



# **The Role of Labour Unions in the Process Towards Sustainable Consumption and Production**

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## 1 Executive Summary

Labour unions are a determining force in the process towards sustainable consumption and production. This assumption is based on the fact that unions represent a significant proportion of the workforce and participate in a wide range of political activities. Due to unions' dual role as societal force and as lobbying organisations, however, labour unions' activities have traditionally focused on issues that directly concern the interests of union members, such as job security, wage levels and working conditions. Only recently, have labour unions, on a case by case basis, started expanding their agenda to include such topics as education, environmental protection or sustainable development.

This study analyses the actual and potential role of labour unions in the process towards more sustainable consumption and production patterns on the basis of several international case studies. More specifically, the study aims to identify areas and circumstances under which the interests of labour unions conform or conflict with the requirements of sustainable production and consumption and investigates the labour unions' potential contribution to achieving more sustainable consumption and production patterns.

At the international policy level the potential role of labour unions in this process is well acknowledged. Also, the growing debate on Corporate Social and Environmental Responsibility challenges unions to re-think the link between societal and workplace issues. As business actors have started to realise that a clear traditional separation of business and societal interest can no longer be maintained, labour unions are becoming aware of the fact that business today is taking on a new, more integrated meaning. It can thus be expected that the role of labour unions in global networks for enhancing sustainability, such as the Global Compact, and the sustainable development debate will become increasingly important. On the national level it can be seen that attitudes and activities of labour unions within the field of sustainable consumption and production greatly depend on the historical context in which they operate and formulate their policies. The societal role unions have assumed, as well as their mandates, leverage, and functions, vary between countries and continents, which makes it difficult to speak about labour unions as a single actor. On the other hand, it provides labour unions with a variety of possibilities to contribute to sustainable consumption and production through different channels and initiatives.

Despite all differences in terms of political power, member structure and internal organisation societal function, labour unions clearly represent a key actor in the process towards more sustainable production and consumption patterns. This is particularly true as the successful implementation of changes in the working environment to a large extent depends on the knowledge, support, and acceptance of workers / employees. Labour unions have a unique infrastructure to facilitate changes in the working environment and are involved in initiatives and policy-making processes on local, regional, national and international levels. As a result of this multi-layered pattern of engagement, labour unions possess a large number of organised workers, expertise and communication channels and thus a great potential for drawing further participants and expertise into the process towards more sustainable consumption and production patterns.

At the same time, the diversity of actors involved and the vastness of the network also bear the danger of fragmentation and conflicting interests, which might then considerably hamper progress. This is especially true as labour unions representing different economic sectors or different stages in the supply chain frequently have distinct interests. Moreover, members' traditional core interests, namely job creation, secure income level and safe working conditions, still constitute the top of unions' agendas. As a result, the concept of sustainable consumption and production has not yet been a priority in the work of labour unions, as it is often considered as conflicting with the economic and social objectives of unions. Hence, labour unions often represent a rather re-active force with regard to sustainable consumption and production which makes it difficult for other actors and potential partners to gauge the reliability of unions in terms of their commitment to advancing concepts of sustainable production and consumption.

Considering their evident stakes in the process, labour unions could and should make a greater effort to develop their own knowledge and theoretical concepts, as well as respective policies and programmes in order to become a full-fledged partner in the process towards sustainable consumption and production patterns. To this end they should adopt a more integrated view on production patterns, which includes societies' economic, environmental and social interests. Also, labour unions should become more involved in identifying and analysing the gains and losses experienced in different economic sectors in the transition process, while supporting employees and workers from traditional industries to transfer more easily into new (and more sustainable) economic sectors, thereby facilitating the shift towards more sustainable production and consumption patterns.

To expand the engagement of labour unions in concrete initiatives and projects at the plant level, unions could help to identify best practices for engaging with employers and workers. Also, partnerships and alliances with other stakeholder groups, including NGOs and other civil society actors, should be actively encouraged. The dissemination of best practices, e.g. through the Global Compact Learning Forum, would be beneficial to increasing the number and the effectiveness of alliances and co-operations.

Generally, labour unions should become more involved with sustainable development policy-making. Given the existing infrastructure, networks and expertise in place, a stronger participation of labour unions in these processes could significantly contribute to ease possible tensions between conflicting objectives. Also, a stronger involvement of expertise from local levels could facilitate bridging the gap between international policy-making and local implementation. However, against the background of labour unions' core interests, it has to be pointed out that participation in national or international policy-making does not necessarily imply a positive attitude towards sustainable consumption and production.

Last but not least, labour unions' activities at the international, national and local level have not yet been sufficiently analysed. A more coherent and systematic approach to study labour unions' activities could support an adequate assessment of labour unions' actual and potential contribution to promoting sustainable consumption and production.

## **2 Introduction**

### **2.1 Background**

Despite recent challenges to their political power in many countries, labour unions remain important actors in modern societies. They have generally established themselves as stable democratic institutions, and they count a significant proportion of the workforce as members and participate in a wide range of political activities. Because of unions' dual role as a societal force and as lobbying organisations, these activities have traditionally focused on issues that directly concern the interests of union members. Thus, job security, wage levels and working conditions, with a particular emphasis on health and safety, have always been high on the agenda and still represent the core interests of labour unions. Under the pressures arising from declining political influence, the often connected social and environmental consequences of globalisation, and heightened environmental awareness, especially in industrialised countries, labour unions have come to (occasionally) expand their agenda to include such topics as education, environmental protection and sustainable consumption and production.

It is certainly true that labour unions have retained enough power to be considered a determining force in the move towards sustainable consumption and production patterns. They have deep historical roots in society, large memberships and a high degree of organisation. Thus, labour unions have great potential to impact sustainable consumption and production in one way or another. So far, however, only limited research has been carried out specifically on how unions' power and potential have been used, and on whether unions can be considered active agents of change or are instead impediments to sustainable consumption and production patterns.

### **2.2 Scope**

This study analyses the actual and potential role of labour unions in the process towards more sustainable consumption and production patterns based on a number of international case studies, especially in the field of sustainable consumption and production. More specifically, the study aims to identify areas and circumstances under which the interests of labour unions conform or conflict with the requirements of sustainable production and consumption. Furthermore, it seeks to investigate the potential that labour unions have in increasing awareness among their members of the ultimately detrimental effects of short-sighted policies and in embracing broader goals and alliances. Particular attention is paid to the potential contribution of unions toward achieving more sustainable consumption and production patterns.

### **2.3 Approach**

Based on analyses of the political developments in the field of sustainable consumption and production, and the historical role and societal functions of unions in a selection of countries, the role of labour unions with regard to sustainability, as well as their potential contribution to achieve more sustainable consumption and production patterns, will be examined.

Suggestions will be offered for institutional changes to promote mutual understanding and learning processes on the side of labour unions in order to further their role as active agents of sustainability.

With this goal in mind, the study looks at historical case studies in selected countries. A generally large body of literature exists on labour unions and their activities, and the country policy backgrounds, which constitute part of the study, are based on this information. However, given the limited scope of this study and its use of specific case studies, the methodology largely centres on interviews with union leaders and officials. Also, the case studies were underpinned by the analysis of official documents.

## **2.4 Structure**

The study begins with a description of how the notion of sustainability developed, with an explanation of the concept's evolution and the subsequent implementation of measures on sustainable consumption and production. It also summarises the history of sustainability as a UN instrument of consumer protection and outlines the implementation frameworks of the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development.

Section 3 includes policy backgrounds on the selected countries (Germany, the UK, the US, Indonesia and South Africa), with a brief explanation of how these countries were selected. Section 4 provides a more detailed assessment of the approaches of and trends in the labour union movement. Case studies are carried out for each of the selected countries, results are summarised and underlying trends identified and examined.

The report concludes with an analysis of the results and an evaluation of the current relation between labour unions and sustainability. It also identifies possibilities for the development and reform of procedures to encourage the shift of labour unions towards sustainable consumption and production. In addition, the section assesses the potential contribution of labour unions to sustainable consumption and production.

### **3 Global Policy Background**

The notion of “sustainable development” came to the attention of the broader public on a global scale with 1992 UN Conference on the Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro. Today, this conference serves as a reference point for the international policy process towards sustainability. Questions about sustainable consumption and production lie at the core of sustainable development and were addressed in Rio and throughout the process that followed. This chapter gives an overview of how the issue of sustainable production and consumption has been addressed at the UN level since the early 1990s, and how labour unions have been involved in UN activities for sustainable consumption and production. Special attention will be paid to common aspects and the connection between these processes. While the focus is on the Rio process, including the recent World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg and its follow-up, the chapter will also briefly address other activities at the UN level, although there might be no direct institutional link.

#### **3.1 UN Guidelines and UNEP Programmes on Sustainable Consumption**

In 1985, through resolution 39/85, the United Nations General Assembly by consensus adopted the United Nations Guidelines for Consumer Protection. The Guidelines represent an international framework for governments, particularly those of developing countries, to formulate and strengthen consumer protection policies and legislation. The Guidelines were adopted "recognising that consumers often face imbalances in economic terms, education levels, and bargaining power, and bearing in mind that the consumer should have the right of access to non-hazardous products, as well as the importance of promoting just, equitable and sustainable economic and social development."<sup>1</sup>

In 1999, the Guidelines were modified to include elements on sustainable consumption. This extension of the Guidelines provided an important opportunity both to update consumer protection policies to include environmental protection and sustainable development and to strengthen the linkage between consumer interests and sustainable consumption, thereby stimulating national policymaking to promote more sustainable consumption patterns.

In 1989, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) started its programme for Clean Production (CP). It foresaw the establishment of National Cleaner Production Centres (NCPCs) and local Cleaner Production Centres (CPCs), which serve as hubs for capacity building. In 1998, UNEP launched the International Declaration on Cleaner Production, which up to now has been signed by more than 400 national and regional governments, companies, federations, NGOs, academia, agencies and inter-governmental organisations. Labour unions, however, are not among the signatories so far. In 1998 UNEP's Sustainable Consumption Programme was launched mainly to improve understanding of the forces that drive consumption.

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<sup>1</sup> See United Nations Guidelines for Consumer Protection (2003).

The program was gradually extended to include activities addressing sectors and themes like advertising, youth, Life Cycle Assessment and sustainable product design. Also, a process of regional roundtables coincided with the expansion of the UN Consumer Guidelines in 1999 to include elements on sustainable consumption.

### **3.2 The Rio Conference and its Follow-Up**

The issue of sustainable production and consumption has been a topic of growing interest since the conclusion of the UNCED conference in Rio de Janeiro in June 1992. Agenda 21, the well-known action programme adopted by the conference, contains numerous references to this issue. Chapter 4 of Agenda 21 highlights unsustainable patterns of consumption and focuses on developing national policies and strategies to encourage changes in such patterns:

- in order to support this broad strategy, Governments, and/or private research and policy institutes, with the assistance of regional and international economic and environmental organisations, should make a concerted effort to expand or promote databases on production and consumption and develop methodologies for analysing them (Agenda 21, Chapter 4).
- the major cause of the continued deterioration of the global environment is the unsustainable pattern of consumption and production, particularly in industrialised countries, which is a matter of grave concern, aggravating poverty and imbalances (Agenda 21, Chapter 4.3).

Chapter 29 of Agenda 21 explicitly addresses the role of workers and labour unions with respect in achieving sustainable development and emphasises the importance of bipartite (employers/workers) and tripartite (state/employers/workers) decision making structures. However, this is not elaborated with specific reference to the promotion of sustainable consumption and production patterns. Environmental and sustainable development concerns are mentioned in line with safety and health matters. This at least implicitly affects the issue of sustainable production. In addition, Chapter 29 calls upon governments and businesses to ensure the adequate participation of workers and labour unions in the process of sustainable development, and encourages labour unions to actively contribute to it. This concerns the level of the individual enterprise as well as the local, national and international levels.

Although Chapter 29 of Agenda 21 clearly acknowledges the significant role of labour unions in sustainable consumption and production, unions are barely mentioned in other chapters. For example, Chapter 30, called “Strengthening the role of business and industry”, addresses the issue of “cleaner production” but does not make a reference to labour unions.

Sustainable consumption and production were not only addressed in Agenda 21 itself, but were also part of the ensuing process. Agenda 21 called for the creation of a Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) to ensure an effective follow-up to UNCED, enhance international co-operation and examine progress in implementing Agenda 21 at the local, national, regional and international levels. The CSD, which institutionally belongs to the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), first convened for a substantive session in 1993 and has since met annually. At its third session, in 1995, the CSD adopted an International Work Programme on Changing Consumption and Production Patterns that addressed: trends



in consumption and production patterns; the impacts on developing countries of changes in consumption and production patterns; policy measures to change consumption and production patterns; voluntary commitments from countries; indicators for measuring changes in consumption and production patterns; and revision of the UN Guidelines for Consumer Protection.

In June 1997, five years after UNCED, the 19<sup>th</sup> UN General Assembly Special Session, also known as "Rio+5", was held in order to review the implementation of Agenda 21. Negotiations produced a Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21. Among the decisions adopted was a five-year CSD work programme, which identified sectoral, cross-sectoral and economic sector issues and established the main themes to be considered in the CSD's four subsequent sessions. This work programme secured sustainable consumption and production patterns status as an "overriding issue" on the CSD agenda for each year.

Since UNCED labour unions have engaged in a wide range of activities. For example, labour union members have participated in sessions of the OECD, FAO, WHO, WTO, ILO and UNEP that address the issue of sustainable consumption and production. Moreover, they have been involved in a large number of national and local initiatives to promote mainly the social pillar of sustainable consumption and production.<sup>2</sup>

Additionally, represented by the ICFTU they have been actively involved in the CSD mechanism as outlined above since 1996 when the ICFTU for the first time co-ordinated the labour union input to the CSD as a one-hour 'Day of the workplace' session. The contribution in 1997 was a session themed as 'Trade Union Dialogue'. In the following years labour unions' input to the CSD focused on the role of workers and unions with respect to concrete thematic aspects of sustainable development, such as Business and Industry (1998), Sustainable Tourism (1999), Food and Agriculture (2000) and Sustainable Energy and Transportation (2001). Over the years not only ICFTU and TUAC participated in the dialogue sessions with other stakeholders, but also other international unions representing various industry sectors.

### **3.3 The WSSD and its Follow-Up**

The decision of the General Assembly in 2000 to organise a 10-year review of UNCED at the summit level led to the WSSD, which took place in August/September 2002 in Johannesburg. The summit produced two main documents: the Johannesburg Declaration on Sustainable Development and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (JPOI). While the former remains general, the JPOI contains an entire chapter dedicated to the transformation of consumption and production patterns. The so-called Type-II Partnerships constitute another major outcome of the summit. In contrast to Type-I deliverables (such as the negotiating text), they do not require global agreement, but simply the commitment of partners (e.g. governmental institutions, business and other stakeholders), and they are aimed at practical implementation of sustainable development objectives. Already at the time of the summit, more than 200 of these partnerships were launched.

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<sup>2</sup> A number of examples of trade unions' activities can be found in: Global Unions (2002).

In the following section the main aspects of the JPOI are highlighted. While the JPOI does not make any explicit statement on the role of labour unions, it calls for stronger involvement of stakeholders in general and explicitly refers to workers. Partnerships between governments and non-governmental actors – which can be seen as a leading concept of WSSD – are mentioned in a number of contexts, including the overall “Institutional framework for sustainable development” (Chapter X, paragraph 150). The promotion of stakeholder involvement is also especially mentioned in connection with the ECOSOC (126c) and the CSD (128), as well as in the context of institutional arrangements at the regional level (143d).

Chapter III of the JPOI, "Changing Unsustainable Patterns of Consumption and Production", calls for, *inter alia*, actions at all levels to encourage and promote the development of a **10-year framework of programmes** “in support of regional and national initiatives to accelerate the shift towards sustainable consumption and production, to promote social and economic development within the carrying capacity of ecosystems and, where appropriate, de-coupling economic growth and environmental degradation through improving efficiency and sustainability in the use of resources and production processes and reducing resources degradation, pollution and waste”<sup>3</sup>. Within this chapter, paragraph 17 on corporate responsibility provides some implicit reference to the role of labour unions, giving testimony to their potential role in sustainable consumption and production. It calls for encouraging “dialogue between enterprises and communities in which they operate and other stakeholders” (17b) and mentions “workplace-based partnerships and programmes, including training and education programmes” (17d). Another explicit reference to the role of workers is given in paragraph 44 (in Chapter IV on the sustainable management of natural resources), which reflects the WSSD initiatives on minerals and mining and emphasises the involvement of workers and other stakeholders in efforts for sustainable mining and minerals development. Furthermore, some statements in the JPOI emphasise the role of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and its standards. Paragraph 45(d) calls for supporting the ILO and encouraging “its ongoing work on the social dimension of globalisation”; paragraph 9(b) calls for “assistance at all levels to increase income-generating employment opportunities”, taking into account the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work.

A larger number of labour unions took part in the preparation of the WSSD and actively shaped the summit. Some of the labour unions were part of the official delegations, and others contributed in the process of preparation. For instance, the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) prepared a series of documents presenting viewpoints on what key issues a particular industry should address in order to move itself closer to sustainability, which fed directly into the UNEP-led sector report process.<sup>4</sup> UNEP also hosted a high-level conference together with the ICFTU and the ILO titled ‘Fashioning a new deal’. The key objective of this conference was to identify linkages between sustainable employment practices and environmental management. Other objectives included improving workers’ understanding of the key environmental agreements and how they can support sound labour practices, identifying partnerships to promote a sustainable labour

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<sup>3</sup> United Nations: Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (2003), Chapter III, Para. 15.

<sup>4</sup> See [http://www.uneptie.org/outreach/wssd/resources/related\\_initiatives/relatedinitiatives.htm](http://www.uneptie.org/outreach/wssd/resources/related_initiatives/relatedinitiatives.htm).

agenda and integrating the environmental dimension into workplace assessments.<sup>5</sup> Generally, the main concern of labour unions at the WSSD was that the social pillar of sustainability be appropriately included in all considerations. The labour unions' approach to sustainable development and sustainable production and consumption patterns is strongly linked to health and safety issues connected to the workplace.<sup>6</sup> Environmental concerns are relatively rarely given separate attention, and are instead subsumed under the issues of health and safety.<sup>7</sup> As a result, labour unions called for an intensive implementation of **workplace assessments**.<sup>8</sup> This term refers to a process whereby labour unions and employers jointly evaluate the environmental, occupational and social standards of workplaces.

Workplace assessments can be carried out on the shop floor level, between several plants, or for an entire region. They make use of commonly agreed checklists against which workplace standards are evaluated. In many cases workplace assessments lead to the development of programmes aimed at improving the identified problems. These programmes can address both simple and complex concerns – from water and energy efficiency issues to social security and employment provisions. They can be of short duration or stretch over several years to fulfil complex objectives. Ultimately the workplace assessment tool is designed to empower workers by providing them with a means to critically analyse their workplace environment and effectively communicate with management about problems and possible solutions.<sup>1</sup>

Labour unions, ILO and UNEP agreed to launch joint work in the area of workplace assessments. Moreover, an agreement with ILO foresaw the introduction of training through the network of UNEP/UNIDO National Cleaner Production Centres. Labour unions did not conclude corresponding agreements for Type-II Partnerships at the summit, but aimed at launching such partnerships in the future. To date the co-operation among ICFTU, UNEP and ILO has resulted in the co-hosting of a series of meetings and workshops with numerous labour federations to demonstrate the link between occupational health and safety and sustainable development. While the document 'Fashioning a New Deal' constituted the main input of the labour union movement to the WSSD it is also considered as crucial document for clarifying the approach toward sustainable development within the labour union movement. In this function it significantly contributed to the further proliferation of the concept of sustainable production and consumption among union members. Unions are also increasingly realising that they need to address the issue of sustainable consumption and production if they intend to extend their activities in the area of general workers' concerns such as quality of life for workers, job security etc..

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<sup>5</sup> Laura Williamson, UNEP consultant, personal communication May 2004.

<sup>6</sup> For more information on Trade Unions' approach, see: Global Unions (2003).

<sup>7</sup> This is reflected by the commonly used abbreviation "OHS" for "Occupational Health and Safety" being extended to "OHSE" ("Occupational Health, Safety and Environment").

<sup>8</sup> Workplace assessment is "a process whereby trade unions and employers in one or several worksites, or in a sector or region, agree to joint assessments of workplace performance according to agreed checklists related to environmental, occupational and social criteria. Such an assessment should lead to joint programmes of change to identify and fix problems ranging from the simple (e.g., workplace water & energy wastes or losses) to the complex (e.g., improving workplace conditions on employment or related to social security or technology and other issues) and be of short duration or stretch over several years to fulfil complex objectives". TUAC(2003).

After the WSSD, the **Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD)** again took over the main responsibility for shaping the follow-up to the summit. At its eleventh session, in April/May 2003, the CSD named the challenge of changing unsustainable production and consumption patterns as a main goal of its work programme for 2004-2017. It also decided on an in-depth evaluation of the 10-Year Framework of Programmes to be undertaken in 2010/2011. Global Unions<sup>9</sup> submitted to CSD-11 an initiative for the workplace assessment partnerships mentioned above, which are intended to provide an overarching framework for a number of additional, related initiatives. The organisation provided a comprehensive list of areas (“clusters”) where such partnerships could take place (Global Unions, 2003), and some are clearly connected with the issue of sustainable production and consumption. This especially applies to:

- research and analysis partnerships for social integration, aiming at integrating the social dimension and other objectives, and
- linkage partnerships for production and consumption strategies referring to the 10-Year-Framework of Programmes and focussing on awareness-raising and consumer information.

This presents a clear example of active involvement on the part of labour unions in the debate and implementation of sustainable consumption and production. Global Unions also contributed to the debate on CSD’s future organisation of work, saying that the proposed Regional Implementation Forums should remain under the full co-ordination and control of the CSD secretariat in order to ensure full participation of all major groups in all regions.<sup>10</sup> It expressed scepticism towards the idea of establishing “dialogues with experts” at intergovernmental preparatory meetings held before each policy session, fearing that consultations with external experts could be created at the expense of stakeholder involvement in the decision making process. Global Unions also called upon CSD Member States to ensure adequate participation of labour unions and foster the actual exchange among the various stakeholders groups present at CSD sessions. In preparation for the CSD-12, 2004 Global Unions have drafted a position paper on 'Assessing the human side of development', which, inter alia, highlights the unions' position on corporate social responsibility in the light of diminishing government action. It furthermore argues that the social dimension of sustainable development continues to be overlooked.<sup>11</sup>

In June 2003, an **International Expert Meeting on the 10-Year Framework of Programmes for Sustainable Consumption and Production** was held in Marrakech, Morocco. The meeting (called "the Marrakech Process") was organised by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) in co-operation with UNEP, in response to Chapter III of the JPOI. Some 120 experts on sustainable consumption and

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<sup>9</sup> “Global Unions” is an umbrella organisation, including The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), The Trade Union Advisory Committee to the OECD (TUAC) and The Global Union Federations, the latter representing workers in ten sectors.

<sup>10</sup> Gereluk (2003).

<sup>11</sup> Global Unions (2004): Workers and Trade Unions at CSD 2004, Assessing the human side of development.

production from 65 countries participated in the meeting, representing government agencies, international organisations, consumer organisations, business and other stakeholders.

The expert meeting emphasised the importance of integrating the three dimensions of sustainable development into the formulation of policies aiming to promote sustainable consumption and production.<sup>12</sup> It further underlined the importance of ensuring the incorporation of sustainable consumption and production into national sustainable development strategies and, when applicable, poverty reduction initiatives. The necessity of clearly defining sustainable consumption and production was also highlighted. The participants stated that after about ten years of debate, the challenge was now to move from the more generic to the specific, with an ultimate focus on implementation. The meeting called upon the relevant UN organisations to report on necessities for action at the international level to support national and regional initiatives. Labour unions also participated in the expert meeting. Their concrete contribution, however, remained limited. They pointed to the danger of treating environmental and sustainability issues as merely technical problems while ignoring their socio-economic and political context, and they stressed the importance of developing solutions at the level of the community and workplace.<sup>13</sup>

### **3.4 Internal Developments**

The involvement of labour unions in global governance processes has to be viewed in the context of the international labour movement's internal discussion about sustainable production and consumption patterns. Taking account of this debate is also important in order to assess the potential for changing these patterns through union activities on the national and local levels.

Two crucial developments are currently underway at the international union level. For the first time, the senior policy level of the union has now finally agreed that sustainable development is a new paradigm for unions. This explicit commitment at the leadership level is expected to provide a new impetus for the entire union movement, complementing the bottom-up approach that currently prevails. At the same time, a so far unresolved discussion revolves around the issue of how sustainability policies should replace, or be combined or integrated with, the traditional issues of health and safety. While some unionists propose that health and safety could provide the backbone for sustainability in the workplace and beyond, others think that well-functioning health and safety structures will be weakened if the focus is shifted to sustainable consumption and production. Partly due to this lack of an overall commitment to sustainable development on the international level, and partly due to the structural characteristics of unions in general, progress in implementing approaches as outlined in 'Fashioning a New Deal' are deemed to be tediously slow so far.<sup>14</sup> Although there have been positive advances through several case studies around the world, an overall movement still needs to be spurred on.

In this context, however, Global Unions are currently taking concrete steps toward widely establishing workplace assessments as an accepted method of giving workers a better

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<sup>12</sup> Marrakech Report (2003), Summary by the Co-Chairs of the Meeting.

<sup>13</sup> "International Expert Meeting on Sustainable Consumption and Production asked to Consider Potential for Workplace Action", press release, <http://www.tuac.org/News/cnews2003.htm>.

<sup>14</sup> Interview, Lucien Royer, Paris 19 February, 2004.

understanding of the implication of their own activities at the plant and national level. This will be addressed through an internet-based assessment platform, which will soon enter its pilot phase with 800 workers from different backgrounds and countries assessing the quality of their workplaces. Also, ICFTU is leading the development of a guidance document for undertaking workplace assessments in co-operation with UNEP and ILO. These efforts have demonstrated that the linkages between environmental considerations and occupational health and safety issues are poorly understood, yet it is expected that the efforts of ICFTU and its partners UNEP and ILO will eventually lead to a broad proliferation of the workplace assessment tool and thus to a better integration of sustainable production and consumption patterns into the everyday lives of workers.

### **3.5 Conclusion**

Since the beginning of the 1990s, the issue of sustainable production and consumption has gained increasing importance at the international level. This is reflected in the expansion of the UN Consumer guidelines and in UNEP's programmes for Clean Production and Sustainable Consumption. Both the UNCED and the WSSD, as well as their respective follow-up processes, addressed sustainable consumption and production, and, as a result of CSD-11 and the International Expert Meeting in Marrakech, the issue is currently high on the political agenda.

The potential role of labour unions in the process is certainly acknowledged, as the number of explicit references in UN documents shows. However, generally labour unions seem to still be regarded as only one significant stakeholder group among others. This fact underlines the importance of the following chapters, which further illuminate the potential role of labour unions in contributing to or impeding the shift to more sustainable consumption and production patterns.

This evidence also shows that the union movement has started to embrace the concept of sustainability and is actively looking into ways to integrate aspects of sustainable development into the daily life of workers. In addition, the growing debate on Corporate Social Responsibility is challenging unions to re-think the link between societal and workplace issues. As management has started to grasp that the traditional distinction between business' interests and societal interest is no longer clear cut but often blurred, labour unions are also becoming aware that business today is taking on a new, more integrated meaning. It can thus be expected that the role of unions in global networks for enhancing sustainability, such as the Global Compact<sup>15</sup>, and the sustainable consumption and production debate will become more important.

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<sup>15</sup> The UN Global Compact, launched in 2000, engages business, labour and other stakeholder organisations to advance – among others – labour standards and environmental responsibility. See [www.unglobalcompact.org](http://www.unglobalcompact.org).

## **4 Union Movements in Selected Countries**

The attitudes and activities of labour unions within the field of sustainable consumption and production greatly depend on the historical context in which they operate and formulate their policies. The societal role unions have taken up, and their strength, duties and functions, vary between countries and continents. Hence, before investigating the chosen case studies in further detail, it is necessary to briefly discuss the development, standing and political role of labour unions in their respective countries. A more detailed description of the labour union movements in the selected countries is given in Annex 7.1 Labour Union Movements in Selected Countries.

### **4.1 Selection of Countries**

Due to the limited scope of the study, only a selection of countries could be considered in detail. Political and economic factors mainly determined the selection. Geographic balance was also a factor, as were availability of sources and personal contacts.

From a political perspective, Germany was chosen due to its relatively advanced policies in the area of environmental protection and sustainable consumption and production. Germany is also Europe's largest economy, and labour unions have traditionally held influential positions in the political arena. The United Kingdom was selected because of its role as the cradle of industrialisation and the labour union movement. The United States was chosen because of its economic dominance, political power and the relative weakness of the US labour union movement. Finally, Indonesia and South Africa complete the selection by offering perspectives from two different cultural, historical and economic backgrounds. Moreover, South Africa has played an important role not only as the host country of the WSSD, but also as a participant in the current debate on sustainable development, including public/private environmental and social responsibility.

### **4.2 The Societal Role of Labour Unions**

Different cultural, historical and socio-economic backgrounds have a strong impact on the development of labour unions and their present role and political position in society. Unions' current membership numbers, relationships with government and capital, working methods and main objectives, including the relevance of sustainable consumption and production, have been shaped by the process of their development.

Great Britain was the starting point of the labour union movement in Western Europe. There, unions developed from interest groups that sought to protect workers from the exploitative conditions of early capitalism. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, throughout Western Europe, the labour union movement gained importance through its achievements in the improvement of working conditions, but also social security and civil rights. In Germany, the labour unions were closely linked to the emergence of social democracy. After World War II, German labour unions were able to gain political power through long-term contacts with members of parliament, alliances with political parties and membership in numerous committees. Given their capability to bargain wages on the national level, German labour unions are frequently regarded as an intermediary power between the state and individual citizens. In contrast, the

labour union movements in the UK and the US are characterised by decentralisation. The absence of nation-wide wage bargaining and a general system of independent employee representatives, but most importantly the lack of co-operation between labour unions and decision makers, has created a system characterised by opposition and open conflict style. In the US, labour unions are considered a private interest group, rather than a necessary institution for democracy.

Labour unions in South Africa and Indonesia underwent a different type of development. In South Africa, the liberation struggle under the apartheid regime was inextricably intertwined with the independent labour union movement. As a result, labour unions continued to be an important player in the political arena by participating in the industrial council system and through close alliances with major political parties. Indonesian labour unions were formed only in the 1960s but, with one exception, were abolished during the Suharto regime. The end of the Suharto dictatorship led to a wave of establishing new unions. However, due to their limited role in the past, the significance of the informal economic sector, the absence of institutionalised relations with the government, as well as legal, political and economic constraints, the role of labour unions in Indonesia remains limited.

### **4.3 Membership and Recent Developments**

In countries where unionism is not as institutionalised as in Germany, labour unions' political clout depends to a large degree on the number and density of members. Structural economic changes, namely increasing de-industrialisation, the growth of private sector services and the differentiation of the workforce, have decreased the number of those blue-collar workers that traditionally enrolled in labour unions. Moreover, especially in Western countries, changes in the working world have been accompanied by a normative re-orientation towards individualism. As a result, in most countries the consciousness and awareness of workers is no longer conducive to widespread union support. In Great Britain the percentage of employees covered by collective agreements fell from 70% in 1984 to only 34.5% in 1999<sup>16</sup>, while membership figures dropped from 13.2 million in 1979 to 7.3 million in 1999<sup>17</sup>. Similar developments took place in the US and – although it is still characterised by a high membership density - in Germany. One important way in which unions sought to counter this development, especially throughout the 1990s, has been through mergers. Unions hoped that by reorganising their remaining members, they could gain advantages through co-operation and maintain political leverage.

In contrast to Western Europe and the US, labour unions in South Africa and Indonesia have experienced growth in membership in recent years, most likely due to their relatively recent legalisation. South African labour unions are associated with the broader movement for social equality and have organised successful membership campaigns. In Indonesia, on the other hand, only a small part of the working force is represented by labour unions, despite a steep increase in members.

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<sup>16</sup> Maass (2001), p. 4.

<sup>17</sup> Fulton (2001), p. 2.



#### **4.4 Political Weight**

The size of labour unions is only one indicator of their political influence. Other factors include the relationship between labour unions and decision makers and the extent of direct participation of labour unions' members in decision making processes. Moreover, the level on which wage bargaining takes place is of fundamental importance.

The political leverage of labour unions varies considerably in the countries analysed here. Labour unions in Indonesia and the United States have neither a large membership base nor well-developed institutional or personal links with the government. As a consequence, the impact of labour unions remains mostly limited to activities in single companies or sectors with a sufficiently large and organised workforce. Given their historical role, labour unions in the UK have a better position than their counterparts in the US or Indonesia, as they benefit from a larger membership base and better relations with decision makers.

South African and German labour unions currently demonstrate the strongest influence and political weight. In South Africa, the labour union movement is well organised and covers a large part of the workforce. Moreover, it has well-established and institutionalised relations with business and government. In Germany, collective bargaining agreements can be extended to include non-union members as well. Another sign of the political weight of Germany's labour unions is the general system of independent employee representatives. However, most important is the fact that German labour unions deeply penetrate the political decision making process, through participating in numerous committees and through personal relations. As mentioned above, they are frequently regarded as an intermediary player between the state and the individual.

#### **4.5 Labour Unions and Sustainable Consumption and Production**

Traditionally, the focus of union work has been on issues directly linked to improving or stabilising the living conditions of workers, in particular wage levels and health and safety concerns. Labour unions development is based on an ideology of industrial development; their success builds on economic growth and progress. These two values have thus traditionally received considerable support. Economic growth has been considered a prerequisite for a rise in living standards. As a logical consequence, environmental concerns were widely regarded as impediments to the goals of labour unions. This was based on the questionable assumption that environmental protection, though not environmental degradation, is a cost to society. However, this attitude has slowly changed, over the last 15 years, due to shifting economic structures in an increasingly globalised world, a raise in average income, and growing concerns about the environment. Furthermore, facing new challenges, such as the loss of members and influence, and consequently the need for reforms to secure survival, many labour unions have sought to widen their field of political action. In a number of countries, a new consciousness has brought about a widening of the political agenda of labour unions to include the broader concept of sustainable consumption and production. This possible paradigm shift brings unions closer to the Corporate Environmental and Social Responsibility debate, in which more links between are made between societal issues and traditional core workplace issues.

From an international perspective, German unions appear to embrace sustainable development more fully than their counterparts in other countries. In the late 1980s, labour unions started addressing issues such as new technologies and environmental protection. Ever since, labour unions have promoted the concept of sustainable development, not only on the level of corporate entities, but also on the national level. In the United Kingdom, the composition of labour union membership has changed as a result of economic modernisation. This may be giving workers with an increased environmental consciousness a stronger voice, as is already visible in a number of local initiatives. However, it is unclear to what extent these initiatives form part of a broader shift toward sustainable consumption and production. US labour unions have also expanded their scope beyond traditional objectives and interests. However, considering the limited public attention that issues of sustainable development attract, labour unions have only sporadically embraced environmental or broader human rights issues.

Unsurprisingly, the traditional fields of employment, social security and wages are much more important for labour unions in those countries that have recently become democracies. In particular, in Indonesia, a country which still struggles to cope with the consequences of the Asian financial crisis of 1997-99, labour unions face a large informal economy, low wages and the absence of workers rights. Under these conditions, the focus of unions' activities remains limited to traditional issues and does not embrace sustainable consumption and production as a broader concept. However, a democratic setting fosters active organs of civil society to defend the rights of workers, the community and society as a whole from uncontrolled economic development. For instance South African labour unions, although acting in an unfavourable economic setting, have started to slowly adopt the concept of sustainable consumption and production, including environmental issues. Testimony to this are the broad political agendas of labour unions, the number of initiatives on sustainable consumption and production, as well as the participation of labour unions in committees and initiatives dealing with environmental and social justice issues.

**Overview Table of Labour Unions in Selected Countries**

	Germany	Indonesia	UK	USA	South Africa
Historical role in society	👍	👎	👍	👉	👉/👍
Freedom to act	👍	👉/👎	👍	👍	👍
Coverage of the working force	👍	👎	👎	👎	👉/👍
Membership development in the recent past	👎	👍	👎	👉	👍
Dependence on member size	👎	👍	👍	👍	👉
Institutionalised partnership-relations with the state	👍	👎	👉	👎	👍
Power of labour unions	👍	👎	👉	👎	👍
Promoting sustainable development	👍	👎	👉	👉/👎	👉/👍

👍 Strong/High      👉 Medium      👎 Weak/Low

## 4.6 Synopsis

The short overview of labour union movements in the countries selected for this study demonstrates that the role of unions is by no means static, but subject to a variety of societal factors. The union movement in Western Europe was fairly strong and managed to establish considerable bargaining leverage as well as, in the case of Germany, close relations with national politics in the wake of increasing industrialisation. However, a decline in membership and union density, followed by a loss of influence, has occurred with the restructuring of the Western economies during the past 30 years. Despite similar starting points in terms of bargaining power in Germany, the United Kingdom and the United States, the current status of unions is quite different in each country. While German unions benefit from an institutionalised consideration in other political fora, unions in the United Kingdom and the United States have a much more difficult standing due to unfavourable political conditions. The union movement in South Africa was an important actor of the social movement under the apartheid regime and benefited from this position during the South African democratisation process in the early nineties. While the role of the labour unions here remains strong, it is increasingly coming under threat due to current instabilities in economic policy and ensuing tensions in existing union-government alliances. A similar development occurred in Indonesia, where labour unions gained strength after the downfall of the repressive Suharto regime. However, their political leverage remains limited due to lacking institutional structures and insufficient ties to relevant decision-makers.

While unions have had to face severe challenges due to substantial losses in influence and changing economic and societal conditions, especially in Western countries, there have been attempts to diversify the range of topics addressed by labour unions in order to address larger parts of the working population by integrating the concept of sustainable development (including sustainable production and consumption patterns) into union activities. These developments, however, have to be considered in the context of other strategies for revitalising the role of unions through an expansion and supplementation of the predominantly social range of issues that traditionally constitutes the unions' agenda.

Thematic diversification within the union movement is paralleled by a trend towards an increasing consideration of global issues, leading to a shift in focus from domestic to international problems and opening up new opportunities for labour union activities.

The persistence with respect to these new policy areas needs to be re-assessed within the coming years. With respect to the potential for new strategies based on past developments and the national context of the labour union movement in each of the countries considered, this study intends to make a contribution by means of case studies and by highlighting innovative approaches as well as difficulties and drawbacks.

## 5 Case Studies

The issue of sustainable consumption and production encompasses a large number of aspects and subject areas. Moreover, there are various possible approaches to shifting towards more sustainable production and consumption patterns. While this study focuses on the themes of green procurement, green housekeeping at the workplace and flexible work/perception of life, it does not narrowly define these topics. For example, green procurement, which is usually linked exclusively to government purchasing, refers here to the whole range of initiatives that contribute to shifting towards more sustainable purchasing, including industry procurement and labelling programs that inform individual consumers. In addition, as the objective of this study is to generate a preliminary assessment of actual and possible union contributions to sustainable consumption and production, it does not focus on certain economic sectors or types of initiatives. Rather, it looks at the broad range of possible contributions of labour unions in these areas.

A comprehensive assessment of labour union activities and attitudes towards sustainability is clearly beyond the scope of this study. The intention here is to give a general overview and to offer an indication of union contributions to sustainable consumption patterns. The case studies thus were chosen to strike a balance between economic sectors, successes and failures, and initiatives of different scopes. Another criterion for the selection was the availability of both written contributions and personal contacts for interviews.

### 5.1 Structure of the Case Studies

The case studies are structured as follows. A short introduction provides a brief background to the case, identifying the main actors, the time frame and the objectives. Following this is a description of the evolution of the initiative, including the organisation of stakeholders, channels of communication, learning processes and changes in the initial goals. Each case study ends with an assessment of the project results with respect to their further potential for on-going activities. In addition, the applicability of the cases to other industry sectors or national contexts as best practices is evaluated.

In general, case studies consider initiatives in the field of sustainable consumption and production that aim:

- to establish sustainable consumption and production patterns within the labour unions themselves and their operations;
- to achieve better sustainable consumption and production patterns in the industries in which the labour union members are employed; and
- to contribute to a general shift toward more sustainable consumption and production within the whole of society.

## 5.2 Germany

### 5.2.1 IG BAU – Flower Label Program

Over half of the cut flowers sold in Germany come from flower farms in Africa, South America and the Middle East. The majority of workers on these farms are women, and their working conditions are rather poor. Insecure working contracts, unsafe working practices and the lack of environmental protection result in a range of social and environmental problems.<sup>18</sup>

In 1990/91, a number of NGOs launched a campaign in response to complaints from grass-roots organisations about working and environmental conditions on Colombian flower farms. In 1999, together with other stakeholders, the flower campaign group launched the Flower Label Programme (FLP). The FLP accords its label for socially and environmentally responsible flower production based on a set of international standards covering human rights, working conditions and environmental and health precautions.<sup>19</sup> The programme also maintains complaint centres for employees.<sup>20</sup> In addition to thus promoting more responsibility on the part of the flower producers, the label also was also created to raise awareness among consumers for the conditions of flower production.

The German Trade Union for Building, Agriculture and Environment<sup>21</sup> (IG BAU) quickly joined the FLP after its inception. This involvement is based on the union's previous efforts in the area of sustainable consumption and production through, for instance, active participation in the Forest Stewardship Council and co-operation with private companies such as IKEA. This high level of activity can be partly ascribed to the IG BAU's membership structure: the environment being one sector represented by IG BAU.<sup>22</sup> Shortly before the creation of the FLP label, German florists suffered a 20% decrease in revenues due to reported pesticide use on flower farms. This triggered the participation of the florists' professional organisation (Blumenverbandstag), the IG BAU and others involved in the industry. However, given the union's history of environmental and social awareness, its primary reason for supporting the FLP was not to protect the interests of its own members in Germany, but to introduce humane working conditions and minimum environmental and health standards on the flower farms. Within the union, the initiative came mainly from management, but union members were also involved, for instance through youth groups and florist sections.

Originally, responsibility for the programme lay with the FLP board, which consisted of two elements: the first group was made up of representatives from production, trade and flower retail, the second group consisted of representatives from NGOs and the IG BAU. In 2003, the FLP was restructured and institutionalised as an officially recognised association (*Verein*)

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<sup>18</sup> [www.gtz.de/social-standards/deutsch/aktivitaeten/projekte/flower\\_label.htm](http://www.gtz.de/social-standards/deutsch/aktivitaeten/projekte/flower_label.htm).

<sup>19</sup> [www.fian.de](http://www.fian.de).

<sup>20</sup> [www.flower-label-programm.org/e1/weaboutus.htm](http://www.flower-label-programm.org/e1/weaboutus.htm).

<sup>21</sup> IG Bauen-Agrar-Umwelt.

<sup>22</sup> They have, for instance, specifically published documents in order to contribute to the German debate on environmental protection. Here they officially ascribe a greater importance to environmental protection than to unemployment, the humanisation of work and other traditional union priorities: Call for the integration of environmental protection into all relevant political sectors. Moreover, they have a position on sustainable production and consumption, at least in the field of forestry.

with four governing chambers<sup>23</sup>. Together, producers, members of trade, the NGOs and the IG BAU have to reach consensual decisions to avoid the dominance of particular interests. However, there remains an unofficial split of responsibilities between the two main sides: the trade and production groups are responsible for marketing of the label, and the NGOs and unions oversee the certification procedure and the overall credibility of the programme. They decide together whether to award their label to a flower farm on the basis of independent reports<sup>24</sup>. Adherence to the standards is then assessed by an EU-accredited, independent body. Beyond the four chambers, co-operation extends to other stakeholders in the exporting countries, such as local labour unions, which are also involved in the certification process.

Although a few problems still remain, especially relating to competition from other labels and low publicity, the label has been very successful. Few conflicts arise between the governing chambers, and the co-operation between stakeholders works well. Producers, labour unions and NGOs from the South also support the initiative<sup>25</sup>. To date, about 60 farms in Africa and Latin America -- together employing about 14,000 workers -- have registered. Many female workers now have permanent contracts and a right to maternity leave for three months. They enjoy the right to organise, and minimum wages and social benefits are guaranteed. Furthermore, they are provided with protective gear while handling pesticides and chemicals, and re-entry intervals (after the application of pesticides) are respected. The use of chemicals has been reduced, at times by 50%.<sup>26</sup> Natural resources are handled more carefully. In Germany, over 100 wholesalers and 900 flower shops offer FLP flowers, but the market proportion of certified flowers is still only 4%.<sup>27</sup>.

The FLP label was awarded “Label of the Month” in 2003 by the consumer-organisation “Verbraucher Initiative”, and efforts are under way to internationalise the label.<sup>28</sup>

IGBAU was not the first and main initiator of the FLP, but its membership structure and long-time involvement in the field of sustainable development meant that it had members eager to join and support a programme to improve working and environmental conditions on flower farms in developing countries. It appears that the intense, productive co-operation with all other stakeholders was the most important factor in the success of the programme. The FLP certainly has the potential to serve as a best-practice example, especially because of its organisational structure as a multi-stakeholder initiative, which has role-model potential. Already, in fact, the FLP has inspired initiatives in other areas, for instance in the banana trade.

## 5.2.2 DGB – The German Trade Union Confederation

The German Trade Union Confederation (Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund) was formed in 1949. As the umbrella organisation of eight of the most important labour unions in Germany, its duty is to (indirectly) represent the interests of the member unions’ 7.7 million workers and employees in the political arena, not only nationally, but also at the European and

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<sup>23</sup> Fian (2003a).

<sup>24</sup> [www.fian.de](http://www.fian.de) ; [www.oeko-fair.de/oekofair.php/aid/66](http://www.oeko-fair.de/oekofair.php/aid/66).

<sup>25</sup> [www.gtz.de/social-standards/deutsch/aktivitaeten/projekte/flower\\_label.htm](http://www.gtz.de/social-standards/deutsch/aktivitaeten/projekte/flower_label.htm).

<sup>26</sup> [www.flower-label-programm.org/e1/weaboutus.htm](http://www.flower-label-programm.org/e1/weaboutus.htm).

<sup>27</sup> [www.igbau.de/db/v2/frameset.pl](http://www.igbau.de/db/v2/frameset.pl).

<sup>28</sup> Fian (2003b).

international levels. This also applies to environmental politics, as stated in the DGB by-laws<sup>29</sup>. Moreover, the DGB co-ordinates the activities of the member unions, and as such is the most important union actor in Germany.

As early as 1972, the year of the Stockholm Conference, the DGB published its first guidelines on environmental matters. Yet efforts in this field remained tentative and largely restricted to health and safety issues. This changed in the 1980s, when the DGB included environmental principles within its policy statements for the first time.<sup>30</sup> A larger number of labour unionists had become active in the Green Party<sup>31</sup>, and forest workers and employees in the energy sector were directly affected by the political discussions on measures to counter air pollution and forest dieback. Hence, environmental politics entered the traditional union duty of representing member interests. However, the confederation was confronted with conflicts of interest between its different branches. In consequence, the DGB developed personal expertise and started to increasingly draw up position papers and join environmental committees in order to add a union perspective to government environmental initiatives.

Besides its responsibility to defend union interests in the national arena, the DGB (as opposed to US unions, for example) regards itself as a societal actor with a socio-political mandate free to develop its own environmental politics. Thus, in the 1980s, the DGB developed a concept of qualitative growth that would lead to job creation by investing in environmental measures. In preparation for UNCED 1992, unions engaged more intensively in environmental politics and sustainable development, always combining the social and environmental dimension. It was recognised that safety for workers and environmental protection are inextricably intertwined. Moreover, the DGB started examining the social costs of environmental damage to society as a whole, triggering the discussion about the internalisation of externalities. In the area of sustainable production and consumption, the DGB introduced campaigns for example on energy saving devices, recycled paper or the collection of used batteries. Furthermore, it successfully lobbied for a change in the Works Council Constitution Act that would create a sound legal basis for the participation of works councils in environmental decision-making at the plant level<sup>32</sup>.

The confederation has also focused its activities on the advancement of environmental education at the plant level.<sup>33</sup> While the DGB has also been active in the National Commission for Environmental Auditors, its attitude has grown more distant over recent years. From a union perspective, the system of environmental management and auditing has not led to improvements above what is legally required. The DGB itself has no environmental management system, but the goal of a sustainable alteration of production and consumption patterns is stated in the current version of its policy statements.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> DGB (2002).

<sup>30</sup> <http://www.dgb.de/dgb/Grundsatzprog/gestaltung.htm#02>.

<sup>31</sup> Interview with Werner Schneider.

<sup>32</sup> Participation of workers was legally guaranteed in the area of health and safety, but any decision concerning environmental policies was still within the authority of management and could only be extended by voluntary agreements. A change of that law in 1998 finally created a legal space for employee initiatives in the areas of green procurement, energy and water saving initiatives etc.

<sup>33</sup> [www.dgb.de/themen/themen\\_a\\_z/abisz\\_doks/b/umwpubl.pdf](http://www.dgb.de/themen/themen_a_z/abisz_doks/b/umwpubl.pdf).

<sup>34</sup> <http://www.dgb.de/dgb/Grundsatzprog/gestaltung.htm#02>.

Increasing unemployment and economic problems in Germany have had an impact on the importance of environmental politics at a national level, which is also reflected in the agenda of German labour unions. After the Red-Green coalition came to power in 1998, it founded the 'Alliance for Jobs' in order to address the problem of mass unemployment. Interestingly, it was the unions who pushed for the integration of environmental concerns into the discussions with the DGB<sup>35</sup>. In order to demonstrate that it would be possible to create jobs and promote environmental protection at the same time, the DGB drew up a list of respective proposals and initiated the "alliance for work and environment". In the context of the alliance, which is only one example of emerging co-operation between labour unions and other political actors, two proposals were finally agreed on: the promotion of the export of environmental technology, and a programme for the energetic refurbishment of 300,000 flats annually<sup>36</sup>.

Currently, efforts focus on extending the "alliance for work and environment" to the European level. In general, possibly because of the privileged position of labour unions within German politics, the DGB has been a leading advocate in advancing environmental concerns at a European labour union level. Especially since the UNCED 1992, labour unions have also expanded their scope of activities to the international level, through world-wide exchange, seminars and assistance to other unions. All in all, environmental concerns have become integrated in other fields of union politics. New forms of co-operation have emerged in order to gain greater political weight in face of the government.

In conclusion, the German labour union movement started dealing with environmental issues from a defensive position, partly due to the lack of capacities, partly because of sceptical attitudes towards environmental concerns. When, in the early 1980s, environmental problems started to directly affect union members, the DGB had to include these issues in its agenda in order to fulfil its traditional role as the representative of workers' interests in the political arena. In line with the mainstreaming of the environmental movement and the rise of environmental issues on the political agenda, the DGB entered the debate in order to fulfil its second function, its socio-political mandate. This has also forced the DGB to adopt the issue on a broader scale, integrate environmental concerns into other fields of union activities and push it regionally onto the European and international level. The confederation has been lobbying for the integration of the polluter pays principle into a socio-ecological tax reform, which would provide the right incentives for more sustainable patterns of production and consumption. However, it has been less dedicated to forming a leading example in terms of, for instance, green procurement or environmental management systems.

### 5.3 Indonesia

Indonesia's labour unions typically focus on social issues and workplace conditions on the factory level, but pay only limited attention to issues of sustainable consumption and production. In fact, the concepts of "sustainable consumption" and "sustainable production" are probably unknown to many union leaders in Indonesia, although their work can be related to sustainable development. For example, the goals of the labour unions include

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<sup>35</sup> [www.dgb.de/themen/themen\\_a\\_z/abisz\\_doks/d/bfaumw.pdf](http://www.dgb.de/themen/themen_a_z/abisz_doks/d/bfaumw.pdf);  
[www.dgb.de/themen/themen\\_a\\_z/abisz\\_doks/k/bfa\\_umw\\_doku.pdf](http://www.dgb.de/themen/themen_a_z/abisz_doks/k/bfa_umw_doku.pdf).

<sup>36</sup> Leittretter (2001).



passing laws that respect the ILO's Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, improving the income of working Indonesians, nullifying the debt that was accumulated during the Suharto regime, and improving safety conditions in the workplace. The failure of labour unions to more explicitly engage in the area of sustainable consumption and production is due to a number of reasons: First, the short length of time since labour unions have been able to operate freely in Indonesia has not been sufficient for the development of broad political agendas. As a result, most labour unions are still in a stage where they focus on clearly defined problems and issues, and progress is measurable and directly felt by the union members. In fact, Indonesia's labour unions are still struggling to institutionalise themselves. Secondly, the sheer number of labour unions operating mainly on the company or plant level means that the unions' focus is still limited to practical issues regarding working conditions in specific locations. The labour unions' priorities have also been shaped by Indonesia's dire economic situation since the Asian Crisis, which led to high unemployment, a large informal sector and generally low incomes. As a result, the political agenda of labour unions includes mostly traditional issues, namely social security, health care, job creation and safety standards in the workplace. These priorities are also reflected by the International Labour Organisation in Indonesia, whose objectives for 2002-2003 were: to create jobs, with particular attention to the position of women, indigenous people and the informal sector; to support labour law reforms based fundamental labour rights; and to combat the worst forms of child labour.<sup>37</sup> Because the number of union members is relatively small, and unions' focus is on issues at the company level, unions have been ineffective as mediators between business and employees on the national level, and are largely excluded from the general political decision making process.

Given the small size of the unions and their early stage of economic and political development, little information is available on specific activities and cases in which unions have been involved in supporting sustainable consumption and production. However, several individuals who have gained public attention represent a notable exception. One of the most famous labour union leaders is Dita Indah Sari, Chairperson of the Congress of the National Front for Indonesian Workers Struggle (FNPBI), which has only about 25,000 members. Ms Sari has been promoting human rights in Indonesia since the 1980s and attracted publicity in recent years when she refused to accept a Human Rights Award worth US\$ 50,000 from Reebok, denouncing the company for paying many workers in Indonesian factories less than \$1 a day. Ms Sari also pointed out that while 80% of workers in Reebok factories are women, the company gives no maternity leave.<sup>38</sup> Her struggle and refusal to accept the award attracted international attention and efforts to compensate Ms Sari and the FNPBI for the financial loss she incurred. The practices of Reebok, which had a code of conduct, contributed to doubts as to whether labour unions should actively engage in and support companies' codes of conduct at all. There is a wide discussion as to whether codes of conduct are standards that contribute to improved working conditions, or whether they are merely guidelines that are used for PR purposes and can be easily dismissed by the employers. FNPBI work is certainly not exclusively focused on Reebok. In the area of sustainable consumption and production, FNPBI pushes for a better environmental conditions in the workplace and equal working conditions for women. FNPBI itself has

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<sup>37</sup> See <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/region/asro/jakarta>.

<sup>38</sup> [http://www.laksamana.net/vnews.cfm?ncat=40&news\\_id=2263](http://www.laksamana.net/vnews.cfm?ncat=40&news_id=2263).

demonstrated how women can take the lead, as not only its chairperson is a woman, but also many of the FNPBI branches around Indonesia are headed by women.

## 5.4 United Kingdom

### 5.4.1 PROSPECT – Green Matters and Car Sharing Database

Prospect was formed on 1 November 2001 after the merger of two existing unions, EMA (The Engineers' and Managers' Association) and IPMS (The Institution of Professionals, Managers and Specialists). It represents more than 105,000 members in the public and private sectors and is the largest union in the UK representing professional engineers. Members work in areas as diverse as agriculture, defence, energy, environment, heritage, industry, law and order, shipbuilding and transport. Currently, Prospect is in the process of drafting a strategy on how to address sustainable consumption and production issues. The strategy is mainly written and elaborated by Prospect's full-time members; however, lay members will participate in the drafting process through meetings and committees before the policy is released.

Generally, Prospect's increasing involvement in environmental policy making is based on two motivations. First, Prospect is trying to have a say in shaping the transition to a low carbon economy in the UK. Secondly, Prospect has an interest in adequately preparing its members to engage in the new economy at all levels. Prospect has demonstrated this interest through its active role in the Trade Union Sustainable Development Advisory Committee (TUSDAC), which aims to direct labour union input into the policy process and to encourage constructive dialogue between unions and the government on sustainable development and other environmental issues.<sup>39</sup> Also, while Prospect's active engagement in the sustainable development debate is mainly due to external developments, such as the increased of sustainable development in local and national governance, it is also due to increased environmental awareness within the membership. However, it is difficult to reconcile a wide range of views on certain environmental issues.

Prospect's engagement in environmental issues is not only limited to the policy making process, but also includes very practical initiatives, in particular the publication "Green Matters" and the car-sharing database<sup>40</sup>.

Twice a year, Prospect publishes a small paper called "Green Matters", which presents activities in the field of the environment and sustainable development that British labour unions and union confederations have been involved in<sup>41</sup>. The creation of "Green Matters" represented an internal decision and was supported by Prospect's Assistant General Secretary. It mainly stems from a desire to disseminate information from internal meetings throughout the whole labour unions' membership and to assign environmental matters a higher position on the agenda. The target group of the paper is the membership itself, but it is sent to a number of other actors as well. In the near future, issues of "Green Matters" will

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<sup>39</sup> <http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/tusdac>.

<sup>40</sup> Another example of a practical initiative is Prospect's environmental education programme for representatives.

<sup>41</sup> [http://www.prospect.org.uk/doclib/category.php?category\\_id=8](http://www.prospect.org.uk/doclib/category.php?category_id=8).

be made available on the internet, thus addressing an even wider audience. Comments from the readers and feedback from other labour unions highlight the success of Green Matters.

The second example of Prospect's involvement in the area of sustainable consumption and consumption (and that of two other labour unions, GMB and PCS) is the development of a car-sharing database for the Veterinary Laboratories Agency (VLA). The initiative began with a survey to ascertain the commuting habits of its staff in order to meet the requirements of VLA's Green Transport Plan. The survey showed that car sharing was an alternative mode of travelling that a high proportion (63%) of VLA staff were either already practising or would consider. During discussions with management, it became evident that management intended to encourage and promote, but not set up, this car sharing scheme. Had the Trade Union Side (TUS) in VLA, which involves all three unions mentioned above, not then taken the initiative of proposing a car-sharing database to management, the project might never have started. When management declared that the costs appeared to be unaffordable, TUS offered to develop the database itself. However, in the end, the IT Unit of VLA came up with an affordable solution that was supported and implemented by management. As the database has only been in place since the end of 2003, there is not sufficient feedback yet to gauge its success. However, it is evident that more efforts in publicity are needed to raise awareness of the programme among employees. An incentive to use the database could be to calculate the cost savings in transportation by sharing cars. There is no theoretical reason why this database could not be used by any other organisation, if certain refinements to specific circumstances, such as the number of employees or flexible working hours, have been carried out.

In conclusion, Prospect's involvement in the sustainable development debate is not only limited to participating in the policy making process, but also includes efforts to raise awareness among its own members and to provide practical solutions in the field of sustainable consumption and production. Prospect is therefore both a reactive force in the area of sustainable development, since it rises to the challenges posed by demands, as exemplified by the database, and a proactive force, as exemplified by its publication "Green Matters" and its participation in the Trade Union Sustainable Development Advisory Committee.

#### **5.4.2 PCS - Work-Life Balance**

PCS currently represents about 288,000 employees in government services.<sup>42</sup> The union has no official general policy on sustainable production and consumption. However, it has been campaigning for Work/Life Balance (WLB) for approximately 20 years. Over the last 6-7 years, the issue has come to the forefront, partly as a result of the increase in part-time workers. WLB is about introducing flexibility into the workplace that takes account of the diverse needs of employees at various stages in their lives (eg. people with disabilities or dependants). WLB also helps employers who want to improve their service and are interested in having a contented workforce, reduced turnover and higher productivity.

In 2000, the Department for Trade and Industry launched a WLB campaign aimed at all employers, urging them to introduce flexibility in work patterns and to enable more

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<sup>42</sup> <http://www.pcs.org.uk/Templates/Internal.asp?NodeID=884075>.

employees to work from home part of the week. In recent years, the government itself has come under increasing pressure to modernize its service.. With regard to the present case study, the Inland Revenue (IR), as an employer, had an interest in extending opening hours, though public demand and the government's 2000 modernisation agenda for more customer-focused service asked for just these sorts of changes.

Because PCS represents 93% of all IR employees, this committed PCS and the IR to find ways of working together to deliver better public services<sup>43</sup>. The pilot project OurTime, launched by the IR in partnership with PCS in 2002, was a response to the challenge of delivering more accessible service and extending opening hours to the public, while at the same time helping staff to improve their balance between work and personal life<sup>44</sup>.

Despite the initial fears of some union members, the initiative was largely driven by them, not management. At the same time, it was clear that governmental pressure was crucial to initiating this co-operation between the union and the IR. Besides national and local PCS representatives, other major actors were representatives from the local and central IR offices and a representative from the national TUC<sup>45</sup>.

The project was planned and organised through surveys and focus groups that asked staff members about their current working patterns, ideal hours, and ideas to better match the needs and aspirations in order to match business with staff needs. The project was publicised internally and to the public through the dissemination of news and information. In three pilot studies, the different flexible working arrangements were tested. At the same time, training packages were offered to inform managers and teams about how to manage and work with WLB. Lastly, in collaboration with TUC, learning access points were established, building a link between WLB and life-long learning<sup>46</sup>.

The biggest obstacle was overcoming the traditionally adversarial structures and attitudes within British industrial relations. Employees were afraid of unpredictability, and the prospect that they would be forced to work extended hours against their will. But the regular meetings helped to build trust and to identify "quick-win" opportunities, through which staff recognised practical benefits. A modernisation agreement was reached that stated that no employee would be forced to change working hours; instead, management would try to fill the extended opening hours with volunteers only. Together with the learning centres, this helped to counter the perception that OurTime was a management ploy to obtain extended hours "on the cheap"<sup>47</sup>. The meetings also helped to counter fears of management that they would lose control and that the new arrangements would leave too much choice to workers. Thus the meetings helped to reduce fears and scepticism on both sides and contributed to creating a trustful working atmosphere between all parties.

Especially against the background of a previously decided pay deal imposed against the will of PCS, it was necessary to rebuild faith and trust between management and the union.

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<sup>43</sup> <http://www.pcs.org.uk/Templates/Internal.asp?NodeID=884075>  
[www.employersforwork-lifebalance.org.uk/pdf/inlandRev.pdf?NodeID=882974](http://www.employersforwork-lifebalance.org.uk/pdf/inlandRev.pdf?NodeID=882974).

<sup>44</sup> TUC (2002).

<sup>45</sup> <http://www.pcs.org.uk/Templates/Internal.asp?NodeID=884075>; TUC (2002).

<sup>46</sup> <http://www.pcs.org.uk/Templates/Internal.asp?NodeID=884075>.  
[www.employersforwork-lifebalance.org.uk/pdf/inlandRev.pdf?NodeID=882974](http://www.employersforwork-lifebalance.org.uk/pdf/inlandRev.pdf?NodeID=882974).

<sup>47</sup> Essery (2003).

Considering the strength of PCS, it was clear to IR management that they had to co-operate with the union to implement longer opening hours.

The project was specifically intended as a model process, with the goal of resulting in insights and lessons, and it was widely perceived as a success. Local achievements include better customer service, stronger links with the community, and a new relationship between management and the union informed by greater trust and the realisation of new ways of working together. The relationship between staff and the Inland Revenue also improved. Productivity and morale could be linked, leading to a higher commitment from staff. Moreover, life-long learning could be promoted within the context of WLB<sup>48</sup>. Lastly, OurTime provided greater choice and flexibility to both customers and employees; raised the profile of WLB, and furthered a win-win approach to flexibility. Nationally, OurTime functioned as a model process. The over-riding aim was to develop a model with wider application to the Inland Revenue as a whole and beyond. It could demonstrate that partnerships with unions work, and that they benefit both staff and management. It forms a template on how to involve unions and employees in decisions concerning the re-organisation of work<sup>49</sup>. The training package and other material that resulted is now used in IR branches across the country, and other governmental departments have shown interest, too<sup>50</sup>. OurTime is thus an enduring success that could also serve as an example for other countries.

The partnership has created a space for unions to actively contribute to the development of policies on alternative working patterns, and to take forward the Government's work-life balance agenda. The experience can be used when approaching new developments such as the use of ICT in advancing telework, which not only supports flexible lifestyles but also helps to reduce work traffic and associated GHG emissions. After OurTime, PCS was able to negotiate a "No-core-time" national agreement, which would not have been possible without the OurTime experience.

The present case study, although it can be located in the traditional field of union activities, nonetheless presents a good example of union innovation and their ability to adapt to contemporary problems, overcome the traditional confrontational attitude towards employers, and work towards co-operation and partnership that results in win-win situations.

## 5.5 United States

### 5.5.1 UNITE – Partnering to Bridge the Blue/Green Divide

UNITE – the union of needletrades, industrial and textile employees<sup>51</sup> – represents members in both the United States and in Canada in a large number of industries, such as apparel, textiles, industrial laundries, distribution and retail, auto parts and supply, and Xerox manufacturing. In a recent merger, UNITE joined forces with HERE, the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees International Union, with a combined member base of 440,000

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<sup>48</sup> Essery, (2003); [www.publicnet.co.uk/publicnet/02081302.htm](http://www.publicnet.co.uk/publicnet/02081302.htm).

<sup>49</sup> TUC (2002); <http://www.pcs.org.uk/Templates/Internal.asp?NodeID=884075>.

<sup>50</sup> [www.employersforwork-lifebalance.org.uk/pdf/inlandRev.pdf?NodeID=882974](http://www.employersforwork-lifebalance.org.uk/pdf/inlandRev.pdf?NodeID=882974).

<sup>51</sup> UNITE was founded in 1995 through a merger of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union (ILGWU) and the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union (ACTWU).



active and 400,000 retired workers. Typical members of both unions would be service workers, in many cases immigrants. Besides traditional union activities in areas like health care, the right to organize, unemployment insurance and minimum wage, UNITE managed to establish a clear profile through its work against unfair labor conditions in textile manufacturing. One of its most prominent campaigns was targeted at stopping sweatshop labor through promoting a union label that would guarantee fair labor conditions.

Another focus area of UNITE's activities revolves around the working conditions in industrial laundry operations. A big issue in this industry is the handling of toxic chemicals. Workers are exposed to toxics originating from two sources. First, toxics, such as solvents and metals, arrive on the items to be washed. Second, detergents used for the cleaning processes are in many cases equally toxic, and may be derived from endocrine disruptors. The US EPA recently issued a proposal to establish formal rules on the transport and handling of contaminated shop towels, which are mainly used in the printing, automotive and semiconductor industries. The provisions focus on the mode of transportation and the degree of allowed contamination of these towels by the time they reach the laundry facilities. While the EPA considers the proposal to be a major step towards more responsible handling of these towels, UNITE claims that the proposal fails to effectively protect workers' health and the environment. In this argument, they are supported by the Sierra Club, one of the most prominent environmental NGOs in the US. This unusual partnership was initiated under the auspices of the partnership programme of the Sierra Club, and it aims to streamline efforts on sustainable production processes of various civil society actors.

This initiative is predominantly targeted at creating an appropriate legislative and administrative framework for pursuing more sustainable production processes and healthier work places for laundry workers. UNITE is also a partnering organisation in the California Solar Project (CSP)<sup>52</sup>. This combined effort of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW), the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) and the Sierra Club is aimed at reducing global warming in a socially and economically acceptable way. By providing the necessary financing, planning and technical support, CSP assists labor unions, their members, environmentalists and others to install solar power systems on homes and buildings, creating jobs, actively building capacities in the solar energy industry, and promoting sustainable consumption patterns. While the programme currently focuses on California, where state legislation favors the installation of solar panels, programme representatives hope that they will be able to establish a best case example for other states as well.

These are only two examples of the current tendency in the US labour union movement to engage in partnerships with the 'green side'. While the interests and positions of workers and environmentalist seemed for a long time to be contradictory by nature, there is a rising awareness that through collaboration, environmental goals can be reached without compromising workers' social security, and that there may even be a positive correlation between higher environmental standards and jobs.<sup>53</sup> Most interestingly, unions are taking an active role in shaping this discussion, advocating more sustainable industry activities. Still,

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<sup>52</sup> [www.californiasolarproject.org](http://www.californiasolarproject.org).

<sup>53</sup> Young, Jim [2003] Green-Collar Workers, Sierra Magazine.

speaking of a broad consensus would go to far, as union activities remain scattered and positions are changing quickly in the face of economic pressure.

### **5.5.2 United Farmworkers of America – Sustainable Agriculture**

High intensity farming throughout the entire United States has always relied heavily on human labour. Particularly in California, which is the largest supplier of agricultural produce for the US market, the leading exporter<sup>54</sup> and the flagship of a \$28 billion business, farming is dominated by specialised, high-acreage factory farms employing large numbers of farm workers. Throughout US and Californian history, employers recruited immigrant minorities who were willing to work hard for comparably low wages. Even today, farm workers are in many cases subject to exploitative working conditions. This ranges from paying below minimum wage levels, providing insufficient or absent health and social security coverage, and long-term exposure to harmful pesticides used on the fields. The United Farm Workers (UFW), a union registered with the American Federation of Labor Unions (AFL-CIO), was founded in 1962 by Cesar Chavez, himself a migrant farm worker, to improve the situation of farm workers in California. After the establishment of respective legislation in the state of California to allow farm workers to assemble, organise and bargain in 1975<sup>55</sup>, the UFW was able to negotiate contracts with a number of growers that grant basic rights and benefits and now cover about 27,000 farm workers in California.<sup>56</sup>

Particularly high on UFW's agenda is the use of pesticides in agriculture. In the past, UFW has spearheaded efforts to ban the use of certain pesticides and to establish and enforce practices for the safer handling of pesticides. For example, the first ban on DDT in the US was effected by a contract between the UFW and a grower, before federal law issued respective legislation. Since this success, UFW has successfully lobbied for the ban of other pesticides, such as captan and other phosphoric pesticides.

The UFW has always tried to establish a sense of environmental farming ethics with growers. However, there is a strong opposition to growers who use organic farming practices merely for marketing purposes, while at the same time treating their workers just as poorly as farmers still utilising pesticides and other chemicals.<sup>57</sup> The concept of sustainable agricultural practices integrating environmental and social issues is strongly advocated within the organisation by educating workers about their rights and providing them with means to enforce pesticide regulation and sustainable farming practices.

Farms establishing contracts with the UFW are allowed to label their products with the UFW union label, which is one important form of product information that enables consumer to make informed choices. While there already is a considerable market for organic produce, fair labour practices in agriculture are also finding growing awareness among consumers, especially in California.

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<sup>54</sup> <http://www.cdfa.ca.gov>.

<sup>55</sup> Generally farm workers are to the present day excluded from federal labour laws, California constitutes an exception in this respect. For this reason, UFW efforts are concentrated in this state, individual contracts could be established with growers in Washington, Arizona, Texas and Florida.

<sup>56</sup> The entire farm labour work force in California is estimated at 500.000.

<sup>57</sup> Rodriguez, Arturo, current president of the UFW.

A positive example of a successful combination of both environmental and human values is Swanton Berry Farm in Davenport, California. While the farm started out specialising in environmentally conscious agriculture, it became the first organic farm in the US to sign a contract with the UFW. The unionisation of the workers provides them with the right to participate in farm management as co-partners and guarantees the best pay scale in the industry<sup>58</sup>, medical and retirement plans, and vacation and holiday pay. Although Swanton is a comparatively small grower and occupies a niche market, positive experiences here could possibly be applied at other farms in the future.

While in this case the UFW was approached by the farmer, in other cases the UFW has actively sought collaboration with societal actors to reach broader sections of society and advocate their issues. For example, the UFW led the joint effort of the Sierra Club, the NRDC<sup>59</sup> and the Teamsters<sup>60</sup> in the fight against substances like methyl bromide. Taking into account the reservations that environmental NGOs had about labour unions in the early 1970s, this collaboration is a major step.

The most recent collaboration of the UFW with an environmental NGO (here again the Sierra Club) is a campaign against a vineyard development in California, which is criticised due to environmental risks such as the probable loss of habitat for endangered species, erosion and groundwater deterioration. In the past, vineyard operators had failed to manage such risks adequately and also denied basic health benefits to their workers. It is feared that negligent environmental management will lead to health risks for vineyard workers. Therefore, UFW is supporting the Sierra Club's appeal of a permit for the proposed vineyard operations.

The case of the UFW demonstrates that industry sectors that rely on a sound environment for economic success show a general tendency to include environmental considerations in union policies. This is especially pertinent for farm worker, since negligent environmental practices directly influence the health of workers and their families. Additionally the UFW case provides another example of a strategic alliance between labour unions and other civil society actors that identified common goals. Through union labels, the UFW also has the opportunity to directly influence consumer choice at a national level, while other activities are mostly limited to the regional scale.

## 5.6 South Africa

### 5.6.1 Plastic Bag Regulation

In 2000, the South African Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism (DEAT) identified littering, including dumping of thin plastic bags, as a problem facing the South African environment. It therefore proposed a new plastic bag regulation that required companies to use thicker bags, in particular if they had printing on them. Through this measure, the government aimed to make plastic bags too expensive for retailers to give them away at no charge, which would force them to introduce thicker, reusable plastic bags

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<sup>58</sup> [www.swantonberry.com](http://www.swantonberry.com).

<sup>59</sup> National Resources Defence Council, [www.nrdc.org](http://www.nrdc.org).

<sup>60</sup> International Brotherhood of Teamsters, Union of the warehouse, parcel and freight workers, public employees and industrial trades.



to the market.<sup>61</sup> To the government's surprise, there was a loud outcry from business associations and several labour unions against the plastic bag regulation.

On the side of the labour unions, South Africa's two largest federations, the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) and the National Council of Trade Unions (NACTU) were engaged in the case. Together with business groups, including the Plastics Federation of South Africa and the Chemical and Allied Industries Association, they expressed concern that the new regulations on plastic bags failed to establish a proper balance between the clean environment and the need for job retention and creation. In particular, both groups expected a loss of approximately 7000 jobs in the plastic bag manufacturing industry alone and losses in the value chain, such as retail and raw material suppliers, that would take the job loss count to more than 71,000.<sup>62</sup>

After a first public hearing on the case, government officials and business and labour union representatives came together in the National Economic Development and Labour Council (NEDLAC). All constituencies of NEDLAC agreed that joint research should be conducted in order to develop a shared understanding of the potential socio-economic impact of the proposed regulations.<sup>63</sup> However, COSATU and NACTU expressed concern that the results, including alternative proposals such as educational programmes, increased anti-littering campaigns, introduction of heavy anti-littering fines and recycling, were not appropriately taken into account.

As a result, business representatives threatened to go to court on this matter, while labour unions showed readiness to mobilise their members.<sup>64</sup> Moreover, COSATU threatened to consider a dispute outside NEDLAC, which could have had ramifications for South Africa's ability to approach the WSSD in a unified fashion.<sup>65</sup> In September 2002, joint pressure from business groups and labour unions resulted in a memorandum of agreement between the DEAT, labour unions and business organisations. The agreement reflected the parties' commitment to a partnership approach to the achievement of sustainable development and included provisions on the minimum thickness of plastic bags, disclosure and transparency, the printing on plastic bags and institutional arrangements.<sup>66</sup> In the end, the agreement permitted plastic bags with a only slightly increased thickness, thereby retaining jobs in the plastic manufacturing and retail industries, but having less impact on environmental conditions in South Africa.<sup>67</sup>

South Africa's plastic bag regulation is noteworthy for several reasons. Although business associations and labour unions did not form an official alliance against the government's proposal, both groups shared similar objectives and co-operated closely. They agreed that the government failed to adequately explain how the proposed regulation would prevent littering or serve the environment in general. Moreover, they believed that the regulation did not balance environmental and economic concerns, and was thus unsustainable.

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<sup>61</sup> Los Angeles Times: South Africa getting a handle on bag dilemma, 30 January 2002.

<sup>62</sup> Press statement by COSATU: [http://www.cosatu.org.za/press/2001/Plastic\\_bags--8816.html](http://www.cosatu.org.za/press/2001/Plastic_bags--8816.html).

<sup>63</sup> The full Study is online available at: <http://www.nedlac.org.za/research/fridge/plastics>.

<sup>64</sup> Press statement by COSATU: [http://www.cosatu.org.za/press/2001/Plastic\\_bags--8816.html](http://www.cosatu.org.za/press/2001/Plastic_bags--8816.html).

<sup>65</sup> Press Statement by COSATU: [http://www.cosatu.org.za/press/2002/Plastic\\_bags--2054.html](http://www.cosatu.org.za/press/2002/Plastic_bags--2054.html).

<sup>66</sup> The agreement is online available at: <http://www.sacob.co.za/News/plastic.pdf>.

<sup>67</sup> BBC NEWS: South Africa bans Plastic bags, 9 May 2003.

Most consultations about the regulation took place within NEDLAC, where labour unions are regarded as important stakeholders. As a result of this involvement, labour unions strongly contributed to the drawing up of compromise, which did not require retailers to charge for the new thicker plastic bags but introduced a levy imposed on each bag sold. The compromise reflected the needs and interests of a large and diverse stakeholder group. Moreover, even after the compromise was reached, government, business and labour continued to meet on a regularly basis in a special task-team formed to address the remaining issues, such as a levy system that was agreed upon in the memorandum. While the very process in the framework of NEDLAC which allowed for the participation and involvement of key stakeholders, including labour unions, can be called sustainable, it should be kept in mind that environmental concerns as such were not expressed by labour unions at any time. This pillar of sustainable development has thus in this case not been fully embraced by labour unions.<sup>68</sup> However, in the end consumption of bags has indeed decreased, especially at stores where bags are being charged for, such as large grocery stores. Bag manufacturers report that bag sales initially dropped to 10% of previous levels, and are currently at 30% of previous levels.

Last but not least, the plastic bag regulation case affected the public understanding of environmental issues. Although it was not the initial intention of the government's regulation, the discussion with South Africa's main stakeholder groups was widely covered in the national and international media, resulting in a highly increased environmental awareness of South African citizens and a significant reduction in the consumption of plastic bags.

### **5.6.2 NUMSA – HIV/AIDS Initiative by Daimler Chrysler South Africa**

HIV/AIDS is a serious threat to the social stability and economic prosperity of South Africa. In 2001, 360,000 South Africans died of HIV/AIDS and five million South Africans were reported to be HIV positive.<sup>69</sup> Union federations in South Africa began to address HIV in the early 1990s, when they realised its significant effect on their membership. As one result, COSATU urged big business to become more proactive in addressing the HIV epidemic. Moreover, labour unions engaged in the field of HIV/AIDS prevention on the national level, e.g. by creating manuals for its members, contributing to policy developments within NEDLAC, and supporting the World AIDS Day, and on the local level, e.g. by developing educational and informational programmes. Further, a number of transnational companies, among them DaimlerChrysler South Africa (DCSA), started programmes to fight the disease, acknowledging the problem and the insufficiency of government actions.<sup>70</sup>

In 1996, discussions between DCSA health services, company management and the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) led to the formulation and implementation of a workplace policy on HIV/AIDS that principally addressed issues of employment equity and non-discrimination.<sup>71</sup> Building on this policy, the DCSA's HIV/AIDS programme was launched in 2001 with support from NUMSA. The goals were to ensure optimisation and long-term sustainability of the DCSA HIV programme and to further reduce

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<sup>68</sup> In other cases, such as the prevention of transboundary trade in toxic waste, there was a broad alliance, including unions. Lukey, Albertyn and Coetzee (1991), p. 170.

<sup>69</sup> Gavin (2002), p. 59.

<sup>70</sup> Global Business Coalition on HIV/AIDS (2002), p. 5-6.

<sup>71</sup> Gavin (2002) p. 59; Seitz et. al. (2002), p. 5.

the proliferation of HIV infection among the workforce of DCSA, their families and immediate communities.

Even before the launch of the programme, NUMSA's involvement in roundtables and workshops made full employee participation possible and ensured a common understanding of the problem and the programme. In the actual implementation phase, NUMSA contributed to the programme through a wide range of activities, such as the education of staff members, the encouragement of HIV/AIDS testing, the distribution of condoms, etc. While it is impossible to determine the concrete impact of the project, condom distribution, voluntary counselling and testing increased, indicating that the project is well under way.<sup>72</sup> Moreover, the project has attracted attention from NGOs, national and international health organisations, and business, and now serves as a best practice example for the UN Global Compact Learning Forum.

NUMSA is now pushing for even deeper involvement in the HIV problem, especially with regards to family and community involvement. It argues that DCSA has to involve families and communities more systematically, because little remains to be done at the plant level, and employees' attitudes and behaviour will only continue to change if the changes are supported by their family and community.

South African labour unions are highly involved in the fight against HIV/AIDS. COSATU and NUMSA are engaged on the national level with a focus on influencing policy making, and on a local level through concrete projects and programmes. NUMSAs active participation in DCSA's HIV/AIDS programme demonstrates the common understanding of the problem and the believe that co-operation will result in benefits for all stakeholders. As a result, unions and DCSA appear to be partners rather than opponents in dealing with the HIV epidemic, despite conflicts in other areas. In this respect, NUMSA's position on HIV appears to be closer to that of DCSA than that of the national government.<sup>73</sup>

With regard to sustainable development, several points seem noteworthy. First, labour unions identified common interests and actively supported DCSA's programme, despite conflicts in other areas. Second, the success of the programme was largely build on trust, transparency and participation, to which labour unions contributed significantly. Last but not least, labour unions pushed to broaden the programme to employee families and communities and other health issues, such as food consumption and local pollution, thus demonstrating the objective to address the HIV/AIDS level on a larger societal level, rather than to limit activities to the plant and their employees.

## **5.7 Summary of Case Studies**

Labour unions are engaged in a variety of initiatives in the area of sustainable consumption and production. These range from practical activities on the plant level to campaigns, and participation in the policy making processes on the national and international level.

On the plant level, examples such as the creation of the car sharing data base, the organisation of awareness-raising events and the work-life balance demonstrate labour

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<sup>72</sup> Seitz et. al. (2002), p. 14.

<sup>73</sup> Seitz et. al. (2002), p. 9.

unions' activities 'on the ground'. Initiatives such as the creation a flower label and the publication "Green Matters" indicate labour unions' engagement on the national level. Moreover, a number of labour unions are engaged in policy-making on the national and even international level. Among the relevant case studies analysed are the South African Plastic Bag regulation and the engagement of the German Trade Union Confederation (DGB). Looking at the case studies analysed in this report, a number of issues can be observed.

As described in Part 4.5, sustainable development, although not an entirely new concept for unions, is usually not regarded as a primary interest. However, an **increasing number of labour unions are involved in initiatives in the area of sustainable development** and acknowledge the importance of the concept to their work. This is confirmed by the case studies analysed here. By and large, all labour unions work in the area of employment policy, social standards and health and safety policy at the workplace. In addition, most labour unions have departed from the narrow focus on health and safety at the workplace and now include other actors in its initiatives and activities, such as communities in the South Africa HIV case study and thematic topics like as Prospect's "Green Matters" and its car-sharing database. However, only a small number of labour unions in developed countries have already elaborated sustainable development or sustainable consumption and production policies, as has the DGB, or are in the process of drafting such strategies, as is Prospect.

These case studies give reason to assume that labour unions are embracing new objectives, namely sustainable consumption and production patterns, **depending partly on the economic and social background of the country**. In particular, issues such as the level of income, unemployment rate, social conditions at the workplace and presence of child labour have a larger impact on the objectives and aims pursued by labour unions and their members. As a result, sustainable consumption and production is relatively high on the agenda in countries such as Germany and the United Kingdom, and relatively low in Indonesia. However, no defining North-South divide in the attitude toward sustainable consumption and production patterns could be identified. One reason for this may be that setting of priorities is influenced by the level of labour unions' activities and their socio-political mandate, which translates into the role of labour unions in the political process. The assumption is that in societies where unions have a role as mediator on the national level, such as in Germany or South Africa, they are more likely to engage politically in matters of sustainable production and consumption as soon as they emerge on the national political agenda. If unions do not have this societal function, they are only likely to become active when sustainable development policy directly affects the interests of their own members, which is the case in the United States for example. Yet another reason might be that social economic and environmental issues are frequently linked together. Usually the poor suffer disproportionately high from heavy environmental pollution, such as waste disposal or toxic emissions.<sup>74</sup> The resulting health risks and problems give them a strong motive to promote actively the environmental debates.

The case studies demonstrate that most labour unions do still **struggle to take on the bridge between their core interests and a broader agenda**. Especially in situations where initiatives for sustainable consumption and production are perceived as a threat to employment, labour unions tend to withdraw from the sustainable development agenda, as

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<sup>74</sup> Lukez et. al. (1991).

was seen in the plastic bag regulation case. However, it seems that there frequently is a possible conflict of interests between labour unions of different economic sectors. The general attitude to sustainability is that labour unions are rhetorically not opposed, but the concept is only rarely actively embraced and furthered by labour unions themselves. In other words, labour unions often possess a **reactive attitude towards sustainable consumption and production**. In most cases, labour unions did not commence programs or plans, but rather joined existing activities that were initiated by other actors such as NGOs, governments or employers. However, it is fair to say that after projects were launched, unions greatly contributed to their implementation. Moreover, once the initiative was started and unions realised the potential congruence with their own goals, they continued to give support, as could be seen in Prospect's car-sharing database.

Furthermore, **the role of alliances and co-operation between unions and other actors can not be overestimated**. Especially in the implementation phase, the structures and networks in place are frequently crucial to successfully carrying out initiatives. Labour unions join alliances with partners despite conflicts in other areas (see HIV case study or car-sharing database). It was repeatedly stated that a prerequisite for success of alliances between unions and other actors is a common starting point for all actors involved.

Moreover, **mutual trust and confidence** between management and employees plays a crucial role to embark on new roads towards more sustainable consumption and production patterns. Open dialogue, participation and transparency in the decision making processes and the management of all initiatives were fundamental to built trust and faith between business and labour unions.

## 6 Conclusion and Recommendations

With respect to the conclusions, it should be re-emphasised that it was not within the scope of the study to critically analyse and assess either labour unions' attitude toward sustainable development, individual case studies or labour unions' engagement in the international policy arena. The objective of this report was rather to closely describe a number of case studies in order to identify potentials for and impediments to labour unions' contributions to achieve more sustainable consumption and production patterns. Due to the design of the study, the cases described in Chapter 5 rely heavily on information gained through interviews with labour union officials (see Annex 7.3 List of Interviewees). The possibilities for verifying this information were limited. Nevertheless, the study clearly points to a number of strengths, weaknesses, challenges and opportunities for labour unions to make a greater contribution to the transition towards more sustainable production and consumption patterns:

The majority of initiatives to achieve more sustainable production and consumption patterns aim at a transformation of workplace and production methods. The successful implementation of such changes in the working environment depends to a large extent on the knowledge, support, and acceptance of workers and employees. As a result, **labour unions are a key actor** in the process towards more sustainable production and consumption patterns. This is also recognised by current international voluntary initiatives, such as the UN Global Compact, in which business, labour, civil society actors and governments are engaged. The case studies presented as examples in this report demonstrate that unions have started realising this potential and that some activities have already been initiated.

In terms of scale of work, labour unions are actively involved in initiatives and policy-making processes on **different levels**. More specifically, labour unions are actively engaged on local, regional, national and international levels. In each of these contexts, labour unions pursue different objectives: In general, at the local and regional level, labour unions participate in specific projects and initiatives with precise goals. The result often directly benefits union members, who are actively involved in the design and implementation of these projects, and in many cases other workers as well. Conversely, on the national and international level, labour unions frequently engage in the broader process of policy-making. Here, labour union officials participate in committees and other fora to influence national and international policy-making processes. As a result of this multi-layered pattern of engagement, labour unions have a **unique infrastructure** that involves a large number of organised workers, expertise and communication channels. This existing infrastructure represents a great potential to draw further participants and expertise into the process towards more sustainable consumption and production patterns.

At the same time, the **diversity of actors** involved and the vastness of the network also bear the danger of fragmentation and conflicting interests, which then might considerably hamper progress. The unions surveyed in this study possess different mandates, play different roles in societies and work under different conditions in their countries. Therefore, they considerably differ in size and political weight with respect to their role in political processes. Also, while some labour unions have experienced large losses in terms of members, others are still in the process of institutionalisation and are currently gaining political power, leaving most labour unions in a state of re-orientation. In addition, labour unions operate under different political, environmental and economic conditions. Consequently, it is difficult to

speak about labour unions in general, and the comparability of the initiatives and activities of labour unions described in this study is limited to a certain degree. However, it also gives testimony to the variety of possibilities that labour unions have to support sustainable consumption and production patterns.

In promoting sustainable production and consumption, this diversity of actors leads to many cases, where unions are confronted with several dilemmas, which are briefly outlined below:

First, members' traditional core interests, namely job creation, secure income level and safe working conditions, still constitute the top of unions' agendas. The concept of sustainable consumption and production has not yet been a priority in the work of labour unions, as it is often considered as conflicting with the economic and social objectives of unions. This is also evident from the fact that most labour unions do not feature sustainable development strategies, policies or programmes. The **lack of a systematic approach** also implies that labour unions represent a rather re-active force with regard to sustainable consumption and production. In most cases, labour unions are not the actors who initiate programmes and activities, but they may join existing initiatives if they see common ground and interests. Yet, the growing debate on Corporate Environmental and Social Responsibility is also challenging unions to re-think the link between broader societal issues and workplace issues. As management has started to learn from the debate that the traditional distinction between what happens inside and outside the factory gate is no longer clear-cut, labour unions are called upon to consider business from a more integrated point of view. The general impression is that unions will only get engaged when such activities do not conflict with other core commitments or goals. Thus, commitments and initiatives remain haphazard and sometimes inconsistent, and do not follow a predictable pattern, making it difficult for other actors and potential partners to gauge the reliability of unions in terms of their commitment to advancing concepts of sustainable production and consumption.

Secondly, the economic sector background of unions plays a crucial role in determining the position of unions with respect to the transition to more sustainable production and consumption patterns. Like businesses, **labour unions representing different economic sectors have distinct interests**. For instance, in the area of climate change, there are different interests among polluting industries, such as coal mining or the oil industry; affected economic sectors, such as agriculture; and economic sectors contributing to the solution of the problem and potentially gaining from a change in consumption and production patterns. In general, labour unions in traditional economic sectors often seem to be better organised and thus tend to have a stronger leverage. Potential opportunities created by a transition towards more sustainable production and consumption patterns, however, are frequently not investigated in detail. These conflicts equally occur among the different interconnected actors up- and downstream in the supply chain, where one industry might reap benefits from a transition while others are likely to experience disadvantages.

While these perceived dilemmas might be considered as impediments to unions' involvement in the process towards sustainable production and consumption, they rather re-emphasise the unique **interface position** unions can have or may assume in the future in bridging these differences and actively working towards the alleviation of conflicts both among themselves and other actors involved. This would entail the further integration of environmental considerations into the current agenda dominated by social and economic aspects, thereby

creating a more coherent and sustainable approach. Secondly, it would include aligning and integrating competing objectives between sectors and stages of the value chain.

This approach would be greatly supported by the considerable **innovative potential**, which is inherent to the diverse labour union structure and demonstrated by the case studies featured in this report. An example for an innovative approach towards advancing sustainable production and consumption patterns is the promotion of workplace assessments, which will lead to greater awareness among workers for sustainability issues and provide for the better integration of social, environmental and economic objectives at the company level.

Another decisive asset of unions is illustrated by the many examples of union **partnerships with other relevant stakeholders at all levels**, including business, government or other civil society actors in the area of sustainable production and consumption on all levels mentioned. While in some cases unions actively sought these partnerships, in other incidents they joined and supported other organisations in their initiatives when the respective goals were considered mutually supportive. As a general impression, the role of labour unions in such partnerships is often related to the social dimension of sustainable development, while other aspects, such as environmental and economical sustainability, are represented by the other actors involved. Judging from the case studies investigated as well as the information elicited through the interviews, the experience of unions with partnerships is usually very positive and provides the basis for future initiatives and further engagement. Best practice demonstrates that partnerships have the greatest impact when they are formed in a specific thematic area and with clearly defined goals. Moreover, transparency, an equal standing of all partners, and a well defined time frame contribute to the success of alliances and partnerships.



## Labour unions and their contribution to SC+P: A SWOT-Analysis

Labour unions are faced with inherent strengths and weaknesses regarding their involvement and the role they might play in the process towards more sustainable consumption and production patterns. At the same time, new opportunities for advancing unions' contribution to this process become evident. Potential threats, which might impede these changes and developments, need to be considered as well. The following summary provides an overview of the most prominent aspects.

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Key position to promote SC+P – the workplace</li> <li>• Unique interface role to link different actors</li> <li>• Operate on all levels (global, national, regional and local)</li> <li>• Extensive networks involving key industrial sectors</li> <li>• Potential for finding creative solutions</li> <li>• Strong involvement with politics (in some countries)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Different and even conflicting interests among unions</li> <li>• Re-active force</li> <li>• No coherent approach to sustainable consumption and production</li> <li>• Difference in unions standing in individual countries</li> <li>• Difficult relation to other key actors (business, NGOs - in some cases)</li> <li>• Several unions faced with diminishing membership</li> </ul>
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Disseminate and build on current best practices</li> <li>• Start integrating SC+P through workplace assessments</li> <li>• Facilitate fair transition process toward SC+P</li> <li>• Use of internet for information dissemination, training, networking and teleworking</li> <li>• Partnerships and alliances with business and other civil society actors</li> <li>• Use international fora (e.g. Global Compact) to gain knowledge and get involved in policy-making</li> <li>• Support implementation of international approaches on other levels</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Localised approaches without effect on other countries, sectors</li> <li>• Hindrance of progress due to conflicts of interest</li> <li>• Overemphasis of social component of sustainability</li> <li>• Incoherence of unions' involvement on different levels</li> </ul>

## Recommendations

To increase labour unions' contribution to the promotion of sustainable consumption and production patterns, a number of concrete recommendations can be made based on the opportunities identified above. In particular, as the unique interface position and the innovative potential of labour unions for providing a link between the social and environmental dimension of sustainable development as well as a link between the various actors involved has not yet been activated to its fullest extent, efforts should focus on the following aspects.

- Given the existing interest in sustainable consumption and production, labour unions should make a greater effort to develop their own knowledge and theoretical concepts, as well as respective policies and programmes in order to become a full fledged partner in the process towards sustainable consumption and production patterns. The Corporate Environmental and Social Responsibility debate has already shown that the working environment and the societal environment is interlinked. As a result, labour unions have to develop a more integrated view on production patterns, which include societies' economic, environmental and social interests. In this process labour unions could build on experience generated and provided by new initiatives, such as the UN Global Compact.
- Different economic sectors will be affected to varying degrees by the transition towards more sustainable production and consumption patterns. This is also reflected in the interests and priorities of labour unions representing different economic sectors and industries. As a result, labour unions should be more involved with identifying and **analysing the gains and losses** experienced in different economic sectors by providing clear cost-benefit analyses. In addition, labour unions could support employees and workers from traditional industries to shift more easily into new economic sectors. This could be achieved mainly **through education and (re)training measures**. In addition, unions have the potential to actively lobby for a more equitable and fairer transition process towards sustainable production and consumption.
- Generally, there should be a **stronger involvement** of labour unions **in sustainable development policy making**. Given the existing infrastructure, networks and expertise in place, a stronger participation of labour unions in these processes could significantly contribute to the easing of possible tensions between conflicting objectives. Also, stronger involvement of expertise from local levels could facilitate in bridging the gap between international policy-making and local implementation. However, against the background of labour unions' core interest, it has to be pointed out that participation in national or international policy making does not always imply a positive attitude towards sustainable consumption and production.
- Labour unions are engaged in many **concrete initiatives and projects** on the company or factory level that promote sustainable consumption and production. This contribution could be enhanced by identifying best practices for engaging

with employers and workers. This assistance could comprise the further appraisal of outstanding commitment of labour unions to sustainable consumption and production and the identification of win-win situations that link social and environmental objectives.

- **Partnerships and alliances** with other stakeholder groups, including NGOs and other civil society actors, should be **actively encouraged**. This should be based on existing positive experiences. Compiling, analysing and disseminating best practices, e.g. through the Global Compact Learning Forum, would be beneficial to increasing the number and the effectiveness of alliances and co-operations.
- Labour unions' activities on the international, national and local level have not yet been sufficiently analysed. A more **coherent and systematic approach** to study labour unions' activities could support an adequate assessment of labour unions' actual and potential contribution to promoting sustainable consumption and production.

Based on the observations and recommendations presented above, the following action plans provides a comprehensive overview of the most **topical items on labour unions' agendas** in their process towards more sustainable consumption and production patterns in the years to come:

<b>Commitment - Awareness</b>	Labour unions are often confronted with conflicting interests when it comes to promoting sustainable consumption and production. These conflicts arise from the respective economic, social, political and cultural frameworks. While acknowledging these factors, labour unions must formulate an internal commitment to SC+P in order to maintain their internal as well as external credibility in negotiation and policy-making processes. This internal and external commitment is crucial in increasing the awareness for issues related to sustainable consumption and production among their members.
<b>Coherent approach – definition of roles</b>	Based on a comprehensive commitment to sustainable consumption and production unions need to ensure a unified, coherent and systematic approach towards the internalization and institutionalization of these concepts throughout their network structure on all levels. Here it is necessary to clearly define roles: overarching policies and goals should be established on the international level. These provide incentives and impulses for further steps and the actual implementation at the local level.
<b>Knowledge</b>	Labour unions have to increase their knowledge base in the area of sustainable consumption and production patterns to better gauge their potential contribution to this process internationally, nationally as well as on a local level. They need to actively turn to other stakeholders in the process to obtain this knowledge (cf. partnerships) as well as develop strategies for disseminating concepts and information within their own.

<b>Participation</b>	Labour unions are a key player in advancing sustainable consumption and production patterns. Consequently, they need to seek a more comprehensive involvement in international, but also national and local policy-making processes. To this end, it needs to be clarified how existing networks and structures can be adapted to meet these challenges.
<b>Best Practice</b>	Labour unions are involved in many innovative approaches and projects on the company level that promote sustainable consumption and production. Outstanding initiatives should be highlighted as best practice examples in order to provide guidance and positive incentives to unions in other countries and sectors.
<b>Partnerships and Alliances</b>	Partnerships and alliances are crucial in working towards reaching unions' goals regarding the SC+P agenda. The UNGC process support the formation of partnerships and alliances on all levels. Making use of these resources would greatly contribute to the number and effectiveness of alliances and co-operations.
<b>Integration</b>	Labour unions' core competence in the process towards more sustainable consumption and production is constituted by their ability to provide a link between traditional health and security issues and environmental aspects. This specific role needs to be further defined and established. Labour unions also need to strive for integration with respect to the agendas of different industry sectors and value chain actors.
<b>Innovation</b>	Labour unions need to build on their past experience in identifying win –win situations and extend these to the area of sustainable consumption and production. Cues for creative solutions, which would benefit the environment and also lead to improvements for workers, more employment etc., already exist and should be further pursued and utilised by unions (e.g. concept of dematerialization).

## 7 Annexes

### 7.1 Labour Union Movements in Selected Countries

#### 7.1.1 Germany

The origin of labour unions in Western Europe goes back to interest groups that sought to protect workers from the exploitative conditions of early capitalism. Despite their official legality, the public role of unions remained insignificant, and the movement was persecuted until the end of the 19th century. Then, however, unions quickly grew in membership (to about 2 million in 1910) and expanded regionally. Together with the co-operative movement and the Social Democratic Party, it formed the working class movement, which was to have great influence on social democratic politics.<sup>75</sup> Through achievements in the areas of income, working hours, holidays and social security, unions have not only played a crucial role in elevating living standards, but also in the implementation of basic civil rights and the development of social democracy.<sup>76</sup>

Today, the constitutionally guaranteed freedom of coalition protects unions and their right to bargain over wages and working conditions with employer associations in the absence of state interference. During the post-war period and at least until the 1970s, unions came to be relatively firmly embedded within the nation state, establishing themselves as an important lobbying group and as an intermediary power between the state and individual citizens.<sup>77</sup> The German government traditionally ascribes considerable importance to the participation of economic interest groups in the political process, in a variety of forms and through numerous channels. Involvement in the form of long-term contacts with members of parliament and alliances with political parties, membership in committees, and direct contact with the administration and the chancellor have led some authors to point to a trend towards corporatism.<sup>78</sup> As opposed to clear competition between government and opposition, between capital and labour, as is found in Great Britain for instance, politics in Germany is geared more towards co-operation, consensus and a logic of exchange. Unions thus serve as mediating institutions within the existing economic and social order and are generally respected in public opinion, by law and employers. Moreover, German labour unions play a dual role of control and counter-force and recognise themselves more and more as service organisations for their members, while continuing to push for structural changes.

Since the 1970s, a range of socio-economic developments have weakened the power of workers and their unions in Germany. Economic problems such as mass unemployment, consequent income reductions, member losses and the dominant public opinion in such periods of crisis always limit the scope of union influence.<sup>79</sup> Besides the rise in unemployment, it is especially the structural economic changes that have had the greatest impact on union politics; these changes include increasing de-industrialisation, the growth of

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<sup>75</sup> Von Aleman (1996), p. 10-14.

<sup>76</sup> Schneider (2000), p. 483-4.

<sup>77</sup> Waddington (2000), p. 317; Von Aleman (1996), p. 42.

<sup>78</sup> Von Aleman (1996), p. 38, 43.

<sup>79</sup> Ebbinghaus (2002), p. 467.

private sector services, and the differentiation and digitalisation of the working world. In addition, the normative orientation towards individualism, which can be identified in all social spheres, including the working environment, finds itself at odds with the traditionally collective approach to conflicts by labour unions.<sup>80</sup> With a neoliberal economic ideology on the rise and the consequent roll-back strategies of the state, a different understanding of social justice and individual responsibility is developing, and the consciousness and awareness of workers is no longer conducive to widespread union support.

Due to the loss of their traditional base -- the stereotypical, ideal union member, the male blue-collar worker -- labour unions have experienced a marked decline in membership numbers and union density. Accordingly, the proportion of 16-25 year-olds within the national labour union federation (Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund - DGB) has dropped from 15% in the early 1980s to a mere 5% today.<sup>81</sup>

However, unlike in other countries such as Great Britain, membership numbers are not the most important indicator of union strength. In Germany, as mentioned above, labour unions can count on their institutionalised partnership relations with the state, and they enjoy political influence on national political decision-making processes. Moreover, the bargaining power of unions extends to non-members. Wage negotiations are held centrally, and it is possible to declare these collective agreements generally binding. Furthermore, through industrial councils, staff associations and other legal provisions, unions can be legitimately present at the company level throughout the country.<sup>82</sup> Yet, as a consequence of membership declines, unions have become increasingly dependent on these institutionalised roles within the welfare state and on their involvement in social policy governance.<sup>83</sup>

Insofar as unions have focused on recruitment as a response to contemporary challenges, they have concentrated on the maintenance and strengthening of membership in familiar sectors, pointing to the services they offer as an incentive to join.<sup>84</sup> Most revitalisation efforts, however, have gone into internal restructuring and in union mergers.<sup>85</sup>

The unfavourable developments of the last few decades have led German labour unions to be largely preoccupied with their own survival and loss of influence. They have found it difficult to adapt to external changes. Among these has also been the ideological shift within Germany (and beyond) towards an increased promotion of the concept of sustainability. The labour unions and their achievements are built based on an economic-industrial growth ideology that is no longer considered desirable in the light of unsustainable practices and environmental problems.<sup>86</sup> Labour unions have traditionally had an unlimited faith in progress, which considered technological and economic developments as necessarily correlated with a rise in social standards. Today, unions can therefore give the impression of a conservative force. Especially in the areas of coal, steel and other traditional industries, unions have become defenders of out-dated and unviable structures. Yet, the 1980s also

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<sup>80</sup> Schneider (2000), p. 487.

<sup>81</sup> Ebbinghaus (2002), p. 473.

<sup>82</sup> Behrens & Hamann (2003), p. 519.

<sup>83</sup> Ebbinghaus (2002), p. 470, 476.

<sup>84</sup> Heery (2003), p. 524.

<sup>85</sup> The most spectacular merger has been the founding of the largest union Ver.di (unified service sector union) out of five separate unions in March 2002.

<sup>86</sup> Schneider (2000), p. 400.

sensitised the unions to a number of social consequences of unfettered progress. From the end of the 1980s onwards, German unions started addressing questions about new technologies and environmental protection, issues that are now no longer seen as a threat to labour market goals. All in all, the labour unions are now in a détente with the Green Party and form the occasional alliance with other social movements when they share common interests.<sup>87</sup> From an international perspective, German unions appear to embrace sustainable development more openly than their counterparts in other regions. This may be due to their embeddedness within the nation-state and their close co-operation with the government. Thus, despite ongoing de-unionisation, which bears similarities to the developments in other Western European countries and the United States, German labour unions remain an important political and societal force.

### 7.1.2 Indonesia

Independent labour unions in Indonesia formed for the first time in the 1960s, but were abolished after the Suharto regime seized control in 1965-66. During this coup, in one of the twentieth century's greatest political massacres, between 500,000 and a million workers, political activists and peasants were killed. During Suharto's 32-year-long dictatorship, independent labour unionism was undermined, and workers were attacked, suppressed and left without genuine protection or any valid means to represent themselves politically.<sup>88</sup> Only one labour union, the FSPSI, was officially recognised. The military was the political actor placed at the centre of economic and political life, a circumstance that continues to influence Indonesian labour politics to date.

In May 1998, the Suharto dictatorship ended, the state transformed into a presidential republic and, a year later, the first democratic elections were held. Since then, Indonesia has experienced a period of rapid and intense transition. Over 300 laws and regulations of reform have been enacted, and Indonesia has furthered its integration and participation in a range of international organisations, including the International Labour Organisation (ILO). A new political openness facilitated and encouraged the founding of labour unions.<sup>89</sup> The Indonesian government has signed important ILO conventions, including number 87, on the right to organise, and has passed regulations for the registration of unions.<sup>90</sup> Unions can be formed on the basis of common craft, enterprise/company, or industry, or a combination of the three, as long the formation is supported by at least ten people. Every registered union can bargain collectively with employers. As a result, Indonesia currently has over 72 registered labour union federations and roughly 16,000 company-level unions<sup>91</sup>, including the FSPSI, which had split into an old guard and reform fraction a year before the fall of Suharto, and developed a new critical stance towards labour policies and the violation of worker's basic human rights.<sup>92</sup> On the whole, the overall level of unionisation remains low, especially given the economic significance of the informal work sector. Only a fifth of the workforce in the formal sector is represented by unions.

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<sup>87</sup> Schneider (2000), p. 402, 475.

<sup>88</sup> Goss (2001).

<sup>89</sup> Casey (1999).

<sup>90</sup> ICEM (1999).

<sup>91</sup> American Embassy Information Resource Center (2003).

<sup>92</sup> <http://www.icemap.org/news-id2.htm>.

Despite the legal provisions, there remain political and economic constraints for labour unions: From 2004 onwards, civil groups will be excluded from the constitutional meetings (MPR).<sup>93</sup> And in order to be registered, a union has to agree with the state ideology of Pancasila (belief in a god, and respect for human dignity, national unity, democracy through consensus and social justice). Regulations also limit the field of union activity to socio-economic issues, something unions have attempted to challenge by engaging in dialogues with political parties and in protests against World Bank programmes.<sup>94</sup> Despite the political space that has opened at the national level, both labour and management in Indonesia often remain uncertain about the interpretation and enforcement of existing labour laws and regulations due to their limited dissemination, the lack of clarity regarding the application of new and previous regulations, and conflicting applications by government authorities and within Indonesia's relatively weak legal system. As a result, companies are able to hinder the formation of unions without any official sanctions on the side of government. In some instances, the military has been employed to intimidate workers for trying to organise unions.<sup>95</sup>

Before 1998, Indonesia experienced impressive economic and social developments, which were accompanied by an increase in the workforce as well as wages. Yet Indonesia remains a low income country. A few years after the Asian economic crisis, Indonesia still faces profound problems, ranging from unemployment to low levels of education and the standing of marginalised groups. Unions remain in a transitional phase, the relationship to their members is marked by distance, and co-operation among unions is limited.<sup>96</sup> Furthermore, they lack experience and authority in the face of strong employers. As a result, their bargaining power is weak and is further eroded by economic reforms that stress deregulation and privatisation. Because of the relative rarity of collective bargaining agreements, the annual minimum wage exercise commonly takes the place of employer wage negotiations. Overall, wages remain very low in absolute terms, and many workers do not even receive minimum wages. The real effects of greater political opportunities on workers thus remains limited.

Like South Africa, Indonesia is undergoing a difficult phase of democratisation. The end of a 32-year dictatorship was followed by the rapid rise and proliferation of unions, fostered by some political and legal gains, at least at a national level. Legacies of the Suharto era, however, still hinder the effective implementation and enforcement of the new labour laws. Hence, labour unions in Indonesia appear to be largely preoccupied with the challenges posed by these weaknesses of the system, as well as with the consequences of the economic crisis and economic reforms. There is little indication - besides some engagement with World Bank politics and relations with unions from Northern countries - that Indonesian labour unions are considering programmatic examinations of broader issues, such as sustainable development.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> [http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/www/de/laenderinfos/laender/print\\_html?type\\_id=10&land\\_id=61](http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/www/de/laenderinfos/laender/print_html?type_id=10&land_id=61).

<sup>94</sup> ICEM (1999).

<sup>95</sup> Workers Online (1999).

<sup>96</sup> <http://www.icemap.org/news-id2.htm>.

<sup>97</sup> Casey (1999).



### 7.1.3 United Kingdom

Great Britain, as the cradle of industrialisation, was the starting point for the wave of union organisation that swept through Western Europe during the 19th century. Compared with Continental Europe, the British system of industrial relations has traditionally been characterised by less regulation and a more limited role for the state.<sup>98</sup> There is no general system of independent employee representatives in place; both staff councils and employer associations are much less important than in Germany. Industrial relations are based on the willingness of employers and worker representatives to settle differences on a voluntary basis. The union movement itself is characterised by the absence of a clear organisational principle, the existence of a multitude of individual unions with diverse origins and individual organisational principles, and a resultant structural complexity.<sup>99</sup> Because bargaining is decentralised, the bargaining power of unions does not extend to non-members, and unions are not part of the political process, membership numbers are much more important in Great Britain than in Germany because they are directly linked to bargaining power.<sup>100</sup> Consequently, due to the decentralisation, non-recognition and low levels of employer organisation and union density, Britain has the lowest coverage rate in Europe.<sup>101</sup>

Despite these unfavourable conditions, however, the role of unions in politics has not been insignificant. For example, the Trade Union Congress (TUC) set up the predecessor of the Labour Party. Before World War I, over 95% of party members were affiliated through the labour unions and even today, the labour unions remain the most important financial source of the Labour Party.<sup>102</sup>

Under Conservative rule (1979-1997), labour unions were systematically weakened by means of legislation and a hostile political climate, which weakened their power and influence over the government and left employers with a relatively free hand in their companies. Thus, the percentage of employees covered by collective agreements fell from 70% in 1984 to only 34.5% in 1999.<sup>103</sup> Rising unemployment and sectoral shifts in the composition of employment, exacerbated by questions over their legitimacy, hurt unions' membership level and density.<sup>104</sup> Membership numbers have dropped from 13.2 million in 1979 to 7.3 million in 1999.<sup>105</sup> The public sector remains a stronghold, with a rate of unionisation of 64%, as opposed to 19% in the private sector.<sup>106</sup>

After "New Labour" came to power in 1997, unions were hopeful that members' working and living conditions would improve. Indeed, the new government enacted a number of promised political reforms in the areas of union recognition, minimum wages and social benefits.<sup>107</sup> After their years of exclusion under the Conservatives, the government again recognised unions as important political actors, and reforms can be interpreted as an adaptation of the

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<sup>98</sup> Fulton (2001), p. 4.

<sup>99</sup> Heery et al. (2002), p. 8.

<sup>100</sup> Heery (2003), p. 525.

<sup>101</sup> Ebbinghaus (2002), 475.

<sup>102</sup> Wrigley (2002).

<sup>103</sup> Maass (2001), p. 4; Fulton (2001), p. 2.

<sup>104</sup> Waddington (2000), p. 319.

<sup>105</sup> Fulton (2001), p. 2.

<sup>106</sup> Maass (2001), p. 2-3.

<sup>107</sup> Fulton (2001), p. 1-2; Maass (2001), p. 2, 4.

continental European model.<sup>108</sup> Yet, the historically close relationship between unions and government did not fully return, as “New Labour” has continued to support market deregulation and privatisation.<sup>109</sup> However, the change in government, combined with a period of sustained economic growth and efforts to change the organisational and recruitment culture, have contributed to the revival of the union movement. Although union density has declined further, the loss of membership has been stopped and more employers are conceding union recognition.<sup>110</sup>

The few signs of change and adaptation within the British union movement point to a shift away from adversarial tactics and a narrow concern on union interests and towards co-operation and the consideration of broader alliances. To compensate for unions’ political marginalisation, the period from 1950 to 1998 saw 441 mergers, in which 522 unions and 3.8 million members were absorbed.<sup>111</sup> Although these mergers have added to the organisational complexity because they have crossed industrial, occupational and political lines of demarcation, they have also increased the internal heterogeneity and led to some internal reforms intended to encourage the participation of under-represented groups of members. Moreover, there have been recent efforts to generally raise the proportion of private-sector employees, women, part-time workers and young people.<sup>112</sup> Membership trends are leading away from a reliance on traditional industries and old patterns of workforce composition, which inhibit union openness to ideas beyond their immediate concerns.

In the past, many traditional industries have opposed environmental regulation, fearing that they could negatively affect employment. At the same time, globalisation and the shift in the industrial paradigm have made these industries less and less viable in Britain. The changing composition of union membership, which could give those workers with an increased environmental consciousness a stronger voice, could lead unions to embrace broader societal issues like sustainable development. A further indication that unions have turned away from their traditionally confrontational political and organisational patterns is the emergence of social partnerships between unions and employers.<sup>113</sup>

However, it is unclear to what extent these partnerships have dealt with concerns that do not immediately affect individual workers, but relate to broader realities such as overall sustainable development. Such issues have been addressed in occasional alliances with social movements, which mostly occur when other resources of power are denied to unions and when objectives are shared. However, these alliances have been rare, especially because of the suspicion of traditional union culture of new influences and its bias towards immediate workplace issues.<sup>114</sup> Besides these alliances with social movements, unions have also expanded their international links. Over the last decades, they have come to embrace the regulatory regime envisaged within European social policy, recognising the importance of European developments, and have even established a few direct links with European

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<sup>108</sup> Wrigley (2002).

<sup>109</sup> Heery et al. (2002), p. 1.

<sup>110</sup> Fulton (2001), p. 3.

<sup>111</sup> Heery et al. (2002), p. 9.

<sup>112</sup> Maass (2001), p. 5-10; Waddington (2000), p. 319-323.

<sup>113</sup> Heery et al. (2002), p. 18.

<sup>114</sup> Heery et al. (2002), p. 14-15.

partners.<sup>115</sup> British unions thus seem to be in a transition period, struggling with the tensions between the legacies of their traditional industrial ideology and external pressures arising from socio-economic transformations, including changes in environmental awareness.

#### 7.1.4 United States

Labour relations in the US gained a legal basis with the Wagner Act in 1935, which established a minimum wage and basic labour standards. Between the 1930s and the 1950s, membership in labour unions skyrocketed, and the move towards bureaucratisation continued. By the 1950s, a relatively stable system of collective bargaining was in place.<sup>116</sup>

The Wagner Act still forms the framework for labour relations in the US. It was intended to encourage the private relationship of collective bargaining, while reducing the governmental role to an absolute minimum. It mainly guaranteed the rights of workers to form unions and bargain collectively, guided by the idea that a balance of power should be embedded in a set of fair rules. The Wagner Act not only rejected direct regulation of substance, but also denied government a role as a harmonising force. Nonetheless, it established a governmental body to oversee the certification of unions and the process of bargaining, and thus moved the government into a central position, giving it essential responsibility for the survival of unions. As opposed to the rather openly acknowledged corporatism in Germany, however, corporatism in the US was limited. While unionism continues to depend on governmental support, that support has been kept as low-key as possible, obscured behind a facade of formal impartiality.<sup>117</sup> And despite unions' traditional support for the Democratic Party, unions have no significant part in the political process, and there are generally no means for establishing public agreements or social contracts. Further structural disadvantages include decentralised bargaining and the absence of a system of staff associations.<sup>118</sup>

After a peak in the 1950s, the level of unionisation dropped to 13.2% in 2002, with 8.5% of private sector workers and 37.5% of public employees belonging to unions.<sup>119</sup> Thus, the vast majority of U.S. employees either have no representation at all, or are represented through some other kind of mechanism. Moreover, unions face not only an adverse employer environment but also enjoy limited public support. Unions are seen as a private interest group, not as a necessary institution for democracy.<sup>120</sup>

The union movement has suffered disproportionately from the socio-economic trends that have been described in the German and British contexts. The effects of economic globalisation have eroded the effectiveness of the traditional union strategies laid out by the Wagner Act and appropriate within the structure of the mass production industry. These strategies less relevant to an increasingly diverse workforce and in an economic environment that highly values flexibility and innovation. Non-union managerial and professional jobs have grown, now accounting for over 50% of the workforce, but their level of unionisation is below

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<sup>115</sup> Waddington (2000), p. 325.

<sup>116</sup> Heckscher (1996), p. 19-41.

<sup>117</sup> Heckscher (1996), p. 42-50.

<sup>118</sup> Heery (2003), p. 525.

<sup>119</sup> [www.aflcio.org](http://www.aflcio.org).

<sup>120</sup> Heckscher (1996), p. xv, 3-4.

8%.<sup>121</sup> At the same time, traditionally unionised industries are shrinking, leaving the movement uncertain and defensive. Corporate management has been able to dominate the way in which market deregulation and corporate restructuring have occurred. Despite the prior existence of industry-wide collective bargaining and attempts at joint labour/management efforts to reorganise work, unions have had little influence.<sup>122</sup> Lastly, the mutual support between unions and liberal democrats has been further reduced, while new social movements have emerged that now have a greater impact on corporations and thus lessen the political importance of the labour movement.<sup>123</sup>

The consequences of these developments have been increasing social and economic polarisation and greater segmentation of jobs along the lines of customer markets.<sup>124</sup> The Wagner Act framework, with its balance-of-power model, is thus becoming increasingly inappropriate in providing an adequate labour relations system in the United States.

As elsewhere, US labour unions have had to focus in recent decades on their own survival in the face of an increasingly union-hostile environment. In general, the union response to their political weakness has been defensive, trying to forestall Republican attacks on unions and limit the negative effects of corporate cost-cutting and downsizing efforts.<sup>125</sup> However, as membership is the key to union strength in the US, recruitment has been at the centre of revitalising strategies. These efforts have required some internal and organisational changes, namely the re-allocation of resources; the development of formal recruitment policies and extension of specialised recruitment functions; initiatives to revitalise central labour councils; and the redesigning of field operations.<sup>126</sup> On a broader scale, the most important changes have occurred through mergers.<sup>127</sup>

A number of signs indicate that US labour unions, like those in the UK, have expanded their scope beyond traditional objectives and interests. As part of revitalisation efforts, especially to further union recognition, to counter the negative public image and to recruit at the grass-roots level, labour unions have engaged in innovative tactics like demonstrations and community coalitions.<sup>128</sup> Sporadically, unions have embraced broader human rights, environmental or student movements. Moreover, international links have been strengthened through corporate campaigns and industrial action in support of unions in other countries.<sup>129</sup> The weakness of the American labour movement has partly forced it to open up, distance itself from its self-image as one of a few key political players, and accept that broader alliances might prove beneficial. These occasions, however, have been rare, and unions mainly still conceive of labour politics in rather narrow terms.

Lastly, several attempts have been made at forming labour-management partnerships intended to foster commitment to a new spirit of labour-management co-operation, concession bargaining and mutual problem-solving. Yet, the legal basis and governmental

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<sup>121</sup> Heckscher (1996), p. 64.

<sup>122</sup> Berg (2000), p. 20.

<sup>123</sup> Heckscher (1996), p. 73.

<sup>124</sup> Berg (2000), p. 13; between 1973 and 1986 for instance, average real weekly earnings dropped by 15% (Heckscher, 1996: 58).

<sup>125</sup> Berg (2000), p. 19.

<sup>126</sup> Hurd *et al.* (2003), p. 101; Heery (2003), p. 523.

<sup>127</sup> Hurd *et al.* (2003), p. 112.

<sup>128</sup> Berg (2000), p. 14.

<sup>129</sup> Hurd *et al.* (2003), p. 112-113.

support for these partnerships have been unfavourable, and they have therefore had little effect on union revitalisation.<sup>130</sup> The scope of issues to be dealt with in these partnerships remains rather narrow, as the Wagner Act and the bureaucratisation of labour unions in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century limit the scope of unions' power over bargaining on wages and employment conditions.

The US union movement is probably the weakest of all those examined. Unions have little influence over macroeconomic policy, and their strength is being further challenged by competing social movements. However, there have been innovative attempts to revitalise the union, especially in terms of recruitment strategies, grass-roots mobilisation and alliances, and labour-management partnerships.

### 7.1.5 South Africa

While unions in Western Europe went through relatively similar phases over the last two hundred years, the South African union movement, which was involved in broader struggles for democracy in a regime under which labour was repressed, followed a different path. The disenfranchisement and exploitation of South Africa's black population facilitated the rise of political unionism in the 1950s and 1980s directed against both state and capital.<sup>131</sup> Open alignment with the Congress Movement could result in exile, and hence the 'official' labour movement was careful to avoid open involvement in liberation politics.<sup>132</sup>

After a wave of strikes in the 1970s, the independent union movement grew and became more militant and unregulated. The state legalised and attempted to co-opt black labour unions by means of a national register, but the independent labour unions were able to use this space to increase membership, strengthen their organisation and advance workers' demands.<sup>133</sup> They even started to use the government-installed 'industrial council' system to extend collective bargaining from the company level to the sectoral level.<sup>134</sup> Then, in 1985, the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) was formed, stating a commitment to non-racialism and worker control.<sup>135</sup>

Its close alliance with the national liberation movement meant that union movement retained an ideological and programmatic independence from both state and capital. Industrial relations were characterised by an adversarial and competitive dynamic between the three forces.<sup>136</sup> With the financial and ideological support of international networks in campaigns for recognition, unions were able to successfully ignore state attempts to control union leadership and to restrict the issues that could be articulated by the unions.<sup>137</sup>

In the late 1980's, the Thor Chemicals controversy displayed how environmental concerns can unite workers in an alliance of protest that included local residents, NGOs and local

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<sup>130</sup> Hurd et al. (2003), p. 109.

<sup>131</sup> Habib (1997), p. 57.

<sup>132</sup> Bezuidenhout (2000), p. 5.

<sup>133</sup> Habib (1997), p. 58.

<sup>134</sup> Bezuidenhout (2000), p. 6.

<sup>135</sup> Mackay & Mathoho (2001), p. 6.

<sup>136</sup> Habib (1997), p. 58-60.

<sup>137</sup> Mackay & Mathoho (2001), p. 7, 30; Rachleff (2000), p. 1.

farmers.<sup>138</sup> International protest against the UK-based multinational supported local protest involving the Chemical Workers Industrial Union (CWIU), Earthlife Africa, the local residents led by their chief and white commercial farmers from the region.

The involvement of the labour unions in the anti-apartheid struggle resulted in the democratisation of labour relations and broader social institutions. After the government lifted the ban on all major liberation movements in early 1990, unions and civil society in general, together with the African National Congress (ANC) and several other political parties, began negotiations on the nature of a post-apartheid society. Through its formal alliance with the ANC and the South African Communist Party (SACP), COSATU was able to shape the agenda and realise many of its goals, including the legal entrenchment of basic workers' rights, labour standards and the promotion of employment equity.<sup>139</sup> Moreover, the government has signed a number of conventions of the International Labour Organisation and has allowed union input in matters of social policy.<sup>140</sup> A number of forums and institutions were informally and legally established at the plant, sectoral and national level to facilitate a new co-operative partnership between labour, capital and the state, the most important of which was the National Economic Development and Labour Council (NEDLAC).<sup>141</sup>

Today, collective bargaining occurs mainly on the sectoral and plant level. Industry-level bargaining takes place in bargaining councils, which can be voluntarily established by employers and representative unions in particular sectors and are authorised to resolve disputes and to conclude collective agreements on wages and working conditions.<sup>142</sup> Influenced by the German model of work councils, bargaining can also take place at the plant-level according to recognition agreements. The so-called workplace forums have to be consulted by employers on issues such as the restructuring of the workplace, plant closures, mergers, etc. Thus integrative bargaining and a regime of co-determination is supposed to be promoted. However, this form of negotiation has not been very successful.<sup>143</sup>

Unsurprisingly, South Africa is one of the few countries where labour union membership numbers have grown steadily, from 673,000 in 1976 to almost four million in 1998.<sup>144</sup> This is due not only to successful membership campaigns, but also because unions formed part of a broader social movement. Unions for a long time presented the only effective vehicle for political participation for large parts of the population.<sup>145</sup> This characteristic of South African unions as a social movement fighting long-term suppression has meant that it has always been more open and susceptible to other influences and ideas than its Northern counterparts, such as forging alliances with other political actors. Yet, the most pressing concern was always establishing minimum employment and civil rights standards. Hence all efforts went into the promotion of social justice and welfare, possibly including struggles against HIV; environmental concerns and the implications of sustainable development have not been high on the agenda.

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<sup>138</sup> Crompton and Erwin (1991), pp. 78 – 91.

<sup>139</sup> Bezuidenhout (2000), p. 2, 9; Mackay & Mathoho (2001), p. 7, 36.

<sup>140</sup> Bezuidenhout (2000), p. 9.

<sup>141</sup> Wood & Mahabir (2001), p. 232-33.

<sup>142</sup> Habib (1997), p. 66-67.

<sup>143</sup> Wood & Mahabir (2001).

<sup>144</sup> Bezuidenhout (2000), p. 34-35.

<sup>145</sup> Bezuidenhout (2000), p. 2-13.

Now that the most important goals of the South African union movement have been realised and an expansion of the scope of union policies seems viable, the extent of union influence and determination is increasingly questioned. This is due to a shift in the macro-economic environment towards a neo-liberal ideology, the promotion of privatisation and greater market flexibility, which can be hostile to the social regulation of labour relations.<sup>146</sup> At the same time, the scope of NEDLAC, which at first allowed for union influence in policy-making, has now been reduced to negotiations on the implementation of macroeconomic policy, with the basic principles being excluded from the agenda.<sup>147</sup> Lastly, within the formal alliance, unions have had to subscribe to the national project of increasing the country's economic competitiveness, and hence, union articulation of issues was and still is constrained by its commitment to the post-apartheid state ideology of national unity and reconciliation.<sup>148</sup> Thus, the political force of union opposition within the official alliance is being slowly neutralised.<sup>149</sup>

As a response to economic pressures, employers are resorting to casual labour and the intensification of work, which in turn might erode the membership base of unions. South Africa's unions now have to defend the newly gained achievements and centralised institutions, drawing more and more similarities with unions in the North. Furthermore, while South African unions used to draw on support from unions in the North, they now find that they have to support the struggles of social movement unions in neighbouring countries, where basic human and labour rights are still denied by authoritarian regimes.<sup>150</sup>

These developments have also impacted the union's relationship with the ANC. From an antagonistic relationship to the state, COSATU moved to the position of a formal ally with privileged access to the ANC at the end of the 1980s.<sup>151</sup> While the alliance was a way of influencing the ANC, it has now repeatedly been used to contain COSATU's militancy and to implement unfavourable macroeconomic policies. The relationship is now riddled with contradictions and full of tension<sup>152</sup>. But although the level of union support for the alliance seems to be waning, it remains a preferred vehicle of influence.<sup>153</sup> Besides, there are signs of a revitalisation with broader social movements, a development that might prove beneficial after COSATU has moved away from community struggles to 'bread and butter' issues, such as wage increases and privatisation, during its phase of institutionalisation.<sup>154</sup>

Despite the current struggles over the country's macroeconomic policies and the resulting tensions within the union-government alliance reducing the strength of the otherwise powerful union movement, its former engagement within the general social movement and far-reaching inclusion in national politics in the past possibly create a rather supportive environment for the inclusion of aspects of sustainability in union policy.

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<sup>146</sup> Mackay & Mathoho (2001), p. 36, Rachleff, (2000).

<sup>147</sup> Bezuidenhout (2000), p. 20-21.

<sup>148</sup> Habib (1997), p. 62.

<sup>149</sup> Habib (1997), p. 70-71.

<sup>150</sup> Bezuidenhout (2000), p. 12.

<sup>151</sup> Mackay & Mathoho (2001), p. 16.

<sup>152</sup> Rachleff (2000), p. 2.

<sup>153</sup> Mackay & Mathoho (2001), p. 18.

<sup>154</sup> Mackay & Mathoho (2001), p. 14.

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### 7.3 List of Interviewees

Name	Position	Organisation	Country
Sue Ferns	Head of Research and Specialist Services	Prospect	United Kingdom
Eric Frumin	Director Occupational Safety and Health	Union of Needletrades, Industrial and Textile Employees (UNITE)	USA
Marc Grossman	Communications Director	United Farm Workers of America, AFL-CIO	USA
Sylvia Honsberg	Women's and union representative in FLP	IG Bauen-Agrar-Umwelt	Germany
Larry R. Kohler	Special Adviser on Int. Economic and Financial Institutions	ILO - Bureau of External Relations and Partnerships	General Background
Bas de Leeuw	Head, Strategy Unit - Production and Consumption Branch	UNEP - Division of Technology, Industry and Economics	General Background
Bill Naudé	Executive Director	Plastics Federation of South Africa	South Africa
Rudy Porter	Field Representative - Indonesia Office	American Centre for International Labour Solidarity	Indonesia
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Werner Schneider	Environmental officer	Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund (DGB)	Germany
Graham Steel	National officer	Public and Commercial Services Union	United Kingdom
Mtutuzeli Tom	President	National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA)	South Africa
Cornis van der Lugt	Global Compact Programme Officer	UNEP - DTIE	General Background
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Wolfgang Weipert	Head of Unit, Environment and Consumer Policy, Federal Executive Committee	Trade Union for Building, Agriculture and Environment, Germany	General Background