Organising as a catalyst for improving work conditions among informal quarry workers in Ghana

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**ABSTRACT**

Organising has been suggested as one way to achieve decent working conditions among informal workers. This study examines how informal workers in Ghana are using organising as a catalyst for improving their working conditions. The study adopted an exploratory qualitative research design, using interviews, focus group discussions, documentary review and observation. Qualitative interpretative analysis methods were used to analyse the data. The study found that welfare-based organisations served as a catalyst for trade union organising among quarry workers. Despite the challenges confronting them in organising, informal quarry workers were able to improve their working conditions through a collective agreement with management. Specific indicators of work improvement included appointment letters for job security, hours of work and overtime, wages and salary (compensation), and training and
development of workers to enhance their skills and competencies. The study concluded that organising informal workers served as a catalyst for ensuring decent working conditions among quarry workers in Ghana. This leads to the recommendation that formal trade unions organising in the quarrying districts should be resourced to be able to organise informal quarry workers in the stone quarry sub-sector of Ghana to achieve decent work conditions for informal workers in Ghana.

**KEY WORDS**
Organising, informal workers, quarry workers, challenges, decent work conditions

**Introduction**
Workers’ organisation, also sometimes referred to as collective identity, has been identified in the literature as a tool for equalising the structural power vested in the employer (Akorsu & Odoi, 2017; Segbenya, 2019, Segbenya et al., 2022). In this context the term ‘workers organisations’ relates to any formal or informal grouping of workers at the organisational, enterprise or national level (Britwum & Akorsu, 2017). Organising, either in the formal or informal organisational forms, is important for both formal and informal workers (Segbenya, 2019). The role of workers’ organisation among informal workers is relevant for increasing the global labour movement’s membership, political leverage, and perceived legitimacy (Boampong & Tachie, 2017; Segbenya, 2019). Workers’ organisations influence resource allocation, and the experience gathered can be used to help informal workers to overcome their challenges (Nkosi, 2017). A focus on workers’ organisation can serve as the basis for the emergence of many international union federations’ investment in informal workers organising campaigns that hope to ally themselves with existing informal worker organisations (Vyas, 2017). Webster and Ludwig (2017) posit that there are several reasons for organising at the individual, local and national levels. In short, organising can help workers to negotiate with authorities or employers to improve their working conditions, share resources to achieve improved incomes, and influence policies, programmes and regulations that can directly affect them.

At the regional level, being organised allows workers to share information and learn from successes in other locations while also influencing regional decision-makers. At the highest level, which is the international level, international networks give workers a formidable, cooperative voice on the global stage to advance changes in international policies that can eventually lead to changes in national legislation (Chen, 2012). Joining the forces of informal workers can provide many benefits to the working poor in the informal economy. The benefits are felt in different domains of workers’ livelihoods and lives. Generally, organising can confer greater voice, visibility and validity on informal workers. As a result, this enables them to increase their influence on the broader environment that impinges on their livelihoods.
Workers’ organisations have been recommended as one of the ILO’s four strategic goals guiding the global development agenda until 2030, which is expected to address decent work deficits in the informal economy (Abeberese, 2014). However, the task of organising waged and self-employed informal workers is a challenge facing the global labour movement and national union congresses (GTUC, 2012). The unionisation rate among informal workers is extremely low in developing countries, where it is estimated that only 0.1 per cent of workers are unionised (Britwum, 2010; Abebrese, 2014). The growing casualisation of employment in developing economies has developed in parallel with declining trade union membership (Osei-Boateng & Ampratwum, 2011). Trade unions have not found it financially viable to organise informal sector workers (Osei-Boateng & Ampratwum, 2011) even though the informal economy makes up about 86.3% or more of the developing economy’s labour force.

Figure 1 summarises the literature drawn on for this study, highlighting the gaps in the existing knowledge and providing a conceptual framework for the research.

It is clear that both formal and informal workers’ approaches or forms of organising, such as trade unionism and welfarist approaches, have been well documented in the literature (Webster & Lugwig, 2017; Wilderman, 2017). Additionally, the purposes for which both formal and informal workers organised themselves have been reported in the literature. These include gaining voice through participation to ensure better working conditions (Nkosi, 2017). There is also literature on the inability of the formal trade unions to mobilise informal workers (Segbenya, 2019). The formal trade union organisational form has been touted as the most appropriate and formidable form of workers’ organisation, capable of ensuring better
working conditions for workers in the formal economy (Vyas, 2017). Thus the top-down approach where trade unions will approach and organise the informal workers has been recommended in the literature (Akorsu & Odoi, 2017). However, the literature reports major difficulties encountered when formal trade unions attempt to organise informal workers and, based on the literature, one could come to a conclusion that informal workers could never be unionised (GTUC, 2012; Segbenya, 2019). The dominant argument suggests that informal workers are passive agents who cannot do anything about their working conditions until organised by trade unions.

**Study gap**

Thus, the literature (Abebrese, 2014; Osei-Boateng & Ampratwum, 2011; Abeberese, 2014; Vyas, 2017) has failed to address how a bottom-up approach can be adopted whereby informal workers could use different strategies to approach formal trade unions for organising. Additionally, the literature (Abeberese, 2014; Vyas, 2017) also fails to address adequately how the existing ineffective welfare associations could be capitalised upon by the trade unions to develop formal organisations. This study takes the position that informal workers in the quarrying sub-sector are active agents who could devise better means (such as cooperatives, self-help groups, associations, or hybrid forms) to address their organisational needs, including approaching the formal trade unions for unionisation.

Furthermore, despite the literature (Webster & Lugwig, 2017; Wilderman, 2017) on the importance of organising for workers, there is a paucity in the literature of discussion relating to how informal workers can surmount challenges to organising and develop strategies to use organisation as a catalyst for enhancing their working conditions in Ghana.

This study starts from the assumption that there are three types of challenges making it difficult for informal workers to organise themselves: worker-related challenges, non-worker-related challenges and institutional challenges. Nevertheless, it presumes that informal workers as active agents could nevertheless devise means to develop forms of association to improve their fortunes.

However the existing literature (Webster & Lugwig, 2017; Wilderman, 2017) on the organisation of informal workers has largely been from the developed world. There is a need for further contributions to the literature on informal workers’ organisation, the associated challenges and how to turn these challenges into a launchpad for better working conditions from the developing economy perspective.

For this reason, this study seeks to examine how organising can serve as as a catalyst for improving working conditions, based on a study of informal quarry workers in Ghana.

**Organising perspectives**

This section discusses the theoretical perspectives and approaches to the study of organising, the organising efforts of informal workers, the forms they take and the challenges to these organisation efforts of informal workers. Two main theoretical approaches in the literature are the unitary theory and the pluralist theory. The unitary theory, proposed by Alan Fox (1966), views an organisation as a single or unified
authority and loyalty structure (Segbenya, 2019). This theory takes a paternalistic approach in which management prerogatives are regarded as legitimate, rational and accepted. Management decisions and actions are right and best in all circumstances and are in the best interest of the organisations and all workers. Any attempt to challenge those actions and decisions is seen as subversive. This approach legitimises the management authority by presuming that management and workers’ interests are the same. Trade unions are regarded as intrusions into the organisation from outside, which compete with management for the loyalty of workers. Thus, workers’ organisation in either formal or informal forms in workplaces, as characterised within this theoretical framework, will be very difficult if not impossible. It also suggests that such management will continue to see workers’ organisation as an affront to their power and an impediment to progress and will, therefore, fight it with all their abilities.

Contrasting with the view of the unitary theorist is the pluralistic theory which is also credited to Alan Fox (Segbenya, 2019). The proposition underpinning this theoretical approach is that workers’ organisations represent a coalescence of sectional groups with different values, interests, and objectives. Thus both workers and management have different and conflicting values and aspirations. This pluralist theory views trade unions as representing legitimate challenges to managerial rule or prerogatives and emphasises competition and collaboration. It considers trade unions as appropriate representative organisations which enable groups of employees to influence management decisions. In this perspective, the organisation of informal workers could be quickly achieved in workplaces whose managements’ attitudes could be characterised as pluralist.

This study made analytical use of these theoretical approaches. It presumed that, although organising remains a legitimate right enshrined in International Labour Organization conventions and the Labour Acts of countries in both developing and developed economies, in practice, the ideological and practical orientation of the management of these workers could largely influence their organisational efforts. The informal quarry workers considered in this study worked for the quarry firms as temporary and casual workers. They could have taken advantage of their legal right to organise themselves or join trade unions. However, the legal provision for organising in itself was not enough to enable it to take place; instead, it must be supported with management commitment. Management commitment to the organisational effort of workers and unions depends on their theoretical position in terms of unitarist theory (anti-organisation) or pluralist theory (for organisation). The next section examines the general organising perspectives among informal workers.

In terms of informal workers’ organisational efforts, organising informal workers can be traced to the dawn of the capitalist production era in the 18th century, where the whole economy was said to be informal (Webster, Britwum & Bhownmik 2017). Informal workers in the early industrial era organised themselves into unions, fought and won their fundamental rights. This brought improvements in their situations, which led to formalisation. However, women (alongside other workers), especially in developing countries, were left out of this process and these excluded workers made up a portion of the labour market that became known as the informal economy.
Organising the informal economy workers is strongly associated in the literature with several prominent examples. These include the founding of the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) of India in the 1970s, the formation of the Ghana Private Road Transport Union in 1935 and the General Agricultural Workers Union in 1959 in Ghana (Bonner & Spooner 2011). Organising as a pillar of decent work attracted the attention of the ILO and was discussed at the 2002 International Labour Conference (Webster, 2015), making this a strategic moment for transnational network building and alliances. Since 2000, several transnational networks of organisations of informal workers have emerged, such as HomeNet South Asia formed in 2000; StreetNet International formed in 2002; the Latin American Waste Pickers Network (Red Lacre) formed in 2005; and the International Domestic Workers’ Network formed in 2009 (Webster, 2015).

**The organisation of informal workers: forms and challenges**

In terms of forms of organising among informal workers, Carré (2013) classified the various forms of informal worker organisations as: trade unions, cooperatives, self-help groups, associations, or hybrid forms. Rosaldo, Tilly and Evans (2012) found that conventional non-member-based organisations often play a crucial role in establishing and supporting member-based organisations (MBOs) such as cooperatives, associations and unions and, furthermore, generally employ hybrid approaches.

Braga (2012) drew attention to another innovative recruitment strategy, in a model often used by NGOs when organising in the informal economy, described as a ‘worker-centred model’. Bonner and Spooner (2011) use this term to encompass a variety of social movement organisations focused primarily on empowering immigrant workers engaged in precarious informal work. Rosaldo et al. (2012:8) describe NGOs as ‘non-bureaucratic grass-roots organisations with small budgets, loose membership structures, improvisational cultures and strategies that are funded by foundation grants’.

Challenges confronting unions and other workers’ organisations can be grouped into those that are worker related, non-worker related and institutional or regulatory. However, there are some challenges in defining informal workers precisely due to the varying degrees of informality and the lack of a clear dividing line between employer and employee (Bonner & Spooner, 2011). Most Labour Acts in developing economies reinforce the division in that the contents of their Acts largely support only workers in an employment relationship. Informal workers mostly do not also perceive themselves as workers, and their organisations do not perceive themselves as allied to labour unions (Bonner & Spooner, 2010).

A second challenge to the organisation of informal workers is the lack of commitment from employers/management of firms where informal wage workers operate. Employers or management often ignore the labour laws and often dismiss informal workers who have little or no recourse to legal remedies. If regulations do exist, city authorities or law enforcement agencies may use these provisions as a source of harassment of informal workers rather than as a means to help them to improve their situation (Bonner & Spooner, 2010).

Lack of commitment from informal workers to the organising processes is a further challenge. Informal workers often work long hours for survival, and time spent on
organising can result in income loss for them. Informal workers are also frequently driven to compete with each other for customers, space and raw materials. Thus, even when they successfully organise themselves to face the authorities in crises, this collective action/organisation may be short-lived unless an ongoing common interest and purpose are identified (Bonner & Spooner, 2010).

The leadership of trade unions or workers organisations can also pose a challenge to informal workers’ organising efforts, especially when these leaders are unelected or may not be subject to recall. Most informal organisations do not have a tradition of democratic functioning, reflected in a lack of agreed rules (constitution) or, where these exist, low levels of compliance with them (Chen, Bonner, & Carré, 2015). There is also a lack of rules and compliance for informal associations of informal transport workers, street and market vendors, rural workers and fishers, among others. In some cases, leaders of informal workers have been identified as having been working for or controlled by politicians (Chen, Bonner, & Carré, 2015).

Another significant challenge for organising informal workers is the lack of adequate resources. Payment of regular membership dues is severely restricted and may be erratic and vulnerable to external shocks such as economic crises or natural disasters (Bonner & Spooner, 2011). Even more, there may be a lack of adequate resources for regulators to monitor and ensure compliance, presenting yet another challenge associated with organising in both formal and informal economies.

Employers of regularly waged informal workers do not always support the efforts and processes that will lead to the development of a collective identity among these workers. This is because employers mostly find it difficult to easily ignore the requests of organised workers as compared to unorganised workers. Some employers deliberately or unintentionally work against informal waged workers’ organising efforts (their fundamental human rights). Thus, the regulator’s role in policing and making sure that workers’ basic human rights are not abused cannot be overemphasised. Meanwhile, regulators’ roles are often compromised due to the lack of adequate resources, such as logistical and human resources challenges (Rosaldo et al. 2012).

Methodology
This study adopted an exploratory qualitative study design using an interpretive approach. The fieldwork was carried out in Ghana, a developing country noted for high deposits of granite and quarry activities for commercial, urbanisation and construction purposes.

Snowball and purposive sampling techniques were used to draw 85 respondents from (four quarry firms) from a total population of 39,536 stone quarry workers in Ghana. The respondents comprised 77 waged quarry workers, three labour inspectors, two trade union representatives and three managers of quarry firms.

Data Collection Procedure
The data gathering process had two phases. The first phase consisted of reconnaissance visits carried out in 2018, which helped to identify problems and to develop research questions and research instruments. These visits also enabled the researchers to introduce themselves to various possible respondents of the study. Access depended
largely on key informants. At this early stage of the process, non-participant observation was heavily relied upon. The second phase of entry into the study sites constituted the main data collection, which largely depended on gains and acquaintances initiated in the reconnaissance phase.

The first part of the second phase was the main source of data collection from the field, carried out from January 2019 to December 2019. The entry for the second phase was made possible by introductory letters and ethical clearance from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the University of Cape Coast, further introducing the researcher to research participants. After the official introduction to participants, data collection dates were successfully scheduled. The purpose of the interview was again explained to research respondents, and terms of confidentiality were addressed. Additionally, the interview format was explained, the interview duration was indicated, and interviewees clarified any doubts about the interview before data collection started. Permission was also sought from respondents to record the interview, and the mode of the recording was also made known to the respondents. In all cases, respondents’ consent was obtained before the interview was administered.

Several steps were taken to enhance the rigorousness of the study design in terms of reliability and validity. Reliability and validity carry different connotations regarding qualitative and quantitative studies. Qualitative reliability indicates that a procedure used by a researcher is consistent across different researchers and different projects. The suggestions of Gibbs (2007) on the need for detailed documenting, among other steps, were used as guidelines for ensuring reliability in this study. First, in terms of data management, transcripts were checked to remove obvious mistakes and avoid drifting in the definition for codes by consistently comparing data with codes and writing memos and their definitions about codes. There was also manual coding and checking for ‘inter-coder agreement’ whereby other persons were engaged to crosscheck the codes. ‘Inter-coder agreement’ in this study sought to achieve agreement between coders on the codes used for the same passage in the text. The aim was not to re-code the same passage of text but to check whether another coder would code it with the same or similar code.

On the other hand, qualitative validity is one of the strengths of qualitative research and involves the tendency for the procedures employed by a researcher to result in the accuracy of findings (Creswell, 2009). According to Creswell, qualitative validity refers to determining whether the findings of a study are accurate from the standpoint of the researcher, the participant or the readers of an account. The triangulation method, which allows data to be obtained from different sources, was the first strategy used to ensure validity. Different data collection instruments were employed, and data obtained with one instrument was equally compared with data obtained from other instruments. For example, the observation guide was employed to validate what respondents had indicated in separate interviews and focus groups.

Thus, by employing data collection methods such as interviews, observations, focus group discussion and documentary review, it was expected that the validity of the outcome of the study would be strengthened. A second method involved member checking, involving a follow-up interview with some respondents in the study who were given opportunities to comment on some earlier findings. Another strategy
adopted was spending prolonged time in the field. The last strategy was adopted to ensure qualitative validity in this study was the use of external auditors who reviewed the entire project. The last phase of entry into the study sites was designed purposely to validate the analysed data from respondents.

Data collection instruments
Data collection instruments were mainly the semi-structured interview protocol guided by the study’s research questions and a focus group discussion guide supported by the non-participant observation guide. The research team gathered field data. The observation consisted of 30 minutes per day over 12 days resulting in six observation hours by the team.

Data analysis
The interview data collected were transcribed and coded. The abductive approach to coding, which combines both deductive and inductive coding, was used. The abductive coding method was used because of its attunement to looking for surprises in the data in order to facilitate rethinking the existing theories. The notion of abduction encourages a ‘flexible theoretical framework as well as a flexible approach to the empirical framework, which manifests itself in a combination of inductive and deductive coding in accordance with the needs of the emerging analysis’ (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019:14). Thus, codes were developed to refer to the various forms and strategies of organising among informal quarry workers and challenges associated with organising efforts of informal quarry workers. This study specifically used qualitative interpretative analysis because it deduces from the data obtained and relies more on what it feels like to participate in the action under study (Morrison, 2012). In the interpretative analysis, the researchers relied on their experience in the research settings to be able to read the information provided by the subjects involved in the study. Theories, conceptual framework and issues and labour laws constitute the ‘experiences and settings’ of this study upon which the analysis of the empirical data from the field was carried out. The qualitative interpretative analysis adopted in this study also uses thematic analysis for the data analysis.

Findings of the study
The presentation of the result and the analysis in this section is grouped under three perspectives: first, how informal quarry workers organise themselves; second, the challenges that confront the organising efforts of informal quarry workers; and third, how informal quarry workers have surmount these challenges by using organising to enhance their working conditions.

Organising among informal stone quarry workers in Ghana
Organising among informal stone quarry workers in this study was a strategic effort by workers to make their voices heard (participation in management) and gain representation at the enterprise level. The study, through interviews, identified the organisational forms among informal quarry workers and found two main types: Welfare-Based Association and Trade Union Organisation. The presentation in the
ensuing sections is based on these two forms of organisation among this category of workers.

**Welfare-based association among informal wage quarry workers**

Informal waged quarry workers in some of the quarries had realised the need to form the welfare-based associations under several circumstances. These included when management had allegedly unfairly sacked a colleague and the development of solidarity and safety nets, such as helping members in financial needs.

Workers in one of the four quarries studied contributed GHC.5 ($0.859) every week to the organisation. A member who later doubled as the leader of the welfare-based association purposively informed all the workers about the formation of the organisation, but only 19 out of 29 workers consented and became members of the welfare association at the workplace for this quarry. However, management’s lack of acceptance of the association meant that there was no space and time for these workers to meet. Consequently, this membership-based organisation lasted for only 20 weeks.

Though workers alleged that the lack of management support and time made it difficult for members to meet, it was also discovered that the autocratic leadership style exhibited by the leadership of the welfare association could also be regarded as a contributing factor. The narratives of the initiator and leader of the association in an in-depth interview attest to this. The leader indicated that:

> A worker was sacked unfairly, and we went to see management as a group of waged workers to apologise, but management rejected our plea and refused to reinstate our colleague and did not pay any compensation to him. I then concluded that we need a welfare association to help each other as workers, so I asked a few colleagues that we should contribute Gh 5 every week for a worker in turn since our wages were paid every two weeks. Nineteen (19) out of 29 wage workers agreed and started with the contribution. I was the leader and any week that the money/contribution was ready, I enveloped it and give it to one worker until all the nineteen workers benefited from this self-arranged welfare scheme within 19 weeks. I then decided that the next round of contribution should be increased to Gh 10 ($1,718). Members neither concerted openly or otherwise; however, nobody ever contributed any amount from then, and that was the end of the self-arranged welfare association that I led to form for wage workers in my company (Waged worker, February, 2018).

As much as the initiative on the part of the leader might have been positive, it can also be seen that the leader dictated the weekly amount paid as dues by members. How the leader emerged as the leader of the association could be traced to the fact that he initiated the whole process of forming the welfare-based association at the quarry. The benefit of this association to members was financial support for the 20 weeks of its existence. It is also apparent that his (self-proclaimed) leadership attempt to increase the amount unilaterally led to the end of the association.

Notwithstanding this, the study also identified the existence and functioning of welfare-based organisations in two other quarries (out of the four quarries studied). Both informal wage quarry workers and permanent quarry workers in these quarries
belong to the same welfare association in the companies. The welfare association had executive members who contributed financially and emotionally to support members in need. There was management support for the welfare associations found in these quarries. Through the support of the management, the welfare association involved almost every worker in the organisation, and the monthly dues were deducted at source from workers’ wages and salaries. In addition, the members of these associations never complained about the leadership style of their leaders (suggesting that they might have been experiencing a more democratic leadership style).

**Trade union organising**

Trade union organisation of informal wage quarry workers was only identified at two of the four quarries involved in this study (Quarries A & C). Trade unions were not aware of the existence of Quarry B and D in the study area. There were two main trade unions involved in organising waged quarry workers in the two quarries. These trade unions were the Construction, Building and Material Workers Union (CBMWU) and, more recently, the General Construction, Manufacturing and Quarry Workers Union (GCMQWU). While the latter was responsible for organising informal wage quarry workers in Quarry A, the former focused on organising only permanent workers in Quarry C. The discussion in this section will thus focus more on the organising activities of the General Construction, Manufacturing and Quarries Workers Union (GCMQWU) in Quarry A because the study is focused on informal quarry workers in selected quarries in Ghana.

The GCMQWU has been in operation for barely four and a half years as of May 2021. It is a breakaway union from the CBMWU. The union had two main strategies: either the union representatives approached the workers, or the workers approached the trade union (GCMQWU) for unionisation. In the former case, industrial relations officers and union organisers spearheaded the organising activities on behalf of the union. When the approach originated with the workers, this depended mostly on enterprise-level organisational form such as welfare-based associations, with executives already in place, and the trade union was called upon to enrol the workers into a union. Once in a while, some employers also called the trade union to unionise their workers.

Reasons for organising informal wage quarry workers, from the trade union perspective, as disclosed in an interview by the trade union representative of GCMQWU, were to create and promote a harmonious relationship between workers and the employer and to bring cooperation and understanding between them. Most importantly, the aim was to protect and promote the rights and interests of workers through collective bargaining for better conditions of service and focus on training and education of members.

In the quarries studied, the approach had come from the workers (a trade union representative confirmed in an interview that a representative of the workers had approached the trade union to organise them). The union executives met workers outside the work premises during their break time and after work, and educated them about the benefits of the union. Subsequently, enrolment forms were given to the workers to provide their details. Local executives of the proposed union were elected and introduced to management and a meeting was arranged with the management of the quarry. The union’s proposal was sent to management for negotiations to begin.
According to the trade union representative, the next stage was that a labour inspector from the district hosting the quarries was informed and later came to verify and ascertain that there was no existing union in the workplace. The labour officer also facilitated the process by sitting in for the drafting of the collective bargaining agreement (CBA) document with workers and management (The district Labour Inspector confirmed in an interview that he had participated in the process). At the time of data collection, the GCMQWU had successfully obtained a certificate for unionising workers of Quarry A. Through the effort and leadership of GCMQWU, workers of Quarry A now have a collective bargaining agreement with management. GCMQWU have commenced organising activities at the quarry. The sequence of events is summarised in Table 1.

Table 1: Formal trade union approach to organising processes in developing economy

| Step | Description |
|------|-------------|
| 1.   | Unionisation begins |
| 2.   | Signing of CBA |
| 3.   | Negotiation |
| 4.   | Issuing of certificate to labour union |
| 5.   | Labour department informed of the union |
| 6.   | Introduction of union to management |
| 7.   | Filling of forms and election of local executives |
| 8.   | Whistle blower |

Source: Authors (2018)

Challenges associated with organising among informal waged quarry workers

The discussion of the challenges of organising informal quarry workers in Ghana is presented from the stakeholders’ perspectives. These stakeholders are quarry workers, management, trade union and regulators. Thus, challenges relating to workers and trade unions are considered as worker-related challenges and challenges relating to the management of the quarries represent the non-worker-related challenges. Challenges relating to government and its regulatory agencies represent the regulatory challenges.

Workers in all the quarries visited indicated high levels of awareness of the trade union and its relevance.

The first challenge associated with unionisation was the lack of permanent membership (a non-worker related challenge). According to the workers, waged quarry workers were quickly sacked by management even for non-grievous offences. Waged workers also indicated that workers do not have appointment letters and could be sacked at any time, which could, therefore, affect the strength and sustainability of their membership in the union. These workers revealed that the management of their quarry knew the
implications of workers being unionised and hence, frowned on workers gathering at the workplace for any reason. The management terminated appointments of workers suspected of trying to organise or bring workers together. According to the workers, this had discouraged them from coming together for any welfare and unionisation issues.

From a management perspective, the key challenge associated with organising was the high wage bills of unionised workers and the resulting increase in production costs (these are also non-worker-related challenges). The high cost of production had translated into high prices of goods/stock for customers. The resultant effect was low sales and loss of customers to competitors. A challenge identified by the trade unions organising informal quarry workers was the lack of management cooperation (a non-worker-related challenge). Some management members threatened workers and discouraged them from joining unions to maintain the status quo.

Union representatives interviewed revealed that, due to low levels of education of informal quarry workers, some were quickly swayed by these management threats. Some waged quarry workers also failed to consider their future in terms of social security, tax deductions for the government for the development of the country, redundancy packages and other factors (a worker-related challenge). These factors influenced the workers, and the union had to take time and resources to orient these workers to be able to unionise them.

Another challenge facing trade unions in organising quarry workers was inadequate logistics and human resources (a non-worker related challenge). Though GCMQWU had about 6,000 organised workers, including three quarry firms, in its jurisdiction, the inadequacy of resources was hampering its progress. Apart from four regions, the union had been unable to establish regional branches. It received calls from workers in all regions with requests to organise them, but due to logistical challenges, the union could not easily and quickly move to these sites for the organising process and subsequent follow-ups. Some of these challenges were indicated to have also affected the organisation of quarry workers in the study area. In terms of staff strength, the union had only a skeletal staff strength of six workers who were paid a monthly allowance because the union could not afford to pay salaries.

Labour inspectors from the Labour Department, the regulatory agency, were interviewed, and the first hurdle identified was a logistical challenge (an institutional challenge). The labour inspector was expected by the national Labour Act (2003) (Act 650) to visit the quarries at least twice a year. Though the number of visits seemed very inadequate to the inspector, it could not be changed due to the lack of official vehicles. This makes the movement of labour inspectors from one organisation to another very challenging. An inspector disclosed in an interview that:

*Sometimes we go for a visit by public means of transport. Some of the quarries are not very close, and one would have to walk for a distance. The situation is alarming when the weather is sunny, coupled with loaded trucks using the dusty road in the afternoon (Labour Inspector).*

The lack of vehicles explains the inadequate number of visits to ensure that employers do not trample upon basic labour rights in the quarrying sub-sector. The situation also exposes the inspectors to several health-related challenges.
It was also revealed that the labour department was suffering from inadequate human resources (an institutional challenge). There were some 300-500 enterprises for the labour inspector, including these quarries, which his outfit was supposed to visit at least twice a year. However, the minimum visits could not even be achieved for all these enterprises with an inadequate labour force. According to the respondent, it had come to his notice that some quarries disregard labour laws, especially regarding workers’ freedom to unionise. Regardless of this challenge, the labour inspection department remained an advisory body, playing only advisory roles, and could not prosecute such offenders (institutional challenge).

**Organising as a catalyst for enhancing working conditions**

The analysis compared eleven indicators of working conditions before and after organising to determine the effect of organising on the working conditions of informal workers. This analysis was based on a documentary analysis of the collective agreement between organised workers and their management in the quarry where informal quarry workers were organised. The results can be seen in Table 2. The results revealed that all the eleven indicators before organising depicted precarious working conditions for quarry workers. However, after organising that resulted in a collective agreement between management and workers, all the eleven indicators that had been very precarious were transformed into indicators of decent work in relation to the working conditions of informal quarry workers in Ghana. The results suggest that organising serves as a catalyst for decent work conditions for quarry workers in Ghana.

**Table 2: Comparing working conditions of quarry workers before and after organising**

| S/N | Decent work indicator                  | Status before organising | Status after organising through CA |
|-----|----------------------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1   | Appointment letter for job security    | Non-existence            | Will be provided.                 |
| 2a  | Hours of work and Overtime             | About 70 hours a week    | 40 hours per week.                |
| 2b  | Overtime calculation                   | Half of the daily mark plus Gh. 2 for feeding | 1. Monday to Friday = NHR*1.25  
2. Saturday: = NHR *1.50; and  
3. Sunday and Holidays: NHR* 2.00. |
| 3   | Wages and salary increment             | Determined arbitrary     | To be determined annually         |
| 4   | Training and development               | Orientation to start work | Refresher courses and further studies |
| 5   | Leaves including holidays, sick, annual and maternity leave | Not observed | 21 days of annual leave        
10 days of casual leave  
12 Weeks minimum maternity leave  
Two times medical checks in a year |
| S/N | Decent work indicator | Status before organising | Status after organising through CA |
|-----|-----------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 6   | Occupational injury and health (safety at the workplace) | Employer cares for the 1st day of medical bill | Work Men Compensation Act of Ghana would be activated |
|     | Night shift risk allowance | Not catered for | 25% of the basic daily wage |
|     | Risk allowance for field workers | No provision | 20% of daily wage |
| 7   | Provision of protective clothing | Responsibility of both worker and employer | Employer’s responsibility based on wear and tear for provision of: |
|     | | | Torchlight and safety boot for watchmen |
|     | | | masks for welders, aprons, helmets, working gear, boots and nose covers for operators; aprons and gloves for storekeepers |

Source: Field data (2018) CA = Collective agreement

| S/N | Decent work indicator | Previous practice | The outcome of proposed CA |
|-----|-----------------------|-------------------|---------------------------|
| 8   | Provision of health insurance | Not in existence | Compulsory for an employer to register workers on NHIS |
| 9   | Termination of appointment and entitlement | Employer’s discretion and entitlements hardly paid | By worker based on ill-treatment, sexual harassment |
|     | | | By employer based on medical ground, unfit; inadequate residual capacity, proven misconduct |
|     | | | A one-month notice from either party |
| 10  | Disciplinary measures | Sacked outright | Absent without permission for less than 4 days = warning letter with one-day wage deduction |
| 11  | Death of a worker and relatives | No provisions | A suitable coffin or Gh. 2000.00 & 2 bottles of schnapps/full piece of Calico & Gh1,000.00 (Muslim) |
|     | | | Transportation of corpse to hometown |
|     | | | Gh. 300 for a worker whose father/mother dies |
|     | | | Gh. 1,500 for and cost of the coffin for the death of spouse or children below 18 year |

Source: Field data (2018) CA = Collective agreement
The first element or indicator in Table 2 is the appointment letter for job security. Securing a job through a statement of assurance in an appointment letter was previously non-existent for most informal quarry workers in Ghana. However, under a collective agreement after organising, workers would now be issued appointment letters which would be renewed after every two years to replace the verbal daily contract between workers and management that was previously practiced. This means that workers cannot be easily sacked without justification by the employer. Additionally, workers’ casual status would also be valid for only a three months probational period, and workers would have to be made compulsorily permanent workers upon expiration of the three months. All these provisions were captured under clause 3.1 of the agreement. This would, therefore, bring quarry firms into line with the dictates of section 75 of the Labour Act of Ghana and workers would be more secure than before.

Hours of work would also be restricted to 40 hours maximum for every wage quarry worker, with daily hours of work left to the discretion of the employer. This provision, as encapsulated in clause 3.3 (a) of the collective agreement after organisation, would afford the workers a forty-eight hour rest period after every 40 hours of work. This would amount to full adherence to both sections 33 and 39 of the Labour Act of Ghana. This recent development also means that management of Quarry A upholds Convention No.1 on maximum working hours for decent work by ILO (ILO, 2012).

Closely related to working hours were wages and salaries. The practice whereby informal quarry workers worked for more than eight years without the commensurate annual wage would be terminated under the collective agreement. The agreement requires the employer and workers to review workers’ salary and wages upwards every year as stipulated in clause 3.4 (c) of the agreement. Thus, Baah’s (2006) assertion that collective agreement in Ghana had indexation and other mechanisms for wage increment due to general economic condition was upheld in the stone quarry sub-sector as well. This means that though the wage rate workers received was already decent; it would be improved annually to take care of economic realities. The formula for computation and payment for overtime looks very transparent and rewarding as compared to the customary practices before workers organised themselves. Sub-section C of clause 3.5 of the agreement stipulated that where the average working week is 40 hours’ work from Monday to Friday, overtime will be paid at standard hourly rate multiplied by 1.25; Saturday: standard hourly rate multiplied by 1.50; and Sunday and holidays: normal hourly rate multiplied by 2.00. Sub-section ‘d’ of the same section of the agreement computes the basic hourly rate as defined as basic daily rate divided by eight.

Enhancing the competencies of quarry workers through on-the-job or off-the-job methods is another novelty as a result of organising among workers. Section 10 of the new agreement between workers and management stipulates that the employer will encourage and assist employees in attaining a higher level of education and skills in those fields of education and crafts applicable to the employer’s interest through internal and external training under NVTI Act 352 (1970). Additionally, the sub-section ‘b’ of the agreement added that where the employee pursues a course with the approval of the employer, the employer shall reimburse tuition fee, cost of education materials and examination fees to the successful employee. This means that the situation where some quarry workers could not further their education will be a thing of the past.
Informal wage quarry workers were not entitled to any annual leave prior to this agreement. Under its terms, workers (non-supervisory grade) who have done 12 months continuous service would now be granted leave with pay for 21 days. A worker is also entitled to a casual leave for ten days in any calendar year after the worker has taken his/her annual leave. Wage quarry workers currently do not enjoy any sick leave. Thus, this employer now conformed to sections 20 and 32 of the Labour Act of Ghana and the ILO holiday with pay convention 1970 (No. 32) (ILO, 2013) on minimum annual leave days provision. However, the 21 days provision in the collective bargaining agreement was higher than the regulatory requirement. This would then agree with ILO’s (2006) assertion that paid leaves in the collective agreement are more beneficial than statutory entitlements.

Previously, female quarry workers would have to choose between their job and giving birth. A pregnant clerical female quarry worker who was an interviewee for this study had to leave Quarry A because she was pregnant. However, the new collective agreement now has a provision to address this challenge facing female temporal/casual quarry workers. Clause 4.5 of the collective agreement states that a female worker who has completed at least 12 months of service before her confinement shall be granted 12 weeks of maternity leave with pay. If medical treatment for a female worker during ante- and postnatal period who qualifies for maternity leave is not available under the national health insurance scheme, the employer shall be responsible for such medical services. This latter provision in the agreement meets the dictates of the Labour Act of Ghana (2003) (Act 651) and articles 8 and 9 of the maternity protection convention, 200 (No. 183) (ILO, 2014; 2015).

The provision of protective equipment/apparel for workers to ensure their safety and health was one major challenge facing wage/temporal quarry workers in Ghana (see Table 1). The situation where some wage quarry workers in some of the quarries buy safety apparel themselves would no longer be the case. This is because sub-section one of clause 5.3 of the agreement made it compulsory for the employer to provide torchlight and safety boots for guards; masks (for welders), aprons, helmets, working gear, boots, and nose covers for operators; and aprons and gloves for storekeepers. Additionally, all field workers were to be provided raincoats during the rainy seasons. The agreement stipulates that management should provide dust masks for workers in dusty sites and also ensure that safety equipment is supplied regularly and remain the property of the employer for a maximum of 12 months but would be replaced at the employer’s cost only on standard wear and tear basis. This provision would, thus, conform to article 16 of ILO’s convention 155. Clause 5.3.2 also outlaws the refusal or failure by a worker to use the protective equipment supplied by the employer for the work for which it/they were supplied. Currently, the labour inspectors indicated the refusal of workers to put on protective apparel provided by the employer as one of the challenges facing them during their inspections. Thus, this provision would help not only the labour inspectors but also the employer in order to reduce the level of occupational injuries and their subsequent cost implications to the employer.

Another area of decent working conditions for quarry workers in Ghana is occupational injuries, diseases and insurance coverage (see point 8 in Table 1). The customary arrangement for quarry workers (Quarries A and B) was that workers bear
almost every cost of medical bills for injuries sustained at the workplace. There was also no health insurance provider for these workers, though the majority of them had registered with the National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS). However, sections 3.9 and 5.3.6 jointly addressed these challenges with the introduction of the Workmen Compensation Law. The collective agreement stipulates that in an event where a worker suffers occupational diseases, dies or suffers personal injury by accident arising out of and in the course of his/her employment, the Workmen Compensation Act 1987 (PNDC 187) will apply. Apart from being compulsory for the employer to ensure that all workers and their spouses under the NHIS register with a reputable insurance company, the agreement also indicated that when prescribed drugs are not under the NHIS drug lists, the employer shall reimburse the cost of the drugs to the worker. Should a worker suffer any illness outside the working time, the worker shall visit the designated hospital of the company for medical attention and submit bills and records on visitation to the employer. The employer may investigate medical bill receipts from external health facilities for their genuineness and make payment to cater for some part or even all the bills. The highest amount to be paid for non-occupational illness is GH. 600 per annum.

The previous practice was that shift workers were not entitled to any special allowances for the risk they took in coming to work for the night shifts and high-risk allowance for the dangerous quarry activities they do. However, the agreement now provides that workers required to work at night shift between 10 pm to 6 am for production reasons would receive 25% of basic daily salary as night shift allowance. Guards who usually work during the night because of their duties were exempted from this provision. All other quarry workers working in hazardous areas in the quarries would be entitled to 20 per cent of their daily wages in addition to the standard daily rate as a high-risk allowance.

Grounds for termination as now established in the collective agreement include a mutual agreement between a worker and the employer, by the worker on the grounds of ill-treatment or sexual harassment, and by the employer on the death of the worker. The employer could also terminate a worker’s appointment if the worker is found to be medically unfit for employment, unable to carry out his/her work due to accident, incompetent or has proven misconduct. A one month notice of written termination of appointment would be required from either party to terminate a contract of employment. Remuneration on termination of employment was also considered. A worker is entitled to any remuneration earned or deferred before the termination. Benefits to be paid to the worker upon the termination of appointment would depend on the tenure of the worker. One-half of a worker’s salary was to be paid for a tenure of three months to 12 months, and two months for a tenure above 12 months. Other issues addressed by the agreement included severance pay, severance benefits, and ex-gratia entitlement, long service awards, grievances procedure and strikes and lockouts, and vehicle maintenance allowance.

**Discussion of findings**

This study has examined organising as a catalyst for improving working conditions among informal quarry workers in Ghana. Specifically, organisational forms and
strategies, challenges associated with organising and how organising was used to better the working conditions of informal quarry workers were examined. The findings that informal quarry workers initiated the organisational approach by contacting trade unions for unionisation is a confirmation that these workers adopted a bottom-up approach. It suggests that if the quarry workers had not consulted the trade union themselves, they would have been left unattended, like other quarry workers who were never contacted by the trade unions. That workers are approaching trade unions for organising in this manner brings into question the appropriateness or suitability of the organising strategy used by the trade unions in the quarry sub-sector, suggesting that this approach could easily and unnecessarily delay the unionisation process.

The results suggest that other quarry workers who had no trade union organisation in their workplaces had not yet contacted the trade unions. Other strategies were notably lacking. Using churches and mosques and politicians as launch pads to organise domestic workers in Ghana, as found by Akorsu and Odoi (2017) was absent in the quarrying sub-sector. Similarly, the strategy of drawing on the public arena intending to restore the dignity and justice for socially devalued and economically marginalised workers, found by Chun (2009) was also not found in this study for organising informal quarry workers in Ghana. Additionally, we found no evidence of other organising strategies such as rallies, struggles, mobilisation and public profile for organising in the quarrying subsector in Ghana. Neither was there any evidence of strategies with mass appeals such as street theatre, song and oral traditions, which have been useful in organising informal workers in India (Vyas, 2017), among the informal workers in the quarries studied.

Another feature of the workers’ approach, or bottom-up organising strategy, used by informal workers in Ghana that confirmed the activeness of informal workers was the strategic role played by the welfare associations. The welfare associations were capitalised upon as a catalyst for the unionisation process by the trade union. The finding that welfare associations served as a catalyst for trade union organising confirms that of Akorsu and Odoi (2017) that informal workers are not passive agents unable to do anything about their situation.

There was evidence that these informal workers faced major challenges in their attempts to organise, including the use of threats by management and reductions in weekly wages to discourage them from unionising (which is a non-worker-related challenge). This is a breach of the Labour Act of Ghana (Segbenya, 2019). Section 79 of the Labour Act (Act 651) provides that every worker has the right to form or join a trade union of their choice to promote and protect the worker’s economic and social interests (Akorsu, 2010). The denial of this opportunity affects the social well-being of these workers. These findings support those of Chen, Bonner, & Carré (2015) that employers are abusing the social rights of workers, especially those in the informal economy. This draws attention to the need for labour inspectors to visit these quarry sites regularly for routine inspections so that the excesses of employers can be checked and curtailed. Unfortunately, the relevant regulatory agency (Labour Inspection Directorate) is confronted with logistical challenges (institutional challenges). This also means that the employers can mistreat the workers with impunity in the knowledge that the inspectors will not visit these quarries or prosecute the offending employers.
This failure is blamed on the under-resourced labour department in terms of requisite labour inspectors. This calls into question the government's commitment to its regulatory role in a tripartite system in which it is supposed to use the structural power vested in it to ensure that employers do not 'bully' labour. With political will, the situation could be remedied, given the large numbers of graduates undertaking national service. These graduates could be posted to the labour department to beef up the human resource needs at no extra cost.

Institutional challenges emerged very strongly among all the challenges (given that workers are committed to the organising efforts) since they have considerable potential to ameliorate the effects of other challenges on the organising abilities of informal workers. Addressing institutional challenges could restore confidence in workers and serve as protection for informal quarry workers who are interested in organising themselves, helping them to gain voice and participation as well as to obtain a decent working conditions at their workplaces.

Despite the challenges they faced, informal workers had, through their own organising efforts, achieved a collective agreement (CA) with management which indicated better working conditions for them as depicted in Table 2.

**Theoretical and practical implications**

The findings of this study have several implications in relation to the tension between the unitary and pluralist theories discussed in the introduction, which were used to frame this study. The (unitary) axiom that management prerogatives are legitimate, rational and accepted (Fox, 1966), creating a work environment characterised by a paternalistic approach, was found to be unable to serve the best organising interests of informal quarry workers in this study. On the contrary, this proposition was rather used by the management of the quarries to stifle the organisational efforts of informal workers in the quarrying sub-sector. Thus, the axiom of the unitary theory that management decisions and actions are right and best in all circumstances and are in the best interest of the organisations and all workers (Fox, 1966) was not upheld by the findings of the study. It rather came out that management actions influenced by the unitary theory served as a major challenge (non-workers related challenges) confronting organising informal workers in Ghana.

The study's findings have several implications for the alternative, pluralist, approach. The outcome of this study confirmed the proposition that both workers and management have different and conflicting values and aspirations, interests, and objectives (Fox, 1966). Thus as much as the workers see unionisation or workers organisation as a legitimate right for social cohesion, voice and participation for better working conditions, management of the quarries regarded such moves as unacceptable and disrespectful, presenting a major challenge to the organisation of informal workers.

Meanwhile, this study has established that it is not enough to wait for management to accept and be committed to the propositions of the pluralist theory. Instead, a strong institutional arrangement is needed to ensure a level playing field for management and workers in organising informal workers. A well-resourced regulatory agency such as the Labour Inspectorate would be able to offer workers some protection to go about
their legitimate organising activities without fear of dismissal or termination of their appointment.

At a more general level, the ability of informal quarry workers to organise themselves for better working conditions, despite the many challenges confronting them, revealed that these workers are active agents able to tackle their challenges. This perspective is, however, missing in the theoretical literature that informed this study.

Closely related to the theoretical implications of the findings of the study are the practical implications. It has been established that both workers and management of the quarries do not wield the same level of power, and that there is a need for regulatory policing to ensure fairness at the workplace for informal workers. Regular visits by regulatory agencies emerged very strongly as a means to encourage organising among informal workers. Thus, it has become imperative to resource regulatory agencies to visit quarry sites.

**Conclusion and policy implication**

Welfare-based organisations were identified as just a short-term organisational form. Even when confronted with the lack of management support and autocratic leadership style, welfare-based organisations nevertheless served as a catalyst for trade unionism. Trade unions still employed traditional organisational strategies that were inadequate; several other quarry workers covered by the study were yet to be contacted by trade unions (Quarry B and Quarry D). Many of the unionisation activities in the sub-sector was left to the initiative of workers proactively calling on unions to unionise them.

The unionisation activities of trade unions in the sub-sector were met with a lack of management support, logistical challenges and the unpreparedness of some wage quarry workers to pay union dues out of their wages. These challenges had delayed the unionisation process for workers. Labour inspectors also had logistical and human resource challenges to adequately visit the quarries to ensure that employers do not use threats, intimidation and victimisation to discourage unionisation, a legitimate worker right. The regulator, the Labour Department, also suffered from a lack of power to prosecute offending employers.

Despite these challenges, informal workers have succeeded in organising and winning collective agreement to achieve decent work conditions. We can thus conclude that organising of workers served as a catalyst for ensuring decent working conditions among quarry workers in Ghana.

In terms of practical recommendation, these results indicate that the labour departments in the quarrying districts be resourced to be able to inspect and enforce international and national laws on freedom of organising among informal workers in the stone quarry sub-sector. In the short term, the labour department should request the National Service Secretariat to annually send graduate personnel to beef up the human resource needs of the department. In the long run, the government of Ghana should employ more permanent labour inspectors for the labour department and its district offices. Logistical support should also be readily provided by the government of Ghana or development partners.
The mandate of the Labour Department should be reviewed through the Labour Act (2003) of Ghana (Act 651) to make it more binding. The review is needed so that the labour inspectors and the department exercising the advisory role provision in practice can also prosecute managers of quarries found flouting labour directives and provisions in the Labour Act on organising.

Waged quarry workers should revive all defunct welfare-based organisations in quarries where there were no formal trade unions organising under the support of trade unions, since these organisations can be seen to serve as catalysts for undertaking formal trade unionism to achieve better working conditions among quarry workers in Ghana. This also calls for orientation by trade unions for quarry workers on the importance of organising.

Trade unions involved in organising informal wage quarry workers should use more proactive organising strategies. These would help to organise other wage quarry workers without trade union form of organising. Strategies involving individuals, churches, mosques, and community-based and non-governmental organisations could also be useful in this regard. The trade union (GCMQWU) could also be more aggressive by contacting workers through their employers’ details at the Registrar General Department for organising rather than waiting for workers to contact them.

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