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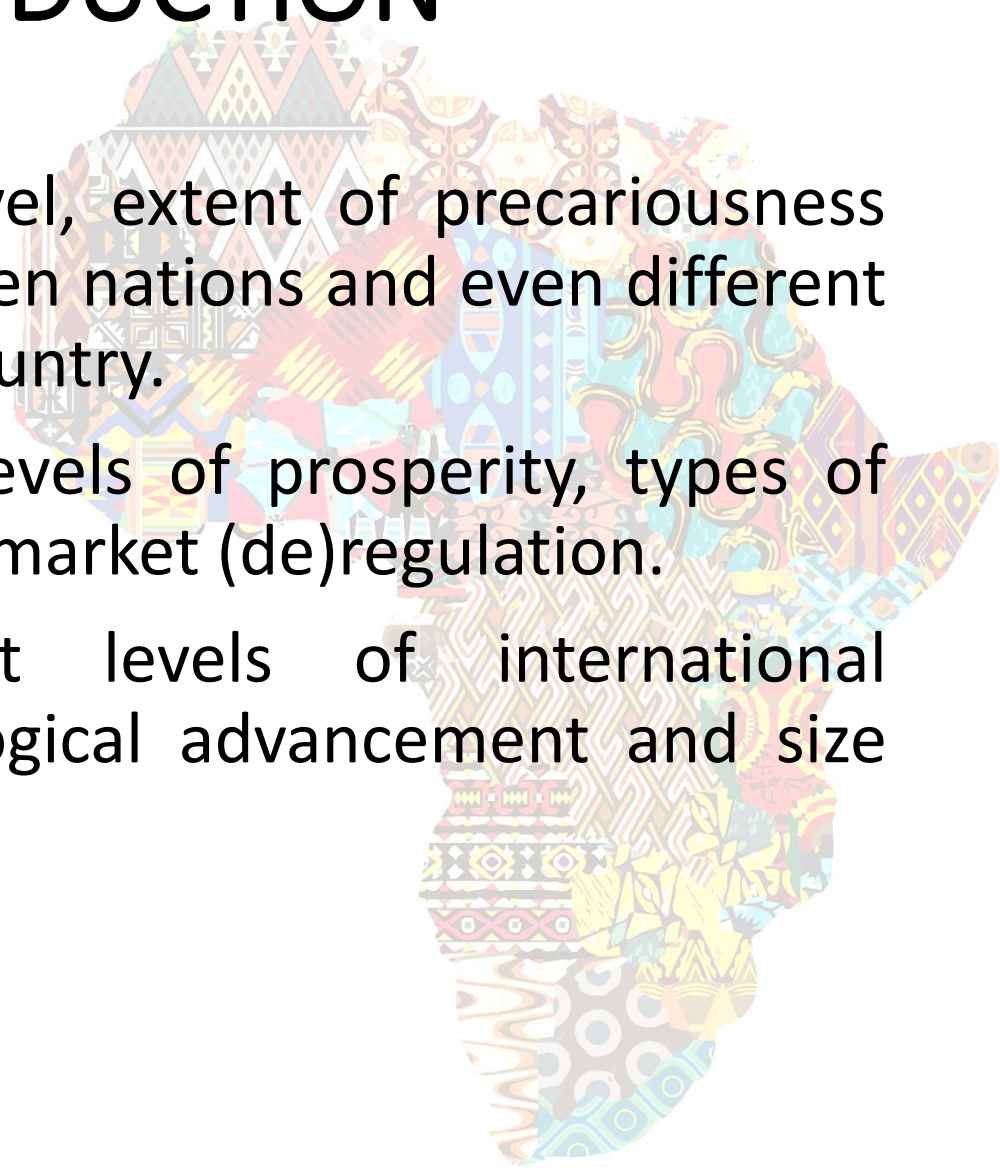
**ADJUSTING TO PRECARIOUS WORK:
AN ORDEAL FOR TRADE UNIONS IN
THE ZIMBABWEAN MINING
SECTOR.**

INTRODUCTION

- There has been an extensive growth of precarious work in Zimbabwe particularly in the mining sector.
- Precarious work has remained problematic in the world of work.
- It has been praised for the freedom and flexibility that it comes with, however, defamed for undermining employment conditions.
- Trade unions view it negatively for replacing standard forms of work and shaking trade union membership.

INTRODUCTION

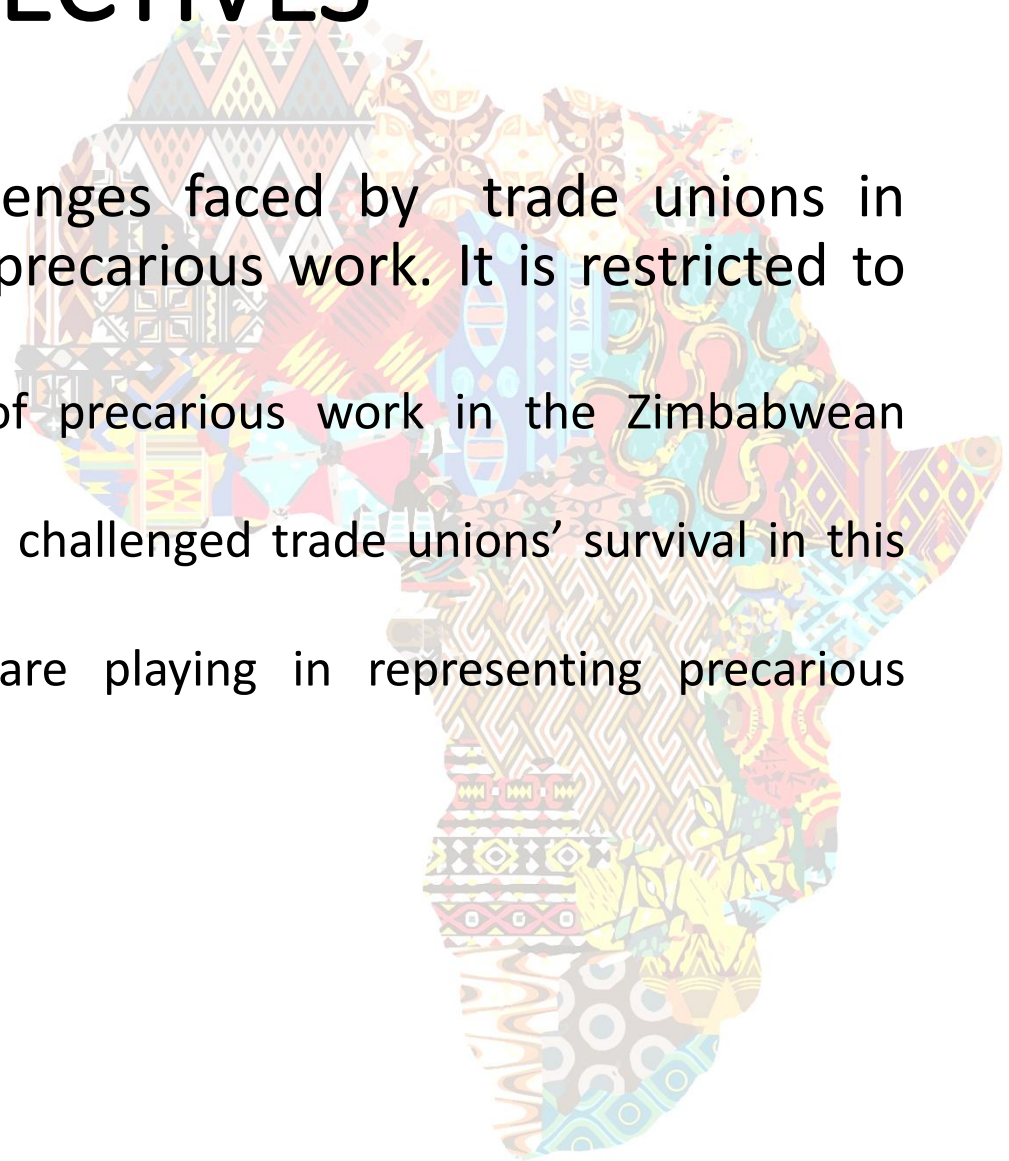
- Differences in the level, extent of precariousness and job quality between nations and even different sectors in the same country.
- Caused by national levels of prosperity, types of capitalism and labour market (de)regulation.
- Sectorial : different levels of international competition, technological advancement and size of the organization.



OBJECTIVES

This paper discusses challenges faced by trade unions in Zimbabwe in adjusting to precarious work. It is restricted to discussion of:

- The forms and causes of precarious work in the Zimbabwean mining sector,
- How precarious work has challenged trade unions' survival in this sector and
- The role trade unions are playing in representing precarious workers.



Forms and causes of precarious work

- Precarious work is branched, different types and levels of precariousness.
- Precarious work is not only manifested in nonstandard forms of employment, both standard forms of employment and non-standard jobs can be precarious.
- Resultantly, there are a number of definitions
- The concept is usually associated with a combination of features, such as non-standard employment contracts, pay insecurity and weak employment and social rights (Medonca, 2020).
- In Zimbabwe, the escalation of precarious work is attributed to progression of non-standard jobs.
- The country's mining sector - temporary work, fixed term contracts, self-employment, labour broking and seasonal work.

Types

- **Temporary work-** specified period of engagement (ILO, 2016).
- Zimbabwean Labour Act - any contract of employment that is not specific on its duration or date of termination is deemed an indefinite contract.
- Whether documented or verbal, a fixed term contract should be set on a predefined term.
- **Casual employment-** employment on sporadic and irregular basis for a specified duration.
- Continuous engagement exceeding six weeks in any four consecutive months, automatically means that worker turns into being an employee on an infinite contract (Labour Act, S12(3)).
- In Zimbabwe, casual work accounts for over 35% of all wage employment.
- **Part time employment-** paid work that has a short duration than full time work with a threshold of 30-35 hours a week.
- In 2014, part time arrangements in Zimbabwe were as high as 50%, with over 50% of the part timers being women.
- Causal factors: loose labour market and the poor economy, part time work is usually involuntary.

Causes of precarious work

- Changing global employment trends, marked by increased calls for a 'flexible workforce'.
- Supply-side: changing demographic composition of the workforce i.e women, young workers and migrant workers.
- Low unionisation rates among young workers.
- Demand side factors: Technological change causing a decline of middle-range occupations, creating a polarized labour market between high-skill "good" jobs and low-skill precarious jobs.
- Occupational shifts, economies moving to service sector and companies compressing labour costs.
- Loose labour market
- The COVID-19 pandemic



How precarious work has challenged trade unions' survival

- Precarious work in Zimbabwe has been heightened by the COVID-19 pandemic making it even more difficult for trade unions to respond and cope.
- The mining sector's response to the pandemic, has increased the numbers of precarious workers, intensified precariousness and introduced new types and levels of insecurity for many workers in the sector.
- As the sector is embarking on its road to recovery:
 - Employer organisations are proposing changes to further 'workplace flexibility', restrain union action, and enhance management discretion.
 - Employment reforms as the emergence of virtual labour markets have washed away traditional aspects of the employment relationships issues of remuneration, working hours and terms and conditions, rights and obligations.
- Absence of a clearly defined employment relationship has posed a huge threat for trade unions' survival and growth.

How precarious work has challenged trade unions' survival

- Reduced associational power- union's capability to relate and develop relationships with a diverse workforce regardless of whether they belong to the same workplace or not.
- Existence of a group of precarious workforce at workplace is however, a major obstacle to inclusive forms of worker solidarity.
- The disjointed workforce characterised by the core, full time workforce and peripheral precarious employees an effective divide and rule tactic for employers weakening labour solidarity.
- Shunning of trade unions by certain groups of employees especially those that feel excluded due to perceived element of favouritism.

How precarious work has challenged trade unions' survival

- Orthodox economists- trade unions are their own enemy. They are co-responsible for the immense growth of precarious work, they do not represent the interests of these so-called “outsiders” in the form of precarious workers.
- Occurrences of changes in jobs and even occupations has greatly affected trade unions' membership making its survival uncertain.
- Short term nature of employment= short lived membership

How precarious work has challenged trade unions' survival

- Different contractual status between full time and precarious workers = diverging and even conflicting interests generating both practical and legal difficulties for trade unions.
- Precarious work is highly characterised by individualism instead of collectivism, a phenomenon that has affected trade unions .
- In a bid to secure recurring employment, these individuals display their loyalty to the employer by not joining trade unions.

Unions' response to precarious work

- In Zimbabwe's mining sector, the record regarding regulation of precarious work has been particularly disappointing, as unions have not been taking an active role in responding to precarious work.
- As it is argued, union strategies and their outcomes are strongly affected by their power resources, the more power resources, the more successful unions will be in fighting precarious employment.
- Instead of coming up with strategies to circumvent challenges being faced by these workers, trade unions in Zimbabwe have had a glaring failure in representing these precarious workers. It is difficult to identify any significant union initiatives currently as unions are facing several barriers .
- The barriers include but are not limited to unfavourable contextual changes, dwindled union strength and influence, intensified divisions amongst unions, and lack of financial resources.

Unions' response to precarious work

- In other countries, national governments, supported by trade unions, have tried to partly (re)regulate the use of nonstandard work contracts.
- Bulgarian legislation limited the use of continual fixed-term contracts while introducing more options for working time flexibility with organisations.
- Chinese Labour Contract Law in 2008 regulated the activities of labor dispatching agencies, limiting them to specific sectors, clarifying their responsibilities towards the employees and preventing them from subcontracting the same worker more than once.
- Trade unions have also tried to regulate the use of nonstandard work and to prevent the diffusion of low-paid contracts.
- On the other hand, trade unions have initiated campaigns to recruit precarious workers and to bargain for them in Japan.
- In Brazil precarious workers have sometimes set up their own unions.

Nature of the mining industry in Zimbabwe

- The mining sector in Zimbabwe is highly diversified, with close to 40 different minerals that include gold, platinum, chrome, coal, and diamonds.
- The sector accounts for about 12 percent of the country's gross domestic product (GDP).
- The sector is differentiated in terms of minerals produced, the number of operating mines and dispersal of control over the mine production.
- There are more than 800 operating mines (large and small) around the country.

Nature of the mining industry in Zimbabwe

- Currently, the sector is alluded to earn approximately 60% of the country's foreign currency, attracts more than 50% of the FDI into the economy and employs over 45,000 people in large scale, and more than 500,000 in small scale and artisanal mining (LEDRIZ, 2016).
- In terms of current performance, the mining sector grew by 8.5% in 2017.
- Concerning employment relations, the picture is mixed as the sector; utilize both standard and non- standard forms of employment. The attitudes of companies to unions operating in the industry vary from cooperative to hostile.
- trade union density in the industry was at its peak in 2004 at 38.6 percent. Conversely, from the period 2004 to 2018, the density declined by 18.9 percent, amounting to 16.6 percent in 2018.

FINDINGS

- Key findings indicated the massive growth of precarious work in the form of self-employment, seasonal work, part time work and short-term contracts in the mining sector.
- A loose labour market, decreased union power, which ultimately points to increased employer power and the effects of the recently COVID-19 pandemic have been cited as some of the causes of precariousness.
- Unions in the Zimbabwean mining sector do not consider precarious workers as part of their constituency and have exerted little to none tangible effort to defend their interests or represent them.

FINDINGS

- In Zimbabwe trade unions in the mining sector focus more on protection of the interests of insiders.
- Conversely, in the Zimbabwean mining sector, unions' power resources are weak to fight precariousness in the sector.
- Finally, trade unions in the mining sector have so far not been able to contribute to slowing down the decline of job quality; as there are no documented series of successful union initiatives.

Recommendations

- Trade unions' approach should be more inclusive.
- Unions should aim at bridging the gap with regular workers, often explicitly targeting non-standard workers.
- Trade unions instead of confining themselves to traditional issues of wage negotiation, should be flexible enough to represent “the outsiders,” and should engage in social movement trade unionism.
- The paper recommends that the union confederation should push for labour legislation in Zimbabwe to be reviewed with the view to protect precarious worker's interests.



THANK YOU!

TINOTENDA!

SIYABONGA!