracy strategies offers. Curtin's notion of contingent solidarities pushes the debate from what she describes as the 'politics of gender' to the 'politics of difference' in order to account for how differences within women can block gender democracy strategies (Curtin, 1999).

How then does one discern issues of class that gives working people their common identity, and gender power relations that set women workers' experiences apart from those of their male counterparts. Women's gendered experience in the workplace and their trade unions has to be incorporated in any framework that analyses union gender democracy strategies in order to shift attention from women as passive agents under the manipulation of patriarchal norms to identify sites of women's agency within the spaces that union gender democracy strategies have offered.

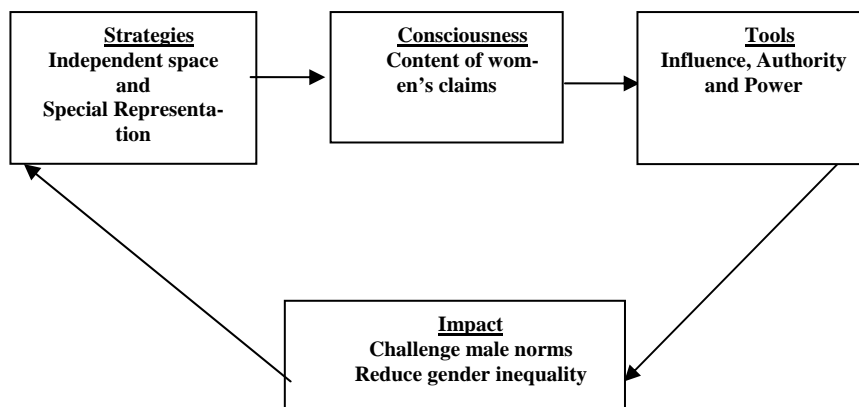


Figure 2: The direction of union gender democracy strategies

This demanded an examination of how strategies impact women's consciousness and allow them to frame their demands in ways that challenge the male norms that underpin trade unionism. Behrens et al's dimension of union power resources was altered to incorporate a class analysis (Behrens, Hamann, & Hurd, 2004a). The resulting

framework follows the notion of redistribution of power to oppressed groups in representative institutions as proposed by McBride (2001) (Figure 2).

Increased female trade union participation and representation provide sent women space that undermines structures and practices that support male dominance. Women's consciousness provides the tool for constructing claims and utilising existing strategies for the pursuit of claims (see Figure 2 above). The successful pursuit of claims by women trade union leaders should lead to the acquisition of power, authority and influence the generation of additional demands to pursue as claims. Each gain in power and authority enhances consciousness and plays directly to challenge male norms while at the same time refining women's demands on their unions to pushing for gender transformatory strategies. The next session uses the above framework to explore the specific demands of women trade unionists within the GTUC and the empowering potential of their visions for confronting women's location within the unions.

The GTUC and Gender Democracy

GTUC's gender democracy strategies captured in Figure 3 below are similar to those summarised in Figure 1 above. Separate organisation in GTUC takes the form of Women's Committees that provide women members the occasion to participate in union activities and special activities offer women the occasion to build capacity to take up union leadership (Figure 3). Special representation or promotional strategies come in the form of quotas and reserved seats like second vice chairperson position reserved for women only within the GTUC and all national unions and a quota policy of least 30% female participation in educational and training programs (Figure 3).

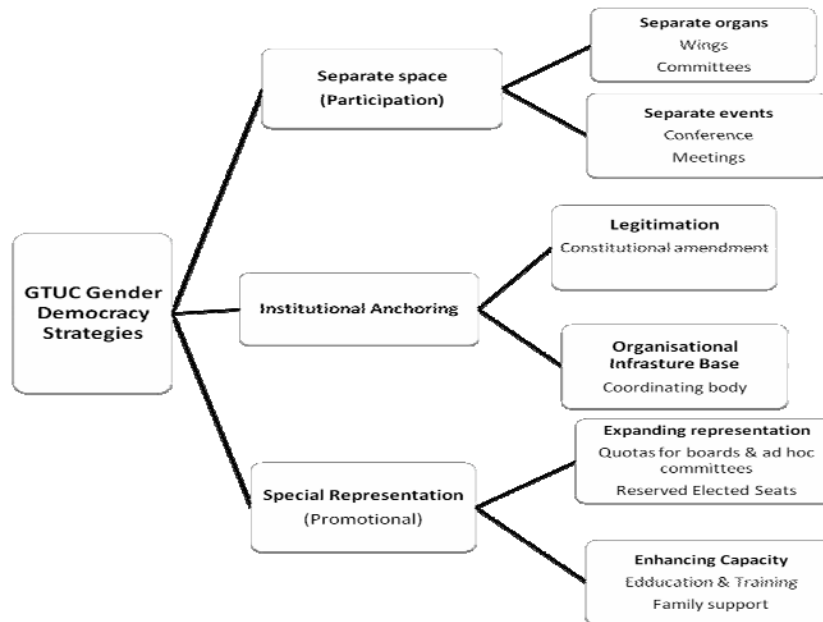


Figure 3 Profile of GTUC's Gender Democracy Strategies

The women's self organs operate in tandem with the consultative structures in the regions and districts, the Regional and District Councils of Labour (RCLs and DCLs). The regional and district Women's Committees are backed by a constitutional provision to pass their concerns to the DCLs and RCLs for action. Decisions of the National Women's Committee are supposed to feed into deliberations of the Executive Board.

Gender democracy strategies in the GTUC and its affiliates originated in 1969 as top down projects usually on the instigation of an external partner were intensified during the late 1980s through to the 1990s. Donor support dwindled in the 2000s amidst calls for gender mainstreaming, shifting emphasis to promotional measures like special seats and expansion of quotas in union activities. At the time of data gathering few Women's Committees were active. The problem blamed largely on union dwindling finances and lack of political will on the part of trade union leadership to ensure some minimal regular allocation of whatever little union finance was available. Funding problems were compounded by the manner in which union events are conceived, poor communication infrastructure in Ghana

and lack of resources for the regional union offices. Union meetings are expensive because of the need to pay for venues, cover travelling and feeding costs of attendees. Poor communication network hikes up costs because written notices which are important to secure members release from their workplaces have to be hand-delivered. Meeting notices have to be produced at commercial centres at a fee. The high costs and low financial allocation made promotional strategies the most important gender democracy strategy.

The Women's Committees and Reserved Seats

As noted in the works reviewed earlier, the institutional location of women's separate organs determines the extent to which it can challenge male norms and open up union space for greater female representation. This potential was underscored by women leaders interviewed. They complained about the general ambiguity of relations between the National Women's Committees and union policy making bodies like the Executive Board of the GTUC and the National Executive Councils of the affiliate national unions. This compounded with union bureaucracy, had the tendency to filter out women's voices and limit the influence of women's committees on union policy. Decisions have to emerge from the districts through to the regions and then to the national level. Women trade union leaders expressed dissatisfaction with the women's committees' lack of power to influence the allocation of union funds and unions' reluctance to commit funds for its operation. They were equally critical of the limits on regional and district initiatives to raise funds outside the ambit of national union supervision. Some such initiatives that had been thwarted by this provision were cited.

Promotional representation was one strategy that was operating in full force with the support of the GTUC and all national unions. The process of creating special seats for women within the decision making structures in all union decision making structures, from the local to the highest national body has been instrumental in increasing women's representation in mainstream union decision making. Leadership role in the women's committees provided the major conduit for female trade unionists to access mainstream union leader-

ship positions to considerably enlarge female presence in union decision-making. Female representation on the EB of the GTUC for example increased from a low of 5.6% in 1996 to 16% in 2003 (Britwum, 2007a; Britwum & Martens, 2008).

The impact of the special seats and quota representation has been strong at the individual level for the women office holders. Women trade union leaders interviewed noted that their engagement with their unions constituted a journey in self discovery, an awakening of individual ability and strengthening self confidence. Women leaders' access to mainstream union office had broken male scepticism about female capacity to hold union office and female inhibition about their ability to succeed as trade union office holders.

Misgivings about the effectiveness of special seats as some women leaders explained was the limited perception that women leaders should only hold special seats and the institutional disconnection between women office holders and the women's organs. The goal of union gender democracy strategies is to bring 'women up to rub shoulders with men' so they can run for mainstream union offices like the Secretary-General position². For them reserved seats seem to suggest that women are suitable for middle and not top union positions. In addition it created the perception among some male union leaders that women leadership was limited to the reserved seats and not mainstream union positions. Some of the women executives interviewed reported male surprise and displeasure with women who vie for mainstream union positions they objected to 'the women taking "their" positions'³. Women leaders' occasion to relate to the general female membership and the women's organs were weakened by their lack of constitutional access. One female in mainstream trade union leadership position recounted her embarrassment when she was walked out of a National Women's Committee meeting on grounds that she had no constitutional mandate to participate in the meeting.

This sense of isolation was especially evident in the first batch of women office holders who had to find their way in uncharted terrain amidst hostility from males and older women who felt uncomfortable with younger women challenging traditional norms. The first

² Interview with Regional Women Committee executives April, 2008

³ Interview with Regional women committee executives May, 2008

woman on the GTUC's Executive board notes that it was 'hectic because there was no woman around, no one to learn from and no one to consult'⁴. The institutional isolation of women leaders raised questions about their credibility among female members in whose interest they have been granted access to union political office. This denied them a constituency support for pursuing claims in the interest of women members. The absence of a support base was however ameliorated for most young women leaders by the presence of some older woman union leaders who provide support and motivation.

When the question was raised as to who should first organise women; women trade union members believed that the responsibility should rest with the unions especially the GTUC to bring women together and provide resources for maintaining organisation. Women union leaders were quite convinced that the union structures provided women space to develop the required awareness and pick up the necessary leadership skills for accessing union positions to engage union structures. Separate events were very important in drawing them out and granting them the confidence to operate within the union structures. The fact that more women are ready to take up leadership positions, it was pointed out was the result of the union educational activities. They harboured the fear that the crop of women offering themselves for union leadership positions might dwindle in the face of a reduction in union education for women.

Despite the misgivings of women union leaders they insisted that promotional strategies have a potential to expand women's ability to utilise unions space for influence and power to challenge male norms. As their numbers increased the institutional isolation that served as limitations should be overcome. What then has been the impact of participating in union structures on the consciousness of women union leaders? This is one of the questions that the next section sets out to explore.

Consciousness and the content of women's claims

This section examines the impact of gender strategies on women's consciousness and their ability to utilise the space offered however

⁴ Interview with former GTUC gender desk officer February 2008

limited to alter male power dimensions within the GTUC and the national unions. The level of consciousness was discerned by examining the demands women were making on their unions and the goals they intend to pursue for the realisation of these demands. Their demands revealed their interpretation of union gender situation as revolving around women's domestic and work experiences as well as their integration in the trade unions.

Three sets of demands emerged from the responses of women trade union leaders. The first demanded support for women in the performance of their domestic gender roles like income generation skills, family life education, health and leisure. The second set targeted women's working experience making demands for an end to discriminatory access to work benefits and sexual harassment. The third and fourth were demands to improve women's capacity to engage their unions and strengthen the women's committees (Table 1).

Table 1: Women's leaders' demands on their trade unions

Target of demands	Content of demands
Domestic responsibilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Skills development - Income generation - Family Life Education and Marital Counselling - Women's health and leisure
Workplace situation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Working conditions - Workplace benefits
Work in the trade unions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Trade union education - Leadership commitment - Leadership skills
Trade union structures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Better functioning women's organ - Support/funds for union activities - Better Contact with Gender Desk/national officers - Broadened space for participation and representation - Better operational framework - Re-conceptualisation of trade unions - Inter union collaboration - National union intervention at the local level

Source: Field data, 2008

The demands targeting women's health and domestic responsibilities called for unions to provide women workers avenues for income

generation, entrepreneurial skills and capital for developing enterprises to supplement low incomes (Table 1). Women, they insisted, earned incomes that were lower than what men earned. As one leader put it 'we earn monthly salaries yet we are like beggars hoping from one credit scheme to the other'⁵. By providing women assistance to take care of children and domestic chores they will be able to devote more time to union work.

Women leaders based their demand for trade union education on the fact that women in the trade unions generally had a lower educational background and virtually no other source of union education. Again they believed that trade union education for women was empowering and would get women to understand the structure and function of their unions and improve on their sense of union ownership. In all group interviews respondents emphasised the impact of union education in enhancing their capacity to engage in trade union activities by improving their understanding of union functions and structures and developing their sense of union ownership. As one respondent put it, 'union education has changed us, we longer see our union as a welfare association'⁶. The benefit of trade union education for women, they insisted, was that it helped to enhance women's background, deal with ignorance, create awareness and give women confidence and capacity to speak in public. These they considered were important ingredients for making women trade union leaders. Trade union education they further explained, was important for broadening the minds of women. The specific content of trade union education that were demanded included an introduction to the Labour Act, women's labour rights and responsibilities, collective bargaining agreements, trade union constitution, government policies on wages and salaries as well as leadership skills. There was the general agreement that women need special preparation like mentoring and public speaking skills to boost their confidence for union leadership positions.

Women leaders' demanded a better framework for the functioning of the Women's Committees as a platform for channelling women's concerns into mainstream trade union structures and others asked for a re-conceptualisation of trade union activities in order to

⁵ Interview with regional women committee Members; February, 2008

⁶ Interview with executives of regional women's committee, April 2008

broaden the space for the operations of women in the trade union (Table 1). For example, they insisted that women membership in the activities of the District Councils of Labour should be expanded in order to improve the functioning of the women's committees in the districts where the bulk of union members are located. Some women leaders were unhappy about their national union's approach to mainstreaming gender into union activities and asked for such efforts to be halted. They worried for example about the fact that the appointment of women organisers had been halted in preference for appointment of general organisers. Women organisers they explained constituted a platform for grooming women leaders and producing women union activists. They also based their demands on the fact that women's needs especially in trade union structures were special and should not be subsumed under general issues.

Women leaders demanded financial support for the women's committees and women's only events such as meetings, seminars and workshops. Some stated that the GTUC should allocate specific proportion of its dues, like 20%, to cover the work of the Women's Committees. Others called for a debate on union finances demanding that the GTUC especially account to women on what percentage of union finances are spent on gender democracy strategies. They justified their claims on the grounds that women's committees are the creation of the GTUC and it behoves it to provide the funds to sustain it. There were suggestions for GTUC to move away from relying on donor funding and set to building its own internal resources to run the women's committee. Others demanded special space for meetings and administrative work. Meeting space will provide a conduit for reaching women trade union members and promote contact between women leaders and members.

Women leaders recognise the opportunities offered by the women's organ and women's only events beyond capacity building and believed that an efficient functioning women's committee should provide more space for women leaders in the trade union structures. For those who had the occasion to be involved in early trade union gender promotional activities, women's organs were seen as instruments that would offer space for women to come together to fight for their rights. They demanded the inclusion of Women Committee leaders on key decision making bodies like the National Executive Councils of the national unions and the Execu-

tive Board of the GTUC with voting rights, regular branch and district meetings and a reliable data base on trade union situation in the regions and districts. There was concern also about the power that women leaders wielded at the regional level. Some felt that trade union regional officers wielded too much power in the running of the Regional and District Women's Committees. They asked for an end to Regional officers' prerogative to determine who participates in union activities.

Union bureaucracy was seen as instrumental in undermining the work of regional and district structures of the GTUC and the national unions especially the autonomy of the women's committees. Seeking approval for carrying out an activity can take anything between 3 to 4 months, women trade union leaders complained. All regional women leaders expressed frustration about the need to seek permission from National Headquarters for every single activity and felt that it could and did indeed stifle initiative. National union leaders on the other hand were weary of granting too much autonomy to regional and district structures citing some experience of the GTUC in one region which amounted to the hijacking of union structures for personal gain. The need for some level of decentralisation was recognised but the balance between a central action and local autonomy was yet to be determined. Others felt however that if national leaders and desk officers would visit the regions and districts regularly then some of the issues of local autonomy and central control could be resolved. At the moment however they lamented that national leadership visits were tied to elections. 'It is only when they need our votes that they come to us in the regions'. Once they get our votes we have to wait till the next election year.'⁷ This accusation of neglect was pointed at gender desk officers as well. Women leaders and members in the regions insisted that they did not know their desk officers.

On the whole women holding leadership positions in national union structures were more likely to raise demands bordering on gender relations within their unions than leaders at the local level. The latter were more concerned with working conditions and access to workplace facilities, like equipment, uniforms and occasion to acquire skills and engage in income supplementing activities. Re-

⁷ Interview with union leaders, April, 2009

gional and national women leaders on the other hand were more concerned about the use of gender democracy facilities to promote women's concerns in the trade unions and their efficient functioning to promote greater union gender democracy.

Women's demands on their unions reveal a general conception that unions can and should solve all problems that women have, ranging from domestic responsibilities to health and workplace issues. Their demands also underscored their belief that failure to deal with their concerns was due to a lack of political will and a prioritisation of union concerns to the exclusion of women's needs. What was important was the impact of the position of women in union structures on the nature of their demands on their unions. As a measure of their level of consciousness, their demands reveal how gender democracy strategies are making a better impact on women as individuals than building group cohesion. What this means for women's sense of autonomy and their acquisition of tools for influencing union nature and operations in their favour is immense. The major tool for acquiring influence, authority and power remains with individual women leaders at the higher levels within union decision making structures. The challenge is how this potential can be translated into group power and influence. This is investigated within the content of their visions and the agenda they intend to pursue from their leadership location within their trade unions.

Trade union women leaders' Agenda

In terms of vision women union leaders were concerned about pursuing avenues for improving women's trade union education as an avenue for capacity and confidence building to facilitate their entry into trade union (see Table 2). Women trade union leaders stated among their vision and goals, the desire to ensure that trade union education was available for all women members. Access to trade union education was considered an empowering tool that gives women an occasion to pursue their rights and develop their sense of union ownership (Table 2). Their desire was to use trade union education as an empowerment tool. Other goals outlined included getting women's concerns mainstreamed into trade union activities and structures. Here the desire was to get the Women's Committee to

serve women's interests was expressed variously as 'serve as women's mouthpiece' and use it to get women's potential known (Table 2).

Table 2 Improve Women's Operation in the Trade Unions

Vision Content	Specific Issues
Education and capacity building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Higher education for women b. Upgrade women's professional competence c. Broaden women's mind d. Trade union education e. Get women to break out of traditional barriers f. Capacity building for newly employed or elected women g. Civic education to participate in elections h. Leadership/public speaking skills, i. international exposure
Representation and participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Mainstream women's concerns into union structures b. Enlarge women's voice in the trade union c. Stop men from looking down on them d. Get women's potential known e. Improve women's sense of union ownership f. Get women to hold high union office g. Promote women's active participation in trade union h. Improve levels and nature of women's representation i. Provide information for national unions/advice leadership on women's special needs

Source: Field data: 2008

The efficient functioning of the women's organ featured as important goal of women leaders interviewed whose desire was to get the women's committees to serve as a networking platform for sharing ideas, experiences and building unity (Table 3). The women's committees at the various levels it was envisaged could serve as the tool to empower women and increase their participation in the trade unions. Others wanted to use their Women's Committees to generate information to feed trade union decisions and action on women. There were those whose aim was to source funding to ensure that

their women's committees functioned. Whilst some were considering writing proposals to source funding from the international donor organisations and their District Assemblies others were considering setting up income generating activities and to utilise the proceeds to support the work of their women's committees (Table 3).

Table 3: Improve the functioning of Women's Committees

Vision Content	Specific Issues
Women's Committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Networking platform for sharing ideas, experiences, and building unity b. Space to organise and empower women c. Coordinate women's committees d. Link women to national women's committees e. Get women to determine their union agenda f. Improve contact with district organs a. Raise funds to support programmes for women

Source: Field data: 2008

Women leaders were clear about the empowering potential of the Women's Committees and most had its proper functioning on the vision agenda. Individual consciousness therefore had a basis for transforming into group solidarity and women leaders insist that the tool is more trade union education.

Conclusion

Though the GTUC and its affiliates had failed to provide women with space for the articulation of their concerns in a consistent and engaging manner, their promotional strategies have been instrumental in women's awareness. Women's awareness of this shortcoming proved an important indication of some level of consciousness and formed the basis for the development of power and authority for providing the basis for mobilising to secure redress. Thus the shortcoming of gender democracy strategies in the GTUC and its national

unions notwithstanding, the promotional measures have made a strong impact on trade union women leaders and offers a site for women potential to push for further strategies that will lend themselves to a further transformation in gender democracy strategies. Women's tools for pursuing a changed agenda in their unions were their numbers in leadership positions which they have used to challenge the fixed notion that mainstream union positions are a male preserve. Women's position in union leadership serves to enhance consciousness, deepening their sense of union ownership. Depending on their location in union structures they can gain influence once they succeed in breaking perceptions about female abilities. The realisation that union is about them and that they have a right to demand that their needs are met is important site for building power. The challenge is how to connect these sites into mobilisation points that should generate some higher levels of power within the unions. This should provide the ingredient that should propel women from holding back to asserting their right of ownership of the union.

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