

Trade unions as DEAR actors

Having global solidarity at their foundations, trade unions are natural actors of Development Education and Awareness Raising (DEAR). To trade unions, Development Education is a life-long, participatory and open-ended learning process that leads to a critical understanding and an active engagement in addressing the challenges of the rapidly changing, interdependent world we live in.

Trade unions have been actively engaged in DEAR for decades, but in the times of a global economic and environmental crisis, the involvement of workers in development education is more important than ever to build understanding and active participation in global development processes, such as human and trade union rights, Decent Work, inequalities, social justice and social protection.

The unique role and potential of trade unions in DEAR

Uniting tens of millions of workers around the world, the trade union movement has a unique potential of effectively reaching a large number of people, often not yet familiar with development issues. Being directly affected by the challenges of economic globalisation, the trade union movement has a first-hand experience and direct impact in various aspects of social and economic development on local, regional and international level.

What is crucial in DEAR, trade unions have a long-standing tradition of international solidarity and cooperation and thus well established and partnership-based North-South relations. Institutionalised and democratic regional and international networks provide platforms for cooperation, exchange and joint action. Active communication channels (including various types of union media) and a well-developed training capacity and infrastructure add to the efficiency and effectiveness of trade union DEAR activities.

Educating and campaigning for decent work

The issue of decent work remains the key trade union focus for development education and campaigning activities. The ILO Decent Work Agenda, with its four strategic objectives: jobs creation, workers' rights, social dialogue and social protection, provides a useful framework for fostering international solidarity and decent livelihoods for people around the world. Delivering decent work requires active engagement of all stakeholders: workers, employers, consumers and authorities, demonstrating global interdependencies and making it a relevant topic for outreach to a wide group of audience.

Recognizing and supporting trade unions as DEAR actors

The importance and specificity of trade union actors in Development Education needs to be properly recognized at national, European and international level and reflected in the DEAR funding programmes. Dedicated budget lines should be opened for social partners (trade unions and employers), following an actor-based approach, in order to ensure the realization of their potential in DEAR.

DEAR initiatives should be supported also in non-European countries, in particular the Middle Income ones, where development education is crucial to build understanding and a critical response to the challenges of economic globalisation.

Through building citizens' understanding and engagement in global development issues, DEAR should also serve to open the space for a critical reflection about development policies and the Policy Coherence for Development.

In order to increase the understanding of development dynamics both in donor and in partner countries, DEAR components should be integrated into bilateral development cooperation programmes financed by the European Commission, Member States and other donors.

November 2012

About the TUDCN

The Trade Union Development Cooperation Network (TUDCN) brings together national trade union confederations from South and North, Solidarity Support Organisations (SSOs) and Global Unions Federations (GUFs) as well representation from International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) Regional Organisations, the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) and the Trade Union Advisory Committee to the OECD (TUAC).