

# *Oil in Ghana: The Work of the General Transport, Petroleum and Chemical Workers' Union (GTPCWU)*

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## **ABSTRACT**

Utilising elements of Coordination and Context-Appropriate Power Theory (CCAP) as a framework, this article assesses the efforts of the General Transport, Petroleum and Chemical Workers' Union (GTPCWU) in Ghana to defend the rights of workers in the oil industry. Whether the GTPCWU has been able to effectively employ structural, institutional and conditional forms of power is examined within the CCAP framework. The analysis is informed by first-hand knowledge of trade union policies and practices, as one of the authors is a GTPCWU official. The research also draws on interviews and email communications with other Ghanaian trade unionists and an academic specialising in labour issues. The findings indicate that the structured labour regime, in which the GTPCWU is embedded, makes it hard for the union to employ structural, institutional and conditional forms of power fruitfully. Nevertheless, agency on the part of union officials and members is significant. This is evidenced by the success of individual union actions, indicating that the GTPCWU possesses a degree of structural power. Utilising institutional power effectively is difficult for the union, as enforcement of labour legislation is weak, and lengthy legal processes ensue when cases do reach court. It is also burdensome for the GTPCWU to exercise conditional power, based on obtaining support from non-union individuals and groups, since its members are widely perceived to have well-paid employment in the formal sector. The GTPCWU's need for assistance in supporting its members through the transition away from fossil-based systems of energy production is outlined. Capacity-building initiatives, including the construction of a training and conference facility, and recruitment campaigns, focusing on attracting more women and youth members, are discussed.

## **KEYWORDS**

Ghana; trade unions; oil industry; Coordination and Context-Appropriate Power Theory (CCAP); structural, institutional and conditional forms of power

## **Introduction**

The discovery of oil at the Jubilee oil field in 2007 and the subsequent start of production in December 2010 was generally met with optimism in Ghana (Maguire, 2010; Fosu, 2017). However, a number of exogenous and endogenous factors have tempered the initial expectations that significant local employment opportunities would be created and revenues from oil production might be used by the state to enhance social service provision for citizens. Exogenous issues include the price volatility of oil on international commodity markets, the ongoing energy transition globally away from fossil fuels and the COVID-19

pandemic, which has adversely affected the Ghanaian economy. Endogenously, equity and transparency issues regarding use of profits from oil production, as well as concerns over environmental degradation, are significant.

Importantly, the position of the labour force and the role of trade unions in defending the interests of workers in the oil industry have rarely been considered in the debates on the Ghanaian oil industry. This article addresses that deficit, by examining the work of the General Transport, Petroleum and Chemical Workers' Union (GTPCWU), drawing on the first-hand knowledge of one of the authors, who is a senior official at the union, as well as interviews with trade unionists and an academic specialising in Ghanaian labour issues. Elements of Coordination and Context-Appropriate Power Theory (CCAP) have been utilised to frame the analysis. The extent to which the GTPCWU has been able to exercise structural, institutional and conditional power, as conceptualised within CCAP, in defending the interests of its members is examined.

The article begins by contextualising the work of the GTPCWU, through an overview of the political economy of Ghana, foregrounding significant aspects of the position of labour. Key elements of the work of the Trades Union Congress of Ghana (TUCG), the national labour centre, which includes the GTPCWU as a member, are outlined. An overview is subsequently provided of the methodology employed in constructing the arguments. This is followed by the case study section, which focuses on an assessment of the work of the GTPCWU. The major points arising from the case study discussion are summarised in the conclusion.

## **Contextualisation: Ghana as a Success Story**

Situated on the Gulf of Guinea and populated by 30.8 million people (Ghana Statistical Service [GSS], 2021a), analyses have highlighted the notable developmental progress of Ghana since the mid-1980s (Naude, 2010; Fosu, 2013). In the political sphere, aspects of Ghana's multi-party democracy have received plaudits, notably the holding of free and fair elections (Graham et al., 2017). The two main parties – the National Democratic Congress and the New Patriotic Party – have a solid support base in most regions, and an electoral violence prevention framework is in place, ensuring that political power has changed largely peacefully in recent elections (Bekoe and Burchard, 2021). Critics, however, point to the lack of a consensus-based approach to policies (Noagah Bukari, 2021), various forms of corruption (Azure-Awuni, 2020) and the stifling nature of the dominance of only two parties, leading to voter apathy (Agomor, 2019) as issues of concern. A political decentralisation process has occurred over the past three decades, based on a government-coordinated pro-poor agenda. However, research by Be-Ere (2021) finds participation in decentralisation processes to be elite-driven and unreflective of the voices of marginalised groups and individuals.

In the economic domain, growth from 1984 peaked at 15 per cent in 2011, on the back of the start of commercial oil production (Aryeetey and Baah-Boateng, 2015). Oil production is a major driver of the formal economy, along with gold and cocoa, which together account for over 80 per cent of export revenues. There has been little significant diversification of the economic structure of the country to provide employment in new sectors (Obeng, 2021). The government officially pursues a national transformation agenda to take “Ghana Beyond Aid” (Government of Ghana [GOG], 2019), but robust mechanisms to facilitate structural change are lacking (Kumi, 2020). The level of income inequality is also an issue, since the “distribution of the gains from growth remains skewed with the nonpoor benefitting much more than

the poor” (Atta-Ankomah et al., 2020: 73).

According to the World Bank (2022b), the unemployment rate is 4.7 per cent. However, the 2021 national census (GSS, 2021b) shows that 77.1 per cent of the employed population earn their livelihoods in the private informal sector. Less than 10 per cent of Ghanaians are registered as taxpayers (Ofori-Atta, 2021). Many in the informal sector have seen their livelihoods decimated as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic (Freeman, interview, 2021).<sup>1</sup>

Overall, therefore, Ghana’s developmental progress since the mid-1980s can be challenged from a labour perspective. A large majority of the workforce earn a precarious living in the informal sector. Formal sector employment is narrowly based and diversification of the economy is proceeding slowly. Consequently, the GTPCWU has to defend the rights of oil workers in difficult and uncertain economic conditions. An overview of the trade union movement, centring on the coordinating role of the TUCG, follows, to provide the foundation for the case study analysis of the work of the GTPCWU.<sup>2</sup>

### ***The TUCG and the trade union movement in Ghana***

Founded in 1945, the Trades Union Congress of Ghana (2020) represents seventeen member unions across all economic sectors.<sup>3</sup> Most of the affiliated trade unions with significant membership levels are in the formal public sector, as it has been difficult to build a high level of membership in the private sector, where many employers resist unionisation of the workforce (Asafu-Adjaye, interview, 2021). Since informal sector workers constitute the majority of the labour force in Ghana, the TUCG has been involved, from the early 2000s, in complex negotiations to integrate them into its structures (Britwum, 2018; Freeman, interview, 2021).

The TUCG (2020: 5) has criticised the impact of neo-liberal policies, as they have deepened in Ghana, arguing that they “continue to frustrate national efforts to foster inclusive developments including the provision of decent employment and the protection of workers’ rights”. Nevertheless, the TUCG engages in social dialogue with representatives of employers and the government (Asafu-Adjaye, 2016). It represents labour at a number of tripartite forums, including the Social Partnership Council (GOG, TUCG and Employers Association of Ghana, 2018) and the National Labour Commission (NLC, 2017).

Overall, the TUCG has provided a voice for organised labour over many years in Ghana and has coordinated a number of actions by unions. For example, in 2016 the TUCG marshalled effective resistance to the implementation of a government proposal to recover full electricity costs through user tariffs (Asafu-Adjaye, 2021, and interview, 2022). While it has organised such successful actions, the extent to which the TUCG is representative of the workforce in Ghana is contested. There is tension between the TUCG and the Civil and Local Government Staff Association of Ghana (CLOGSAG) over rights to determine policies and poaching of members (Britwum, interview, 2022; Commey and Alhasan, 2022). Moreover, the formation of splinter groups, such as the Coalition Against Leadership of the Trades Union Congress and

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<sup>1</sup> See also Baah-Boateng and Vanek (2020) for statistics on informal sector workers in Ghana.

<sup>2</sup> The overview is kept brief to allow more space for a discussion of the GTPCWU’s work. For analyses of the Ghanaian trade union movement, see Britwum (2003, 2011, 2016), Kraus (2007), Britwum and Martens (2008), Akwetey and Dorkenoo (2010), TUCG and Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung (2012), Lawani (2016), Sackeyfio-Lenoch (2017) and Asafu-Adjaye (2021).

<sup>3</sup> According to the Danish Trade Union Development Agency (DTDA, 2020), twenty-one unions with stated membership numbers are affiliated to the TUCG. Another nine unions are listed as TUCG affiliates but unable to provide membership numbers.

Organized Labour, is an issue of concern (Amankwaah, 2021). A separate, smaller trade union centre, the Ghana Federation of Labour (GFL), has existed since 1998 and the influential Ghana National Association of Teachers is unaffiliated to the TUCG. In this context, trade union membership levels and density are discussed in the following section.

### **Trade union membership levels**

The level and density of trade union membership in Ghana are hard to determine accurately. According to the TUCG (n.d.), 500 000 workers belong to the federation, from a total labour force of 13.7 million. Table 1 contains other estimates of the number and density of unionised workers.

**Table 1: Trade union membership levels and density in Ghana**

Source of Information	Year	Unionised Workers	TU Density
TUCG (n.d.)	2020	500 000	3.65%
Danish Trade Union Development Agency (2020)	2020	832 000	6.07%
International Labour Organization (ILO) (n.d.)	2016	No figure stated	20.6%

*Source: Figures provided by the World Bank (2022a) have been used to calculate trade union density.*

Taking the figures provided by any of the three sources at face value, trade union density in Ghana is fairly low. Notwithstanding the differences among the three estimates, the trade union density figures show the GTPCWU is embedded in a national labour regime where its members are among a minority of unionised workers. This makes it important for the GTPCWU to receive clear and solid support from the TUCG. The GTPCWU benefits from being affiliated to the TUCG in a number of ways. For example, the Labour Research and Policy Institute (LRPI) at the TUCG was commissioned by the GTPCWU to undertake a study on “The State of Unionisation in the Oil and Gas Sector in Ghana” (LRPI, n.d.). The study provided baseline data on the number of registered oil companies operating in the country, the total workforce for each firm and the gender of the employees. The TUCG also provides the GTPCWU with general policy advice and releases its officers to serve as resource persons at planning meetings and workshops.

These forms of assistance do not, in themselves, substantially redress the imbalance of power between the labour movement in Ghana and a government focused on attracting foreign capital and an open business climate for domestic entrepreneurs. They have, however, increased the capacity of GTPCWU officials to construct evidence-based discourses and to configure coherent initiatives in contestations with the government and representatives of employers over labour rights.

## **Methodology**

### **Data sources**

The research draws on an examination of existing published literature on trade unions in Ghana, and utilises three primary data sources to inform the analysis. First, as one of the authors is a GTPCWU official, insights

are provided which draw on first-hand knowledge of union policies, programmes and day-to-day activities. Second, unpublished GTPCWU documents and the union database were examined. Third, the research assesses information provided in different forms of communication undertaken in 2021 and 2022, with six officials from the TUCG, an academic specialising in Ghanaian labour issues and the General Secretary of the Union of Informal Workers Association of Ghana (UNIWA). The participants were selected as they had knowledge and experience of a number of the priority issues for trade unions in Ghana identified by the TUCG and the GTPCWU, notably youth and gender (TUCG, 2020). As participants engaged in the research using various forms of communication, a systematic comparison of their perspectives has not been undertaken.

The positionality of the investigator is always a factor when undertaking research. As the Deputy General Secretary (DGS) of the GTPCWU, one of the authors brings an insider perspective to the research. It can be argued that insiders face difficulties in sufficiently detaching themselves from the research context and issues to avoid bias. However, all researchers take a position influenced by their situated knowledge (Fleming, 2018). The deep understanding of the DGS of the GTPCWU, of the history and culture of the organisations under study, was valuable in obtaining a nuanced interpretation of data and issues. As a non-Ghanaian, the other author brings an outsider viewpoint to the research. The ability of outsider researchers to proficiently understand the experiences and views of people within particular settings and cultures has been questioned (Holmes, 2020). However, an advantage of the outsider researcher perspective in this research was the freedom from commitment to the organisations examined. This freedom allowed the possibility of recognising properties and patterns in the data and views expressed by participants, not necessarily apparent to an insider because of familiarisation. The authors engaged in ongoing communications, in an effort to maximise the benefits of their particular knowledge sets and to learn from each other, as well as the participants. Where the analysis utilises, to a significant degree, the first-hand knowledge of the DGS of the GTPCWU, it is cited in the text as “Sallah (Interview, 2022)”.

### ***Coordination and Context-Appropriate Power Theory***

CCAP was selected as a theoretical framework for the analysis because it delivers a clear and concentrated set of concepts to use in assessing the GTPCWU’s ability to exercise power. It also provides an accessible toolkit, which can be employed by trade unionists in formulating policies and practices. Trade union officials from Tanzania, Ghana and Sierra Leone stated that they value theoretical frameworks on labour which have an overt practical import, given how busy they are dealing with day-to-day labour issues.<sup>4</sup>

CCAP centres on three types of power which trade unions are able to exercise (Brookes, 2019). First, unions can use structural power, which is the capacity to physically disrupt an employer’s operations through actions such as strikes. Second, institutional power can be deployed, which is the capacity to hold an employer accountable through laws and regulations. Third, conditional power may be wielded by unions; this is the scope to mobilise non-labour stakeholders in a dispute, thereby threatening the profits of an employer and thus forcing a reaction. While the focus of CCAP is transnational labour alliances, it has been adapted in this research to concentrate on how structural, institutional and conditional forms of power have been utilised by the GTPCWU within the domestic setting.

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<sup>4</sup> Interviews conducted by McQuinn with officials from three national federations and more than twenty individual trade unions in Tanzania, Sierra Leone and Ghana from 2010 to 2022.

## Case Study: The GTPCWU

The GTPCWU was formed in 1966, out of what used to be the Post, Transport and Maritime Workers' Union. The organisation has 6 813 members (4 467 men and 2 345 women).<sup>5</sup> GTPCWU members are part of the 21 per cent of the total trade union membership in Ghana classified as industrial sector workers.<sup>6</sup> The majority of GTPCWU members come from the petroleum and transport sectors, and the union represents the largest number of workers in the oil sector in Ghana.

The technical capacity of the GTPCWU is solid. It has offices in Accra, Takoradi and Kumasi, which provide employment for fourteen full-time and two part-time staff. The majority of funding for the GTPCWU – 95 per cent – comes from members, who contribute a percentage of their pay every month in dues. The other 5 per cent of funding comes from international partners – Industri Energi, IndustriALL and the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) – and is used for organising and training purposes (Sallah, interview, 2022).

Key areas of concern for the GTPCWU are low numbers of youth and women members within the organisation, union substitution tactics and lack of recognition of worker's rights on the part of employers in the oil industry, casualisation of the workforce, and weak implementation of labour laws and local content regulation by public administrators.

The GTPCWU is sensitive to the fact that it is not easy to effectively represent union members who work in the oil sector, given its high profile and international dimension. The oil industry is one of the government's priority thematic areas for development (GOG, 2014). Part of the development plan is a significant increase in revenue from oil rents, which contributed 3.1 per cent to the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2020 (World Bank, n.d.). Given this focus, the government's priority is to attract foreign investment to the oil industry, rather than ensuring that workers' rights are protected.

Ownership of all mineral resources in Ghana is vested in the President on behalf of the people. The government's National Oil Company (NOC), charged with the overarching management of the resource, is the Ghana National Petroleum Corporation (GNPC). In addition, the Petroleum Commission (PC) was set up by the government in 2011 to regulate the upstream<sup>7</sup> oil industry, which is based around a relatively small number of sizeable enterprises.<sup>8</sup>

An objective of the GNPC (n.d.) is to reduce “the country's dependence on crude oil imports, through the development of the country's own petroleum resources”. However, most of the oil produced in Ghana is exported, to the extent that more than 90 per cent of petroleum used in the country needs to be imported (Abudu and Sai, 2020). The reliance on exports raises concerns about the reality of national control of the oil industry, as well as issues regarding sustainability. Ayelazuno and Graham (2022: 360) summarise the overarching position clearly in stating that Ghana “is rich in oil, produces and exports oil; yet it depends on the imports of petroleum products for its domestic consumption”.

From the GTPCWU perspective, the reliance on oil exports, the heavy presence of foreign ownership in the industry and the deleterious economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic cause disquiet about the

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<sup>5</sup> Source: GTPCWU database held at its head office.

<sup>6</sup> The figures are based on a definition of the industrial sector consisting of “mining, manufacturing, utilities and construction” (Visser, 2019: 19).

<sup>7</sup> “Upstream” is about extracting oil and natural gas from the ground; “midstream” is about transportation and storage; and “downstream” is converting these resources into fuels and finished products (Singh, 2022).

<sup>8</sup> See Appendix for a list of upstream oil companies operating in Ghana.

position of its members. Ayelazuno and Graham (2022) show that foreign oil companies in Ghana took a 77.7 per cent share of revenues for the eight years from 2011 to 2018. This statistic provides support for Ackah-Baidoo's (2013: 410) argument that the government is "fixated on promoting oil extraction, regardless of the cost, even if it means dismissing some key development needs".

It has been estimated that there are around 7 000 employees in the upstream oil sector in Ghana (Stephenson and Banda, 2019) and the Petroleum Commission (2020a) forecast that a minimum of 500 jobs for Ghanaians would be lost in 2020. The rapidity of change in the oil industry makes it hard to assess the validity of the PC's projection. Nevertheless, a number of oil companies have cut jobs during the pandemic. For example, one of the biggest upstream oil producers, Tullow Ghana, reduced its workforce in the country by 25 per cent (PC, 2020b), and a number of oil workers have only kept their jobs by accepting pay cuts. Baah-Boateng (2021) cites a Ministry of Employment and Labour Relations (MELR) survey, indicating that 34 per cent of jobs lost in the oil, gas and energy sectors as a result of the pandemic have been restored. However, it is difficult to assess the veracity of this claim by the MELR.

As well as concerns about job losses, the environmental sustainability of the oil industry in Ghana is a major issue for the GTPCWU. Krane (2020: 323) highlights the importance of addressing environmental sustainability, since the "fossil fuel sector ... remains responsible for two-thirds of the ongoing GHG [greenhouse gas] emissions that continue to accumulate in the atmosphere". The need for a transition from a fossil fuel economy is thus clear.

In the case of Ghana, Obeng-Odoon (2014) points out that there has been a commitment to ecological sustainability as oil production has developed, though it is not matched by capacity. Furthermore, environmental civil society organisations (CSOs) play an active role in sustainable development debates in the country. The GTPCWU works with the Environmental Protection Agency and other CSOs in finding ways to address pollution issues at the workplace level. Ensuring that members do not work in a polluting environment is a priority for the union (Sallah, interview, 2022)

However, the overarching issue of the environmental damage caused by the production of oil, as a fossil fuel with a high carbon content, is not being systematically addressed. How the government will ensure that oil workers are retrained and get decent jobs in an economy transitioning to a lower-carbon form of oil production and renewables is uncertain. Considerable financial resources are likely to be needed, as well as technology transfer from developed countries, if such a transition is to occur effectively in Ghana.

### ***Increasing GTPCWU capacity: The Frafraha project***

Given the scale and complexity of the economic and environmental challenges, the GTPCWU is aware that it is vital to build the capacity of the union if it is to defend the interests of oil workers effectively. A major initiative to raise its capacity is the Frafraha Project, which entails building a dedicated office, training and conference facility for the GTPCWU in a town around twenty kilometres from Accra. The initiative is being funded by a small levy on the membership and corresponds to one of the union's stated objectives: "to acquire, hold, lease or convey any real or personal estates and to invest or reinvest the resources of the union" (GTPCWU, n.d.). Once operational, the facility will assist in fulfilling a core objective of the union, which is to increase the quantity and quality of training courses, workshops and other facilities provided for its officials and rank-and-file members.

Currently, it is time-consuming and expensive for the GTPCWU to find and pay for premises suitable for training courses and workshops on a case-by-case basis. The creation of the Frafraha facility aims to solve that problem, as well as providing local employment opportunities. However, the project has no

proposed completion date, and failure by officials to provide clear information on progress could lead to a rift with members. Such rifts have occurred in other African trade unions. For example, perceived lack of transparency from officials during the construction of a hotel, training and conference facility by the Sierra Leone Teachers Union angered members (McQuinn, 2017).

### **Data is power?**

The need to acquire, maintain and analyse relevant data concerning labour issues in general, and the union membership in particular, is regarded as vital by officials at the GTPCWU (Sallah, interview, 2022). An online database provides the basis for knowledge about the membership.

Table 2 shows that 506 GTPCWU members currently registered on the database are employed in the oil industry. This represents 7.2 per cent of the estimated number of 7 000 Ghanaians working in the upstream sector of the oil industry. Several factors need to be considered in assessing this percentage. First, the membership section of the GTPCWU database is being updated as part of a modernisation programme, so numbers will change as the process continues. Second, the volatility of employment in the oil industry in Ghana means that numbers working in the sector alter regularly. Third, the number of 506 GTPCWU members working in the oil industry includes those in the upstream, midstream and downstream sectors. The figure has not been disaggregated by sector in order to protect the anonymity of members.

**Table 2: Membership of the GTPCWU: Oil workers currently on the database**

<b>GTPCWU Members</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Contract type: permanent</b>	<b>Contract type: fixed term</b>	<b>Full Age Range</b>	<b>Youth Members (ages 15–35)</b>	<b>Members aged 30–35</b>
506	425 (84%)	81 (16%)	438 (86.6%)	68 (13.4%)	24-70	182 (36%)	154 (84.62% of total youth members)

*Source: GTPCWU database held at the head office*

*Note: Figures for all youth members of the GTPCWU (ages 15–35) are provided in the second-last column of the table. In the last column, figures for youth members aged 30–35 are provided. These youth figures have been disaggregated in this way to highlight how many GTPCWU members categorised as youth are 30 years old or more and therefore could have been working for fifteen years, since people can officially join the labour force in Ghana at the age of 15. The United Nations defines “youth” as those persons between the ages of 15 and 24 years.*

From Table 2, it can be seen that the majority of GTPCWU members in the petroleum industry are male and have permanent contracts. Furthermore, over one-third of the members are categorised as “youth”. This broad picture is discussed in more detail following Table 3, which provides data on GTPCWU members, disaggregated by firm.

**Table 3: Membership of the GTPCWU: Oil Workers by individual firms**

	Members (Number)	Male	Female	Permanent Contract	Fixed- term Contract	Full Age Range	Youth Members: Ages 15–35	Ages 30–35 (% of All Youth)
Firm 1	39	39 (100%)	0 (0%)	39 (100%)	0 (0%)	28–56	13 (33.3%)	12 (92.3%)
Firm 2	82	71 (86.6%)	11 (13.4%)	71 (100%)	0 (0%)	25–58	33	22
Firm 3	1	1 (100%)	0 (0%)	1 (100%)	0 (0%)	53–53	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Firm 4	74	46 (62.2%)	28 (37.8%)	71 (100%)	0 (0%)	30–60	22	22
Firm 5	38	31 (81.6%)	7 (18.4%)	38 (100%)	0 (0%)	28–54	28	20
Firm 6	68	68 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	68 (100%)	27–64	10 (14.7%)	7 (70%)
Firm 7	22	21 (95.5%)	1 (4.5%)	22 (100%)	0 (0%)	29–47	9	8
Firm 8	40	33 (82.5%)	7 (17.5%)	40 (100%)	0 (0%)	30–43	19 (47.5%)	19 (100%)
Firm 9	16	15 (93.8%)	1 (6.2%)	16 (100%)	0 (0%)	32–70	1 (6.3%)	1 (100%)
Firm 10	24	22 (91.7%)	2 (8.3%)	24 (100%)	0 (0%)	27–59	10 (41.7%)	9 (90%)
Firm 11	32	29 (90.6%)	3 (9.4%)	32 (100%)	0 (0%)	27–65	5 (15.63)	4 (80%)
Firm 12	14	12 (85.7%)	2 (14.3%)	14 (100%)	0 (0%)	29–56	11 (78.6%)	9 (81.8%)
Firm 13	10	5 (50%)	5 (50%)	10 (100%)	0 (0%)	24–46	8 (80%)	5 (62.5%)
Firm 14	33	29 (87.9%)	4 (12.1%)	33 (100%)	0 (0%)	39–60	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Firm 15	42	26 (61.9%)	16 (38.1%)	42 (100%)	0 (0%)	28–60	9 (21.4%)	7 (77.8%)
Firm 16	10	10 (100%)	0 (0%)	10 (100%)	0 (0%)	32–60	3 (30%)	3 (100%)

*Source: GTPCWU database held at head office*

*Note 1: Where percentages are not given in the two columns providing data on youth members, it is because the ages of some members on the database for those firms were not stated.*

*Note 2: As with Table 2, figures for all youth members of the GTPCWU are provided in the penultimate column on the right-hand side of the table. In the column on the far right-hand side of the table, figures for youth members aged from 30–35 are provided. These youth figures have been disaggregated in this way to highlight how many GTPCWU members categorised as youth are 30 years old or more and therefore could have been working for fifteen years, since people can officially join the labour force in Ghana at the age of 15. The United Nations defines “youth” as those persons between the ages of 15 and 24 years.*

Utilising the data presented in Tables 2 and 3, an assessment is undertaken in the following three sections as to how the GTPCWU has been using structural, institutional and conditional forms of power in defending the interests of its members.

### **Structural power**

GTPCWU officials have made systematic efforts to build trust with ordinary members of the union. Members are encouraged to share their opinions on the work of the union, to provide constructive criticism where needed and to hold officials accountable for the way they manage assets. These relationships are built through regular workplace visits by GTPCWU officials to interact with shop stewards and rank-and-file members (Sallah, interview, 2022).

However, a problem for the GTPCWU in using structural power effectively is the casualisation of labour in the oil industry. This widespread use of sub-contracted labour makes it difficult for the GTPCWU to unionise workers. Some workers refuse to join the GTPCWU, arguing that it is pointless, given the fact that they are unaware of who exactly is their employer (Sallah, interview, 2022). This problem has grown with the increase of domestic labour consultancy enterprises, which advise oil company management teams on ways to outsource non-core operations, thereby increasing the number of workers who are unsure of the name of their employer. Even in cases where casualised workers are able to clearly identify who they are working for, and want to become members, the GTPCWU meets resistance to unionisation from employers. In these cases, some employers have caused doubt and confusion among workers by arguing that staff employed on casual contracts do not have the right to join a union. This is one of a number of union suppression tactics used by management teams to deter the collective representation of workers in the oil industry (see Ayentimi, Burgess and Bayaram, 2019, for an overview).

In addition, a number of enterprise-based trade unions have begun organising workers in the oil industry. Such unions have no links with the traditional labour movement in Ghana and are, on occasion, supported and controlled by employers as part of a “union substitution” strategy. They have made attempts to poach GTPCWU members, weakening solidarity among oil sector workers (Sallah, interview, 2022).

Another obstacle to building structural power is the reluctance to join the GTPCWU on the part of Ghanaians with the skills and qualifications to obtain specialist jobs in the oil industry. For Asafu-Adjaye (Interview, 2021) there is a social class element to this issue. Ghanaian oil workers with specialist skills that are valued by employers are often highly educated and not well disposed towards joining the GTPCWU, which they see as a blue-collar organisation, unable to represent their interests.

These perceptions of difference make it difficult to generate unity within the union. Gallas (2018) points out that union actions in particular conditions can be successful in benefitting a certain group of workers at the expense of others, thereby weakening them as a class. This is a salient point in the context of attempts by the GTPCWU to inculcate solidarity. The wide variations in the terms and conditions of employment in the oil industry make it hard for GTPCWU officials to persuade union members that they have the same interests when trying to exercise structural power. Detailed research on this issue would be useful.

The GTPCWU has tried to enhance its structural power through union recruitment drives in recent years. However, membership numbers have not markedly increased, given layoffs caused by the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and obstructive management tactics. Recruitment drives targeting youth and women are examined below.

### Youth-based recruitment

Youth is one of the priority areas for both the GTPCWU and the TUCG, since young people are “a very significant proportion of the Ghanaian population and workforce” (TUCG, 2020: 66). An initiative is currently being undertaken at the TUCG to ascertain the number of youth members of trade unions in Ghana (Acheampong, interview, 2021). The Vice Chairperson of the National Youth Council at the TUCG emphasised the importance of trade union assistance for youth in Ghana, since political parties always promise them support before gaining power and then fail to deliver on those promises (Adiza-Lampety, interview, 2021).

Although the percentage of GTPCWU members categorised as “youth” is significant at many of the firms listed in Table 3, disaggregating the figures provides a more nuanced picture.

The classification of the age range for youth is 15–35 in Ghana. For the Youth Desk Officer at the TUCG, this range is valid, as many workers stay in the informal sector throughout their twenties, while living with their families as dependents. Getting employment in the formal sector often comes later, after people have assiduously built and utilised social networks and contacts (Afriyie-Domfeh, interview, 2021). This perspective is corroborated empirically by Ablo’s (2012) study of Ghanaian offshore oil workers. During interviews with forty-two workers, Ablo found that forty of them had obtained employment through cultivating social contacts, which they had also needed to advance their careers once in post. The Vice Chairman of the TUCG’s National Youth Council concurs with Afriyie-Domfeh’s analysis, stating that the classification of youth in Ghana is less about physical age and more about weak socioeconomic standing in society, lack of agency on the part of individuals and dependence on family (Acheampong, interview, 2021).

The socioeconomic factors outlined by Afriyie-Domfeh and Acheampong may be salient in explaining why the majority of GTPCWU members classified as “youth” are in the upper range of the category (30–35). In seven out of the twelve firms where it was possible to calculate percentages, between 80 per cent and 100 per cent of members classified as youth were in the 30–35 age bracket. The lowest percentage of youth members in the 30–35 category for an individual firm listed on the GTPCWU database is still a significant 62.5 per cent. In short, the ages of GTPCWU members reveal the paradox that a significant number of members are “old youth”.

The GTPCWU is concerned that people in the lower age range for youth are not joining the union. For Sallah (Interview, 2022), the union is facing an existential crisis as a result of the increasing age structure of its members. In response, the GTPCWU is initiating new models of organising that aim to attract young workers into the organisation.

First, the GTPCWU is running an initiative where a group of union organisers regularly visit educational institutions to promote the value of trade union membership among students. The organisers are all young, based on the premise that this will make them relatable to the students. Simple and clear messages are provided to explain the value of GTPCWU membership among those planning to enter the oil sector.

The GTPCWU is also building a fully age-disaggregated dataset of its membership. Part of this aim has already been achieved, as the age-related data in Tables 2 and 3 show. Once completed, the dataset will be used to tailor campaigns and training courses to the needs and interests of youth members. Moreover, a youth committee has been created at the union, which has produced working policy documents outlining strategies to increase the membership of young people. The GTPCWU has created a separate annual budgetary allocation for youth activities, so these strategies can be implemented robustly. Moreover, desk

officers, who work directly with youth members, have been appointed in full-time positions at the union. A further initiative is the identification and mentoring of youth leaders within the membership.

### Gender-based recruitment

Unionised workers in the oil industry are predominantly male, particularly in the offshore sector. Most women employed in the industry work in administration, marketing or the low-paid end of the service sector such as cleaning. There are few female senior managers or technical specialists in the oil industry. One reason for this is the double burden faced by Ghanaian women, who, while working in the productive sector, also undertake most of the labour in the reproductive sphere (Overa, 2007). This double burden limits the ability of many women to devote time and energy to career advancement.<sup>9</sup>

Moreover, in the oil industry, employment for women tends towards ghettoisation. Ablo (2022) makes the point that the networks women use to get employment in the offshore oil industry in Ghana limit them to low-paid work, such as catering and cleaning clothes. Women often have to stay in these jobs out of loyalty to the contacts who got them the positions on the understanding that they would remain in them for the long term. In the three individual firms listed in Table 3 where women made a sizeable proportion of the union membership (one-third or more), the overwhelming majority of their jobs were in low- to mid-level administration positions.

The GTPCWU has followed a similar path to the one it is taking with youth in attempting to recruit more women into the union. A fully gender-disaggregated dataset of its membership is under construction, which will be used to create campaigns and training courses focused on key issues for women members. A women's committee has been created, which has produced working policy documents outlining strategies to increase the membership of women. As with youth members, the GTPCWU has allocated a dedicated portion of its finances for gender activities. Moreover, full-time gender desk officer positions have been created at the union.

### Using structural power

It remains to be seen whether these initiatives on the part of the GTPCWU will lead to a notable rise in numbers of youth and women members. Even if increased membership does materialise, there is no guarantee that this alone will significantly increase the GTPCWU's structural power. Despite these difficulties, however, structural power has sometimes been employed effectively in disputes with employers. Two such actions are summarised below.

First, Ghanaian oil workers in Takoradi took direct action in 2011 in a dispute with management at Weatherford International, an oilfield services provider. The actions occurred following complaints by Ghanaian offshore oil workers about discriminatory practices. Following a breakdown in negotiations with GTPCWU officials, management locked out the Ghanaian employees, preventing them from entering the work premises. Union members turned this tactic back on the employer, using padlocks to lock in management and expatriate oil workers for a day. After this action, media outlets were informed about the situation facing Ghanaian workers, leading to coverage of the situation in the national press. The use of calls for further negotiations by the GTPCWU and engagement with the media to raise the visibility of the dispute, coupled with direct action by oil workers, led to management agreeing to end discriminatory terms

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<sup>9</sup> See the Global Issues piece in this Special Issue titled "African Trade Unions and the Politics of Gender" for an interview with Deborah Freeman, the General Secretary of UNIWA, for further points about gender issues in the workplace in Ghana.

and conditions for Ghanaian oil workers.

Second, at Schlumberger, an oil provider in the upstream sector, direct action by workers, with GTPCWU involvement, helped to resolve a dispute arising from management reluctance to allow unionisation of the plant. In response, workers gathered for twenty-four hours, in shifts, at the entrance of the premises and prevented management from entering. This led to a stand-off, and police were called to maintain order. The action was finally resolved at the negotiating table. GTPCWU officials obtained guarantees from management during the negotiations that all workers would be allowed to return to work without victimisation.

These examples illustrate the importance of agency on the part of GTPCWU officials and individual union members in confrontations with employers. As Brookes (2019: 38) puts it in analysing the power of trade unions, “agency matters”. However, such successes have not been numerous, because of the adverse structural position of labour in which GTPCWU members are implanted in Ghana.

The volatile situation of oil workers in Ghana has led to one, perhaps ironic, reason for employees joining the GTPCWU. It is recognised that in most cases the GTPCWU is able to negotiate better exit packages for members during redundancy rounds than are given to non-members. This has become a reason in recent years for workers agreeing to join the GTPCWU (Sallah, interview, 2022).

### ***Institutional power***

Employing institutional power effectively has been a problem for the GTPCWU. Trade union rights, including freedom of association and collective bargaining, are enshrined in labour laws. However, weak enforcement of legislation and the lengthy bureaucratic procedures involved in taking cases through the courts substantively limit the union’s institutional power.

Public administration in Ghana is based on an uneasy mixture of indigenous and imposed models. Hangovers from the colonial system imposed by the British coexist with attempts, from the 1980s, to establish New Public Management (NPM) methods, infusing principles of competition and private sector oversight. From the 1990s further reforms to administrative systems were introduced, based on the “good governance” agenda promoted by Western donors. In overall terms, public administration lacks coherence, effectiveness and dynamism, to a large extent because “models were imported from the developed world without tailoring them to suit the Ghanaian context” (Mohammed, 2019: 18).

Employers in the oil industry are aware that public administration is slow and ineffective, making it time-consuming and expensive for the GTPCWU to use litigation during disputes. For Sallah (Interview, 2022), therefore, some employers deny the legal rights of oil workers as a strategy aimed at weakening the GTPCWU, since they know it would be difficult for the union to resort to legislation to obtain redress. Four examples are provided below, highlighting different aspects of the GTPCWU’s difficulties in using institutional power fruitfully.

First, problems have occurred when oil workers want to join the GTPCWU. Workers leading legal unionisation initiatives have been dismissed on the pretext of redundancy. The African Oilfield Services (Ghana) company, for example, refused to sign a verification form allowing workers to join the GTPCWU. Subsequently, one of the leaders of an attempt by workers to join the union was sacked without the provision of a tangible reason (ITUC, 2013). Furthermore, in 2013 fifteen workers at Mobicrane Ltd, an oil and gas provider based in Takoradi, were dismissed for attempting to join the GTPCWU (ITUC, 2013). Intimidation of workers who want to join the union at a number of oil companies in the Western region has also been reported to union officials (Sallah, interview, 2022). In these cases, recourse to existing labour

legislation by the GTPCWU would have involved a lengthy and resource-depleting process with no guarantee of a positive outcome for the workers.

Second, awards by arbitration panels in favour of the GTPCWU, acting on behalf of members, are not always observed by employers. This has been the case on several occasions concerning panel decisions about salary levels. The GTPCWU has used the law courts in an attempt to make employers honour the arbitration awards. However, the process has invariably been slow and expensive. As the court cases dragged on, employees were left for long periods without salaries, which has weakened their support for the GTPCWU (Sallah, interview, 2022).

Third, delays at the Labour Department in issuing Collective Bargaining Certificates (CBCs) have affected the level of support for the GTPCWU. CBCs contain guarantees that certain salary levels must be paid and benefits, such as health insurance, provided to workers. However, it can seem to oil workers that the granting of CBCs is always a work in progress. Delaying tactics by employers in drawing up CBCs, along with sluggish processing of them by public administrators, have caused workers to lose faith in the union and sometimes to withdraw membership (Sallah, interview, 2022).

Fourth, the GTPCWU has largely been unable to persuade the government to implement local content regulations as part of its efforts to protect the jobs of members (PC, 2019). According to these regulations, oil firms must have at least 5 per cent equity participation of indigenous Ghanaian companies. They are also required to transfer technology and skills to local workers in order to increase their employment in the industry (Ackah and Mohammed, 2020). The government set a target of 90 per cent local participation in the oil and gas sector by 2020, which was not met. The key issue with local content regulations is the lack of a rigorous and systematic enabling environment for their implementation (Suleman and Zaato, 2021), which the GTPCWU has been able to do little about (PC, 2020c).

These difficulties that the GTPCWU has experienced in exercising institutional power illustrate the strength of the argument of Phillips, Hailwood and Brooks (2016) that there is a need to examine political contestations over control of oil production and profits in Ghana, mediated by the external orientation of the economy and national sovereignty, under transnational conditions. For example, rigorous enforcement by public administrators of local content regulations would be unwelcome to the foreign oil companies which dominate the industry. It is, therefore, frustrating but unsurprising to GTPCWU officials that calls on the government to enforce local content regulations in the oil industry have been met with a muted response.

Nevertheless, agency remains a relevant element in the exercise of institutional power by the GTPCWU. Odijie (2017) points out that the discovery of oil in Ghana has led to the development of vibrant civil society organisations, able to provide well-articulated challenges to the policies of government and firms involved in the industry. The GTPCWU, therefore, has potential allies in the civil society realm, which it can link with in attempting to use legislation to defend the interests of its members. Moreover, the TUCG has a representative on the Public Interest and Accountability Committee (PIAC), a statutory body, which has since 2011 published biannual and annual reports aiming to keep “Ghanaians and other interested stakeholders constantly informed about how the country’s petroleum revenues are managed and utilized” (PIAC, 2021: xxii). This, at least, provides the GTPCWU with a link to a voice for labour. However, the significance of this link can be questioned in the light of Graham et al.’s (2019) argument that power-holders in the oil industry have not responded to calls by the PIAC for greater transparency and accountability. Moreover, there is little public discussion of PIAC reports.

## **Conditional power**

The use of conditional power is problematic for the GTPCWU, given the perception by members of the public that oil workers have secure and well-paid jobs. This has made it difficult for the GTPCWU to generate sympathy and support from groups and individuals outside the union during disputes.

The high turnover of employment in the industry shows that jobs are by no means stable. Salaries in the oil industry vary widely, according to a number of factors, such as a worker's degree of skills specialisation and whether contracts are permanent, fixed-term, full-time or part-time, and whether jobs are in the upstream, midstream or downstream sector. It is difficult, therefore, to generalise about how well paid the Ghanaian labour force in the oil industry is overall.

Several studies have shown the complexities involved in assessing how well-remunerated local oil workers are in Ghana. Tsiboe-Darko (2019), for example, reveals how the discovery of oil has led to increased rents and rising land prices in Takoradi, the city at the centre of the industry, which has made it difficult for many Ghanaian oil workers to afford accommodation in the area. Focusing on the same city, research by Oteng-Ababio (2018) shows that residents felt that well-paid jobs for Ghanaians in the oil industry had only been created in a small number of specialist areas, such as project management, procurement and finance. Moreover, Ablo (2022: 7) points out that Ghanaian offshore oil workers receive significantly lower wages than expatriate staff at the same companies. Nevertheless, "low wages in the oil and gas sector remain higher than similar jobs in the non-oil sector".

This factor, along with the visibility of a small number of Ghanaians in lucrative specialist positions, has helped to foster the perception on the part of the general public that oil workers are a privileged class. This makes it difficult for the GTPCWU to get support from non-union groups when confronting wage discrimination and other iniquitous labour practices affecting its members.

## **Conclusion**

In this article we have analysed the work of the GTPCWU, which represents the interests of members working in an important sector of Ghana's narrowly based formal economy – oil. Three core elements of Coordination and Context-Appropriate Power Theory – structural, institutional and conditional labour power – were used as conceptual tools, which provided a way to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the GTPCWU in defending the interests of its members. The research findings show that the GTPCWU faces some problems which resonate with other traditional trade unions across Africa in the industrial and manufacturing sectors. It represents mostly male union members on permanent contracts, who are part of a small formal sector workforce. The GTPCWU also faces the context-specific problem of defending workers in an industry based on the use of fossil fuels, which is increasingly criticised for its negative environmental impacts. The findings also reveal that while the agency of the GTPCWU is significant when examining its ability to deploy structural, institutional and conditional power, any meaningful assessment of the union's strategies, policies and actions also needs to be framed within an analysis of "the structuring conditions within which agency takes place" (Bieler, 2018: 243).

First, in relation to structural power, committed direct actions by oil workers, supported by the GTPCWU, have resulted in some instances of employers changing their behaviour and practices. However, these successes have been relatively rare. Structural restrictions limit the ability of the GTPCWU to defend the rights of members and engage in successful direct actions. It is difficult for the GTPCWU to exercise structural power when many employers make it difficult to engage with potential members. Furthermore,

members of the GTPCWU in the oil industry are employed across a range of upstream, midstream and downstream firms. This makes it onerous for union officials to highlight commonalities of interest among workers and to coordinate actions in disputes with employers. Second, the GTPCWU has a degree of institutional power, since labour legislation in Ghana guarantees freedom of association and the right of unions to bargain collectively. Local content regulations for the oil industry are also clearly outlined. However, lax enforcement of legislation and the lengthy and costly legal processes which ensue when cases do reach court make it difficult for the GTPCWU to use institutional power effectively. Third, the GTPCWU faces considerable obstacles in utilising conditional power meaningfully, given the perception on the part of members of the public that oil workers are among the lucky few in Ghana who have stable and lucrative jobs in the formal sector.

Overall, the GTPCWU is embedded in a structured labour regime, which makes it hard, but not impossible, to employ structural, institutional and conditional power effectively. This analysis has focused on the use of different forms of power from the union side. Brookes (2018) makes the point that, in studying the position of trade unions, an examination of relational power, encompassing the interests, resources and strategies of employers' associations and government officials, is valuable. A longitudinal study, incorporating an examination of the use of power by employers' associations and government officials working on labour issues in Ghana, as well as the perspectives and actions of individual union members, would provide a fuller picture of the position of the GTPCWU.

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## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

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## Appendix: Upstream Oil and Gas Operators in Ghana

Operator	Contract Area	Contract Area size (sq. km)	Effective Date	Location	Status of Operations
	Deepwater Tano	Jubilee = 61 TEN = 450 Wawa = 106	July 19, 2006	Offshore Tano Cape Three Points Basin	1. Production from Jubilee Field. POD expected soon 2. TEN Fields under development. First oil Q4 2016 3. Appraisal of Wawa Discovery in progress
	West Cape Three Points	Jubilee = 48 MTA = 416	July 13, 2004	Offshore Tano Cape Three Points Basin	1. Production from Jubilee Field 2. Integration of Mahogany and Teak discoveries into Greater Jubilee Field 3. Appraisal of Akasa discovery in progress
	Offshore Cape Three Points	693	March 15, 2008	Offshore Tano Cape Three Points Basin	1. Sankofa and Gye Nyame Fields under development. 2. First oil expected Q4 2017
	Deepwater Tano-Cape Three Points	2010	July 19, 2006	Offshore Tano Cape Three Points Basin	Appraisal
	Saltpond Field	12	July 30, 2004	Offshore Saltpond Basin	Production
	Expanded Shallow Water Tano	1508	January 22, 2015	Offshore Tano Cape Three Points Basin	Exploration
	Central Tano	278	March 27, 2014	Offshore Tano Cape Three Points Basin	Exploration
	Shallow Water Cape Three Points	1500	July 14, 2014	Offshore Tano Cape Three Points Basin	Exploration
	South West Saltpond	2050	Not Effective	Offshore Tano Cape Three Points Basin	Exploration *****
	Deepwater Cape Three Points West	944	February 22, 2014	Offshore Tano Cape Three Points Basin	Exploration
	East Keta	2239	July 17, 2014	Offshore Keta Basin	Exploration
	Offshore South West Tano	175	July 17, 2014	Offshore Tano Cape Three Points Basin	Exploration
	Offshore Cape Three Points South	755	July 18, 2014	Offshore Tano Cape Three Points Basin	Exploration
	East Cape Three Points	1565	April 12, 2013	Straddles Offshore Tano Cape Three Points and Saltpond Basins	Exploration
	South Deepwater Tano	3482	December 4, 2013	Offshore Tano Cape Three Points Basin	Exploration
	West Cape Three Point Block 2	673	2016	Offshore Tano Cape Three Point Basin	exploration
	Cape Three Point Block 4	1127	2016	Offshore Tano Cape Three Point Basin	Exploration
	Onshore/Offshore Keta Block	3000	2016	Accra-Keta Basin	Exploration

Source: (PC, 2022).