



ASSEMBLÉES ANNUELLES
ANNUAL MEETINGS
BRAZZAVILLE | CONGO
MAY 25-29 2026



ASSEMBLÉES ANNUELLES
ANNUAL MEETINGS
BRAZZAVILLE | CONGO
MAY 25-29 2026



**Friedrich
Ebert** 
Stiftung

African Trade Unions Push for Worker-Centred Development Finance at AfDB Annual Meetings 2026

John Mark Mwanika

Brazzaville, Republic of Congo - African trade unions have called for a decisive shift toward worker-centred development finance, warning that Africa's industrialisation, infrastructure expansion, and energy transition agendas will fall short unless workers are placed at the core of decision-making.

Speaking during the 2026 African Development Bank (AfDB) Annual Meetings, held in Brazzaville from 25–29 May under the theme “*Mobilising Africa's Development Financing at Scale in a Fragmented World*,” labour representatives urged policymakers to align financing strategies with the realities of African workers.

A high-level delegation coordinated by the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Trade Union Competence Centre (FES-TUCC) for Sub-Saharan Africa comprising ITUC-Africa and IndustriALL Sub-Saharan Africa engaged with key stakeholders including AfDB leadership, the African Union Commission, the International Labour Organization (ILO), and development partners.

Development Finance Must Deliver Decent Work

Across discussions, union representatives emphasized that development finance must be judged not only by economic growth indicators or infrastructure outputs, but by its tangible impact on people's lives.

They argued for investment frameworks that prioritise:

- decent work creation
- fair wages
- social protection systems
- inclusive industrialisation

Debates around the African Economic Outlook 2026 and the proposed New African Financial Architecture for Development (NAFAD) highlighted mounting concerns over debt burdens, constrained fiscal space, and uneven industrialisation across the continent.

While welcoming growing momentum for African-led financing solutions and domestic resource mobilisation, trade unions stressed that these efforts must directly tackle unemployment, inequality, and precarious work.

In engagements with AfDB Vice President and Chief Economist Prof. Kevin Urama, the delegation called for stronger labour participation in development finance governance, including the adoption of methodologies to measure the “job content” and social impact of major investments.

Challenging Labour Exclusion from Development Governance

A central theme emerging from the meetings was the continued marginalisation of organised labour in development decision-making processes.

Trade unions called for:

- institutionalised participation in project design and appraisal
- integration of labour standards in AfDB-funded projects
- stronger accountability and safeguards
- recognition of trade unions as a distinct democratic constituency

They underscored that workers are not just beneficiaries of development but active agents in industrialisation, productive transformation, and economic governance.

Concerns Over Civil Society Dialogue Gaps

Concerns were particularly pronounced during the AfDB Civil Society, Philanthropy and Diaspora Dialogue on NAFAD.

Despite wide-ranging discussions on economic sovereignty, infrastructure, and youth employment, trade union delegates noted the limited attention given to labour rights, social dialogue, and decent work including in the resulting Brazzaville Declaration.

They warned that Africa's development agenda remains incomplete without integrating labour perspectives, given workers' central role in delivering infrastructure, public services, and industrial growth.

Key messages from labour representatives included:

- development finance must be anchored in labour rights
- Just Transition policies should align with ILO principles
- industrial strategies must generate quality employment
- worker participation is essential for equitable development

Energy Transition, Debt Justice and Critical Minerals

The meetings also surfaced growing concerns about the governance of Africa's energy transition and extractive industries.

Trade unions and civil society actors highlighted risks associated with:

- debt-financed energy projects
- fossil-fuel dependencies
- privatised transition models
- weak consultation frameworks
- critical mineral extraction tied to global supply chains

Particular attention was paid to cobalt, lithium, and other strategic minerals, which are increasingly central to the global green economy.

The delegation called for:

- robust labour protections
- environmental accountability
- community participation
- local value addition
- fair and equitable supply chains

They also reiterated the need for debt restructuring and fairer financing systems that prioritise social outcomes over dependency and inequality.

Strengthening Continental Partnerships

The AfDB Annual Meetings provided an important platform for reinforcing collaboration with continental institutions.

Engagements with the African Union Commission focused on industrial policy, mining governance, labour rights, and AfCFTA implementation, including discussions around a potential Memorandum of Understanding with trade union organisations.

Meanwhile, discussions with the International Labour Organization (ILO) examined labour standards, wage systems, employment creation, and cooperation through the Africa Trade Union Network for Economic Transformation (ATUNET).

Toward a Worker-Centred Development Agenda

The Brazzaville meetings underscored the growing relevance of trade unions as strategic actors in Africa's development trajectory.

For FES-TUCC and its partners, they revealed both expanding opportunities for engagement and persistent institutional gaps in integrating worker voices.

As debates intensify around financing sovereignty, industrial policy, climate transition, and infrastructure development, trade unions are positioning themselves to ensure that Africa's transformation is grounded in:

- decent work
- democratic participation
- social justice

The delegation reaffirmed its commitment to sustained engagement with continental institutions and broader alliances to advance a worker-centred vision of Africa's future.