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## CHALLENGES FACING TRADE UNIONS IN PUBLIC HIGHER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS: CASE OF RAAWU AND THTU AT IRDP-DODOMA, TANZANIA.

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### ABSTRACT

*Researchers, Academicians and Allied Workers Union (RAAWU) plus The Tanzania Higher Learning Institutions Trade Union (THTU) are vital to represent the workers' interests relating to improving the working conditions by employer. The objective of this paper was to examine the specific challenges that faced these two unions. The sample size of the study comprised of 64 respondents from both unions at the Institute of Rural Development Planning (IRDP). Systematic sampling was used to obtain sample elements from the sample frames while purposive sampling was used for key informants. Methods of data collection consisted of interview and focus group discussion. Descriptive statistics including frequencies, percentages based on multiple responses cross-tabulation were used in data analysis. SPSS version 20 was a tool of data analysis. Finding revealed that both RAAWU and THTU were mainly facing similar challenges such as government interference, inter-union rivalry as external challenges while internally the unions suffered from lack of transparency in spending members' monthly subscription fees, lack of regular meetings at branch levels, shortage of funds and RAAWU members responded of poor leadership as another challenge in the union. Based on these findings, the paper provided recommendations for solutions at government and trade unions levels to increase sustainability of labour unions.*

**Key words:** Trade unions, challenges, poor leadership, shortage of funds

## **1.0.INTRODUCTION**

Nowak (2015) argued that trade unions have been powerful change agents, and organized labour at the workplace. Trade unions began for the first time in Europe during the sixteenth century, starting from craft guilds and later to mutual aid societies (Ndiritu, 2015). Labour union intensity growth in Europe in fact took place in Britain since the industrial revolution of 18<sup>th</sup> century, whereas in America unionization became famous during the 19th century (A Brief History of Unions, N.D). The period of industrial revolution marked the rise of what Akaoka (1970) referred as the expansion of products market which exacerbated competition among capitalists, lowering of wages and working conditions. Workers had to unite to influence their employers to raise wages and improve the working conditions.

Unlike in Europe and America, trade unions in Africa grew mainly in agrarian society predominated by capitalist relations imposed on workers by colonial rule (Geiss, 1965). Low wages, poor housing, high rents and soaring prices were among of many problems which led to unionization among workers to demand colonial employers at that time to cease exploitation of labour. Colonial government repression through state organs was one among many challenges against trade union movement. During the struggle for African independence, labour unions in several African societies joined national movements and political parties to demand an end to colonial rule (Musa, 2014). However, the period after independence was a turmoil for many trade unions in many parts of Africa. The single party regimes in Africa post-independence left no room for free and independent trade unions and consequently the existing trade unions became branches of the regimes or were banned (Budeli, 2012).

However, the rise of democratic movements during the 1990's especially in Sub-Saharan Africa triggered efforts among trade unions in Zambia and Zimbabwe as an example to demand changes in the single party regimes in favour of multiparty democracy (Maree, 2012). As trade unions in Sub-Saharan Africa were championing the demand for democracy, Tanzanian trade unions' efforts were minimal or non-existent because of restrictive legal framework to participate in political activities and more activeness among other civil societies in opposing abuse by the state (Babeiya, 2011). Persistent workers' problems such as low wages and poor working conditions in

general also has had a significant contribution to trade unions inactiveness during Tanzanian democratization in 1990's. Critically, several of these reasons should not be expressed as only being responsible in holding back trade unions during the struggle for democratization but also can be understood as challenges which have destructed active efforts in collective bargaining with employers and the struggle for improving working conditions of their members.

According to a report by Legal and Human Rights Center (2015), Tanzania had several registered trade unions including: Tanzania Union of Industrial and Commercial Workers Union (TUICO), Tanzania Plantation and Agriculture Workers Unions (TPAWU), Communication and Transport Workers Union of Tanzania (COTWU), Tanzania Teachers' Union (TTU), Tanzania Mines Energy, Construction and Allied Workers' Union (TAMICO), Tanzania Railways Workers Union (TRAWU), Tanzania Fishing and Marine Workers Union (TAFIMU) and Telecommunication Workers Union of Tanzania (TEWUTA). Others were: Tanzania Media Workers Union (TMWU), Tanzania Pilots' Union (TPU), Tanzania Agro-forestry Workers Union (TAWU), Mufindi Paper Employees Trade Union (MPETU), The Higher Learning Institutions Trade Union (THTU), Financial, Industrial, Banking, Utilities, Commercial and Agro-processing Industries Trade Unions (FIBUCA), Tanzania Road Transport Workers Union and Tanzania Seafarers Union. These trade unions belonged to different industry, employers and socio-economic sectors. It is anticipated that these trade unions in Tanzania were facing specific challenges that could not apply in other trade unions from other industry. But, the trade union literature has done inadequately to address those specific challenges and instead it has tended to address the problem from a general trade unionism perspective. In response to this situation, this article is intended to examine the specific challenges that encounter Researchers, Academicians and Allied Workers Union (RAAWU) plus The Tanzania Higher Learning Institutions Trade Union (THTU) as formed in higher education sector.

## **Theoretical Framework**

The article used unitary approach and modern organization theory. Elements in these two theories were considered relevant in posing specific challenges that may face trade unions. Unitary approach assumes that employment relationship is harmonious and parties cooperate to achieve common objectives (Cradden, 2011 as cited in Tefurukwa & Kamugisha, 2015;

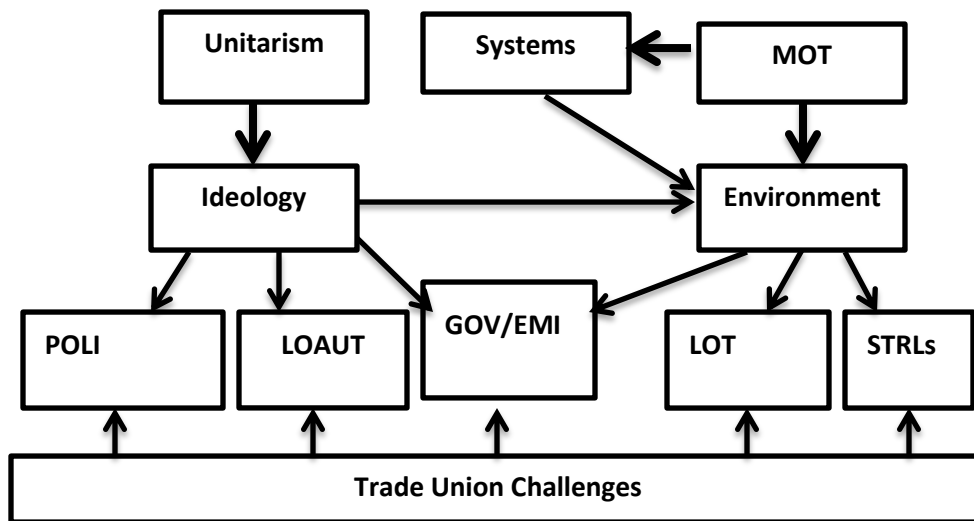
Tirintetaake, 2017). According to Culliane & Tony (2012) the theory has been responsible in developing an ideology organized around three elements including: employer authority, workplace conflicts and trade unionism. From employer authority, the theory assumes employer as a source of authority to which loyalty among employees should be directed. Workplace conflicts are illegitimate, irrational, deviant behaviour and in any case employees' negotiations, collective bargaining, strikes and lockouts are unwelcome. Referring to this conception, trade unionism should be kept out because they compete against employers and disrupt employees' loyalty to their employer. The article considers that the ideology of unitary approach around those three elements above also apply to employers in public and private sector in Tanzania. Employers may avoid trade unions negotiations or establish stringent laws, rules and regulations against their activities due to their beliefs that trade unions create disharmony that prevent realization of common organizational purposes.

In addition to this, a decision to use modern organization theory (MOT) was reached in order to supplement unitary approach. There were several internal challenges in trade unions that were falling out of scope of unitary approach. MOT has been used to prescribe management of organizations in commerce and manufacturing. But the paper borrowed it because many of its emphasis apply to trade union organizations. According to Scott (1961), MOT views organizations as systems with interdependent parts like individuals and their attitudes, formal arrangements of functions in structure, informal organizations like groups, status and roles as well as physical settings. Understanding of how these interdependent parts affected one another an attempt to analyze them thoroughly was important.

Önday (2016) argued that many writers have used this theory but each of these writers usually has their own special emphasis when they considered organizations as systems. In reference to this argument, the paper considered that trade unions as systems succeeded or failed to accomplish their goals due to the nature of interdependence existing among their parts. For instance, members' negative attitudes on union leadership could result in membership loss through withdrawal and weaken strengths of the trade unions such as RAAWU and THTU. If trade unions leaders at national and branch level were not transparent in spending members' financial contributions, it could signal governance problems in the systems thereby creating apathy among trade union members

Yang *et al*; (2013) and Groth (N.D) added interesting component in modern organization theory. Both argued that organizations being systems with interdependent parts, they also depended on internal and external environment for success or failure. Robbins (1990, as cited in Yang *et al*; 2013) further stated that those systems were usually open and when they interacted with the general environment they were influenced by six factors including economic conditions, political, legal, social, cultural, technological and demographic conditions. These conditions were facing trade unions during their interaction with their internal and external environments. Many of these factors acted as challenges which created difficulties for trade unions in influencing employment policies among employers. Internal challenges that were thought not to have been addressed by unitary approach included: shortage of funds, incompetent leadership, lack of communication policies while from the external environment trade unions were facing challenges like government autocracy and stringent laws enacted to weaken their capacity in the struggle for labor rights of their members. Succinctly, the diagram below shows the independent and dependent variables that emerge from the two theories above to elaborate the challenges facing RAAWU and THTU trade unions.

**Figure 1: Unitary & Modern Organization Theories on Trade Unions Challenges**



*Source: Authors*

**Note key:** POLI = Political interference, LOAUT = Lack of Autonomy, GOV/EMI = Government or Employer Interference, LOT = Lack of Transparency, STRLs= Stringent laws

## **2.0.METHODOLOGY**

### **2.1. Study Area and Population**

Study area was the Institute of Rural Development Planning, Dodoma (IRDP). The institute was among of higher educational institutions which had staff who either joined Researchers, Academician and Allied Workers' Union (RAAWU) or Tanzanian Higher Learning Institutions Trade Unions (THTU). This institution was chosen because it could provide specific challenges that were facing respective trade unions. The population of the study consisted of all 168 registered trade union members in which 85 were THTU members while 83 were registered members in RAAWU.

### **2.2. Research Design and Sampling**

Cross-sectional study design was undertaken by the study through collection of data from different section of population at single point in time. Sample size was 64 respondents who were registered as members of trade unions at the Institute. This sample size was adopted based on the argument of Altunişiket *et al*; (2004 as cited in Delice, 2010) which emphasized that respondents between 30 and 500 at 5% confidence level was generally sufficient for researchers. Systematic sampling procedure was used to draw 33 respondents from sample frame of THTU members and 31 respondents were obtained from among members of RAAWU through a random selection at start and with selection of others at regular interval. THTU had more representation in the sample size because it had more members than RAAWU at the workplace. Purposive sampling was also used to obtain information about trade unions from RAAWU chairman and THTU secretary as key informants.

### **2.3. Methods of Data Collection**

Both interview and focus group discussion (FGD) were methods of data collection. The former was used to obtain quantitative data while the latter was for collecting qualitative data. Tools of data collection were structured questionnaire for interview while those which were unstructured were used during FGD in a group of six individuals who were members of RAAWU and THTU unions.

## **2.4. Data Analysis**

Descriptive statistics based on frequencies and percentages by using multiple responses cross-tabulation were used to analyze data on respondents' membership, occupation and specific challenges facing RAAWU and THTU trade unions at IRDP. Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20 was a tool for data analysis and used after editing, coding and entry of responses from respondents.

## **3.0.RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **3.1. Trade Union Membership and Occupation**

Out of 64 respondents, more than half as indicated on Table 1 below were registered members of THTU while 30 (46.8%) had membership in RAAWU. Many workers at the Institute had joined THTU because as suggested by "THTU Background" (N.D) many workers had lost trust in RAAWU that was relatively older union in the sector. Eventually, THTU managed to have more members than its counterpart when it was introduced at the Institute since 2014. Other factors that made THTU to recruit more members than its counterpart could be similar with those found by Kiberia (2015) in Kenya among teachers and consisted of peer pressure and high union subscription fee charged by RAAWU before the introduction of THTU at the Institute.

Table1 further reveals that more respondents constituting 16(25%) among the teaching staff belonged to THTU membership unlike RAAWU which had less membership from this category of staff, but retained many of non-teaching managerial staff comprising of 11(17.2%). The reason behind this situation could be attributed to an assertion that academic staff at IRDP was capable to switch membership to relatively younger trade unions after losing hope in the older trade union unlike their counterparts. Additionally, many others such as drivers, security personnel, stores and estate departmental personnel comprising of 8 (12.5%) were RAAWU members unlike THTU which had less respondents constituting 5(7.8%) from this respective department.

**Table1: Trade Union Membership and Occupation (n= 64)**

<b>Trade Union membership</b>	<b>Frequencies &amp; Percentages</b>	
THTU	33 (51.6%)	
RAAWU	30 (46.8%)	
Non-response	1 (1.6%)	
<b>Total</b>	<b>64 (100%)</b>	
<b>Occupation of Members</b>	<b>THTU</b>	<b>RAAWU</b>
	<b>Frequency&amp; Percentage</b>	<b>Frequency &amp; Percentage</b>
Teaching Staff	16 (25%)	11(17.2%)
Non-teaching managerial staff	9(14.1%)	11(17.2%)
Librarian	3 (4.7%)	-
Others	5 (7.8%)	8 (12.5%)
Non-Response	-	1(1.6%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>33 (51.6%)</b>	<b>31 (48.4%)</b>

### 3.2. Challenges Facing RAAWU and THTU

Many trade union members' responses from both RAAWU and THTU on one hand had almost similar percentages on challenges facing their trade unions but on another some responses were less compared to their counterparts. As Table 2 below indicates, the responses which were equal and common regarding challenges facing these two trade unions were relating to government interference. One of focus group discussion participant also commented in the same way as participant said in the following words:

*We are talking about challenges in our trade unions..... the policy and law of this country leaves much room for the government to interfere in our trade union activities. This has been a tradition for many years. Today if RAAWU or THTU members go against the wishes of their employer, government of which it is employer will obstruct all efforts. We can't*



*organize action freely without suppression by government coercive organs..... (FGD participant)*

The challenge of government interference for these two trade unions is not novel because as it was found by Tefurukwaa & Kamugisha (2015) the government immediately after independence enacted strict laws, diverged trade unions leadership through political appointment and forced all public servants to join one trade union prior to political liberalization of 1990's. The findings about the challenge suggest that trade unions have not been independent not only in the past but also in an era post-political liberalization. For instance as per United Republic of Tanzania (1998) trade unions registrar can cancel registration of trade unions and suspend the branch unions once he or she has not been satisfied by their behaviour in protecting employees or the general public interests. This is worrisome because the registrar can use his discretion backed up by law to deregister these trade unions in favour of government interests.

For many years trade unions were formed to react and demand employers to improve the working conditions of workers and poverty (International Workers' Symposium, 2005). Thus, government interference that has been perceived by RAAWU and THTU members as a challenge hampers both unions from being effective to ameliorate any potential appalling labour conditions at their workplace. This challenge is an expression of hostility among some African governments against trade unions as reported by Solidarity Center (2014) and grows from an ideology entrenched in the unitary approach as earlier elaborated in the theoretical framework.

Despite of the fact that responses from both unions had similar percentages on government interference as a challenge, they differed on other many challenges. Multiple responses on Table 2 reveals that many responses from THTU comprising of 15 (53.6%) showed that there was lack of transparency in spending members' monthly subscription fees in their trade union unlike RAAWU responses which constituted only 13 (46.4%). However, this difference in responses between both unions is very narrow in range and probably it could be argued that lack of transparency in spending members' monthly subscription fees was a challenge that cut across all these two unions. Based on the modern organization theory, this was an internal environmental factor in unions' systems and could develop negative attitudes of members towards officials and discourage members from participating in trade unions activities

Responses from the interview of THTU and RAAWU branch secretary and chairperson indicated that financial transparency for branch members from headquarters of the trade union was problematic as they responded during the interview:

*We have no any financial reports that are sent from THTU and RAAWU headquarters. Perhaps if you want one you can get it from the THTU and RAAWU headquarters. Anyway, just make a follow-up for that....(key informant)*

An attempt was made to review information on the available THTU and RAAWU internet websites but the financial information that could inform members about revenue and expenditure was not yet published by these trade unions. Lack of transparency in spending members' monthly subscription also could signal one of trade unions governance problems in THTU and RAAWU as well. The challenge probably was attributed by financial accounting and management illiteracy among branch, divisional and branch level union's officials. Financial transparency has been one of the principles created Trade Union Development Cooperation Network (2008) for unions to qualify for development cooperation with other unions globally. Lack of financial transparency on members' subscriptions and other sources could have negative impact to RAAWU and THTU initiatives in establishing development cooperation with other local and international trade union supporters.

Table 2 below further reveals that more responses comprising 13 (59.1%) among THTU responded that there was lack of regular meetings unlike RAAWU responses which consisted of 9 (40.9%) responses. Despite of these differences it is reasonable to argue that the challenge was responded by huge number of respondents from both unions. The findings also corroborated with those which were gained from FGD as one participant was heard saying:

*We hold seldom meetings and often gather to prepare celebrations of May day. We lack frequent meetings at our branch trade unions to air out our employment concerns against employer. If you ask about schedules for meetings to one of us here, he or she will hardly answer you (FGD participant).*

These findings partly complied with those by Adefolaju (2013) which revealed that members of five trade unions in Nigeria also held seldom meetings in their unions. Lack of regular meetings at the branches in this higher learning organization was a form of internal problem that can be deduced from Schillinger (2005) report that trade unions in Africa were weak organizations with many problems internally. Lack of regular meetings then indicated that there was a vacuum in regular face -to -face communication between branch leaders and members about many sorts of problems and progress related to working conditions and trade unions programmes.

The other challenge that was raised by many responses consisting of 5 (62.5%) from among RAAWU members was the rivalry between both unions in the sector as opposed to 3 (37.5%) responses from THTU. Many responses from RAAWU believed that there was rivalry between trade unions probably because at this branch level RAAWU had less number of members compared to THTU as indicated earlier above. In fact this finding supports those found by Gupta & Gupta (2013) in India where multiple unions in the same establishment led to rivalry among unions by playing down one another to gain influence of workers. As argued by Jit(2016) the existence of a single strong and united union was important in the same industry because it could protect the interests of the workers more effectively and compel leadership and employers to focus on strategic issues affecting employees.

Furthermore as displayed by Table 2 more responses consisting of 3 (60.0%) among RAAWU responses indicated that this trade union was facing shortage of funds compared to 2 (40.0%) responses from THTU respondents. To this effect it could be expressed that the union monthly service charges of one percent from a member's salary as stipulated by The Union Act, No. 10. 1998 in section 54 (2) was not raising adequate income for these trade unions. Lack of finance in these unions was also attributed to the fact that both had members from public universities which were of the minority compared to Tanzania Teachers' Union whose membership and subscription was drawn from public school teachers all over the country.

However, the challenge of lack of finance did not only exist in THTU and RAAWU but also it has affected the Zambian Union of Finance and Allied Workers and many unions in Kenya as found by Parasuraman & Mwape (2016) and Anyango *et al*, (2013). Lack of finance had potential impacts as far as performance of trade unions was concerned. Firstly, they could not appoint the

legal counsel to defend members' grievances in the public service commission and labour courts effectively. Secondly, they could not effectively provide services such as more education, training, funeral grants and sickness benefits as historically provided by trade unionism.

Moreover, poor leadership as a challenge in trade unions also emerged in responses which constituted 2 (100.0%) from RAAWU respondents whereby THTU respondents had nil responses on this aspect as revealed by Table 2. The findings almost s was supported by Adefolaju (2013) in Nigeria where he found that about half and quarter of respondents from surveyed trade unions responded that the performance of their union leaders was average and poor. Responses indicate that there was a belief on existence of leadership challenge in the unions though it was absolutely responded by RAAWU respondents. Poor leadership implied lack of responsiveness of leaders to workers' employment concerns. Trade union leadership particularly for RAAWU rarely encouraged involvement of members in decision making, participation and failed to abide too many issues of internal trade union democratic leadership such as transparency and openness as included by Jit (2016) as necessary ingredients in trade unions leadership.

**Table2: Challenges Facing RAAWU and THTU Trade Unions at IRDP (n= 64) \*\*\***

<b>Challenges</b>	<b>RAAWU Frequency &amp; Percentages</b>	<b>THTU Frequency &amp; Percentages</b>
Government interference	16 (50.0%)	16 (50.0%)
Lack of transparency in spending members' monthly subscription fees	13 (46.4%)	15 (53.6%)
Lack of regular meetings at branch level	9 (40.9%)	13 (59.1%)
Rivalry between both trade unions	5 (62.5%)	3 (37.5%)
Shortage of funds	3 (60.0%)	2 (40.0%)
Poor leadership	2 (100.0%)	Nil

**\*\*\* Multiple responses. Frequencies and percentages exceed parameters.**

#### **4.0. Conclusion and Further Research**

Trade unions in higher learning educational institutions were of important needs among workers in such public institutions. They could represent employees in collective bargaining with their employer and influence many of labour conditions for betterment of their members. This paper found that despite of being important for workers, both RAAWU and THTU were facing many similar challenges of which without solutions they would undermine trade union effectiveness. Some of the challenges that were found among both unions were external and consisted of government interference and inter-rivalry between RAAWU and THTU. Many other challenges in these trade unions comprised of lack of transparency in spending members' monthly subscription fees, irregular meetings at branches, shortage of funds and poor leadership particularly for RAAWU union. Limitation of the study emanates from the fact it was undertaken at a single public higher educational institutions. Therefore, the study could be extended to all other public higher educational institutions to fill the gap of knowledge on responses from other institutions about the specific challenges that were facing RAAWU and THTU.

#### **5. Policy Recommendations**

Based on the findings the paper gives out the following policy recommendations at two levels relating to government and trade unions themselves.

(a). Recommendations at government level

1. The government should allow more autonomy to flourish for RAAWU and THTU to engage in actions with their employer without obstructive interference. This can be achieved through an innovation of government non-interference policy in trade unions of higher educational institutions.
2. Fair laws for existence and functioning of trade unions should be in place by amending those sections which threaten RAAWU and THTU operations.
3. Registrar of trade unions should conduct capacity building of RAAWU and THTU officials from time to time to make improvement in their performance of duties for the members.

(b). Recommendations at RAAWU and THTU trade union level

1. RAAWU and THTU personnel at national and branch level should increase transparency on spending members' monthly subscription fees by communicating financial reports at every end of their fiscal year using Information and Communication Technology such as internet facilities.
2. Hire technical personnel in financial accounting and management to maintain books of accounts and prepare financial information needed by members
3. Make investment of the available financial resources to increase financial capacity of RAAWU and THTU; and refrain from any potential embezzlement practices.
4. Amalgamate in order to formulate a single, strong and united union with large membership base to be able to influence positive changes in working conditions.
5. RAAWU and THTU should network with other international and local trade union supporters to gain moral and material support to strengthen their trade union capacity.
6. Provide leadership education and training to national, divisional and branch leaders to improve quality in leadership performance.

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