



Gender, Work & Organization Conference

28-30 June 2023 | Stellenbosch | South Africa

GENDER, WORK & ORGANIZATION



Stellenbosch Business School



Gender, Work and Organization

13th International Interdisciplinary Conference

28-30 June 2023, Stellenbosch, South Africa

Conference theme

Marginalized gender identities - how can intellectual activism transform work and organization?

CALL FOR COLLABORATIVE EVENTS

COLLABORATIVE EVENT TITLE:

Role of unions in supporting marginalised employees in industry

COLLABORATIVE EVENT COLLABORATORS:

Prof Nasima Carrim, University of Pretoria, South Africa
Prof Herbert Kanengoni, University of Pretoria, South Africa
Dr Tlanai Masiya, University of Pretoria, South Africa
Ms Tsholofelo Tsheole, University of Pretoria, South Africa
Ms Blessing Chabaya, University of Pretoria, South Africa

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Abstract:

Workplace inequalities have persisted globally, particularly at representation level in the case of marginalised employees. There is notable under-representation of women on collective engagement bodies such as unions that aim to advance interests and equality in the workplace. Evidence suggests that the unions play a significant role in the bargaining process in attaining outcomes that may equally benefit women. As the world of work has been historically characterised by collective representation of the majority and a disregard for individual group needs and interests, it is not clear how and to what extent unions promote the interests and equality of women as a marginalised group in the workplace.

Content:

Scholars have argued that besides being part of the equality problem in the workplace, unions can conversely be part of the solution (Briskin, 2014; Tailby & Moore, 2014). Although researchers have acknowledged the role of unions as that of voicing and promoting employee needs, concerns have been raised as to the voice unions represent and whether the voice of marginalised as women is heard (Keune, 2021; Lejeune, 2021; Marino et al., 2018; Wilkinson et al., 2018).

In essence, the critical question is do unions promote equality for marginalised employees and how. Incorporating equality in union bargaining agenda could be a means of transforming collective bargaining as a vehicle to fair interest representation workers in the face of workplace changes (Dickens, 2000).

One notable problem of union representation in the workplace is the tendency to advocate for the majority employees (Gumbrell-McCormick & Hyman, 2018). Consequently, the interests and needs of the marginalised employees who are often in the minority is neglected. Unions are also political institutions as they require contract ratification through majority, the median voter model therefore implies that unions negotiate interests that reflect the needs of median employees (Budd, 2017; Gumbrell-McCormick & Hyman, 2018). Consequently, this privileges some while marginalising others. This prompts a need to explore the power dynamics within unions and bargaining frameworks as well as the framing of union agendas, including the extent to which their framing activity dislodges the predominance of the traditional class-based bargaining priorities (Briskin, 2014).

We highlight that power shapes framing of bargaining agenda in the workplace, which in turn influences the advancement of women's interests in the workplace such as need for work life balance, equal pay, training and decision-making. Kennedy-Macfoy et al. (2021) remind us that trade unions exist to strengthen the collective voice of employees as a means of challenging the dominant power structures.

Globally, the trade union movement is also navigating unprecedented times due to global pandemics and economic recession. It is therefore a crucial time for both employees, employers and governments through both the tripartite or bipartite processes to effectively transform social dialogue and equality particularly for the marginalised.

Objectives and aim of the session:

The symposium gives us a platform to understand and explore the comparative experience of countries on the role of unions in advancing the interests of women in the world of work. This offers an opportunity for in-depth discussion and stimulation towards collaboration by connecting senior and junior scholars who are engaged with, or want to be engaged with, advancing union roles and initiatives in ensuring workplace equality of the marginalised in SADC as part of emerging markets.

To do so, research needs to be centered on analyses of power in the workplace and take seriously the ways in which institutionalised power relations manifest themselves and how these enable and constrain promote equality in the workplace by advancing interests of women.

We therefore focus on the following questions:

Main research question: How do unions support women in the workplace?

Sub-questions:

- What is the status of power structure of unions?
- How do institutionalised power relations enable and constrain promote equality in the workplace by advancing interests of women and persons with disabilities
- How may the bargaining frame promote the interests of women
- What outcomes have unions achieved for women
- In focusing on these questions we will ascertain and promote scholarship on unions in enhancing interests and equality concerns of the marginalised in the workplace. In addition, this may assist in informing future research.

Facilitator:

Prof Herbert Kanengoni, University of Pretoria, South Africa

Panel members:

Dr Farai Ncube, Midlands State University, Zimbabwe: Bargaining power structures and women's interests in the workplace

Prof Musawenkosi Saurombe, University of Johannesburg, South Africa: Unions and women work life balance

Prof Kletus Muhena Likuwa, University of Namibia, Namibia. Continuity and change in gendered Labour contracting

Prof Nasima Carrim & Ms Blessing Chabaya, University of Pretoria, South Africa. Contesting terrains, women activism within trade unions

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