

UNION AID ABROAD-APHEDA

Strategic Plan Addendum, 2021-23

1. The current context compelled a review

APHEDA's **2017-20 strategy** noted the intensifying and interlinked global economic and climate crisis, the consequent increase in inequalities, geopolitical rivalries, labour migration and refugee flows and the prevalence of authoritarian and sexist governments. These issues have not receded in their importance and will continue to be a focus for APHEDA's work.

Two issues in particular, however, have precipitated a re-examination of APHEDA's strategy, resulting in this Addendum to our strategy; the global challenges of COVID-19 and of escalating climate change.

1. Covid-19

Since early 2020, the **Covid-19 pandemic** has not only caused millions of deaths and hundreds of millions of infections, disrupted our work, and required emergency efforts with partner organisations around Covid-19 prevention and food security, it has deeply intensified:

- The loss of waged jobs and work in the informal sector for hundreds of millions of people;
- Health inequalities within and between countries;
- Austerity programs ensuring the elite maximise profits while working people are impoverished;
- Inequalities within and between countries, and between women and men;
- Food insecurity;
- Acceleration of shifts in power between the major economies, and between regional leaders, threatening trade and military conflicts;
- The decline of democracy and democratic space.

The health, social, economic and political impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic are not short-lived or easily overcome, and our partners want to direct some of their energy to addressing these issues in the coming period.

2. Escalating climate change

The urgency of the **climate and environmental crisis** has increased, with few years before global warming ensures irreversible catastrophic outcomes. Key impacts being experienced include:

- Rising seawaters threatening coastal populations and agriculture;
- Unprecedented destructive weather emergencies;
- Desertification and loss of access to fresh water;
- ;
- Loss of biodiversity and destruction of marine ecosystems
- Extreme levels of water, land and air pollution;
- Rising heat levels with dangerous consequences for human work capacity, in outdoor work in particular.

The old paradigm of 'green growth' and reliance on fossil fuel corporation engagement has proven hollow. Along with addressing the symptoms of the climate crisis, the urgency is to cut emissions and de-carbonise the economy, by actions that empower the majority of the global population -- workers, urban and rural poor, indigenous peoples -- instead of bolstering the markets, profiteers and conservative governments.

The climate crisis poses the question of power: who controls the energy, water and food systems? By taking a 'public goods' approach, Union Aid Abroad – APHEDA has implemented projects in energy democracy with unions, in food sovereignty and agro-ecology with farmers and women workers, and in community water resources management. We are resolved with current and future partners to do more to deepen and broaden our interventions to address the climate crisis.

There are also fresh openings and readiness for change evident in the current context that provide APHEDA and its partners with the determination to make some shifts in approach and to persist in strong action in support of global social transformation. To name but a few of these:

Heightened awareness of the critical role of ordinary workers have come to the fore including health workers, cleaners, transport and postal workers, fruit pickers and farm workers, teachers, factory workers making PPEs and ventilators. These and others are the critical workforces whose vital roles have been highlighted during the pandemic along with the precariousness of their working conditions and often poor wages, creating opportunity to amplify the demands for change. Women as the majority workers in health and care industries, have become more visible, but their demands for wage justice remain.

Calls for action on climate change have become much more widespread and there is a heightening of the voices of those impacted at the forefront of change. In the lead up to COP26, there is an upsurge of action in heavy fossil-fuel dependent countries making new commitments, for example Indonesia's May 2021 announcement it will withdraw from coal-fired power.

Large popular mobilisations have occurred throughout the world, despite concerns about the spread of COVID-19 and repressive government action. Notable are the massive strike action of farm workers in India; movements against racism in many countries of the world, sparked by BLM and George Floyd protests; the 'Milk Tea Alliance' of young people in South East and East Asia in support of democracy in Hong Kong, Myanmar, Malaysia, Thailand, Taiwan, Korea; continued smaller scale mobilisations by young people for climate justice.

Renewed participation of Australian workers in international movements, including around against racism and struggles by First Nations peoples, has opened opportunities. Union Aid Abroad – APHEDA can make a key contribution to the Australian union movement through education and campaigns about global issues, based on our work

overseas, and help renew the anti-racist and international solidarity foundations of the labour movement.

2. About this Addendum

This Addendum should be read in conjunction with Union Aid Abroad –APHEDA Strategic Plan 2017-20.

Our analysis of the current global upheaval and of opportunities for action, have led us to conclude that the current Union Aid Abroad –APHEDA Strategic Plan 2017-20 is still critically relevant and provides a solid framework for action for APHEDA’s future. We thus re-commit to critical elements of the plan as shown in section 3 below.

We have also identified shifts/adjustments that we can make to both the international work and the national work of Union Aid Abroad-APHEDA to respond more effectively to what is currently happening in our world in relation to the twin challenges of COVID-19 and climate change.

Section 4 below gives **five areas** across the **international and national programs** that we intend to focus on in the next two years as a result of our analysis. Some of the proposed work we articulate in this section is current work; other goals and strategies give greater emphasis to existing work and suggest an expansion and; there are some new goals and strategies.

3. Recommitment to the strategy

The Statement of Purpose as outlined in the 2017-20 Plan will continue:

Australian unions working globally in partnership for the achievement of dignity at work, social justice, economic equality and the realisation of human rights. We work to achieve this through strong unions and social movements, sustainable development programs, global solidarity and support in times of crisis.

The core values described in the 2017-20 Plan remain constant:

- Solidarity
- Partnership
- Movement-building
- Equality and justice
- Accountability

The four pillars as documented in the 2017-20 Plan remain as the guiding directions of work:

1. Trade union development, workers’ rights and safety at work;
2. Climate justice, energy democracy and just transition;
3. Rights of migrant workers and refugees;
4. Women’s rights and feminist movement development

Our flagship campaign *Asbestos. Not here. Not Anywhere* will continue for a further 4 years from July 2021.

4. Shifts/adjustments for the next two years

The shifts that we intend to make in our international and national program are articulated below along with a rationale and strategies for each.

INTERNATIONAL PROGRAM

1. Increase emphasis on supporting workers in the informal economy.

Why is this important?

In general, informalised work is associated with vulnerable employment and diminishing rights to freedom of association and collective bargaining, higher exposure to occupational health and safety risks, no appropriate workplace protections, and an increased likelihood that people will suffer from illness, accident or death. In this type of work, workers are often faced with no minimum wages or hours of work, no safety standards and no social security or other safety net. Workers everywhere increase their power where they collectivise, organise and make demands for rights and their self-determination is respected.

COVID-19 has seen a rapid loss of work which has disproportionately affected those in informal employment. Women and migrant workers are deeply affected with jobs losses, reduced hours and being forced to move into more informal economy work. Decent Work remains a core demand of the international union movement, APHEDA and its partner organisations.

Across our union and community partners there are opportunities to pivot to have a greater emphasis on organising of informal economy workforces, especially women, and migrant and refugee workers. Securing jobs and social protection floors are considered priorities for ITUC affiliates in the COVID context.

What we are trying to achieve/change?

- Reverse the trend towards more precarious work, specifically employment vulnerabilities during the current pandemic as well as in anticipation of future crises
- Increase workers' access to quality jobs¹ and decent living standards with equal access to healthcare, social protection and better working conditions
- Support the ability of trade unions, community based organisations and migrants to engage in the decision-making process around the allocation of COVID-19 recovery funds which includes decent job creation, improvement of social protection and healthcare services

¹ https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE:R204

- Encourage and support the organising of informalised and precarious workers fighting for their rights, into formalised and unionised employment or towards organisations of informal workers asserting health, gender, labour, economic and political rights.

How will we do this?

- Encourage and support the organising of informalised and precarious workforces within the existing work with partner organisations where possible
- Collaborate with interested partner organisations to:
 - understand the extent and nature of informal and precarious work under COVID;
 - consider strategic sectors of focus;
 - investigate potential strategic relationships with other organisations; and
 - scope funding sources
- Support partner organisations to highlight the situation and needs of women, migrant workers, refugees and people with disabilities in their communication and campaign strategies.
- Engage in migration policy reform networks to support healthcare access of migrant workers in destination countries.
- Promote and protect quality work (contextually appropriate) and advocate against precarious work, both within existing projects and new partnerships.
- Seek funding to build on and extend existing quality job creation projects
- Enable staff development within our organisation on this issue

2. Highlight the increasing repression and attacks on democratic rights under COVID-19 against trade unions and other civil society organisations and movements

Why is this important?

COVID-19 has provided an opportunity for regressive governments to curtail rights, introduce austerity measures and shut down dissenting voices. Across the global union movement and allied movements, there are opportunities to collaborate to resist this trend. The 2020 ITUC Global Rights Index gives a comprehensive overview of workers' rights violations in each country globally.

Women continue to be both targeted and excluded in many countries of the Global South due to systemic sexism and misogynistic attitudes in society. For example, young female teachers have been targeted for arrest by the Myanmar junta as reports of sexual violence in prisons increase. Women continue to be under-represented in trade unions leadership, further inhibiting the capacity of unions to effectively organise women workers.

What we are trying to achieve/change?

- Strengthen campaigns of Global South unions under attack by mobilising Australian union support
- Increase the capacity of partner organisations to fight a slide backwards in workers' rights and conditions.

How will we do this?

- Lend support to the campaigns of formalised workforces and their unions, who are facing increased trade union repression, deregulation of work rights and denial of civil rights and freedom of association, in order to decrease or mitigate these measures
- Connect unions in priority countries with unions in Australia to help pressure the Australian government to take action in support of union demands in the countries where we work
- Build internationalism amongst Australian unionists by highlighting the reality and the impact of trade union repression
- Support the development of personal relationships between unions and unionists to assist in campaign efforts, for example linking workers by sector and linking women workers.

3. Support initiatives for equitable vaccine access and protection of workers' health

Why is this important?

COVID-19 has given a new meaning to health protection, public health and primary prevention. The gulf between rich and poor countries with regard to diagnostics and access to vaccine and treatments is dramatically visible and growing. Many Global South countries are not expected to have adequate vaccine access until 2023-4 unless things change. Meanwhile poor public health systems are unable to cope to the health crisis.

Protecting workers' health, both in their workplaces and in the communities where they live, has new emphasis and urgency. OSH protections and rights have been brought into sharp focus in combatting the pandemic with work and workplaces an important source of transmission. Frontline workers, often women in the health and care industries, are vulnerable and often lowly prioritised.

These issues have exposed weaknesses in many countries as well as opportunities for improvements in workers' health rights. The COVID crisis puts more pressure on trade union resources and increases demands on them. Our experience with the Asbestos campaign has shown us how important the environmental health issues are, with broader lessons for the pandemic in terms of workers' health, beyond the workplace.

What we are trying to achieve/change?

- Vaccine equality between countries and within countries
- A fairer share of Australian aid going to vaccine access and quality public health systems in the Global South
- Protection of workers' health at home and in the community as well as in the workplace.

How will we do this?

- Work with others to remove barriers to accessing vaccines, diagnostics and treatments
- Assist partner organisations to encourage governments to share IP, trade secrets and technology for COVID diagnostics, treatments and vaccines
- Lend support to partners' efforts to enforce COVID safe workplaces and, where possible, OSH rights more generally
- Promote OSH rights in COVID context to trade union partners through sharing (including translating where appropriate) successful partner and broader trade union actions and initiatives, including ITUC key demands
- Advocate for vulnerable workers including those already suffering occupational disease with regard to their increased risk in this COVID era
- Promote an expanded understanding of workers' health that includes the importance of addressing risks in the home and community and the broader social determinants of health.

4. Build a larger climate justice program across energy, food and water sovereignty

Why is this important?

The world is not on track to retain global heating within 1.5 degrees as per the ambition of the Paris Agreement. If we are unable to achieve this, the impacts for Global South countries will be devastating. Ecosystems and economies are predicted to collapse. Human suffering created through natural disasters, loss of food production and access, heat-created inhabitability, drought and the drying up of water systems, will increase.

By virtue of their lower income, subjugated roles and precarious and unequal workloads, women are more at risk in a heating world.

Fossil fuel use is still on the increase in the Asia-Pacific region. Australia is still one of the largest per capita emitters and continues to aggressively promote and impose export fossil fuel markets through bilateral and multilateral relationships. This is of serious concern. The WHO also acknowledges that escalating climate change will increase the risk of more frequent pandemics.

What we are trying to achieve/change?

- Engaged unions achieving energy transition in line with the science in targeted countries
- Expansion of union networks across Asia Pacific region working collaboratively for climate justice and Just transition
- Climate change action through organising farm workers, small farmers, rural landless and food processors around the goal of food sovereignty.
- Deeper understanding by Australian unionists of impacts of global heating in the Global South.

How will we do this?

- Expand/upscale work in Asia Pacific region by actively seeking funding from solidarity organisations, government donors and philanthropic organisations for just transition.
- Support trade union national centres to expand work in sectors outside of energy, regarding decarbonisation and equitable and just transition (e.g. Health, transport, land use etc).
- Link the South and South East Asia APHEDA projects on decarbonisation projects, Just Transition or renewables organising projects, as well as new sector work, with unions in Australia and internationally for the sharing of expertise and knowledge.
- Explore scope for collaboration to help support food and water sovereignty policy advocacy, linked to our agricultural projects
- Contribute content from our international program to the climate education programs of Australian unions to help highlight Global South impacts.

NATIONAL PROGRAM

- 5. Strengthen international consciousness-raising and seek new opportunities for the education and organising of Australian workers towards internationalism.**

Why is this important?

The twin crises of COVID-19 and climate change and their impacts are devastating for many we work with in the Global South. The issues are urgent and Australia as a middle power, a country in the Asia-Pacific region and one of the richest OECD countries in the world, has an important part to play for global economic and social equity.

Both crises provide an opportunity for APHEDA with Australian unions, to educate, agitate and organise for social change and for Australian government responsibility in support of international equity. The issues of COVID-19 and climate change provide an opportunity to connect workers in Australia and internationally on common issues of OHS and Just Transition, for example.

In recent years we have effectively used the asbestos campaign towards similar ends. Women unionists are an important part of APHEDA's activist base. We can identify more opportunities to engage women with our program and on the COVID-19 and climate change impacts that heighten the gender equality divide.

What we are trying to achieve/change?

- Deeper understanding by Australian unionists of the impacts of both the pandemic and global heating in the Global South
- Stronger interest from unions in connecting with APHEDA on initiatives to build international consciousness and solidarity
- Larger pool of engaged activists
- Increased funding and a pro-public purpose for Australia's international development program in the context of the twin crises of COVID19 and climate change

How will we do this?

- Work with the ACTU and ATUI on new ideas for international consciousness raising, starting with scoping what is needed and the time and resources required
- Build 1:1 relationships with unions where there are now enhanced opportunities for linking them with our international partners around COVID-19 issues, for example with health-related unions
- Increase our membership base to bolster the pool of people that we can more actively develop and involve in international solidarity work.
- Develop our digital engagement capacity to enable us to better engage, support and build our activist networks and take people on the donor journey using the new CRM.
- Establish a volunteer-led program of volunteer retired educators to assist in broadening the extent of a global justice education program.
- Increase our resources that would build our capacity to quickly extend this work.