

Global Labour University



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Progress report 2002 – 2005

"I think all of us were quite excited but maybe also a little bit nervous about what lay in front of us.

It was also difficult for some of us to get used to working academically again, sitting in our flats with heaps of reading material in front of us, having to write term papers - sometimes without any clue how to get it done in time. But in the end we all managed in some way and looking back now, we can be very proud of getting all the requirements done.

We have often been referred to as the guinea pigs and sometimes we really felt like this. However, while guinea pigs do not always survive the experiments carried out on them – we have.

To cut a long story short, this programme was a great experience for all of us.

It's hard to judge whether we will change the trade union movement as a result of this course, but being in this masters programme has certainly changed us.

The fact that people from so many different countries can work together so well for such a long time - quite often under a lot of stress and time constraints - provides hope for better, more social and harmonious forms of globalisation."

(Quote from the speech of the student representative at the 1st GLU graduation ceremony, Annex I)

1. Summary

The Global Labour University (GLU) idea was launched in 2002 with the aim to build a network of Universities, Trade Unions, Foundations and the ILO (Annex II) in order to facilitate discourse, stimulate research and provide university-level qualification programs on the political, economic and social dimensions of globalisation for labour and trade union experts.

The core activity of the GLU network during the reporting period was the development and implementation of a Pilot Master course on "Labour Policies and Globalisation" at the University of Kassel and the Berlin School of Economics in 2004. The curriculum for this course was jointly developed and evaluated at a series of international workshops by an international group of academics and trade unionists in the course of 2003 and 2005. Many international experts joined the staff from the two universities to teach at the pilot course. International and national trade unions engaged also actively by offering internship opportunities to the students. In September 2005 23 students from 18 countries successfully graduated from the pilot course. A second group of 22 students started their studies in September 2005

International expert teams are working on textbook developments concerning global governance, macro economic regimes and development, trade unions and globalisation. The annual GLU conferences are platforms for researchers, trade unionists and GLU students to debate the global challenges labour is facing. The conferences are also opportunities to develop new joint research initiatives. The findings of the annual conferences are published in regular GLU yearbooks. In cooperation with the Global Union Research Network (GURN) information dissemination and international networking is strengthened. In 2007 the Universities of Witwatersrand (South Africa) and Campinas (Brazil) are planning to offer additional Master Programs on Labour Policies and Globalisation within the Global Labour University framework. This will further strengthen the North-South cooperation within the GLU and allow students to pursue their studies partly in the North and partly in the South.

The first phase of the Global Labour University project has been uniquely successful in

- agreeing among very diverse project partners on the structure and content of the curriculum,
- selecting a highly motivated, diverse and gender balanced group of trade unionists/students for the course,
- establishing a certified and internationally recognised Masters course on “labour policies and globalisation”,
- initiating new forms of international cooperation between trade unionists and academics
- initiating joint research and textbook development
- contributing to the international debate on global labour issues.

However, there are also many issues where students and organisers identified the need and possibilities for further improvement of the project to meet the numerous challenges like:

- managing of and benefiting from cultural diversity
- translating academic analysis and research into applicable labour policies
- productive use of the rich experiences of the participants
- ensuring full reflection of the perspectives and discourses from different parts of the world
- ensuring full gender mainstreaming in the program.

A growing number of universities and trade unions committed to cooperate further in the GLU network. There is a high number of applications for the program and the project is in a timely manner addressing a need of the international labour movement to strengthen its capacity to successful engage in the debate on a social dimension of globalisation.

2. Structure of the report

The report itself is kept short to give an overview about the overall project development. For those interested in more details a number of annexes is attached to provide comprehensive and detailed information. The idea is not to report merely on activities but also to provide new and old network partners with comprehensive reference material about the activities, debates and achievements of the last three years to maintain and strengthen the spirit of cooperation, transparency and open critical debate that is the basis of any lasting and successful network.

3. Background

Successful policies for development and poverty alleviation require country ownership and involvement of the civil society in policy development and implementation. Trade unions play an important function in organising and empowering people. They are a crucial partner in promoting the ILO Decent Work agenda. To engage effectively in the struggle for transparent governance, implementation of core labour standards, employment creation, social protection and poverty alleviation trade unions - like all civil society organisations - have to meet the permanent task of upgrading their organisational efficiency and expertise.

Trade unions throughout the world are facing the challenges of rapid economic and social changes through a globalisation process that is undermining existing regulations and arrangements without providing an adequate new regulatory framework. On national and global level trade unions need to strengthen their analytical capacity, their organisational efficiency and their political ability to represent working people effectively in social and economic policy debates in general and to promote pro-poor social and employment policies.

Despite a more complex reality, policy advice and recommendations from international institutions and also from most academic circles are often based on overconfidence in the wealth-creating capacity of freely operating market forces. In the public debate the widening gap between rich and poor, the destruction of a public infrastructure and the economic collapse of entire countries are discharged either as inevitable transition costs or explained by the lack of market reforms. Trade unions have consistently called for policies that aim at full employment, sufficient income and social security as essential objectives of a development strategy. The ILO is advocating that decent employment has to be at the core of any sustainable poverty reduction strategy, insisting that alternatives to the often disappointing results of decades of structural adjustment are necessary and possible.

In this context there is a growing understanding within the international debate that in many countries trade unions are rather part of the solution than part of the problem. The issues of good governance, civil society development and country ownership of development programs within the PRSP process or similar restructuring initiatives require a prominent role of workers' organizations.

Trade unions are, at an increasing number of occasions, invited to participate from the start in the debate about necessary economic reforms. This is clearly a success after years of trade union protest. However, at the same time, it increases the demands on trade union capacity and competency. Trade unions clearly realize that their members and society at large are not primarily interested in criticising the shortcomings of globalization, but they are keen on policy proposals that can make a difference and improve the situation.

A vision of social justice for all and coherent concepts for social and economic policies are key factors to achieve this objective. Highly committed and well-qualified trade union experts and

alliances with the academic world are vital to improve trade union capacity in these areas. The growing influence of globalization and transnational companies on the daily life of workers in most countries increases the demand for a global network and an understanding of the global economy for trade unions.

4. Project implementation of the first project phase 2002 - 2005

The Global Labour University is a response to the increasing demand for highly skilled trade unionists engaging in substantive and solution orientated discussions and negotiations with employers, governments, international institutions and civil society organisations. The master program on "Labour Policies and Globalisation" is key element of the GLU project. Additional post graduate programs, textbook and curriculum development, related research and knowledge dissemination will be developed as follow up and extension of the pioneering pilot master course.

Joint international course development

A network of trade unions and universities from different world regions cooperate on the Global Labour University. (Annex II). The curriculum for the pilot course was developed and discussed at 5 international workshops from 2003 to 2005. (Annex III –VI). The jointly developed curriculum became the basis for the accredited Master program at the University of Kassel and the FHW Berlin (Annex VII).

Based on the international curriculum development workshops the following main structure for the pilot course was agreed:

First Semester (mid October – mid February):

- Trade Union Strategies in a Global Economy
- Governance of Globalisation
- Strategies of Multinational Companies and Labour
- One World Seminar
- 1 Elective

6 week Internship with German, European and international trade union organisations and the ILO (mid February – end of March)

Second Semester (April – June):

- Economic Policy and Union Strategy
- Labour and Sustainable Development
- Organisational Development of Trade Unions
- Colloquium on current Trade Union Issues
- 2 Electives

Master thesis (July – September)

Oral Assessment (September)

Pilot course implementation

23 Students (8 men, 15 women) from 18 countries participated in the first course (Annex VIII). The program is unique in its content, composition and structure. The cooperation between trade unionists and academics, the cultural diversity of the participants and the organizers constitute both a chance and challenge. During the pilot course many members of the international network contributed to the program. In addition to the staff at the two universities academics and trade unionists from Brazil, Germany, South Africa, UK, and ILO staff taught on the course to ensure an

international perspective. Trade Union experts from Austria, Canada, the Caribbean, Germany, Mexico, South Africa and the US, as well as the ETUI, the IMF and other Global Unions gave guest lectures during the pilot course (Annex IX). The practical involvement of all partner universities in the delivery of the program is an essential precondition for productive discussion and joint future collaboration on curriculum development.

Internship program

Internships with labour organizations are key elements of the program to give students the possibility to get some practical experience about international trade union work and to become part of global labour networks. Internships stimulated students to focus their research interests on issues of relevance and practical use for the international labour movement. In several instances the internships helped to develop closer cooperation between the student and the hosting organization. A number of Global Unions hosted an intern. This cooperation will be continued and extended in the following years. A comprehensive evaluation of the internship program was undertaken and a number of conclusions were drawn for future internships (Annex X). It was seen as vital to have a good matching process between students and possible host institutions making sure that expectations from both sides are met to the largest possible degree.

Master Thesis

Students wrote their masters thesis on a wide range of labour related issues. (Annex XI). A number of the studies explored new territories and provided valuable new insights in labour issues on national and global level. Research of high quality and of general interest will be published in a series of discussion papers.

Review

High emphasis is given to the feedback from the students. Student representatives were present at meeting of the national coordinating council of the pilot course and the international GLU workshops. Independent moderators facilitated a one day mid-term review and a final review discussion. The students appreciated the program in general but mentioned also a number of problems and made a series of proposals how to improve the program further. The attached review paper is based on the criticism expressed by the students during the year and at the final discussion in September 2005. The criticism addressed major organisational, structural and content problems (Annex XII). This valuable feedback has already been used to make major changes for the new program.

Curriculum and Textbook development

There is an ongoing process to discuss and reflect on the curriculum and to develop textbooks on the core topics of the course through regular international workshops. This continuous international discourse is stabilizing the network, ensuring the high quality of the program, initiating new research and enabling fruitful debate about global labour issues. The active participation of trade unions from national and international level is important to ensure a trade union orientated focus of the program. For the first phase the following three areas were identified for the textbook development:

- institutions for global governance from a labour perspective,
- macro economic labour strategies in a global economy,
- trade unions organizational strategies and globalization.

Global Labour University Conferences

The first Global Labour University conference was organized in Berlin in May 2005 (Annex XIII). The annual Global Labour University conference will be organized at a different university every year. The concept is to develop a forum of trade union experts and academics for debate and research on relevant global labour issues. The next conference will take place April 5-6, 2006 at the University in Kassel in Germany (Annex XIV). Contributions and participation from the Global Unions would be highly welcome. The conference will work mainly in working groups and focus on

- employment and wages policies in a globalized economy
- cross boarder organizing
- institutional requirements for better global governance.

5. Continuation and Extension of the Program

22 participants from 20 countries (11 women, 11 men) were selected from 130 applicants for the second course that started in September 2005 in Germany (Annex XV). There is a clear demand among trade unionists for such a program and a need to continue and extend the program. In Latin America and Francophone Africa the language barrier is an important problem. The program has been highly attractive in the developing world and many applicants had to be turned down. Concerning the industrialized world more applications from European countries would be desirable. Global Unions with their knowledge and contacts in the different regions are important partners to disseminate the information about the program and to identify qualified applicants.

Preparations are under way to extent the program and to offer similar courses in Brazil (Annex XVI) and South Africa in 2007. The additional programs will be able to benefit from the experience of the pilot course. A second and third program in the South will also promote the creation of more academic and trade union capacity in the developing world. It will also offer students the possibility to study partly in the North and partly in the South.

6. GLU Council and Steering Committee

At the last GLU workshop which took place in May 2005 in Berlin the participants discussed a network structure for the GLU. International and national trade union organisation, universities, research institutes and other organisations supporting the international labour movement can become members of the GLU network. The members will meet once a year for an annual GLU council meeting and elect a GLU steering committee consisting of five persons to facilitate project coordination (Annex XVII). The structure is conceptualized to provide a light and transparent coordination structure for the GLU.

7. Resources

The generous financial support from the German Ministry for Development Cooperation, the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, the Hans-Böckler Foundation, the German Academic Exchange Service and the ILO provided the financial resources for the development and implementation of a masters course in "Labour Policies and Globalisation".

The enthusiastic commitment of many experts from the partner universities, the national and international labour movement and last but not least the trade unionists/students of the pilot course was the invaluable intellectual resource to implement this first project phase.

8. Achievements and lessons learned

During the first phase an active and committed network of trade unions and universities has been established. Many project partners committed time and resources to implement the project. The idea of a masters program on Labour Policies and Globalisation has been conceptualized and piloted in a first one year course. A total of several hundred trade unionists have applied for this course in 2004 and in 2005. The experience of trade unions with interns from the program was in general very positive as was the overall assessment of the project by the GU representative for the GLU. (Annex XVIII) The project partners are committed to continue and extend the program.

The curriculum and the practical course implementation require further improvement. (see Annex XII) In particular the perspective of the South needs stronger emphasis in the course as well as a stronger reflection of the gender dimension. More work is required not only to manage multicultural diversity in the program, but to make it an invaluable asset of the course. The links between the internships and possible academic work should be strengthened. Research cooperation among universities and between trade unions and academic institutions need to complement the joint work on curriculum development, teaching and text book development to make the program an important part of the international discourse on labour policies and globalisation.

9. Prospects

The Global Labour University has had a promising start. It will take a few more years to gather experience and to consolidate the curriculum. The first 'generation' of students is only now returning to their trade unions and it will be interesting to look at their future work with trade unions. The great enthusiasm of the students is very promising that they will use their newly acquired knowledge and their new international networks in their trade union work at home. The program organisers will support international networking through an Alumni-Network and through the full integration of the students in the Global Research Network www.gurn.info.

For a lasting success of the Global Labour University the development of additional programs in South Africa and Brazil in 2007 and in Asia in 2008/09 is essential. The existence of several "campuses" of the GLU is a condition for lasting internationalisation of the discourse and a genuine reflection of the different regional perspectives in the curriculum, the research agenda and the actual teaching.

The project extension can build on the experience of the pilot program. In addition to the already existing commitments from several network partners there is a need to approach donors for further funding to provide for additional scholarships, curriculum development, research and international networking.

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