THE WORLD BANK, TRANSPORT AND LABOUR RESTRUCTURING IN GHANA

Neo-liberal transport restructuring and trade union alternatives

A three year ITF education and research project, with the support of Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES)

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This is a report of an ITF research project for which field work was carried out between March 6 and March 13, 2006, with some desk research before and after those dates. The field work was supported by FES Ghana.

The primary aim of the project was to collect information and develop knowledge on transport restructuring, the role of the World Bank and its impact on workers and unions in Ghana, in the context of an ongoing FES-supported ITF project looking at those issues in global context. The Ghana project was also designed as a participatory action research programme, with a view to building capacity among ITF's Ghanaian affiliates while developing ITF's understanding about how to conduct participatory research involving its affiliates.

The deliberate choice of this methodology was informed by the concern that the project should not only generate information required for ITF research purposes, but also provide a basis for collective learning which builds union capacity to further engage with and influence the restructuring process. By enabling union members to share and critically reflect on their problems and experiences of restructuring, a foundation is established from which the unions in Ghana can explore new strategies and responses.

The field work had two phases. The first involved collecting information through workshop-based discussions with union leaders, shop stewards, activists and workers invited by ITF affiliates in three transport sectors – rail, ports and passenger road transport. Information gathered through the workshops was then complemented by interviewing and meeting with selected representatives of government, management and union branches in workplaces.

Given the participatory approach of this project, the quality of the learning process for the participating unions needs to be given equal value and weight to the actual research findings. It is therefore important to begin to reflect on the methodology and to identify the lessons for future activities. Therefore, in the concluding section of this report -- Section 5 -- some conclusions are drawn about those issues as well as about the content of the information gathered through the project and implications for future ITF research and policy.

Sections 2, 3 and 4 are reports of the information gathered through the project, linked to material gathered in desk research carried out both before and after the visit. They cover the rail, ports and passenger road transport sectors respectively.

These sectoral accounts should be understood in the context of structural reform of the public sector as a whole carried out under the guidance of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank from 1983 to 1991, and which included a reduction of 32,000 public sector position between 1987 and 1991 alone. The IMF and Bank projects contributed to a programme which included:

- severance payments to departing workers of two months of salary for every year of service;
- employment counselling, retraining, and courses in entrepreneurial development;
- credit facilities; and
- food-for-work programs for those unable to secure alternative employment opportunities.

According to World Bank evaluation, retrenched workers invested a large proportion of their severance payments in the establishment of small businesses and farms. However, because of severance payments and the need to raise wages for skilled civil servants, the net budgetary savings from the civil service reform proved negligible, and further efforts to cut government spending were required.

Background

On March 2, 1883, a deputation of businessmen with interests in the Gold Coast met with its Governor, Sir Samuel Rowe, to urge the west African British colony's administration to arrange for the development of railways there. This would allow them to reduce the cost of their extraction and removal of the region's natural resources, they explained. A few months later, the group wrote Rowe a memo in which they reminded him: "That the Gold Coast, being entirely without beasts of burden, or means of water intercommunication, there can be no real or important development of its resources or trade without the formation of railways. That therefore it is desirable Her Majesty's Government give their support to the construction of a railway between Assin, Denkera and Cape Coast Castle." (Metcalfe, 1964, p.414.)

The traders' lobbying was not in vain. The result was the construction of the three strategically routed lines that formed the first railway in Ghana, as Gold Coast became upon independence in 1957. It began operations in 1898, and its headquarters were established at Takoradi Harbour early in the 20th century. The railway grew to 950km of track, and was used initially "to convey heavy equipment from the Takoradi Harbour to the mines in the Tarkwa areas in the Western Region" (Osei-Antwi , undated), and later for carriage of bauxite, manganese, gold, cocoa, timber and other natural resources, as well as passengers.

Freight volume grew from 47,388 tons in 1906 to 805,227 20 years later, while passenger traffic grew from a total of 689,292 to around 1.5 million over the same period. "At the peak of its performance in the early 1960s, the railway lifted over two million tons of freight and some eight million passengers in a year." (Osei-Antwi , undated.) For most of the 20th century, Ghana's railway and ports were administered together through a Ghana Railways and Ports Authority, until they were separated in 1976 with the institution of the Ghana Railway Corporation. By then, however, underinvestment in maintenance, in the context of the development challenges besetting the independent country at a time of rapid change in the world economy and African politics, had set the railway on a path of decline.

During the 1980s, as part of a Transport Recovery Programme (TRP) under Ghana's Economic Recovery Programme (ERP), which was devised under the terms of International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank structural adjustment programmes (SAPs), parts of the railway benefited from rehabilitation funded by the World Bank and the African Development Bank (AfDB). Other parts were not redeveloped, however, and the network as a whole remained deficient. There were three Railway Rehabilitation Projects (RRPs) under the Transport Recovery Programme. RRP1, from 1983 to 1988, improved parts of the Western Line, while RRP2, from 1988 to 1995, focused on the Eastern and Central Lines.

Research sponsored by the ITF and the World Bank Institute in 1997 found that only the tracks that were the most damaged were changed under RRP1, which was undermined by continued problems of deficient signalling, rolling stock and workshops. Both unions and management criticised RRP2 for focusing on the Eastern and Central Lines before the problems undermining the effect of the Western Line investments had been tackled. Moreover, the research found that the investment in the Eastern Line itself was undermined by a similar set of problems as those that persisted on the Western Line -- continuing deficiencies in the state of track and bridges, and lack of spare parts, especially for the radio-based signalling system. (Martin and Micoud, 1997)

In short, it seems that the RRPs brought some improvements, but the lack of an overall strategic approach limited and undermined them. Nevertheless, freight traffic increased from 350,000 tons in 1983 to 594,000 tons in 1988 -- both modest totals compared to the 1,600,000 tons carried annually in the 1970s -- and passenger numbers also grew. At the same time, the workforce was reduced, from 11,000 in 1978 to 4,500 in 1997. The railway unions argued then that the improvements in freight and passenger numbers and in labour productivity showed what might be done with further investment, and they were ready to accept further workforce reductions as part of a package. They also urged government to involve them more in designing and implementing the railway's revival.

World Bank and railway privatisation

By then, however, the future of the Ghana Railway Corporation had been transferred to a significantly different area of engagement between the World Bank and the country's government than the Transport Recovery Programme. Instead, it had been allocated a place in another World Bank project, a Public Enterprise and Privatization Technical Assistance project (PEPTA), developed in collaboration with the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the European Union (EU). Under PEPTA, it was intended to expedite the privatisation of 114 state-owned enterprises -- in addition to 79 divestitures already completed by the time PEPTA began in 1995 -- and to carry out large scale labour retrenchments in those enterprises.

PEPTA was neither a sector-specific project nor one in which the strategic approach to any particular state-owned enterprise was considered in the context of its specific contribution to development. Rather, its strategic aim was essentially to privatise as much as possible as quickly as possible, on the basis of the continuing World Bank/IMF assumption that doing so would bring economic benefits. But, like many other World Bank-sponsored privatisation programmes in Africa and other parts of the world during the late 1990s, it did not go according to plan.

In 2000 PEPTA was restructured, following a 'mid-term review' by the World Bank, which "recognized an evolution in the thinking on privatization and private sector promotion in general" and "recommended that the divestiture program no longer be based on simply counting the number of companies privatized, without regard to their importance in the economy" (World Bank 2005, p.4). Instead: "The divestiture component was to be refocused on introducing private sector participation in five large infrastructure and financial companies (Electricity Corporation, Ghana Railways, Ghana Water Company, National Investment Bank, Ghana Commercial Bank)."

Despite this more strategic approach, the revised PEPTA project persisted with general assumptions rather than sector-specific evidence as to what private sector participation could bring to the railways. "Public-private participation (PPP) in these key enterprises, and the preparation leading up to it, would entail improvements in service delivery which, in turn, would ultimately have a larger impact on the economy, lowering the cost of infrastructure provision and improving the business environment in general," according to the Bank. "The revised project scope was more in line with government priorities, and the privatisation program was in line with the objectives of the macroeconomic program agreed with the IMF and the Bank." (World Bank 2005, p.4, our emphasis.) The terms of that macro-economic programme were expressed in Ghana's Country Assistance Strategy, the document drawn up by IMF/World Bank client country governments as the basis for the interventions by the institutions. It stated, for example, that the strategy's objectives included "increasing competition, lowering costs, creating investment opportunities for private investors, reducing public sector involvement in the productive sector and signalling the Government's commitment to enlarge the role of the private sector in the economy". (World Bank 2005, p.6)

In accordance with this plan, Ghana Railway's administration was restructured into a limited liability company in 2001 (Ministry of Transportation, 2006). By 2003, further steps had been taken in the direction of privatisation, including the selection of various technical advisors to "fast track" a planned concession to a foreign private partner. Two years after that, the government had chosen a company called United Rail, supposedly registered in Britain but apparently led by Railroad Development Corporation of the USA, as its preferred choice of concessionnaire. By May 2005, the World Bank was describing arrangements for introducing private sector participation in Ghana's railway as "completed" (World Bank 2005, p.13).

In fact, however, negotiations came to a halt during 2005, with financial responsibility for the anticipated retrenchment of many rail workers reported to be one of the stumbling blocks. According to Christopher Ameyaw-Akumfi, Minister of Ports, Harbours and Railways, interviewed for this report following the ITF/FES seminar: "We came to a point where we all realised we need $27m to retrench. That was the main reason the concession negotiations failed." The plan was to retrench all the remaining railway workforce, with the concessionaire rehiring around 2,000 (about half the remaining workforce). The government approached the World Bank for financial support for the retrenchments, but, according to the minister, was told that the credit line had closed. "We told them we could not concession without it. In fairness to them, we probably didn't move fast enough." However, he added: "I have no faith in the World Bank. They have been very disappointing to say the least."

The minister said the World Bank was also dissatisfied with the government's choice of private partner, for reasons that are not clear. (Other critics had expressed concern about United Rail, and there were press reports that the company had no history on

Britain's companies register.) However, in relation to the privatisations planned under PEPTA as a whole, the World Bank has admitted: "The technical assistance which was to be associated with staff retrenchment never took place, as the expected support from donors did not materialize. The Government paid out severance payments with the proceeds of the sale of enterprises. The (Ghanaian government's project) completion report notes that in a number of cases firms were sold or liquidated and the payments to workers have not been made because of lack of resources. It is not clear why the Bank did not consider taking over this aspect of the project." (World Bank 2005, p.14.)

By 2006, the government had removed Ghana Railway Corporation from its list of companies to be privatised, but it continues to seek private partners for concessions of particular lines or development of new lines and services.

Union responses and workers' experiences

In such circumstances, it is not surprising that Ghana's railway workers' unions, though very keen on securing investment for the future of the industry, and not opposed in principle to privatisation if that could be shown to be the route to such investment, have remained concerned about their members' futures. From the outset of PEPTA, the Railway Workers Union and the Railway Enginemens Union had been concerned about the scale of the job losses proposed, a reduction of the railway workforce from 4,500 to 1,600. Their concerns about retrenchments had been fuelled by their experience of retrenchments associated with a similar concession for the railways in neighbouring Côte d'Ivoire and Burkina Faso (which share a railway network) and by the way in which a previous reduction in the Ghana Railways workforce was carried out. In 1993, 1,300 workers had been retrenched, but no opportunities for redeployment or retraining had been provided, and workers lost not only their cash income but also housing and medical benefits. Moreover, the unions argue that retrenchments undermined health and safety and increased work-related stress among the retained workforce, leading to declining morale and low productivity.

The unions had won management support for a set of alternative proposals in 1997, in response to the railway privatisation planned under PEPTA, but the government appears not to have considered them very seriously. The unions' proposals would have led to investment in Ghana Railways, to improve efficiency and productivity across the whole freight and passenger network, with a view to serving the country's economic and social development more effectively. The unions argued that some railway job losses would be appropriate in that context, although they remained opposed to retrenchments on the scale envisaged as part of the privatisation plan.

In the event, however, neither the unions' proposals nor the planned concession have been carried out. Instead, by the time of our visit, policy paralysis - induced at least in part, it would seem, by Ghana Railways having been trapped within the failing PEPTA project -- had reduced the railway to a condition that appears to threaten its very existence. PEPTA as a whole has been designated a "moderately unsatisfactory" project by the World Bank itself (World Bank 2005, p.6), and in the railway case not only has it clearly failed to achieve privatisation but also it has served as an obstacle to any other approach to regeneration. Indeed, the railway has declined so much that only one of the three lines -- the Western Line -- is now functioning at all, carrying bauxite and manganese. Accounts from workers at the ITF/FES workshop suggested that the only investment taking place is being made by the freight interests themselves, with bauxite and manganese producers keeping their services going by paying for diesel. Carriage of other freight, such as timber and cocoa, has shifted to roads, which have received much larger and more consistent investment, thanks largely to World Bank and AfDB loans and donor support.

The Ministry of Transportation refers on its website to a potential to nearly double rail freight volume, but notes that the potential remains unfulfilled because of lack of investment. It also notes that passenger services are loss-making, and seminar participants confirmed that passenger services have in fact now ceased to operate at all. The Ministry of Transport describes the freight sector as GRC's "lifeline", and claims that volumes carried grew from 810,000 tons to 1.4 million tons between 1996 and 2001, the latest year for which the site offers numbers. However, by 2002, the Ghana railway unions were warning of "a drastic decline" with "sizeable loss" of market share and financial health.

The impact of this lack of investment on the railway's workers has now reached critical proportions, according to accounts at the ITF/FES seminar. Participants spoke of:

- loss of rest time and increased workload;
- salaries always being in arrears (when we visited in March, workers had only just received the pay they had been due in January);
- absence of water or lighting in workers' accommodations;
- lack of in-service training;
- lack of protective clothing;
- lack of flags, signal lamps, detonators and torches required for safe and effective track maintenance;
- lack of fire extinguishers in trains and workshops, and disbandment of the railway fire brigade;
- withdrawal of medical staff and clinics, and their replacement with sick bays in which nurses but not doctors were available;
- stores staff covering two stores where they used to look after one;
- reduction from eight to one worker maintaining stores accounts;
- station masters doing double shifts of 24 hours at a stretch.

In addition, there has been considerable outsourcing, which means that many GRC workers are operating alongside casual employees on worse terms and conditions than themselves, in such activities as cleaning and security. Participants suggested that their own terms are also being eroded, with some aspects of the collective bargaining agreement, such as the provision of car and bicycle loans, not being honoured, and, more seriously, social security payments deducted at source not being forwarded to the appropriate agency. The unions complain that management is silent in response to their complaints about such matters, and that there is, in general, poor communication between management and employees, which fuels the rumour mill.

The strong sense from the seminar was of a downward spiral, with the company arguing that it cannot keep up with salary payments because of low productivity while the unions argue that the low productivity, which they do not dispute, is the product of lack of investment and low morale. "People are worried that the railway will collapse," said one participant, adding that some had adopted the attitude: "If they are going to retrench me anyway, why should I put in the effort?"

These problems manifest themselves sometimes in dangerous ways. For example, following a derailment said by the workers to have been caused by inadequate track maintenance, nine workers were said to have been suspended without pay. Train drivers reported that they are sometimes on duty for as long as 20 hours at a time, often because delays caused by a faulty signal or point lead to a journey taking double its scheduled time. One footplateman said: "Sometimes you reach a point where a point is not working. Sometimes because of inadequate maintenance, you see weedy track. Drivers have to get down and fix the line themselves, and weed the track. Sometimes you find joints that have dropped, which is very dangerous because it can cause a train to break in two. You have to go back and fix and recouple the train."

According to another: "Some trains go without guards, although not officially. So if there is no guard, the assistant has to do the guard's duties. Retraining is not happening, although sometimes what is expected of you is not the same as your job description. You are supposed to let the station manager ahead know about an accident, but you cannot always contact them."

Another commented that there is a range of occupational health and safety hazards arising from these maintenance deficiencies, made worse by lack of protective equipment. Because engine doors would not close properly, for example, a driver could be exposed to excessive engine noise, but was not issued with ear protection. Among workers' comments and concerns were:

- "the fans don't work, and so the cab overheats";
- broken windscreen wipers leave drivers "at the mercy of the weather";
- "if it is raining you have to put your head out of the window to see";
- such problems are sometimes compounded by faulty speedometers.

The workers blame these problems not only on inadequate investment but also on the effects of poor management of both outsourced and in-house workers. They also acknowledge decline of commitment of some workers themselves, which seems to have been encouraged by the investment and management failings. They say that some directly employed and some contract maintenance workers are not properly organised, and that they often have to walk several miles before reaching the place on the track where their work is required, because transport is not provided. There are also claims that outsourcing of security has led to increases in theft and robberies. Some contracts are well run, however, and in those cases the workers have the equipment they need and receive better pay and allowances, and enjoy better conditions of work, than GRC employees. In those cases, say the GRC workers, maintenance has improved.

Therefore, the workers do not blame outsourcing as such but the highly variable quality of the contractors and the poor management of in-house maintenance operations. "Outsourcing works well provided the companies are good and it is well organised," said one participant. And another, reflecting on the impact all of these problems have had on morale, commented: "These are not just failures of management. We all need to change our attitudes to the railway, or else we are also responsible for its downfall."

However, if the unions are to play a positive part in reversing the decline, it appears they will first have to convince their declining membership that they have the capacity to do so. The catalogue of problems that have sent the Ghana railway into its downward spiral is finding expression in loss of union membership, a problem made worse, union leaders claim, by the fact that union dues deducted at source do not necessarily reach the union. One senior union representative remarked candidly: "The union has lost members because of job cuts and many workers are unhappy with the union and its inability to be effective. The union has no financial resources to assist workers. Workers do not see the union as providing the services they need. The workers do not see the union doing anything on their behalf."

Current developments

Shortly after the seminar, the Ghana News Agency reported (March 30, 2006): "The Railway Workers Union (RWU) supported by the Railway Enginemen's Union (REU) and the Association of Railway Senior Officers (ARSO) on Thursday mounted a peaceful demonstration in Accra to appeal for the restoration of government subvention to the Railways. The demonstrators, clad in red paraphernalia, and holding placards, some of which read 'Railway is in coma, we need oxygen', 'In the short term, we need subvention while waiting for government plans' and 'A hungry man is an angry man' presented a petition addressed to President John Agyekum Kufuor through Professor Christopher Ameyaw-Akumfi, Minister of Ports, Harbours and Railways.

"The petition signed by Samuel Kokovena, General Secretary, RWU, Charles Leeward, National Chairman, REU, and J. A. K. Amoah, President, ARSO, asked for a restoration of government subvention to the Railways, better conditions of service and early payment of salaries and allowances. The petition stated that the challenges faced by the Railway Workers were as a result of Government's 'inability to resource and capitalize the Railways to play its rightful role in the national economy'. It called for the institution of urgent measures to restore the Railways to its former glory.

"The petition said the withdrawal of government subvention since 1997, had 'contributed significantly to the deterioration of the assets and infrastructure' adding that 'railways the world over are financially supported by the State irrespective of ownership and our Railways cannot be an exception.' It asked the President to urgently intervene to conclude salary negotiations with the Unions, which had dragged on since April 2005. 'As Unions we are concerned about the need to modernize and increase efficiency of the system, employment opportunities and to maintain a social and long term economic dimension to plan the Railways', the petition said."

The GNA account added that the union petition urged the government to fully involve the workers in restructuring plans for the railway, but it did not report a conciliatory response from government. It noted that Minister Ameyaw-Akumfi had commented that, with some railway lines not operating, workers were being paid for no work. He had made a similar remark in his interview for this report, when he also indicated that the government hoped to revive the privatisation plan in some form, but "that will require another look at labour in the railway sector". The minister added:

"The concession was going to be done with the understanding that the government would undertake wholesale retrenchments. We ran into difficulties and now the concession is on ice. We have removed the railways from the divestiture list. But a PPP (public-private partnership) has not been ruled out. We would welcome an investor on any line.

"The PPP would require restructuring and an agreement about what to do with the labour force that we have. One major problem is that the company is clearly overstaffed. It is not possible to reduce it because there is no money to pay for retrenchment. If I was a private operator, I would not need all of the 3,600 workers: two of the lines are not working at all. Most of the workforce is idle, but they insist on timely payments and increments. They expect the government to put in money to maintain track and pay salaries."

Clearly, this is an unusual view about the responsibilities of state employees, in that, in effect, it suggests that they should bear GRC's financial risks even though they do not own or manage the business. However, it also captures the predicament facing both the company and its workers, and the danger of continued decline towards collapse unless something is done. The World Bank has assisted in such circumstances elsewhere, by financing restructuring and associated retrenchments as part of the process of privatising a railway. (The World Bank's first ever loan explicitly to finance labour retrenchments was in Argentina's railway.)

However, the experience of railway concessioning elsewhere in Africa, often carried out through World Bank projects, may have put the institution off railway privatisation in Africa. A recent World Bank-sponsored evaluation notes: "One of the chief characteristics of the African concessions is that they have nearly all been associated with substantial investments principally in infrastructure. But these investments have been financed for the most part by bilateral and multilateral lending agencies." (Bullock 2005, p.44) Those agencies had intended to kickstart an investment spiral that would see the concessionaires, in time, financing further investments from the railways' revenues. "But are the concessions really self-sustainable in the sense of being sufficient to ensure renewal of assets in the longer-term? Or will the railways be back, either during the current concessions, or at the end, requiring another shot of investment to prepare them for the next concessionaire?" (Bullock 2005, p.44). The report's answer to its own question followed: "There appear to be two major considerations: firstly, few, if any, of the concessions have been generating the cash flow needed to make such investments from their own resources and, secondly, there is a definite risk-aversion to investing in infrastructure with a life significantly beyond the length of the concession. Even that horizon may be too optimistic; the discussion of the existing concessions shows that even ten years can see the political and economic environment radically changed, leaving the concessionaire high and dry."

In contrast to that gloomy prognosis, railways have a "bright future" according to an article sourced to the Ghana News Agency and found on a government website: "Today Ghana Railways stands at crossroads waiting to be ushered into a new phase of its existence. This is because after much neglect, it has now been realised that rail services are crucial to the transport needs of the country. It is in this vein that the Government has drawn up a long-term development plan that proposes to expand the existing railway network from the Southern to Northern parts of the country." (Osei-Antwi, undated). The idea is to improve links with neighbouring countries, to develop services linked to inland waterways at Volta Lake, and to build a new passenger service between Accra and Tema to relieve the very heavy congestion on and pollution from the road between them.

However, the same article argues that this bright future requires further reduction and if possible elimination of government subsidy, which has already been heavily reduced under PEPTA and other World Bank projects as part of the structural adjustment process of the last two decades. The government believes that the gap would be filled by a concessionaire that would be "required to inject capital, improve productivity and quality of service at a competitive price and lower total costs to the economy". (Osei-Antwi, undated). The latest foreign investor reported to have expressed an interest in doing so is a Czech consortium led by CZMT Invest AG, an engineering company, which is reported to have "presented detailed financial and technical proposals to the Government for the rehabilitation of the western rail line from Takoradi to Awaso". (Daily Graphic 2006). Their proposals also include a "comprehensive plan for the extension of the rail lines from Awaso through Sunyani, Techiman, Wenchi, Bamboi, Bole, Wa to Hamile".

The government now appears to be resigned to reducing the railway workforce further in a gradual way, financing retrenchments by borrowing from private banks against the railway's assets. This would take place in parallel with gradual privatisation, with concession contracts for particular lines now more likely than one overall concession. In his interview with us, the minister said the workforce would be reduced in batches of around 200 at a time, and this process appears to be underway: according to union sources, there will be early retirement for workers aged over 57, which would affect around 500 workers, while a concession deal with an unnamed company would be signed by the end of 2006.

Yet, "as of now" (July 28, 2006), the government had not yet discussed these plans with the rail unions.

Background

Takoradi and Tema ports handle between them nearly 90% of Ghana's export and import trade, and therefore make a major contribution well beyond the harbour gates to employment in the country's economy. Ghana has also set out to make its ports important hubs for west Africa as a whole, particularly following Côte d'Ivoire's political violence and disruption in recent years. The Ghana Gateway Project involves not only further improvements to Takoradi and Tema ports, but also, and more controversially, the establishment of a new container terminal at Tema, to be run under a concession by a company called Ghana Ports Services Consortium.

Ports restructuring has been a long process in Ghana. As long ago as 1986, the World Bank financed a ports project for Tema and Takoradi consisting of:

- rehabilitation and modernization, consisting of:

- repair and rehabilitation of existing infrastructure and facilities;
- removal of sunken vessels and other wrecks;
- provision of container and roll-on/roll-off facilities at Tema;
- provision of cargo handling equipment, communications and office equipment and floating craft, and repair of salvageable equipment;

- institutional strengthening, consisting of:

- technical assistance for strengthening management of Ghana Ports and Harbours Authority (GPHA), including GPHA headquarters and port managements at Tema and Takoradi;

- a training program for port managers, staff and skilled workers, and support for project supervision and coordination.

The demands of institutional transparency were not as great 20 years ago as they are today; apart from the details cited above, no documentation is available online at the World Bank about that project. It may not yet have been routine for the Bank to condition such projects on privatisation, but Ghana was already locked into an IMF/World Bank structural adjustment programme that severely constrained public resources for improving public infrastructure and services. In any event, in 1989, the GPHA did embark on a privatisation programme, "aimed at reducing the role of the state in port operations and increasing private participation in its operations" (MDU 2005).

This began the process of making Tema and Takoradi "landlord ports", meaning that their assets remain in state ownership while their operations are increasingly turned over to private businesses. The Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA), rather than the World Bank, has been the main source of international technical and financial assistance in Ghana's ports privatisation process.

According to the World Bank, a number of key steps were critical to the success of the project. These included a "timely, proactive, and professional" approach by the government and GPHA management; "avoidance of autocratic approach"; adoption of a "consultative, persuasive, and participative style, which has resulted in a very positive atmosphere among the port community"; and "inclusion of representatives of the Maritime and Port Workers Union on the organizational restructuring and labor rationalization working team of the Project Implementation Committee and their attendance at its meetings on a regular basis". (Labor Issues in Infrastructure Reform -- a toolkit, 2004, p.163.)

Impact of restructuring on port workers

Research carried out during the field visit supported the above evidence that there had been considerable dialogue with the union, and suggested that some of the outcomes for its members have been beneficial as a result. In particular, although ports privatisation is typically associated with casualisation, in Ghana it was accompanied by the establishment of a dock labour pool, which had the effect of reducing the extent of casual dock work. The extent of social dialogue since privatisation has varied between companies, however, and the field visit research suggested that a "positive atmosphere" is not experienced by all port workers (although it is by some). The research also suggested that it would not be justified today to give the GPHA management so glowing a testimonial as the World Bank has done, particularly because of its failure to enforce labour standards in some of the stevedoring companies.

The port reforms have brought two major rounds of labour reductions and restructuring, the first at the outset in 1989 and the most recent in 2002. On both occasions, the GPHA workforce was reduced by 40 per cent, but in the more recent case that does not necessarily mean complete retrenchment. Rather, a Ghana Dock Labour Company was established as part of a process that increased the number of private stevedoring companies operating in the ports; MDU has a 40 % stake in the ownership and management of that company (the majority is owned by stevedoring companies). According to the GPHA, the permanent workforce was halved from 2,961 to around 1,410 as a result of the recent reforms. Although this has led to an increase in the proportion of casual dockers relative to permanent employees -- the proportion has risen to 80 per cent, according to information received at the seminar -- it also appears to have improved employment security and terms and conditions in some respects for many if not all of the casuals.

Information provided by seminar participants indicated that there are now nine stevedoring companies in the ports, and some of those that were already present have reduced their workforces -- in the case of GSL, for example, from 300 to 77 -- while the new arrivals have absorbed many of those workers. The net effect is not precisely clear, but the best estimate of MDU leaders is that the overall workforce has reduced from 4,500 to 3,600, a 20 per cent reduction. However, both numbers include casuals and each casual docker is now working more frequently than before, three or four shifts per week compared to as few as one a month previously. Under the new system, only those who are regularly employed are retained on the register, and up to 1,200 casuals are now working every day.

That raises the issue as to whether they should continue to be casuals at all. Casual work is supposed to allow for the flexibility that is required in the industry, but is now also being used in Ghana's ports as a form of disguised and less protected employment, not only for dockers but also for other staff, such as clerks and security workers. There is a perception among permanent employees that contract labour is used against them, to undermine their own conditions of service and collective bargaining, which weakens the workers' unity. The problem is made worse by the fact that some of the stevedoring companies are not union-organised, and their aggressive employment practices are inhibiting their workers from coming forward as volunteers to organise them.

Although the union participants in the seminar acknowledged those problems, they also noted that some of the stevedoring companies do bargain with unions. One participant even described relations between his company and the union as "cordial" and another suggested it helps that most of the companies are locally owned and that the union has a stake in the dock labour company. "The union has a say in decision making. The union can now negotiate with management. The director's office door is always open to the union. Top men in the union are always available to us," we were told. Where social dialogue is working well, the seminar heard that "employee behaviour has improved greatly compared to the past" and that there is "more discipline among the workers". However, another participant said: "Most of the stevedoring companies see the union as a monster." In those cases, unions were not consulted properly, and mistrust has grown.

There is a mixed picture in relation to pay and conditions, too, with casual workers enjoying better terms and conditions today than casuals did before the restructuring in some respects. Terms and conditions for casual workers are now negotiated through the collective bargaining arrangements with the unions, unlike before, and the casuals have their own representatives in such talks, whereas before they were excluded from direct representation. One of the working groups in the seminar described negotiations as "difficult", and commented: "We are negotiating with the stevedoring companies who are on the board of directors, but they are also the customers and want to keep their costs down. Pay levels are higher than previously and are reviewed on an annual basis. This was not the case in the past." However, the casuals still only earn about half of what the permanent workers are paid. Bonuses are said to have been reduced in size, but many of the casuals were excluded from receiving them in the past, because only those who worked a certain number of days qualified. According to an interview with Nii Komieteh Botchway, managing director of the GDLC, following the seminar: "A bonus is very important to casual workers. It is now built into the wage. For every day you work, you get 10% of your wage at the end of the year as a bonus. In the past, you had to work a minimum number of days in order to get a bonus."

Other terms appear to have improved in some respects and worsened in others, and there is also some variety between the stevedoring companies. On the one hand, casuals are now covered by insurance and by social security contributions, which they weren't before, and are entitled to medical care in the port. On the other hand, medical care for permanent workers but not casuals extends to their families as well as themselves and some companies are evading their social security contributions, according to seminar participants, by illegally employing unregistered dockers, whose terms and conditions fall completely outside the regulatory system. The union believes, therefore, that supervision and enforcement of the rules needs to be improved, and that GPHA, as the "landlord", should take more responsibility for ensuring this. It was said that the union's representations to GPHA on this subject had been met with assurances that everything possible was already being done to enforce the regulations, but the unions do not believe that. Against that, however, participants noted that the new system, if it is honoured, is more transparent and has made it more difficult for the 'headman' of dockers' gangs to "get money from employers, hire labour for less, and pocket the rest".

There is a similarly mixed picture in relation to health and safety issues. Permanent workers are given boots, overalls and helmets which the casuals do not always receive, although, according to GLDC managing director Botchway: "The GDLC takes responsibility for basic protective equipment (helmet, boots, gloves) which has been agreed with the stevedoring companies. Anything over and above the basic equipment is the responsibility of the stevedoring companies. We try and make sure that they comply. We try and move on them as soon as possible if there are complaints of non-compliance from the workers. It is in our interests otherwise we have to pick up the bill for injuries."

The seminar heard, however, that there is some confusion as to the boundary of responsibility between the GDLC and the stevedoring companies in relation to protective clothing, that the GDLC does not always issue the basic items to casuals, and that the obligation on the companies are not always enforced. Likewise, although in general it was stated that "safety awareness has improved", there were also reports in the seminar that many problems remain. Among the points made in the seminar were:

- Safety equipment is inadequate.
- There should be notices warning of dangerous cargo.
- There is lack of supervision.
- Discharges are allowed at any time. "This has been a problem since the days of Adam".
- Health and safety education needs to improve: people need to be informed what is dangerous and why using equipment is important.
- "We were steverdoring a vessel. The weather changed, and the wind got up. Operations were stopped. When it normalised, the gang was called on board. Bu there was a misunderstanding between the signal man and the winch man. It led to a docker falling down off an eight-high stack of containers. The winch man said they had seen a hand which gave a signal to hoist. The same thing happened at another company. Use of unskilled labour leads to accidents."

On the other hand, it was also said that there are fewer injuries than in the past, and that, although safety training remains insufficient, it has improved, leading to few accidents.

The subject of training in general revealed similar variety of actual and perceived change. One working group of participants reported: "In the stevedoring companies, there is lack of training to meet the requirements of the modern port. Training is a lot worse than before, and there are many more accidents now." But others said that training had improved. For examples:

- There is not enough training but it is better than before.
- The dock labour company offers some training, about four programmes every year.
- The dock labour company also gives some specialised training, e.g. for winchmen, forklift truck operators and for newly installed modern equipent, such as gantry cranes.
- In the past training was selective, but now covers a wider range of workers.
- Training is compulsory for workers and it is part of the conditions of service and is massive improvement, although still room for improvement.
- Stevedoring companies offer training to some skilled (eg fork lift operators) non-permanent

workers.

There was general agreement that training and health and safety protection were both better for permanent employees than for casuals; that it was better in some stevedoring companies than others; and that the existence and activities of the dock labour company were the main reason for those improvements that had occurred.

It was also noted that dockers are working harder than they used to do. "We do a job three would do before," said one participant, and a dock manager complained that he was working 12 hours a day, seven days a week. The role of stevedores is widening: before, stevedores were limited to loading and unloading ships at the quay, but now they are also responsible for the short transfer to the standing area, a trend that could lead for further loss of demarcation between jobs.

Finally, equal opportunities for women appear to have improved, with equal pay being reported and more women managers than before. It was also reported that there are now four dockers with disabilities at one of the ports.

Current and future developments

There are concerns that the new privately run Tema container terminal could undermine some of the improvements that have been made at existing ports, while maintaining or worsening the negative consequences of the reforms that have already taken place. GLDC managing director Botchway acknowledges that increased containerisation will mean further job reductions, as container ports are less labour intensive. "We anticipate that there will be a structural change in the demand for labour and this will result in the casual pool shrinking 3-5% per annum over 5 years," he said, adding that the remaining workforce would be more highly skilled and likely to earn more. His points were echoed in an interview with Gordon Amin, Tema port director, who pointed out that, while general cargo stevedoring gangs are composed of 16 workers, container gangs only need six. (At present in Tema, however, container gangs have 11 workers.) The opening of the new terminal is likely to have a major impact on employment, as it is expected to attract all Tema's current container traffic, which accounts for 70 per cent of Tema's existing operations. There have been criticisms about the lack of transparency with which the concession for the new terminal has been given to a foreign consortium involving Maersk, which will not be obliged to recruit its stevedores from the existing workforce.

There are also concerns that inadequate oversight by government agencies is preventing the potential for efficiency improvements in the existing ports from being fully realised, despite sacrifices by the workers, and that this could also endanger further jobs in the future. Dockers' representatives at the seminar expressed the view that there is a structural impediment to realising productivity improvements, in that each of the private stevedoring companies are granted a quota of work, regardless of their relative efficiency. The unions believe that the companies should have more incentive to increase their efficiency without undermining the terms and conditions of work of their permanent and casual employees.

Failure of privatisation and deregulation

Following independence in 1957, Ghana established a public bus transport service through a publicly owned company called the Omnibus Service Authority (OSA). Fares were held down to enable the service to be affordable, but this also undermined the service's revenue, a problem that became acute once Ghana entered into a Economic Recovery Programme (ERP) under IMF/World Bank guidance in the 1980s. This was because, like structural adjustment programmes imposed by the IMF and World Bank throughout Africa and the rest of the global South at that time, in Ghana the programme involved big cuts in public subsidies and services.

According to a World Bank report, in the context of public spending cuts as part of the overall IMF/World Bank structural adjustment programme in the 1980s, the OSA was unable to buy spare parts or new buses, but believing these shortages to be temporary was reluctant to carry out retrenchments. This led to an ever-growing ratio of personnel to operational buses. (Galenson, 1989)

In response to the declining services and growing demand, Ghana's government partly deregulated the sector in the early 1990s, encouraging the private sector to participate in the provision of bus services, although their fares were also government-controlled. Later OSA was privatised and fare regulations for inter-city services deregulated, although fares regulation, through the Road Transport Co-ordinating Council, remains for taxi services in Accra. Regulations covering such matters as driver fatigue remain for intercity services, but are not are properly enforced, putting those companies that treat their staff properly and safely at a cost disadvantage.

As a result, according to the World Bank, which encouraged the deregulation in the 1990s: "The fare controlled private sector bus operators entered the market to fill in the deficit in public service but they found it profitable to operate only at high load factors associated with a low quality of service. Investment in new large vehicles could not be sustained in this regime. The residual deficit in services was filled by taxis operating outside the fare control, contributing to a proliferation of small vehicles. Therefore, while deregulation of the public transport services in Accra has increased supply, it has worsened road congestion, the urban environment, user safety and security. The private mini-buses (trotros) in Accra have operated on an opportunistic basis, without any schedule, route licensing or service standards. The license gives them a permission to operate anywhere, resulting in their concentration along the main high density corridors. This situation has particularly worsened the travel environment for the poor who live in outlying areas and depend most on public transport." (World Bank 2004)

The problems have been made much worse by Accra's rapid population expansion -- it is growing by 4.4 per cent per annum -- leading to "heavy congestion particularly during the peak periods, low vehicle utilization, weak implementation of traffic management measures, inadequate facilities for pedestrians and bicyclists, poor road safety arrangements and high accident rates. Almost 70% of the person trips in the city depend on some form of buses as the dominant mode which use less than 25% of the road space; in contrast, private cars and taxis move less than 30% of the person trips but consume about 70% of the road space. Despite the importance of urban public transport in satisfying mobility needs of the residents, it operates under financial and management constraints. The poor public transport suppresses the economic and social advantages for which the city developed in the first place." (World Bank 2004).

Reversing privatisation and deregulation

Ghana's government has already responded to these problems by recreating a publicly owned bus service, Metro Mass Transit (MMT), and now the World Bank has decided to support this with a project, currently at appraisal stage before approval (although originally it had been due for approval in July 2006) with four components (World Bank 2004):

- Component 1: Introduce a limited competition regime and procurement and evaluation capacity (estimated US$2.5 million). This component would support development of a procedures manual for planning and designing a Bus Rapid Transit system, structuring and drafting of contracts for the regulatory authority, for the operators and the ticketing system and training of staff. This would require establishment of a tendering authority and creation of legal entities capable of bidding for service contracts, to discipline the market and provide protection from wasteful competition.

- Component 2: Develop a pilot BRT system and feeder NMT facilities (estimated US$27.5 million). This component would support constructing priority measures on pilot corridor(s) to support Bus Rapid Transit as an integrated system of facilities, equipment, services and amenities that collectively provide high quality, high performance rapid transit. This component would also support construction of facilities for pedestrians and bicyclists as feeders to the BRT pilot corridors. The project will produce and implement a package of measures based on demand management, efficient network design, bus priority measures and effective traffic engineering.

- Component 3: Institutional Strengthening (estimated US$4.0 million). This component would include support to set up the Greater Accra Urban Transport Authority, including training, capacity building and technical assistance to manage, plan and monitor performance. The key activities would include: (a) dissemination of learning and experience to lead to wider application of sustainable transport solutions; (b) secondments to the Tendering Unit of London buses that has been administering a "limited competition" regime for urban passenger transport for over a decade and designing twinning arrangements between Accra and London; (c) development of competence for tariff setting and service contract framework designs; and (d) introduction of a basis for effective competition in the bus transport sector through a system of route tendering.

- Component 4. Monitoring and Evaluation (estimated US$2.0 million). This component would include: (a) development of a comprehensive M&E framework for measuring (both quantitatively and qualitatively) the impact on various initiatives; and (b) development of a better data base and case study information on the impact of urban transport interventions on GHG emissions.

Evidently, the World Bank has ended its damaging commitment to liberalisation of urban road passenger services. Now it not only cites with approval (in the project information document) Ghana's re-establishment of a publicly owned urban bus service, but is also assisting Ghana in bringing the existing private operators into a regulated publicly run urban system. However, evidence from the ITF/FES seminar suggests that, like the earlier liberalisation, the new policies are having mixed effects on transport workers, and that a more systematic approach to consulting them through their unions could benefit all parties. In addition, it appears that not all the problems of intercity bus transport are being tackled, and that there are many of them.

Impacts on road passenger workers

The seminar found that the most disadvantaged workers are those who, following privatisation of OSA and liberalisation, went into the informal sector, where overloading and poor vehicle maintenance are endemic. The picture varies in the larger private bus companies that entered the market following liberalisation or OSA's privatisation, but in the companies whose workers were represented there appear to be few complaints, as the working groups in the seminar revealed.

At the Intercity company, which was the product of OSA's privatisation in 2000, it was reported by union representatives that 400 jobs were lost at that time. According to numbers obtained from the company, in interviews with management representatives, there were at one time as many as 2,000 workers employed by OSA, but the workforce had dwindled to no more than 800 at the time of divestiture. By March 2006, there were 596.

For the remaining workforce there was some reduction in terms and conditions. For example, the number of leave days was reduced from 34 to 28. However, salaries are reported to have increased -- with an increase of more than 20 per cent in the first year after privatisation -- and health and safety arrangements have shown "considerable improvements". In addition, some conditions improved; for example, medical insurance now covers staff 24 hours a day, not only when they are at work. According to the working group: "Before privatisation, there was a lot of inefficiency and waste of money. There was also political interference. The output of the workers was weak. Now goals are set and you have to attain them. Recruitment procedures are better and people are appointed on basis of competence."

In an interview conducted after the seminar with management representatives at Intercity, a positive attitude to the union was expressed. It was noted that the company struggles to compete with others that have lower overheads, because they have up to three times fewer drivers and do not observe rules about drivers' working hours. "We are perceived as higher quality, and the market trusts us. But we have low capacity, and the passengers have to go somewhere. We have withdrawn from so many routes. The returns are too low, for example, on Kumasi, Wa and Takoradi (routes from Accra). The informal sector undercuts us, and they are using buses we used to run, that we sold to them."

Another senior manager said that training is a major problem: "There is no serious or systematic programme. In the end we may have fewer staff, but better trained. We have a training school, but only drivers are trained. We need training in transport strategies and management, etc., and in specific departments -- stores, procurement, etc. Occasionally we bring in consultants, but there is no systematic programme. Every time training comes up, they (the company's private owners) say there is no money."

The workforce is represented by the General Transport, Petroleum and Chemical Workers' Union, which is seen by management as playing a positive role. One senior manager commented: "The unions are doing very well. They have moved away from their militant stand of yesteryear, and now understand the issue. They understand their survival is dependent on the business's survival. Union activities were nearly killed in the transition from public to private, when most of the union people were victimised. Pressure from unions has restored the situation. They are the workers, so what they say must be taken very seriously. They no longer side with bad workers."

Consequently, in meeting the challenges faced by competition from the informal sector, dialogue is seen as important: "We need to cut costs: ideal is to sit down with the union, discuss the situation as it is, and get their views and work out mutual benefit to sustain the organisation."

The union argues, however, that the major savings should come from a better approach to procurement, which it says is wasting a lot of money by buying buses cheaply from too many foreign sources, and the company cannot maintain spares supplies for all of them.

In the Kingdom bus company, a "steady decline" in the size of the workforce was reported, but pay was reported to be "better than other transport companies". Health and safety arrangements were "no problem" and there is regular training for drivers, although not for other staff.

The recent job losses at Kingdom are related to the establishment of MMT, which has a workforce of around 1,000, recruited largely from the private companies. However, the seminar participants agreed that at MMT the health and safety arrangements are less good, despite its being a publicly owned company, and that it is a "poor employer, not union-friendly". It was also stated that training for drivers is worse.

Another problem in relation to MMT experienced by unionised public transport workers in Accra is that the government is now once again both a service provider and the sector's regulator. The Ghana Private Road Transport Union (GPRTU), which represents some 60,000 self-employed workers in the taxi and small bus services, and is affiliated to the Ghana TUC, emphasised the government's conflict of interest and how they perceive its impact on them. The GPRTU's membership grew rapidly in the liberalised market, but is now seen, in effect, as part of the problem as outlined by the World Bank project document. In an interview with leaders of its Mamobi branch, in Accra, we were told that the branch had grown from 50 to 250 cars over the last five years. "Privatisation didn't affect us directly but since government has said private sector is the engine of growth, we assumed they would assist organisations like ours, who perform very well, to acquire new vehicles. But the new government is less supportive than the previous one."

He explained that, as a government body controls fares, the government has a conflict of interest; but he also acknowledged that his members could not increase fares much in any case because passengers would not be able to afford more. "We are a hand to mouth business. RTCC won't put up fares when the gas price increases, which happened only last month. Gas accounts for 35% of our costs. Our profit margins are very small and we cannot replace our vehicles. If we charged fares to sustain our businesses, they would be two or three times higher. We need government grants to buy new vehicles. 90% of our members can't send their children to school."

GPRTU leaders see MMT as undercutting them on profitable routes while neglecting less profitable ones; ironically, that is exactly the charge that has often been levelled at private operators entering liberalised markets. "MMT has no history and knowledge of bus transport. They only go to a few areas. They don't go to where roads are bad. So they avoid our high maintenance costs. And they won't carry foodstuffs," the Mamobi GPRTU leaders told us. The latter point may appear trivial, but as many poor people do carry foodstuffs, and even livestock, on public transport, it is an important issue in relation to passenger transport and poverty.

Policy and research conclusions

In all three sectors, the exercise has demonstrated that the combination of all three research methodologies -- desk research, interviews and participatory research -- complement each other well and combine to produce a much richer picture than could have been accomplished without any one of them.

The picture that emerges is of unions attempting simultaneously to influence the direction of the restructuring of their sectors while dealing with the effects of restructuring, which is not an easy combination for any union to accomplish, and is much harder with the severely limited capacity available to unions in developing countries. The importance of actually gathering evidence about the effects of restructuring rather than making assumptions based on earlier experience or ideological attitudes comes out strongly, because of the mixed impact of restructuring. The research showed that public employers have not necessarily been better employers or service providers, and private employers have not necessarily been more efficient or effective; these findings challenge assumptions often made, in the former case, by union organisations and, in the latter, by the World Bank and other international institutions.

The quality and strength of union organisation and capacity (including knowledge) appears to be a significant variable in all cases. In addition, a further issue that emerges in all three sectors is that social dialogue tends to have overall beneficial effects, while its absence tends to make negative impacts on workers and on the services in which they work more likely, provided unions engaged in such dialogue have the capacity and genuine independence that are prerequisites for its benefits being achieved. Commitment by government and international institutions not only to genuine social dialogue but also to policies to improve the way in which transport services operate -- and, therefore, to mobilisation of the resources to enable them to do so -- are also vital.

Some specific conclusions can also be drawn in each of the sectors:

- In rail, the urgent need for multi-stakeholder discussions about the future of the railway are evidently urgent, and must include the railway unions. There is an urgent need to develop and build consensus around a strategy that can bridge the gap between the existing dire predicament of the railway and the "bright future" that the government, rightly, holds out as being possible and necessary for Ghana's future. Since it is clear that workforce restructuring will form part of such a strategy, early discussions between the ministry, the GRC and the railway unions are essential.

- In ports, a number of issues emerge:

- The role of the Ghana Ports and Harbour Authority, as the ports landlord, must include more effective supervision of the Ghana Dock Labour Company and the stevedoring companies to ensure that they comply with the regulatory obligations.

- The present arrangements appear not to reward those stevedoring companies that both comply with their obligations and are efficient, because each company receives a quota of business in any event. To improve standards, there should be rewards for compliance and penalties for failure to comply, so that all dockers enjoy the terms and conditions, training and health and safety protection to which they are entitled.

- The MDU needs to develop a strategy to build its membership and organisation, and pursue collective bargaining agreements, with those companies that remain unorganised.

- Some work is also required to secure trade union organisation and collective bargaining at the new Tema container terminal when it opens. Again, the GPHA's role as "landlord" should extend to setting standards for the new terminal, including standards about employment practices and labour relations.

- In public road transport, the unions, the Ministry of Transport and the World Bank all now have an important new opportunity to work together to promote the best possible outcomes of the new World Bank project on Accra rapid transit bus services. Among the issues arising from that are:

- Component 1 envisages the development of a procedures manual and staff training; it is clearly essential that workers and unions be consulted about the manual and about their training needs, and involved in the design of the resulting products and services. The evidence in this report shows that there are not only deficiencies in training in general, but also in particular skills, and that the workforce itself is a key source of knowledge about this. If the World Bank project is to contribute successfully to training for the new integrated system, the experience of existing training deficiencies as perceived by managers and frontline workers must be factored in from the design stage onwards.

- Component 2 envisages the development of an integrated public transport system; again, consultation with workers and unions is essential to ensure the system draws upon their practical knowledge of everyday transport issues; in addition, the particular role of GPRTU members within an integrated system demands that they are specifically involved in planning the new system.

- Component 3, like Component 1, involves training and capacity building, and it is equally important that workers and unions are consulted and involved in the design and development of the activities envisaged.

- Component 4 envisages the development of a monitoring and evaluation system for the new integrated rapid transport system; the knowledge of the workers on the ground is very often overlooked in monitoring and evaluation, with the result that how services actually work (rather than how officials say they do) is overlooked; this mistake could be avoided in the Accra case by involving workers and their unions in both the design and implementation of a monitoring and evaluation system.

- The integrated public transport system envisaged for Accra is an exciting development, but it requires not only a participatory approach to its development, as indicated in the preceding points, but also that the service providers themselves are of sufficient quality. The evidence in this report shows not only the need for an approach to personnel development and training that involves and builds the capacity of the workforce, but also that other issues need to be addressed with urgency in MMT and other companies. In particular, the need for a more rational approach to procurement is required, so that each service provider can ensure it can maintain its fleet more effectively.

- The World Bank project envisages (Component 3) establishing links between Accra and London in planning the development of the new integrated system. Consideration should be given by ITF and its affiliates involved to arranging parallel links between the unions in the two cities, so that the unions in Ghana are well informed about how the system works in London, and can aim to learn from the experience of their colleagues there.

Methodological conclusions

This research project is the first systematic attempt by the ITF to collect information and analyse the impact of transport restructuring on unions and workers in Ghana. Through the seminars, workers were able to discuss their individual problems and listen to the problems of their fellow workers – a wealth of information was shared and collected on how restructuring has affected jobs (number of jobs, quality, job definitions, reorganization of work, workload, job security etc), health and safety, training, pay and conditions, and union rights and representation.

By sharing information and piecing together different stories, a basic body of knowledge was generated that provides a framework for adding further information and generating new knowledge. The action-oriented approach to the research means that it is the concerns of the participants which constitutes the starting point, establishes the priorities and shapes the research framework. This is important for several reasons.

Firstly, the research does not aim to be neutral but is informed by a clear set of interests (those of transport workers) which are made explicit. Secondly, in terms of the relationship between the ITF and the participants, it is this framework which carries the collective voice of the participants to which the ITF will be accountable. This gives the participants a strong organizational basis from which to control the research process and own the outcomes.

The fact that the research framework has been shaped by union members from the outset, influenced the approach that the ITF then adopted when gathering information from government and management representatives. It was the concerns and problems of workers as articulated in the workshops that informed the line of questioning with other players in the industry. In analyzing the information gathered from these sources, a critical indicator is how what management/government says compares with the actual experiences of workers. The reference point for important issues concerning productivity, efficiency, workplace organization and job security were the workers themselves.

An important aspect of the methodology is the process of validating workers' own knowledge of workplace and industrial changes. For a wide range of reasons linked to their class position, workers often do not recognize the knowledge and information generated by their daily experience of work as being "important" and/or "relevant".

There is an underlying perception that information and knowledge exists externally to themselves, and that a research project is about outside people bringing information to workers and "educating" them. The participatory action research methodology of this project exposed the workers and unions to a different approach. An approach which attempts to mobilise the wealth of information which workers have about the functioning of their workplaces. Workers' familiarity with the details of individual jobs and work organization overall means that it is often workers who are best placed to identify problems with efficiency, productivity and work organization.

The seminars enabled different occupational categories within a transport sector to discuss in a detailed way the impact of restructuring on workers. Through report backs, this information was then shared with the other groups. There were significant outcomes from this process:

- By sharing and reflecting on their own experiences, the union and workers became aware how much they already know about the impact of restructuring.

- By systematically gathering information from workers, the union gained access to more detailed information about issues such as job losses which can be used in a variety of different contexts to strengthen the union's position, such as collective bargaining with management.

- By bringing a cross-section of workers together, the particular problems and interests of different categories of workers became clearer; for example, the different impact which restructuring has had on casual dock workers in contrast to permanent dockers. This challenges the union to understand restructuring in a more complex and nuanced way, and how to represent the interests of different groups of workers whilst maintaining worker and union unity.

- By gathering information collectively, the basis wad laid for the union and workers to consider their responses and strategies, and recognize that workers themselves have answers and proposals which can be developed to challenge the plans of government and management.

However, there were also problems experienced through implementing the participatory action research methodology, including:

- For both the union and workers, this approach to information gathering was new. It therefore took time to build confidence in the process and to get participant's to contribute their experiences in sufficient detail and depth. In most groups, there were participants who did not make any contribution.

- Linguistic and cultural differences meant that the ITF researchers often could not adapt the methodology sufficiently to connect with participants in a more effective and meaningful way.

- Whilst the methodology aimed to mobilize information and knowledge from workers, the ITF researchers were unknown to the majority of participants and therefore there was a barrier which is likely to have had an impact on the information communicated in the seminar.

- The seminars relied on small group work to generate information making it difficult to focus in depth on individual experiences or particular workplace experiences. It might have been more useful to have interviews with individual workers or small groups of workers in their workplaces in advance of the seminar, with the seminar then providing the opportunity to collectively reflect on the information gathered.

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