IMPLEMENTING AN INCLUSIVE NATIONAL TRIPARTITE CHARTER ON LABOUR RELATIONS FOR DECENT WORK IN UGANDA: AN EVIDENCE REVIEW

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The Economic Policy Research Centre (EPRC) is an autonomous not-for-profit organisation established in 1993 with a mission to foster sustainable growth and development in Uganda through advancement of research –based knowledge and policy analysis. Since its inception, the EPRC has made significant contributions to national and regional policy formulation and implementation in the Republic of Uganda and throughout East Africa. The Centre has also contributed to national and international development processes through intellectual policy discourse and capacity strengthening for policy analysis, design and management. The EPRC envisions itself as a Centre of excellence that is capable of maintaining a competitive edge in providing national leadership in intellectual economic policy discourse, through timely research-based contribution to policy processes.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF ACRONYMS

CBAs	Collective Bargaining Agreements
COFTU	Central Organisation of Free Trade Unions
EPRC	Economic Policy Research Centre
FUE	Federation of Uganda Employers
ILO	International Labour Organisation
LMIs	Labour Market Institutions
MGLSD	Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development
MoFPED	Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development
MoLG	Ministry of Local Government
MoPS	Ministry of Public Service
NOTU	National Organisation of Trade Unions
NTCLR	National Tripartite Charter on Labour Relations
PWDs	Persons with Disabilities

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Social dialogue is essential for resolving industrial disputes, promoting workplace harmony, and balancing the interests of workers, employers, and government through negotiation and consensus. This review assessed the implementation of Uganda's 2013 National Tripartite Charter on Labour Relations (NTCLR), its effectiveness in fostering inclusive labour governance, and the legal, operational, and political challenges limiting its impact. It also identifies priority actions for the ongoing review process.

Findings from policy dialogues with government, employers, and workers' representatives show that the NTCLR has strengthened industrial relations by expanding collective bargaining agreements across sectors such as tea, coffee, hospitality, education, and floriculture. In several export-oriented industries, improved labour standards have enhanced worker welfare and productivity. The Charter has also served as an important operational guide, helping to interpret labour relations where statutory enforcement is weak.

However, the Charter's effectiveness remains constrained by legal inconsistencies and institutional weaknesses. Contradictions between the Constitution, the Labour Unions Act, and the Employment Act create ambiguity around union formation, recognition, and collective bargaining. The "one union per enterprise" clause is particularly contentious, as it conflicts with constitutional guarantees of freedom of association and has proven difficult to implement in practice. The continued registration of multiple unions within the same sectors has led to duplication, rivalry, and weakened bargaining power. In addition, the NTCLR is not legally binding and lacks a clear enforcement and accountability framework.

Implementation challenges include weak coordination among tripartite actors, limited institutional capacity, slow dispute resolution, inadequate labour inspection, low awareness of the Charter, and insufficient monitoring and evaluation systems. Political interference and unclear role definitions further undermine trust and effective collaboration. Inclusivity also remains limited. With the majority of Uganda's workforce in informal employment and increasing participation in digital and gig-based work, many workers, including informal, domestic, and platform workers, remain outside structured social dialogue and labour protections.

To strengthen the revised Charter, priority actions include: i) Reviewing or replacing the "one union per enterprise" with a clearer coordination and negotiation framework consistent with constitutional principles. ii) Clarifying roles, mandates, and communication channels among tripartite partners to improve coordination, transparency, and accountability. iii) Formally recognising emerging forms of work, including digital and gig work, within social dialogue structures. iv) Clearly defining stakeholder responsibilities in organising and integrating informal workers into labour governance systems.

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper examines the extent to which Uganda's 2013 National Tripartite Charter on Labour Relations has been effective in promoting dialogue among social partners, as mandated. This evidence-gathering and synthesising exercise was intended to inform the ongoing efforts spearheaded by the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development (MGLSD) to review the Charter's performance following more than 10 years of implementation. Social Dialogue (divided into three basic types --bipartite[1], tripartite[2] and tripartite plus[3]) is defined by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) as any form of negotiations, consultations, and information exchanges between governments, employers, and workers on critical issues of common interest, aimed at promoting social justice, industrial peace, and economic development (Parez and Luis, 2002; Junko, 2003; ILO, 2020). Its success relies on strong and independent workers' and employers' organisations, political commitment, respect for fundamental rights, and institutional support.

Globally, many countries are practising social dialogue as a means of engaging in public policy formulation and reform, with people at the centre. The practice stems from countries that have ratified ILO Convention No. 144, which requires governments to consult employers' and workers' representatives on proposals concerning public-interest reforms, such as minimum wages, working hours, salaries, annual leave, and unionisation. Further, the principles of freedom of association and right to collective bargaining are set out in Conventions No. 87 and 98, respectively. Convention No. 87 establishes the right of workers to organise, without any distinction whatsoever, subject to national laws (ILO, 2003).

Working within the international frameworks, countries have established social dialogue structures, for example, in almost all North European states--Austria, Finland, Ireland, and the Netherlands have revamped their employment engagements through social dialogues. Other countries, such as the United States of America, Barbados, New Zealand, Australia, and the Philippines, have established best practices for successful social dialogue. Barbados through its National Economic Council (NECC), comprising the Government, the Barbados Workers' Union (BWU) and the Barbados Employers' Confederation (BEC), plus other private-sector organisations such as Chambers of Commerce would meet regularly to address emerging economic problems facing the country such as the contestation of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) which the council felt it did not address the negative social consequences adequately and unfair measures set which were inequitable in distributing the burden once the devaluation of the currency was undertaken (Parez and Luis, 2002; Junko, 2003).

In Africa, South Africa is considered to have the best experience of social dialogue through its National Economic Development Labour Advisory Council (NEDLAC), which helps organise and represent minorities in social sectors and is closely intertwined with the struggle for democracy, addressing Apartheid (ibid). In Namibia, Nigeria, Zambia, Rwanda, Senegal, Chad, Ghana, Kenya, and Tunisia, social dialogue has generally been successful, although some failures have also been noted. In Ghana, the tripartite routinely sets the minimum wage, in Morocco, the dialogue culminated into commitments to raise public-sector pay and increase in minimum wages in 2025, in Zambia, the Tripartite Consultative Labour Council ensured industrial peace and aligning of shareholder round wage and employment policies, while in Tunisia, the National Dialogue Quarter received a Nobel Peace Prize for successfully mediating peaceful resolution to a political crisis hence safeguarding democracy (Anyigba, 2025). In Angola, state employees do not usually enjoy freedom of association, despite ongoing social dialogue (ibid).

In 2013, as a signatory to the ILO Convention No. 144, Uganda formulated the National Tripartite Charter on Labour Relations (NTCLR), which was signed to foster industrial peace, promote social dialogue, and improve employment conditions (MGLSD, 2013). The charter was signed by the government, the Federation of Uganda's Employers (FUE), and trade union representatives from the National Organisation of Trade Unions (NOTU) and the Central Organisation of Free Trade Unions (COFTU). The Charter outlines the roles and responsibilities of all parties in fostering a harmonious working environment and reducing disputes

1 'Bipartite social dialogue' or 'bilateral process' – Usually involves two principal parties, notably the workers' and the employers' organisations.
2 'Tripartite social dialogue' or 'three-legged mechanism' – It involves three parties, notably workers' and employers' organisations and the government.
3 Multilateral social dialogue' 'Tripartite plus' social dialogue – In this model, other interest groups in society are involved, in addition to the workers' unions, employers' organisations and the government, which form the three pillars of social dialogue. This type of social dialogue may also include traditional social partners, the government, and other relevant parties.

between workers and employers by encouraging dialogue rather than industrial action. While the Convention and rules of engagement are well stipulated, and social dialogue is vital for navigating complex challenges, such as digital and green transitions, through face-to-face negotiations, challenges regarding inclusivity and implementation of the Uganda 2013 NTCLR remain, given the changing conditions in the world of work.

In Uganda, however, the effectiveness of social dialogue is increasingly shaped by structural shifts in the labour market, includng high levels of informality, a rapidly growing youth population, and the emergence of digital and platform-based work. These dynamics place pressure on existing labour governance frameworks and underscore the urgency of reviewing the NTCLR to ensure its continued relevance. For example, Uganda has a large informal economy with the majority of workers (about 90%) engaged in the informal sector (UBOS, 2024). However, the characteristics of the informal sector do not easily facilitate social dialogue. Yet the ILO promotes social dialogue in the informal sector for its potential to facilitate the transition from informal to formal conditions, as effective dialogue in this sector can improve working conditions (Jason, 2008; Munu, 2019). Beyond its role in promoting industrial harmony, the Charter also has implications for economic stability, as effective labour relations reduce uncertainty, enhance productivity, and support investment, particularly in sectors requiring long-term capital commitments.

After 12 years of implementation, the NTCLR is undergoing review spearheaded by the MGLSD. The process started in 2025; however, it has not yet been completed. The extent to which the review process is evidence-based is not clear. In addition, it will be critical to document what worked, what did not work, and what should be adopted to inform the NTCLR review process. In addition, with the changing dynamics of work to include gig-economy different forms of marginalisations and vulnerabilities are manifesting with require recognition and representation in the charter. This paper fills this gap by providing an evidence-based assessment to inform a more responsive, inclusive, and operationally effective revision of the NTCLR.

In this regard, the paper addresses the following objectives to inform the review process.

1. Examine the extent to which the NTCLR has attained its objectives.
2. Assess the effectiveness of the NTCLR in promoting decent work and adaptability to the changing environment, with inclusion of the marginalised persons
3. Document best practices in social dialogues that must ensue for the NTCLR to be strengthened.

In line with the objectives, we address the following questions.

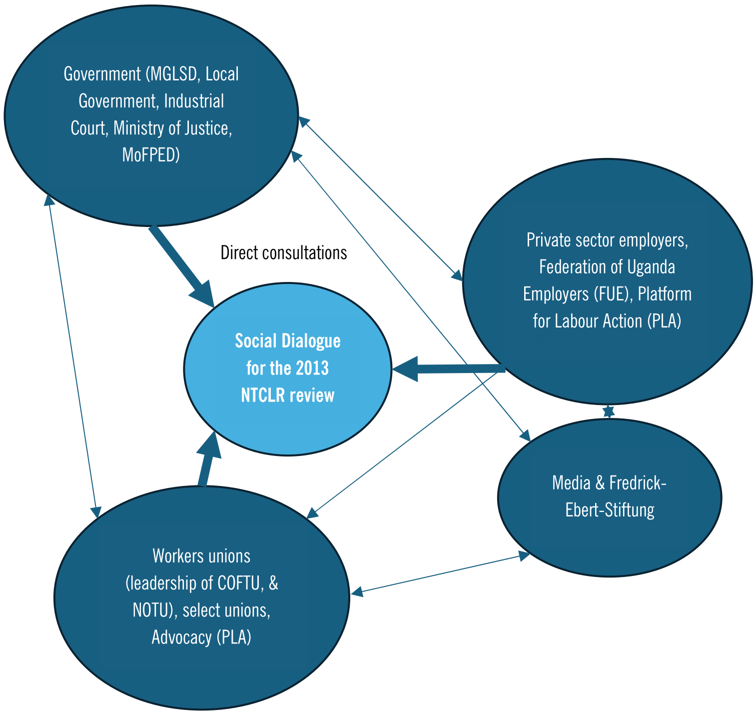
i. Did the 2013 NTCLR achieve its objectives? If yes, how was this achieved? And if not yet, why?
ii. To what extent has the implementation of the NTCLR been effective, given the changing world of work and inclusion of the marginalised groups, such as women, youth, disabled persons, among others?
iii. What more needs to be done or revised to ensure that the 2013 NTCLR becomes effective?

The rest of the study is organised as follows: Section Two presents the study's evidence generation methods and analytical approaches. Section Three presents key achievements of the 2013 NTCLR, implementation challenges and key priorities for effective future implementation. Section Four discusses practices and experiences for strengthening the effective implementation of social dialogues in other countries. Finally, Section Five concludes the paper and outlines specific policy actions needed to strengthen the implementation of the revised NTCLR, as a key step towards promoting inclusivity and decent work.

2. APPROACH

Several approaches have been employed in conducting this evidence review. First, a comprehensive review of existing literature on social dialogue was undertaken. This was to guide the collection of evidence on which mode of evidence gathering the team should follow. Thus, documents reviewed included the 2013 NTCLR, the Employment Act, Labour Unions Act, Collective Bargaining frameworks, and selected International Labour Organisation (ILO) conventions, among others. In addition, a literature review on best practices in other countries was conducted to provide insights into how best to make the 2013 functional and effective.

Figure 1: Evidence building process for the review of the 2013 NTCLR



Source: Authors conceptualisation, 2025

Second, a co-creation meeting was held at the Economic Policy Research Centre, bringing together tripartite partners and advocacy institutions, such as the Platform for Labour Action. This activity aimed to clarify the status of the 2013 NTCLR, thereby strengthening the paper's narrative, objectives, and methods. At this meeting, held in February 2025, EPRC learnt that the MGLSD was in the final stages of reviewing the 2013 NTCLR; however, several issues remained contentious among stakeholders, and EPRC could support the gathering of evidence to inform the review process objectively and independently. To ensure that no institution was left behind during the consultation and evidence-gathering process, a stakeholder mapping exercise was also conducted in the same month. This enabled the team to identify additional individuals, institutions, and other government agencies to engage, ensuring that consultation was as inclusive and comprehensive as possible. The study documented through a stakeholder mapping exercise which stakeholders had high interest, high power, low interest, and low power. Hence, a multi-lateral social dialogue to evidence generation was followed, called "Tripartite plus social Dialogue". Beyond the MGLSD, employer and worker representatives, advocates such as the Platform for Labour Action (PLA), private-sector entities, the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES), and the media were involved in the process.

Third, to guide subsequent stakeholder policy dialogues, EPRC had to concretise the form of social dialogue to undertake. Based on the literature, there are several approaches depending on the issue of interest/objective (Ratnam and Tomoda, 2005). These can take the form of information sharing[4], public hearings[5], direct consultations[6] and collective bargaining[7]. While all these are relevant, in this evidence review process, direct consultations were employed. This was because the discussion concerned the review of the implementation of the 2013 NTCLR, including what worked, what did not, and the way forward. In brief, the consultations aimed to understand and document the reasons for the Charter review. In this regard, direct consultations were made independently for each tripartite partner. The consultations were guided by a set of questions (Annexe 1). The consultation process for reviewing the NTCLR is presented in Figure 1.

4 Civil service statutes contain rules on the right to be informed. Public administration has an obligation to inform public servants and/or exchange information
5 These comprise another form of social dialogue that often involves the users of public services or their representatives.
6 This could be at the individual level, with staff representatives, or using public-service advisory bodies. Consultation may occur before decisions are made, and/or later, during implementation.
7 The legal framework for collective bargaining is distinct and restricted in the public services in many countries. Not all entities under public law are empowered to bargain and conclude collective agreements.

From Figure 1, *Government consultations included representatives from*: the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development (MGLSD), the Industrial Court, the Ministry of Public Service, the Ministry of Local Government, and the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development. These primarily occurred in July and August, 2025 based on key informant interviews.

Employers' consultations comprised the following: Federation of Ugandan Employers, Roofings Limited, Uganda Insurers Association, Platform for Labour Action, MMI Steels, Uganda Tea Association, Uganda Flower Exporters Association, Regal Paints (U) Limited, Protea Hotel, Equal Opportunities Commission, and Cairo Bank. The social dialogue consultative process for this category was held over two days in September 2025 (the List of participants is in Annex 1).

Worker Union consultations included representatives from: the National Organisation of Trade Unions (NOTU), Central Organisation of Free Trade Unions (COFTU), Statutory Authority and Judiciary Workers Union (UPSAJWU), Uganda Farm and Agro-Based Workers Union (UFABWU), National Union of Lawyers, Judicial Officers and Allied Workers (NULJOAW), Uganda Markets and Allied Workers Union (UMAWU), Uganda Chemical, Petroleum and Allied Workers Union (UCPAWU), Uganda Liberal Teachers Union (ULITU), Amalgamated Transport and General Workers' Union (ATGWU), Uganda Bottling, Bakers, Millers and Allied Workers Union (UBBMAWU), Uganda Media Union (UMU), Uganda Beverages, Tobacco and Allied Workers Union (UBTAWU), National Union of Government and Allied Workers (NUGAWU), Uganda Hospitality, Leisure and Allied Workers Union (UHLAWU), Uganda National Teachers' Union (UNATU). The social dialogue consultative process for this category was held for two days in October 2025 (the list of participants is in Annexe 2).

Fourth, at the end of each consultation, information was captured and synthesised into themes. For example, the assessment of the Charter's achievement of its primary objective, strategies for strengthening the Charter, priority issues for inclusion in the revised Charter, contentious issues requiring consensus building, challenges affecting the implementation of the Charter, and the inclusion of informal workers, Persons with Disabilities (PWDs), and youth, along with enablers for the effective functioning of the Charter. The extraction process remained iterative, allowing emerging themes to be incorporated as analysis progressed. A validation dialogue was held in mid-October 2025 with all stakeholders to provide feedback on the synthesis. This ensured that the report's findings and recommendations were owned by all those consulted and reflected the views gathered.

Across these approaches, EPRC's role was to provide guided knowledge brokering between and within employers, workers, and government; stocktaking; and consolidation into synthesis.

3. FINDINGS FROM THE POLICY SOCIAL DIALOGUE: WHAT DOES THE 2013 NTCLR REVIEW PROCESS NEED TO CONSIDER?

3.1. Anchoring of the 2013 NTCLR

The foundation of Uganda's labour governance is enshrined in the 1995 Constitution of the Republic of Uganda, which explicitly guarantees the right to fair labour practices. Article 40(1) requires Parliament to enact laws that promote safe and fair working conditions, prevent exploitation, and protect workers from unfair dismissal and discrimination. Article 40(3) grants all workers' constitutional right to form and join trade unions, as well as the right of employers to form associations for mutual protection and the representation of their interests.

Building on these constitutional provisions, Uganda has enacted a series of key labour-related statutes that guide the operations of the NTCLR. The most critical to the Charter include the Employment Act (2006), which sets out fundamental standards of employment, including contracts, wages, and working conditions. The Labour Disputes (Arbitration and Settlement) Act (2006) provides procedures for dispute resolution through mediation, arbitration, and the Industrial Court. The Workers' Compensation Act (2000) ensures compensation for occupational injuries and diseases. The Occupational Safety and Health Act (2006) mandates safe and healthy workplaces. The Equal

Opportunities Commission Act (2007) and the Disability Act (2020) promote inclusion and non-discrimination, especially for marginalised groups such as women, youth, and persons with disabilities (PWDs). On the policy side and in line with the statutes, these include the National Employment Policy (2011) and the National Equal Opportunities Policy (2006), which provide overarching frameworks for sustainable job creation, equality, and decent work. Together, these policies and legal instruments create a comprehensive framework for promoting inclusive, fair, and productive labour relations in Uganda.

Box 1: Insights into the 2013 NTCLR
Aim: To contribute to national development through strengthening of social dialogue and tripartism, promotion of decent employment, social protection, enhanced skills development, productivity, enterprise growth and competitiveness. **Principles:** These are (1) Tripartism and social dialogue; (2) Non-interference; (3) Collective bargaining; (4) Equity, fairness and Justice; (5) Equality of opportunity and treatment; (6) Mutual trust and respect; and (7) Restriction on publication of information in the media. **All parties:** Out of the 16 items that all parties agree to, the first and critical to this review is "To promote, respect and protect the rights of workers as enshrined in Article 2, 20, 29 and 40 of the Constitution of the Republic of Uganda".

Source: MGLSD (2013). National Tripartite Charter on Labour Relations. Ministry of Gender Labour and Social Development (MGLSD)

Despite its anchorage within the broader policy and legal framework, the 2013 NTCLR is not legally binding. It is more of a voluntary agreement among tripartite partners to guide industrial relations. This presents a challenge for enforceability. Indeed, a key informant stated that,

> *"Lack of alignment between the charter and the broader legal/policy environment may constrain its full implementation and effectiveness". (*Worker dialogue, 2025*)*

In addition, as stated in Box 1, the Charter in its roles for workers and employers states that there will be "one union, one enterprise". This, at the same time, contravenes the principle that all partners must respect workers' rights and freedoms. This raises concerns regarding the constitutional consistency of certain provisions within the NTCLR, particularly in relation to freedom of association..

3.2 Has the 2013 NTCLR attained its goal and how?

Indeed, given the Charter's overall aim, it has achieved this by promoting social dialogue, particularly within unions and between unions and workers (bilateral arrangements). Box 2 provides insights into this journey.

Box 2: Historical context of social dialogue in Uganda, institutional relationships and establishment of the 2013 NTCLR
Historically, workers/labour/trade unions in Uganda emerged in the late 1930s. These were largely influenced by the need to advocate for African workers, who were often marginalised compared to Asian workers, especially in the growing industrial and transport sectors. The Trade Union Ordinance of 1937 was the first legal instrument to allow the registration of unions with a minimum of seven members. The Uganda Motor Drivers Association (1938) was the first registered union, were formed to advocate for better pay and against exploitation. While the 1950s saw growth (e.g., formation of the Uganda Trades Union Congress in 1956), the 1971-1979 Idi Amin era saw severe suppression of labour unions. In 1987, the National Organisation of Trade Unions (NOTU) was formed to bring together various unions. Later, the 2006 Labour Unions Act recognised the Central Organisation of Free Trade Unions (COFTU) as another key body. Unions today play a crucial role in negotiating Collective Bargaining Agreements (CBAs) to protect worker interests. Employer unions (employer organisations) in Uganda emerged to counter the rise of trade unions in the 1940s-1950s, consolidating later into the Federation of Uganda Employers (FUE) under the Trustees Incorporation Act 1939 Cap 126, Laws of Uganda, established to represent employer interests, promote social dialogue, and foster harmonious labour relations with workers' unions like NOTU. Internal struggles and leadership disputes have characterised Uganda's labour movement since the mid-2000s. In the aftermath of these conflicts, trade union leaders sought to identify genuine and capable representatives to stabilise the movement. In this regard, the 2013 National Tripartite Charter emerged from deep-seated conflicts and rivalries within Uganda's trade union movement. Before its formulation, there was widespread duplication of unions, rivalry over membership recruitment, and internal power struggles, which the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development at the time struggled to mediate. For example, deep and frequent confrontations between unions such as NOTU and COFTU over workplace membership at Kinyara Sugar Works, which led to the dismissal of union members aligned with rival factions. These conflicts created a crisis of representation and threatened industrial harmony.
The Charter, therefore, was timely and introduced order, unity, and cooperation among trade union centres. Its main purpose was to promote social dialogue and harmony, secure decent employment, and prevent overlapping representation in the workplace. With the Charter in place, some degree of peace was fostered between the National Organisation of Trade Unions (NOTU) and the Central Organisation of Free Trade Unions (COFTU).
While acknowledging that the Charter has contributed to improving relations among unions and reducing overt rivalry, pockets of unions still experience internal disputes, though these are now more contained. Since the agreement was signed, the Charter has been credited with fostering collaboration among formerly competing unions, such as the hospitality and hotel workers' unions, and promoting mutual understanding within the broader labour movement.
Nonetheless, implementation of the Charter by MGLSD remains inconsistent, particularly in coordinating tripartite processes, enforcing agreed frameworks, and ensuring visibility and monitoring."
Despite weaknesses in government enforcement, the Charter had achieved notable success in improving cooperation between trade unions and employers. For example, the Federation of Uganda Employers (FUE) played a constructive role in helping unions gain recognition from previously resistant companies. Increased ongoing collaborations between FUE, NOTU, COFTU and the ILO on joint programmes, which demonstrate improved harmony and dialogue between employers and workers' representatives. In addition, FUE is proactive in mediating between unions and in supporting efforts to advance the minimum wage agenda, which remains a sensitive issue.

Source: EPRC Compilation from Social Dialogue engagements with workers and employers October, 2025

3.3 Effectiveness of the 2013 NTCLR in fostering decent work and inclusion

As part of the approach in evaluating the effectiveness of the 2013 NTCLR in fostering social dialogue for decent work and inclusion, the study examined key indicators like population, population growth, population structure, GDP, size of the informal sector, welfare status (GNI per capita, ease of doing business, extent of foreign direct investment, state of democracy, extent of corruption, innovation and e-participation (Box 3). All these factors will largely affect the ease or difficulty of conducting social dialogue through the NTCLR. For example, it is likely possible to conduct social dialogue where corruption is not rampant and the informal sector is narrow, with democratic traditions encouraged and practised. Were the social dialogue activities since 2013 influenced by issues such as gender rights in the workplace and the minimum wage?

Box 3: Basic Facts	
Population *(million in 2024)*	45.9
Annual population growth rate *(percent)*	2.9
Dependency ratio *(per 100 people ages 15-65)*	84
Median Age *(years)*	18
Real annual GDP growth rate *(percent)*	6.3
GDP per capita *(USD)*	987-1,200
GNI per capita (PPP) *USD*	3,200
Human Development Index (HDI) ranking *(of 193)*	157
Literacy rate *(percent-aged 10 and above read and write)*	74
Informal sector share of total employment *(in percent)*	92
Gender Inequality Index ranking *(of 172)*	141
Global Innovation Index (GII) ranking *(of 139)*	124
E-Participation Index (*of 139)*	93
Doing Business Ranking 2022 *(of 190)*	116
Corruption Perception Index *(of 180)*	140
Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) per capita *(USD)*	1,263
EIU Democracy Index ranking *(of 167)*	99

Source: Various sources

From Box 3, Uganda's population is approximately 46 million, up from 42 million in 2020, growing at an annual rate of 2.9 percent. Almost 50 per cent of the population is of working age, which implies that Uganda has a relatively young, productive population. With a median age of 18 years and an equally high dependency ratio, Uganda is consistently ranked among countries with the youngest populations globally, owing to high birth and fertility rates. The Afrobarometer reports that over 80 percent of Ugandans feel free to join any political organisation and express their opinions, with approximately 82-83 percent stating they are free to say what they think and 82-88 percent free to join political organisations, although around 64-68 percent also report needing to be cautious about their political speech. Nonetheless, Uganda is relatively democratic and ranks among the most democratic countries in Africa. The high Gender Inequality Index (GII) may be due to persistent disparities in reproductive health, education, labour force participation, and political empowerment, despite women holding 33.8 percent of parliamentary seats, which is higher than the sub-Saharan African average. Despite progress, women face significant barriers in owning assets, accessing land, and accessing financial services, with many involved in unpaid care work. In terms of doing business, Uganda remains weak, largely due to poor infrastructure, high costs, and the unreliability of amenities such as electricity. Corruption is becoming rampant amidst growing FDI. FDI per capita is approximately USD 65 – USD 70, reflecting robust growth driven by projects such as Tilenga, Kingfisher, and East African Crude Oil Pipeline (EACOP), as well as substantial investment from the Netherlands and France. The informal sector is large, with nine out of ten working-age persons working in the informal economy.

Estimates show that approximately 15 percent of employees in Uganda belong to a labour union (Danish Trade Union Development Agency, 2023). Unionisation is hindered by a high percentage of workers lacking formal contracts (about 67%). Approximately 275 Collective Bargaining Agreements (CBAs) were reported in 2020, covering roughly 583,000 workers (ibid). Frederick Ebert Stiftung (FES) of Uganda has been working since 1967, focusing on strengthening trade unions to promote social justice, democracy, and workers' rights, particularly in the informal economy. As noted above, the Uganda Bureau of Statistics estimates that about 92 per cent of Uganda's working labour is engaged in the informal sector (UBoS, 2024), and very few of these are formally unionised. However, several sectoral unions, e.g., for transporters, street vendors, domestic workers, agricultural workers, boda-boda operators, casual labourers, and market vendors, have been organising workers in the informal sector in recent years. FES has been particularly assisting the Amalgamated Transport and General Workers Union (ATGWU) in organising informal transporters such as boda-boda riders.

The social dialogues on issues of effectiveness of the Charter in supporting informal workers showed that while efforts are ongoing, the Charter can further explicitly state in its review emerging issues that deepen the informal work, such as the gig economy. That is:

> *"Many new forms of employment like platform-based work did not exist when the 2013 Charter was developed, and therefore, the document needed updating to remain relevant. Further it was suggested that the Charter should have a defined review period, such as every five or ten years, to ensure responsiveness to evolving labour market realities." (*Worker dialogue, 2025*)*

> *"The inclusion of the informal sector calls for the establishment of district-level consultative forums to facilitate social dialogue and recognition of informal sector associations." (*Worker dialogue, 2025*)*

Women in Uganda still face discrimination in social dialogue processes because most of them work in informal subsistence agriculture, where they have limited formal rights. The value placed on their work predominates, and workers' rights, such as hours, leave, and pay, are difficult to enforce in informal work settings where many are self-employed and earn below the national poverty line. These conditions hinder the effectiveness of social dialogue, particularly when advocating for the rights of marginalised groups. Even fewer women in the formal workforce are unionised. To address these gaps, the revised Charter could consider mechanisms for formally recognising informal worker associations and integrating them into structured social dialogue platforms at both national and sub-national levels.

Nonetheless, sector-level social dialogue between labour-sector-specific unions and the government, particularly in education and health, has made some progress, notably on issues such as inadequate pay for science teachers and doctors. However, the dialogue since 2024 over increasing secondary school teacher pay for Arts teachers remains unresolved, leading to frequent strikes and divisions within the Teachers' unions due to salary disparities. Employers noted that:

> *"Improved social dialogue had contributed to reduced strikes, better labour relations, and increased productivity, particularly in sectors such as floriculture (Box 4) and tea. However, gaps remained. Informal sector employees remained largely outside the scope of the Charter."*

Box 4: Collective bargaining reduces sexual harassment in the cut flowers export sector in Uganda

In Uganda, the improvement of workers' rights and enhancement of working conditions has been promoted on farms through collective bargaining and advocacy by trade unions and NGOs. The 2010 Collective Bargaining Agreement between the Uganda Flower Exporters Association (UFEA) and the Horticulture and Allied Workers' Union (UHAWU), requires the establishment of a sexual harassment policy and provides further detail on its key content (Collective Bargaining Agreement between UFEA and UHAWU, 2010, para. 20 & 20.1), establishes employers' obligation to take measures to prevent sexual harassment if they employ more than twenty-five employees (Collective Bargaining Agreement between UFEA and UHAWU, 2010, para 20.4) and provides for a grievance-handling procedure (Collective Bargaining Agreement between UFEA and UHAWU, 2010, para. 15). Along with these measures, the agreement also includes the establishment of a joint gender and equality subcommittee mandated to "study, inform/advise and make recommendations" to the Joint Negotiating Council (JNC) (Collective Bargaining Agreement between UFEA and UHAWU, 2010, para. 22a).

Through this collective agreement, working conditions have improved, and farms have implemented a mixture of employer-led and worker-led grievance mechanisms. Women workers can raise concerns with women respondents in the union's Women's Committee, and changes in management structures have been implemented to reduce excessive or discretionary power, exacerbating sexual harassment.

Source: GoU (2010). The Republic of Uganda Collective Bargaining Agreement between signatory members of Uganda Flower Exporters Association and Uganda Horticultural and Allied Workers' Union

The Charter's effectiveness has been proven through emphasising the role of each stakeholder in the tripartite. This has facilitated the growth of Collective Bargaining Agreements (CBAs), with approximately 275-282 registered in Uganda between 2020 and 2022 (Danish Trade Union Development Agency, 2023). As noted earlier, CBAs have been successfully implemented in sectors such as tea, coffee, and hospitality to enhance worker welfare and, more recently, to incorporate child labour prevention clauses. For example, in collaboration with the ILO, the National Union of Plantation and Agricultural Workers of Uganda is actively involved in sectoral agreements, including significant updates from 2022 to 2025, with negotiations aimed at eliminating child labour on outgrower farms in coffee and tea.

The NTCLR is recognised as an important operational framework that provides interpretive and procedural guidance in the absence of strong statutory enforcement. As one stakeholder stated,

> *"If someone went to court and said my employer has stopped me from joining a union… this Charter becomes an operational framework, part and parcel of the legal and policy framework." (*Worker dialogue, 2025*)*

This underscores the Charter's bridging role of filling gaps left by outdated or ambiguous laws, while guiding the conduct of social partners in line with international labour standards.

In conclusion, the Charter has fostered the expansion of CBAs, strengthening the role of employers and unions. As a result, many bipartite engagements have increased, which have improved dispute resolution and created a coalition among workers to raise awareness about advocating for decent work and inclusion for persons in the informal sector and women, despite the fact that informality is specified in the Charter as one of the roles of all tripartite stakeholders to *"work towards the transformation of the informal sector",* this does not specify how this will be done in each stakeholders roles. Additionally, export-oriented sectors such as floriculture have adopted standards that surpass minimum legal requirements on occupational safety, gender equality, childcare, and worker welfare. Many employers now recognise that improved working conditions not only enhance compliance with global market expectations but also strengthen productivity and enterprise reputation.

These structural characteristics discussed in this subsection, particularly the high level of informality, a youthful population, and limited unionisation, present both constraints and opportunities for social dialogue. While they weaken traditional collective bargaining mechanisms, they also highlight the need for more adaptive, inclusive, and decentralised dialogue frameworks.

3.4 Challenges affecting the Charter implementation efforts

Despite the tremendous success of the 2013 NTCLR, challenges persist. During the social dialogue processes conducted to inform the review of the Charter, these challenges primarily concern legal and operational aspects. We discuss these in detail below.

3.4.1 Legal challenges

These were mainly related to:

- **Violation of the Charter on fundamental rights of workers to freely create or associate with its clause on "to promote the principle of one union one enterprise".**

The freedom of association guaranteed under Article 29 of the 1995 Constitution of the Republic of Uganda permits any individual to join or form a trade union of their choice. While the Charter sought to streamline representation by emphasising "one union per enterprise", this provision appears to conflict with the constitutional right to free association. As one stakeholder put it,

> *"If the Constitution is giving workers rights to form, can the Charter then limit it? That's the question." (*Worker dialogue, 2025*)*

This highlights the need to harmonise the NTCLR with Uganda's supreme legal framework, ensuring that the Charter complements rather than contradicts constitutional principles. One possible approach to addressing this contradiction would be to adopt a coordinated bargaining framework that allows multiple unions within an enterprise while requiring the negotiation of a single collective bargaining agreement. This would preserve constitutional rights while reducing fragmentation in negotiation processes.

- **Inconsistencies between the Constitution, the Labour Unions Act, and the Employment Act, all of which define the rights and responsibilities of workers, employers, and trade unions**. Stakeholders emphasised the need to amend existing labour laws or issue ministerial guidelines to resolve ambiguities regarding union eligibility, recognition, and operational procedures. For example, it was observed that

> *"The Labour Union Act and the Employment Act... do not tally with the Constitution." (*Employer dialogue, 2025*)*

> *"If the Labour Unions Act was able to say to join a union within your trade or business… it would have guided better." (*Worker dialogue, 2025*)*

The Labour Unions Act and Employment Act offer fragmented guidance, lacking clarity on union eligibility, recognition, and collective bargaining procedures. Consequently, ambiguities in interpretation and enforcement remain, limiting the Charter's potential to institutionalise structured labour relations.

- **The 2013 NTCLR is not legally binding, which limits its enforceability and reduces compliance incentives among social partners in arbitrating labour/industrial disputes in the Industrial Court.** Such procedural bottlenecks point to weak enforcement and regulatory capture, undermining both the spirit of the NTCLR and the broader objective of promoting decent work through social dialogue. The NTCLR operates within a fragmented legal environment, with no comprehensive mechanism to ensure constitutional consistency, policy coherence, and effective implementation. The absence of a clear enforcement framework has left the Charter's role largely interpretive rather than binding. Consequently, the ways in which the Charter contributes to legal alignment, inclusivity, and decent work remain underdeveloped, leaving a gap in reform and institutional strengthening.

Many of the Charter's provisions rely on voluntary compliance, and bureaucratic hurdles in recognition agreements further impede accountability. Weak political will and government interference in union activities reduce the effectiveness of legal and regulatory frameworks, allowing gaps in compliance to persist without consequences for non-performing actors.

> *"The challenge is that the government cannot bite. They cannot sanction members, even when they fail to do the right thing after strong advice." (Employer dialogue, 2025)*

- **The Charter lacks a clause addressing emerging forms of work such as digital and platform work.** It was observed that gig workers, such as delivery couriers—namely, Uber drivers and Safeboda operators—operate under ambiguous employment arrangements, classified as "independent contractors" and/or "partners" rather than as workers. This classification excludes them from essential labour protections, including collective bargaining, social security, dispute resolution, and occupational safety standards. As digital labour rapidly expands among Uganda's youth, the absence of legal recognition and representation mechanisms leaves platform workers unprotected and invisible within tripartite dialogues.

- **Inclusion of civil society ("Tripartite Plus")**. The inclusion of civil society through the "Tripartite Plus" model remains contentious. Employers are generally open to integrating non-traditional actors but remain cautious about defining the scope and responsibilities of civil society participants to prevent dilution of decision-making authority. Workers, on the other hand, express concern that the inclusion of external actors could weaken their direct representation and influence within union and tripartite structures. Despite these concerns, both employers and workers recognise the potential of civil society engagement to enhance inclusivity, broaden perspectives in negotiations, and strengthen advocacy, provided roles and responsibilities are clearly defined.

> *"But you find that over time, we have had civil society organisations, we have had NGOs that have really played a role in shaping labour and employment practices here in Uganda. There is a section that involves recognition; of course, when you meet the unions here, they are completely opposed to it, which is why you are talking about a tripartite plus? However, the current document leans somewhat toward recognising other sector players. It does not have to be only these three, but there are also other sector players, and they could also have roles and responsibilities to play in shaping the labour market." (*Employers dialogue, 2025*)*

3.4.2 Operational challenges

These range from:

- **Multiple difficulties in implementing the principle of "one union, one enterprise "commitment.** Not only is this clause legally contradictory, it is also operationally difficult to enforce within the current policy environment. Despite the provisions of the Labour Union Act (2006) and the 2013 NTCLR, social partners have not fully agreed on how to implement the issue of "one union in one enterprise" in the revised charter. According to the 2013 NTCLR, employers and workers unions have the responsibility to oversee Collective Bargaining agreements (CBAs) where there are more than one labour union in one enterprise. Specifically, employers have an obligation to oversee the negotiation of a joint CBA in situations involving more than one labour union within an enterprise, while labour unions are obligated to act in the interests of the workers and negotiate a single CBA in cases involving more than one union. On the other hand, the Federation of Uganda Employers (FUE) is tasked with overseeing the implementation of the "more than one labour union in one enterprise" policy. At the same time, MGLSD continues to issue licenses to multiple worker unions within the same sector, hence making it cumbersome for employers and worker unions to promote the clause. Even worse, employers noted that managing multiple union negotiations is costly in terms of negotiation time required to finalise a collective bargaining agreement (CBA) and administrative human resources. Furthermore, in cases where multiple unions exist within a single enterprise, larger unions tend to demand a larger share of employees' monthly commissions than smaller unions.

> *"So, the issue of one union, one enterprise, as long as the ministry continues issuing certificates to new unions that are duplicates, that clause is beaten…"* (Worker dialogue, 2025)

> *"You have carpenters here, you have engineers… each category would have its own representation. And now tell me how easy it would be for management to be dialoguing with these unions."* (Employer dialogue, 2025)

Multiple unions weaken collective bargaining, reduce union effectiveness, and complicate the enforcement of charter principles.

> *"You're now telling me you are amending the Labour Union Act, and on one hand, you're saying, 'Please don't register.' But then, look at what's happening on the ground. There is so much confusion and proliferation. So, which is it? Are you registering unions or not? Just today, they registered several new unions. So, we asked their lawyer, 'Now you have registered these seven unions. But at the same time, you are bringing us this new provision of 'One union, one enterprise.' Why? This is a weak position. It's a strategy to divide us."* (Worker dialogue, 2025)

Overall, these findings point to a broader coordination failure within the labour governance system, where inconsistencies between policy provisions, regulatory practices, and stakeholder roles create fragmentation in representation and inefficiencies in collective bargaining processes.

- **Uganda's central tripartite institutions continue to operate without formal reference to the 2013 NTCLR in their communications.** It was reported that difficulties remain in accessing official information, inconsistencies in reporting and coordination between the Ministry, employers, and unions. These gaps have resulted in misdirected complaints, delays in dispute resolution, and weakened accountability. It is thus recommended that clear communication hierarchies from enterprise-level committees to national tripartite platforms, along with independent, professional mediation structures, must be insulated from political influence. In addition, enhanced communication procedures and information-sharing protocols are crucial to improving transparency, responsiveness, and timely decision-making.

- **Inadequacies in human capacity and capabilities hinder the smooth support of the Charter's operations.** For example, the Labour Advisory Board, which advises the Minister on matters related to employment and industrial relations, remains understaffed to fully conduct labour inspections. The Minimum Wages Advisory Board, which advocated for the passing of the Minimum Wage Bill in parliament in 2017, has not succeeded in getting the bill signed into law. Furthermore, dispute resolution settlements between parties remain slow in Uganda. In this regard, the Industrial Court, established under the Labour Disputes (Arbitration and Settlement) Act of 2006 as a referral body to arbitrate labour disputes referred to it under the Act, became operational only in 2014, with six judges appointed to handle such disputes.

Labour officers, union leaders, and employer representatives often lack tailored capacity-building opportunities, resulting in a limited understanding of their roles and responsibilities. Awareness gaps, weak leadership, and insufficient knowledge of labour laws contribute to ineffective dispute resolution, poor adherence to Charter provisions, and inconsistent application of collective bargaining agreements.

> *"There is inadequate human resource capacity for these unions to enforce workers' rights and standards." "Labour unions remain constrained by weak leadership governance, mainly at the local government level." (*Worker dialogue, 2025*)*

> *"The industrial court is understaffed. Only two judges. The court is overwhelmed. There are so many cases. They inherited a big lot. And because they are understaffed, the new cases which are coming every day is a challenge. They take long, maybe three to five years to dispose of a case." (*Employer dialogue, 2025*)*

> *"There have been labour officers who disturb. First, they don't know the law. Then they want to argue with you who knows the law. The word is that they don't have capacity. Most of them are social scientists. But some have elevated and upgraded, and they have done a diploma, which I appreciate. Others have learned on the job, which is perfectly good. Then you will go to this very disturbing one, who doesn't know the law, is arguing. They don't even know what they're doing. And you don't want to come out offensive. But of course, you'll find those aggressive lawyers; they'll tell you, "No, I cannot appear before a labour officer who doesn't know the law. I'll take the matter to court," as simple as that. So, the dialogue will fail at that point. But at that step, at the labour office, there is an opportunity." (*Employer dialogue, 2025*)*

Addressing the above constraints requires a phased strengthening of institutional capacity, including enhanced training for labour officers, improved resource allocation, and the use of alternative dispute resolution mechanisms to reduce pressure on formal judicial structures.

- **Limited popularisation of the Charter among members and the public limits its use and ownership.** Particularly, the lack of awareness and understanding of the NTCLR among unions, employers, workers, and other stakeholders. Poor communication and reporting structures have limited the dissemination of the charter, leaving many employees and employers unclear about their rights and responsibilities. Furthermore, the informal and digital sectors often remain excluded due to a lack of tailored strategies for awareness and inclusion. Although the 2013 NTCLR laid the foundation for structured social dialogue, it had never been fully integrated into the Employment Act or the Labour Unions Act. As a result, awareness remained low among employers, unions, and government officers, leading to inconsistent application of its principles. Participants highlighted persistent gaps, including unclear communication channels, limited dissemination, bureaucratic hurdles to recognition agreements, and a lack of structured reporting mechanisms, which have contributed to the Charter's limited visibility and use in daily labour administration.

> *"After the Charter was developed, I think it wasn't popularised. The awareness about the charter remained in a few entities." (*Employer dialogue, 2025*)*

- **Roles of stakeholders in specifically organising marginalised groups, such as domestic workers and informal workers, are not specified beyond the statement encouraging them to promote the organisation of informal workers.** The Charter and existing labour laws do not sufficiently address the needs and realities of informal workers, leaving them excluded from formal social dialogue mechanisms and national consultations. In addition, Local governments were cited as actively resisting the organisation of informal worker groups, particularly market vendors, despite these groups having formed unions and sought recognition. This lack of structured engagement has increased vulnerabilities and restricted informal workers' access to labour protections. The Charter offers limited provisions for household-based labour, and Uganda has not fully aligned domestic work protections with ILO Convention 189. Domestic workers often operate without written contracts, regulated working hours, or enforceable wage protections. Their workplaces, that is, private homes, fall outside the effective reach of labour inspection, making it difficult to identify violations or ensure compliance. The combination of invisibility, limited awareness of rights, and lack of representation channels reinforces the vulnerability of domestic workers, particularly women and girls.

- **Disagreements over union membership eligibility**. Employers often prefer excluding supervisors and junior managers from union membership to reduce potential conflicts of interest and maintain managerial authority. Workers, however, suggested that eligibility should be based on actual managerial power rather than job title, as automatic exclusions can undermine worker representation and equity. Confusion over voluntary versus imposed membership, hierarchical distinctions between unionised and managerial staff, and concerns about misrepresentation in worker organisations further complicate this issue. The Charter must balance these competing perspectives to ensure fair, inclusive, and context-sensitive union membership rules.

> *"There are still disagreements over which employees, supervisors and managers should be excluded from the union membership." (*Employer dialogue, 2025*)*

- **Weak coordination among the tripartite partners hinders effective decision-making and Charter alignment with other national laws, policies and guidelines**. These structural weaknesses contribute to inconsistent implementation across sectors and workplaces, reducing the Charter's overall effectiveness. Without a clear coordination framework, monitoring and evaluation for tracking Charter compliance and outcomes become difficult. This has led to insufficient planning and follow-up mechanisms. The lack of structured, evidence-based advocacy further weakens the ability to identify compliance gaps and to inform policy adjustments, leaving a disconnect between the Charter's formal processes and on-the-ground realities.

> *"Can we have an elaborate monitoring evaluation and learning framework for that charter to be even able to give government feedback through the Ministry of Gender. How have we gone? How have we performed? How are we moving?" (*Worker dialogue, 2025*)*

In its absence, employer associations and unions do not know how to act or within what limits, further weakening the Charter's objectives and compliance. Gaps in collective bargaining legislation, overlapping authority, unclear enforcement mandates, and weak implementation of labour laws create an environment where both employers and unions may act without accountability. Moreover, limitations in the mandates of employer associations and unions, combined with ineffective enforcement mechanisms, leave workers and other stakeholders vulnerable to non-compliance.

> *"Government has not fully granted the constitutionally granted rights to collective bargaining… some restrictions exist on the principle of free and voluntary bargaining." (*Employer, 2025*)*

To address this challenge, the revised Charter could include a clearly defined coordination framework outlining roles, communication channels, and accountability mechanisms across all tripartite actors.

3.4.3 Political challenges

Decentralised labour governance conflicts with local political interference in inspections and arbitration. Political interference undermines union autonomy, creates divisions among workers, and compromises impartiality in labour dispute resolution. Seasonal political pressures, conflicts of interest, and bureaucratic barriers further weaken the operationalisation of the Charter, reducing the credibility and effectiveness of tripartite dialogue mechanisms at the local level.

> *"There is an element of government interference in the operation of unions in Uganda. Then we said, let's review this because we have seen a lot of gaps. Government is really interfering and bringing confusion to unions." "Now this tripartite which is here… it is political. They are smuggling in their things… government politics… they are listening to unions so that they can get more voters." (*Worker dialogue, 2025*)*

In conclusion, while Uganda has established a comprehensive legal and institutional framework governing labour relations, the lack of a harmonised, coherent system to align these instruments with the NTCLR has hindered effective implementation at legal, operational and political levels. Although the Charter serves as an operational guide to promote social dialogue and decent work, its provisions often conflict with constitutional guarantees, particularly regarding freedom of association and the right to form multiple unions.

Mitigating the above risks may require the establishment of clearer operational guidelines and safeguards to ensure that labour administration processes remain insulated from undue political influence, particularly at decentralised levels.

4. LESSONS FROM OTHER COUNTRIES ON IMPLEMENTING SOCIAL DIALOGUE

This section explores how insights from different contexts can inform the implementation of the NTCLR in Uganda. By analysing regional, continental and global practices and experiences, innovative methods can be identified to effect NTCLR implementation.

Drawing on regional, continental, and global experiences (Table 1), Uganda can adopt strategies to improve NTCLR implementation by integrating insights from diverse experiences.

For example, to include informal workers in social dialogue, social partners have undertaken various efforts across jurisdictions. In some countries, governments have permitted the creation of spaces within existing social dialogue structures to address the inclusion of marginalised workers (ILO, 2018). Indeed, some nations have modified or restructured existing social dialogue institutions such as wage councils, labour councils, and health and safety fund boards. For example, in Argentina, a new entity, the Unregistered Work Commission, was established within the country's existing tripartite framework. In other countries, entirely new informal tripartite structures have been created to represent informal-sector participants. For instance, in Uruguay, the Tripartite Wage Council for domestic work was formed (Table 1).

In other cases, effective inclusion of marginalised groups in the implementation of social dialogues has been achieved by ensuring their representation in the governance structures of employers' social dialogue bodies. For instance, in the Dominican Republic, a National Recycling Board, formed by the National Network of Companies for the Environment, ensured waste pickers were represented on its board (ibid). In other instances, employer organisations have also offered informal sector associations positions on their governing councils; for example, in Ghana, the Ghana Employers' Association (GEA) assigned a seat to the Association of Small-Scale Industries on its governing council (Table 1).

Beyond social partners, *South Africa expanded the social base of social dialogue to include representatives of young people, women, the unemployed, and other special and vulnerable groups, such as persons with disabilities* (Budeli et al., 2022). In this context, the National Economic Development and Labour Council (NEDLAC) is a unique example of a well-developed "tripartite plus" social dialogue mechanism, in which civil society serves as the fourth partner, represented in one of the four policy streams addressing development issues. Incorporating these social dialogue partners into the conventional tripartite framework offers two main benefits: first, it makes social dialogue reforms more inclusive and boosts their effectiveness; second, it enhances public awareness through information campaigns. Furthermore, CSOs also include other groups such as domestic and migrant workers, as well as the unemployed.

To establish a robust institutional framework for the effective implementation of the Charter, Germany adopted the *Institutionalised Social Partnership model*. This model balances economic growth with workers' rights through cooperative labour relations. To ensure effectiveness, Germany established Works Councils (Betriebsräte) at the enterprise level, negotiated industry-specific wage agreements that included non-union members, and fostered tripartite alliances to address automation, reskilling, and the integration of vocational training, aligning skills with labour market needs. Uganda could learn from these experiences by strengthening sector bargaining through binding agreements, promoting enterprise-level worker participation to facilitate consultation on safety and wages, and transferring tripartite skills development, in which unions, employers, and the government co-design TVET curricula.

To improve awareness of social dialogue activities, Brazil implemented *a decentralised and participatory tripartite system (Table 1)*. To achieve this, Brazil created sectoral tripartite commissions with binding decision-making power, started regional tripartite forums, e.g., São Paulo Labour Forum, to address local labour disputes, promoted digital participation enabling informal workers and unions to submit inputs on policies in real time, and formalised representation for informal sector unions (e.g., domestic workers' unions in policy talks since 2015). Key factors that enabled Brazil to implement these measures included effective grassroots mobilisation and strong civil society pressure (e.g., the Unified Workers' Central, as well as the integration of technology and digital tools such as e-Tripartite, which streamlined negotiations during COVID-19.3

While the experiences summarised in Table 1 and discussed above are context-specific, they provide useful guidance for adapting institutional and policy innovations to Uganda's labour market realities. Across these international experiences, three cross-cutting lessons emerge for Uganda. First, effective social dialogue systems require clear institutional coordination mechanisms to reduce fragmentation and improve accountability. Second, inclusive participation, particularly of informal workers and marginalised groups, is critical for relevance in evolving labour markets. Third, legal and regulatory backing is essential to ensure enforceability and sustained compliance. These insights provide a practical foundation for strengthening the NTCLR in a context-specific manner.

Table 1: Other countries' practices on implementing an inclusive National Tripartite Charter on Labour Relations

Country	Best Practice	What was done	How it was done	Achievements	Lessons for Uganda
Germany	Institutionalised Social Partnership	• The Social Market Economy Model balances economic growth with workers' rights through cooperative labour relations. • Co-determination (Mitbestimmung) gives employees a role in company decision-making, particularly in large firms.	• Created Works Councils (Betriebsräte) at enterprise levels. • Industry-specific wage agreements for workers, even non-union members. • Tripartite alliances for work address automation and reskilling. • Vocational training integration aligns skills with labour market needs.	• During the COVID-19 recession, Germany's short-term labour program was widely recognised for protecting jobs and boosting domestic demand (IMF 2021). • In companies with over 2,000 employees, half of the supervisory board members are worker representatives (Bennet & Elena, 2016).	• Strengthen Sector bargaining with binding agreements. • Enterprise-level worker participation to mandate worker consultation on safety and wages. • Tripartite skills development where unions, employers and government co-design TVET curricula. • Crisis resilience tools for economic shocks (e.g., climate disasters).
Sweden	Decentralised Collective Bargaining and strong trade union representation and welfare mechanisms	• Sectoral agreements tailored to regional economic conditions. • High union density • Ghent System, where unemployment funds managed by unions incentivise membership while providing social protection.	• Autonomy of social partners where government acts as a facilitator, not a director, in labour relations. • Lifelong learning systems where the Tripartite-funded Agreement Monitoring Unit (AMU) reskills workers for technological shifts.	• During the COVID-19 crisis, social partners collaborated with the government to design and implement labour market policies such as short-time work schemes and by initiating bipartite projects like 'Suntarbetsliv' and restructuring organisations that facilitated the rapid reemployment of nine out of ten laid off workers within seven to eight months (Eurofound, 2020).	• Establish autonomous sector bargaining with minimal state interference, building trust through MoUs. • Strengthen Trade Union capacity by adopting a Ghent model where Uganda can partner with NSSF to offer union-managed unemployment top-ups, thus boosting membership incentives. • Establish a Tripartite Data Platform to provide real-time data on skills gaps, informing TVET reforms.

Country	Best Practice	What was done	How it was done	Achievements	Lessons for Uganda
Denmark	Flexibility Model Integration and Tripartite Skills Development Capacity-building funds for worker organisations.	• Denmark combined labour market flexibility with strong social protections like easy hire/fire rules for employers and generous unemployment benefits. • The Tripartite Vocational Education Council designs curricula matching industry needs • Companies receive subsidies for apprentice training	• High Union Density with the majority of workers unionised ensuring Labour's voice • Automatic extension of sectoral agreements to non-unionised workers		• Adaptive labour market policies combining easier hiring with enhanced NSSF unemployment benefits. • Expand sector bargaining in the enterprises • Tripartite skills development where unions, employers and TVET co-design curricula • Develop a tripartite Job protection fund for economic shocks • Create digital dialogue platforms by implementing an e-Tripartite system for remote negotiations
Brazil	Decentralised and participatory tripartite system	• Created sectoral tripartite commissions with binding decision-making power. • Regional tripartite forums, e.g., São Paulo Labour Forum, to address local labour disputes. • Digital participation that enables informal workers and unions to submit inputs on policies in real time. • Formalised representation for informal sector unions (e.g., domestic workers' unions in policy talks since 2015) • Reserved seats in quotas for women and youth in sectoral commissions	• Grassroots Mobilisation with strong civil society pressure e.g Unified Workers' Central (CUT) • Technology Integration with digital tools like e-Tripartite streamlined negotiations during COVID-19.		• Decentralise Tripartite structures by establishing district level labour councils. • Establish a mobile based tripartite portal for informal workers • Establish quotas for marginalised groups in Uganda's Tripartite Labour Advisory Board • Legalise informal worker representation by amending the laws to recognise associations of boda boda riders, market vendors and domestic workers.

Country	Best Practice	What was done	How it was done	Achievements	Lessons for Uganda
South Africa	Robust tripartite system	• Four-Party Structure of Government, business, labour, community constituency (NGOs, informal sector groups and youth/women's organisations) • Sectoral bargaining councils	• Strong legal backing • Grassroots participation of community constituencies amplifies informal sector voices (e.g., street vendors in policy talks). • Independent mediation of the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation, and Arbitration (CCMA) which resolves disputes impartially.	• Development of a Social Partners' Economic Recovery Action Plan and the subsequent establishment of implementation structures and processes to track and collaborate on the implementation of the Economic Recovery and Reconstruction Plan (ERRP).	• Expand Tripartite to "Quadripartite" to add community constituency (e.g., market vendors, boda-boda associations) to its Tripartite Charter following the National Economic Development and Labour Council (NEDLAC) model. • Establish a thematic labour council to negotiate wages and working conditions for workers under national priority sectors. • Establish an independent Labour Mediation Commission (modelled on CCMA) to fast-track disputes. • Establish crisis response protocols for future job shocks.

Source: Authors' compilation from various sources.

5. CONCLUSION AND EMERGING POLICY ACTIONS

This section presents the conclusion and emerging policy actions that the government and social partners should consider in reviewing the NTCLR to ensure its inclusiveness, timely responses to employment and technological changes, and the promotion of decent work in Uganda.

5.1 Conclusion

Social dialogue remains central to promoting industrial harmony, resolving labour disputes, and balancing the interests of workers, employers, and government through structured negotiation and consensus-building. Uganda operationalised this commitment through the 2013 NTCLR, anchored in the 1995 Constitution and supported by key labour laws and policies. This review assessed the extent to which the Charter has achieved its objectives, the legal and institutional barriers affecting its implementation, and the degree to which it promotes inclusivity in a rapidly changing labour market.

Findings from the policy dialogues indicate that the NTCLR has contributed positively to strengthening social dialogue, particularly through increased bipartite engagement and the expansion of CBAs across sectors such as tea, coffee, hospitality, education, and floriculture. In some export-oriented sectors, improved labour standards have enhanced worker welfare, productivity, and compliance with international market expectations. The Charter has also played an important interpretive and bridging role, guiding labour relations in contexts where statutory enforcement is weak.

However, significant legal, operational, and political challenges continue to constrain its effectiveness. Although Uganda has a comprehensive labour governance framework, inconsistencies between the Constitution, the Labour Unions Act, and the Employment Act create ambiguity regarding union formation, recognition, and collective bargaining. The Charter's provision on "one union per enterprise" conflicts with constitutional guarantees of freedom of association, raising questions about its legality and enforceability. Moreover, the NTCLR remains non-binding and lacks a clear enforcement framework, leaving compliance largely dependent on voluntary adherence.

Operational challenges further weaken implementation. These include duplication and proliferation of unions, weak coordination among tripartite actors, limited institutional capacity within the Ministry and the Industrial Court, slow dispute resolution, inadequate labour inspection, low awareness of the Charter, and insufficient monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. Political interference at decentralised levels and disagreements over union membership eligibility also undermine confidence in labour governance institutions.

More importantly, inclusivity remains limited. Despite recognition of the need to transform the informal sector, the Charter does not clearly define the roles of stakeholders in organising informal workers, domestic workers, and emerging digital platform workers. With over 90 per cent of Uganda's workforce engaged in informal employment and increasing numbers participating in digital and gig-based work, many workers remain outside formal protections and structured social dialogue mechanisms.

Going forward, the effectiveness of the NTCLR will depend on its ability to evolve from a largely voluntary framework into a more coherent, enforceable, and inclusive instrument. Addressing legal inconsistencies, strengthening institutional capacity, and expanding coverage to emerging forms of work will be critical. If successfully reformed, the Charter has the potential to play a central role not only in promoting decent work but also in supporting Uganda's broader economic transformation.

5.2 Emerging Policy Actions--What does the 2013 NTCLR review need to consider?

The priority actions are grouped into three areas: (i) legal and regulatory reforms, (ii) institutional strengthening, and (iii) inclusion and future-of-work considerations. Actions requiring urgent reconsideration of the 2013 NTCLR are indicated below:

a. **Remove the Clause of "To promote the principle of one union one enterprise."** This is not easy to implement under Uganda's supreme law—the 1995 Constitution — which is the basis for all laws, regulations, and policies. The continued registration of multiple unions operating within the same sector or enterprise has led to duplication, rivalry, delays in negotiations, and a weakening of collective bargaining. It was observed that while the principle aims to promote harmony and efficiency, its practical implementation contradicts constitutional rights to freedom of association and lacks sufficient legal guidance on union precedence, enterprise definition, and coordination mechanisms.

b. **Include a clear coordination and communication section:** A shared position emerged that instead of rigid enforcement, the revised Charter should provide clear coordination rules, define enterprise-level negotiation frameworks, and establish mediation mechanisms that promote harmony without undermining workers' rights or union autonomy. The clarity of its use in communication will strengthen recognition of the Tripartite Charter in all formal communications. The revised Charter must explicitly clarify communication channels, strengthen information-sharing systems, and embed the Charter as an operational and legal reference across all formal labour processes. There was also strong consensus on the need to clarify the distinct roles of government, employers, and unions to eliminate long-standing confusion about mandates and responsibilities. Unclear role definitions have fostered mistrust, conflict, and inefficiencies in dispute-resolution and negotiation processes. Unions stressed the need to reinforce their mandate as advocates and representatives of workers, while employers emphasised clarity around engagement protocols, consultation processes, and enterprise-level negotiations. Government actors acknowledged their responsibility to ensure an enabling environment for social dialogue, to set standards, to enforce compliance, and to institutionalise tripartite outcomes in national planning and budgeting. Across all groups, participants highlighted the importance of clearer legal guidance, consistent mediation structures, and stronger accountability to reduce ambiguity and strengthen tripartite collaboration.

c. **A clause on emerging forms of work, especially on digital platforms and the Gig Economy.** A major gap identified relates to the gig economy and other emerging forms of work, which were not anticipated in the 2013 Charter. Stakeholders noted that digital platform workers, casualised labourers, and workers without written contracts fall outside existing labour relations structures, leaving them highly insecure and with limited social protection. Both unions and employer associations acknowledged that they lack strategies and organising models to adequately represent gig workers or negotiate protections with digital platform workers. Accordingly, stakeholders agreed that the revised Charter should formally recognise gig, digital, and remote work arrangements, define their place within social dialogue, and expand mechanisms for representation and protection for these growing segments of the labour force.

d. **Clearly specify the role of each partner in organising informal workers**. There is an urgent need to organise informal workers and integrate them into Uganda's labour governance systems. With the informal sector accounting for approximately 70 percent of national employment, it is observed that the Charter's current exclusion of informal enterprises creates a dual labour system that undermines decent work goals. Numerous challenges, including conflicting associations, confusion between registration and Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) processes, political interference, and social protection gaps, continue to weaken the representation of informal workers. To address the situation, unions called for simplified organising models and collaboration with civil society organisations that already support informal and vulnerable groups, while employers advocated incentive-based compliance mechanisms and sector-driven approaches to gradually formalise informal enterprises. Stakeholders agreed that the inclusion and empowerment of informal sector unions and associations should be central to the revised Charter.

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ANNEX EMPLOYERS

Annexe 1: List of participants for the Workers' social dialogue

NO	Name	Organisation	Position/Title
1	Oketcho John Siel	Central Organisation of Free Trade Unions (COFTU)	Chairman General
2	Twine Winnie	Uganda Markets and Allied Workers Union (UMAWU)	General secretary
3	Katherine Kamedde	Central Organisation of Free Trade Unions (COFTU)	
4	Kivumbi Peter	Central Organisation of Free Trade Unions (COFTU)	Chairman
5	Atim Alice Rhoda	National Organization of Trade Unions (NOTU)	Committee member
6	Abima Stephen	National Organization of Trade Unions (NOTU)	General secretary
7	Erima Jackson	Central Organisation of Free Trade Unions (COFTU)	General secretary
8	Kagufu Geresom	Central Organisation of Free Trade Unions (COFTU)	
9	Kalamagi Y Gowan	Uganda National Teachers' Union (UNATU)	Program Officer
12	Andrew Tusingwire	Central Organisation of Free Trade Unions (COFTU)	Deputy General Secretary
15	Madina Guloba	Economic Policy Research Centre (EPRC)	Senior research Fellow
16	Rosemary Kakonge	Uganda Bottling, Bakers, Millers and Allied Workers Union (UBBMAWU)	National Chairperson
18	Bitamale Oume	National Organization of Trade Unions (NOTU)	Deputy General Secretary
19	Mugyema Frank	National Organization of Trade Unions (NOTU)	General secretary
21	Oprong John	National Organization of Trade Unions (NOTU)	General secretary
22	Brian Sserunjogi	Economic Policy Research Centre (EPRC)	Research Fellow
24	Pauline Nakitende	Economic Policy Research Centre (EPRC)	Research Analyst
25	Christine Alum	Economic Policy Research Centre (EPRC)	Research fellow

Annexe 2: List of participants for the employers' social dialogue

NO	Name	Organisation	Position/Title
1	Justine Namuli	Roofings limited	Senior Human Resource Manager
2	Kabi Geoffrey	Federation of Uganda Employers (FUE)	Employment relations officer
3	Angella Kemigisa	Uganda Insurers Association	Research Analytics
4	Bwiitw Lydia	Platform for Labour Action	Director Programmes
5	Nakamya Hellen	MMI Steels	Supervisor
6	Grace Nabakooza	Federation of Uganda Employers (FUE)	Head Employee Relations & Legal Services
7	Brian Sserunjogi	Economic Policy Research Centre (EPRC)	Research fellow
8	Mpologoma Betty	Uganda Tea Association	Executive Secretary
9	David Tushabe	Uganda Flowers Exporters Association	Programme Officer
12	Emmanuel Otim	Regal Paints (U) limited	Human Resource & Administration Manager
15	Laura Namayega	Protea Kla	Human Resource Manager
16	Ssembatya Derrick Charles	Equal Opportunities Commission	Research Officer
18	Pauline Nakitende	Economic Policy Research Centre (EPRC)	Research Analyst

Table 1: Employment Act, Labour Unions Act and NTCLR contradictions

Area	Employment Act (2006)	Labour Unions Act (2006)	Contradictions Introduced by the NTCLR
Freedom of Association	Recognises workers' rights to freely form or join trade unions of their choice.	Provides procedures for registration and governance of unions, supporting workers' freedom of association.	The NTCLR's push for "One Union, One Enterprise" appears to restrict workers' constitutional right to join a union of their choice, creating tension with the freedom of association guaranteed in both Acts.
Scope and Coverage	Covers all workers, including those in informal and formal employment.	Primarily targets formal sector unions with defined structures.	NTCLR coverage is inconsistent, emphasises formal tripartite actors and lacks explicit mechanisms for informal economy workers, gig workers, and platform workers, despite the Employment Act's broader definition.
Collective Bargaining	Defines CBAs as binding and enforceable instruments negotiated between employers and recognised unions.	Gives unions the legal mandate to negotiate CBAs on behalf of workers.	The NTCLR's requirement for harmonised negotiation structures may interfere with the autonomy of unions to negotiate independently as provided for in both Acts. It may also blur recognition procedures, leading to disputes over which union holds bargaining rights.
Institutional Coordination	Assigns MGLSD the lead role in compliance monitoring, dispute resolution, and labour administration.	Grants MGLSD authority to register unions, monitor their activities, and ensure union accountability.	The NTCLR introduces additional coordination structures (e.g., councils and committees) without clear legal alignment. These risks overlapping mandates and confusion about which body has final authority especially in dispute escalation.
Dispute Resolution	Establishes mediation, arbitration, and recourse to the Industrial Court as formal mechanisms.	Provides dispute-handling protocols within union structures before escalation.	NTCLR's dispute-handling pathways at times do not follow legally prescribed procedures, creating parallel channels that may contradict legally recognised sequences in the Employment and Labour Unions Acts.
Inclusivity and Protection of Vulnerable Workers (Women, PWDs, Youth)	Explicitly prohibits discrimination and mandates equal treatment of women, youth and PWDs.	Does not explicitly address marginalised groups outside formal union membership.	NTCLR's inclusivity provisions are broad but non-binding, lacking enforceable obligations. This creates contradictions where the Employment Act mandates protections that the Charter treats as aspirational rather than enforceable commitments.

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