

SUCCESES AND CHALLENGES OF THE NUMSA GENDER COMMITTEE

INTRODUCTION

This session will try to cover policies adopted at the Congress and Central committee and will be divided in the following sections: -

- ⇒ **Collective Bargaining**
- ⇒ **Campaigns**
- ⇒ **Gender Structures/Coordination**
- ⇒ **Education**
- ⇒ **Recommendations for discussion**

Since its launch NUMSA rallied women around three demands: -

1. Full maternity rights
2. An end to sexual discrimination
3. Ten days paid childcare leave

In 1993 the congress adopted a resolution on women's empowerment that covered the following broad principals: -

1. Development of women leadership
2. Advancement of women's issues and integration of women's issues in the mainstream structures of the union.

Central committee of 1994 adopted a policy covering the following: -

1. To employ a full time national gender coordinator
2. Establish factory gender committees from factory to national level
3. Run women development schools

The 1996 congress resolution covered the following: -

1. Women in Employment

- ♠ Encourage employment of women in the traditional male dominated industry.
- ♠ Abolish gender biasness in promotion and recruitment procedure, job creation schemes should prioritise employment of women.
- ♠ State and employers should take responsibility of childcare facilities.

2. Union

- ♠ Encourage the elections of female shop stewards.
- ♠ Organisers to be trained to understand women's demands and take women's issues up as a collective union issues.
- ♠ Childcare facilities at all union meetings.

ACHIEVEMENTS

- ♠ Collective Bargaining – attempts have been made to put forward the above demands at industry level, although these demands were not successfully achieved some companies have full maternity rights, childcare etc as a result of women taking up these issues at plant level.
- ♠ Gender Co-ordination – the union employed a national gender co-ordination but still have to carry two portfolio's the one of health and safety as well.
- ♠ Gender Committees – has been established at factories but not to the extent one would like.
- ♠ Female shop stewards – since NUMSA's launch more women are elected as shop stewards.

- ♠ Childcare facilities – the union paid for childminders at meetings, but a proper policy has not been developed nationally.
- ♠ Numsa news – covered regular slots on gender issues [but convened to a few writers]

OBSTACLES

The following are but a few obstacles that hampered the process in achieving the above: -

- ♠ Rejection of quota system at 1996 congress
- ♠ Regions don't implement national program
- ♠ No proper co-ordination at regional level [administrators Vs gender co-ordination]
- ♠ Shop stewards lack of understanding in terms of gender issues
- ♠ Negotiators not sensitive or rather don't understand gender demands
- ♠ Attitudes of male shop stewards and to an extent female leadership
- ♠ Lack of confidence, interest of women
- ♠ No proper discussions in LSSC, REC DO and CC
- ♠ Status of women – no research has been done in terms of the status of women in the different industries

Status of Women in the union

It is very difficult to answer this question, because the union has not done any substantial research into the matter. However it is commonly accepted that women make out a small percentage of our membership [no research has been done in terms of how many women is really employed in the industries] we therefore have no clear idea where women membership are located, the union is also not able to assess what is the potential for the recruitment of more women workers. Women Leadership within the union is restricted in most cases to a local level. It is generally accepted that most women are located in the low skilled, low paid jobs in the industry, some will be employed in the motor,

engineering and electronics industries and a few if not none as artisans. Due to this inequality the conditions of employment of women workers are likely to be poorer than those of the overwhelming number of male workers in the industry, this make the battle for women rights to be improved [maternity rights] even more difficult. At the other end of the industry, Auto and Engineering tend to employ more men; this is because of the traditional male bias in the industries. Women were regarded as a great risk and cost factor, given their need for maternity leave and childcare responsibility. Furthermore companies are not prepared to spend money on training and new technology to make the work environment friendlier to allow women to take up positions previously seen as the male terrain.

It is this background that informs us when we look at implementation of our resolutions on women in NUMSA.

HOW HAS THE UNION IMPLEMENTED RESOLUTIONS

As one can measure the achievements the union to some extend tried to implement our resolutions if we look back to all resolutions one must ask was sufficient work done, taking in account the following:

The constitution commits the union to fight and oppose discrimination in all its forms within the union, the factories and society. The union went further and adopted a resolution that spells out: -

- Fight against discrimination and this include equal pay, equal opportunities.
- Full Parental Rights.
- Empowering workers through affirmative action

COLLECTIVE BARGAINING ISSUES

Whilst it is true that the union has made serious attempts put forward demands to better the lives of women, it has not been consistent and through a thoroughly planned campaign. Furthermore due to a lack of awareness amongst workers and attitudes of organising staff, these gender demands are the first that are compromised on during negotiations.

Organisers feel that they are overburden with a large number of issues they have to deal with and women's issues at times are not seen as a priority.

Reasons why gender related demands don't get motivated properly by our bargaining delegates are because they don't understand the issues at hand and how to motivate those demands.

The demands for affirmative action is also not campaign driven nor well research. More often these proposals are tabled at bigger and wealthier companies that do not necessarily employ women workers. As a result our demand for affirmative action serves more the interest of our fellow black male members as oppose to include women members, this is obviously not deliberate action by the union.

As with other demands no work has been done on recruitment procedures [all jobs open to women]. NICESEMI employers rather told us that the Equity Bill would cover us. We all now that laws need to be enforce, how can we challenge recruitment procedures if we don't have a policy within the industry to implement the equity bill.

Wage Equity – the demand for equal pay for equal value of work is a fundamental demand to the upliftment of female workers. Yet the union has not done any significant policy works and there is no guideline on this area. We do not know what are the motivations nor have an understanding as to the status of discriminatory pay in our factories.

Research – The union lack the capacity to research and analyse. It is therefore not clear what the existing conditions of women are in the above categories. Nobody has been task to analyse the information in wages and other agreement. Attempts has been made by the then women's committee to collect information [questioners] but this has not been very successful and one do not know where that information are today, this is mainly because of lack of proper co-ordination and capacity to do so.

DOES THE CURENT CO-ORDINATORS HAVE THE CAPACITY TO IMPLEMENT AND MONITOR ISSUES MENTION ABOVE

The Gender structures at national and regional level tried to help establishing a clear awareness of women's issues. The presence of a national co-ordinator helps to ensure that some of the demands are tabled at national level. The establishment of gender committees assisted in building women's capacity and leadership skills, yet this few women are not able to reach the majority of women. This is because a few women aren't able to implement the resolutions effectively. Factory structures as we want to see them could not be establish in terms of gender programs, due to lack of capacity.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DISCUSSIONS

Some of the following recommendations came from a workshop held in the Western Cape and others came from an ILO study how to integrate gender issues in the mainstream structures and programs of union

Gender analysis

Carrying out a gender analysis is usually the first step in planning a programme because attitudes, prejudices and assumptions about women's roles are stumbling blocks to the promotion of equality between men and women. No disaggregated data and ignorance of women's actual roles, work and contributions towards development cause them.

A gender analysis requires the following: -

- What are the division of labour between men and women?
- Who has access to and control over resources and benefits?
- What needs men and women have?
- What are the constraints and/or opportunities i.e. the extent of direct and indirect discrimination
- What capacity does the union have to promote equality between men and women in the union and in industry?

It is most important that women are given the opportunity to identify and prioritise their own needs. The information is usually more reliable and this may require specific organisational arrangements, such as utilising female interviewers and or organising meetings for women only.

Allocation of resources

As in many programmes with a social dimension, women's programmes or components of programmes are often under resources. If a program is not explicit in setting targets on men and women's participation and does not clearly allocate resources for women specific programs, the chances are that women programs will not materialise.

Gender & Education

Basic Shopstewards Training - module should have a slot explaining the concept gender and also include the unions policy on women. The national education program should include gender issues such as:

- Women's oppression
- Sexual division of labour
- Gender discrimination
- Sexual harassment

Gender & Organising

- Establishment of gender structures should not be seen as something separate and should therefore be the responsibility of organisers and the organising sub-committee should monitor them.
- Arrange meetings suitable to gender time.
- We should focus on factories where there are many women workers.

Gender and Campaigns

Our campaigns do not effectively integrate a gender perspective, with agency shop and admin we do not need a gender perspective as it cuts across all workers irrespective of gender. On the other campaign i.e. Living Wage, Childcare, and Time Off for gender reps and Health & Safety we should: -

- Provide training for factory genders reps to spearhead these campaigns in the factories.
- Ensure gender reps are elected on the health and safety committees as a strategy to ensure they get time off.
- Demands should be given priority at NBC and should be discuss at regional level.
- The 1999 shopstewards elections should focus on the election of female shopstewards [develop a poster with the focus on women leadership]

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- The union to vigorously campaign to ensure more women is elected as shop stewards.
- Each factory [where possible] to at least have one female shop steward.
- Campaign that women be trained and given opportunities to find jobs previously or currently occupied by men, e.g. artisans, mechanics, etc.

COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

To some extent the processes of collective bargaining undermine our gender demands and therefore should: -

- Have one process
- Demands should be collected at factory level
- Involve gender reps or female shop stewards in the bargaining process
- Industry to employ more women [demand on recruitment procedures]
National negotiators to be trained on gender related demands if they don't understand it.
- National gender co-ordinator to be part of process.
- Negotiate a Parental Rights Agreement in all sectors.
- Re-visit all gender related demands and see where we can improve, e.g. an end to sexual discrimination {engineering sector}

WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

Continue with the gender schools and develop an advance school for those who progressed from previous schools.

Regions to assess those participants who attended previous school to monitor the growth of female leadership.

Develop a course for all female office bearers.

LOB's, ROB's and NOB's to be trained on women specific issues and attend gender sensitivity workshops run by the education department.

REGIONAL CO-ORDINATION

The NGF came up with the following proposals after the discussions of full time co-ordinator were not discussed properly or at all at the CC.

- ⇒ The funeral benefits has been re-allocated to locals
- ⇒ Administrators in the regions will no longer be doing the benefits {only those outstanding claims} as from March 1998.

⇒ Some regions felt that the benefits clerk's work will be redundant, therefore suggest the following: -

⇒ Not to have a full time co-ordinator but use existing staff as some regions benefits clerks only do benefits.

Regions to decided for themselves how to approach this issue e.g.

Use administrators that are sensitive towards gender issues and have the will to make a success of our programs.

Swap administrators were there is a need [locals Vs region]

Regional Gender Co-ordinators must be part of the Regional Team, to ensure gender are integrate in all departments and gender issues are not undermined.

Motivation for swap

In the regional office you can manage your work more in terms of time, you do not work direct with members as per the local offices. If the gender co-ordinator is situated in the local she/he will not have the time to attend to regional activities or COSATU meetings.

National Co-ordination

The portfolio of gender and health and safety should be split.

The research officer should be task to do a proper research on how many female workers we have in the different sectors.

The national gender co-ordinator should look at all the national industry agreements and see how we can compile a parental rights agreement and also improve those demands as mention above.

End