"Decent Work" in the Port Industry- Resilience of Social Dialogue: A Scope Study with Related Analysis

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Author's contribution

The sole author designed, analysed, interpreted and prepared the manuscript.

Method Article

ABSTRACT

This paper endeavors to review the literature in a conceptual and practical mode with reference to the research work on workplace on a select area viz., labour relations practices at the ports and identifies the importance of theoretical analysis to support workplace social dialogue. The paper is explorative in attempting to provide theoretical imperatives of social dialogue at the waterfronts as institutional framework in the light of democratization of labour-management relations at the ports. The paper has underscored the significance of the institutional framework of Social Dialogue at the port to provide trade unions and other stakeholders with an opportunity to expand the benefits of port reforms, and labour-management relations, beyond the scope of collective bargaining. Further, the paper explores conceptual understanding of Research Methodology in workplace study. In particular, it engages with the epistemological issues surrounding the adoption of a particular method of doing research. This and the epistemic of research method are discussed along the conceptual framework.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The analytical insights from this paper resonate with ILO's theoretical and conceptual assumptions behind "Decent Work" agenda in contemporary workplace, which focus on the "promotion of full and productive employment and enterprise development; social protection for all, through various ways; including enhancing social protection coverage, and promoting better, safer, and healthier working conditions; improving governance in the world of work and the labour market through promoting effective tripartism and social dialogue to promote decent work" (ILO's Decent Work 2002) . This therefore provides conceptual basis for this paper, to further engage with critical theoretical analysis and conceptual evaluations of "decent work and social dialogue", in particular, at the ports, and broadly, as the global dynamics of world of work remain fluid, heterogeneous and complex; even as "concrete cost" of labour-power in the context is "indeterminate".

The paper is divided into two Sections; Section 1 provides a review of empirical and theoretical literature on port reforms and the implications for decent work. This Section also provides analytical insights into conceptual framework of Social Dialogue, and its resilience in mitigating deficits in the world of work. Section 2 provides the conceptual relevance of a particular research method in doing workplace study. It provides the epistemic of ethnography in conducting research work of this type. The paper is essentially a conceptual and methodological exploration and review of literature; providing analytical tool to understanding the implications of port reforms on employment relations at the ports.

1.1 Context of the Research; Analytical Background and Review of Literature

Worldwide, the Port Industry has been identified to continue to contribute significantly to the economic development of various countries. Improved terminal operations, increased private sector partnership (PSP), as well as efficient cargo handling techniques have been identified to contribute towards substantial improvement in ports' operations all over the world [1]. However, just like other "public-sector" of a national economy, for instance in Nigeria, reforms in the operations of the port industry continues apace in the context of "globalization of the transport sector" [1]. Globalization of the port industry has engendered continual and far reaching reforms in the ports' operations, generally. Reforms in the industry remain a continuous process, influenced and driven by different circumstances of various countries [1].

Even though the issue of reform in the ports is a world-wide phenomenon, countries adopt different approaches and strategies for the restructuring. Within the context of the reform generally, "international shipping lines and private operating companies, continue to display a more commercial approach to ports administration, management and operations" [1]. Evidence from ports all over the world continue to show private partnership with the public port authorities, in "developing and managing port facilities, and in the integration of various transport modes that converge at the port i.e sea, road and railway" [1]. These range of port operations defined the commercial orientation and activities of port industry. Commercialisation has thus signified a more decisive role for ports operation in both developed and developing economies [1] (Adeleye 2005). The on-going restructuring and reform in the port industry has therefore involved the following roles for the stakeholders; Public-Private roles and partnership, "landlords" management of ports. However, these are not without implications for employment relations and world of work, at the waterfront.

Faced with this development, the employability of the workers in terms of retaining what remains of their jobs within the context of on-going reforms have come to represent an important economic and employment relations issue for the social partners. The emerging reform processes have raised questions on, for instance, the issue of equal access to available work opportunities in the ports. In other words, do workers at the container terminal enjoy similar or more equal secure and better paid work? Do job opportunities shrink? And how are severance and other entitlements being managed at the ports? Indeed, in the context of layers of managerial regimes that characterised ports operation, employment relations issues have also become challenging; tasking the capacity and strengths of the social partners. It is in this understanding that Turnbull [1] had noted that under the current arrangements of PSP, and landlord administration, new forms of interests' representation and mediation are required in coping with the challenges. As he noted, under the landlord model of port administration, public port authorities typically lease terminals and other port facilities to private companies. And the

implications are there in terms of employment relations.

Typically, at the ports, employment relations are segmented into two levels; first, a permanent core of highly skilled operators who are expected to be functionally flexible, and also work on shift basis. This form of employment is supplemented by "casuals" or temporary workers who are employed to cover specific, but typically, less skilled tasks [1].Consequently, differential form of employment relations exists at the ports. Expectedly, these are bound to generate tensions and palpable perceptions of job insecurity amongst the casualised dockworkers in the industry. Employment categorisation into these two levels could be expected to continuously be a source of confusion and confrontation amongst the social partners. While labour reforms may have been acknowledged as significant aspect of port reforms (UNCTAD 1999), the implications remain for the dockworkers. Indeed, an important index for assessing how ports adjust to the reform policies is the quality of labour-management relations and work-life balance, at the ports.

1.2 Reforms in the Nigerian Seaports: Historical and Institutional Context

As global reforms processes in the port industry remain a worldwide phenomenon, the distinctions are less obvious, in terms of neo-liberal logics for commercialization and privatization, between ports in the developing countries and in industrialized nations. As noted by Juhel [2], the same operational challenges confront all ports worldwide. Thus the institutional context and managerial framework for dealing with neo-liberal imperatives of port reforms are characterised by; reconfiguration of national/institutional port system and development strategies; need for a reform in the legislative, institutional and procedural provisions for port system planning and regulations; re-organization of port management and operational system [2]. The above reform imperatives are global; even in the context of developing countries, and are "cohered" by contextual "innovative-financing" system.

Port operations in Nigeria started in 1909s, with the opening of Lagos Lagoon facilities for ocean going vessels. In 1921, the Apapa Port in the South West of Nigeria began with construction of the first four deep water berths (Nigeria Port Authority (NPA), www.nigerianports.gov.ng

accessed 12 Nov 2018). On discovery of coal in Enugu, South East of Nigeria, the Port of Port Harcourt was conceptualized and later opened for port operations in 1913. Thus, port development started in Nigeria to support the economic activities in the exploitation and exportation of minerals and crops such as coal in the Eastern part of Nigeria, and Cocoa and Kola from the West and to support importations of goods into the country (NPA, 2018).

The Nigerian Port Authority was established as a continuous Public Corporation by the Ports Act of 1954, to address "institutional weakness" identified to have characterised port operations, and to further develop more coherent policy framework for port operations (NPA 2018).

In response to neo-liberal prescriptions of commercialization, the Federal Government in 2003 started the process of Public-Private Partnership (PPP) arrangement in the ports management and operations. Accordingly, the Landlord Model was adopted for all the Nigerian Ports (NPA 2018). In line with this policy regulations, 25 Port Terminals were handed over to private Terminal Operators with "lease agreement ranging from 10-25 years" (NPA 2018). Included in the "concession-agreement" was the concept of Build Operate and Transfer (BOT). Under this new policy arrangement, the Authority ceded some of its functions and responsibilities to Terminal Operators at the Ports. Also, as part of institutional reforms, the former eight (8) ports were reduced to six (6) major ports, with two in Lagos South West Nigeria; Lagos Port Complex and Tin-Can Island Port Complex; and four (4) in Niger-Delta South-South Nigeria; Calabar Port, Rivers Ports, Onne Ports Complex and Delta Ports Complex (NPA, 2018).

In Nigeria, the port reforms revolve round three-tiers of institutional structure and processes for framework of operation. The new institutional structures of Port Sector's reform in Nigeria are as follow:

a) Federal Ministry of Transportation: Under the new institutional arrangement, the process of broad policy formulation and planning at national level of marine infrastructure development is now with the Ministry, as government institution. Connected with this is the formulation of appropriate legislative guidelines and laws; enacted or backed by the Parliament. And

as ports reform is a global phenomenon, the Ministry maintain contact with international bodies for "best practices" in the industry (NPA 2018).

b) Nigerian Port Authority (NPA): While the overall institutional and policy-formulation in the context of the port reform resides with the Federal Government through the Ministry of Transportation, the responsibility for management of ports in Nigeria is vested with the Nigerian Port Authority. As set out in the Act, establishing the NPA, the functions and responsibilities are: Ownership and administration of land and water within port limits; planning and development of port operational infrastructure; Leasing and concession of port infrastructure and setting bench mark for tariff structure (NPA 2018)

c) Terminal Port Operators: The Terminal Operators are responsible for investment in the Quay, cargo handling and stevedoring operations, pilotage and the overall security of the ports; the security of each terminal is the responsibility of the individual terminal (NPA 2018).

Source: Nigerian Ports Authority www.nigerianports.gov.ng

2. PORT REFORMS IN NIGERIA AND IMPLICATIONS FOR DOCK LABOUR

Within the context and rhythms of work processes and operational activities of the ports in Nigeria, there have been considerable impacts and implications on employment relations, especially at the terminals, where the influences of reforms on labour processes are more immanent. Labour process implications of the managerial practices, and of ports are the scholarly concerns of this paper. In particular the paper is concerned with conceptual framework to understand the lived experiences of port workers and their explanations of the labour process regarding the accompanying managerial practices, given the peculiarities of the NPA as State Owned Enterprise within the Nigerian peripheral capitalist mode of production. As a State Owned Enterprise, the NPA contributes significantly to the Nigerian socio-economic development. The analytical remit is thus specifically inspired by the realization that NPA as a "state-capital" does sustain the collective

socioeconomic interest of the citizens of Nigeria. This is illustrated in understanding that NPA as the "cash-cow" of Nigeria "fiscus". The lived-work experience of port workers in this context, their interpretations, and indeed their orientation as "Dock Labour" are therefore the analytical focus of this paper.

Literature has shown what organisation of work often means for workers, and workers' interests at the workplace, as something different from its presentation by the Management [3]. Thus, to Gregor, forms of managerial practices and the discourse surrounding them are designed to exploit the workers in the organization. In essence, from the perspective of labour process analysis, work processes at the workplace with its components of new technology of production, work re-organizations and employee involvement are strategies that "when stripped bare, aimed at tapping into the shopfloor based knowledge for increase productivity, and work intensification" [3,4].

In the context of port operations and labour process, managerial practice is to be conceived as a medium and outcome of distinctive and often unequal power relations between capital and labour. In this sense, managerial practices generate potentially problematic issues and tensions on the waterfront. While on the one hand, worker's situation at the ports, reflect the dimensions of labour process and managerial practices, their experience and perceptions also reflect these dynamics. Within the institutional and regulatory framework that established the NPA, operational activities at the ports are expected to respond to the reforms. The nature and patterns of work relations at the interfaces thus become important. This is because "it is at the factory level that the formation of workers' consciousness and its manifestation are clearly shown in response to the production process" [5]. Dock labour processes "reflect workers' perception and explanations of their locations in the production relations" [5]. Questions therefore persist on the need to examine and analyse workers' experiences within the context of the reforms and the labour process.

It is therefore important to understand the theoretical exploration of the dynamics of port reforms and dock labour process and the managerial practices on employment relations. In teasing out the implicated dimensions of managerial discourses that surround dockwork process, the imperatives of emerging technology

of port operations and its embedded control dimensions, and implications on dock employment relations, and workers' own experiences and perception of this is theoretically analysed.

The analytical context that provides conceptual exploration for this paper is the Nigerian Port Authority, (NPA) in Nigeria and Hamburg Port Authority, Germany. The choice of NPA, and indeed the focus on the two ports as foci of analysis is influenced by several factors: First, for instance in Nigeria, NPA remains one of the most significant and largest State-Owned Enterprise in the economy; contributing significantly to the "fiscus"; and there is a curious duality to this. Reform in the industry, as influenced by regulatory and institutional frameworks reverberate in the port operations generally, and its managerial practices. This has implications on employment relations both at the level of individual workers and the "collective". Secondly, such reforms in port operations affect the roles and activities of the trade unions.

In Nigeria, reforms in the port operations have also been accompanied by labour reforms. In other words, Nigeria has also introduced a "comprehensive system of labour market regulation on its waterfront" (Adeleye 2005). Two major regulatory agencies through the PSP were formed in the attempt to reform the port operations. These were the Joint Dock Labour Industrial Council (JODLR) established in 2000, and Joint Maritime Labour Industrial Council (JOMALIC) established in 2003 (Adeleye 2005). Under this arrangement, it was assumed that significant improvement in working conditions on the waterfront would be achieved. JOMALIC was responsible for regulation of workers activities at the ports, co-ordinate the supply of labour to the stevedores, and manage payments system for workers (Adeleye 2005).

While JOMALIC may have been responsible in facilitating an existing process of collective bargaining that involved the representatives of NPA, and the workers, in setting wage agreements, the active involvement of the union i.e. Maritime Workers Union of Nigeria (MWUN) could be expected to be circumvented by the regulatory arrangements of the reform exercise. For instance, as observed by Adeleye (2005), "Unions exclusion from various drafts of port reform policy has created internal difficulties within the MWUN". The implications of this, as observed by Adeleye (2005) is that members of MWUN being largely dominated, numerically, by NPA staff, consistently faced redundancy, massive pension deficit and irregular payment of salaries. Fear and anxieties are bound to exist among unions members over the activities of the ports authorities under this current arrangement.

2.1 Advance in Technology and Reforms in German Baltic Seaports

Just like other EU Ports, German seaports have also undergone the process of fundamental reforms as influenced by globalisation and advance in technology of operation (containerization). The challenge of coping with growing international trade, and increase in "transport streams" continue to shape reforms in the German Baltic seaports. Thus, the two major German Baltic seaports- Hamburg and Bremen/Bremerhaven have had to respond to the challenges through institutional and technological re-organisation of port operations. Governed through elaborate institutional and financial structural changes, German ports are re-adjusting to the global challenges [6]. These are, however, not without implication for dock labour as containerization of port work process has revolutionized "core area of port economy" (Deecke and Lapple, 1999: 332) with a renewed emphasis on labour productivity on the waterfronts. In the context of intense competition among the EU ports, the two large container ports of Hamburg and Bremen/Bremerhaven have had to-restructure their port operational activities; even as intercontinental container transport system intensified. In the emerging context, traditional work processes have been reconfigured, thus affecting the world of work at the ports. As noted by Deecke and Lapple (1999:332), the functional changes in the work processes have led to "erosion of traditional port functions".

The central roles of ports of Hamburg and Bremen/Bremerhaven in the Baltic region have positioned the two ports as largest German container ports, and thus function as gateways for international container seaports (Deecke and Lapple, 1999). As part of reform processes, the port authorities own the basic infrastructure, and lease it out to terminal operators, here also like NPA, on long-term concession. The port authorities, however, retain and manage the regulatory framework and functions. Terminal operators provide and maintain their own "superstructures" such as building, and cargo-handling at the terminal. Just as other Landlord

framework, dock labour is managed by private terminal operators [7]. And as the challenges of globalization deepens, management seeks greater efficiency and cost effectiveness in the deployment and utilization of port labour. The reform processes thus provide the leverage for the management not only to control the capital processes, but also the labour process in a way that assure efficiency and profits for the terminal operators.

Ports, generally, have therefore, not only become crucial to the enhancement and development of global trade, but also as significant catalyst in the neo-liberal reform and transfer of modern technologies within the complex process of port containerization. This however has led to the transformation of dock labour and workplace relations; the nature of work, patterns of employment and workforce demography at the ports [8].

2.2 EU Ports Reforms and Implications for Decent Work

Port industry remains fundamental to the economy of EU, as the industry serves up to Seventy-four percent of EU imports, and cargo exports; reaching thirty-seven percent (Comm/2013/0295 www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank). In the EU, Sea Ports continue to play significant role in the Union's territorial continuity; linking islands and peripheral areas with mainland (Comm/2013/0295). However, as the Sea Ports vary in size, location, organisation and types, so also they differ in "performance and connectivity", making EU's port industry a "heterogeneous type". The European Commission had noted that for the port industry to perform as a well-integrated network industry, certain challenges in the context of ports operation environment need to be resolved (Comm/2013/0295). Not least are the challenges to improve the quality of port operations and services, and making port governance framework attractive to investors. Accordingly, in 2013, the Commission presented new "modernisation program", designed to reform the ports operations in the EU Sea Ports. The reform agenda involved a "Communication" for action plan, and proposal for a "Regulation" (Comm/2013/0295). The aim was to "improve efficiency and transparency" of port services in the EU, and to enhance competition in the Sector. Among others, the broad objectives of port reform are; to "establish freedom to provide port services (market access); assure

financial transparency of public funding to ports; and encourage investment" (www.europarl.europa.eu).

In the twenty-three member states with coastlines in the EU, ports employ directly and indirectly over three million employees (Comm/2013/0295). As noted by the Commission, two thousand and two hundred port operators currently employ over one million Dockers. In the build-up to ports reforms, cognisance is been given to the "social and labour sides", in particular the implications on dockworkers' world of work. Thus, with a focus on "non-legislative" approach of the "social components" of port reforms, and promotion of discussions amongst social partners, the European Sectoral Social Dialogue on ports was launched in June 2013.

2.3 European Sectoral Social Dialogue on Ports (SSDC)

In the context of EU sea ports reforms and the emerging challenges facing ports operations, generally, a social dialogue committee called European Sectoral Social Dialogue on ports was launched by the European Commission in June 2013. The committee involves port authorities, terminal operators, Dockers and other port workers across the EU port industry (Port Economics, www.portecon.eu). The European Sectoral Social Dialogue on ports provide the new initiatives and framework for employers and employees at the ports to jointly address challenges such as "training and qualifications at the ports, health and safety at work, improved working conditions at ports and gender equality in ports employment" (The Liberalization of EU Ports Services, www.europarl.europa.eu).

Embedded in the EU sea ports reforms are the introduction of new technologies applicable to cargo-handling and logistics at the ports. These "modernisation projects" require new training and qualifications for dockworkers and promotion of safety and health at workplace. As part of an action plan to cope with these challenges, sectoral social dialogue on ports was launched. European Social Dialogue refers to "discussion, consultation, negotiations and joint actions involving organisations representing two sides of the port industry .i.e employers and employees" (PortEconomics, www.porteconomic.eu). Social partners are to jointly contribute to improvement of working and living conditions of people employed in the sector, as well as to the

competitiveness and productivity within the EU ports. At the European ports operations levels, social dialogue model has come to represent sustainable framework and tools of "good governance" and "social solidarity" at the ports. It has come to mean a resilient institutional process and structure to "mitigate the negative and social impacts of ports modernisation" (www.portseconomics.eu). As European ports continue to face the "modernisation challenges" in the industry, social dialogue remains veritable tool to deal with the diverse complexities, and indeed, the implications on new generation of workers, gender issues at the ports, and how to promote decent work.

Many years on, in the existence of SSDC, there are bound to be challenges in the "unbundling" of EU ports with direct and indirect implications on diverse areas of world of work on the waterfronts. This paper takes this analytical understanding further to evaluate the performance of SSDC in the context of globalization of EU ports operations. The paper reviews the levels of coordination in the implementation of SSDC at the National Levels of sea ports, in particular in Germany; providing a comparative analysis at the National levels in the EU. Countries in the EU have specific ports operations and port labour scheme. Institutional machinery of social dialogue is expected to respond, and be strengthen further, in a way that assure efficient ports operations and decent working conditions (EU Sectoral Social Dialogue for ports, (www.feport.eu).

Drawing on institutional literature and analysis, this paper attempted to tease out how Germany has been able to advance the concept and practice of social dialogue, at informal and formal levels within the context of EU SSDC at ports. At the national levels, there could be "complementarity" and "divergence" in the process and practice of social dialogue, as institutional framework. This paper therefore endeavors to present a comparative understanding of empirical interplays and evidences from countries on ports level reforms, and the performance of social dialogue.

Thus, while literature review continues to suggest that labour reforms in the ports may have brought in more "flexible work arrangement" and fulfillment of "globalization logic" of port reforms, the "flip-side" of this, remain the deregulation of port employment, reduction in jobs, insecurity and deterioration in ports workers' terms and conditions of employment (Turnbull 2005).

3. JUSTIFICATION FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

If decent work is to be preserved or further firmly established in the port industry, it is increasingly being acknowledged that institution of social dialogue should assist in addressing the questions of employment security, fair remuneration, training and development, health and safety, equality of opportunity, and mitigation of any form of discrimination in the workplace [9] (ILO 2001). When social partners are encouraged to embrace the processes and structure of social dialogue, concerns towards enhancing work-life balance is thus strengthen in the port industry. In the attempt to ensure acceptable approaches to employment relations issues for the social partners in the workplace, institutions and capacity for use of social dialogue amongst the parties concerned, need to be in place and well-strengthen [9]. As noted by Turnbull [1] "there is now a wide recognition that social dialogue amongst the parties i.e government, employers and unions in the port industry is a prerequisite for effective management of the structural reforms" Even though considerable efforts may have been put in place, generally, through the tradition of collective bargaining, toward mitigating the adverse effects of the reforms, sustainable framework of social dialogue will further promote and enhance acceptability of decisions on how to preserve jobs; even in the context of numerous challenges [9]. Empirical evidence from research continue to show that, where workers representations are actively involved in the process of reform, adverse consequences from terms and conditions of employment are greatly reduced [1] (Turnbull 2005).

3.1 Research Method for Workplace Study: An Epistemological Concern

This section of the paper is concerned with conceptual understanding of Research Methodology in workplace study. In particular, the section deals with the epistemological issues surrounding the adoption of a particular method of doing research. This and the epistemic of the research method are discussed along the following three areas: ethnography, interview, participant observation and focused-group discussion in research work; all of which fall under qualitative research method.

In this section, we attempt first, to clarify and elaborate on some of the conceptual issues relating to the use of qualitative research method generally, and in particular, how the method is relevant for workplace study. As noted by Denzin and Lincolin [10] "qualitative research is concerned with interpretative, naturalistic approach to the world we study." While making sense of people's own interpretation of their social relations, qualitative research locates the researcher in the world he is studying. Writing on the importance and relevance of qualitative research method, Babbie and Mouton [11] note that it is an approach in which the researcher takes as its departure point, the "insider's perspective", in social action. It seeks to explore the lived experiences of the research subjects based on their "symbolic materials", that is meaning, values and norms enacted and attached to their "sociational" experiences. It is an "emic perspective" that privileges our understanding of the research subjects' behaviour in their "cultural milieu". As noted by Wolcott (1987) [11] "culture should be understood as attributes of a group with patterns relating to their social world." To Lincolin and Guba [12], "qualitative research is more sensitive to and adaptive to many mutually shaping influences and values patterns", in the research setting. Writing on the need for the researcher to infuse the social setting into his description, Miles and Huberman [13] stress how "thick description" allows meaning to come out, and which only the research subjects can best communicate.

To Brockington and Sullivan [14] (cited in Scheyvens and Storey 2003:57) qualitative methods allow the researcher "to explore the meanings of people's worlds, the myriad personal impacts of impersonal social structures" on the individual. As they note, "qualitative methods work inductively, building theory from observation" [14] and 2003 in Scheyvens and Storey 2003:57. In other words, the "symbolic interpretation" the research subjects give to their perspective and social dynamics are explained through the lens of qualitative inquiry. The researcher must be able to locate himself in the world of the research subjects. The world, in which the researcher immersed himself, is then turned into "a series of representation, field notes, interviews and conversations" [10]. Guided by the situational understanding of the research subjects, the researcher is therefore able to make sense of the natural setting through the 'interpretive narratives' of the research subject. The world view of the researched

subject is reflected through the 'reflexivity' of the researcher [15].

As mentioned above, Miles and Huberman [13] stress how thick description allows meaning to come out, and which only the research subject can best communicate. In other words, qualitative research unearths the various dimensions of the subject's lived-world, privileging an "insider's perspective" into the research. On the inclinations of researcher adopting a particular methodological approach, Morgan (1979) notes that this will be influenced by his or her underlying view of reality (ontology), and ways of knowing (epistemology). In the context of remit of this paper, here, a researcher's ontological and epistemological concerns are guided by the inclinations he has towards examining the underlying dynamics of dock labour process, in particular, within the broad context of port reforms, and the implications on workplace relations; from the perspective of the workers.

3.2 Ethnography (Workplace Study): A Conceptual Clarification

In what follows here, I describe Ethnography as a research technique, in line with explanations given by Fetterman [16], Hammersley and Atkinson [17], on Ethnography. Brewer [18] describes Ethnography as the "study of people in naturally occurring settings or fields by means of methods which capture their social meaning and ordinary activities, involving the researcher participating directly in the setting." Ethnography, therefore, stresses the need for the researcher to have access not only to the research objects' social setting, but also their social meaning and activities. However, ethnography, as noted by other writers involves 'triangulation' of methods stressing the need for the researcher to approach the research setting with full awareness and recognition of the strength and limitations inherent in any of the research methods adopted. In the context of workplace study therefore, ethnography has become an important method of enquiry. It has become a useful tool in analysing workers' lived-work experiences and managerial practices in the workplace. This is more so when the purpose is to capture the orientation and perception of workers in the workplace.

However, within its genre, ethnography has also taken on a critical perspective; a neo-Marxist turn, in post-structuralist analysis of workplace relations. These are located in Hugh Willmott's

(1995) informal social organization in the workplace, and the dynamics of workplace resistance [19,20]. Espousing the inherent qualities in Ethnography as a research technique in his Extended Case Method, Burawoy [15], for instance, elaborates and qualifies it as an approach that highlights the importance of participant observation as an important tool for the researcher in placing the everyday lives of workers in its local work context. This implies that the researcher, while 'rooting himself in the context of the world of the research object, will need to "thematize his participation, thus allowing himself to be guided by evolving dialogue with the participants" [15].

Ethnography, as a research technique, according to Burawoy [15] embraces 'reflexivity', an approach that stresses not detachment, but "engagement as the road to knowledge, assuring multiple dialogue to reach explanation of the empirical phenomenon.'' In other words, through reflexivity, the researcher is able to comprehend the interaction between the workers and their local processes in the social world he studies. And as Kuhn (1962 cited in Burawoy [15]) notes, "reflexivity in ethnography builds on knowledge through reconstruction of theory" and is thereby able to accommodate the dimensions of the research setting. Thus, in a grounded empirical underpinning of such ethno-methodology, the researcher, in the context of workplace study needs to go beyond 'pigeonholing' of 'capital' and 'labour' as deterministic 'categories', especially in a peripheral capitalist workplace, to discuss the multiple processes, interests, and overlapping in the workplace. In other words, the "existential folk stories and indigenous narratives of the research subjects should guide the academic theory brought to the social world of those we study" [15]. The hallmark of reflexivity in ethnographic study, according to Burawoy [15] is demonstrated when the knowledge of the research objects is not created ''Tabula Rasa' but through dialogue between the researcher and the participants.

More discussions on the importance of ethnographic study as research tool in a workplace environment are further located in Burawoy [21]. According to Burawoy [21], there is a combination of factors that could warrant ethnographic study; "the internal processes within the field over time, and forces external to the field." The underlying facts that therefore recommend ethnographic study is the reality that the world we study undergoes real historical changes, and the 'dynamic properties' that characterize these changes can only be fully understood and put into empirical analytical perspective through ethnographic study of the research site. Thus, questions and implications of dock labour processes within the historical and social context of the port industry, and in the wider dimensions of the world of work, are best addressed by ethnographic research method.

Ethnography opens up for the researcher, the historical dimensions and social processes that characterize the social context being researched. In making a case for the relevance of ethnography, guided by this historical process, we argue that 'in-situ' observations allow the researcher to study others in their micro-social space and time, involving an "analysis of the canonical works of either himself or that of his forebears in a diachronic comparison" [21]. This way, and by "standing on the shoulders of the giants" [21], the researcher brings to the research field 'a frog-eye view' (Adesina1995) that makes the study unfold along what Burawoy [21] categorizes into "central dimensions" or themes that guide the researcher; "first as participant observer, and secondly for the reconstruction of a theory that answers both the internal and external forces." Focused study of ethnographic type takes as its point of departure, an "adequate awareness and cognizance of changes in historical context, the interests and perspectives of the objects' at research site," [21].

In the context of the port industry, ethnography explains workers' account of their experiences of managerial practices, and the "social relations of production". Work processes in the port industry exemplified in managerial control practices of terminal operations and procedures, (mediated by both micro and macro social processes), and technology of port operation impact on labour relations in the industry. Ethnography not only opens up for researcher's understanding, workers' own account, but also explains the unfolding dimensions of port operations on "concrete expenditure" of labour-power at the ports. An analysis of dimensions of internal managerial practices interfaced with technology, and impact on world of work in the ports is best accounted for through the ethnographic lineage.

3.3 Reflexivity in Ethnographic Study

Ethnography allows the research to be done in a manner that is not a description or illustration, but done through foregrounding and

conceptualization of a theoretical lens, and analysis of the dynamic trends of labour processes, in the light of emerging, and contextual specificities of the external forces e.g the reform processes. Attentiveness to how the external forces of workplace relations feed on the internal micro-social process remains the "hallmark of best structuralist ethnographic study" [21]. It throws up "complementary and contradictory multiple perspectives" [21], implicated in the analysis of the research site. This is more compelling if the concern is to situate and thematize the "interconnectedness" between the internal micro social processes of workplace relations with the external forces that reconfigured managerial practices and the dock labour process. Ethnographic study 'problematizes' not only the 'thematic assumptions' and findings in the context of these emerging dynamics, but also calls for theoretical reconceptualization in explaining the emerging assumptions. Theoretical lenses brought on to the field guide the researcher in reflecting on the assumptions. However, while conceptualization of the emerging assumptions may not necessarily 'deconstruct' or 'reconstruct' findings, merit in its adoption lies in its abilities to problematize the emerging workplace configuration. Its values also lie in paying distinct attentiveness to 'fluxes' and 'processural dynamics' of the labour process, with adequate cognizance of 'disruptions' on the field from the 'external'. With understanding and inspirations gleaned from the research site, ethnographic study analyses concepts, explores themes, and based on these, new questions are posed, aimed at offering explanations and accounts of the "changing terrain" of the workplace [21]. In justifying the use of ethnography on workplace study, Burawoy [21] argues that in "the context of changes that give character to the field of study today, the re-composition of everyday life has become a product of transactional process; of new trajectories in institutional processes; changes in individual identities at work and reconstitution of workplace". In other words, ethnography tracks down, and helps the researcher to make sense of the evolving trajectories.

While raising concerns on pedagogical implications of ethnography, and its broader implications on reliability of research outcome, Adesina [22] however, notes that ethnography with its technique of "participant observation is essentially a simulation of social realities and experiences of those being researched." According to him the process catches the danger of just "rehearsing the power-relations context of the workplace" [22]. Drawing on Brown's (1984) distinction between 'Work' and 'working on Work', the latter reflects the engagement of the researcher at the research site which might just be a 'pretentious undertone' of the reality of work. Adesina [22] further highlights the problems associated with doing participant observation, especially in a workplace context where "immanent locational and class differences between the researcher and the research objects cannot be ruled out." While urging researchers to be conscious of their own "pedagogical orientation" on the field, he stresses the need to be attentive to the context of the research setting, especially of a workplace where "problems of management" often shape our research agenda and conversation. Such asymmetric relations between the researcher and the research objects often have implications for ethnographic writing and findings in which 'shopfloor' experience of workers may be substituted by experiences and orientation of the researcher [22].

3.4 Justification of Ethnography as Methodological Approach for Workplace Study

As suggested by [23](Daudi 1986, cited in) there are two major approaches that guide the researcher in his methodological analysis; "one entails an effort to provide a comprehensive epistemological discussion that allows for a review of major theories involved; and the second involves empirical analysis of the procedures to be incorporated in data collection and analysis". Preference for this research method for workplace study is premised on its resilience in providing a detailed explanation of the 'epistemological foundation', thereby facilitating a fuller understanding of the issues involved in studying dock labour process, even in the context of the reforms.

In keeping with sociological traditions that seek to provide explanations to dynamics, rooted in local specific conditions, we adopted ethnographic approach for docklabour process understanding. While allowing a limit of the field of analysis to a particular context, it facilitates an in-depth exploration of the unique dimensions of labour process that influenced or shaped the experience and orientations of workers in the

port industry. In other words, it seeks to explore how the interplay of dock work process and managerial practices shape the lived-work experiences of workers. On how the researcher should decide on the techniques for gathering data, Silverman (1985, cited in [23]) notes, "given the wide range of possible research topics brought to the research field, there are no hard-and-fast rules for conducting research." Corroborating this, Gaskell (2000) observes that the technique for gathering data must reflect the specific aims of the given study [23].

Since the broad objective of workplace study is to explore meanings workers give to their subjective conditions and how they interpret port reforms and the embedded managerial issues, a decision by the researcher to combine the use of ethnography as research method with interviews and participant observation, as techniques for gathering data become pertinent. Noting the importance of interviews in ethnographic study, Collinson (1992) suggests that using interviews allows the researcher to gain access to many issues that questionnaires do not allow [23]. In other words, participant observation combined with interview aids the researcher to gain the social significance of 'dockfloor folklore'; "while positivist methods like questionnaires constrain research by imposing a particular structure or predefined categories on the research" [23]. On the other hand, a more open-ended research method such as interviewing allows and encourages respondents to narrate stories of their own reality. According to Silverman, [23] "interview-data obtained through open-ended techniques reproduce and rearticulate cultural processes and practices grounded in a given pattern of social setting or organization." Cultural realities are displayed in manners that are "neither biased nor accurate but simply real, from the respondent's point of view" (cited in Mohammed 2003: 14). Thus, the use of participant observation provides researcher with the analytic tool to obtain knowledge about the "social processes" of the workplace, its routine and the specific daily practices. Daudi (1986) and Collinson (1992), separately noted in their work, that many acts of daily work experiences of workers draw on a thorough knowledge of the technical and social specificities embedded in the social organization [23].

Opportunity to understand the context which "direct observation" provides, gives analytical insights into on-going practices, consistencies,

patterns and nuances in the workplace that are themselves context defined. As noted by Muhammed [23] "fractures within and between patterns could not be easily analyzed and coded without taking context into consideration." Actors in workplace relations are engaging in "infinite and counter nuances" [23] in the specific context. To Gaskell, therefore (cited in [23]) "what goes in one setting must be understood in its own terms within the context, in which a researcher must be able to deploy 'an approach which allows him multiplicity of methods in the specific settings." This therefore provides the opportunity to bring together seemingly "inconsistent" and often "contradictory categories" that give a 'thick description' of the particular workplace.

3.5 Analytical Relevance of Ethnography

This therefore explains the analytical relevance of ethnography, participant observation and interview as research tools. It is on this that Gill (2000, cited in 18 [23]) suggests that a "context-based analytical approach must be adopted in such ethnographic study." Such a perspective is characterized by certain features that should prevent the researcher from adopting an 'a priory', and taken for granted stance which could yield unproblematic 'truth' of the context. On this, Brockington and Sullivan [14] caution that "qualitative methods go beyond numbers, to consider meanings derived from findings, and to problematize, rather than accept uncritically the production of data." With this orientation, the researcher would be able to appreciate that his analysis and understanding of the context are "historically" and "culturally specific" and also relative. Such an approach appreciates that knowledge is 'socially constructed'; reality of the world we study are constructed by the on-going social processes, embedded with people, practices and phenomenon that are linked to action, practices and discourses" [14].

Thus in the context of port reforms and docklabour, the unfolding dynamics of dock labour process and managerial practices require a combination of theoretical concepts and methodological approaches in the interpretation of not only the dynamics, but indeed workers' lived experiences in the context. In making sense of the workplace regimes on waterfronts therefore, Ethnography as a research tool remains relevant.

While the use of qualitative technique for gathering data and gaining insights from the field have been found to be well established in the

social science discipline [12], it has also been demonstrated to be complemented by quantitative technique. Quantitative research tends to adopt a more technical numbers and tables approach in analysis [13], while qualitative research utilizes words and 'thick descriptions' as method of analysis. For Lincolin and Guba [12], researchers in the social science discipline should be 'wary' of 'technicist' approach of quantitative research.

However, as shown in literature, some researchers such as Lincolin and Guba [12], Bart Kosko [24], Steiner Kvale [25], and Babbie and Mouton [11], have demonstrated that there was indeed no need for separating the social research work into quantitative and qualitative. Thus, the researcher should apply the combination of both in his analysis and evaluations of findings, in which it would be demonstrated that social research inquiry could simultaneously be guided both by qualitative and quantitative considerations of research reports. Yet emphasis remains that, in the instances of ethnographic studies, reports are captured better through qualitative method. As indicated above in our justification for ethnography, this is more so when the researcher will need to actually make sense of "enduring" social process from the perspectives of the research objects, in their own context. This is when 'insider's perspective' becomes highly important to be privileged into researcher's analysis. Thus, as noted by Babbie and Mouton [11], qualitative research method is crucial to capture the underlying dynamics in the social context.

However, in the context of social reality, what produces "balanced research" evidence is the 'triangulation' of techniques both within and across the qualitative and quantitative. As should be demonstrated in researcher's findings, it entails utilizing the strength of one to mitigate the weakness of the other. And in addressing the questions of objectivity and validity, as often raised by the 'positivists', Lincolin and Guba [12] have rightly cautioned against rigidity of quantitative techniques. They argue that qualitative inquiry of ethnographic study should start with 'multiple constructed realities' of the social context [12]. To them, this allows for credibility, neutrality and consistency which in the final analysis fulfil the ground objectives of both qualitative and quantitative research.

Nevertheless, arguments on the appropriate research tool to be adopted for investigating the social world remains problematic. This is why Smalings [26] earlier advocated for a non-rigid scientific protocol that does not privilege one technique over the other. The concern for a researcher, as noted by Smalings is to adopt a "multi-method" approach to his data collection. This will allow a consideration of the detailed evidence from the field. Importance of such detailed discussion from the field will therefore inform the relevance of multi-method approach that underpins researcher's adoption of technique of interview, participant observation in his evaluations of responses from the field.

4. CONCLUSION

In this paper, attemp has been made to review contextual literature on ports reforms and implications on decent work. The resilience of the concept of Social Dialogue is subjected to analytical discussion while suggesting scope for further research work. Qualitative Research Methodology, with attention to its merits as a method of inquiry is reviewed. Justifications for the adoption of Ethnography and its limitations as method of inquiry for workplace study of this type were also analysed. While its theoretical and conceptual merits and justification are particularly placed against the backdrop that the social realities of the world of work for the workers is better captured through their own 'lens', and with attentiveness to 'narratives' of their own 'stories', the broad challenges remain. Further research work for empirical findings and analysis therefore could add value in that direction.

CONSENT

As per international standard or university standard, respondents' written consent has been collected and preserved by the author(s).

COMPETING INTERESTS

Author has declared that no competing interests exist.

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