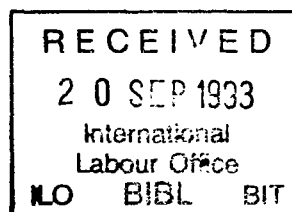


***Equality for Women in Employment:***  
***An interdepartmental project***

WORKING PAPER

**The unionization of women workers in different  
industrial sectors in South Africa**

Catherine O'Regan  
Bee Thompson



*Note: The IDP Women Working Papers are preliminary documents circulated informally in a limited number of copies mainly to stimulate discussion and to obtain critical comments.*



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## Preface

The unionization of women workers in different industrial sectors in South Africa by Catherine O'Regan<sup>\*</sup> and Bee Thompson<sup>\*\*</sup> examines, inter alia, the situation of women in the membership and leadership of the trade unions in South Africa, especially those affiliated to the major trade union federation, Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU). While these unions have not been in existence for a long time and despite the racism and repressiveness of the society, some of them have, as well as COSATU itself, adopted and implemented a number of measures in relation to women with varied results. Indeed, in a few of the unions there is an adequate proportion of women in their membership and also in leadership positions. In several of the unions, however, women are grossly underrepresented in particular in higher leadership positions.

The report also contains a detailed case study of the South African Clothing and Textile Workers' Union (SACTWU) which has a large number of women members because of the preponderance of women employees in the industries covered by it. Here there is analysis of interviews undertaken to show the benefits perceived to have accrued to women from membership of the unions and measures needed to accommodate women's needs in the unions and to increase women's participation in leadership positions.

Some recommendations for action are made in the conclusion. The unions are also urged to keep records on their membership disaggregated by sex.

This report is an output of the ILO's interdepartmental project on equality for women in employment, a project which adopts a multidisciplinary approach to analyse some of the major concerns regarding equality for women in employment. The project is geared, inter alia, to generating data that could form a strong basis for the formulation of effective programmes and activities for future action.

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## Abbreviations

ANC	African National Congress
COSATU	Congress of South African Trade Unions
CWIU	Chemical Workers' Industrial Union
FAWU	Food and Allied Workers' Union
FEDSAW	The defunct Federation of South African Workers
LRA	Labour Relations Act
MEWUSA	Metal Engineering Workers' Union of South Africa
NACTU	National Congress of Trade Unions
NEHAWU	National Education, Health and Allied Workers' Union
NUM	National Union of Mineworkers
NUMSA	National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa
PAC	
POTWA	Post Office and Telecommunications Workers' Association
PPWAWU	Paper, Printing, Wood and Allied Workers' Union
SACCAWU	South African Commercial Catering and Allied Workers' Union
SACP	
SACTWU	South African Clothing and Textile Workers' Union
SAMWU	South African Municipal Workers' Union
TGWU	Transport and General Workers' Union

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# 1. Introduction

A study of the unionization of women workers in different industrial sectors in South Africa needs to be understood in the context of political and economic change in South Africa. Substantial unionization of the black workforce only occurred in South Africa during the 1980s. Apartheid was still in its heyday, political repression was severe and economic growth was faltering. This context had a number of implications for the unionization of women workers: first, the promotion of gender equality was rarely seen as a priority by unions, given the fight against racism and apartheid and the struggle for recognition and secondly, the effect of economic downturn was to make the unions' task of improving working conditions for all workers, not only women, difficult.

As in most western economies,<sup>1</sup> women employees are clustered in certain areas of the economy, notably services and commerce. Trade unions emerged most strongly in the manufacturing and mining industry. Although there are some exceptions, for the most part these areas were dominated by male workers. It is only in the 1990s that substantial inroads into the public service have been made by non-racial trade unions. Given the relatively recent development of unions, it is too early to identify long-term trends in the unionization of women.

Research into the major unions does show that women are under-represented at most levels of leadership within the unions. This has not gone unchallenged by female members. Different strategic responses have been debated vehemently, particularly within the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU, the largest non-racial trade union federation in South Africa). More difficult to determine is the factors which promote or retard women's involvement in trade unions. In this regard, we have undertaken a case study of one of the unions, the South African Clothing and Textile Union, to identify such factors.

This report is, therefore, divided into five sections: first, a brief historical description of the events of the 1980s; secondly, a description of the South African economy and its sectors including growth rates from 1960 to date; thirdly, a discussion of the demographic information concerning women in the workforce; fourthly, a discussion of the role of women in unions including the different strategic responses which have been developed by unions to address the difficulties faced by women and finally, the analysis of a case-study undertaken of the South African Clothing and Textile Workers Union (SACTWU). In conclusion, the report seeks to make some suggestions regarding proposals for action by the ILO, trade unions and employers.

## 1.1. Historical context

Before 1979, black workers were excluded from the operation of labour legislation in South Africa. This meant that black workers could not be represented on industry level collective bargaining forums (industrial councils) nor could they belong to registered trade unions. Although there was a period of active organisation of black workers during the 1940s and 1950s, this was ended in the 1960s by heavy-handed state repression of trade unions and union activists as well as of political organisations, such as the African National Congress (ANC) and the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC). During the 1960s and early 1970s, the economy saw a period of rapid growth, but black workers did not form unions.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See Sue Hastings and Martin Coleman "Women workers and unions in Europe: An analysis by industrial sector" IDP.Women/WP.4, International Labour Office, Geneva, 1992; the authors note that the Eastern European experience is quite different. See also Susan C. Eaton "Women workers, unions and industrial sectors in North America" IDP.Women/WP.1, International Labour Office, Geneva, 1992.

<sup>2</sup> For an interesting account of the history of black trade unions in South Africa see Steven Friedman *Building tomorrow today: African workers in trade unions 1970-84* (1987, Ravan Press, Johannesburg).

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During 1973, there was a wave of strikes, particularly in the province of Natal, which was followed by the slow rebuilding of black unions, and the appointment of a government commission to consider the position of black workers and labour legislation.<sup>3</sup> By the late 1970s, the newly emerging black unions had a small but significant membership in major industries, and in 1979 the Government announced labour legislation which would permit black workers to join trade unions and to bargain on behalf of their members. In 1980, the total union membership in South Africa was 808,000 (the majority of whom were white) but by 1992 there were approximately 2.90 million members (the majority of whom were black) within 200 registered trade unions.<sup>4</sup>

The largest trade union federation is COSATU with 1.2 million members and 14 affiliated unions. This federation promotes the principle of one union per industry, although this is not as yet strictly enforced. COSATU is a member of the triple alliance together with the South African Communist Party (SACP) and the ANC. It has accordingly a high political profile and is closely involved with political developments in South Africa.

The second largest trade union federation is the National Council of Trade Unions (NACTU) which is aligned to the PAC with 327,000 members and 23 affiliated unions. The third largest is the Federation of Salaried Employees (FEDSAL), which comprises largely white workers, with 225,059 members and 14 affiliates. Then there is the Federation of Independent Trade Unions (FITU) with 201,364 members and 23 affiliates, and finally there is the right-wing white South African Confederation of Labour with 88,553 members and six affiliates.<sup>5</sup>

The largest trade unions in the country are all affiliates of COSATU. They are the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM), the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA), the South African Clothing and Textile Workers Union (SACTWU), Food and Allied Workers Union (FAWU) and South African Commercial Catering and Allied Workers Union (SACCAWU).<sup>6</sup>

The 1980s was a decade of rapid union growth in South Africa. It was also a period of intense economic and political turmoil. The South African economy was already under stress (see part II below) and although the National Party Government was firmly entrenched, it was experiencing widespread and growing internal resistance. For example, there was the emergence in 1983 of the United Democratic Front (UDF), an ANC-aligned, loose federation of political, civic, women's, and youth organisations as well as some trade unions which united behind the banner of non-racialism and democracy. Internal resistance, coupled with increasing international financial, economic, trade and cultural sanctions, created a growing crisis for the South African State. In 1986, the Government abandoned its policy of influx control, a central tenet of apartheid in terms of which urbanization by blacks was tightly regulated, and which had sought to keep African people out of the urban areas. At the same time, however, it instituted a state of emergency aimed at quelling resistance to its rule. In addition it sought to implement a series of political reforms, none of which was successful.

Finally, in 1990, the South African Government announced the unbanning of the ANC, the SACP and PAC and released Nelson Mandela, president of the ANC from jail. The

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<sup>3</sup> The so-called Wiehahn Commission, published as *The Complete Wiehahn Report* (1992, Lex Patria, Pretoria).

<sup>4</sup> See the National Manpower Commission Annual Report 1992 at 12-13. In addition to registered unions there were 47 unregistered unions in 1991 with a paper membership of approximately 300 000 workers. It is widely believed that this figure is greatly exaggerated. A fuller discussion of the development of black trade unions in the 1980s can be found in J. Baskin *Striking Back: A History of COSATU* (1991: Ravan Press, Johannesburg).

<sup>5</sup> 1991 National Manpower Commission Annual Report.

<sup>6</sup> See figure 9 below at p. 31.

period between 1990 and 1993 has been a period of uncertainty and violence. During this time, COSATU has worked closely with its alliance partners. This alliance is apparently set to end once democratic elections have been held. It now seems as if the first democratic election will be held in April 1994.

The major piece of labour legislation governing trade unions and collective bargaining is the Labour Relations Act (LRA) 28 of 1956 which does not cover farmworkers, domestic servants and state employees.<sup>7</sup> As a significant number of women are farmworkers, domestic servants and employees of the State, this means that many women are excluded from the labour legislation. Although there is no direct link between labour legislation and the emergence of trade unions, it is notable that trade unions representing farmworkers, domestic servants and employees of the State have been later to develop than trade unions governing workers covered by the LRA. The National Manpower Commission (NMC) estimated, in its 1991 Annual Report, of the workers that fell within the terms of the LRA, some 52.5 per cent were members of a registered trade union.

## 1.2. The South African economy

South Africa is classified by the World Bank as an upper middle income country. In 1990 it had a per capita income of \$2,520, which is about eight times less than that of the USA, and four times greater than that of Zimbabwe.<sup>8</sup> A distinctive feature of the South African economy is the extent of the inequality that it displays. For historical reasons this inequality manifests itself along racial lines, with a disproportionate share of income accruing to the white population group. Thus, on average whites currently receive personal incomes about 9.5 times greater than Africans, 4.5 times greater than coloureds and 3 times greater than Asians.<sup>9</sup> Poverty, on the other hand, is concentrated among Africans. The Bureau for Market Research estimated that, in 1989, 52.7 per cent of Africans lived below the poverty line. Significant numbers of so-called coloureds and Asians also lived in poverty, with proportions below the line of 28.1 per cent and 10.7 per cent respectively. Among whites on the other hand, only 1.6 per cent experienced such intense poverty.<sup>10</sup>

Mining is a core feature of the South African economy, with gold, diamonds and coal the most important products. This sector is a very important earner of foreign exchange, with mineral products currently accounting for over half of total merchandise exports.<sup>11</sup> The mining sector also has very important linkages with the rest of the economy. The share of mining in gross domestic product (GDP) has however fallen, as the economy has diversified into manufacturing and services. It dropped from 28 per cent in 1911,<sup>12</sup> to about 12 per cent in 1989.<sup>13</sup> Growth rates since the 1960s have been relatively low, and in fact between 1986 and 1991 output shrank at an average rate of 1.7 per cent per annum.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>7</sup> State employees will, however, soon gain certain individual and collective rights under the imminent Public Service Labour Relations Act.

<sup>8</sup> *The World Bank Atlas* (1991, The World Bank, Washington, DC) at 8-9.

<sup>9</sup> Bureau of Market Research *Personal Income of the RSA — TBVC countries by population group and magisterial district* (1989, Unisa, Pretoria).

<sup>10</sup> Bureau of Market Research *Raming van voedingsbehoefdige persone in die RSA en TBVC lande 1989* (1990, Unisa, Pretoria).

<sup>11</sup> J. Leger and M. Nicol "Gold Mining in South Africa. Priorities for restructuring" Economic Trends Research Group, Working Paper No. 1.

<sup>12</sup> J. Nattrass: *The South African economy: Its growth and change* (1983, Oxford University Press, Cape Town).

<sup>13</sup> Leger and Nicol, op cit. at 2:

<sup>14</sup> *South African Statistics 1992* (Central Statistical Service, Pretoria).



The manufacturing sector is important and grew rapidly during the 1960s and 1970s. Its share in GDP rose from 20.5 per cent in 1960 to 24 per cent in 1981.<sup>15</sup> A strategy of import substitution was followed, commencing with consumer non-durables and then progressing to consumer durables, and finally to more sophisticated intermediate and capital goods. "National self-sufficiency" has been a persistent theme in government manufacturing policy. Since 1981, however, the sector has stagnated — the average annual growth rate between 1980 and 1991 was -0.7 per cent.<sup>16</sup>

Agriculture currently contributes about 5 per cent of GDP, and 10 per cent of formal wage employment.<sup>17</sup> There are also large numbers of people — many of whom are women — engaged in subsistence agriculture in the so-called "homelands".<sup>18</sup> The share of agriculture in output has declined over the years, standing at 21 per cent in 1911 but only 12 per cent in 1960.<sup>19</sup> Its share in employment has declined even more rapidly, from 22 per cent in 1960 to the previously mentioned 10 per cent today.<sup>20</sup> The future of the agricultural sector depends to a large extent on the policies and incentives that a future government will provide. Land reform will be a major issue, and many commentators have stressed the importance of encouraging small-scale farming. In the past, small-scale, and especially African, farmers have not only been neglected, but actively prejudiced.

The services sector is large, heterogenous and growing. In 1960 it accounted for 48 per cent of GDP, and by 1991 this had grown to 52 per cent.<sup>21</sup> Employment growth has been particularly rapid in government services, and the share of this sector in formal wage employment rose from 9.5 per cent in 1960 to 16.6 per cent in 1990.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, had it not been for this sector, total employment growth would have been negative during the 1986-91 period.<sup>23</sup>

The economy as a whole has experienced little or no growth in recent years. The average annual growth rate for the 1980s was 1.5 per cent,<sup>24</sup> while the 1990s have seen negative growth rates. The 1990 and 1991 growth rates were -0.5 per cent and -0.4 per cent respectively, and in 1992 the decline accelerated to -2 per cent.<sup>25</sup> These growth rates compare poorly with the 1960s and 1970s, when the average annual growth rates were, respectively, 5.6 per cent and 3.3 per cent.<sup>26</sup>

The growth of employment has been even slower. The National Manpower Commission<sup>27</sup> reports that formal sector employment grew at an average annual rate of only 0.4 per cent during the 1980s. During the 1990s the number of jobs has actually fallen, and by

<sup>15</sup> *South African Statistics 1986* (Central Statistical Service, Pretoria).

<sup>16</sup> *South African Statistics 1992* (Central Statistical Service, Pretoria).

<sup>17</sup> F.S. Barker: *The South African labour market: Critical issues for transition*, 58 (1992, J. L. van Schaik, Pretoria).

<sup>18</sup> For instance, see F. Wilson and M. Ramphela: *Uprooting poverty: The South African challenge* (1989, David Philip, Cape Town). See also H. Gilliomme and L. Schlemmer (eds.): *Up against the fences: Poverty, passes and privilege in South Africa* (1985, David Philip, Cape Town).

<sup>19</sup> *South African Statistics 1986* (Central Statistical Service, Pretoria).

<sup>20</sup> F.S. Barker cited above, n. 19 at 58.

<sup>21</sup> *South African Statistics 1992* (Central Statistical Services, Pretoria).

<sup>22</sup> F.S. Barker cited above, n. 19 at 58.

<sup>23</sup> *South African Labour Statistics 1992* (Central Statistical Service, Pretoria).

<sup>24</sup> *South African Reserve Bank Quarterly Bulletin*, Mar. 1993. Calculated for the period 1981-90.

<sup>25</sup> *South African Reserve Bank Quarterly Bulletin*, Mar. 1993.

<sup>26</sup> *South African Statistics 1992* (Central Statistical Services, Pretoria).

<sup>27</sup> *National Manpower Commission Annual Report 1992* at 29.

September 1992 was 5.1 per cent below its June 1989 level.<sup>28</sup> This translates into 276,000 jobs lost. Sectorally, most losses have been sustained in mining, manufacturing and construction. By October 1992 the indices of employment in these sectors were 83.5, 96.2 and 88.6 respectively (1985 = 100; index for total employment in October 1992 = 98.6).<sup>29</sup>

South Africa's total population is estimated at 37,737,618 (see table 1). Population growth has remained relatively high, averaging 2.8 per cent per annum between 1970 and 1990.<sup>30</sup> Real per capita output<sup>31</sup> has thus been decreasing since the mid 1970s, and has fallen a full 13 per cent since 1989.<sup>32</sup> Needless to say, this means that poverty, unemployment and informal sector employment have grown tremendously. An estimated composition of the economically active population is set out in diagram 1 below where the "economically active population" refers to those people presenting their labour for remuneration on the labour market. The term includes both formally and informally employed people, and people currently unemployed but willing to work. The diagram shows that almost 40 per cent of the economically active population (EAP) was estimated to be outside the formal sector of the economy in 1991.

Table 1. South African population with racial and gender breakdown

Race	Males	Females	Total
Whites	2 519 883	2 548 278	5 068 110
Asians	4 888 952	497 669	986 620
Coloureds	1 605 811	1 679 907	3 285 718
Blacks	14 058 332	14 338 838	28 397 170
Blacks in South Africa (excl. TBVC)	10 864 932	10 781 538	21 646 470
TBVC states	3 193 400	3 557 300	6 750 700
Total	18 672 978	19 064 692	37 737 618

Source: *Population Census 1991: 03-01-01* (Summarized results after adjustment for undercount) and 03-01-26.

With respect to the population, males made up 49.48 per cent of the population and females 50.52 per cent. In the so-called "self-governing territories" ("homelands") and nominally independent TBVC states, depleted by migrant labour, females made up 53.6 per cent of the population. Within cities themselves, men outnumbered women by a factor of 1.3 to 1 and in towns by 1.1 to 1 in 1990.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>28</sup> *South African Reserve Bank Quarterly Bulletin*, Mar. 1993.

<sup>29</sup> *South African Reserve Bank Quarterly Bulletin*, Mar. 1993.

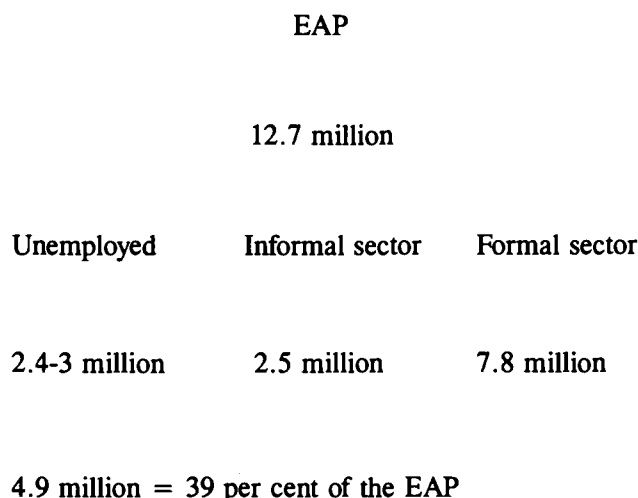
<sup>30</sup> *Development Bank of Southern Africa Annual Report, 1991/92*.

<sup>31</sup> Measured as Gross Domestic Product per capita.

<sup>32</sup> *South African Reserve Bank Quarterly Bulletin*, Mar. 1993.

<sup>33</sup> *CSS Current Population Survey: Blacks* (Mar. 1990); see also D. Budlender: "Women in Economic Development", *South African Review* 6 (1992, Ravan, Johannesburg) at 352.

Diagram 1. Composition of the economically active population  
by employment status, 1991



Source: *National Manpower Commission Annual Report, 1992:37*

### 1.3. Women in the labour force

The share of women in the labour force has been steadily rising over the years. According to Barker,<sup>34</sup> it rose from 23 per cent in 1960 to 36 per cent in 1990. Population census figures are 33 per cent for 1980,<sup>35</sup> and 39.4 per cent for 1991 which seem a little too high and do not give a completely accurate account of changes in the proportion of females in the economically active population over the years. Possibly a more useful indicator for the purposes of this report is the share of women in the employed labour force which is 36.3 per cent of those recorded as employed or self-employed in the 1991 population census. It is among this section of the labour force that unionization is concentrated.

Women are more likely to be unemployed than men. Of women classified as economically active in the 1991 census, nearly 25 per cent were unemployed. The corresponding figure for men was 14 per cent. A more comprehensive picture of the employment status of women is given in table 2. The table shows the position of all men and women of working age.<sup>36</sup> The most striking fact is that less than half (46.2 per cent) of women between the ages of 20 and 59 years were employed in either the formal or informal sectors in 1991.<sup>37</sup>

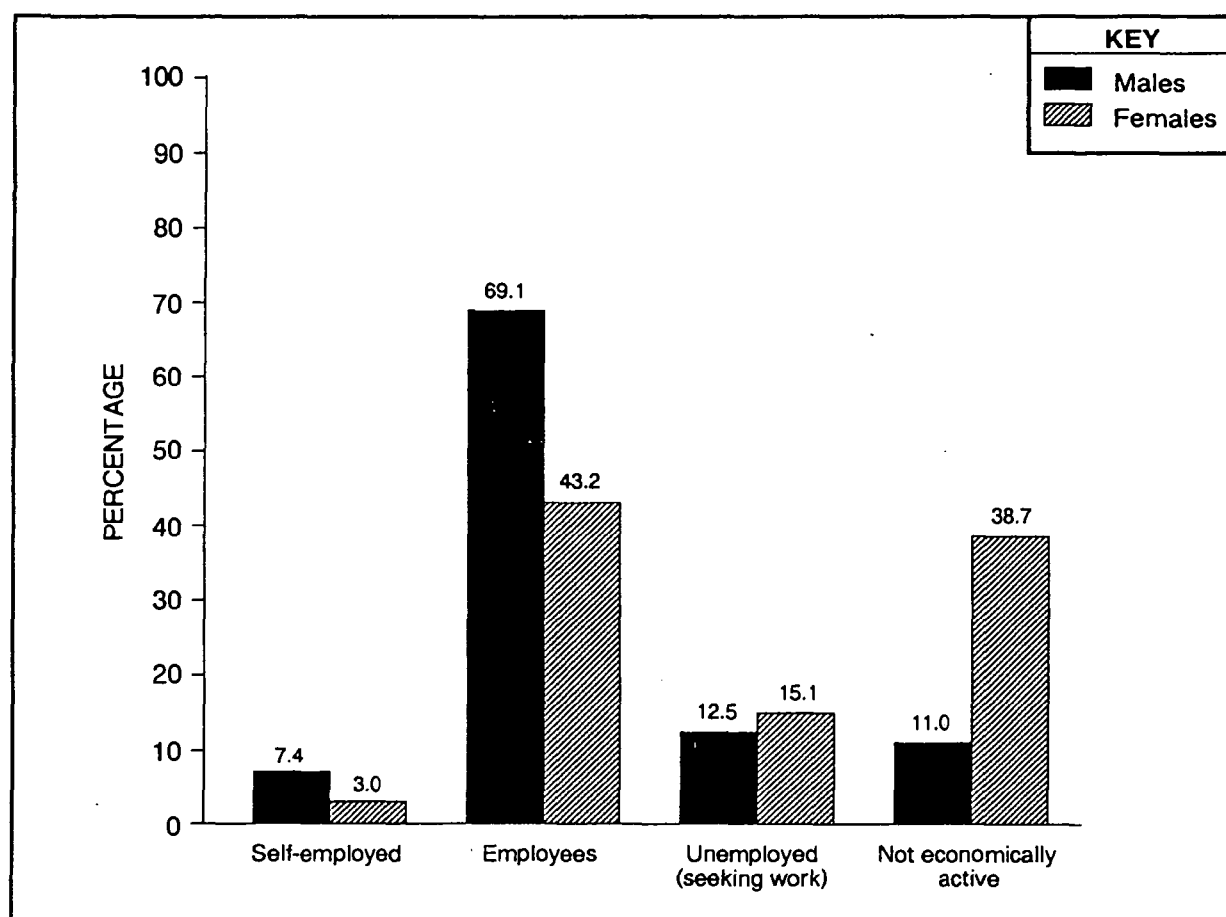
<sup>34</sup> F.S. Barker, cited above n. 19 at 35.

<sup>35</sup> Calculated from *South African Labour Statistics, 1991*.

<sup>36</sup> The working age for women is taken to be 20 to 59 years, and for men 20 to 64 years. The common retirement age for women is 60 years, and 65 years for men.

<sup>37</sup> These figures are probably on the conservative side for two reasons. Firstly, Transkei, Bophutatswana, Venda and Ciskei are excluded, and employment there is even more scarce than in the rest of South Africa. Secondly, there may well be significant numbers of people younger than 20 years and/or older than 60-65 years who are employed or looking for work.

Table 2. Classification of the population of working age by work status



Source: *Population Census 1991: 03-01-01* (Summarized results after adjustment for undercount).

Unemployment is concentrated most heavily among African women. Thus, of women unemployed in 1991, 84.4 per cent were African. This is in contrast to the proportion of Africans among the employed (and self-employed), of 57.9 per cent.<sup>38</sup>

### 1.3.1. Women's employment by occupation

Women are employed predominantly in service occupations, as is evident from table 3.<sup>39</sup> Thus, in 1991, 26.6 per cent of economically active women were employed in service occupations, excluding nurses and teachers.<sup>40</sup> The latter are classified as professional and technical workers, which explains the relatively high proportion of women in this category (9.3 per cent). These two categories together accounted for over one-third of economically

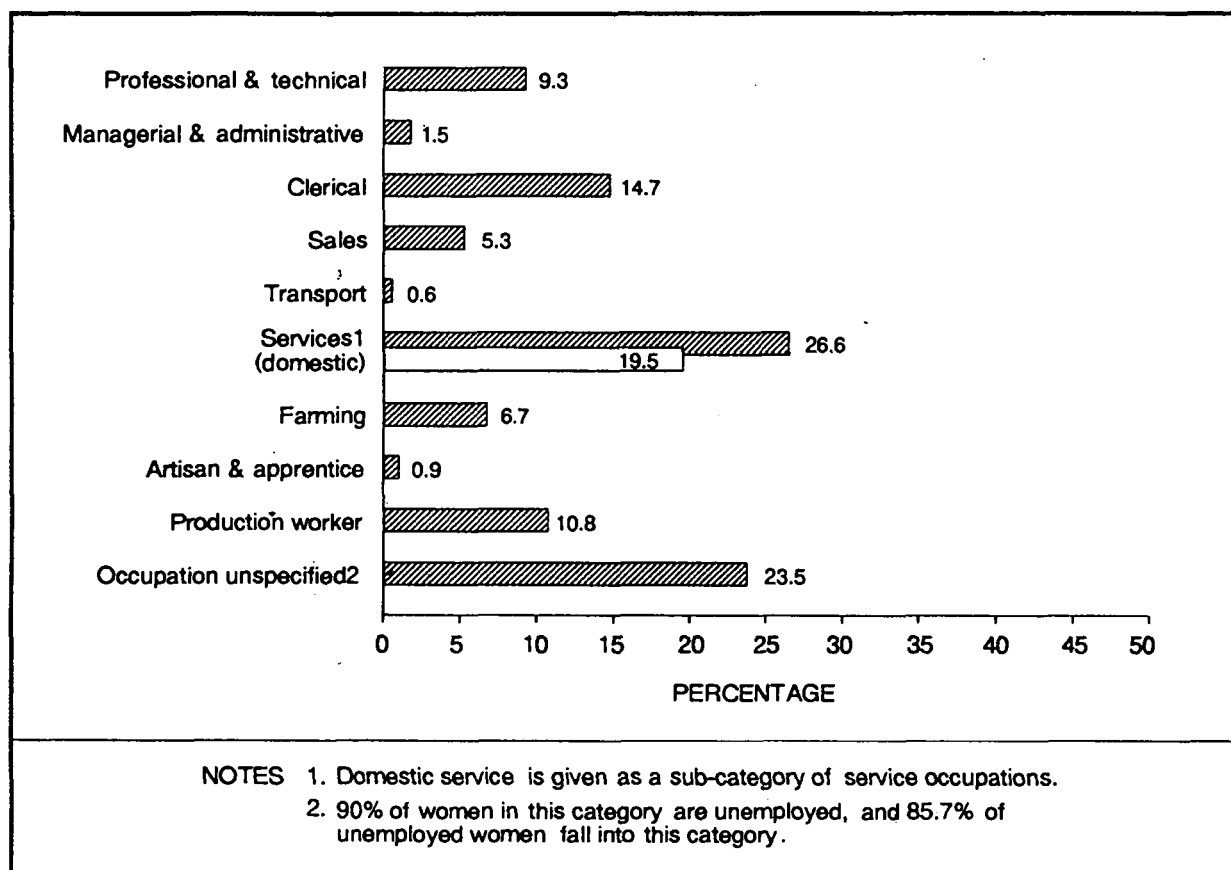
<sup>38</sup> Excluding the TBVC states. Their inclusion would not change the overall proportions to any marked degree.

<sup>39</sup> The TBVC states are excluded. Their inclusion would, however, leave the figure largely unaffected.

<sup>40</sup> Nursing assistants, auxiliary nurses and unregistered midwives (etc.) are classified as having service occupations.

active women.<sup>41</sup> It is also interesting to note that almost 20 per cent of women were employed in domestic service alone.

Table 3. The distribution of economically active women by occupation (1991)



Source: *Population Census 1991: 03-01-01* (Summarized results after adjustment for undercount).

Of those employed in service occupations, 83.4 per cent were African, and a full 90 per cent of domestic servants were African. Of those employed in the professional and technical category, by contrast, only 41 per cent were African while 45.3 per cent were white. Clerical and sales occupations are fairly common among women, together accounting for 20 per cent of the female labour force in 1991. Production occupations accounted for only 10.8 per cent of economically active women, and agricultural occupations for only 6.7 per cent.<sup>42</sup>

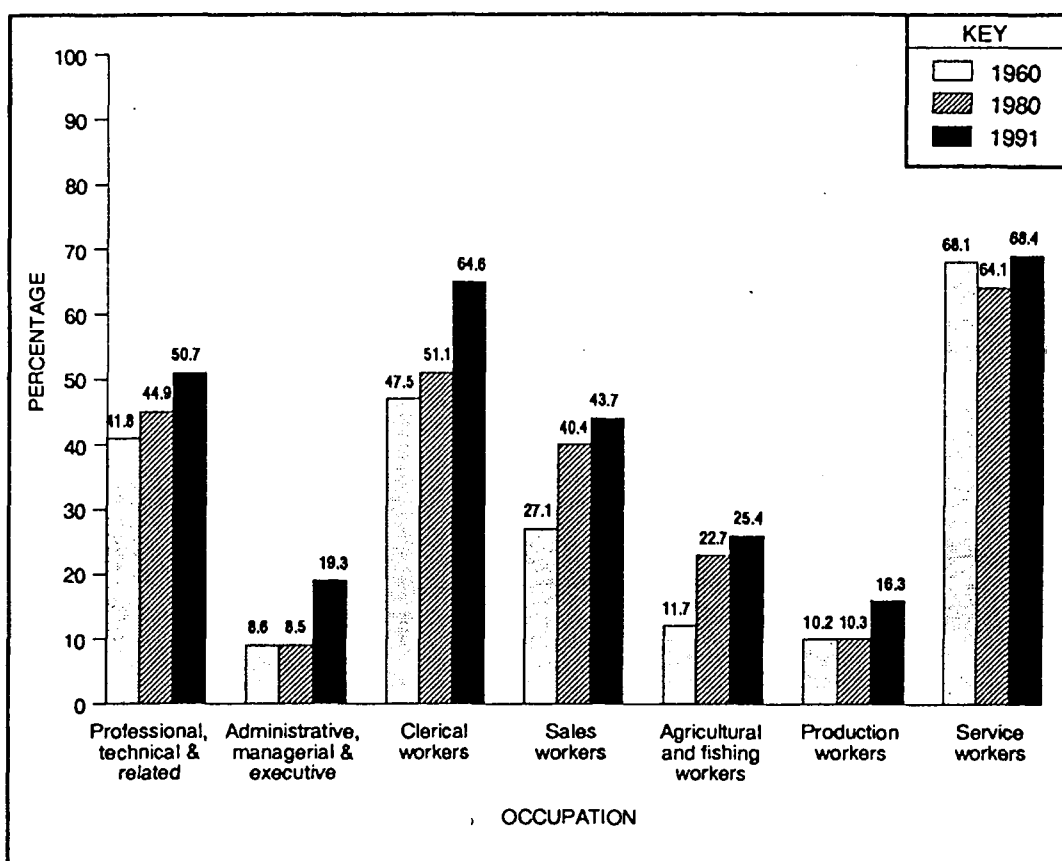
<sup>41</sup> If the category "occupation unspecified" is excluded, the proportion of women employed in the "services" and "professional" categories together rises to 42.6 per cent. Of women that fall into the "unspecified" category, about 90 per cent are unemployed.

<sup>42</sup> Note that many women on commercial farms work as domestic servants, and would thus fall into the "services" category.

African women are relatively poorly represented in clerical and sales occupations. The 1991 figures showed Africans constituted 25 per cent of the workforce here as opposed to 57.8 per cent for whites. They were even more poorly represented in administrative and managerial occupations, with only 12.1 per cent of women in such occupations African, while 77.6 per cent were white. African women, however, dominate production and agricultural occupations, representing 67.5 per cent and 79.9 per cent of the 1991 female workforce respectively.

Table 4 shows women as a percentage of the labour force in each occupational category.<sup>43</sup> Women predominate in the service occupations, and have done so since 1960. In the professional and technical category, women's share has been steadily rising and by 1991 was 50.7 per cent. There have also been significant changes in the clerical and sales categories, with women's shares by 1991 rising to 64.6 per cent (1960 = 47.5 per cent) and 43.7 per cent (1960 = 27.1 per cent) respectively.

Table 4. Women as a percentage of the labour force in each occupational category, 1960-91



Sources: 1960 and 1980: *Population Census Report: 02-80-03*: Development Bank of Southern Africa 1980 Census Reports on Transkei, Bophutatswana and Venda; *Population Census Report 1991: 03-01-01* (Summarized results after adjustment for undercount).

In the remaining occupational categories women's share has also been rising, but women still constitute a relatively small proportion of the total in each category. It is,

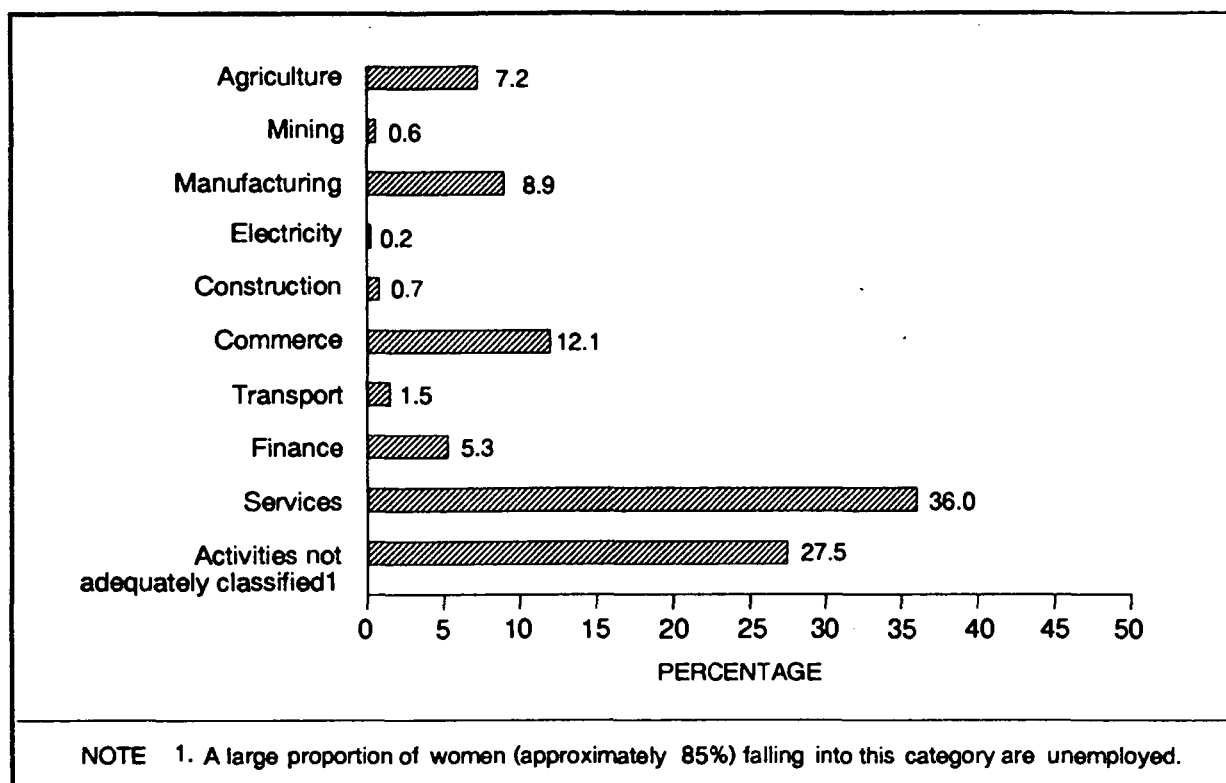
<sup>43</sup> The year 1970 is excluded because during the population census of that year women engaged in subsistence agriculture were on the whole treated as economically active. In earlier and subsequent censuses, they were regarded as not economically active (see Barker cited above n. 19 at 39).

however, worth noting the rise in the female proportion of “administrative, managerial and executive” workers. The proportion rose from 8.5 per cent in 1980 to 19.3 per cent in 1991. The reasons for this deserve further investigation.

### 1.3.2. Women’s employment by sector

The sectoral distribution of women reflects their occupational distribution, as may be seen from tables 5 and 6. Table 5 shows that the service sector is by far the single most important employer of women, with over one-third (36 per cent) of economically active women located there in 1991.<sup>44</sup> The next most important sector, namely commerce, employed 12.1 per cent of women. The manufacturing and agricultural sectors employed less than 10 per cent each.

Table 5. The distribution of economically active women by sector (1991)



Source: *Population Census 1991: 03-01-01* (Summarized results after adjustment for undercount).

Turning to the share of women in the labour force in each sector, table 6 shows that women dominate in the services sector. It also shows that nothing much has changed since 1960, with the share of women rising only marginally from 60.5 per cent in 1960 to 62.4 per cent in 1991.<sup>45</sup> Perhaps more interesting are the fairly substantial increases in the share of women in most other sectors since 1960.<sup>46</sup> By 1991, women constituted almost half of

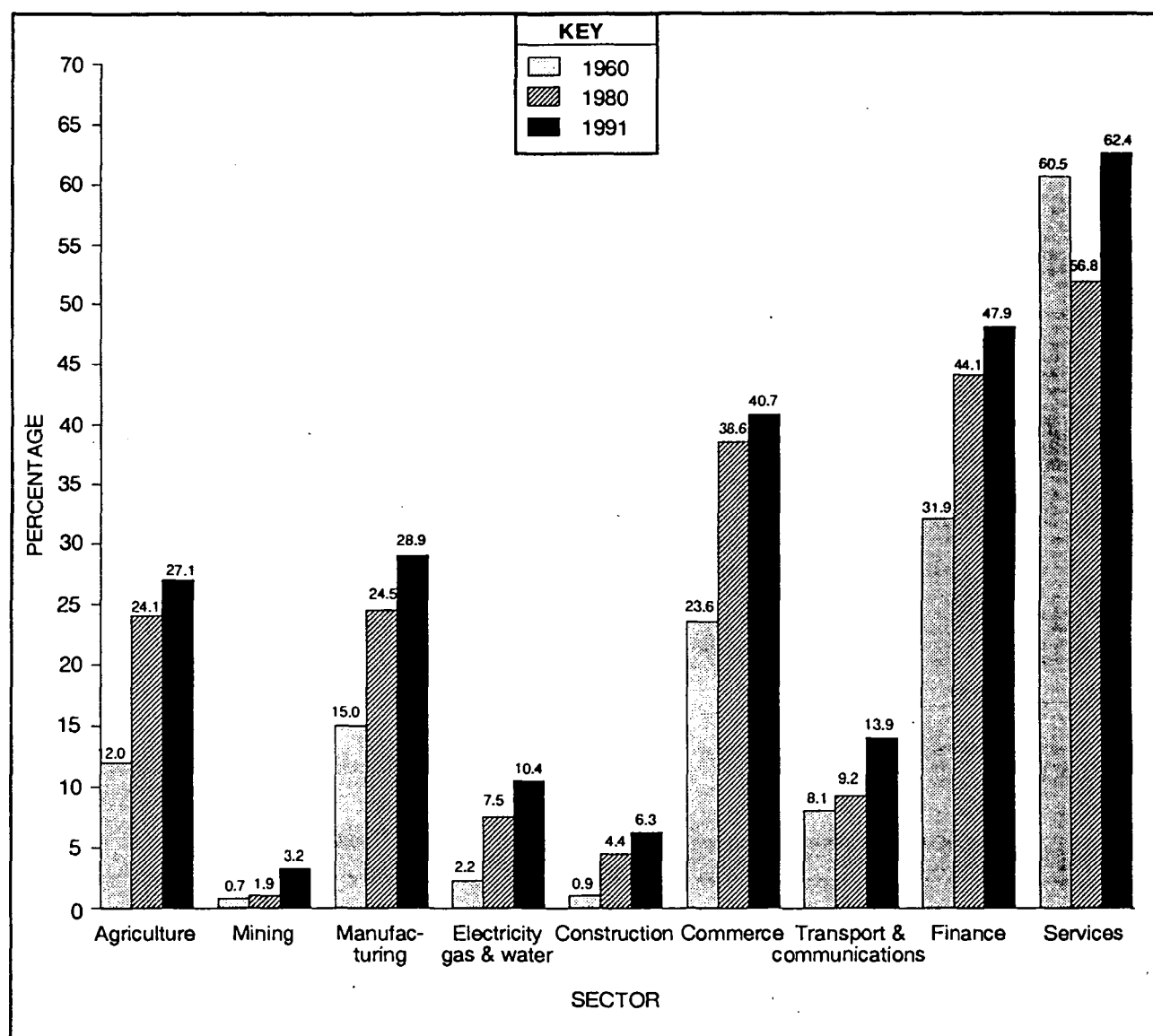
<sup>44</sup> If the “activities not classified” category is excluded, the proportion of women employed in the services sector rises to 49.6 per cent. Most of those that fall into the “activities not classified” category are unemployed.

<sup>45</sup> The reason for the lower share in 1980 is not known and perhaps deserves further investigation.

<sup>46</sup> Most of the unemployed are excluded from these categories, falling rather into the “activities inadequately defined” category. The increase in the share of women thus reflects actual employment growth, rather than simply larger numbers of women seeking employment in the various sectors.

the labour force in the financial sector (47.9 per cent) and over 40 per cent in commerce. They were also fairly strongly represented in manufacturing (28.9 per cent) and agriculture (27.1 per cent). However, some sectors have remained totally dominated by males, namely mining, construction, transport and electricity. The gender division of labour (and the racial division) is caused by a complex of social, cultural and economic factors. Some of these are explored in the case-study covering the garment and textile industry below.

Table 6. Women as a percentage of the labour force in each economic sector

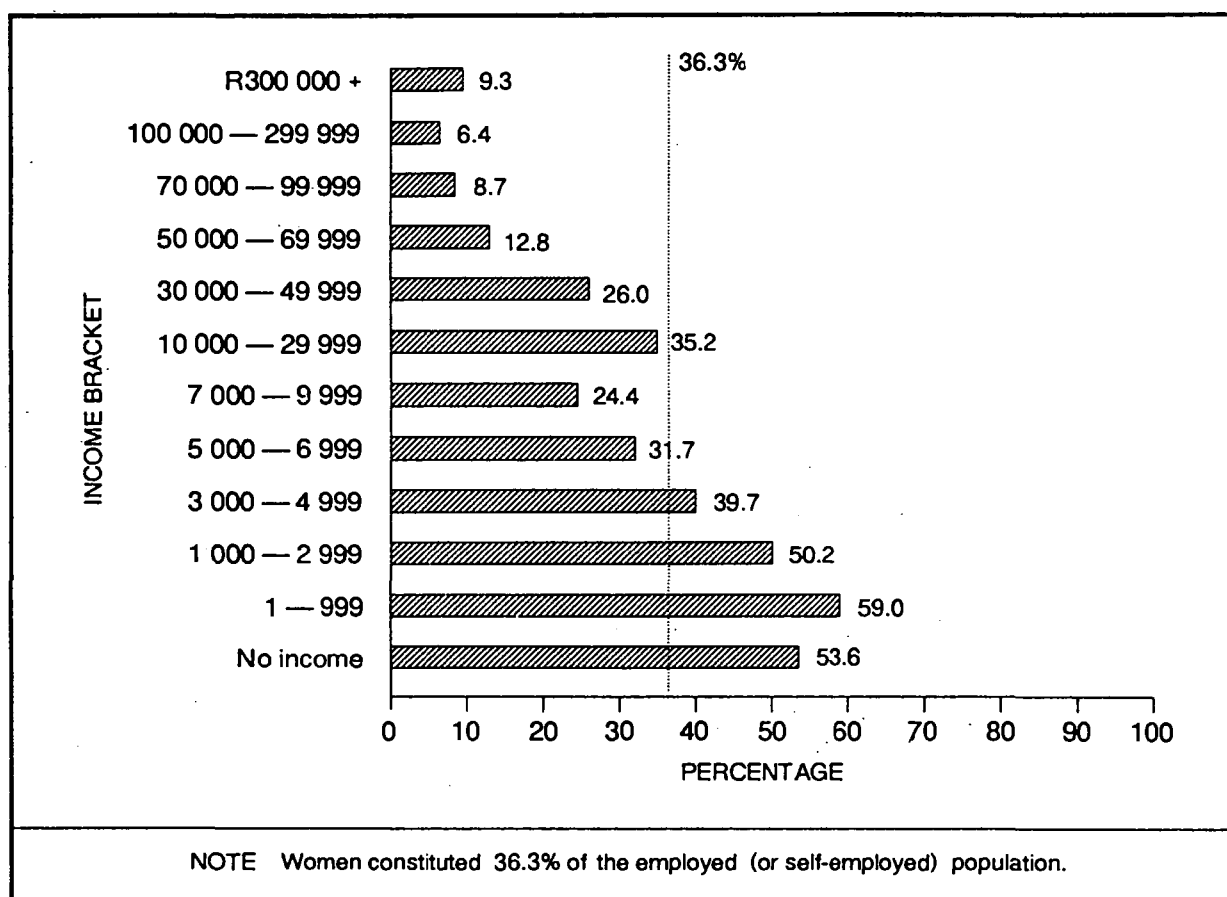


Sources: 1960 and 1980: *Population Census Report 02-80-03*; Development Bank of Southern Africa 1980 Census Reports on Transkei, Bophutatswana and Venda; *Population Census 1991: 03-01-01* (Summarized results after adjustment for undercount).



Despite the increase in women's share of employment over the past 30 years, including their penetration of the professional and managerial/administrative professions in large numbers, they are still very far from being represented in the upper echelons of the economy, and the better paying jobs in general, in proportion to their participation in the labour force. This is portrayed in table 7, which shows the distribution of income from employment. The table shows the proportion of workers in each income category that is female. Clearly, women are concentrated at the lower end of the income scale.<sup>47</sup>

Table 7. Income distribution: Women as a percentage of earners in each income bracket (1991)



Source: *Population Census 1991: 03-01-01* (Summarized results after adjustment for undercount).

There are at least four possible explanations for this pattern of income distribution. Firstly, women tend to predominate in what are regarded as more menial — and therefore lower paid — jobs.<sup>48</sup> Secondly, nurses and teachers, who account for a large proportion of professional women, are mostly relatively poorly paid state employees. Thirdly, women

<sup>47</sup> If women were paid on an equal scale to men, their share in each income category would be around 36 per cent (since they constitute about 36 per cent of the employed labour force).

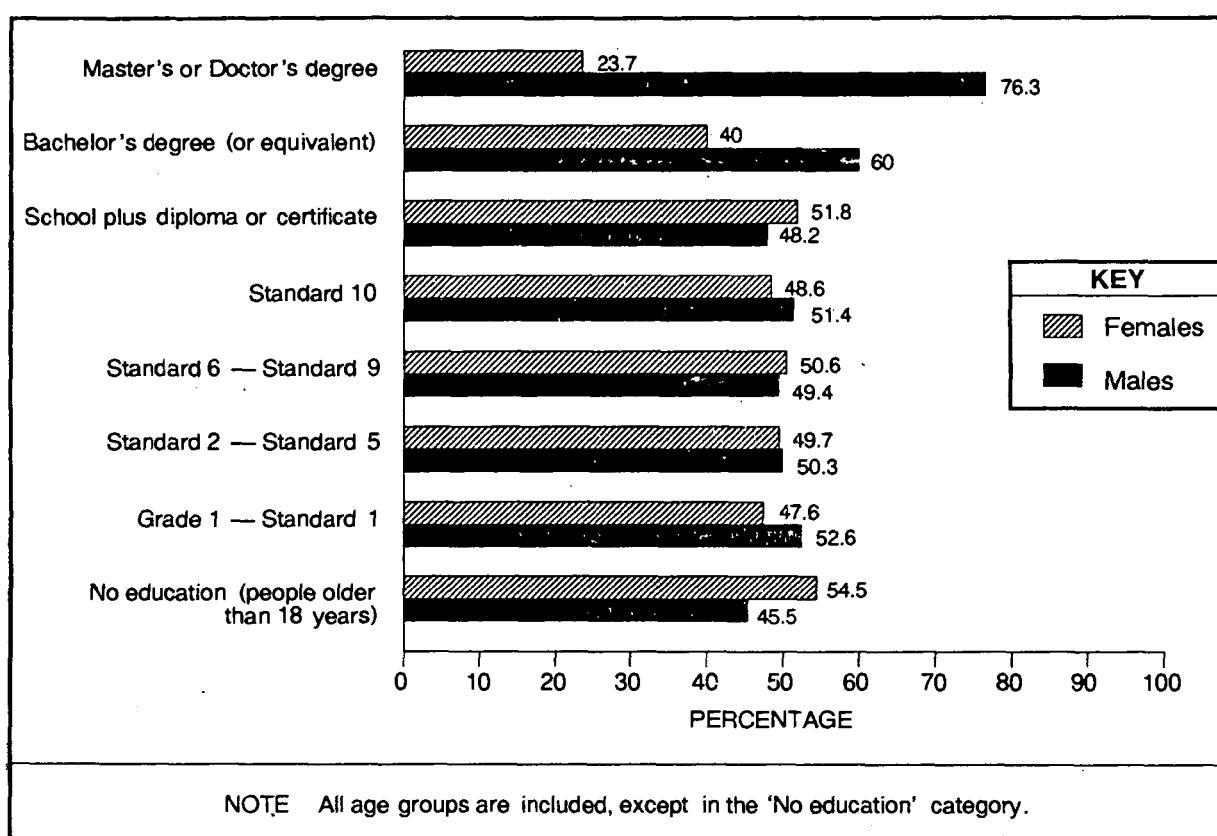
<sup>48</sup> Certainly domestic service, which employs nearly 20 per cent of the female labour force, is relatively menial work and is on the whole very poorly paid. See also Budlender cited above n. 36 at 353.

are probably more likely to occupy middle management rather than top management positions, and, therefore, do not earn the very high salaries associated with the latter. Finally, this pattern of income distribution could indicate gender discrimination. This could occur both in the form of lower wages paid for occupations dominated by females, and lower payment for work of equal value that is done.<sup>49</sup>

### 1.3.3. Education levels

Table 8 gives an indication of the educational levels of women vis-à-vis men in 1991. It shows the proportions of the population in each category that are male and female respectively.<sup>50</sup> For example, of those who have passed standard 10, 48.6 per cent are female and 51.4 per cent are male.

Table 8. Comparative levels of education of males and females: Relative shares in each category (1991)



Source: *Population Census 1991: 03-01-01* (Summarized results after adjustment for undercount).

The two most striking features of the table are, firstly, that women's level of education is not as low as one would have expected although more women than men over the age of 18 years have no formal education.<sup>51</sup> Secondly, significantly more men have university

<sup>49</sup> See D. Budlender, cited above n. 36 at 356 and P. Pillay (1985): "Women in employment in South Africa: Some important trends and issues" *Social Dynamics* 11(2) at 25.

<sup>50</sup> Note that this figure covers the entire population, including children. Only in the "no education" category are children younger than 18 years excluded.

<sup>51</sup> According to the 1991 population census, there are about 3 million people over the age of 18 years with no formal education.

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degrees than women. The disproportionate number of unemployed educated women cannot, therefore, primarily be explained in terms of differences in levels of education. At the primary and secondary levels of education, males and females are more or less equally represented. The explanation must be more complex.

## **2. Women in the trade unions**

### **2.1. Membership**

It is significant that neither the National Manpower Commission nor the major trade union federations keep statistics on the number of women in trade unions and in the unions' leadership positions. This makes it impossible to draw any conclusions about the proportional representation of women in unions by economic sector. Although the major union federation, COSATU, has a policy of "one industry one union", the lines between industries are not finely drawn (and almost certainly are not the same as those drawn by the Central Statistical Services) so that comparisons between union membership and the Central Statistical Services are pointless.

The only figures available which give gender composition of union membership are those of a survey done for an earlier report to the ILO.<sup>52</sup> This survey received responses from 12 of the 14 COSATU affiliates including the five biggest unions, one NACTU affiliate and one FEDSAL affiliate. The sample is therefore fairly representative of unions representing black workers, but is very limited in relation to white workers. The unions claim total membership of 1.267 million members of which 333,470 (or 26.3 per cent) were women.<sup>53</sup> This is considerably lower than the proportion of women in the workforce. The union composition figures, however, may not be reliable. It is quite clear from many of the survey responses that unions do not keep accurate records on the number of women in their unions, and that many of the figures supplied were estimates. Nevertheless, it appears that female membership of unions lags behind women's participation in the workforce. This may be for a range of reasons of which the most important is that unions generally have been unsuccessful at organizing sectors in which women are dominant. For example, there has not been intensive unionization of domestic and farm workers many of whom are women. Furthermore, the unionization of the public sector only commenced in the late 1980s and is still incomplete. Many workers in the public sector are women. Certain economic sectors in which women are dominant have however been effectively organized, particularly the clothing and retail industries.

### **2.2. Leadership**

Although most of the unions surveyed stated that they had a formal policy to promote gender equality, only three of the unions (South African Clothing and Textile Workers' Union (SACTWU), Chemical Workers' Industrial Union (CWIU) and South African Municipal Workers' Union (SAMWU)) have national executive committees which reflect their level of female membership. Similarly, only two unions had a proportional level of female representation on negotiating committees (SACTWU and CWIU).

<sup>52</sup> O'Regan and Thompson *Collective bargaining and the promotion of equality* (1993).

<sup>53</sup> Even if the NUM is excluded with its almost exclusively male membership, the figure is only 33.4 per cent.

As noted in the earlier report,<sup>54</sup> SACTWU and CWIU have followed very different routes to achieve proportional representation of women at leadership level. SACTWU is a union with majority female membership, 60 per cent of its total membership of 160,000.<sup>55</sup> CWIU, on the other hand, has a small proportion of women among its ranks (only 12 per cent). SACTWU has an explicit policy of not creating separate constitutional structures for women within the unions. It has no reserved positions for women on its executive bodies, although generally women are proportionately represented adequately on these bodies. A detailed study of SACTWU is undertaken in Chapter 3. CWIU on the other hand has a specific policy of reserving seats for women on all its structures, and it actively encourages the creation of separate women's forums.

Other than SAMWU, which also has a relatively low percentage of women members but a reasonable representation of women on its leadership structures, all the remaining unions showed considerable under-representation of women at leadership level (see table 9). For example, South African Commercial Catering and Allied Workers' Union (SACCAWU) which had 55 per cent female union membership has 8 per cent female representation on its national executive committee, 15 per cent on its regional executive committees and only 10 per cent of its negotiators are women. Paper, Printing, Wood and Allied Workers' Union (PPWAWU) with under 25 per cent women membership has very limited representation of women on its national executive committee (2 per cent), 12 per cent on its regional executive committees and only 5 per cent of its negotiators are women.

Worthy of note is that newly emerging unions in the public sector such as the Post Office and Telecommunications Workers' Association (POTWA) and the National Education Health and Allied Workers' Union (NEHAWU) which have substantial women membership,<sup>56</sup> have few or no women represented on their national executive committees or regional executive committees and have no active policy on promoting gender equality within the union. Only four of the unions who responded to the survey stated that they had no such policies: POTWA, NEHAWU, Food and Allied Workers' Union (FAWU) and Metal Engineering Workers' Union of South Africa (MEWUSA). NEHAWU and POTWA are both young unions who have faced gruelling battles to obtain recognition in the public sector. Given the conservatism and racism within the public sector, this has not been an easy task.

It is hard to identify clear trends emerging from the figures reflected in table 9. The two unions with majority women membership, SACTWU and SACCAWU, have followed very different routes to protecting their members' interests. SACTWU has clearly developed a pattern of women leadership, whereas SACCAWU has very weak women leadership, but has, on the other hand, responded dynamically to women's demands concerning parental rights.<sup>57</sup> Unions with a substantial (but minority) female membership, such as FAWU (35-40 per cent), POTWA (40 per cent), NEHAWU (55 per cent estimate) and PPWAWU (25 per cent) have made little progress in developing women leadership, and only limited progress in the context of recognizing women's demands.

Unions with very small numbers of women members seem to have followed two different tracks. Unions such as SAMWU (15 per cent) and CWIU (12 per cent) have actively sought to protect women's interests and encourage women's leadership in proportion to the number of their members. Other unions such as Transport and General Workers'

<sup>54</sup> O'Regan and Thompson footnote 48 above.

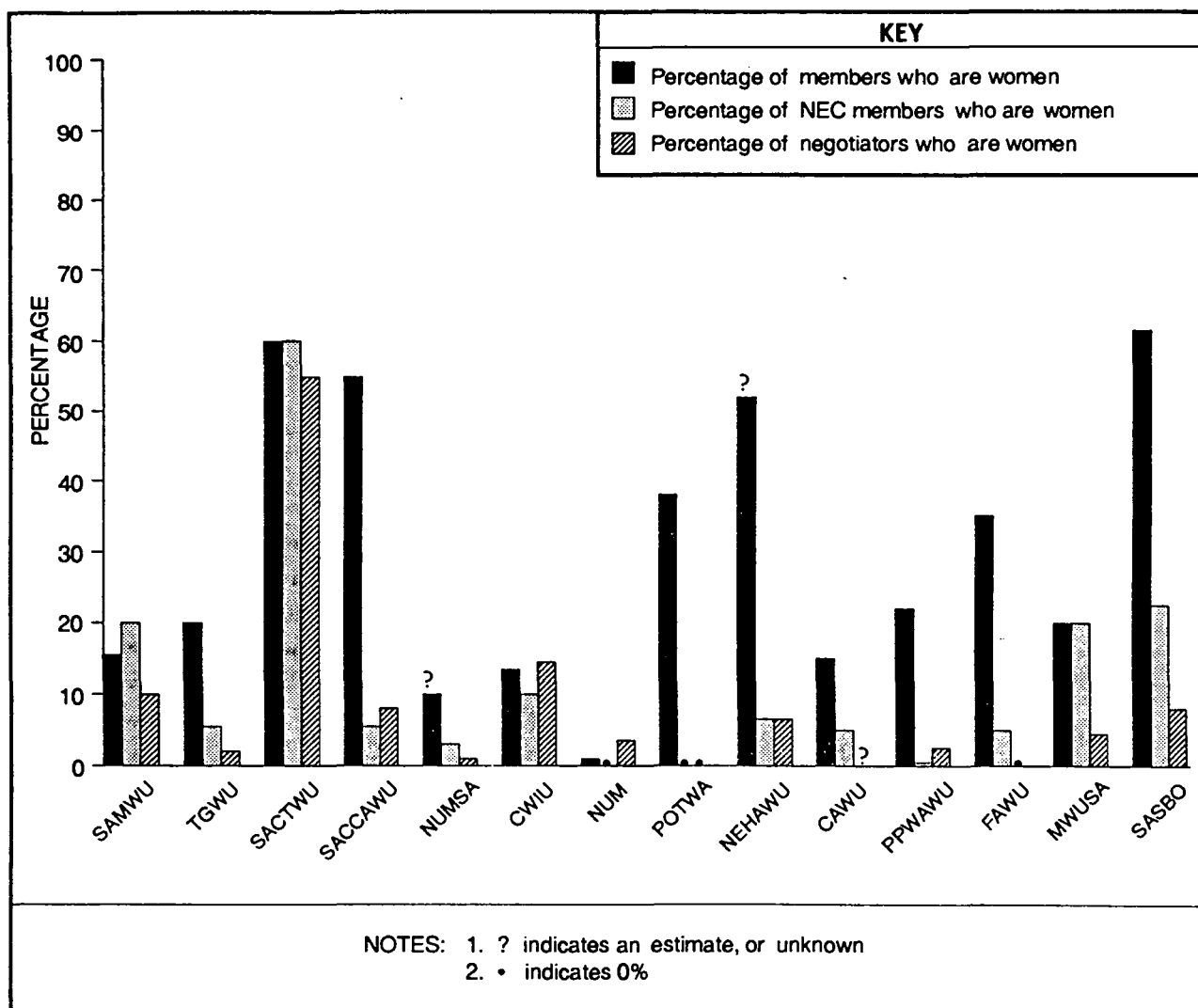
<sup>55</sup> During the course of a case-study conducted by the authors reported in Ch. 3 below corrected figures of 180,000 and 64 per cent were obtained.

<sup>56</sup> Although the NEHAWU response failed to give any figure on the proportion of women members, it is well known that NEHAWU, being active among hospital workers and university employees, has a substantial female membership. The authors estimate the figure at 55 per cent.

<sup>57</sup> See O'Regan and Thompson *Collective bargaining and equality in South Africa*.

Union (TGWU) (20 per cent) and National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) (12 per cent estimate) have made few attempts to develop women leadership and only limited attempts to address women's demands.

Table 9. Women as a proportion of total union membership; National Executive Council membership; and negotiators



Source: O'Regan and Thompson, *Collective bargaining and the promotion of equality in South Africa*

It is hard to draw general conclusions from this information. Tentatively one could say that where unions have a small female membership and they actively seek to encourage women leadership by the promotion of women's forums and the recognition of women's bargaining demands, they will be successful in their task. This could be because employers will be willing to accede to demands concerning women as they will not be expensive or impact dramatically on the workplace, and the interests of male members will not be threatened by women's demands. Where such unions do not seek to protect women members' interests, women will remain in a vulnerable position. On the other hand, where women are in the majority, it seems that it is likely that bargaining demands on issues peculiarly relevant to women will be met by employers because of the organized strength of women workers.

It is suggested that the greatest difficulty for the achievement of women's demands and the encouragement of women leadership lies where female membership is below 50 per cent of union membership but is nevertheless significant enough to pose a threat to the interests of male members, and to have significant financial implications for management.

How unions should most effectively develop women leadership, and the obstacles to such development, is not something that can be determined from the survey. However some suggestions are obtained from the case-study on the South African Clothing and Textile Workers' Union contained in Chapter 3 below.

### 2.3. COSATU's position

Since its inaugural congress, COSATU<sup>58</sup> has expressed concern about the position of women. The 1985 COSATU policy identified the achievement of gender equality as one of the objectives of the federation. It specifically suggested that the following strategies should be followed to achieve gender equality:

- \* raising consciousness in ordinary educational programmes;
- \* planning special programmes aimed at building women workers' confidence;
- \* establishing a watchdog subcommittee under the education department to monitor progress;
- \* promoting women's rights through collective bargaining.

Although the proposal seemed promising, little progress had been made by 1987. During 1987, a series of women's discussion groups or forums were formed in several unions affiliated to COSATU. The purpose of these discussion groups was to prepare for the first COSATU National Women's Conference which was to be held in 1988. Vigorous debate took place within the unions over the proper place for the development of women's interests. At this time, the defunct Federation of South African Women (FEDSAW) was in the process of being relaunched, and many women activists within the unions felt that women's issues ought to be dealt with by FEDSAW, not by a women's committee within COSATU. The 1988 Women's Conference was characterized by lively debate around these issues. Finally the Conference concluded that a national women's subcommittee, as had been proposed in the 1985 policy document, should be established under the COSATU National Education Committee. It agreed in addition that women's forums at local level could exist, but that there should be no coordinating structure for such forums at regional or national level. The effect of the decision was to allow women's forums to exist at local level, but to deprive them of an effective mouthpiece at national and regional levels. The result was that issues concerning women tended to be referred to the local women's forum, where they ended up in a dead end without resources or support. The formal constitutional channel for proposals from women's forums was to the regional education committee, generally dominated by men, which would then refer the matter to the regional executive committee. This mirrored the national position. Not surprisingly, women's forums had limited impact.

The 1989 National Congress of COSATU saw no further progress,<sup>59</sup> and it was only in 1991 that a major breakthrough for women in COSATU occurred. At this Congress, it

<sup>58</sup> We have focused on COSATU responses to gender issues because COSATU is the largest union federation in South Africa. It is also the federation which has most publicly sought to redress gender inequality. Much of the information in this section is drawn from Fiona Dove "Clearing the gender hurdles" (1992) 16(8) *SA Labour Bulletin* 63-68 and interviews with the COSATU Women's Coordinator, Dorothy Mokgalo and Connie September, National Treasurer of SACTWU.

<sup>59</sup> Indeed one of the most controversial proposals at the 1987 Congress was a motion condemning sexual harassment of women unionists by men unionists. After a vigorous debate the original motion was abandoned and a compromise (and weaker motion) was adopted.

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was agreed that the national women's subcommittee would employ a full-time coordinator, women would have the right to establish regional women's forums and that they would be allocated proper resources. Regional women's forums were established almost immediately, and a range of workshops were organized by COSATU for women. In 1992, a second COSATU national women's conference was held which produced a set of detailed proposals (a copy of these are attached as Annex A). The conference agreed that separate forums to discuss gender issues were necessary to build women's confidence and skills and programmes, but that such separate structures must not result in women's issues being sidelined. The route followed by CWIU in requiring proportional representation of women on structures was supported.

According to the survey referred to above, most unions have established women's committees. The notable exceptions are SACTWU (discussed more fully in Chapter 3), the National Union of Mineworkers (which has less than 1 per cent women membership) and POTWA. Pressure is growing in the federation for the national gender coordination position to be made full time and for the coordinator to have a permanent seat on the central executive committee of COSATU. In addition, there is pressure in several unions for full-time gender coordinators to be appointed in the individual unions. It is too early to tell whether these moves will be successful.

In conclusion, it is clear that although COSATU has paid lip-service to the need to attend to the concerns of women members, such attention is paid only when powerfully organized women's groups within the federation make effective demands. The initial women's forum structures were handicapped by a lack of resources and a lack of effective channels to which they could refer their demands. The newly established women's coordinating committees within the unions are hoping to reverse this process. However, given the disproportionate share of domestic duties women unionists already bear, the task of women's forums is going to be hard to fulfil. Availability of resources for the appointment of full-time officials for these forums could be of some assistance in this area.

### **3. Case-study of the South African Clothing and Textile Workers' Union**

In order to give some greater insights into the process of the unionisation of women, a case-study was undertaken of one particular union, the South African Clothing and Textile Workers Union, (SACTWU). SACTWU was chosen for several reasons: it is a union with majority women membership that has succeeded in obtaining proportional representation of women on its leadership structures without adopting special rules for this; it is the third largest union within COSATU after the NUM and NUMSA; and it is the largest union in the Western Cape region of the country.<sup>60</sup> The objective of the study was to provide some understanding of the special difficulties of organizing women, as well as to consider the ways in which unions can and should accommodate the needs of women and develop women leadership.

SACTWU is a COSATU affiliate with approximately 180,000 members. Of these approximately 64 per cent are women. The union has members in the clothing, textile and leather industries. These industries are concentrated in the three largest provinces of Natal,

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<sup>60</sup> The authors are grateful to the organizers, office-bearers and shop stewards of SACTWU in the Western Cape for their support and assistance in the preparation of this report. We wish particularly to thank Connie September, National Treasurer of the Union and Pregs Govender, a former official who gave advice and encouragement.

the Cape and the Transvaal. The union is the product of a series of mergers during the 1980s. In this merger process, unions which had a long history of organization in the industry and which were often conservative (such as the Garment Workers' Union and the Textile Workers' Industrial Union) merged with strident young unions (such as the National Union of Textile Workers).<sup>61</sup>

The union has 55,769 members in the Western Cape of whom it is estimated that 85 per cent are women; 19,403 members in the Eastern Cape; 21,839 members in the Transvaal; and 62,608 members in Natal. (In the last three areas, there are no estimates of the proportion of women.)

The colour<sup>62</sup> composition of the union varies regionally. In the Western Cape, the majority of the members are so-called coloured, in Natal the union has substantial African and Indian membership, and in the Transvaal it is composed largely of Africans.<sup>63</sup> The significance of the colour composition lies in the different socio-economic and cultural experience of different groups. This experience has been substantially exacerbated by the policy of apartheid. "Coloured" people as a group have not experienced as great an economic hardship as Africans, as explained above.

The union, like most COSATU affiliates, does not keep figures on its sex composition. Connie September, the union's National Treasurer, has argued that as part of a campaign to promote the interests of women, unions ought to start keeping statistics on the sex composition of their members.<sup>64</sup>

The Western Cape region is divided into four zones: Main Road Zone (City Centre) which comprises the Cape Town; Woodstock and Salt River locals; the Sunrise Zone (Elsies River and Northern Suburbs locals); the Central Zone (Maitland, Epping, Cape Flats and Southern Suburbs locals); and the Peri-Urban Zone (Boland, Southern Cape and Atlantis branches).<sup>65</sup> There are approximately 500 factories in the Western Cape and 1,011 shop stewards. Although there is no accurate record of the number of women shop stewards, a regional official estimated that two-thirds of the region's shop stewards were women.

### 3.1. Methodology

Prior to starting the research, advice on methodology was sought from a range of office-bearers, officials and ex-officials of the union. It was decided that a series of semi-structured interviews with a range of shop stewards and organizers should be held. Eighteen such interviews were conducted.<sup>66</sup> For practical reasons, it was decided that only the Western Cape region of the union would be targeted. The union in this region employs 12 organizers, of whom four are women. Six of these organizers were interviewed, three women and three men. Twelve shop stewards were interviewed. Of these two were regional office-bearers, five were local or branch office-bearers and five were shop stewards with no other office in the union. Of the shop stewards interviewed, six were male and six were female. As befits the demographic picture of the union, most of the interviews were with "coloured"

<sup>61</sup> For a discussion see "Garment and textile giant" (1989) 14(2) *SA Labour Bulletin* 101-106, annexed hereto marked "B".

<sup>62</sup> This analysis is based on discussions with union officials. Given anthropological doubts about the concept of race, and particularly the way it has been manipulated in the South African context, we prefer to use the concept of "colour" in this context.

<sup>63</sup> The union, true to its non-racial philosophy, does not keep figures on the colour composition of its members.

<sup>64</sup> Connie September "Women in the unions" (1992) 16(18) *SA Labour Bulletin* 83.

<sup>65</sup> The union refers to peri-urban "branches" and urban locals. Branches given their distance from the regional office, are entitled to greater resources than "locals".

<sup>66</sup> The interviews were conducted by Catherine O'Regan and a research assistant, Rowena Fester.



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people. In addition, an attempt was made to ensure that shop stewards and organizers from non-metropolitan backgrounds were interviewed. (A list of the people interviewed is annexed hereto marked Annex C.)

Many of the interviews were conducted in Afrikaans and some of the quotations appearing in the text which follows have been translated. Most of the shop steward interviews took place at the factories where the shop stewards worked during working hours. The interviews with union organizers were carried out at the union offices. In addition to the series of semi-structured interviews, discussions were held with the National Treasurer of the union, Connie September (who is also the only female national office-bearer), the education officer, Andre Kriel, as well as the regional organizer, Lionel October.

The interview covered a range of questions relating to the gender division of labour within the clothing and textile industry, the organization of women, the accommodation of women's needs within the union and the extent and nurturing of women's leadership. Each of these issues will be discussed separately.

### **3.2. Gender division of labour in the clothing and textile industries**

One of the questions put to the respondents was why they thought there were so many women in the clothing and textile industries. Although the answers varied, the most common responses are typified by the following quotations:

Traditionally this is a low-wage industry, and women's income has always been regarded as a secondary income in the family ... The belief underlying the low wages and poor working conditions in the industry were that women would not challenge these conditions. [Interview No. 13 — male organizer.]

Women have been conditioned to accept a domestic role — to make clothes. Girls have always been told that they should do certain jobs — domestic type jobs — for example nursing and sewing. It's easy therefore for women to find work in the clothing industry. [Interview No. 14 — female organizer.]

The logical corollary of this approach is that: "Men would feel 'too inferior' if they did needlework." [Interview No. 2 — male shop steward.]

Most of the respondents indicated that men would be considered "less masculine" if they took work as machinists in the garment industry. Respondents considered work in the garment industry as "light work". On the other hand, a male shop steward described work generally reserved to men in the textile industry as "really hard stuff" [Interview No. 6]. The strict division of labour which exists within the industry is reinforced by both employers and workers. One respondent noted that:

Women see jobs in the garment industry as reserved for them. They think it is more difficult to get jobs elsewhere. Employers look at the sex of the applicant not at whether they can do the job. Jobs are strictly divided by gender. [Interview No. 8.]

It is not surprising that the industry-level collective bargaining forum sets higher minimum wages in respect of jobs typically performed by men. The major job categories distinguish between people responsible for cutting out garments (cutters) and people responsible for sewing up the garments with machines (machinists). There are far fewer cutters than machinists. The industrial council agreement provides that cutters should earn half as much again as seamers per week.<sup>67</sup>

The division of labour is not only divided along sex lines, but also along colour lines. Most of the respondents noted that they had hardly ever met an "African" machinist, or a male machinist. Jobs as machinists in the garment industry in Cape Town have historically

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<sup>67</sup> The basic wage for cutters is R299 and for machinists R199.50 per week (Industrial Council for the Clothing Industry (Cape) Consolidated Main Agreement, annexed hereto marked E).

been for “coloured” women. The union is concerned about the colour and sex division of labour, but changing attitudes towards it is a slow process. When asked what they would think if one of their sons sought a job as a machinist in the clothing industry, most of the people interviewed laughed. Of course the colour division of labour has changed as the industry has changed. Initially the clothing industry, particularly in the Western Cape, was dominated by “white” immigrants. This changed in the course of the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>68</sup>

### 3.3. Getting women to join SACTWU

In the case of the garment industry, there is a closed shop in the Western Cape region and, therefore, all workers who are employed within the garment industry are obliged to join SACTWU. Comments about organizing women, therefore, were generally directed at the textile industry where no closed shop operates.

The general view of the organizers and shop stewards interviewed was that women were at least as likely as men to join the union. Among the range of reasons given for this were the protection the union offers and the importance of the benefits provided by the union. One female shop steward stated that: “Women are more likely to join because of the facilities the union offers such as the workers’ health clinic<sup>69</sup> and the sick fund.” The union has maintained a tradition of benefits for its members. For many members, including women,<sup>70</sup> these benefits are very attractive. One female shop steward stated that women join because of the benefits [Interview No. 3]. Many COSATU unions do not have substantial benefits for members and SACTWU is somewhat of an exception. Benefits range from sick pay<sup>71</sup> and maternity pay to funeral and death benefits.<sup>72</sup> Until two years ago, the union also had a social work department. One organizer [Interview No. 13] noted that many sexual abuse cases had been brought to this department and that the reports had generally been made by female members. The organizer commented that it would be desirable to open the social department again to meet women’s needs and in fact the union is considering doing this. It is also considering establishing health care clinics for its members. Many of the female shop steward respondents noted that one of the needs of women members was for advice on domestic problems, particularly violence and abuse. One of the women shop stewards [Interview No. 5] stated that she felt unable to deal with the complaints which were brought to her by her members and wished the union would provide her with some training to deal with sexual abuse.

The importance of benefits to women members is significant. It suggests that women come to the union for assistance with problems other than those that are directly factory-related. A union’s ability to respond to these issues could significantly affect its ability to attract women members.<sup>73</sup>

Another question posed was whether women organizers are better than men at organising women. There was no unanimity among the interviewees on this issue. Women organisers generally thought that they were better able to organize female members than male

<sup>68</sup> For a discussion of the historical division of labour and its impact on unionization see L. Witz “Separation for Unity: The GWU and the SACWU 1928-36” (1988) 14(1) *Social Dynamics* 34-35. See also Iris Berger *Threads of solidarity: Women in South African industry 1900-80* (1992, Indiana University Press).

<sup>69</sup> This clinic, though run from the SACTWU buildings, is in fact a general workers’ clinic open to workers from all industries regardless of whether they are union members.

<sup>70</sup> One female organizer noted that men were also interested in benefits [Interview 16].

<sup>71</sup> Sick pay and maternity pay in the leather and clothing industries are governed by industrial council agreements.

<sup>72</sup> These benefits are provided by the union. See list of benefits provided to members in Annex F.

<sup>73</sup> This conclusion is echoed by commentators such as Iris Berger. See her *Threads of Solidarity: Women in South African Industry 1900-80* (1992, Indiana UP) at 297-8.

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organizers. One of the organizer respondents noted that she had recently organized a textile factory dominated by women which a male organizer had been trying for five years to sign up without success [Interview No. 16]. A male organizer stated that it was important for a male organizer to be sensitive to women's problems when organizing women [Interview No. 17]. On the other hand, several of the male shop-steward respondents took the view that men were better organizers than women. A male shop steward noted that if a woman goes to a factory dominated by men, it was unlikely that she would succeed in organizing that factory [Interview No. 7]. Another commented that African men "feel uneasy with females" and would prefer a male organizer [Interview No. 6]. The same commentator stated that women did prefer women organizers.

In this regard it is interesting to note that SACTWU has recently employed two more female organizers in response to membership pressure to increase their number. Before 1992, of the ten organizers employed by SACTWU in the Cape region, only two were women. That figure has now been improved to four out of 12. Most respondents welcomed this move. The general sense of the responses was that a good organizer should be able to organize any factory regardless of sex or colour, but that sex and colour were relevant factors in determining how easy it would be to organize a factory.

### **3.4. Accommodating women's needs in the unions**

#### **3.4.1. Meetings, transportation, child care and training**

Once people become involved in the union as shop stewards, or local or regional committee members, they have to attend a number of meetings outside working hours. Generally, local executive and regional executive committees meet once a month and there is a regional congress for all shop stewards twice a year. Special projects require additional meetings. Nearly all the people interviewed were of the view that both the number of meetings that shop stewards and executive members were required to attend, *and the timing of such meetings created difficulties for women*. One female organizer said that the first question women ask when approached to join the union is "will we have to attend meetings?" Men never ask this question, she noted [Interview No. 16]. Although several respondents stated that the number of meetings required sacrifices from men as well, most of them felt that the sacrifices were particularly difficult for women in the light of their responsibility for domestic work and child care. One respondent said:

The time of meetings is a problem for women and often women don't attend. Men don't easily take on domestic duties. In addition men can be impatient at meetings with women who want to leave earlier because of their work at home. There is no doubt that the greatest attendance is at meetings held in work time. [Interview No. 8 — female shop steward.]

Another respondent noted that:

Holding meetings after work can be a problem, since women have to sort out their domestic and child care problems. Child care is a big problem, especially since there are so many single parents — I think about 40 per cent of women members are single parents. Sometimes the union has to intervene and speak to the husbands to explain to them why it is important that their wives attend union meetings. [Interview No. 13 — male organizer.]

One of the female shop steward respondents [Interview No. 8] suggested that one of the ways of solving the problem for women shop stewards would be to demand additional time-off for the performance of shop steward duties from employers. Although most factories award time-off for shop stewards, generally this is only several days per year. The shop steward argued that *women would be more active as shop stewards if more union meetings were held during working hours*.

Another problem with meetings is *transport to meetings*. Most regional meetings are held in the regional offices of the union in Cape Town. Local meetings may be held either

at the regional office or at local offices depending on the location of the local offices. The union always provides transport home for shop stewards after meetings if they end late when public transport is unavailable but it does not generally provide transport to meetings. Although many shop steward respondents praised this effort, there were several criticisms of the transport provided. One respondent stated that: "Even if taxis are provided, they are usually too few taxis with the result that taxis are overloaded." [Interview No. 1 — female shop steward.]

Another respondent indicated that: "Sometimes there is a problem with transport home because taxis have to carry many people and people get home at different times. For example, a meeting might end at 8 o'clock but some people might only get home at 11 o'clock." [Interview No. 2 — male shop steward.]

Several respondents commented that the failure to provide transport to meetings could be especially problematic for women. First, because the union does not generally cover the cost of bringing children to the meeting. One male shop steward stated that: "Transport is a problem. The union needs to pay for the cost of transporting children to and from the meetings." [Interview No. 6.]

A further problem for women is *the danger of public transport*, particularly in the late afternoon. One female shop steward stated that women shop stewards were worried about being assaulted on public transport. "I myself am frightened of travelling to the union office in Salt River at 5 o'clock on winter evenings." [Interview No. 8 — female shop steward.]

The union has recently taken a policy decision to provide *child care* at its major regional congresses. Regional congresses are meetings of all shop stewards in the region and are held twice a year at the union offices, generally on a Saturday. Respondents were of the view that this decision was a good idea both because it enabled women to attend the regional congress without worrying about providing child care and because it kept children out of the meetings. Most respondents were of the view that the provision of child care should be extended to other meetings.

One female organizer suggested that the problem of child care at meetings could be solved in some cases by holding local meetings at the homes of local office-bearers [Interview No. 16]. She stated that this had been adopted in her local with great success. She acknowledged, however, that large meetings would have to be held at the union office.

There was great disagreement amongst the respondents on the *extent to which women participated in meetings*. Some respondents were of the view that SACTWU women had no difficulty speaking and participating in meetings. One respondent stated that: "Women speak forever, because they know they are in the majority". [Interview No. 2 — male shop steward.]

Another thought that: "Women don't need any encouragement; they usually dominate the meeting; many of them are political activists and don't hesitate to speak in meetings". [Interview No. 13 — male organizer.]

This was the minority view. Most respondents thought that although some women were not hesitant to speak, most women lacked confidence. Respondents thought that women were generally more confident to speak in the presence of other women and in the factory. It was also noted that younger women and politicized women had more confidence. A further relevant factor identified was the subject matter: women being less willing to speak about issues such as sexual harassment.

When interviewees were questioned as to why women were more reluctant to speak than men, the general answer was that women were frightened of being heard to have said the wrong thing. One woman shop steward mentioned that: "I never speak because I am afraid that I may say the wrong thing." [Interview No. 5 — female shop steward.] Another respondent stated that women were frightened to speak because they expected an adverse

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response. She noted that there was a tendency to be too critical of contributions to meetings [Interview No. 16 — female organizer].

Respondents were asked whether women should be given *special training to build their confidence* to speak in meetings. Most respondents were of the view that special training would be a good idea, but a significant number thought that such training should be offered not only to women but also to men. In this regard, many of the women shop stewards and organizers who had attended COSATU training courses for women organizers and shop stewards praised them highly and said that it had been influential in giving them confidence.

### 3.4.2. Union structures for gender issues

The final question in relation to accommodating women's needs in the union, was the question of the appropriate structures for dealing with gender issues.<sup>74</sup> As stated earlier, SACTWU has the policy position of not encouraging separate women's constitutional structures within the union. The stated reason for this approach is the fear of "ghettoization" of women's issues. In responding to a question about women's structures, many respondents echoed the fear of ghettoization. One male organizer said:

There are certain issues in which women need to be alone [if they are to discuss freely], for example, abortion, reproductive rights and sexual harassment. However there is a danger that men would reject any policy decisions made by such separate structures. Accordingly we need to restructure gender participation in the regional executive councils and at national level, but this participation must not be limited to women. [Interview No. 17.]

Another male organizer, however, commented that women's issues are not getting sufficient attention in the union's constitutional structures and that attention needed to be paid to correcting this problem [Interview No. 13].

Women feared that establishing a separate constitutional structure for women would mean women's issues would be sidelined. One woman who had been involved in all the COSATU gender forums noted that, although the forums had been a valuable training experience for her, little had been done by the unions in response to the demands of the forum [Interview No. 16 — female organizer]. Generally, her view was that demands made by the COSATU Gender Forum were not taken seriously. On the other hand, several respondents stated that the answer would be to have separate structures concerned with gender issues upon which men as well as women were represented, and with a clear relationship to the union's constitutional structures such as the regional and national congresses.

Pursuant to COSATU policy, a SACTWU regional gender coordinating committee has been established in the Western Cape and a number of shop stewards and organizers have been appointed to this committee. However, several respondents noted that nothing had happened since the election which had taken place some months previously. Respondents were also uncertain about the precise structure and function of the coordinating committee. It was interesting too that several respondents were not aware at all of what the SACTWU policy decision on gender forums was, nor that there were any such forums within SACTWU. By far the majority of these people were male shop stewards.

## 3.5. Female leadership in the union

At present the proportion of women on the National Coordinating council is 29 per cent. This proportion differs, however, from region to region as can be observed from table 10 below.

<sup>74</sup> See discussion above at pp. 33-35.

Table 10. Number of women on the SACTWU National Coordinating Council

Region	Women	Men
Natal	1	3
Western Cape	0	4
Eastern Cape	1	1
Transvaal	0	2
National office-bearers	2	2
Total	5	12

The National Coordinating Council comprises the office-bearers from each region together with the national office-bearers: it is in a sense the key executive body of the union. At this level it is quite clear there are not enough women in the leadership of the union. Before this level, however, as the information set out in table 9 shows, the proportion of women in leadership is sufficient. Therefore, if one looks at the national executive committee or the executive committee of each region, there is a substantial proportion of women. It is only at office-bearer level (chairperson, vice-chairperson, treasurer and secretary) that this proportion drops dramatically.

The respondents were asked whether there were sufficient women in the SACTWU leadership. Responses were almost evenly divided. Five of the 12 shop stewards and three of the six organizers thought there were not enough. A slight majority thought there were sufficient women in leadership positions. One female organizer drew a distinction between factory-level and union-level leaders. She stated that: "At the factory level women are strong, but there are not enough women leaders at union level." [Interview No. 15.]

The overall impression gained from the interviews was that although female union leadership at factory level and even local level is adequate, the higher one looks in the union the less women leadership there is. There are several reasons for this. One of the recurrent refrains in the interviews was that women were less interested in politics and more interested in factory issues. Said one female shop steward: "Women have more interest in practical issues not political issues. Women are the leaders in the factory." [Interview No. 8.] Another female organizer stated that: "Women are very good at taking up issues in the factory but they clam up at meetings at the union." [Interview No. 16.] The same female organizer noted that women shop stewards are excellent in the factory, but less effective at union level. A male organizer put it slightly differently: "Women are more low-key; they deal with day-to-day problems rather than major union policy issues." [Interview No. 17.]

There seems to be a strong correlation between women's vigorous activities in the factory, their lack of interest in broader policy issues and their lack of time to devote to union affairs because of the double shift. Respondents repeatedly noted the problem of time pressures for women. One respondent explained that: "The majority of female members are married and have other responsibilities. They can't always be leaders." [Interview No. 11 — female shop steward.] And another said in relation to training for women that: "Women aren't interested in extra courses because it will take too much of their time; they will have to neglect their responsibilities as parents/wives." [Interview No. 1 — female shop steward.] Others were more critical of the sexual division of labour in the household and observed that it created problems for members. Several respondents noted too that women were reluctant to become shop stewards because of the pressure of time. Said one female shop steward: "Women are reluctant to take up leadership positions because of pressures of time." [Interview No. 8.]

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Nearly all the organizers mentioned that from time to time they needed to speak to husbands who felt that their wives were spending too much time at the union. One of the women organizers interviewed said that her involvement in the union had been a contributory factor to her divorce [Interview No. 16]. A woman shop steward noted that husbands become angry because women were not at home to do the housework and also because of sexual jealousy [Interview No. 8].<sup>75</sup>

Despite the above, it is estimated that approximately two-thirds of SACTWU's shop stewards in the Western Cape region are women. In addition, a substantial proportion of local executive committees and the regional executive committees comprise women (see table 9 above). Several respondents stated that women, especially those with small children, were unable to be effective and active leaders. Indeed, one female organizer who had no children stated that: "You can't have children and be in the union." [Interview No. 15.]

Another repeated theme which came through the interviews was *the problem of sexual harassment*. Although there was no specific question relating to sexual harassment in the questionnaire, the issue was raised both within the workplace and the union, particularly by women respondents. Several respondents were of the view that sexual harassment within the union kept women from developing into good leaders. One female shop steward indicated that: "Sexual harassment by male union members, especially at congresses, has been addressed but not successfully. Such harassment is degrading for women and keeps good shop stewards away from congresses." [Interview No. 4.]

Several women made allegations about sexual harassment within the union, particularly at training courses. Three of the female respondents described circumstances in which they had been harassed while attending training courses. In each case, they had taken the matter up. Nevertheless they all thought that sexual harassment was still a problem within the union. As stated by one female organizer: "Men think that if you chat to them and smile at them you will sleep with them. They must learn that 'no' means 'no'. This problem puts many women off the unions." [Interview No. 16.] Another shop steward stated that: "If men know that you are using contraceptives, they'll harass you because they know you won't fall pregnant if you sleep with them." [Interview No. 4.]

Problems with sexual harassment are not limited to within the union. Most of the respondents were aware of issues of sexual harassment within the workplace and agreed that where sexual harassment took place in the workplace, male members were as angry about it as women workers.

Another issue investigated was personal appearance. One respondent commented that people tend to rate women shop stewards not on the grounds of their competence, but on their appearance and observed that this was unsatisfactory [Interview No. 8]. Several comments about clothing and appearance were received during the interviews. One organizer noted that dress was very important to how one was perceived [Interview No. 16]. Another female shop steward mentioned that at union meetings: "Women have to be careful about what they wear — men whistle at them and accost them." [Interview No. 4.] Another female shop steward noted that: "Men think that all women wear short skirts just to attract men." [Interview No. 1.]

Another relevant explanation expressed for women's limited number in leadership positions was the union's failure to encourage women in such positions. One respondent was of the view that women did not become leaders because *the union did not encourage women*. She added that: "In SACTWU men get all the opportunities" [Interview No. 1]. Another

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<sup>75</sup> This has been a frequent refrain of women unionists in South Africa. See the account of the FOSATU "Workshop on Women", one of the earliest such meetings held in 1983. Vol. 9(3), December 1983, *SA Labour Bulletin*, pp. 7-17 at 10.

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said that "men don't encourage women to take leadership positions" [Interview No. 8]. This comment was directed more at union members than union leadership. In general, the view was that the union leadership was not opposed to the development of women leaders but did not make much effort to encourage women in this area.

Unionists in other countries feel that there is *a higher drop-out rate among female than male union leaders*.<sup>76</sup> Accordingly respondents were asked whether they thought this applied to SACTWU. Most respondents did not think so. However, six of the 18 respondents were of the view that there was a greater drop-out rate amongst female leaders. Of these, most thought that that drop-out rate was due to domestic pressures. One male organizer [Interview No. 18] stated that he thought there was a greater drop-out rate due to pressure from husbands and families. A female shop steward stated that women tended to drop out for personal reasons and because they tended to lose confidence easily [Interview No. 8].

One male organizer noted that women leaders tended to drop out when they became pregnant. He cited the example of a local chairperson who had fallen pregnant and had lost her place on the local executive while on maternity leave [Interview no 17]. Most respondents were of the view that the union sought to ensure that women did not lose leadership positions as a result of pregnancy.

Respondents were also asked whether they thought women shop stewards were as good as men. Only two respondents (both women) stated that they did not think that women shop stewards were as good as men. One female organizer indicated that: "Women shop stewards are not as good as men, but they do have the potential to be as good as men. Women need education." [Interview No. 14.]

The remainder of the respondents were of the view that women shop stewards were as good as men but several thought that they tended to be different from men shop stewards. One male shop steward noted that women got angry more quickly than men [Interview No. 9]. Several stated that women were more concerned about members' problems and shop floor issues.

Another question put to respondents was *whether seats should be reserved on executive structures and negotiating committees for women*. Such a policy is contrary to SACTWU's present position. A small majority of the respondents were of the view that such seats should be reserved for women. Significantly, there was a division here between organizers and shop stewards. Of the 12 shop steward respondents, nine thought there should be reserved seats for women. Of the five full-time organizer respondents, only one thought there should be reserved seats for women. One may conclude that full-time officials are more integrated within the union hierarchy and endorse the "official" line.

Among the reasons given in support of reserved seats is that it would give women an opportunity to participate in leadership and to gain experience. A male shop steward added that: "If a union is to take the issue of developing women seriously, reserving seats for them is the only way for them to learn leadership skills." [Interview No. 6.]

On the other hand, those who felt that reserving seats was not a good idea, mentioned that it would be a problem for women to be appointed on grounds other than merit. According to one male organizer: "Appointment should be based on ability and competence; the organization must not be made to suffer because of window dressing." Another male organizer stated: "There shouldn't be reserved seats for women. Such a system would undermine their confidence even more, because they would think they were token appointments."

This concern about reserving seats for women was again expressed in response to a question about the adoption of a policy of affirmative action in relation to the appointment

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<sup>76</sup> See, for example, Susan C. Eaton cited above n. 1, p. 39.



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of union officials. Eight of the 12 shop stewards interviewed but only one of the six organizers thought that affirmative action was a good idea. Some were of the view that people who were unable to do the job would be appointed. Various respondents interpreted the concept of "affirmative action" differently. Some respondents thought that affirmative action meant the appointment of under-qualified people, whereas others thought it meant giving preference to women among qualified candidates.

## **4. Conclusion and recommendations for action**

Substantial unionization of the South African workforce is a relatively recent phenomenon and has taken place against a background of severe state repression and a policy of legalized racism. Despite the difficulties, the trade unions within the major union federation (COSATU) have been concerned with the need to organize women and to develop women leaders. So far only a few unions have been successful in this aim. Those unions that have been successful have followed different paths, and it is difficult to reach general conclusions as to what policies will most promote women's effective participation within unions in South Africa.

South African unions are structured principally along industrial lines. This means that the proportion of women in the unions is dependent upon women's participation in the industries concerned in which the unions organize.

There have been three types of programmes adopted by COSATU-affiliated unions in South Africa to promote the interests of women. The first of these is special training programmes for women. These have generally been conducted under the auspices of the COSATU national women's subcommittee, or women's forums within the separate unions. In the case-study of SACTWU, all the women who had attended these training programmes felt that they had been important in their own personal development as unionists, but criticized them for their failure to have an impact on the broader union. It would seem that special training courses for women, particularly to develop female leadership skills, are essential to the development of women leaders. However, such training courses should be seen solely as leadership development programmes, rather than forums for the solution of "women's issues". Other institutional structures are required for that purpose.

The second programme adopted by the unions in COSATU has been the establishment of women's forums. As earlier observed, these forums were first established in 1988, but they were given no resources, nor were they given channels of communication to decision-making bodies within the unions. The women's forums were thus ineffective in furthering the interests of women. Since 1991, it has been realized that gender forums need to be established within the separate unions, but that these must have clear institutional links to decision-making structures. There is considerable concern that women's issues should not be removed from mainstream union business by the establishment of separate gender forums. One of the commonly voiced proposals is that gender forums should not consist only of women.

The third programme adopted by only one COSATU union to date, the Chemical Workers Industrial Union, is the reservation of seats for women on executive structures. In this way, CWIU has ensured that women are proportionally represented on executive committees. In the case-study of SACTWU, many organizers and shop stewards were found to be suspicious of the reservation of seats on the grounds that although it could lead to an adequate proportion of women in such positions, it would produce ineffective leadership. They also felt that people who were elected as women's representatives may be undermined

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as leaders by their special status. If reserved seats for women are adopted within unions, care would have to be taken to ensure that the incumbents are fully competent.

One of the most important policies which should be adopted by the union in furthering gender equality is the need to keep records of female members and leaders within unions. As we found in compiling this report, these statistics are not kept at all by unions. It is, therefore, difficult to assess the extent of the under-representation of women workers in unions.

The unions also need to ensure that employment practices within the unions are gender sensitive. Where possible union jobs should be restructured to make them compatible with family responsibilities so that they do not exclude women with small children. This should apply to as many jobs within the union as possible.<sup>77</sup>

A further policy that unions could adopt would be to seek to extend paid time off for the performance of shop steward duties. This may enable more women shop stewards to increase their involvement in union work.

The continuation of the current positive political and other developments in South Africa could also contribute in some way to the unions' positive attitude to tackling gender issues in the unions. It would seem that the International Labour Organization could assist in the promotion of the unionisation of women. There are a range of ways in which this could be done. The most important may be to sponsor women's training sessions and conferences both within South Africa, regionally within southern Africa and sub-Saharan Africa as well as internationally. This would provide an opportunity for women within the unions to exchange ideas and build networks of women unionists. The women's training sessions outside the ILO which have been held in South Africa have been successful, but there is no doubt that additional resources in this area would be very useful. A second area where the ILO can be of use is in the adoption of resolutions regarding the role of women in unions. Susan Eaton refers to the effectiveness of the 1975 resolution in this regard.<sup>78</sup> These resolutions will only be effective if they are distributed widely amongst unions and unionists to inform them and to inspire their action.

Finally, the ILO could assist in the preparation of training materials. Research done by the ILO is extremely important, but in the context of a poorly educated workforce, the reports and other materials need to be prepared in simple language. The publication of such research, and the preparation of training materials built on such research, could greatly facilitate the task of unionists in their attempts at organizing women's training.

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<sup>77</sup> For a discussion of a possible programme of action for the unions, see Connie September "Women in the unions", Vol. 16(8) Nov. 1992, *South African Labour Bulletin* 82-83. Ms. September raises many of the issues discussed in the text.

<sup>78</sup> See Susan Eaton "Women workers, unions and industrial sectors in North America" ILO 1992, p. 65.

## **COSATU Second National Women's Conference**

*held at NASREC, Johannesburg on 7-9 August 1992*

### **Commission report on women and economic policy**

The responses below should be read in conjunction with the document in the conference package on Women and the economy (pp. 34-39). Page numbers are indicated with each point.

#### **1. Population — page 34**

- (a) Women have no say in the financial matters of the family even if they are the head of household. For many women in rural areas the money is sent by husbands sometimes with instructions on how to spend it. Sometimes no money is sent; sometimes the money is not enough even if the women budget very strictly. Women have no economic say in the sense of having access to land. Apartheid; laws and tradition have prevented women from having independent access to land:
- (b) The high number of young children in the population — especially in the rural areas — affects the position of women very seriously. The lack of child care facilities and financial problems mean that the needs of children cannot be met. Women as the breadwinners have to leave their children unattended when they go to work. This sometimes leads to exploitation of child labour. This places a great deal of stress on women and affects their health negatively. It also restricts their participation in society and in organizations.

This means that our education policy should take these issues into account. For example:

- free and compulsory education up to a certain level;
- protection of children against abuse and child labour;
- more schools to be built by the Government;
- family planning should be the responsibility of both partners. Any national policy on family planning should be developed with people's involvement and input of both men and women so that the policy will be popular and not imposed from the top;
- sex education in schools and in the family — including education on safe contraception.

#### **2. Women in the workforce <sup>79</sup> — pages 34-35**

- (a) In the mass employment schemes and job creation schemes which COSATU is proposing there should be provision for women in employment. COSATU should demand and negotiate for 50 per cent of jobs created to go to women. In addition education, literacy and training programmes should be run for women.
- (b) As an immediate step COSATU should demand that the Department of Manpower which runs training courses should ensure job placements for those who have been trained.
- (c) COSATU should campaign for women to be in other industries, not only in low-paying industries and to improve wages in the low-paying industries. These demands should also be put forward in collective bargaining especially in centralized bargaining forums.
- (d) Most of the people in the informal sector are women. Some own and control their own businesses, others work for men. The Government should set up more training centres for people in the informal sector.

<sup>79</sup> These demands should be negotiated through the National Economic Negotiating Forum (NENF).

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### 3. Education and training — page 36

We should make sure that women get access to more training through:

- taking advantage of free training programmes run by the Department of Manpower;
- literacy programmes in companies;
- in-service training in the workplace;
- Government should take responsibility for setting up training centres;
- unions should be represented on industry and national training boards and should have a say in retraining programmes;
- schools should start early with career guidance so that children can decide on the direction they want to take.

### 4. Children and the home — pages 36-37

(a) Improving social security benefits should include:

- UIF should be extended to people even if they have not had a job;
- special assistance should be provided for pregnant women especially women who are unemployed or are not covered by maternity agreements in companies.

(b) Preschool facilities — Government should build child care centres and unions should campaign for these.

(c) Housing shortages and restrictions on women's access to housing affect their security and health. Therefore

- the State should take responsibility for building houses to overcome housing shortage;
- women should have the right to get housing independently irrespective of whether they are married or single;
- company housing schemes should make provision for workers — especially women — to negotiate an alternative arrangement/continue with the scheme even if they change jobs or lose their jobs.

## Women and the COSATU growth path

### 1. Redistribution of resources and power — page 381.1

Women should be employed in local authorities and institutions that provide basic needs — e.g. ESKOM — at all levels up to planning and managerial levels. Women should have independent access to these services, e.g. housing and to sign contracts independently.

1.1. The composition of local councils and other structures of public control should reflect the population of the country. Affirmative action programmes to achieve this should include among other measures a quota system for women. Affirmative action programmes should include education and training programmes — e.g. extending bursaries, encouraging girls to make subject and career choices that will help them to get out of “women's jobs”, workplace training should upgrade women's skills and train them for other work which is not “women's work”. But education and training programmes on their own will not be enough. We need a package of policies including education and training, employment policy, promotion policy, etc.

1.2. Tax system — we support this point in the COSATU economic policy. We need a new tax system which will not be based on race or sex or marital status. There should be no additional tax for married women. COSATU structures which are working on these issues should take these demands forward and report to the constitutional structures and inform the gender coordinator of progress.

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## 2. Industrial policy

- 2.1., Overcoming past imbalances in women's employment and unemployment can be
- 2.3. done by taking special measures which include:
- and — equal employment opportunities for women;
- 2.4. — employers and Government should contribute to a fund for employment creation and training — which will make special provision for women. Training materials should be gender-sensitive and illustrate the capacity of women to do jobs even in areas traditionally regarded as men's work;
- special attention to women in rural areas, informal sector and unemployed women;
  - technology should assist with job creation;
  - equal pay for work of equal value;
  - in the short term — training opportunities for women in existing programmes, in the long term a special clause in industrial policy that employers should negotiate with unions on employers' role in providing resources and training opportunities for women.
- 2.2. — Employers should invest in the production of basic goods and services to make them affordable;
- the responsibility for tasks like child care should be socialized, e.g. through child care/educare centres;
  - in addition, our organizations should campaign for shared responsibility for domestic work so that this is not seen as the women's responsibility. This campaign should be referred to COSATU structures, the National Women's Coalition and other structures in the democratic movement. The idea of developing a Family Code (on the lines of Cuba) should be explored by these structures.
  - The role of women's unpaid labour (housework, child care, etc.) should be recognized as a contribution to national wealth and should be included in the calculation of national wealth.
- 2.3. See 2.1.
- 2.4. See 2.1.
- 2.5. This point on technology should read: "The development and introduction of technology must be gender sensitive." (Note: Not clear what is meant by heavy — because if it is too heavy for women it will also be unsafe for men. Also technology is supposed to make work lighter and easier.

## 3. The role of the State — page 39

- 3.1. Minimum of 50 per cent representation of women at all levels.
- 3.2. Public works programmes promoted by the State must employ at least half women. Agreed.

## 4. Building workers' power — page 39

It is essential that in building workers' power and participation in all spheres of economic and political life, women are represented, e.g. National Economic Negotiation Forum, National Manpower Commission, UIF Board, National Councils such as the Electricity Council and workplace bargaining forums. Agreed. In addition:

- political and economic education should start at school level;
- skill training programmes for women to ensure that they play an effective role in all spheres of economic and political life at all levels — including planning, engineering programmes and managerial levels;
- all research and development on the production of goods and services that affect women's lives should ensure input from women and funds should be allocated for developing gender-sensitive perspectives;

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- research and development work on social services should ensure input from women;
  - statistics: in COSATU should indicate sex categories of male/female; other — e.g. government, research institutions, business, etc. should give race and sex breakdown so that we can monitor progress in transformation of our society and in affirmative action programmes.

## **Commission on violence**

The Commission identified the following forms of violence:

- political violence;
- sexual violence;
- physical violence;
- structural violence.

The group proceeded to discuss the following:

### **1. Domestic violence: Wife battery**

Demands identified:

- laws should be changed;
- abuse centres to be established;
- financial compensation should be instituted.

### **2. Sexual violence**

- Abuse centres should be set up in those areas where they do not exist and must be subsidized by the Government;
- no differentiation should be made in law between rape in a marriage and rape by a stranger.

### **3. Sexual harassment**

- Discrimination;
- free education for all on sexual harassment at home and school;
- promotion at work should be on merit;
- draw up a code of conduct.

#### **3.1. Trade unions**

- Education and training on sexual harassment.

#### **3.2. Society**

- Demand abuse centres which should be subsidized by the Government and be utilized to educate our youth on sexual harassment;
- demand free compulsory education on sexuality and defences in school syllabus;
- demand that laws should change to protect basic human rights.

To achieve these demands we have to do the following:

- need to campaign against all forms of violence;
- in this campaign COSATU must spearhead “night marches”;
- have workshops, use media and cultural activities to highlight the campaign;
- the Women’s Charter should have a clause which protects women against violence.

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## 4. The effect of violence on the participation of women

The Commission identified that violence affects women's participation and therefore we should do the following:

- should have child care at meetings as this is a cause of friction in the household which leads to violence;
- should demand safe transport for shiftworkers as this increases the risk of rape;
- public transport must be subsidized by the State;
- need peace and political tolerance as this affects women;
- support the demand on the electrification of townships;
- strengthen relationships in the women's tripartite;
- develop clear programme.

## 5. Law and education

The Commission identified that we do not know much about the law that is used to protect women in other countries. We need to correct the situation to have an equitable law. Therefore, the Commission recommends that the National Women's Subcommittee should do research on the law and women and further to hold a workshop and then report the findings to the CEC to take it further.

## 6. Political violence

- Demands on violence should be forwarded to the coalition;
- PAYE: should be directed to the democratic fund;
- COSATU should be directly represented at local, regional and national dispute committees;
- look into the future of the hostels;
- democratization of the SAP and SADF;
- should also look at the political demands whether they address political violence;
- strengthening of resolution committee by involving women.

# Commission report on the Charter of Women's Rights

*How do we see the Women's Charter?*

## 1. Do we need to draw up another one?

- 1.1. There is a need for a new Women's Charter
  - 1.1.1. We need to learn from the existing one.
  - 1.1.2. There are new developments which need to be looked into.
  - 1.1.3. Charter that will involve and represent all women in South Africa.
  - 1.1.4. The past one was not adopted as a constitutional document.  
Therefore, we need a new one that has constitutional status or under the Bill of Rights.
- 1.2. What would be the objective of the document?
  - 1.2.1. Raising consciousness of women, and ensuring that the process of drawing up the Charter is an educative one.
  - 1.2.2. Make women's voices to be heard — listened to.
  - 1.2.3. Make women to be part of the decision making in the country.
  - 1.2.4. Unifying women in South Africa.
  - 1.2.5. Should be accessible and understandable to all people of South Africa.

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### 1.3. How should it relate to the Workers' Charter?

- The Women's Charter should be a separate document. In addition, women workers' rights should be part of the Workers' Charter.

### 1.4. What rights should be contained in the document?

- The demands collected from the women should be in the document.
- The gender rights that were proposed to be in the workers' charter should be included (see page 79).  
Other rights should be included, such as:
  - The right to family life (the definition of the family should be broadened to include single parenting, unmarried parents).
  - Childbirth and childrearing as a fundamental right.
- Debate is still needed on the demands.

## 2. The Coalition

### 2.1. What do we think the aim of the Women's Coalition should be?

- To unite women in drawing up a document on women's rights (Women's Charter) and entrench women's rights in the new South Africa.

### 2.2. Should COSATU continue to participate in the Coalition? If yes what would our objective be? What role should COSATU play in the Coalition?

#### 2.2.1. COSATU participation:

- 2.2.1.1. Discussion so far in affiliates has been very limited. Some affiliates as well as a COSATU delegation have been attending the Coalition meetings since the launch in April 1992.

- 2.2.1.2. COSATU and affiliates should continue participating, having a common position.

- 2.2.1.3. COSATU's representative on the steering committee should continue and ensure that she circulates the information to all affiliates.

#### 2.2.2. COSATU's role in the Coalition:

- 2.2.2.1. To see to it that the rights of women workers and the unemployed are included in the document.

- 2.2.2.2. To educate and conscientize women.

- 2.2.2.3. To build unity with other women's organizations.

- 2.2.2.4. Together with the alliance to give direction to the alliance.

### 2.3. Should it continue after the Women's Charter is complete (i.e. one year)?

The need for continuation should be reviewed after the document/charter has been drawn up.

### 2.4. Who should be part of the Coalition? Which organization? Should individuals be part of the coalition?

- 2.4.1. All organizations whose membership includes women should be included, at the appropriate level.

- 2.4.2. Individuals should be reached by the WNC programme and involved at the local level. Further, individuals should be encouraged to join organizations.



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2.5. Review/look at the proposed structure of the Women's National Coalition

- We need to ensure that the Coalition structure works as democratically as possible.

### 3. Campaign

3.1. COSATU's objectives in taking up the campaign and on women's rights

- 3.1.1. To build gender awareness and educate members on women's rights.
- 3.1.2. To collect demands from women workers.
- 3.1.3. To build unity amongst women workers and mobilize them around the campaign.
- 3.1.4. To organize the unorganized women workers.
- 3.1.5. To build women's structures and leadership within COSATU.

3.2. Taking forward the campaign in COSATU

3.2.1. How? Proposed methods include:

- 3.2.1.1. Involvement of constitutional structures.
- 3.2.1.2. Coordination of the campaign by the national women's subcommittee.
- 3.2.1.3. Workshops and meetings to popularize the campaign.
- 3.2.1.4. Questionnaires — factory to factory.
- 3.2.1.5. Interviews.
- 3.2.1.6. Media — all forms including internal media.
- 3.2.1.7. Mass demonstrations of women supporting the demands.
- 3.2.1.8. Linking the campaign to existing campaigns.

3.2.2. Who should be involved in the campaign in COSATU?

- 3.2.2.1. All members of COSATU should be involved in the campaign.
- 3.2.2.2. The actual demands will be collected from women workers.

3.3. How can we use the campaign to build tripartite alliance, alliance in rural areas, working with other organizations?

3.3.1. Tripartite Alliance

- 3.3.1.1. Having regular alliance meetings and workshops on the Women's Charter.
- 3.3.1.2. Need to plan together as an alliance — set up a subcommittee (Women's Rights Committee).
- 3.3.1.3. Relationship also at regional and local levels.

3.3.2. Rural

- 3.3.2.1. Work hand-in-hand with existing structures, e.g. TRAC and the Tripartite Alliance.
- 3.3.2.2. Visits should be made, interviews conducted and workshops held.
- 3.3.2.3. Use COSATU affiliates, e.g. FAWU, PPWAWU, SADWU and SACTWU.
- 3.3.2.4. Use churches in reaching women.
- 3.3.2.5. Reach through tv.

3.3.3. Working with other organizations.

- 3.3.3.1. Joint workshops with other organizations, e.g. NACTU.
- 3.3.3.2. Use the workers' summit to popularize the campaign.

- 3.3.3.3. Our overall approach should be to reach as many working women as possible, including, e.g. women in Inkatha and the independent unions. Regional women's forums should work out how best this can be done.
- 3.3.3.4. Encourage COSATU women to join other organizations.

## **Proposed timetable for COSATU**

### **Phase 1: Planning, popularization and education<sup>80</sup>**

August	Report to constituencies (all affiliates/regions) at all levels. Discussions in women's structures.
September	COSATU Nedcom Women's Subcommittee workshop (5-6 September) COSATU regional workshops. Finalize campaign plans.
October	COSATU CEC (October) to endorse campaign.
November and December	Discussions in constitutional structures. Popularizing and education on the campaign. Suggested methods include pamphlets, posters, t-shirts, shop steward bulletin, COSATU radio bulletin, use of SABC radio and tv.

### **Phase 2: Finding out women's demands**

January to March	Suggested methods include simple questionnaires, workplace meetings, interviews, workshops, door-to-door (with civics ANC etc.)
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### **Phase 3: Processing the demands**

April	The National Women's Committee will coordinate the processing.
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### **Phase 4: Discussion and debate on key issues.**

May and June	Includes a national working women's summit.
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### **Phase 5: Finalizing demands**

July	Submission of demands to the Coalition.
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### **Phase 6: Formulation of charter and process of adoption**

August	By the National Conference of the National Coalition.
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<sup>80</sup> Throughout the campaign there needs to be ongoing coordination and cooperation with the Women's National Coalition.

## Garment and textile giant <sup>81</sup>

The two major unions operating in the garment and textile industries will merge in mid-September this year bringing together a total of 175,000 workers. They are COSATU's Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers' Union (ACTWUSA) and the independent Garment and Allied Workers' Union (GAWU). *Labour Bulletin* correspondent reports.

The new union will be the third biggest in COSATU, after NUM and NUMSA. ACTWUSA will bring with it 71,000 members, most of them from Natal and Transvaal. Workers from the two provinces together make up 50,000 of ACTWUSA members. Most of ACTWUSA's Natal membership is concentrated in the textile industry, while a significant proportion in the Transvaal is employed in clothing factories. GAWU, by comparison has a token membership of only 1,000 in the Transvaal and OFS.

The majority of GAWU's 98,000 members are concentrated in the clothing industries of the Western Cape, where it represents 52,000 workers and Natal, where it has 46,000 members. Another important characteristic of its membership is that most are coloured and Indian women workers.

The new union's biggest region will be Natal where it will have a total of 76,000 members. From COSATU's point of view, the new union will be its biggest affiliate in both Natal and the Western Cape. This will have an important bearing on the effectiveness of the federation's national campaigns.

A lot still has to be done before these statistics become meaningful. But much has already been achieved since the initial meeting in December last year. The unions have reached agreement on a number of issues. Though not the most important issues, they have been significant enough to give both unions the confidence to commit themselves to unity in just over two months from now.

## No-poaching agreement

One of the most positive agreements is the undertaking by both unions not to organize in factories where the other union exists. Poaching of membership by one union from the other has been the source of great hostility between them. One of the factors which made the unity talks necessary was the clashes between the GAWU and ACTWUSA membership in factories where both unions have a presence.

The unions have agreed that at two factories, Man about Town and Kingsgate, arrangements would be made for joint representation. At the same time, ACTWUSA agreed to withdraw its application for membership of the Natal Clothing Industrial Council, on which GAWU is already represented.

As a demonstration of their commitment to the merger, the unions exchanged leaders. GAWU's Special National Congress was addressed by ACTWUSA's first vice-president. In exchange, GAWU sent its treasurer to address the ACTWUSA Special National Congress. Another factor which has generated a sense of optimism is that all the merger committee meetings between ACTWUSA and GAWU have been conducted in a "comradely and constructive manner".

But there are differences, and important ones. Much still has to be done to allay the suspicions that exist among members, given the varying political traditions the two unions come from. In fact this is one of the reasons for GAWU seeking a postponement of the inaugural congress from 1 July to September.

In motivating a postponement, GAWU pointed out that unless there was a greater participation in debate and discussion of the merger at grass-roots level serious division could be created. It also pointed out that interaction between GAWU and ACTWUSA had been limited to leadership and merger committees. GAWU recommended that a programme to increase interaction of membership at all levels should be drawn up. It will be important to translate this programme into reality on the factory floor if the two unions are to forge one identity and "foster a spirit of fraternalism"

<sup>81</sup> SALB, Vol. 14, No. 2, June 1989.

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among their respective members. The history of conflict between the two unions makes this imperative.

## Political policy differences

There are also differences on the question of political policy. The Freedom Charter is an important focus of these differences. While neither union has adopted the Charter, there is support for the document within GAWU's ranks. Neither union emerged from their respective SNC's with clear-cut positions on the document. GAWU committed itself to embarking on an intensive education programme on COSATU's political policy and the Freedom Charter, as well as the ANC's constitutional guidelines.

ACTWUSA on the other hand has decided to initiate debate on the question of a Workers' Charter. But it clarified that the resolution calling for debate on the Workers' Charter did not mean opposition to the Freedom Charter. ACTWUSA also points out that the constitutional guidelines call for a charter protecting workers' rights. In ACTWUSA's view, the constitutional guidelines offer more scope for consensus, and therefore a broader basis for unity, than the Freedom Charter.

The question of alliances is also at issue. While ACTWUSA believes that its leadership should not take up positions in organizations outside the union, GAWU encourages this. But both unions have committed themselves to finding common grounds on these issues. They have also stressed that neither side should make the merger conditional on a resolution of these differences. A resolution will nevertheless have to be found if the new union is to advance the struggles of the garment and textile workers. If anything, these differences guarantee lively debate in the new union, as well as within COSATU.

What must emerge from these debates and from common struggle in a single garment and textile union is a new culture and a single identity. This will not be easy. The new union will be the only COSATU affiliate in which African workers will be in the minority. GAWU will bring with it a large majority of coloured and Indian workers, while ACTWUSA membership is mostly African.

## New militancy among coloured and Indian workers

It would be incorrect to categorize the GAWU membership as conservative because of its dormant past. Perceptions of COSATU have changed radically in the last year among GAWU membership. There is a clear and positive identification with COSATU policy and this has become more apparent with every mass rally. Placards and union songs point to the development of a new and militant consciousness. The workers' militancy was developed in the living wage strikes and in the protests against the new labour law (LRA) last year. GAWU members launched wildcat strikes and protests against the LRA, while COSATU itself was inactive in the Western Cape.

GAWU's living wage campaign was also accompanied by militant action, the most significant of which was the Rex Trueform strike where 2,000 downed tools for three weeks. This was the first major strike in the clothing industry in the Western Cape, and it generated massive support from other garment workers. There were wildcat strikes at a number of other factories in support of the living wage campaign. In fact, the increases negotiated at industrial council were the biggest ever won by the union in the Western Cape where the bulk of the GAWU membership is concentrated.

A militant shop steward leadership in the union also began to emerge. During the Build-a-Bridge campaign shop stewards won a promise from the city council that it would build a footbridge over a busy road. Militant shop stewards also met with South African Transport Services (SATS) to discuss grievances over changing train schedules that made them late for work. Shop stewards took the lead in these campaigns.

In an unprecedented show of organized worker strength, GAWU managed to convene a living wage rally of more than 6,000 members. This was by far the biggest gathering of workers in the Western Cape in recent labour history. All this shows that GAWU has been able to mobilize the latent militancy of its constituency more effectively than most would have expected, given its conservative past.

In Natal too GAWU has succeeded in mobilizing Indian women workers into militant struggles. The most surprising indication of this was the massive support for last year's three-day stayaway in June.

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ACTWUSA also has conservative traditions, drawn mainly from TWIU and GWIU which were former TUCSA affiliates. The third union which merged into ACTWUSA was NUTW, a militant former FOSATU affiliate whose main base was among textile workers in Natal. NUTW was one of the COSATU affiliates which most consistently opposed alliances with community organizations.

## Different traditions and cultures

The merger will therefore bring together various degrees of militancy, different political traditions and different cultures and this presents enormous challenges. It could also have positive implications. GAWU, for example, which is going through the wildcat strike phase, could draw on the important tactical lessons that the NUTW membership has learnt in the last ten years of factory floor struggles.

GAWU and ACTWUSA have agreed that the new union will seek affiliation to COSATU. This will introduce a new tradition into the federation — namely the tradition of closed shops. GAWU has closed shop agreements with the industrial councils in the Western and Eastern Cape and well as Natal. These prevent any other union from organizing in the clothing factories. Closed shops are unprecedented in the history of the progressive labour movement. The existence of the closed shop in one of its biggest affiliates will certainly initiate a debate in COSATU around this issue.

COSATU unions have always operated on the basis of the principle of majoritarianism and a 50 per cent plus one representation which ensured that no minority union would be given recognition. This was in line with democratic principles, the cornerstone of COSATU policy. But the amended labour law makes it an unfair labour practice *not* to recognize minority unions.

Closed shops were first raised in COSATU as a possible strategy to fight minority unions promoted by the LRA. GAWU's entry into COSATU will therefore contribute to the debate on how the federation should resist minority "fish and chips" unionism.

## New base for COSATU in the Western Cape

At another level, GAWU's entry into the federation has important implications for COSATU's presence in the Western Cape. One of the major weaknesses in the federation's national network has been the absence in the Western Cape of structures that were comparable to those in the Transvaal, Eastern Cape and Natal. The type of unionism that emerged in the Western Cape failed to mobilize the majority of workers in the area, namely coloured workers, into action.

By comparison, GAWU has been able to mobilize this sector of workers into action around the same issues that are of concern in COSATU. The garment industry is the biggest in the Cape. The merger will root COSATU for the first time deeply in the communities of the coloured majority. In Natal too, the new union will bring a huge constituency of Indian workers into COSATU.

There are other plus factors for the organization in the garment, textile and leather industry. The potential membership of 175,000 will cover almost all major factories and companies in every region in the country. This will place workers in the strongest position ever to consolidate national structures and demand a national industrial council for both the garment and textile sectors.

This has already become the focus of the living wage campaign in both GAWU and ACTWUSA. While GAWU has identified the need for a single national industrial council in the garment sector, ACTWUSA has also moved to secure national recognition at major companies in the textile sector, among them Barlow Rand's Romatex.

Case-study: Schedule of interviews conducted

No of interview	Sex	Age	Children	Language	Union office	Industry in which person works	Period of employment	Urban or peri-urban
1	Female	26	1 (9 yrs)	Afrikaans	Shop steward	Garment	10 yrs	Urban
2	Male	44	5 (ranging 21-3 yrs)	Afrikaans and English	Regional treasurer	Garment	13 yrs	Urban
3	Female	45	3 (ranging 29-25 yrs)	Afrikaans	Vice-chair of local	Garment	25 yrs	Urban
4	Female	40	2 (10-4 yrs)	Afrikaans	Chairperson of branch	Garment	10 yrs	Peri-urban
5	Female	58	3 (13-17 yrs)	Afrikaans	Local secretary	Garment	40 yrs	Urban
6	Male	28	1 (baby)	Afrikaans	Regional chairperson	Garment	6 yrs	Urban
7	Male	27	3 (9yrs - 6 mths)		Branch treasurer	Textiles	10 yrs	Urban
8	Female	28	None	Afrikaans	Secretary of local	Textiles	9 yrs	Urban
9	Male	52	7 (30 - 2 yrs)	Afrikaans	Shop steward	Textiles	16 yrs	Urban
10	Male	30	2 (4-1 yrs)	Afrikaans	Shop steward	Textiles	9 yrs	Urban
11	Female	40	3 (22-13 yrs)	English	Shop steward	Garment	Over 20 yrs	Urban
12	Male	27	3 (9-2 yrs)	Afrikaans	Shop steward	Garment	10 yrs	Urban
13	Male	32	1 (15 mths)	English	Organizer		7 yrs	Urban
14	Female	25	1 (6 yrs)	Afrikaans	Organizer		1 mth	Urban
15	Female	32	None	English/Afrikaans	Organizer		5 yrs	Urban
16	Female	34	2 (15, 11 yrs)	Afrikaans	Organizer		1 yr	Peri-urban
17	Male	27	2 (9, 6 yrs)	English	Organizer		1 yr	Urban
18	Male	29	1 (6 yrs)	Sotho	Organizer		4 yrs	Peri-urban

# **Equality for Women in Employment**

## **An Interdepartmental project**

### **Working Papers**

IDP Women/WP-1	Women Workers, Unions and Industrial Sectors in North America	Susan C. Eaton
IDP Women/WP-2	Gender Inequality in the Labour Market: Occupational Concentration and Segregation, A Manual on Methodology	Janet Siltanen, Jennifer Jarman and Robert M. Blackburn
IDP Women/WP-3	Statistical Measurement of Gender Wage Differentials	ILO Bureau of Statistics
IDP Women/WP-4	Women Workers and Unions in Europe: An Analysis by Industrial Sector	Sue Hastings and Martha Coleman
IDP Women/WP-5	Women and Social Security in Latin America, the Caribbean and Sub-Saharan Africa.	Nancy Folbre
IDP Women/WP-6	Les syndicats et les travailleuses dans le secteur non structuré: le cas des travailleuses domestiques à Recife, Brésil et des vendeuses sur les marchés à Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso.	Marie Anderfuhren et Mamounata Cisse
IDP Women/WP-7	Organizing Homeworkers in the Informal Sector in Australia, the Netherlands and Canada.	Jane Tate
IDP Women/WP-8	Collective Bargaining and the Promotion of Equality: The case of South Africa	Catherine O'Regan Clive Thompson
IDP Women/WP-9	El Hostigamiento Sexual en el Empleo Qué se ha hecho hasta ahora en Costa Rica	Marta Eugenia Solano Ana Elena Badilla
IDP Women/WP-10	The Unionisation of Women Workers in Different Industrial Sectors in South Africa	Catherine O'Regan Bee Thompson