



# NAMIBIA

## A TRADE UNION FOCUS ON THE SDGs

#HLPF2024

**WORKERS DEMAND A NEW SOCIAL CONTRACT**

### WORKERS NEED DURABLE RESPONSES TO MULTIPLE CRISES

To address the multiple crises, the government of Namibia has decided to intervene in key areas: employment creation, prioritising youth employment and entrepreneurship; expanding social protection coverage; and a national formalisation strategy. Trade unions have been actively involved in the implementation of these initiatives.

This follows up on several stimulus and relief measures to directly support individuals, small and medium-sized enterprises and corporations, and safeguard jobs introduced in response to the COVID-19 crisis. At the time, employment retention measures were undertaken through the flexibilisation of labour regulations, oriented to avoid major retrenchments and closures of businesses. Trade unions note that these have not yielded the expected results, as many people have lost their jobs and salaries, and hours of work were cut unilaterally, with workers forced to go on unpaid leave.

To combat the climate crisis, in 2021 Namibia pledged to cut its greenhouse gas emissions by 91 per cent compared to the business-as-usual scenario. The plan identifies key sectors such as energy, water resources, coastal resources, human settlements and urban planning, agriculture, and forestry, developing targeted strategies for each. In addition, the government foresees increasing the share of renewable energy use. However, the overall reduction is conditional on international financial support, without which the country can only guarantee a 14 per cent reduction.

### ARE TRADE UNIONS AT THE TABLE?

The government developed its current National Development Plan (NDP 5) before the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) in 2015. As a result, the NDP is not well aligned with the objectives of the 2030 Agenda. Trade unions suggest that this has led to critical SDGs receiving little or no attention. While preparations for the drafting of the next National Development Plan (NDP 6) are ongoing, trade unions warn that there is little indication of this being adequately aligned with the SDGs.

National development and the implementation of the SDGs are overseen by the National Planning Commission (NPC) in the office of the president. The director of the NPC is designated as a principal advisor to the president on economic and development planning.

Trade unions report that there is no transparent monitoring or evaluation of the implementation of the SDGs, with the government relying primarily on input from the national statistics agency. Trade unions have provided input towards the development of NDP 6, but based on the white paper released by the government in 2024, do not

believe that their recommendations were considered. While the government has recently announced that it would take a bottom-up approach of consulting plans directly with communities, with findings then validated with national stakeholders, it remains to be seen how this mechanism works out in practice.

Social partners are engaged in a dialogue on socio-economic development but not on the SDGs. However, implementation of SDG 8 has improved thanks to Namibia becoming a pathfinder country of the Global Accelerator on Jobs and Social Protection for Just Transition. Thanks to this process, trade unions have been able to engage with the government at least on an ad hoc basis.

Trade unions report that no specific resources have been allocated to the implementation of the SDGs aside from those allocated towards the NDP and the acceleration action plan, the Harambee Prosperity Plan. An analysis of the budget demonstrates that only 35.5 per cent of the SDG indicators are covered by the NDP and existing budget lines.

#### TRANSPARENCY



Irregular access to limited information

#### CONSULTATION



There is no consultation process at all

#### SOCIAL DIALOGUE



There are individual contributions from social partners to the national government



# IS THE (DECENT) WORK GETTING DONE?

In 2023, 11 per cent of workers in Namibia were living under the poverty line, an increase from 10.9 per cent in 2019. This, together with a drop of 12 places in the human development index (HDI) ranking from 2019 to 2022 suggests a regression in meeting **target 1.1 (eradicate extreme poverty)**. On **target 1.3 (nationally appropriate social protection systems)**, 27.2 per cent of the population had access to either direct or indirect social protection benefits in 2016. However, the services are unevenly applied and difficult to access for the rural and poorest sectors of the population.

In 2024, women's labour market participation was lower (54.1 per cent) than men's (61.2 per cent) which may correlate with their greater responsibilities for performing more unpaid domestic work, suggesting that further efforts are needed to achieve progress on **target 5.4 (recognise and value unpaid care and domestic work)**. With regard to **target 5.5 (ensure women's full and effective participation)**, in 2023, 38.5 per cent of Namibia's parliamentarians were women. The representation of women in senior and middle managerial positions stood at 48.2 per cent in 2018. However, Namibia's budget is not gender responsive, allocating the fewest resources to the sectors which overwhelmingly employ women – agriculture and SMEs.

There are serious concerns about Namibia meeting the targets set by **SDG 8 (decent work)**. The proportion of informal employment outside of agriculture stood at 47 per cent in 2018, with more women (50.4 per cent) than men (43.4 per cent) being informally employed. In addition, the share of vulnerable employment stood at 32 per cent in 2022. This suggests further efforts are needed to meet **target 8.3 (support decent job creation)**. On **target 8.5 (full and productive employment and decent work for all)**, the 2018 unemployment rate stood at 19.9 per cent, with young people (15–24) being particularly impacted (38 per cent). In addition, NEET indicators for **target 8.6 (reduce the proportion of youth not in employment, education or training)** stood at 31.8 per cent of youth aged 15–24 in 2018, with young women being more affected (34.2 per cent)

than men (29.3 per cent). Indicators for **target 8.7 (eradicate forced labour and the worst forms of child labour)** are extremely worrying, as the high rates (16 per cent) of multidimensional poverty suffered by children in Namibia cause them to engage in child labour including its worst forms, such as commercial sexual exploitation. **Target 8.8 (protect labour rights and promote safe and secure working environments for all workers)** is far from being met, as in 2016 there were only 61 trained labour inspectors for a working population of nearly 680,000 in the country. In addition, there are limitations on the rights to freedom of association and collective bargaining, as certain sectors of workers are prevented from joining trade unions or entering into collective bargaining agreements.

Progress remains to be made for Namibia to reach **target 10.4 (progressively achieve greater equality)**, as in 2015, the top 10 per cent of income earners had a 47.3 per cent share of GDP, with the bottom 20 per cent of income earners holding a paltry 2.8 per cent share. The absence of a national minimum wage and high levels of informal employment are the principal driving factors of inequality in Namibia. With regard to **target 10.7 (facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people)**, Namibia adopted a National Labour Migration Policy in 2020, due to be implemented as of 2025. As a result, trade unions and employer federations launched a bipartite network to work towards the elimination of all forms of discrimination against migrant workers.

On **SDG 16**, Namibia is far off reaching **target 16.10 (protect fundamental freedoms)**, as trade unions which are not affiliated to the ruling party are routinely discriminated against or denied the right to register their activities.

## TRADE UNION ASKS TO LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND

Trade unions call on the Namibian government to:

- Put in place effective measures to mitigate global crises and their impacts on the economy.
- Strengthen and extend social protection (e.g. pensions, basic income) and ensure universal access to healthcare.
- Adopt a pro-employment and gender-responsive budgeting approach across all fiscal planning processes.
- Adopt policies for a wage-led growth, making wages commensurable to living conditions to increase demand.
- Adopt monetary policies that encourage employment creation, reducing the interest rate for loans in proportion to the number of jobs created.
- Prioritise social dialogue for the implementation of the SDGs by establishing a national tripartite dialogue on the SDGs, together with a co-ordinating task force.
- Set up a focal point in each ministry responsible for mainstreaming, monitoring and reporting on the progress or challenges in the implementation of the relevant SDGs and targets.
- Set up a reporting mechanism on the SDGs, with quarterly reporting sessions, open for participation to trade unions.



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