

Revised CEC Discussion Paper
COSATU National Gender Committee
September 2001

Gender – A Struggle within the Struggle: Engaging Our Theory, Assessing Our Practice

“The struggle to conquer oppression in our country is the weaker for the traditionalist, conservative and primitive restraints imposed on women by the male-dominated structures within our Movement, as also because of equally traditionalist attitudes of surrender and submission on the part of women.”
O.R. Tambo, 1981, ANC Women’s Conference

This quote by Comrade O.R. Tambo remains relevant today. One of the key challenges that we face in the gender struggle is the elimination of conservative attitudes and resistance to change on the part of both women and men. For this reason we have chosen the theme: “Gender: A struggle within the struggle”. This theme clearly points to the challenges and contradictions that we face in living up to our political vision through our organisational practice. We are also aware that the struggle for the transformation of gender relations is not simply about attitudes, but about dismantling structural inequality and challenging the material basis of women’s oppression under capitalism. Therefore the gender struggle is an integral part of the struggle for socialism.

The aim of this paper is to engage the Central Executive Committee of COSATU in a process of debate and reflection on our gender perspectives and vision; to assess the implementation of our policies; and to agree on a process of implementation and monitoring.

Section A of the paper deals with our theoretical framework, exploring the relationship between patriarchy, capitalism and apartheid, discussing a Marxist analysis of women’s oppression and debating lessons we can draw from approaches by socialist countries to transforming gender relations. This section highlights the challenges we face as a federation to build conscious gender activists that are able to develop our theoretical perspectives and take up the task of transforming our practice and ourselves.

Section B takes an organisational focus, and makes an assessment of COSATU’s progress in the struggle for gender equality. This section tries to deal frankly and robustly with the need for the federation to take a firm and resolute stance in grappling with some of the thorny issues in the implementation process, in order to match our practice with our theory.

Section C deals with the Implementation Strategy for the COSATU Gender Policy. This section identifies six key focus areas from the policy for implementation and proposes tasks, time frames and accountability processes for affiliates.

Section A: Engaging Our Theory

Bringing gender relations into focus

It is generally agreed that race, class and gender, and in our historical context, apartheid capitalism and patriarchy, are inextricably linked. Few would dispute the fact that each form of oppression has its own specific features that articulate with each other to form a system. Nevertheless, there is a tendency to assume that gender oppression would disappear with the elimination of class exploitation. A more useful approach suggests that there is a need to make a conscious effort to eliminate women's oppression *specifically* and *simultaneously*, as opposed to seeing it as simply subsumed under class and race, or as merely functional to apartheid and capitalism. Our goal is that class struggles and the national democratic struggle should at all times be engendered, and at the same time gender struggles must have class and national content. But the integration of gender *automatically* be addressed within a democratic or socialist project, as history has demonstrated. is one part of our strategy, we must still give specific, focussed attention to gender issues and in particular to the advancement of the concerns of women in the federation. This focussed approach is important because without specific attention, gender issues often become invisible and fall off the table. Women's oppression will not The experiences of Socialist states in particular, show us that changes in ownership and control of the means of production do not automatically lead to women's emancipation from household labour, nor do attempts to socialise unpaid reproductive labour necessarily liberate women from unequal gender power relations in the home.

A materialist approach to the emancipation of women

An important challenge facing us it to develop theoretical and practical approaches to women's emancipation that are specific to the South African context. We should take as a starting point that the most useful theoretical approach is a materialist approach. This paper argues, however, that we need to acknowledge that there are some limitations in classical Marxist writings, as they do not give adequate attention to analysing gender relations. Although Marx, Engels and others wrote more on this question than they are often given credit for, and than many Marxists are actually aware of, there are still inconsistencies, silences and gaps in classical Marxist writings, to be elaborated below. In addition, there have been distortions of socialist theory in some of the socialist countries, leaving us with a legacy of uneven and at times contradictory applications of Marxist theory in the transformation of gender relations. It is our contention that Marxism provides us with the most appropriate tools for understanding and transforming gender relations. However, we must guard against reproducing the gender-blindness of the dogmatic, rigid applications of Marxism that prevailed in some countries and organisations, particularly the strand represented by Stalinism. There have been numerous attempts by Marxists to deal with areas of gender-blindness in the classics, and these can assist us greatly in moving forward. This leaves us with the challenge of developing and applying a materialist perspective to our own conditions.

Another challenge in our attempt to develop a revolutionary theoretical approach to

gender struggles, is that the people that are trying to transform gender relations are deeply affected by sexism themselves. Political organisations are male-dominated, most of the political thinkers are men, and their perspectives are often impeded by the personal benefits they derive as a result of women's oppression, resulting in gender-blindness. Because men do 'benefit' it is often difficult for them to see how their own lives have been distorted and limited by sexism. On the other hand, women are often not well organised, because of their gender roles, and in order to become conscious gender activists, they need to overcome the paralysing effects of internalised oppression. Thus, each activist faces a challenge of promoting and developing a revolutionary theoretical approach, and challenging sexism within the struggle, while simultaneously engaging in a personal struggle to challenge gender power relations and internalised gender oppression in their own lives.

Capitalism, Apartheid and Patriarchy: Understanding the links

Colonialism and Apartheid

Under colonialism and apartheid, race, gender and class oppression were combined to form an intricate system of oppression. The racial and gender form of colonial domination covers its underlying economic logic – the exploitation of the black working class, using mechanisms such as extracting surplus through black working class women's unpaid reproductive labour. Race and gender oppression are not merely about prejudice, but ultimately about using power and control in the interest of capital.

The colonial system in South Africa, as throughout the continent, intensified the gender oppression found in pre-colonial systems. The combination of colonial and customary oppression denied women basic social and economic rights in the family and the community. Many women were barred from living in cities, owning land, family planning, inheriting, borrowing money or participating in political and social struggles. The system led to widespread abuse of women, both inside and outside the family. African women were confronted by triple oppression – oppression on the basis of their race, gender and class.

Apartheid laws set out limited and impoverished roles for African women. In particular, as they enforced migrant labour, they defined the role of African women in society and the economy. Restrictions were placed on women working and living in urban areas through pass laws. Black working class women bore the brunt of apartheid, capitalist and patriarchal oppression. Apartheid capitalism also benefited from women's oppression in that large numbers of African women worked as domestic workers and cleaners under extremely exploitative conditions. Furthermore, women's unpaid labour in the rural areas enabled bosses to pay extremely low wages to migrant workers.

The following quote from an SACP 10th Congress (1998) document demonstrates how the capitalist system benefited from and reproduced patriarchal relations in South Africa: "...the specific capitalist growth path in our country involved the appropriation of existing patriarchal customs and traditions, and their articulation into the reproduction of the capitalist system. This articulation saw the vast exacerbation of the coercive features

of pre-existing patriarchy. In particular, the brunt of the reproduction of a massive army of reserve cheap labour was borne by the unpaid (and hidden) labour and effort of millions of women. The reproductive functions often carried (at least to some extent) by society at large in other developed economies (by way of pensions, public education, health-care and housing, and municipal water and power infrastructure) has been borne, at huge personal cost, by millions of black women in our country (and in our region). It is they who have had to care for the young, the sick, the unemployed and the aged. It is they who have to spend their lives fetching water and fuel. The legacy of this continues to impact dramatically upon the life-opportunities, resources, and general marginalisation of the women of our country and region (SACP, 1998:19-20).

The Sexual Division of Labour

Women's work is an outcome of the sexual division of labour, which means that women have two distinct spheres of work. One is reproductive work, which is largely unpaid and unrecognised, and the other is productive which has a market value. Capitalist economists ignore the contribution that women make to the economy and society because they only consider the market value of work performed by individuals in an economy. A materialist analysis recognises how women's work contributes to capital accumulation because it reproduces the workforce at no cost to capitalists. Thus, women are made responsible for performing unpaid reproductive labour, through the daily renewal of workers, through clothing, feeding and raising children. This labour is essential to the survival of the society and to the reproduction of the working class, however it is invisible, unpaid and undervalued.

The sexual division of labour under capitalism is different from previous societies. The development of capitalism and the industrial revolution created a physical separation between production (in factories) and reproduction (in the home). Before capitalism production and reproduction took place around or near to the home, which meant that reproductive labour was often integrated with productive labour. Working class women have had to carry the costs of this separation by combining waged work with childcare and unpaid domestic work. A key factor in women's oppression is the fact that women could not be 'productive' during the childbearing period, and therefore required subsistence. This role was granted to men by capitalists – they were made responsible for supporting women during this time, and thus were given the role of 'breadwinners'. A sexual division of labour does not have to be oppressive, however in the capitalist system it is oppressive because men have been given economic advantage while women have been marginalised and disempowered. Under capitalism the family and household are used to keep women oppressed.

This hidden unpaid labour has a strong class, and racial dimension to it. Reproductive labour in the Sandton household is not the same as in the Khayelitsha household. In Sandton there are microwaves, dishwashers and washing machines that are operated by the domestic worker, while in Khayelitsha, the burden of unpaid labour falls on the shoulders of the mothers and daughters of the household. So the exposure and struggle against hidden reproductive labour is particularly a working class issue since it is

working class women who bear the brunt of it – in their own homes and as domestic workers in other people's homes.

A concrete example of how the intersection of unpaid labour, race and class impact on the lives of women is to take a simple issue like the time that a person wakes up in the morning. An African working class woman would have to rise in the early hours of the morning in order to prepare food for the children and heat water for washing. She will also have to rise early because she has to travel a distance by public transport from her home in the township to her workplace. The fact that she does all these things is because she is a woman, African and working class.

Labour market segmentation

Women have far higher rates of unemployment and lower levels of participation in waged work. Only about a third of waged workers are women. When women are in waged work their jobs are often similar to the work they do at home – like cleaning, sewing, nursing and teaching. They earn lower wages for these jobs and are usually at the lowest rung in the workplace. Capitalists try to argue that this gender discrimination in wages is based on men's role as 'breadwinners', but at the same time they take advantage of cheap and vulnerable female labour to undercut the wages that men receive.

Men and women are also separated into different types of jobs, in different types of industries with different levels of skill and responsibility. This is referred to as labour market segmentation. Different segments in the labour market are associated with different levels of income, security, legal rights, status and levels of organisation. In South Africa labour market segmentation is closely related to race and gender.

Race and gender divisions often coincide with class divisions; for example white men dominate the capitalist class, while black women are among the poorest of the poor. However, class divisions are not the same as race and gender divisions, for example, white workers may act in racist ways to protect their relatively privileged position, and trade unions can maintain a high level of sexism in their ranks. Gender divisions are also evident between men and women of the same race; for example black men will tend to benefit more than black women will from black economic empowerment and affirmative action.

Globalisation and the feminisation of labour and poverty

There are various global trends in play that have had an impact on women's work. In most regions women's share of the labour force is on the increase but this has contradictory effects. From a positive point of view, women have been integrated in the formal economy, which has improved their financial status, and resulted in an increase in their proportion in secure jobs, particularly in new sectors, and in certain professions and positions. However, a far larger proportion of women have been negatively affected, since their increased employment has not resulted in better access to higher paid jobs, nor has it mitigated discrimination. Studies reflect a decline in labour standards and occupations for women and increasing shifts from formal to informal work. Furthermore, women are often the last to benefit from job expansion and usually the first to suffer the

consequences of job contraction. This is particularly the case in Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa.

This increase in women's employment is referred to as 'feminisation of labour' and driven by the private sector's desire for low wages, labour control, productivity, and *flexible labour* - which women provide through their predominance in temporary and part-time work as a result of their position in society, the economy and the home. This kind of flexibility does not help workers balance work and family responsibilities; in fact it is used "for the sole benefit of employers, without the slightest consideration for women workers. Irregular working hours, work schedules with no rest periods and wage cuts have served only to increase exploitation of women workers" (ICFTU 1999:10). Consequently the process of globalisation acts as a mechanism to propel women into the more insecure sectors of the economy where they are exposed to appalling working conditions, exploitation and fierce anti-union repression. A horrifying example of the extreme discrimination that women face in the increasingly competitive global economy, is to be found in export processing zones (EPZ's) where women workers rights are constantly violated through sexual harassment, forced pregnancy tests, forced use of contraceptives and in some cases forced sterilisation.

In South Africa, there have been massive job losses that have had a particularly negative impact on women, as workers in the clothing and textiles industry, and as women and families that are reliant on remittances in the cases of mining and construction, and other industries. Threatened retrenchments in the public sector would have a severely negative impact on women's employment and poverty. Privatisation and public sector cutbacks represent a real threat to gender equality because they threaten the employment of women (in relatively protected employment) and would effectively *increase* the burden of unpaid labour on women by shifting the provision of social services and basic needs from the state to women.

The struggle for socialism: what about gender?

Having briefly reflected on the current context, and the relationship between race, class and gender, we now turn to the struggle for socialism to draw out some lessons about the emancipation of women in Marxist theory and practice. This section first discusses selected Marxist classical writings on women's oppression, and then briefly touches on the experiences of socialist countries in transforming gender relations, and finally draws out key areas where there is a need to further develop our theory and practice.

Marxism and women's oppression

Engels was the first Marxist that made a significant analysis of the oppression of women in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*. He examined family structures in different societies in different eras. He traced a historical transition from matriarchal to patriarchal family forms, and identified the monogamous family as intrinsic to capitalism. He showed that the family, monogamy and women's oppression are not natural, and had nothing to do with evolution, but were specifically intended to

control the ownership of private property, through the protection of heirs. He saw the family as the institutionalised subjugation of women by men for the purpose of entrenching and perpetuating the capitalist system. Overthrow of mother right on which earlier societies were based laid the foundations for women's subjugation, private property, monogamous marriage and patrilineal inheritance: "The first class opposition that appears in history coincides with the development of the antagonism between man and woman in monogamous marriage, and the first class oppression coincides with that of the female sex by the male." (Engels, 1972:129)

The following are some of the key theoretical arguments presented by Marxists in understanding gender oppression:

★ *Highlighting the link between production and reproduction*

A crucially important aspect of Engels' contribution was the emphasis on both production and reproduction within the materialist analysis, with the assertion that both are determining factors in history. He explains that this refers to "the production of the means of existence, articles of food and clothing, dwellings and of tools necessary for that production" and "the production of human beings themselves, the propagation of the species." He goes on to argue that: "The social organisation under which the people of a particular historical epoch and a particular country live is determined by both kinds of production: by the stage of development of labour on the one hand and of the family on the other." (Engels, preface to *The Origin of the Family*, 1884)

Unfortunately this approach is generally not carried through in Marxist writings, and an exclusive focus on production is more common. For example, socialists in the Comintern later refused to endorse the view expressed by Engels – what disturbed them was the implication that the family represented an autonomous, if not independent, source of social development.

★ *A materialist analysis of women's oppression*

The Marxist analysis was significant in developing foundations for a materialist conception of women's oppression, breaking with "naturalism" and biological reductionism. Biological reductionism simply means reducing explanations to biology. Biological reductionism can be found amongst those seeking to justify women's oppression as natural and stemming from biological differences, as well as amongst some feminists who base their arguments on women's "inherent" superiority. Identifying a material and historical basis for women's oppression is important because it creates the possibility of transformation.

★ *Identifying marriage and the family as oppressive institutions*

Engels was damning of the institution of marriage under capitalism, describing it as analogous to prostitution, with the role of the wife differing only in the duration of her services. Engels argued that unlike a wage worker a wife does not hire out her body on piecework but "sells it into slavery for once and for all." (Engels, 1972:79) He envisaged the liberation of women through the overthrow of capitalism. In his view within a classless society the family would be replaced by non-exploitative freely-chosen sexual unions within which the status of male and female would be equal.

★ *Identifying the oppression of household labour*

Lenin's contribution went beyond that of earlier writings, because he emphasised women's material oppression in the household, condemning 'domestic slavery' and 'humiliating subjugation' in the household. Thus, Lenin emphasised a crucial area that remains a core focus of socialists today – the unpaid labour performed by women to maintain and reproduce the working class: "The female half of the human race is doubly oppressed under capitalism. The working woman and the peasant woman are oppressed by capital, but over and above that, even in the most democratic of the bourgeois republics, they remain, firstly, deprived of some rights because the law does not give them equality with men; and secondly – and this is the main thing – they remain in 'household bondage', they continue to be 'household slaves', for they are overburdened with the drudgery of the most squalid and backbreaking and stultifying toil in the kitchen and the individual family household." (Lenin, 1966:83-84).

Alexandra Kollontai argued that the work performed free of charge by the housewife for her family should become part of the responsibility of the community and that the "socialisation" of domestic life was integral to the creation of a communist society. Lenin also emphasised the transformation of 'petty housekeeping' into large-scale socialised services.

★ *Linking women's emancipation with the struggle for socialism*

Many Marxists have pointed to conditional links between women's emancipation and socialism. For example, Lenin argued: "the proletariat cannot achieve complete liberty until it has won complete liberty for women." At the same time, women's emancipation would not be achievable without a fundamental transformation of capitalist relations of production.

Marxist analysis identified two key features of women's oppression:

- ★ Women's exclusion from production
- ★ Women's 'domestic slavery'

Marxists argued that women's emancipation required three key steps:

- ★ the elimination of private property
- ★ the inclusion of women in social production
- ★ the socialisation of reproduction

While it is accepted that these are important conditions for women's emancipation, it is now widely acknowledged that these alone are not sufficient conditions.

Lessons from socialist experiences

A focus on women's participation in the labour force

A major limitation of socialist states was that they saw women's emancipation as being achieved primarily through women's participation in the labour force. However, women did not enter waged work in large numbers, and where they did, they were in a

structurally disadvantaged position compared with men. Many progressive policies and practices were developed, such as education and training to counter sexual segregation in the workplace, equality at work, equal pay and social provisions such as childcare to facilitate women's labour force participation. This meant a focus on women at work, without looking at what happened in the home, which remained the 'private sphere'. This had the unfortunate consequence of placing a greater burden on women to fulfil multiple roles, as workers, as mothers and as political or community activists. In many pieces of legislation in socialist countries women were defined as workers and mothers, while men were defined solely as workers.

Shifts and reversals in policy on women

There were also shifts and contradictions in policies and ideology on the role of women. For example, during Stalin's time, there was a reversal of the gains made by the Bolsheviks who had introduced public child-care, laundry and kitchen facilities and a Family Code, which amongst other things, legalised homosexuality, abortion and made divorce easier. Another remarkable aspect was that in cases of uncertainty about paternity, the courts would order all possible fathers named by the woman to pay child support. Under Stalin, not only were these and other gains reversed, but also there was a propaganda campaign that appealed for social stability and espoused conservative family values and the glory of worker motherhood. In China there were also contradictions that related to the economic requirements and demand for labour at a given time. For example, there was a concerted effort to get women into textile handcraft production, followed by a later campaign to get women to work in the fields with departure of men into the army. However, there was an acknowledgement of the complexities involved in the struggle for women's emancipation, Mao Zedong was quoted as saying: "To liberate women is not to manufacture washing machines."

Another weakness of socialist projects was the denial of the fact that men benefit from women's oppression and are directly implicated as oppressors. Thomas Sankara identified this reality in a Women's Day speech: "Comrades, only the revolutionary transformation of our society can create conditions for your liberation. You are dominated by both imperialism and men. In every male languishes the soul of a feudal lord, a male chauvinist, which must be destroyed. This is why you must eagerly embrace the most advanced revolutionary slogans to make your liberation real and advance toward it more rapidly".

Critical lessons

The most critical lessons that we can draw from these experiences include the following:

- Class struggle will not automatically solve women's oppression
- This highlights the need for women to organise to struggle against their oppression
- In our theory production and reproduction must always be conceptually linked, we must guard against emphasising production and contributing to the invisibility of reproductive labour
- The struggle to transform interpersonal, gendered power relations between women and men must be addressed simultaneously with the socialisation of domestic work to ensure real change in household relations

- Power relations within the household must be explored, analysed and challenged
- There is a need to acknowledge that not only is women's oppression beneficial to capital, it also benefits individual men, including working class men, and not only do they benefit, they often play an active role in defending and perpetuating patriarchy
- Patriarchy needs to be analysed as having a material basis not simply as an ideological phenomenon
- There is a need to move beyond an analysis that sees patriarchy as simply functional to capitalism because, for instance men and capitalists may have conflicting interests in the use of women's labour power
- The analysis of gender relations should not be confined to the relation of women to capital, but should also include household relations, gender and the state, gender and organisations, relations between women and men and differentiation amongst women

Concluding remarks

Thus, the paper has argued that there is a need to develop a focused approach to understanding women's oppression, in its *relation* to class and race, and also understanding its own specific dynamics. Our approach to the emancipation of women should include the deepening and sharpening of our theoretical understanding and debates as well as the development of conscious cadres, both women and men, that are willing to challenge not only their views, but their daily practice.

There is a need to focus on the structural and economic manifestations of patriarchy, and to also look at the impact that this has on our organisations. In other words, we need to apply a rigorous analysis to the gender dynamics *within organisations*, in our case within trade unions. The same analysis needs to be applied to gender power relations between individual women and men.

The SACP/COSATU political education manual highlighted the fact that the elements of sexism in the working class, like violence and abuse directed at women, are political issues and need to be seen as one of the central challenges that must be overcome. For the working class to fulfil its role as the motive force for transformation we must have unity within our ranks and we must struggle against all forms of oppression that keep us divided.

But as important, is the need to tackle gender relations at the personal level. Fundamental to this challenge is the transformation of individuals to become conscious gender activists. This means that men must begin to internalise their commitment to gender equality – starting in their own lives. It also means that women must refuse to be bullied and harassed by men, and that they must act on the power that they already have.

The need for women to organise themselves and to play a leading role in gender struggles, national struggles and class struggles has been clearly highlighted by the mistaken assumption that class struggle would automatically liberate women.

This is the key challenge to activists – to struggle to give political expression to our ideals and vision *and* to transform our daily practice and conduct.

Section B: Assessing Our Practice

Introduction

The previous section highlighted the lessons that have been learnt, in particular the importance of conscious strategies and action to ensure that gender struggles are central to class struggle. It also emphasised the need to organise women to struggle for their emancipation, and not to wait for a third stage!

The main objective of trade unions is to conscientise workers around their rights, which are mostly undermined by the state and employers, and to mobilise workers around their problems and rally them to take collective action. Class unity and strong leadership are essential factors in trade unionism because workers experiences are not enough to organise workers to take up action against the capitalists. Collective leadership is therefore essential to achieve the aspirations of workers and to build real democracy, which embodies true worker control by giving voice and space to the most exploited and marginalised. For COSATU to take its rightful place as a leading force in the transformation of society it must lead the transformation of gender relations. To do this effectively requires relentless commitment to challenge oppressive gender relations in all spheres and honest reflection on our individual and organisational practice.

As the Secretariat report to the Congress in 1997 stated: “COSATU’s commitment to women’s emancipation is unquestionable. Since our inception this matter has been on the agenda and we have taken countless resolutions on this important matter and have engaged in efforts to redress past imbalances and the impact of gender inequality in the unions and in the workplace. To some extent we have been able to achieve progress however we cannot claim to have changed the mindset of many of our members and to some extent of our leaders.”

We have adopted resolutions to advance the struggles of women workers, to conscientise men about patriarchal practices, and to break down practical and structural barriers to the full participation of women. Some affiliates have put special measures in place to ensure that women are represented in decision-making structures and organisational activities.

There have been areas of progress, which have largely been the result of intense activism by women that have organised themselves and fought tirelessly within the federation since the launching congress. Women have struggled for recognition and a voice in their unions; for the right to organise separately in women’s and later gender structures; for the election of women as leaders; for women workers’ collective bargaining demands to be met; and for policies and action against sexual harassment.

Notwithstanding this progress, COSATU’s record in the struggle for gender equality has been marred by significant resistance and a lack of political seriousness. Nowadays many male leaders in COSATU are familiar with the appropriate policies and approach on gender issues, but outside of formal meetings they still make jokes about “this gender issue”. Debates on gender issues are still characterised by defensiveness and accusations,

rather than constructive engagement with implementation strategies. Instead of decisions and action being taken, gender issues are often deferred indefinitely. Most comrades become indifferent when gender issues are on the table, and gender coordinators are blamed for the resultant failures, yet there is a lack of collective leadership and accountability.

Some male leaders understand the importance of the struggle for gender equality at a political level, but at a personal level they still do not see women as their equals, both within the organisation and the home. There are men in leadership that use their positions to gain access to women. It needs to be said that there are still men within our organisation that abuse women, physically, emotionally and sexually.

The COSATU Gender Policy

The federation has adopted a number of resolutions on gender issues, which were consolidated into the COSATU Gender Policy, adopted at the 7th COSATU Congress in September 2000.

The National Gender Committee developed a gender policy to ensure that affiliates will comply with the position and resolutions of the federation. The main objective of this policy is to instill and promote a culture of solidarity amongst federation members since we all are victims of socialization and upbringing, within the patriarchal capitalist system. This policy is a framework for the achievement of the vision, principles and objectives of the federation.

The context: Gender relations in the labour market

The Gender Policy is located in a context in which women are harshly discriminated against in the labour market and in the workplace. These are the issues which COSATU, and the democratically elected government, are charged with tackling.

As discussed earlier, the intersection of racism, patriarchy and capitalism are clearly reflected in the South African labour market. The labour market is still segmented in terms of race and gender. It is characterised by a sexual division of labour, in which women are largely associated with domesticity and servicing, while men are associated with machinery and technology. Women, particularly black women, are concentrated in low paid-jobs, in the service and informal sectors and face wage discrimination. They tend to be concentrated in vulnerable sectors such as domestic work and the farms as well as in survivalist activities in the informal sector.

Males, particularly white males, dominate the upper echelons of the labour market. As a result of inherited wage inequities and the fact that women are concentrated in low paid jobs, women's share of income is substantially lower than men's. Discrimination also takes the form of differences in the valuing of men and women's jobs translating in wage disparity. The majority of the unemployed are women, particularly black women.

Women also face hardship in accessing and sustaining their participation in the labour market. The majority of women have to juggle work with domestic responsibility such as cooking and taking care of children. The shortage of childcare facilities and the sexual division of labour in the home impose serious burdens on women. Maternity leave and pay provision are inadequate, and in some cases even the legislated minimum is not complied with.

How are unions faring in eliminating gender inequalities in their structures and in the workplace?

Given this context, and the political objectives and visions of emancipation discussed in the earlier section, we need to make a frank and fearless assessment of our progress.

Some affiliates stand out in the good work that they have accomplished in certain areas, and deserve to be noted for this:

- ★ CEPPWAWU has adopted a 25% quota, which applies to leadership structures and to all union activities. Women are included in negotiating teams, except for Pulp and Paper, which remains a highly male-dominated sector.
- ★ FAWU has elected a woman as a Vice President.
- ★ NEHAWU has a 50% quota system, which they have gone a long way towards implementing. Two of the national office bearers are women, and 6 out of 9 provinces have 50% women as office bearers. The CEC adopted a policy that in each province either the chair or secretary should be a woman, in order to counter the tendency of electing women as only Treasurers or Deputy Chairpersons. As a result, four provinces have women as Provincial Chairpersons and one province has a woman as Provincial Secretary. It is one of the unions that has argued strongly and consistently for the adoption of the quota and women's leadership development in COSATU. NEHAWU held a National Gender Conference in 1998 and is running a three-year programme for women's leadership development. NEHAWU has employed women as officials, including the following: Health and Safety Officer, Human Resources Officer, Legal Officer, National Accountant, Gender Officer, one of the Research Officers and one of the Communications Officers. There are also a small number of women represented in negotiating teams.
- ★ NUM is in the process of establishing gender structures at different levels and has recently held a national gender workshop to facilitate work in the union on the gender issue. NUM has also made a significant start by identifying women for organiser positions. These are an important advances, particularly since the union is operating in a highly male-dominated sector, with entrenched patriarchal attitudes. The Mineworkers Development Agency, set up by the NUM, has made groundbreaking progress in facilitating developmental projects in rural areas that involve the female partners of retrenched mineworkers in earning a living.

- ★ NUMSA recently elected a woman as a Vice President.
- ★ SACCAWU has made significant strides in negotiating parental rights provisions in certain retail companies, and has had visible and active campaigns on the issue. The union has consistently put parental rights and other gender issues on the collective bargaining agenda and has played a leading role in raising awareness in the federation in this regard. The union has also made a useful contribution through materials development on parental rights, in the form of booklets and a parental rights negotiating manual. The union has also had a leading role in campaigns and education on sexual harassment, and has trained sexual harassment officers in its regions. SACCAWU has a policy on ex-officio representation of women on its constitutional structures. Two of the national office bearers are women. The union is running a three-year women's leadership development programme.
- ★ SADTU has budgeted a significant amount for its gender programmes, which is an important basis for demonstrating commitment to the issue. The union regularly deals with gender debates in its official newsletter.
- ★ SAMWU has a 33% quota and held a Women's Conference in 1998.
- ★ SATAWU has adopted a 50% quota for educational activities. There are two female national sector coordinators, in cleaning and maritime (a highly male-dominated sector) and there is one Regional Secretary that is a woman. The union has committed itself to the principle of non-homophobia, through their constitution, and is the only COSATU affiliate to have done so.

We hope that where there are achievements that have not been mentioned here, affiliates will make the necessary additions during the CEC discussions.

The following is a general assessment of COSATU's progress in key areas:

- ***Representation in leadership***

Overall COSATU's long standing resolutions around building women leadership have not been effectively implemented. Women remain under-represented at all levels of leadership in the federation, from shopfloor to national executive levels. The 1997 COSATU Congress resolution called for 'measurable targets', which were recently defined through the newly adopted Gender Policy. It is too soon to assess the progress in implementing the gender policy. The important challenge currently is for affiliates to develop concrete strategies and to adopt mechanisms (for example, ex-officio positions, reserved seats, deputy and portfolio positions, quota and proportional representation) as detailed in the policy in order to reach the targets for women's leadership (see Table 1 below).

COSATU has passed a number of resolutions calling for campaigns on electing women as shopstewards. This is a crucially important area that requires resources, focus and energy so that we build women's leadership from below.

Affiliates and the federation have not yet put in place systems to calculate the proportion of women members and shopstewards, which is crucial to setting targets and monitoring progress.

Table 1: Targets for COSATU Affiliates

SECTOR	% women by sector	% women union members (includes non-COSATU)	1998/99 % ROB's COSATU Affiliate	1998/99 % NOB's COSATU Affiliate	Target for shop-stewards	Target for LOB's	Target for ROB's	Target for NOB's
Construction	9%	11%	13%	0%	15%	15%	15%	15%
Chemical, paper, printing & wood	26%	16%	14%	0%	30%	30%	30%	30%
Communication	36%	34%	3%	0%	30%	30%	30%	30%
Food and Fishing	27%	22%	24%	0%	30%	30%	30%	30%
Government (Admin, Health, etc)	65%	58%	34%	33%	50%	50%	50%	50%
Educators	64%	64%	7%	0%	50%	50%	50%	50%
Mining and Energy	6%	4%	2%	0%	5%	5%	5%	5%
Metal and Auto	18%	16%	6%	0%	20%	20%	20%	20%
Police & Correctional Services	24%	18%	0%	0%	20%	20%	20%	20%
Agriculture	28%	31%	28%	17%	30%	30%	30%	30%
Retail, Catering and Hotels	49%	47%	16%	33%	60%	60%	60%	60%
Clothing and Textile	72%	74%	30%	33%	65%	65%	65%	65%
Local Authority	23%	21%	14%	17%	30%	30%	30%	30%
Banking	61%	55%	71%	14%	65%	65%	65%	65%
Transport	15%	10%	17%	0%	20%	20%	20%	20%
TOTAL (COSATU)	34%	30%	25%	33%	30%	30%	30%	30%

Please Note:

(1) Statistics were not available for cleaning and security, therefore only the transport sector of SATAWU's constituency is covered.

• **Gender Co-ordination**

COSATU Congress took a resolution on employing full-time gender co-ordinators. There are few affiliates that have implemented the resolution - only 5 affiliates have full-time gender co-ordinators currently employed and 2 have part-time co-ordinators (see Table 2 below). Two affiliates, namely NUMSA and SAMWU, have had vacancies for more than two years.

In many affiliates gender co-ordinators are represented on constitutional structures, however their role is often marginal. COSATU regions make use of administrators as gender co-ordinators, and in some regions they are not entitled to sit on constitutional structures because they are required to perform administrative tasks. This situation cannot be allowed to continue any longer. Gender co-ordinators are often given additional administrative tasks, leaving limited time for gender co-ordination. Most part-time gender co-ordinators are administrators, who do not have status and influence in unions.

Table 2: Affiliate Gender Co-ordinators 2000/1

Affiliate	Full Time	Part Time	None	Additional Responsibilities
1. CAWU				
2. CEPPWAWU				
3. CWU				
4. FAWU				Ed. Dept. Administrator
5. NEHAWU				
6. NUM				
7. NUMSA			Resigned – but not replaced	
8. POPCRU				Coordinates HIV/AIDS
9. SAAPAWU				
10. SACCAWU				
11. SACTWU				National Office Bearer
12. SADTU			Resigned – but not replaced	
13. SAMWU			Resigned – but not replaced	
14. SAPSAWU				
15. SATAWU				Coordinates Provident Fund
16. SASBO				

- ***Allocation of resources***

COSATU has committed itself to allocate sufficient resources to make sure that resolutions are implemented, but this has not happened to a meaningful extent. COSATU structures do not have enough resources to implement their programmes. In many affiliates gender budgets are minimal, leaving the structures poorly resourced and unable to play an effective role in reaching women members.

- ***Gender committees***

COSATU has established structures at regional and national level. There are affiliates that do not have structures at all. NALEDI research on assessing gender structures highlighted the fact that gender structures often do not have a clear programme or vision of their role and objectives, and are largely marginalised from the core work of unions. Unions do not provide adequate political support and resources to ensure that gender structures function effectively. The report found that the concept of gender is often misunderstood, and in some cases misused, in ways that misdirect the strategic role of gender structures, and ultimately undermine the development of strong women leaders. Gender committees have an important role to play in mobilising women at a local level around gender struggles and demands at the workplace.

- ***Education***

Gender education on its own has not led to an increase in the number of women leaders in the federation and affiliates. However, a number of affiliates do have gender education programmes, which is important. It is necessary to evaluate to what extent gender has been mainstreamed into affiliate education and training. The participation of women in programmes other than those related to gender needs to be improved significantly.

- ***Developmental programmes***

Developmental Programmes and adherence to the gender biasedness has been marked with great achievement by some affiliates, as well as through DITSELA and SHEP since

1994. However there is still a problem with women participation and their development as second layer leaders, becoming resource persons, being vocal and conversant with a variety of areas other than gender. This can be attributed to poor follow up and a lack of adherence to the principles of training of trainers (TOT) and cascading.

- ***Sexual harassment.***

There is still denial of the extent of this problem in the federation. We need to come to terms with the realities of our day-to-day experience, no matter how sensitive they may seem. Sexual harassment is discriminatory and disregards ones privacy, dignity and respect. It inhibits ones freedom of expression and freedom in general. The perpetrators of this action do it consciously or subconsciously hence the need to create a free environment and take purposive steps and preventative measures in our workplaces to educate our members and staff members. There is a need for research on the extent of sexual harassment in the unions and workplaces, which SHEP has undertaken to do.

As COSATU we have developed a code of conduct and have included it as a component of our workshops. This has been an important milestone. SHEP has also played a remarkable role to train our affiliates on this important matter. We are still faced with the challenge of recommitting ourselves to our code and the NEDLAC code of good practice (which was largely the result of labour's initiative). We must build on this progress by negotiating sexual harassment policies at the workplace and being steadfast and principled where our membership or management transgresses. We need to engage in vigorous awareness raising, training and develop policy on procedures around this issue so that we are able to deal with such cases so that victims are free to report these cases without any fear of further victimisation and job insecurity.

- ***Employment in trade unions***

The employment record of the trade unions reproduces the gender discrimination found in the broader labour market. There is a gender division of labour in the trade unions – where the most influential positions, such as educators, organisers and regional/general secretaries are overwhelmingly male-dominated, while the majority of women employed in unions are in administrative positions. 1997 figures of employment in trade unions reflect that 94% of administrators were women, with only 12% of female organisers, with even lower percentages for other positions.

COSATU does not have an employment equity strategy or affirmative action policy to deal with the gender inequality that prevails in the federation.

- ***Organising women***

The estimated proportion of women members of COSATU is 37%, which is roughly correlated to the proportion of women in formal employment. However, COSATU has not made good progress in organising the most vulnerable and marginalised sectors, which are dominated by women. Domestic workers in particular have not been prioritised by the federation, and yet their plight is a fundamental reflection of the apartheid economy and the intersection of racism, patriarchy and capitalist exploitation. The increasing emergence of casualisation also has a gendered impact in terms of benefits and insecurity, and most of these workers are women. An assessment of

COSATU's effectiveness in defending workers should be based on our ability to give a voice to the most marginalised – African women.

- ***Collective Bargaining***

A common concern is that collective bargaining demands are often not gender-sensitive. Where demands are taken up they are easily compromised in negotiations. The lack of women organisers and the lack of gender sensitivity on the part of male organisers contribute to these problems. Nevertheless, some affiliates have made good progress in taking up collective bargaining campaigns, particularly on parental rights. But most affiliates have not even made an assessment of the gender-related demands that have been won, even on the most basic issues such as maternity benefits.

- ***Barriers to women's participation in trade unions***

COSATU and affiliates have taken countless resolutions on eliminating barriers to women's full participation. COSATU and a number of affiliates provide childcare facilities at meetings and workshops, however the extent of this practice has not been concretely assessed. Other barriers such as gender stereotypes, lack of support and encouragement to women, resistance of partners to union work and the sharing of domestic responsibilities are more difficult to measure. However, the extent of education, consciousness-raising and campaigning on these issues is not adequate.

- ***Campaigns***

COSATU is involved in campaigns such as domestic violence and HIV/AIDS. HIV/AIDS is a political, economic and social problem facing our country and threatening our economic growth and political muscle as labour. We cannot effectively deal with this pandemic without challenging patriarchal relations in society, given the fact that women remain most vulnerable to infection and will largely bear the brunt of caring for the sick in poor communities. This dimension must be continually highlighted by COSATU.

National days such as Women's Days and Childcare Days are taken up, however they are often treated as events without adequate resources to take forward ongoing campaigns. Childcare Day in particular has lost its focus from being a day that was used to push the demand for childcare to a celebration of children's rights. Childcare demands should be taken up as a campaign with the might of the entire federation behind it.

- ***Research***

COSATU called for the establishment of the Women and Work Programme at NALEDI in 1994 and since then a number of research reports and publications have been produced on women in unions and in the workplace/economy. The NGC and NALEDI continue to work closely together.

Gender struggles in society: building the women's movement

Alliance Gender structures

Our struggles as COSATU have always been defined as the struggle for national liberation and for democracy. Now that we have achieved political democracy we are still faced with the challenge of economic and gender emancipation, to deepen and

advance this political power. This therefore means that the tripartite alliance shaped by deep historical links and common struggles is still relevant. The past political realities of opposition and resistance made it easier to create a common platform between us whereas the current context is characterised by deepening class contradictions and political tensions which impact directly on relationships within the alliance.

The gender alliance does meet, however we do not have a well-coordinated programme and meetings. We hold regular meetings informed by a need to react to immediate developments on issues relating to the gender machinery such as the CGE, WNC, OSW etc. We have acknowledged the need to support each other and that without the alliance the global challenges we are all faced with will be increasingly overwhelming. The only hope for us is to be vigilant and guard against talking about the alliance as if it is outside ourselves. We have located ourselves at the centre of building the women's movement, fighting the struggle against HIV/AIDS, and building our local structures and not simply being content with numbers.

The Women's National Coalition

South African women from all walks of life, from different class, colour, creed and ideological backgrounds joined forces to form the Women's National Coalition. This process initiated by the alliance gender structures and was funded by our international allies. Its mandate and key task was to draw the Women's Charter, which would ensure women's participation in the development of the constitution and ensure effective equality in all spheres of their lives. It was supposed to disband after finalising the charter.

The democratic transition has led to a changed political landscape. The new dispensation catered for women's needs through legislation with the result that the struggle for gender equality became institutionalised. Although ideally government institutions and the gender machinery should form but one aspect of transformation, to be enriched through mass mobilisation and grassroots struggles, the environment has tended to demobilise the militancy of gender struggles, much the same as broader struggles. The challenges and extent of the abuse of women, poverty and degradation are still much the same, yet there is very little activism around these issues.

The deployment of comrades to government and the gender machinery meant that the activists that had been driving the WNC withdrew, weakening its political direction and allowing a vacuum to be created. In the same way that class contradictions have sharpened in broader political struggles, these tensions have prevented the WNC from taking clear positions on important issues facing working class women. This led COSATU women to conclude that our energies would be better utilised by focusing on building the women's movement. However, we recognised that it would continue to exist without us and that we should try to use the networks and platform to contest ideas and draw in allies to take up the struggles of poor, working class women.

The 1998 alliance workshop attempted to reposition the alliance around the WNC, however we emerged from the workshop with different position and could not come out

with one consolidated alliance position. Hence a workshop to resolve this issue is envisaged in the near future.

On the Women's Movement it was felt that we need to take it upon ourselves to make sure that working class women are mobilised around their daily realities and that this contributes to the consolidation of gender consciousness in society.

In relation to the CGE, we have participated in some of the events that they have hosted. Our assessment is that they have not had a particular focus on women workers, and the labour perspective has been inadequate.

We have made some contributions to the passing of progressive legislation on women and gender issues through our parliamentary submissions, however this area of influence and its co-ordination could be much improved.

International Solidarity

COSATU has always been among the key central players in the international arena through its involvement in the International Labour Organisation and international human rights and trade union structures such as the SATTUC, ICFTU and International Trade Secretariats through the affiliates. We have also contributed to the lobby for the implementation of the UN Gender Platform of Action through the gender machinery structures, and through our own policies.

Solidarity is important to strengthen our struggle at all levels and to mobilise workers and women in particular to fight the impact of globalisation, which poses a major threat as it accelerates exploitation and poverty. Women are faced with the same challenges namely poverty, impact of restructuring, gender inequality, poor implementation of policies in the unions, and trafficking of women and children. This necessitates a need to continue with solidarity relation not only financially but also in terms of exchange of views, experience and strategies.

Conclusion

The assessment contained in this section has shown that there is uneven progress in affiliates in implementing our policies and resolutions, and that overall we still have a long way to go to demonstrate that we are putting gender struggles at the centre of the struggle. The final section, Section C proposes a strategy for implementation of the gender policy.

Section C: Strategy for Implementation of the Gender Policy

Background

At the last National Gender Conference we identified a need to focus on the effective implementation of resolutions rather than to come with new resolutions. The implementation strategy is a framework intended to achieve that objective.

The need to engage the federation, its affiliates and structures therefore becomes imperative. This meeting of the CEC is therefore most appropriate to arrive at or reaffirm enforcement mechanisms and effective implementation and monitoring strategies for the Gender Policy. In this regard we need to agree on an approach, process and timeframes. Hence the need to include it as a component in our workshops and developmental programmes.

The successful implementation thereof will largely be determined by our understanding of the policy, strategies to translate it into action, clear roles, timeous interventions and most importantly, political will.

The COSATU Gender Policy

The Gender Policy is underpinned by human rights and democratic principles that recognise women's rights as a fundamental freedom, and further recognises the right of women to participate freely in the socio-economic processes both in their private and public life.

This policy is a framework for the achievement of the vision, principles and objectives of the federation. The policy is located in the South African socio-economic and political context, with the objective of building a non-racial, non-sexist democratic society. The policy addresses itself to COSATU's organisational context through an analysis of the current situation, policy recommendations in the areas of building gender equality in the workplace and in the unions, including affirmative action mechanisms, measurable targets and indicators of progress. It expresses the desired aspirations, expectation and outcomes and informs all role players of their role and provisions and options for the realisation of the elimination of gender inequality. It is a means for effective enforcement and monitoring for affirmative action measures and a means to mainstream gender perspective into activities, programmes, positions and culture of our organisation.

Intended Outcomes

Affiliates are therefore expected to:

- Work towards the realisation of a shared vision and common understanding of gender struggles and strategies
- Translate the vision and principles underpinning it into concrete action to accelerate the transformation process

- Involve and inform role players and encourage trade unionists and leaders in particular to be sensitive, vocal and give political direction
- Become proponents of gender equality and encourage members to do the same at the workplace and in the home by sharing domestic responsibilities
- Engage all structures in debates to advance the consciousness of our membership
- Achieve collective leadership and accountability, which is essential for the realisation of the vision and objectives of the gender unit
- Have office bearers play a meaningful role in giving political direction and also being held accountable for the success / failure of the gender structures
- Stimulate critical thinking and evaluation of approaches and strategies and create platforms for regular assessment and timeous interventions
- Develop their own policy, policy positions, strategies, action plans and monitoring mechanisms
- Sensitise leadership to be able to express the aspirations of their members and of the organisation on key policy issues
- Co-operate with NALEDI and SHEP in terms of research information requested to inform, assess, identify strategies and way forward
- Allow for gender representatives to give feedback and collect mandates through constitutional structures
- Have clear timeframes for the development of positions, action plan and evaluation and monitoring mechanisms
- Strategize to ensure that the COSATU programme of action and campaigns are implemented successfully

Measurable Targets: Developing an Action Plan

Affiliates are tasked to develop an **action plan** for the implementation of five key focus areas. Affiliates will then report on the basis of these plans and the targets set out in the Gender policy. These reports will be compiled into one report, which will reflect progress and areas of need for improvement and intervention.

Accountability

According to the principle of collective leadership office bearers should see the implementation of the gender policy as part of their role. Each affiliate should deploy office bearers to ensure that gender structures are functioning and that they have sufficient support and resources to achieve their objectives.

- *General Secretaries will be accountable for reporting to the CEC and ensuring that the action plan is implemented.*

The **action plan** will need to contain information on the current situation and strategies for change in each of the following areas:

1. Women's Leadership

- ★ Set up systems for the ongoing collection of statistics on women's leadership at all levels, including national, regional, local and shopstewards, as well as a gender breakdown of membership
- ★ Report on the mechanisms that have been identified to increase women's representation, for example:
 - Ex-Officio membership
 - Portfolio position,
 - Proportional representation,
 - Quota
- ★ Identify strategies to build the qualitative aspect of women's leadership, such as developmental programmes, mentorship, and report on the monitoring of these processes
- ★ Set up a campaign for the election of women as shopstewards, including publicity, education and support programmes.

2. *Collective Bargaining*

Employment Equity legislation creates the space for unions to negotiate for the elimination of barriers to women's employment. Affiliates are tasked to develop an action plan, collect data on existing agreements, and report on progress in the following areas:

- ★ *Parental Rights Agreements*, ensuring that the following *minimum* basic demands are put forward:
 - a minimum of 6 months fully-paid maternity leave
 - childcare facilities
- ★ *Sexual harassment policy* at company/workplace level, as part of the employment equity process
- ★ *HIV/AIDS policy*
- ★ *Employment of women* - Affiliates should monitor the changing employment profile of women and the gender impact of changing employment practices

3. *Employment Equity in trade unions*

- ★ COSATU and affiliates to develop Employment Equity plans, including:
 - affirmative action strategy
 - recruitment policy
 - childcare policy
 - developmental programmes

4. *Sexual harassment*

Develop an action plan on eliminating sexual harassment including:

- ★ Campaign on zero tolerance of sexual harassment
- ★ Awareness-raising
- ★ Creating a free environment for reporting of sexual harassment offences and procedures and developing clear procedures and practice in this regard (e.g. sexual harassment officers)

5. *Building gender structures*

- ★ Establishment of women or gender structures
- ★ Appointment of fulltime Gender Co-ordinators
- ★ Mobilising of resources to ensure their effective functioning

TIME FRAME

Activity	By when	Who/Accountability?
CEC to discuss and endorse the implementation strategy	Apr 2001	COSATU CEC
Affiliates to develop action plans	July 2001	General Secretaries
Data collection and assessment of action plans	Aug 2001	COSATU Gender Dept. and NALEDI
Initial Report on progress to CC	Sep 2001	General Secretaries
Monitoring of progress: Visits to Affiliates and regions	Mar 2002	COSATU Gender Dept. and NALEDI
Affiliates to assess implementation of action plans	July 2002	General Secretaries
Report on implementation to CEC and submit action plan for 2002/3	Sept 2002	General Secretaries
CEC to evaluate implementation and revise implementation strategy and action plans	Sept 2002	COSATU CEC/ COSATU Secretariat