



**Friedrich
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Building Worker Power Through Education: Reflections on the GLU Engage Program

The Global Labour University (GLU) Engage Program, hosted at the University of the Witwatersrand, continues to be a vital space for trade union officials, labour researchers, and shop stewards from across Africa who seek to strengthen their analytical and organising capacity. The only requirement for participation is proficiency in English.

This intensive two-month course provides participants with tools to build power for change through capacity building, collective bargaining, organising, and agitation — turning academic insight into practical strategies that transform unions and societies.

At its heart, the program uses the Power Resource Approach to help participants understand the realities of workers' lives, from the productive to the reproductive, from the formal to the informal economy. As Marx reminds us, it is our labour power, our capacity to create value, that sustains the entire system. Yet this power is systematically exploited for profit. When we grasp this truth, we recognise that workers make society run, and workers can transform it. Class consciousness and unity therefore remain non-negotiable.

The participants engage deeply with the following modules:

- Labour and Development
- Global Wage Policy and Finance
- Global Governance, Society and Development
- Organising in the Shadow of a Pandemic
- A Research Module on Informal or Unorganised Workers in Johannesburg

Through these modules, participants examine the changing nature of work and power in Africa's political economy. The program brings to light how informality now accounts for nearly 80–90% of total employment across Sub-Saharan Africa, with women making up the majority of those in precarious, low-paid, and unprotected work. From uber drivers and domestic workers to street vendors and hair dressers, women sustain households and communities through labour that is largely invisible, undervalued, and unprotected.

This feminisation of informality reveals the deep link between capitalist exploitation and patriarchal social relations. Drawing on Marx and Engels' *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, participants explore how the sexual division of labour, and women's unpaid care work, became the hidden foundation of capitalist accumulation.

Today, that same division continues to define inequality in the world of work, where women carry the dual burden of productive and reproductive labour.

The program also highlights the failure of many African governments to protect workers' rights. Too often, states side with business interests, weakening labour laws, undermining collective bargaining, and cutting social protection. As unions confront these realities, they realise that the struggle cannot stop at the workplace. It must extend to engaging the state either through progressive alliances or through policy influence, mass mobilisation to reclaim governance that serves the working class rather than capital.

At FES TUCC, we believe that education is not merely about learning — it is about liberation. As Paulo Freire reminds us, "*Education is either the practice of freedom, or the means to bring about conformity*". The GLU Engage program embodies this principle: it builds analytical confidence and political clarity, turning knowledge into collective power for change.

Now more than ever, the call "*An injury to one is an injury to all*" must guide our practice. Trade union work must go beyond representing the already-organised to embrace the millions of informal, precarious, and marginalised workers who make up the real face of Africa's working class.

The GLU Engage program compels unionists to build inclusive organising models that respond to this reality, models that mobilise informal and care-economy workers, strengthen the Power Resource Toolkit, and connect struggles for gender justice, decent work, and social transformation.

Only when unions organise, educate, and act together can they reclaim worker power and transform society.

Heartfelt congratulations to the 2025 GLU Engage graduates, who have successfully completed this demanding and transformative journey. Over two months, they demonstrated commitment, discipline, and a deep passion for the working-class struggle. They leave the program equipped not only with academic knowledge but with a renewed political clarity and a determination to strengthen their unions, advance gender justice, and build collective power for a more equitable society.

Amandla!