

Building the engines of COSATU: *restructuring the Federation*

This chapter is dedicated to the late Elijah Barayi.

1. Our vision

2. Current problems

3. Options

4. Recommendations: reforming the Federation

The chapter focuses on the structures and capacities of COSATU rather than affiliates. It also focuses on the relation between COSATU and affiliates. It makes recommendations for reforming the Federation so that it can implement the strategies recommended in earlier chapters. Some of the recommendations will lead to constitutional changes as well as certain changes in some of our traditions and cultures. At the same time, we will develop new traditions and cultures which will help us face the future with confidence. Where these are accepted, they will be implemented. Where recommendations are rejected, the status quo will prevail with consequences to the other recommendations. While change is painful we are hopeful that we will not opt for the status quo simply because it is familiar.

1. Our vision

1.1 COSATU's goals and programmes

Transition has opened up great potential for COSATU to intervene, drive and shape transformation at many levels of our society. This requires it to engage with a tremendous range of forces, institutions and forums on a multitude of policy issues. At the same time it is expected to continue with its primary role - giving a better service to its own members.

The Commission has proposed a political programme focused on *making democracy work* and *extending democracy* beyond the political sphere of society (see Chapter 3). This programme means engaging vigorously within the Alliance, with government, with parliament, and with employers at NEDLAC as well as at industry and enterprise levels.

We have also drawn up the outline of an economic programme *for reclaiming redistribution* (see Chapter 4). This too requires COSATU to engage within the Alliance and with government, in NEDLAC, in the transformation of the public service and the state sector, in establishing stakeholder rights in the private sector and utilising them effectively, and engaging in struggles to establish and expand the social sector and co-operative sectors.

We have identified the provinces and towns as sites which are likely to become increasingly important for the formulation and implementation of economic development policies. Provincial and town budgets, the restructuring of the public service at these levels, and regional development projects, will all have a powerful impact on economic development. It is therefore important for COSATU to be able to engage at these levels.

We have also identified the likelihood that collective bargaining will come under increasing pressure from employers under the guise of international competitiveness and "globalisation". This may make it increasingly difficult for unions to improve their members' living standards through collective bargaining only. This does not mean COSATU should neglect collective bargaining. On the contrary, we propose that it should co-ordinate and reinforce the collective bargaining strategies of the affiliates. But it does mean that it is important for the trade union movement that the state actively redistribute wealth and consistently improve the social wage. In order to ensure this, COSATU will have to strengthen its ability to engage effectively and proactively with the state and NEDLAC.

These are some of the goals the Commission has set for COSATU in relation to different institutions and forums:

- to redefine a new and more active relationship within the Alliance
- to engage effectively with national government
- to negotiate agreements and shape policies at NEDLAC
- to strongly influence industrial policy
- to engage proactively with the transformation of the public service
- to engage proactively with the restructuring of state assets
- to engage effectively at the level of provincial government
- to engage effectively at the level of local government
- to build both long-term and *ad hoc* alliances in civil society.

COSATU also needs to sustain a more consistent and active involvement in the international labour movement, although this is not an area that has been explored by the Commission.

1. 2. COSATU structures

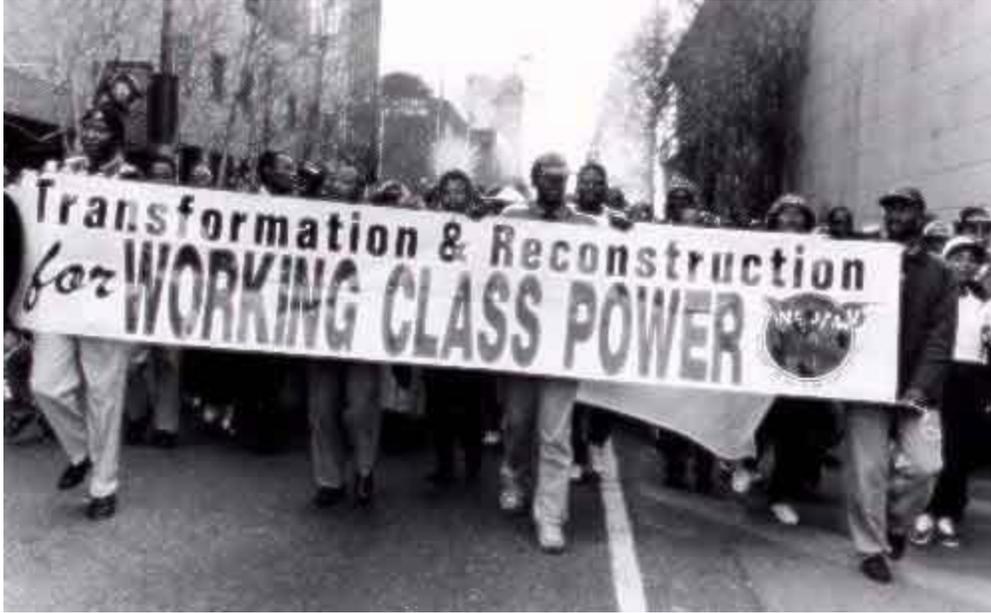
Different structures of the Federation and its affiliates focus on different institutions and activities. This can be represented as follows:

Level	COSATU / union structure	Institution / activity
National	COSATU national	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the Alliance • the government • public sector transformation • NEDLAC • policy formation • civil society alliances • international

		relations
Provincial	COSATU region	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provincial Alliance • provincial government • development & other forums • civil society alliances
Local	COSATU local	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • local Alliance • local government • civil society alliances
Industrial	Affiliate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • collective bargaining • sectoral industrial policy • public sector restructuring • recruit and service members
Workplace	Affiliate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • collective bargaining • company restructuring • public sector restructuring • workplace democracy

1.2.a COSATU and the national/provincial/local levels

The table shows that COSATU needs a powerful centre in order to engage with the Alliance and with government at national, regional and local levels. The Federation is also critical for engaging in NEDLAC, in development forums, for shaping the transformation of the public sector and for building alliances in civil society.



A vision of transformation: but COSATU lacks the engines to implement the vision - *Photo: William Matlala*

1.2.b COSATU and the industrial level

On the other hand, powerful affiliates are important for engaging at an industrial level in collective bargaining and sectoral industrial policy issues, for organising and servicing workers, and for building workplace organisation capable of engaging employers at that level. But COSATU also needs to strengthen its capacity to co-ordinate the activities of affiliates both in relation to industrial policy and in relation to collective bargaining.

Industrial policy

COSATU's co-ordination is important because:

- sectoral industrial policy should be developed within the framework of national industrial development
- there is a relation between what is negotiated at NEDLAC by the Federation and sectoral industrial policy
- the affiliates individually may be unable to access or impact on key industrial policy institutions such as the Industrial Development Corporation (IDC), Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), Development Bank of South Africa (DBSA), the Reserve Bank, etc.
- affiliates should share experience and strategies.

Collective bargaining

COSATU's co-ordination is important because:

- affiliates could mobilise around common goals - the potential of this was clear during the Living Wage Campaign of the 1980s

- gains made by one affiliate in its bargaining could be taken up by other affiliates and pushed in their collective bargaining
- if certain benefits are to be co-ordinated with the state's provision of the social wage (for example, national health insurance, retirement funds) there will need to be co-ordination across affiliates
- collective bargaining may have to be aligned with a national strategy for closing the wage gap (see chapter 4).

1.2.c Affiliates and the workplace level

Co-ordination is also necessary at this level. Co-ordination could focus on solidarity struggles, and joint recruiting campaigns for vulnerable sectors. It is also important for affiliates to begin sharing experiences of, and strategies for, responding to company restructuring and democratisation in both the private and public sectors.

1.2.d A vision of the Federation as a whole

In summary of the above, and in order to implement the programmes COSATU needs a national trade union centre with:

- strong engines to drive and implement its programmes
- strong regions and locals to implement its programmes at those levels
- centralised structures able to co-ordinate and support affiliates, and intervene in, or take corrective steps against affiliates where necessary
- effective participation by affiliates in the centre
- a strong policy capacity.

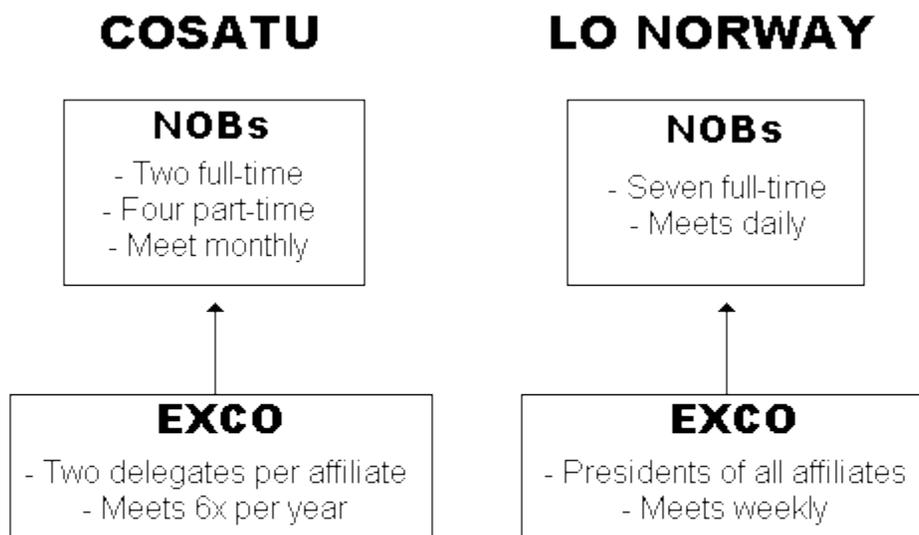
2. Current problems

The programme summarised above is extremely ambitious. It is impossible for COSATU to engage with so many forces, institutions and forums, on such a multitude of policy issues, with its current capacity and structures. This is borne out by our experience so far over the past three years. There has been instances where COSATU has tended to be effective in responding to initiatives of government or employers via these forums. At the same time COSATU has not been fully effective in putting forward its own proactive programmes for transformation, in negotiating and lobbying for these, or mobilising behind them.

This leads us to the conclusion that it is a waste of time to develop and adopt ambitious programmes, unless COSATU is prepared to address seriously its problems of capacity, its structures and the way the affiliates work together. The rest of this chapter focuses on an analysis of structural and capacity problems in the Federation, options for overcoming these, and our recommendations. The previous chapter, analyses the obstacles to organisational effectiveness in both the Federation and affiliates, and makes recommendations to overcome those.

2. 1. The lack of an engine

Capacity can mean many things. We believe the essence of the capacity problem in COSATU is the lack of strong, dynamic, working structures that can act as an engine in driving the programme of the Federation. A comparison with the structures of the Norwegian centre, LO Norway, illustrates what we mean.



- LO Norway has two powerful engines
- COSATU has one weak engine

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COSATU has very limited implementation and co-ordination structures. It has only two full-time national office bearers (NOBs). The role of Exco is to make decisions about how to implement policy and to monitor their implementation; in reality it does not *participate* in implementing or co-ordinating. In other words, COSATU is driven by its secretariat of two. It therefore has a relatively weak engine which while suited to our principles of worker control, is no more appropriate.

LO Norway, on the other hand, has an NOB structure and an Exco which are strong *working* structures. They strategise, make decisions, implement and co-ordinate. In other words, LO Norway has two strong engines to drive its work - the full-time NOBs, and Exco.

2.2 Lack of capacity to implement policies

The great majority of COSATU policies have not been fully implemented. One reason is the weak engines analysed above. But a second one is the lack of resources and the apparent inefficiency in certain departments of the Federation's head office. Most COSATU departments have huge tasks, and very few

people to handle them. This creates an environment conducive to inefficiency, poor systems, and 'ad hoc-ism' and 'last minute-ism'.

The result is that COSATU tends to be reactive, responding to initiatives from outside. Even where the Federation has proactive policies, there are very few people to implement them - so COSATU continues to be reactive. This is a problem that needs to be addressed along with the problem of weak engines.

2.3. The weak link with affiliates

It is notable that in the LO Norway structure, there is a high level of interaction between affiliates and the centre, and joint implementation. Formal meetings are underpinned by continuous working together.

In COSATU, on the other hand, the link between the centre and the affiliates is quite weak. The structures where the affiliates meet to determine COSATU policies and strategies - Exco and the CEC - are large, unwieldy debating forums. Affiliates do not generally participate in implementing decisions. Exco does not meet often, so affiliates are distant from the constant pressure on the NOBs to develop new tactics and responses to rapidly changing conditions. The result is poor co-ordination of, and communication with, the affiliates. All of this encourages a lack of commitment to, and cynicism about, the programmes of COSATU, and a tension between secretariat and NOBs on the one hand, and affiliates on the other.

These weaknesses, together with weaknesses within the affiliates, mean that the information flow from COSATU via affiliates to members is inadequate. Members often complain that the NOBs are negotiating without a mandate because they are not informed about the progress of negotiations and campaigns, or about Exco decisions. The structural weaknesses in the Federation are contributing to the gap between leadership and base. Most workers and affiliates expect the Federation to play a role in helping them cope with the new challenges. Currently the Federation is seldom able to assist.

2.4. Inability to support or intervene in affiliates

Because of its lack of capacity, and the weak link between affiliates and centre, COSATU as a federation is unable to support, in a consistent way, an affiliate which is weak or is experiencing internal problems. Likewise, if there is a dispute between affiliates (for example, over demarcation) it is extremely difficult for the Federation to intervene. There are instances where affiliates are implementing policies that are contrary to the Federation's policies and positions, yet the Federation is powerless to intervene.

These problems weaken and undermine the Federation as a whole, and make it difficult to act in a unified way. It is obvious that COSATU will be unable to implement its ambitious programmes unless it is able to act as a powerful and unified force. It is also clear that every affiliate is weakened if there are sectors or affiliates that are weakly organised or have internal problems. The strength of each affiliate in its own sector depends not only on its own strength, but on the strength of the trade union movement as a whole. Deregulation, 'labour market flexibility' and attempts to roll back unions start where the movement is weak and expand from there. Such weaknesses limit COSATU's ability to resist employer or government attempts to undermine union power.

2.5. The regions

COSATU regional structures are not adequately resourced to engage effectively with provincial governments and regional development forums. Yet these are likely to become increasingly important arenas for public service delivery and economic and industrial development.

Regional structures are weak because, like national structures, they lack powerful engines, and they do not receive adequate strategic or policy support from the national level. Not only do the regional structures of many affiliates fail to implement decisions of the REC, but often affiliates fail to even attend meetings of the Federation in the regions. Research done for the Commission indicated that there is lack of clarity about the role COSATU regions should play in relation to affiliates.

The result is that regional office bearers (ROBs) feel disempowered in relation to the affiliates as well as in relation to national structures. ROBs told the Commission that they need the authority to deal with affiliates which do not attend or support COSATU programmes, that they need more financial and human resources, and that they should have more say in COSATU national structures

2.6. The locals

Locals used to be real centres of innovation and activism in the movement. In the early 1980s the locals took on many of the tasks of organisers - organising new factories and training new shopstewards. In the middle and late 1980s the locals became political centres, building local alliances, driving local struggles and campaigns, mobilising solidarity, as well as implementing national campaigns.

But as the unions became more centralised (head offices became the centres of innovation, rather than the locals or shopsteward committees) and as the nature of the political struggle changed - also becoming more centralised - the locals degenerated into administrative centres, their agendas packed with complex documents from head office. As a result COSATU locals have become very weak, stagnating between major COSATU campaigns. As in the regions, there is lack of clarity about the role of locals and their relation to affiliates.

The Commission met many local office-bearers at worker forums, and at other meetings. All complained of poor attendance at local meetings, and argued that their weak constitutional status, their lack of powers to discipline affiliates, and their lack of resources in the form of finance, offices, administrators or organisers make it impossible to rebuild the locals or develop an active programme.

3. Options

The Commission has identified four possible options for dealing with the problems in the Federation and building the kind of national centre that is needed: 1 continuing without change; 2 reforming the structures of the Federation; 3 a radical restructuring of the Federation to transform it into a unitary structure - a single organisation with industrial arms; or 4 a mixture of 2 and 3.

1) COSATU continues without change

COSATU could choose to continue as it is without change. In this case, the Federation would lose its ability to be a proactive movement for transformation. The struggle for transformation may well be lost. COSATU would tend to narrow its focus and concentrate on its core agenda of defending workers' interests and collective bargaining - ie drift towards *bread and butter unionism*. The Commission believes that the Federation would probably become looser and looser. Strong affiliates would continue to do well, and weaker affiliates would stagnate or disappear. The Alliance would get weaker, and COSATU would adopt *ad hoc* or defensive positions at NEDLAC. NEDLAC could become marginal or be closed down. In the end there may be no reason for affiliates to belong to a federation.

2) Reforming the Federation

COSATU could reform its structures and practices to strengthen the capacity and engines of the Federation, and develop a closer working relationship between affiliates and centre, without radically changing the constitutional relationship between Federation and affiliates. The Commission believes this option would go a long way to overcoming the weaknesses and problems we have identified above, and giving the Federation the capacity to be proactive.

3) Forming a unitary structure

COSATU could opt for the radical option of transforming the Federation into a single organisation with industrial arms. There would be a single constitution for the whole organisation, specifying the powers and functions of all structures. The industrial arms would not be separate organisations, but be designated COSATU-mining or COSATU-metal for example. Members would be recruited directly into COSATU, and their dues would be paid to COSATU and then partially redistributed to its industrial arms. Collective bargaining and industrial action would be directly co-ordinated by COSATU.

For trade unions, the structure which engages in collective bargaining is the most powerful structure. Therefore, for a unitary structure to be sustainable, collective bargaining would probably have to be highly centralised, both at a sectoral level and at national level via, for example, NEDLAC.

A unitary structure would solve the problem of tension or conflict between affiliates, and between affiliates and centre. The centre would have powers to support, discipline, intervene in or override the industrial arms.

4) A mixture of 2 and 3

COSATU could opt for structures that are more of a mix between a federation and a unitary organisation. This would mean developing more unitary elements to its structures to complement its current federal structure. For example, locals and regions could be given a stronger constitutional status as structures which embody the interests of organised workers as a whole.

The 'voice' of representation in COSATU is currently the voice of the national industrial unions. Issues and mandates are filtered through the national structures of the affiliates before being voiced in the CEC or congress. This serves to filter out the realities and issues being faced by the *Federation* (as distinct from *affiliates*) at regional and local levels; in fact it may filter out a large part of the grassroots issues

faced by workers in *communities* and *provinces* (as distinct from *workplaces* and *sectors*). In this option, the local and regional voice could be institutionalised in the major policy-making structures of the Federation. For example, regions could have 10% of the representation and vote at national congress and in the CEC; locals could have 15% in both structures. Likewise, regional congresses could ensure 20% of their representation comes from locals.

In this option, the centre would have a stronger identity of its own, and more power vis-a-vis the affiliates - but the affiliates would still have their own independent powers.

4. Recommendations: reforming the Federation

The Commission rejects option 1. We did not have the time to fully consider the implications of options 3 and 4. We recommend option 2, which is developed in detail below. However, we recommend that affiliates consider options 3 and 4, and that, if they appear to have advantages, they form part of new terms of reference for the Commission in its current form or as the congress may decide.

4.1. Strengthen national structures and activities

It is noticeable that the key difference between COSATU and LO Norway has less to do with constitutional powers that the centre has over the affiliates, and more to do with the close integration of affiliates in the activities of the centre, and the emphasis on structures of co-ordination and implementation (NOBs, Exco). Of course, strengthening affiliate activities and co-ordination in this way is not only a matter of structure - it is also a matter of leadership, traditions and culture, which will take some time to develop. However, appropriate structures could create the platform for new cultures and practices to emerge.

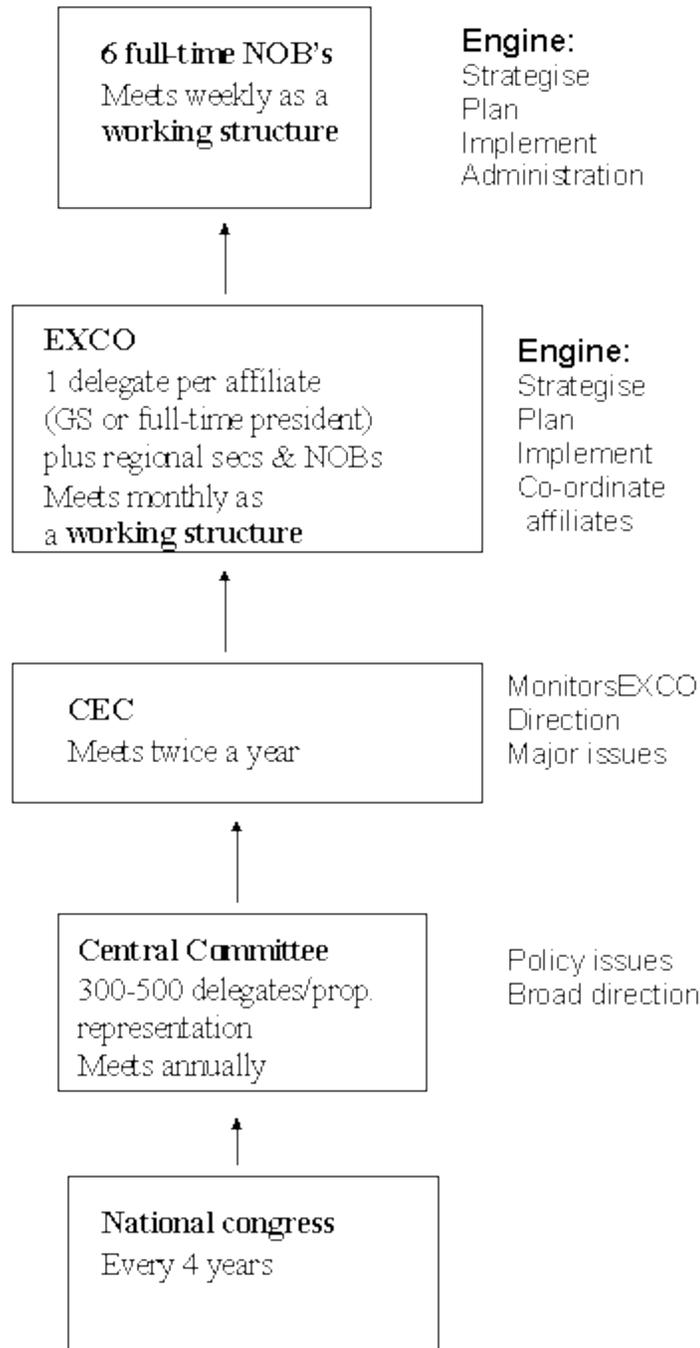
We recommend a number of changes to the constitutional structures of the Federation. We believe these changes are necessary if COSATU is to meet the challenges it currently faces, as well as any of the future eventualities indicated by the September Scenarios. If these recommendations are rejected, the status quo will remain. This will indicate a choice of option 1 above.



National structures of COSATU need to be strengthened - *Photo: William Matlala*

The diagram illustrates our proposals for changes to national structures of the Federation:

National structures: our proposals



4.2 Strengthen the National Office Bearers

COSATU still has the same NOB structure as it did when it was launched. There are only two full-time office-bearers. This means it has weak and under-resourced capacity for implementation and co-ordination. This also disempowers worker office-bearers. We therefore propose that all COSATU NOBs be full-time.

The argument against full-time worker office-bearers is that it undermines worker control and democracy in the organisation. Our assessment, however, is that in an organisation as big, dynamic and complex as COSATU, retaining part-time worker office-bearers actually disempowers worker office-bearers and so undermines democracy. Part-time worker office-bearers are unable to familiarise themselves in depth with all the issues facing the Federation. A large part of NOB meetings is spent on the secretariat briefing worker office-bearers about developments, rather than in collective strategic discussion. Worker office-bearers are also continually torn between their duties in the Federation and their accountability as shopstewards to their members in their workplace, and their duties in their own affiliate. All of these factors undermine the ability of worker office-bearers to lead and control their organisation in practice. The full-time office-bearers - the secretariat - have become the *de facto* leadership of the Federation. That is the reason we propose full-time worker office-bearers.

A team of full-time office-bearers would be able to spend more time on organisational work in the regions, and work more consistently with affiliates. Their reports to Exco would be more focused, making for a more effective Exco. In all of these ways, a stronger NOB team will empower other Federation structures - locals, regions and affiliates - to play a more dynamic role in the Federation.

This would raise several questions. Should the office-bearers operate as a collective, allocating responsibilities amongst themselves (as in Norway), or should each office-bearer have a specific portfolio and responsibility for specific head office departments (as in Brazil - where CUT has an executive of about 10 full-time secretaries, each with a specific portfolio)? If COSATU decides that each office-bearer should have a formal portfolio, should they be directly elected to those portfolios at Congress, or should the elected office-bearers allocate the portfolios amongst themselves after Congress? Also, what would be the division of duties between the general secretary and the president where both are full-time? The COSATU constitution places overall political leadership with the president and administrative and political accountability to the general secretary. Norway has a president and no general secretary. Brazil has both, but the president is more like the COSATU general secretary, whereas the general secretary is responsible for managing and running the organisation.

We recommend the following:

- the CEC should define the various portfolios to be held by the NOBs, and decide on the allocation of portfolios to specific positions (for example, which portfolios should be dealt with by the president) (see below) This should be linked to responsibility as defined by the constitution or as will be amended to ensure that there is dynamism, accountability and cooperation;
- the general secretary and assistant general secretary may be elected from the ranks of workers or officials as currently defined in the constitution;
- the president, treasurer and vice-presidents have to be workers at the time of their election, or be current holders of a position as worker office-bearer in the Federation or in an affiliate, nationally or regionally. The issue to debate is what the approach will be should they seek re-elections. COSATU has many officials in affiliates and the Federation who have risen through the ranks as workers. Should they be eligible or not. If so at what point?
- the NOBs, while accountable for their specific portfolios, will operate as a collective and meet at least once a week
- the president will be the leader of the team of NOBs, and will be accountable as such to the constitutional structures of the Federation This may require constitutional changes to ensure that there is no ambiguity on the levels and nature of responsibility.

- office-bearers can hold their position for a maximum of two terms, plus an additional term holding a different position - for example, vice-president and president
- the affiliate of the office-bearer should negotiate an agreement with her/his employer to re-employ the office-bearer once her/his term of office ends.

The Commission also wishes to comment on the tendency for delegations at congress to lobby and engage in "horse-trading" to ensure that "their person" (whether representing their affiliate or their political tendency) is elected as office-bearer. It is vital for the trade union movement and for COSATU that the office-bearers are comrades with, on the one hand, tried and tested track records as labour activists and leaders, and, on the other hand, the combination amongst themselves of qualities and skills to handle the wide range of portfolios we have identified. We urge affiliates to bear this in mind.

The following is an example of how the CEC could define and allocate portfolios:

1. Political, social and economic:

- relations with the alliance (national, provincial, local)
- engaging with government (as above)
- building other alliances (as above)
- NEDLAC
- transformation of the public service
- restructuring of state assets
- industrial policy
- regional development policy

The president and the general secretary should assume responsibility for this portfolio. The negotiations department, the parliamentary office and any policy capacity would be accountable to these NOBs.

2. Organisation, education and campaigns:

- regions and locals (helping with strategising/building local and regional campaigns etc.)
- organising strategies (with special reference to weaker affiliates, and to vulnerable layers/sectors of workers and white-collar workers)
- generally supporting and assisting affiliates
- building and deepening COSATU campaigns
- gender

The assistant general secretary and a vice-president could assume responsibility for this portfolio. The organising and education departments would be accountable to these NOBs.

3. Finance and administration

This position integrates financial management and administration. It requires someone who can give leadership in developing effective financial and administrative systems. The treasurer and assistant general secretary could be responsible for this portfolio.

4. Collective bargaining and solidarity

- collective bargaining
- human resource development
- workplace democracy

This portfolio does not exist at the moment, but we consider it vital for making consistent gains in these areas, and for the development of a more integrated and unified Federation. The general secretary and a vice president could be responsible for this portfolio.

5. International

The president should take charge of the international portfolio.

The role of the full-time office-bearers is not to take over the jobs of the existing heads of department. The heads of department, not the NOBs, must manage the departments. The role of the NOBs is to develop a strategic vision for COSATU, to ensure this strategic vision is implemented, to lead campaigns, negotiations, alliances and so on. Their role is like that of the government minister, while the head of department is more like the government director-general.

4.3. Strengthen the Exco

The main need is for Exco to be more integrated with the activities and tasks of the Federation, and to take responsibility for more of the implementation and co-ordination of decisions and policies. A more consistent and coherent Exco which concentrates on building COSATU programmes and activities is needed. We believe that the key to doing this is for Exco to be smaller and meet more frequently, and so be more intimately involved in strategising, planning and the implementing of decisions.

It is likely that a smaller, tighter Exco which meets more regularly would ensure not only that more capacity and energy are devoted to COSATU activities and programmes, but also that affiliates can more consistently place their own concerns and issues on COSATU agendas, thus ensuring that these issues are central to COSATU activities, and boost co-ordination and solidarity between affiliates. The delegates to the new Exco must be those who can take decisions on behalf of their unions and implement them - in other words, they should be the general secretary or president of their respective affiliates.

The new Exco structure would be the engine of COSATU. It would, for example, strategise and plan COSATU campaigns. It would compare the collective bargaining agenda and strategies of the affiliates and work on developing common demands and strategies, and build solidarity in practice. It would drive COSATU's engagement with public service transformation and restructuring of state assets. By developing an ongoing working relationship between affiliates, the new Exco would facilitate support for weaker affiliates, assistance to affiliates with internal problems, resolution of disputes between affiliates, and the taking to task of any affiliate which broke ranks or undermined COSATU policies and strategies.

The new Exco is therefore a mechanism for strengthening the Federation by empowering the affiliates to drive, and benefit from the Federation, rather than strengthening the centre *against* the affiliates. While the current situation has the advantage of two people who many report back more adequately, the structure has failed to play an integral part of building organisation. Indeed as raised earlier, report backs are usually done by the Federation.

4.4 A new policy-making structure: the Central Committee (CC)

The Commission recommends the establishment of a new policy-making body to meet once a year. It would replace one of the two national policy conferences on COSATU's agenda. It would also be a forum with larger worker delegations, and so allow for greater worker participation in shaping the policies and direction of the Federation between national congresses. This will help to counter the emphasis on full-time office-bearers and officials in our proposals for the NOBs and the new Exco.

The Central Committee would consist of between 300 and 500 delegates from affiliates on the basis of proportional representation. It would be a formal policy meeting, adopting resolutions or position papers, and would focus on key strategic issues facing the Federation. For example, a Central Committee meeting in the current circumstances would be likely to focus on GEAR, the Alliance, public service transformation and delivery, and the restructuring of state assets.

The current policy conference is an ineffective forum. It does not have powers to adopt policy, but only to recommend policy to the CEC. The result is that the senior leadership of affiliates often fails to attend the policy conference, and is then unfamiliar with motivation for recommendations when these come before the CEC. The debate has then to be repeated in the CEC. The Central Committee would be a constitutional structure with the power to make decisions, and so senior leadership would attend.

The Central Committee would institutionalise more frequent participation by large worker delegations in shaping federation policy and strategy than the triennial congress does. This would be the highest policy making body between congresses. We recommend therefore that congress meets once every four years rather than every three years.

The CEC should continue to meet twice a year as it currently does, except in so far as certain policy making powers may be vested with the CC mentioned above. We further recommend that the second annual policy conference becomes a conference for regional leadership (possibly including representatives of locals as well) to develop policy and strategy in relation to provincial government and regional development, which could be fed to either the CC or the CEC as the case may be. This would contribute to strengthening COSATU in the regions. We also recommend that there should be an Alliance policy conference every year.

4.5. Strengthening the regions and locals

There are many questions about the appropriate role, functions and structures of COSATU regions and locals (see Section 2.5 and 2.6). At the same time, provinces and towns are taking on an increasingly important political and economic role, demanding new responses and capacities from the Federation.

We make a number of recommendations for strengthening and supporting regions and locals. However, because of time and resource constraints, the Commission was unable to investigate the problems of regions and locals in an in-depth manner. We recommend that COSATU mandates Phase Two of the September Commission to do such an in-depth investigation (see Chapter 11).



Workers' forum before elections: COSATU needs to empower locals and regions to engage government and the Alliance
- Photo: William Matlala

COSATU needs to empower the regions and locals to engage with provincial and local government and development forums, to co-ordinate affiliates and to develop an active ability to plan and implement campaigns. The implication of this approach is that COSATU ceases to see regions and locals as administrative outposts or transmission belts for the head office, but as creative and innovative centres.

Building dynamic regions

COSATU is a federal organisation in terms of its affiliates but not in terms of its regional structures. The regions and the head office are seen as one - but the regions do not have direct access to the resources of head office. The constitution of South Africa, on the other hand, is federal and devolves considerable financial and economic powers to provincial government. The provinces are becoming very important arenas of service delivery, budget prioritisation, and economic and industrial development. The regions need to develop the capacity to engage effectively with the Alliance, government and development forums at provincial levels, as well as to co-ordinate and align affiliate activities and programmes (this does not mean that we support the federal character of the national constitution). We propose four ways to build this capacity.

Firstly, the regional structures should work in a similar way to national structures.

There should be a tighter, smaller structure meeting and working more regularly with the regional office-bearers. We call this the regional executive committee (REC) and propose that it meets once every two weeks. It should be constituted by the regional secretaries of all affiliates in the region.

The current REC should be renamed the Regional Council (RC) and should function broadly as it does now. It should perform similar functions in the region as the CEC does nationally - setting broad direction, monitoring the REC, and making policy decisions within its scope.

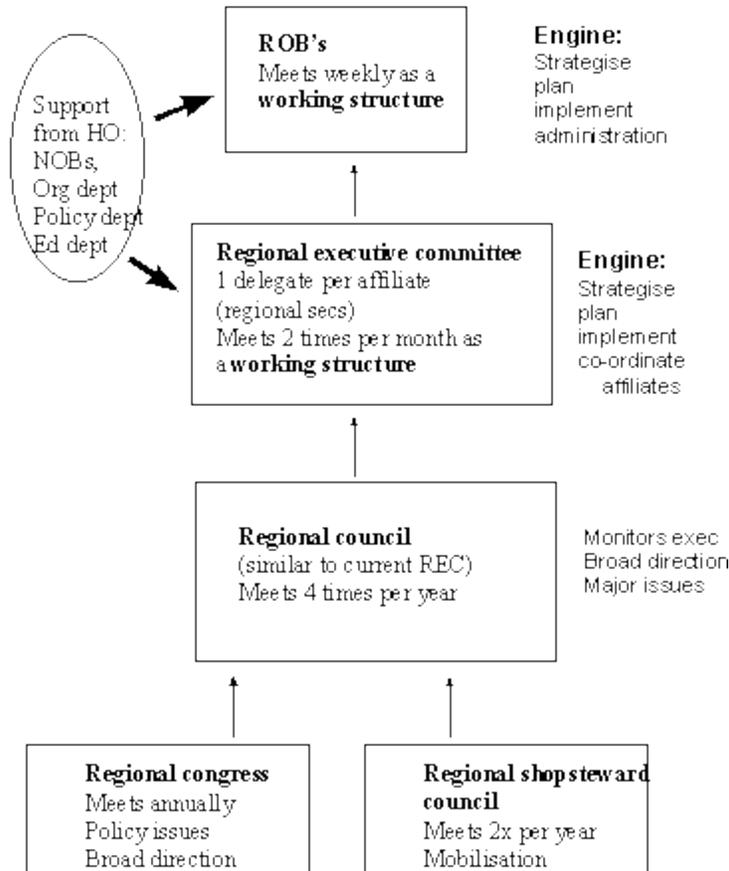
Secondly, consideration should be given to changing the constitutional status of the regions by giving them representation and voting rights in the national constitutional structures of COSATU. We recommend that regions have 10% of the vote in the CEC, Central Committee and national Congress.

Thirdly, the regional offices need more consistent and deeper support from head office. Thus the relevant NOBs in a stronger NOB structure should spend more time in the regions, helping develop strategies for negotiation and campaigning. For example, the NOB (president or general secretary) responsible for political and economic issues should spend time helping the regions strategise and engage with the Alliance, provincial government etc. The negotiations/policy department should develop regional development policy expertise and networks, and assist regional offices in engaging with provincial government and development forums on these issues.

The NOB responsible for organising and campaigns, together with the organising and education departments, should develop ongoing programmes with the regions. Workshops should also be held where regions and locals can share their experiences and strategies.

Finally, regional and local office-bearers are often unable to take sufficient time off from work to fulfil their *federation* duties, because their recognition agreements specify time off for *affiliate* duties. We recommend that affiliates negotiate extra time off for workers to attend to COSATU duties.

Regional structures: our proposals



In our analysis of the current situation (Section 2) we referred to the lack of clarity about the relation of regional and local structures of COSATU to affiliates. Should these COSATU structures help affiliates build organisation, develop organising strategies, co-ordinate recruiting campaigns, and run education programmes, or are these support functions best left to the affiliates? Should regions concentrate on supporting outlying locals in towns where there are no union offices, building their ability to recruit and service members? Or is the primary task of regions and locals to co-ordinate the political and economic activities of COSATU at regional and local levels?

We were unable to explore these questions. We recommend that COSATU refer them to Phase Two of the September Commission.

Building strong and innovative locals

COSATU needs to redefine the purposes, role and structures of the locals so that they can once again become centres of innovation and activism. Locals should be seen primarily as forums for co-ordination and solidarity between local unions, and as the structure through which COSATU engages with town councils and local political, civil society and economic forces, rather than as forums for report backs and mandates in relation to complex and distant national issues. However, at the same time, locals must be

able to deal with national issues. This requires a more developed and differentiated structure than is currently the case.

Currently, virtually all issues and decisions are discussed and decided in the local council, and local office-bearers do not play a strong leadership role. This is a very unwieldy and inefficient way of working. Often the most important issues are not discussed and the meeting spends all its time on matters arising or correspondence. This is a waste of workers' precious time. It is no wonder that shopstewards stop attending.

There were two views within the Commission on how best to overcome these problems. We were unable to reach consensus in the Commission, and have therefore decided to report these two views, and invite affiliates to debate this prior to, and at, Congress.

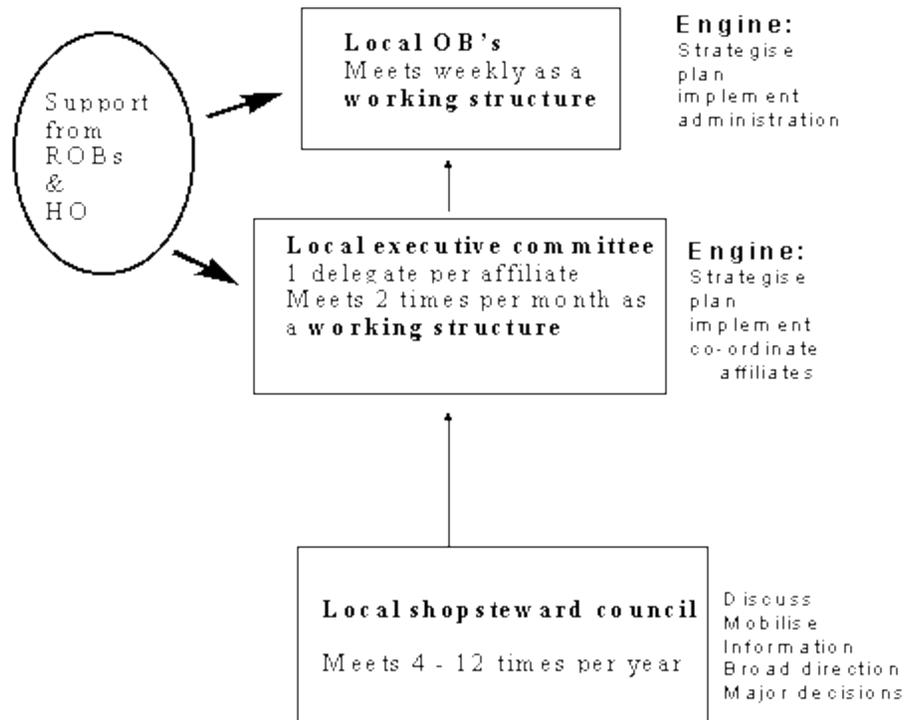
View 1: Build an executive structure as an engine to drive the local

According to this view, the problems faced by the locals are the result of changing conditions of struggle. Locals are trying to deal with an increasing volume of issues generated by local, regional and national developments. Issues have also become more complex, and taking initiatives more difficult. Shopstewards are no longer prepared to attend as many meetings as they used to. Locals are no longer their only source of political information as they used to be during the 1980s. The general meeting of shopstewards has, in the last few years, failed to provide the engine to drive the local, and is unlikely to provide the engine again in the future.

This assessment leads to the following proposals:

- that a new structure, the Local Executive Committee (LEC), be constituted consisting of 1 representative per affiliate, to meet with the local office-bearers (LOBs) every two weeks to assess, strategise and plan the work of the local; members of the LEC to work with the LOBs in implementing decisions.
- that the shopsteward council should meet less frequently (for example, 10 times per annum); the LEC should decide whether to call extra meetings (for example, when mobilising for a campaign, hearing report backs from the local town council, discussing solidarity action etc.)
- the LOBs meet weekly or fortnightly to deal with administration, co-ordinate and assess their work, assess new issues, consider communications from head office or the regional office, plan meetings of the shopsteward council or LEC, etc.

Local structures: view 1



This structure will increase the strategising/planning/implementing capacity of the local, and at the same time ensure that maximum use is made of shopsteward council meetings. When a shopsteward council meeting is called, everyone should know exactly what its purpose is. The LOBs and LECs should deal with most of the information flow from national or regional level, considering reports and giving mandates on the less critical issues, and selecting the major issues which would need to be considered by a general meeting of shopstewards.

View 2: Avoid bureaucracy and build the shopsteward movement

The second view argues that the locals are different from other structures, as they are the foundation for the shopsteward movement which characterises COSATU. They are fundamentally structures for mobilising shopstewards and building solidarity, and they have no policy-making role. It argues that the proposals put forward by View 1 will substitute an executive structure (LEC) for the shopsteward movement and bureaucratise the grassroots of COSATU.

This assessment leads to the following proposals:

- there should be no fundamental change to the structures of the local, or to the frequency of local council meetings
- COSATU should develop a national programme for local activities and campaigns
- consistent support and education for local office-bearers, made possible by the new NOB and Exco structures, should be sufficient to revive and activate the locals.

Both views:

The Commission is unanimous that the regional office, and the departments and NOBs at head office, should provide the necessary training in leadership, campaigning and planning skills, policy assistance on local town council issues and local public sector transformation, and local development issues. This support should be easier for the strengthened NOB, Exco and head office structures to provide.

We do not envisage focusing this support on traditional training programmes. Conditions facing different locals vary enormously. A rural local where there are no union offices faces different problems to an urban local in a major city. We recommend that NOBs and relevant head office officials spend time with selected local leaderships, assessing their issues, helping them find solutions for problems, and analysing successes. These can serve as pilot projects, and their experiences can then be shared with other locals. Workshops should be held where office-bearers from different locals compare experiences and strategies.

We recommend that locals should focus on programmes for public sector transformation - targeting the local police station, or schools, or hospital or clinic, or local council services. Such programmes can serve as a focus for building the Local and the Alliance, engaging with the town council, building campaigns and civil society alliances, and supporting the programmes of local public sector affiliates (see Chapter 5, *Democracy for delivery*).

COSATU does not have the financial resources to provide local offices or employ local staff. We recommend that affiliates in the local agree amongst themselves to provide office space and administrative support for the LOBs.

The Commission considered the idea that locals should have representation and voting rights in regional and national structures, but agreed that delegates from locals may not have a clear constituency, especially when locals are as weak as they are now. Local issues should be channelled through the regional COSATU structures and so into constitutional structures.

Our proposals should lead to revitalised and resourced shopsteward locals that will assure COSATU of a dynamic presence at the grassroots level.

4.6. COSATU departments

We have not done a full assessment of all COSATU departments. Our comments here are about the *strategic role* of the different departments. However, we recommend that a priority for COSATU is to commission an in-depth assessment of the functioning and effectiveness of COSATU head office and its departments, in terms of the vision and goals set out in this chapter. The goals of such an assessment should be to make recommendations about the staffing, effectiveness and possible restructuring of head office. As there should be an OD component to this, Ditsela should be involved in the assessment (see Chapter 9, Section 4.10). The CEC may need to appoint a sub-committee to oversee the assessment.

The role of COSATU departments is to back up the NOBs in implementing their portfolios. Two important departments are also relatively under-resourced - the negotiation/policy formation department, and the organising department. We also recommend that a new collective bargaining department be established.

The key problem is not so much formulating policies, but rather the *implementation* of policies. COSATU has many policies but seldom implements them consistently. The departments need to focus on the proactive implementation of COSATU policies and strategies. The assessment of COSATU head office effectiveness referred to above, should ensure this issue is addressed.

Negotiation/policy formation: with a staff of one, this department has to co-ordinate and lead an incredibly wide range of negotiations and policy issues. Policy formation needs to be separated into various portfolios along the lines of those outlined above in Section 4.2., more staff should be employed, and specialisation encouraged. There should also be a more consistent and closer working relationship with NALEDI.

If COSATU is to engage effectively with the Alliance, government and NEDLAC it will have to strengthen its ability to make policy, to co-ordinate policy formation and to implement policies and strategies. If it cannot do this, it will be unable to develop a proactive strategy at these levels.

Organising department: while this department appears to be relatively big and well-resourced with 8 staff, 3 of these are human resource development specialists, and 2 are administrators. There is 1 gender co-ordinator, 1 campaigns co-ordinator, and the department's head also has to provide organisational support to affiliates.

We would suggest that the department concentrate on the activities set out under *Organisation, education and campaigns* above (Section 4.2). The organising department should be seen as a dynamic, campaigning department, always seeking new opportunities to build and expand COSATU and its affiliates. It should:

- co-ordinate federation campaigns
- together with affiliates, identify key organising campaigns (for example, farmworkers, construction workers, rural towns, the summer offensive [see Chapter 7, *New workers, new members*]) and co-ordinate and drive these
- together with affiliates, develop strategies for organising vulnerable workers (see chapter 7)
- together with affiliates, develop strategies for organising more skilled and white-collar workers (see chapter 7)
- dynamically and proactively implement COSATU's gender programme
- assist affiliates to develop organising strategies and campaigns
- assist regions to develop programmes, strategies and campaigns
- assist locals to develop programmes, strategies and campaigns.

The human resource development section should be moved to a new collective bargaining department. Two more staff should be employed to boost the organising department's capacity to develop its core functions.

It appears that in addition to its many tasks, the organising department also has to provide support to affiliates that are weak or collapsing. They may need to consider utilising Ditsela or similar institutions where skills different to the ones they possess may be needed (see Chapter 9, Section 4.10, for recommendations about OD). Where the organising department does assist affiliates it should be in its field of expertise - assisting the affiliate to develop organising strategies and implement them (with special reference to vulnerable and white-collar workers) .

A *collective bargaining department* should be established to work with the relevant NOB in supporting and co-ordinating the collective bargaining demands, strategies and solidarity across the Federation. Alternatively, this function could be located in the negotiations department. In addition to the human resource development specialists referred to above, this department should employ an economist or senior trade unionist with extensive collective bargaining experience as head of department. We believe this should become a major strategic focus for the Federation and affiliates.

This department would have to work in close liaison with the negotiation / policy department or form a single department to ensure co-ordination between the collective bargaining of affiliates and certain aspects of NEDLAC negotiation - for example, human resource development, productivity negotiating, the social wage, and so on.

The *education and training department* is of vital importance in building effective organisation. However, education is often neglected in practice in the Federation. Establishing an NOB education portfolio should enhance its status. Education and training should be seen as a more *strategic* function, integral to organising, campaigns and policy development. For example, if the organising department is initiating a campaign to organise vulnerable workers, the education department should run programmes that support and deepen the campaign. If COSATU is campaigning for public sector transformation, education programmes should create forums to discuss and analyse the tasks and goals of such transformation. The education department should support COSATU's gender programme. There may, in fact, be a good case for merging education and organisation into one department; the investigation into COSATU head office should consider this option.

In addition, the focus of the education department should be:

- building the leadership skills of federation office-bearers at regional and local levels
- assisting affiliates to build their own education departments and programmes
- running workshops and seminars on federation policies and strategies for officials and worker leaders of affiliates
- running advanced programmes on issues such as organising strategies, workplace democratisation, union administration and union management for affiliate and federation staff.

The *communication department* has two distinct functions. Firstly, the communication department should manage the information flow and communication within the Federation. This is a strategic political task - ensuring that different structures and levels (for example, affiliate general secretaries, COSATU regional secretaries, COSATU local chairpersons) receive the appropriate information and know what decisions, actions or responses are required of them. This is an ongoing function, flowing from meetings of Exco, of NOBs, of NEDLAC, of the Alliance, etc. The communication department should also facilitate information flows upwards, from locals and regions to national structures, departments and office-bearers.

The second function of the communication department is public relations and media liaison. This includes keeping the media informed of COSATU policies, decisions and programmes, raising the public profile of COSATU, ensuring that the media understand our struggles and goals. The Federation needs to be more proactive in this sphere, inviting senior correspondents and editors to off-the-record briefings, organising media breakfasts, facilitating media encounters with workers, etc.

The Shopsteward magazine also needs to be used more effectively as a tool of communication within the Federation.

4.7 Campaigns

Over the past few years COSATU campaigns have tended to be reactive, *ad hoc* events. The most effective campaigns have focused on new labour legislation negotiated at NEDLAC. COSATU has not been able to develop proactive or offensive campaigns that focus ongoing struggles on its agenda. From the early 1990s there has been a tendency to identify too many campaigns with too many goals, and lose focus as a result. Campaigns have therefore been ineffective, often not going beyond the drafting of a resolution.

We therefore recommend that campaigns be:

- fewer and more focused
- continuing and proactive, with clarity about goals, time frames and about who the campaign is directed at
- linked to the core political, economic and collective bargaining programmes of the Federation
- co-ordinated by the affiliate general secretaries and Federation NOBs in the new Exco proposed above
- based on campaign proposals developed by the new Exco, rather than doing this in a broad campaign conference (the conference should be used to deepen, mobilise and popularise rather than decide what campaigns COSATU should launch)
- COSATU should plan a regular "summer offensive" to organise new workers, especially in vulnerable sectors or jobs (see Chapter 7 *New workers, new members*).

4.8 Relations between the centre and the affiliates

The Commission has recommended that COSATU should become a tighter, more unified and co-ordinated federation. Our recommendations in relation to the NOBs, Exco, RECs, and LECs are intended to achieve this. Strengthening these engines should facilitate a closer and ongoing working relationship between affiliates and generate a new culture of solidarity and mutual support. In other words, our recommendations strengthen the centre by empowering the affiliates, not by reducing the powers of the affiliates.

But there is also clearly a need for a more active role by the centre in supporting affiliates, resolving disputes and intervening where an affiliate is in crisis or is undermining COSATU policy. There needs to be consensus in the Federation that COSATU may intervene in affiliates when they:

- experience deep political conflict that creates a crisis in the union
- experience serious administrative or organisational crisis
- adopt or implement policies that contradict Federation policy
- are unable to grow or reach large pockets of workers in their sector because of a lack of resources or inability to develop and implement focused strategies.

Each of the situations noted above requires different kinds of interventions and different capacities from the Federation. They could be distinguished as follows:

1. *Deep political conflict*: the intervention of the senior leadership of the Federation is required - including COSATU NOBs and affiliate NOBs.

1. *Serious administrative or organisational crisis*: Currently this kind of issue is dealt with by delegating people from head office departments (eg organising, education, finance, etc) or an official from an affiliate to try to help the struggling affiliate. This is mostly ineffective for two reasons: firstly, the delegated staff have so many other tasks that they are unable to provide the kind of consistent and long-term support required; secondly, while the relevant staff are experts in their fields, they do not have any experience of organisational restructuring or OD. This requires a different dedicated institution - new capacity (see Chapter 9, Section 4.10 for a discussion of this, where we recommend Ditsela should take on this task). Often organisational/administrative crisis is combined with a political crisis as in 1 above. In such cases a COSATU team consisting of senior NOBs and OD specialists should be convened.

1. *Adopt or implement policies that contradict Federation policy*: This could be dealt with by the restructured Exco described above. It should be the duty of NOBs to draw the attention of Exco to any such case. A continuing working interaction - rather than an infrequent talking shop (the current Exco!) - should make it easier for affiliates to be open and honest about these issues. Demarcation disputes should be dealt with by a special tribunal of three (two affiliate general secretaries and one NOB) elected by Exco.

1. *A weak or stagnating affiliate*: This is the real terrain of the organising department, and it should have the capacity to consistently help affiliates deal with such problems.

4.9 Fewer bigger stronger affiliates

Bigger and stronger affiliates will be able to intervene more decisively in their industries, and develop more coherent industrial policies. A smaller number of bigger affiliates will also improve the coherence and co-ordination of COSATU. As the first step in this direction, the affiliates should be grouped into sectors. We recommend the following sectors:

- manufacturing
- mining & construction & farming
- private sector services
- public sector
- transport

The experience of the Scandinavian union movements shows, however, that unless the sectors (cartels) have clear practical functions they will have no life or reality, but simply generate more meetings.

In Denmark the cartels have taken over collective bargaining from the affiliates (because the latter were problematically organised in a mixture of general and occupational (craft) type unions), and they have undermined the functions and powers of the centre (LO) to the extent that its resources and finances have been redistributed to the cartels. In Norway, LO took a decision to establish cartels and give them collective bargaining powers (historically exercised by affiliates and by LO); however, LO has been reluctant to give these powers to the cartels in practice, and so they have very little significance or life of their own. In Sweden centralised bargaining by the LO has collapsed and devolved to the affiliates. LO

strategists are considering the formation of cartels, but it is unclear whether the affiliates would be prepared to give up any of their collective bargaining or decision-making powers to cartels.

If the sectors promised to significantly increase the bargaining power and co-ordination between affiliates in COSATU they might be viable. If they simply perform an administrative function, ie yet another meeting where affiliates have to agree on their representation and mandate to COSATU, they are unlikely to appeal to anyone.

4.10 Financial implications

The recommendations put forward in this chapter will result in financial savings in some areas, and increased costs in others. Overall, the Federation will require an increased income in order to build its capacity as recommended. This may require increased affiliation fees from affiliates. This should however not deter the Federation from taking certain decisions since finances can always be reorganised. The alternative may be a decay of the organisation, stuck in old traditions and cultures for their own sake rather than the contribution they make to the current situation.