



**Organisation of Trade Unions of West Africa (OTUWA)**  
**L'organisation des Travailleurs de L'Afrique de L'Ouest (OTAO)**



**Headquarters:**

Paschal Bafyau Labour House  
Plot 820/821, central Business district  
Federal Capital Territory  
Abuja, Nigeria

**Phone:** +234-803 4030 777  
**e-mail:** otuwahq@gmail.com

---

## A Brief Profile

---

### Preamble

Founded in 1983 in Conakry, Guinea, the Organisation of Trade Unions of West Africa (OTUWA), made up of national labour centres from West African countries, started brilliantly and functioned optimally during the first decade of its existence, with the secretariat being hosted at intervals country by country.

Against the backdrop of its activities in the early years of formation which were deemed to be critical to the socio-economic and political integration processes in the sub-region, the Council of Heads of State of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in 1986 ratified a decision that granted OTUWA recognition within ECOWAS structures.

Upon relocation of the secretariat of OTUWA to Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire, a combination of factors – the then Ivorian civil war, the sudden death of the Secretary General of OTUWA and the subsequent lack of institutional capacity at the Secretariat – made it to become dormant.

However, in 2014, OATUU and ITUC-Africa, with the active support of the International Labour Organisation (ILO), decided to work together to revive OTUWA, so as to enhance the role of trade unions in the regional integration process, particularly in the context of the ECOWAS Treaty which recognises the role of trade unions in the integration process and which granted OTUWA a category A consultative status within ECOWAS.

It was the outcome of this decision that the congress to re-launch OTUWA was held in Abuja in October 2015 where new officers of the organisation were elected, and an Executive Secretary was subsequently appointed.

### Objectives of OTUWA

In the overall context of the above and in consonance with prevailing socio-economic and political developments therefore, the objectives of OTUWA include the following:

- i) Bring the voice and visibility of West African workers to ECOWAS and other International labour platforms;
- ii) Highlight labour-related problems in the West African sub-region and focus national labour centres' attention on these issues as a means of addressing them;

- iii) Facilitate trade union unity and engagement of national unions in popularising worker-related issues and policies contained in ECOWAS protocols and policies geared towards promoting the integration process.
- iv) To work towards full, decent and freely chosen employment and the elimination of all forms of discrimination based on race, sex, nationality or creed.
- v) To fight for the improvement of working and living conditions including the extension and sustenance of social security coverage to everyone.
- vi) To promote greater gender equality; and
- vii) To promote the ratification and effective implementation of International Labour Standards.

## **Structure of OTUWA**

To effectively moderate its activities, OTUWA has the following structures:

1. ***Executive Committee:*** This is made up of the President, two Vice Presidents, and a Financial Secretary/Treasurer – who are elected on a 4-year tenure, renewable once; the Executive Secretary is an ex-officio member, Chairperson of the Women’s Sub-Committee of the General Council and Chairperson of the Youth Sub-Committees of the General Council.

The duties of the Executive Committee include; determining the objectives to be achieved; developing the plan of action and ensure its implementation; reviewing the progress report; and Propose the amount to be paid as affiliation fees during its term of office, among others.

2. ***General Council:*** Made up of one representative from each of the fifteen member countries of ECOWAS, the General Council meets once in a year, and has as its principal duty, decision-making in the absence of Congress. It operate two standing committees; namely:

(a) ***Standing Committee on Women:*** This composed of 15 members (one representative from each of the fifteen member countries of ECOWAS). They meet once in a year.

(b) ***Standing Committee on Youth:*** 15 members (one representative from each of the fifteen member countries of ECOWAS). They meet once in a year.

3. ***Congress:*** It is the highest decision-making organ and meets once in every four years. It consists of all duly accredited delegates representing each affiliate member of OTUWA based on the principle of proportional representation.

The Congress meets to: (i) consider proposals for amendments to the Constitution and Standing Orders; (ii) consider policy proposals and major policy platforms; (iii) consider provisional budget proposals for the coming quadrennial; (iv) elect members into the governing structures and relevant committees; (v) consider reports from the General Council; (vi) fix the rate of affiliation fees, and any other duties or functions as may be contained in the OTUWA constitution.

- 4. *The Executive Secretariat:*** The Executive Secretariat is headed by the Executive Secretary and supported by programme officers and other support staff. The Executive Secretary is the chief administrative officer of OTUWA and performs the following functions:
- (i) Serve as an ex-officio member of Congress.
  - (ii) Liaise with ECOWAS in consultation with the President of the Executive Committee and may seek support from friendly organisations to implement the Programme and Budget of the OTUWA.
  - (iii) Develop the programmes and the budget of the OTUWA,
  - (iv) Be the chief Rapporteur, coordinate programmes and projects, disseminate information, carry out the activities of the OTUWA and be responsible for financial management.
  - (v) Take part in all meetings of the Executive Committee and shall be the Rapporteur.
  - (vi) Fill vacant posts within the Executive Secretariat by announcing internally. Equal opportunity shall be offered to all member countries.
  - (vii) Plan, organize and provide the logistics for all the programmes and projects.
  - (viii) Coordinate and implement the plan of action,
  - (ix) Provide accurate, consistent and reliable information and reports to the governing bodies, the members and the general public.
  - (x) Publicise press releases and relevant correspondences.
  - (xi) Prepare the agenda and call meetings in consultation with the President of the Executive Committee.
  - (xii) Perform other functions as provided for in the Standing Orders and any other duties assigned by the Congress or Executive Committee from time to time.

## **Activities since the Re-launch**

- 1. *Strategic Planning Workshop/Strategic Plan:*** After a period of consultations with trade union leaders and partners, the new leadership of OTUWA, in its efforts to properly reposition the organisation, decided to organise a strategic planning workshop. The workshop, supported by ILO and LO/FTF Denmark, was held from May 11-13, 2016 at Hotel De Bently, Utako, Abuja and attended by representatives of trade unions from across West Africa, ILO Area Office in Abuja, ILO Geneva (ACTRAV), ITUC-African Region, global unions – Building and Woodworkers International (BWI) and Public Services International (PSI) – Friedrich Ebert Foundation-Nigeria and the American Solidarity Centre-Nigeria. The workshop has the following objectives:
- (a) To review the state of trade unions in the West African sub-region;
  - (b) To articulate the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) of OTUWA as a sub-regional trade union centre;
  - (c) To develop a strategy of engagement with ECOWAS and other multi-lateral organisations for the benefit of workers within the sub-region;
  - (d) To discuss and develop a financial sustainability plan for OTUWA; and
  - (e) To outline programmes and activities to be captured in a 5-year strategic plan for OTUWA.

A comprehensive report of the workshop and a 5-year Strategic Plan have been produced and printed in both English and French along with electronic copies in CD-ROMs for mass circulation.

2. **(A) Dakar I: Rebooting Conference:** In continuation of the revival efforts to make OTUWA functional, a second major activity, tagged “*Rebooting Conference*”, was held in Dakar, Senegal from 21<sup>st</sup>-22<sup>nd</sup> July 2016 under the theme: “*Rebuilding the West African Trade Union Movement*”. Like the Strategic Planning Workshop held earlier in May in Abuja, the Rebooting Conference was attended by leaders of OTUWA at the Executive Committee and General Council levels, with representatives of sister trade union bodies with various affiliations in attendance.

Now known as Dakar I, the programme was organised with the support of the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES) office in the Republic of Benin, which has responsibility for trade union activities in West Africa, with additional support of the FES office in the host country, Senegal. The following were the objectives of the conference:

- a. To further deepen the revival process with inputs of trade union leaders across the West African sub-region and reflect them in the 5-year Strategic Plan.
- b. To fine-tune initially conceived re-building ideas and initiatives, complement or consolidate them with fresh views and enhanced ways.
- c. To involve leaders of OTUWA’s affiliate national centres to own-up the programmes being developed to transform OTUWA into an organisation that is abreast of issues relevant to the wellbeing of working people of the West African sub-region.
- d. To develop a strategy of engagement with ECOWAS and other multi-lateral organisations for the benefit of workers within the sub-region.

**(B) Dakar II: Rebooting Conference:** Like Dakar I, Dakar II was organised with the active support of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation (FEF) under the theme: “*Strengthening Workers Movement in the West African Sub-region to Boost Socio-Economic Integration.*” The principal objectives of Dakar II Conference include:

- a. To review the progress made since Dakar I.
- b. To review and identify strategies for the implementation of OTUWA's 5-year Strategic Plan.
- c. To discuss and identify ways of raising fund for the execution of the Strategic Plan.
- d. To identify potential challenges/obstacles to the implementation of the Strategic Plan and ways of addressing them.
- e. To develop a strategy of engaging with ECOWAS and other multi-lateral organisations towards the full actualisation of OTUWA's Strategic Plan.

Both conferences, apart from their objectives, also helped participants and the leadership of OTUWA to have deeper conversation on the various ways in which the work of the organisation could be mainstreamed

in order to recapture trade union voice that has been missing in the sub-regional economic and socio-political life.

Towards this direction, three key groups were set up by Dakar I to carry out sub-regional-wide trade union campaigns. They include:

- i. ***Institutional or Organisational Development Working Group:*** With the mandates to address issues of finance/funding; strengthening organisation building within OTUWA and its affiliates and relations with trade union partners.
- ii. ***Economic and Social Governance Working Group:*** With the mandate to concentrate on relations with multilateral institutions like ECOWAS, BRICS, MINT, African Union, European Union, the UN System, especially the ILO, etc.
- iii. ***Communication Working Group:*** With the mandate to address issues relating to communication between OTUWA and its national centre affiliates as well as use of modern information, communication technology in all its ramifications to strengthen the work of OTUWA.

The Working Groups have been constituted and have had their inaugural meetings between November 2016 and January this year. The Institutional Development and Renewal held its second meeting in Dakar in the second week of 2017.

3. ***Ouagadougou: Constitutive/First Meeting of the Working Group on Institutional Development and Renewal:*** The first meeting of the Institutional Development and Renewal Working Group was convened in Ouagadougou, capital of Burkina Faso on November 23, 2016, under the Theme: “Institutional Renewal for the Fight Against Hunger in West Africa - A Trade Union Perspective.” In attendance were representatives of trade union affiliates of OTUWA from Nigeria, Ghana, Niger, Mali, Benin, Senegal and Burkina Faso. The meeting discussed ways of improving the internal organisation of West African trade union centres and strategies to finding solutions to food insecurity and hunger in the sub-region. The second meeting of this working group focused attention on addressing financial sustainability. On the food security matrix, the working group addressed the problematic of achieving Goal Number Two of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) on hunger-free sub-region.
4. ***Cotonou: Constitutive/First Meeting of the Economic Governance Working Group:*** The meeting took place in Cotonou, capital of Benin Republic, on 5<sup>th</sup> December 2016 with participants from Nigeria, Cote d’Ivoire, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Benin, the host. The meeting, while deliberating on its mandate of making OTUWA and important prop for harnessing and mobilising the energies of workers and their organisations in influencing policy dialogue at the sub-regional and other levels to realize governance mechanisms, processes and outcomes that have positive implications for the working people, identified a number of issues relevant to combating food insecurity and hunger in West Africa, in particular and Africa in general.
5. ***Abuja: Constitutive/First Meeting of the Working Group on Communication:*** The meeting, which was held in Abuja on February 17, 2017, generally discussed strategies and mechanisms of utilising information/communication to popularise policies and mobilise workers for the implementation of policies across the sub-region. Among key strategies identified for implementation were; (i) the need to begin the publication of a newsletter, (ii) the designing and activation of an OTUWA website; and (iii) the need to immediately activate social media platforms such as whatsapp, Facebook, Twitter, etc.

## **OTUWA Strategic Plan**

The outcome of the OTUWA Strategic Planning workshop was the development of a 5-year strategic plan which had ten pillars. The Strategic Plan is available in electronic form, in English and French, as well as in CD-ROMs.

The ten pillars are as follows:

Pillar 1 : To Strengthen and Capacitate the Secretariat

Pillar 2: Supporting Unity and Increased Membership for Affiliates

Pillar 3: Engaging with ECOWAS

Pillar 4: Engaging Regional Conflict & Terrorism

Pillar 5: Supporting Democratic Elections

Pillar 6: Sustainable Development Goals

Pillar 7a:Special Programmes

Pillar 7b:Special Programmes II

Pillar 8: Building of OTUWA Secretariat & Training Institute

Pillar 9: Financial Mobilization & Stability

Pillar 10: Monitoring and Evaluation

## **Looking Forward**

Although OTUWA is obviously facing the challenge of resources to meet its core objectives, it has in the brief period of less than two years of re-emergence attracted support and patronage. This has come, first from the Nigeria Labour Congress, which is hosting the OTUWA Secretariat on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor in its Labour House National Secretariat in the Central Business District of Abuja; this is in addition to the payment of the salaries of the Executive Secretary and his driver and an imprest to run the Secretariat.

There have so far been impressive solidarity and support from international organisations such as the ILO, FEF and LO/FTF, particularly in the organization of the strategic planning workshop and the subsequent drafting of the strategic plan and translation from English to French.

The FES continues to extend this solidarity support with a work plan spanning 2017 by supporting the activities of the three Working Groups as well as other programmes designed to strengthen OTUWA structures.

Among the urgent needs of OTUWA are core funding to build the institutional capacity of OTUWA and its national affiliates in the core areas of engagement with ECOWAS and its member states and other multilateral agencies; research and documentation as well as educational and organizing activities.