



TRADE UNION RECRUITMENT

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1. Introduction

In this module, we shall examine some basic recruitment stages and strategies for use by union organizers to integrate a group of workers or individuals into a new or established union organization (trade union).

Why recruit?

A democratic workers' organization is built around its members. Without these members, the organization is virtually an empty shell. These members constitute a significant source of energy. That is all the more reason why most unions continuously seek to expand their workforce and join forces with other unions - at the local, regional and international levels. The recruitment of new members into a union group (or the recruitment of new union groups within a larger organization) literally runs around the clock.

2. Recruitment process stages: Preparation

You must be well prepared before embarking on the recruitment of new members. There is need to map out a well-defined plan, backed by thorough research. The same applies for the establishment of a new union organization or the recruitment of workers into an established union organization. This is especially important if you are a novice in labour union matters.

Approaching an individual worker or a group of workers is no easy task - one of the reasons why you should be well prepared. All recruitment processes do not necessarily observe the following stages. You can omit, add or follow a different sequence of implementation as you please. They are intended to serve only as a guide.

➤ Definition

To recruit: convincing workers to join the organization (trade union) by persuasion.

Stage 1: Conducting thorough research

Identify a group of workers that you want to recruit. Gather as much information as possible about these workers and the circumstances behind such recruitment. This will help you develop your strategy.

A preliminary survey (Mapping)

It should be noted that the trade union campaigns oftentimes tout the benefits of union membership (well-enumerated, more secured, more earnings) but make no distinction between the benefits derivable from the respective union groups. (Huge mistake! As shall be explained hereafter)

As per the research stage, you are neither required to be a renowned researcher nor have abundant resources to successfully dig up information. Use your initiative. Make use of the collective knowledge and resources derivable from your own members, colleagues and partners.

It has been contended that the benefits of trade unionism, solidarity and collective bargaining are just as significant to a fifty-two-year-old mine worker residing in Niamey, as they are to a 25-year-old young hairdresser working in Accra.

The recruitment toolkit should provide a basis for "preparing" our trade union campaigns, specifically hinged on the following aspects:

Needs – perceptions – motivations – desires – attitudes - preferences - characteristics and reasons

The following checklist contains a set of questions you need to ask as well as possible sources of information. First and foremost, you need to have the background information of the person you wish to enlist, or you may opt to target a specific group of workers in a given location. You may or may not be familiar with these workers. Adapt the checklist according to your needs.

Checklist 1:

Information required - Possible Sources

What kind of worker are you considering? What type of work do they do? Are they men, women or a mixed group? Are they self-employed workers, employees or they have workers working for them? Why are they doing this work? Based on the viewpoint of the contact persons in the target group – Based on the viewpoint of the leaders of their associations – Based on the viewpoint of the workers themselves – Based on your own observations - What is the potential number of employees in your target group?

Information required and where to find such information

From already-organized union groups within the vicinity - research departments (trade unions and NGOs) - Where employees work and where they reside? – Are there any collective amenities e.g. streets, parking spaces, churches, including sales, collection or production outlets? - Where is the best place to meet with the workers? - What is the best time to meet with the workers? - Based on the viewpoint of the contact persons in the target group – Based on the viewpoint of the leaders of their associations – Based on the viewpoint of the workers themselves – Based on the viewpoint of experienced colleagues – Based on your own observations - What are the problems encountered by employees in their workplace? - What is their average wage income? – Are they confronted with health and safety related problems? - Are they subject to harassment by the authorities, employers? - Do they work long hours? - What are the most pressing problems? – Any other problems? - Based on the viewpoint of the contact persons in the target group - Based on the viewpoint of the leaders of their associations - Based on the viewpoint of the workers themselves – Based on your own observations - Based on the viewpoint of the unions from the same sector – Based on the Internet - What problems are workers most commonly confronted with? - Do they face any housing problems? - Do they have

transportation problems? - Do they have problems with access to medical care and other social security measures?

What are the laws and principles governing such group of workers?

Labour Code - Municipal Acts, Regulations - Trade unions and other workers' associations - NGO- Ministry of Labour - Local government or municipal authorities - Who are the proponents (partners) and opponents of such union? - What are the available references?

To simplify matters, you may ponder on the most significant variables that may cause a person to sign or reject a membership card.

The trade union statement intended for non-unionized target groups varies from one organizer to another and from one union to another.

As it were, the organizer must ponder on: "Problems confronting the non-unionized target group, from its viewpoint?"

He must not only grasp the response, but carefully adjust its organizational and communication strategies to these responses.

Stage 2: Developing your strategy

While planning your strategy, all relevant factors must be taken into consideration:

The workers, the environment, the resources and the organizational principles

After collating and analyzing the above-mentioned results, an operational action plan for strategic organization should be formulated and submitted to the Union Management Executive for consideration and acceptance.

This plan shall include:

- **A thorough analysis of the non-unionized target group;**
- **A broad outline of the strengths and weaknesses of the union as perceived by the non-unionized target group (SWOT ANALYSIS)**
- **The measurable objectives for organizing campaign (SMART)**
- **A communication strategy (style, tone and content of messages, choice of communication vehicles);**

- **Defined responsibilities for union leaders, permanent officers, organizers, activists and militants;**
- **A detailed budget;**
- **A precise timeframe.**

Briefings and debriefings shall be helpful for:

- **Better understanding**
- **Recalling of set objectives**
- **Assessing the impact of the union's messages**
- **Addressing difficulties**

This assessment of the Labour Comments transmitted or intended to be transmitted to non-unionized target groups, is vital for appraisal of the effectiveness and merits of actions undertaken.

Finally, the overall results of the campaign, whether successful or not, should be thoroughly evaluated.

Decide on the strategic approach

First of all, you must have a clear picture of the overall mission. Evaluate the objectives, scope, ambit and outline of your recruitment strategy and its guiding principles. Mind you, your organization has adopted a decision endorsing this. There will be need to agree on the following:

Type of organization: If you are starting a new organization, decide what kind of organisation is appropriate and workable. Is it going to be a trade union, a cooperative, an association?

Would it be preferable to unionize the workers on the basis of cultural, community and other interests? For example, immigrant workers coming together in a common location or sharing a similar situation.

Workers: What sector, sub-sector and group of workers are you targeting?

Membership: Who are eligible or not eligible to join? What is your membership limit?

Priorities: What are your priorities? Are you willing to recruit women and low-wage workers in the sector?

Approach: Are you going to integrate existing associations into a large organization or bring together the workers as individuals or work within an existing organization with a view to recruiting individual members? Or a combination of these possibilities? Does your constitution provide for possible alternative approaches?

Big or small: Is the organization in place a large-scale establishment; are you envisaging an extensive recruitment campaign or are you involved in a smaller-scale local initiative?

Objectives and targets: What you want to achieve? What is the turnover you expect to achieve?

Collaboration: Do you work with other organisations or other people? For example, an NGO that works with a specific target group and with whom you could collaborate effectively.

Allocation of resources: What resources will the organization (trade union) commit to the recruitment programme?

Map out the details

Your overall strategic approach and research work will enable you to map out every detail of your strategy. You will need to reach a decision on the following issues:

Contact persons: Where will you start? It would be preferable to team up with a contact person who will speak to the workers with you or on your behalf.

Do you have a contact person with whom you can start work? Is this person a leader among the workers? Do the workers trust him? If you do not have a contact person, how do you envisage to make initial contact? You can, for example, circulate pamphlets providing information about your organization and inviting workers to a meeting.

Venue: You will need to identify the best location to hold talks with the workers: most likely in their workplace. During quiet periods, you can talk to vendors at their sales outlets. You can talk to taxi drivers at their parking lots or boarding points. You can speak to domestic workers over the phone. It may also be advisable to make contact with workers within their communities. This could be achieved during church activities or social events. You may even decide that the best approach would be to opt for home visits. Hence, you need to be creative.

Sometimes, talking to the organizers may constitute a risk to workers. Should you first meet them in secret?

Periods: Many workers in the informal economy work for themselves and their families. Others work for demanding employers and therefore have little free time. When is the best time to contact these workers and for how long? If you want to meet a group of workers, when is it possible? Do they have breaks or can they just meet you at the end of the workday? Do they have days off?

Communication tools: You may decide that it is best to talk "privately" with workers. You can choose a more public approach. You need to choose the most appropriate approaches. You may decide that you require some communication media to assist in providing information about your organization to workers: such as a pamphlet or a newsletter. You can also envisage creative ways for making use of cell phones or the employer's telephone line.

Motivational issues: Several organizations shirk their responsibilities when workers are confronted with a serious and immediate problem. Attracting workers into the organization by addressing their real concerns is a useful strategy. However, adequate precautions must be taken. Your strategy must include how to build on the issue, and subsequently how to preserve the interests of workers when the problem or crisis has been curtailed.

Step 3: Mapping out the practical details

Paying attention to practical details and ensuring proper administration may sound boring but it can make a difference. This does not mean that one cannot recruit effectively without an office or a secretariat. It simply implies that you must be well-organized yourself! Make use of the preparation checklist below to help you create your organization.

Mapping out the practical details for recruitment purposes

- Do we have? / Are we?
- When
- Set a start date
- Make sure you have adequate time
- Set a timeframe for the first phase
- Set a timeframe for the entire project/campaign where appropriate
- Decide when to assess progress
- Who
- Establish the recruitment team
- Conclude clear agreements with recruiters: who will be responsible for what and when?

Decide who is responsible for:

- Overseeing the process
- Producing reports
- Producing recruitment materials
- Ensuring that membership forms and maps are available
- Dealing with data entry and filing of records
- Organizing meetings
- Arranging transportation
- Handling money and payments

3. Recruitment process stage: **Implementation**

Activities to be performed must be carefully reviewed while addressing the following issues:

Who? What? Where? When? How? Why?

You have identified your strategy and approach. You have made all the preliminary practical arrangements. You should now be ready to begin the recruitment process. There are two important issues to keep in mind:

- The stages do not follow a linear sequence: search work is never interrupted; logistical arrangements may change along the way; the strategy should be revised, and so forth.
- Things do not always go as planned. Monitor events to re-evaluate your action plan when required.

Stage 4: Locating prospective workers

- **Are you prepared?**
- **Before setting out to recruit, identify the qualities, attributes and skills you require to successfully recruit workers.**
- **What are your strengths and weaknesses?**
- **What are the qualities, attributes and skills of the organizers / recruiters**

"Do I / Am I ...?"

- Speak the workers' language
- Understand and respect the workers' culture and career path
- Know the problems they face
- Feel empathetic towards them
- Show respect to workers
- Honest and trustworthy
- Hard working and committed
- Act independently and impartially
- Act in a fair and democratic manner
- Confident and courageous
- Patient and persevering
- Have a pleasant and friendly approach
- Know how to listen and communicate

Experience: qualities of an organizer

➤ Concerning organizers for an existing trade union

"...they must know how to coordinate operations and should play a leadership role within the group, or be well-respected persons. The contact persons must be eloquent, capable of educating other operations managers and they must be serious and honest. "

➤ Who can be solicited?

It is essential to find a gateway, a means of approaching the workers. The most common way is through a contact person. Where possible, find someone who can introduce you to a contact person who is close to the target group. It can open doors and help counter fear and mistrust. This contact person must be recognized and respected by workers who know and trust him. It may be a formal or non-formal leader of a group or an association of workers, or a leader in their community.

Conversely, the group or association leaders could be precisely those whom the workers are afraid of or distrust. In this case, you have a problem. If you ignore the leader, he may become hostile and ruin your efforts to forge a union. If you work with the leader, the workers may reject your endeavours. There is no simple answer to this problem. Be aware of this possibility and be prepared to change your strategy.

At times, you will have to build a list of contact persons from scratch. You must then approach a worker or group of workers without having been introduced. If you must proceed this way, make sure beforehand that you have carefully observed the group and are fully aware of its situation before choosing a worker or group of workers to approach.

"IT IS EASIER TO RECRUIT LIKE-MINDS."

➤ Where and when?

It is often preferable to discuss with your contact persons outside the workplace. Holding an informal social gathering at a community centre, a place of worship or any other gathering space can be a good starting point. You can visit these people at home or invite them to your home or office.

You will need to determine whether the workers are vulnerable to pressure from authorities, criminals, employers, spouses. It may be preferable to meet your contact person secretly and then proceed gradually and carefully with the recruitment of new members.

If nothing prevents you from conducting an open recruitment, find conducive gathering places, select resting or break periods to visit workers and groups of workers in their workplaces.

➤ What to say?

Here is an example of how a conversation with a new contact person or group of workers can be conducted. ONE TO ONE TALK

1. Greet and introduce yourself, laying emphasis on your credentials.

2. Briefly explain where you come from and indicate that you are there to provide information about your organization and how the latter can assist her/him/ them.

3. If the worker / contact person is not inclined to talk you, you should gently and courteously try to convince him to talk to you. If this proves impossible, be sensitive and decide on an appropriate time to say "thank you for giving me your time" and beat a retreat. You can always come back later to attract the person.

4. If s/he agrees to discuss, start by presenting an overview of your organization:

- **What is your organization all about (trade union)?**
- **What is its objective?**
- **Who are the members?**
- **Where does it operate?**
- **How is it run, who are the leaders, what are its democratic ideals?**

5. Explain why workers need to adhere to such an organization:

- To build unity, solidarity and a power base.

If we really want to STRENGTHEN OUR POWER: A Union-Building Strategy that would transform resources at your disposal into an economic power required to obtain the changes you so desire. "Union-building is therefore a means of ensuring the development of our resources or reducing their own resources, in such a way that the parties are reliant on each other and we can thus negotiate change together."

- To enable them to collectively confront their problems and to assert their demands.

- To provide support in difficult times.

6. Give a practical demonstration of how its functions. Provide concrete examples:

- How you can resolve a major problem for this group of workers.

- Success stories and achievements of your organization (trade union).

- Success stories and achievements of similar organizations (trade unions).

7. Ask if they have any questions or concerns and make time to listen and respond.

8. Invite him / her / them to join you, if deemed appropriate.

9. Make sure you can follow-up this discussion.

10. Provide your phone number and jot down the worker's number.

11. Provide written information such as a pamphlet or a newsletter.

- **How to convey such information: The right approach:**

- Be friendly, yet professional.
- Be respectful and calm.
- Be brief, clear and concise. Do not give too many details from the start.
- Do not cease to interact with the worker during the conversation. Leave room for comments and questions. Respect the knowledge and experience of workers.
- Listen to the comments and questions raised by the workers and do your best to answer them.
- Make sure you have enough time and do not be in a hurry.
- Make the worker feel that their concerns are legitimate and important.
- Be an expert (connoisseur) without being arrogant.

The wrong approach (Common mistakes)

You must not:

Promise what you cannot accomplish.

Exaggerate the achievements of the organization.

Be dishonest.

Schedule a meeting without attending.

Ignore or neglect the concerns of workers.

Flaunt your knowledge or display arrogance.

Threaten.

Lose your tempers.

Be impatient.

Contradict your statement through a disrespectful body language.

Make sexist remarks, harass or treat a woman unfairly.

Take an employers' stance and make generalizations using categorizations such as "them" and "us".

Workers may react differently to your approach. You must deal with foreseen and unforeseen circumstances. In order to be well-prepared, ponder on how you might respond to the following situations.

Common issues and concerns of workers

Be prepared to answer the questions below. Do your best to answer them. Take time to prepare yourself. Do not be afraid to admit that you do not know, or to indicate that there is no one right answer. Do not be evasive or dishonest. In some cases, you can ask the workers what they think and build a discussion around the issue.

- **Why should I join an organization?**
- **What can the organization do for me?**
- **How can you solve my problems?**
- **This is my immediate problem - can you solve it?**
- **What can you do for me that I cannot do myself?**
- **How can you help me make earn money / sell more / perform better than my competitors?**
- **How much do I have to pay?**
- **Why should I pay dues?**
- **How shall my money be used?**
- **How would I know that my money will not be stolen or misused?**
- **How will I find time to participate in such a group?**
- **Who are the leaders? How can I trust them?**

Stage 5: The recruitment meeting

Several meetings will be held in the course of this stage. They may commence with only one or two participants and then expand to a core of individuals who will assist in recruit more people. Ideally, you will hold meetings with a larger number of workers:

- **Give background information about the organization.**
- **Discuss issues and concerns.**
- **Explore possible solutions and the role this organization can play.**
- **Share experiences of other workers in the informal economy.**
- **Develop a plan to address a particular problem.**
- **Report on success stories.**
- **Report on progress made.**
- **Foster workers' and leaders' involvement and commitment in the recruitment process.**

Host an effective recruitment meeting of

Prior to the meeting

In collaboration with your contact persons, choose the best venue and time to hold the meeting.

Inform the workers in due time and give a brief explanation of the purpose and the time schedule of the meeting.

Find an appropriate way to convey the message to the workers.

Be clear about the expected results of the meeting and formulate a realistic and interesting agenda. Please circulate the agenda in advance, if possible.

Decide who will chair the meeting, who will take the minutes and who will respond to the issues that would be addressed.

Provide enough time for questions and discussions. Prepare the necessary materials for the meeting.

During the meeting

Explain the purpose of the meeting and the various agenda items.

Chair the meeting firmly so as to deal with the issues raised, reach relevant conclusions and finish on time.

Conduct the meeting democratically to ensure that all the voices are heard, particularly those of the female workers.

Produce highlights of the decisions and agree on the way forward.

Take minutes of the meeting and ensure that they are comprehensive.

When meetings are not possible

"Workers tend to be individualistic and have little or no time for group meetings. This is because they will be losing revenues or daily income when they attend meetings outside their workplace. "

"Workers are not interested in meetings; all they are concerned about is making money."

Meeting is the most powerful communication tool for democratic groups of workers. However, informal economy workers often find it difficult to attend meetings. As for self-employed workers, the time lost in meetings means less time working and consequently less money earned! As for others, their work-time schedule prevents them from participating.

The informal economy workers may also be confronted with other additional barriers such as responsibilities for their household and their children, safety concerns, religious or cultural obligations and so forth.

If the workers are unable to attend your meeting, then you must find ways to reach out to them. Transmitting information individually to workers and receiving feedbacks on their problems is an onerous task which requires resources and imagination. See below for a few key ideas:

- **Mobilize some teams of volunteers to help you visit workers in their homes.**
- **Send messages using the informal communication networks.**
- **Visit workers in places where they socialize.**
- **If possible, send regular messages through cell / mobile phones.**
- **Establish a network of "leaders" within the community or in workplaces where you can transmit messages and receive feedback from employees.**
- **Communicate regularly through pamphlets.**

Challenges

When you seek to recruit female workers, you may encounter difficulties. You must consider particular circumstances affecting women such as social and cultural obligations or organizational experience. Some of the recruitment barriers affecting female workers include:

- **Time: women have very little time to attend meetings and to engage in group activities because of housework and child monitoring. Men do not often contribute on an equal level!**
- **Traditional male attitudes: husbands or spouses may prevent women from joining groups or participate in their activities.**
- **Religion and Culture: These may restrict the freedom of women to leave their home or neighbourhood or even to discuss with men.**
- **Confidence: women have no confidence in joining or participating in organizational activities.**
- **Fear: Women may fear that to lose their livelihoods if they become active in an organisation women are afraid of their husbands, the community and fear for their safety.**

Actions

- **Observe the situation of the women that you intend to approach to ascertain their religious and cultural beliefs, their type of work and work schedule, as well as their organizational experience.**

- Work with someone who is close to women and in whom they have confidence. In most cases, it should be a woman.
- Obtain support from prominent leaders, who are well-respected and trusted. This can help you to build confidence among women and as such men can work with their reticent spouses.
- Proceed slowly and carefully. Explain clearly. Listen! Let the women speak air their views and draw their own conclusions.
- Explain the practical benefits of belonging to the organization. Convince them through concrete examples of other women’s situation.
- Try to meet the women where they are safe. It can be an existing gathering at their workplace, in their homes (when their husbands are absent but only if you're a woman!). It must be in a place where they are not afraid to be seen with a female/male organizer.
- Choose the right time to hold discussions and to ensure the participation of children, if necessary. Provide the necessary materials.
- The discussion should be brief and direct.
- Work with groups of women, if possible, to support each other and build trust.
- Show respect for religious, cultural and linguistic diversity.
- Encourage women to go out and recruit more women. Decide together on tasks to be undertaken and the persons to be responsible for such tasks.
- In mixed recruitment sessions, make sure that the issues of concern to women are discussed; encourage women to speak, what women say should be respected and treated as important as men’s views.

Make sure you do not:

- Propose romantic relationships or engage in acts of sexual harassment.
- Jeopardize women by revealing the interests in a bid to hasten their adherence to the union.
- Delay them so that they travel unsafely, or arrive home late.
- Adopt a superior attitude or speak to them with authority.
- Lose patience when women take a long time to talk or are reluctant to adhere to the union.
- Ignore women and their views or the concerns raised during the mixed recruitment sessions.

4. What is the way forward action?

It is very important for you to maintain contact with new members.

Otherwise, there is no need to persuade them to join the organization and then abandon them later. Visit them regularly. Organize meetings. Raise questions and help them solve their problems. Provide regular information through pamphlets, circulars, newsletters, and / or through elected representatives and activists.

- **Officially invite members to the premises of the organization, or associate yourself with them to incorporate an organization. This will entail organizing elections for leaders and representatives.**
- **Provide formal and informal educational training sessions. Capitalize on your experiences and imbibe your organization's approach for recruitment and unionization of workers. Attract more members into your organization by effectively addressing their concerns.**
- **Advertising in magazines, newspapers and community radio stations, and producing promotional materials, are among the avenues to explore, taking into consideration your research works and financial commitments as well as other union related commitments.**
- **"Informing" and "convincing" or "persuading" an audience is not at all the same task: each requires separate analytical, writing and presentation skills.**

Union text Editors are usually very skilled and experienced journalists from the print media.

A pro-union publicity writer and editor could introduce an interesting perspective to a trade union communication strategy aimed to facilitate and booster the recruitment process.

I wish you good luck!

Thank you