

"WOMEN IN THE LABOUR MOVEMENT - CONFRONTING THE NEW MILLENIUM"

The year 1999 is the year of assessing performance and delivery. In the political arena we are reflecting on the accomplishments and shortcomings of our young democracy as we prepare our nation for South Africa's second democratic elections on the 2nd of June 1999. At this time, it is important that we also evaluate the progress we as a united labour movement made subsequent to April 1994, since the involvement of COSATU in our struggle for democracy was and still remains crucial.

For women the 2nd of June 1999 presents itself as a challenge, especially women within COSATU. The challenge lies in the need to ensure that women are more represented in all structures of the federation, affiliates, down to local structures.

Women make up the majority of citizens in South Africa and have been and remain under represented within the trade union movement. This has been the case since the launch of COSATU in 1985.

Women make up 36% of COSATU's membership, while women in shop steward positions are only 14%. This figure puts women in a difficult position to assume leadership in all levels of the federation since the shop steward body is the recruiting pool for leadership. COSATU's national leadership have 16% representation of women, with 25% women in leadership at regional level.

Thirty-five participants, of whom two thirds were women, participated in a workshop organised by the Trade Union Library and Education Centre on the 18th of March 1999. The purpose of the workshop was firstly, to assess the extent to which we have been successful in implementing and promoting the resolutions taken at the Third National Women's Conference of COSATU in 1996. Secondly, we examined what we can do to ensure that these resolutions are successfully implemented and adhered to?

Trade unions represented at the workshop included SACCAWU, SACTWU, NUMSA, CEPPWAWU, CWU, SASBO, FAWU, and the National Domestic Worker's Union.

Groups noted the following:

COSATU RESOLUTION:

DECISION ON WOMEN AND GLOBALISATION

"Cosatu will fight to protect women against the negative effects of globalisation."

1. Cosatu will take a stand:

- a. Against the setting up of Export Processing Zones (EPZs) and other forms of deregulation.*
- b. Against privatisation.*
- c. Against sub-contracting and outsourcing.*
- d. Against the imposition of conditions (Structural Adjustment Programmes) by un-elected and unaccountable institutions such as the IMF and World Bank.*

3rd National Women's Conference of COSATU, 1996

Group response

- The Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU) rejects the idea of EPZ's in South Africa or anywhere else.
- South African Clothing and Textile Workers Union (SACTWU) also opposes EPZ's. SACTWU says that EPZ's do not develop a country's economy but lead to poor working conditions. EPZ's will lead to competition between countries and regions as they all try to undercut each other to attract investors. Instead of developing their economies EPZ's will lose taxes and become even more dependent on foreign investors.
- South African Municipal Workers Union (SAMWU) object intensely against the privatisation of public sector services. The union argues against the recent privatisation of Dolphin Coast's water to SAUR international at the end of January 1999. This was not discussed with union while the Municipality signed the contract with the support of government. COSATU and the government are involved in a heated controversy about this issue.
- **We are of the opinion that COSATU has taken a political stand on issues concerning globalisation but implementation is either unsuccessful or absent. The above are examples of unions exerting strong objections to globalisation and privatisation. Linked to globalisation are privatisation, subcontracting and increasing**

outsourcing of activities, which dictate the need for labour to adopt adequate strategies to address this.

COSATU RESOLUTION:

2. "Cosatu will engage in the following campaigns and activities at all levels:"

- a. *No retrenchments. This campaign must be revived and widely publicised. Women to be actively involved in the campaign.*
- b. *An organising programme should be undertaken for organising temporary, casual, sub-contracted, enfranchised, part time, seasonal workers as well as those employed by foreign companies.*
- c. *All workers in b to be employed under the same conditions as permanent workers, i.e. wages and benefits.*
- d. *Build strong international and Southern African regional solidarity and mobilise for widespread support for our positions.*
- e. *We need to undertake research on the effects of globalisation on women:*
 - * in our workplaces and industries.*
 - * in the Region.*
 - * around the world.*
- f. *An education programme on the effects of globalisation on workers and in particular working women must be developed.*
- g. *COSATU to ensure that women are adequately represented in the economic transformation team of the alliance.*

3rd National Women's Conference of COSATU, 1996

Group Response

- **Women in the South African labour market have not been protected against effects of globalisation.**
- Not enough has been done by COSATU to ensure that women are adequately represented in the economic transformation team of the alliance.
- Participants acknowledged the event of the Presidential Jobs Summit in October 1998. COSATU have to monitor programmes aimed at the employment of women and youth, which were agreed upon at the summit.

- Ditsela together with COSATU, is playing an important role in educating workers and importantly women workers, on the impact of globalisation on workers:

Impact of globalisation on women:

- Women make up 70% of the world's poor.
- 66% of the world's illiterate are women.
- Women's work is marginalised, casualised, outsourced, turned into part – time jobs or pushed into home based work.
- Women are often the first to be retrenched.
- Women are concentrated into jobs that are regarded as “women's jobs”. These jobs are often regarded as unskilled.
- Women often receive lower wages than men because of the type of work they do do do, or because they are concentrated in the informal sector.
- Women often work longer hours than men do.
- Unemployment affects women more than men because of the kinds of jobs they are concentrated in.
- Increasing the number of women workers does not necessarily mean better wages or working conditions for women.
- To survive many women are forced into the informal sector.

Adequate research has been done on the effects of globalisation on women. However, the challenge of effective practical implementation of strategies to alleviate and counter these effects on women, is not a reality.

COSATU RESOLUTION:

DECISION ON WOMEN AND WORK

1. JOB CREATION

- a. We need a gender biased system in favour of women as a criteria for employment in the public works programme.*
- b. Encourage women to take jobs that are traditionally male.*
- c. Support the need for education and training for workers involved in Public Works Programme.*
- d. COSATU should be involved in affirmative action programme for the next 2 years this will include training on all COSATU regions / affiliates and to ensure that shop stewards are appointed in affirmative action positions.*

3rd National Women's Conference of COSATU, 1996

Group Response

- We agree that the Employment Equity Bill played a positive role in job creation for women.**
- However, where women are recruited into jobs that are traditionally male dominated, women are still discriminated against. Adequate training programmes together with structured support is not available to the above women. Recruiting women is not sufficient. The proper structures need to be in place to ensure the success of women in decision making positions.**

COSATU RESOLUTION

2. WAGE EQUITY

- a. We reaffirm our demand for equal pay for the work of equal value regardless of sex.*
- b. We support the COSATU resolution on the skills based grading system away from current grading systems.*
- c. The Women's Sub-Committee should discuss the skill based grading system and evaluate the extent that it is addressing the needs of women.*
- d. We need to sensitise negotiators about the need to negotiate these issues during collective bargaining.*

3rd National Women's Conference of COSATU, 1996

Group Response

- The Equity Act opens up the space for trade unions to negotiate equal pay for work of equal value.
- However, the Wage grading system needs serious attention and restructuring.
- We need to organise campaigns for women organisers and negotiators in the unions to ensure that women's issues are given the necessary attention and effectively negotiated during collective bargaining.

COSATU RESOLUTION

3. COSATU WOMEN'S CONFERENCE

- a. *Future women's conference must receive detailed reports from affiliates regarding the implementation of all the resolutions taken at women's conference.*

3rd National Women's Conference of COSATU, 1996

Group Response

- The above resolution has the full support of participants, though the implementation thereof has been unsuccessful.
- An area of improvement identified by participants was that Regional secretaries and Education officers need to improve their communication with affiliates to ensure that accurate information filters through to them since,
- Affiliates do not attend women's conferences but women in the national leadership attend.
- In most cases affiliates do not have the necessary structures in place to take up issues decided upon at conferences.
- Affiliates need to be strengthened through regional leadership providing assistance to affiliates.
- Regional secretaries need to put pressure on affiliates to provide a detailed update of the implementation of resolutions at a local level.

COSATU RESOLUTION

4. EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS / BCOEA

- a. We reaffirm our position on the 6 months maternity leave fully paid for by employers and these must not be compromised.*
- b. Men should take equal parental responsibility.*
- c. COSATU should campaign to change the mindset of the stereotype, sex roles through education re: girlchild and boychild.*

3rd National Women's Conference of COSATU, 1996

Group Response

- **The BCEA makes provision for adequate transport, information regarding health and safety implications and the right to medical examination for night shift workers.**
- **Significant progress was made by the BCEA on a general level but for women there are still limitations involved, e.g. BCEA makes provision for 4 months unpaid maternity leave, while women need a full 6 months paid maternity leave.**
- **In the instance of a woman being retrenched after she received maternity leave she would not be in a position to draw unemployment since she's already drawn maternity benefits.**
- **On the resolution that men should take equal parental responsibility, women asserted that the struggle of women to implement greater equality in their homes and daily lives is extremely difficult and slow as no legislation can change a particular mindset, attitude and behaviour.**
- **We decided that our education system need to be gender sensitive, we must instil the equality of men and women in our children, from an early age and ensure that the education our children receive constantly reinforces this belief.**

COSATU RESOLUTION

5. GENDER STRUCTURES AT THE WORKPLACE

Affiliates should look at appropriate structures to spearhead transformation on the shop floor.

3rd National Women's Conference of COSATU, 1996

Group Response

- **Participants felt very strong about unions and workplaces not making sufficient progress in being gender sensitive. Women still suffer discrimination in recruitment procedures, with regard to training and leadership opportunities and sexual harassment, both at the workplace and in the unions.**
- **We critically assessed the role of existing gender committees and discussed whether we progressed or regressed. Participants reached consensus that not much progress was made through present gender committees. As a result of this we need to seriously attend to the role of affiliates and the lack of structural organisation of most affiliates.**
- **The issue whether we need advisory committees was well debated and included discussion around whether we should not rather concentrate on strengthening existing gender committees. Participants felt it more feasible to strengthen existing structures instead of duplicating committees. Where gender structures are not present we must build and develop efficient bodies.**
- **Regarding women's participation in structures we stated that women are used by the male dominated leadership of the unions as tokens for window-dressing and not to perform a meaning full role in transformation in the trade union and on the shop floor.**
- **On the development of women's leadership e.g. Training, women are not adequately trained. In many instances women are told that there is not sufficient funds for the gender budget. We need to increase the pressure on the COSATU leadership to include training needs of women in the budget and to provide ample funds for training.**
- **Sexual harassment is an issue that participants felt is severely neglected both in our union structures and at workplaces. We have been successful in adopting a code of conduct regarding sexual harassment but had little success in the practical implementation thereof at the workplace and in unions.**

- Sexual harassment occurs at all workplaces and in all union structures on a daily basis. Women need to be educated to understand that it is our right not to endure sexual harassment. We need to develop our confidence to assert ourselves and take action against sexual harassment.

COSATU RESOLUTION

DECISION ON WOMEN'S STRUGGLES AND THE NEED FOR A STRONG WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

1. NATIONAL WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

- Conference confirms the need for a strong women's movement. This is necessary for the advancement of our struggles, among others gender transformation and a non-patriarchal society.*

3rd National Women's Conference of COSATU, 1996

Group Response

- The formation of a National Women's Movement is in an indefinite formative stage, which participants viewed as an unsuccessful attempt as results are absent.

COSATU RESOLUTION

2. GENDER COMMISSION

- The alliance must nominate people to sit in the Gender Commission, and the alliance secretariat must drive this process.*
- The alliance should consider appropriate mechanisms as how to interact and influence the functioning of the Office on the Status of Women located in the Deputy President's office. This should be placed on the alliance meeting scheduled for the end of May 1996.*

3rd National Women's Conference of COSATU, 1996

Group Response

- Gender Commission exists but results are not delivered. Most women felt that their concerns are not dealt with effectively.

COSATU RESOLUTION

3. PARLIAMENTARIANS

We need to improve and strengthen our relationship with the Parliamentarians by ensuring that we develop programmes that involve them. In this way we ensure accountability and a deeper understanding of what happens in Parliament and in addition we mandate our Comrades to take up working class issues within Parliament.

3rd National Women's Conference of COSATU, 1996

Group Response

- **It was a general opinion that there exists poor communication between parliamentarians and grassroots structures. Communication should be improved to ensure that our interests are represented fully.**

COSATU RESOLUTION

DECISION ON BUILDING THE ORGANISATION

1. ATTENDANCE OF WOMEN IN MEETINGS

- Constitutional structures must ensure that gender issues are incorporated in the agenda and their broad working programmes.*
- Childcare facilities must be provided in all meetings to facilitate maximum participation of all including those with young children.*
- We need to develop an education and training programme aimed at empowering both men and women to ensure a balanced participation in meetings.*
- Meetings should be convened taking into consideration times that are appropriate and coinciding with the transport needs for women.*
- COSATU should consider a system whereby women are represented in proportion to affiliate women membership in all committees, workshops, conferences etc. where possible.*

3rd National Women's Conference of COSATU, 1996

Group Response

- **Gender issues need to be prioritised on the agenda for serious discussion and action to be taken. We need to revisit existing policies and formulate new policies.**
- **Childcare facilities are not provided at all meetings. At national level satisfactory provision is made for childcare but this need to be the case at regional as well as local level.**
- **Most of the time men dominate meetings which lead to women not enjoying the freedom to speak their minds. Both men and women need gender education to understand the real life implications of gender differences and the meanings we attach to it.**
- **Meeting times are still a problem for most women since most union meetings are held after working hours, in the evening and on Saturdays. Most women cannot attend these meetings because they have to fulfil family and domestic responsibilities.**
- **Women are not represented in proportion to affiliate women membership of the unions. We need to ensure that more women are elected as shop stewards if we are serious about increasing the number of women in influential leadership and decision making positions. A collective plan needs to be developed and implemented to deal with the constraints around electing women as shop stewards.**

COSATU RESOLUTION

2. WOMEN AND VIOLENCE

- a. COSATU must engage on a concerted campaign to challenge the use of violence against women. In this regard we must take up joint programmes with organisations like POWA. The focus on the campaign should be on, among other issues, rape, battery and political violence.*
- b. COSATU should campaign for the establishment of a private counter where women can report cases of rape and violence.*

3rd National Women's Conference of COSATU, 1996

Group Response

- **The Domestic Violence Bill provides the necessary laws and structure for women to use it for our protection, now we need to be educated to use our rights to our advantage and fight domestic abuse.**

Additional points raised in the workshop:

- We need to broaden our focus to include rural women
- We need to recognise family responsibilities and explore options to include married and divorced women in trade union activities.
- Women need to be educated to use the Maintenance Bill passed in Nov 1998, to their advantage.
- On the issue of Public holidays, we need to reflect how we recognise May Day. We tend to devalue public holidays by not making constructive use of such days to educate and inform our communities about the struggle workers and especially women, waged to bring about the changes we enjoy today and which we take for granted.
- What actions are we taking with regard to unemployed women, should they be entitled to UIF, maternity benefits if their husbands are employed? For the above to be motivated men must acknowledge and value the work that women do. COSATU women volunteered to look at ways to link up with unemployed women.

Conclusion

Participants share the conviction that the above COSATU resolutions are good resolutions but little has been done on the implementation and monitoring of implementation.

Presently the COSATU Gender Forum is organising a Children's Day campaign. Activities organised for the celebration of National Women's Day on the 9th of August will be confirmed in due time.

Crucial to our empowerment participants added, is the need for us to improve our support for one another. As working class women we must realise that our power lies in us taking organised collective action. We ourselves must take responsibility for bringing about the necessary changes.

Women who were involved in writing this article includes, Jackie Breda (COSATU), Elma Geswindt (COSATU), Hester Stephens (Domestic Workers' Union), Moeniera Peters (Labour Research Service) and Farnaaz Majiet (TULEC).