

# Transforming ourselves to transform society *building effective organisation*

## 1. Current reality

## 2. Options

## 3. Our vision

## 4. Problems and recommendations

*This chapter focuses on the organisational problems in COSATU and affiliates. It makes recommendations about building effective, democratic and dynamic organisation, and for boosting organisational capacity.*

## 1. Current reality

A COSATU regional office-bearer told the Commission: "We always talk about transformation of society, transformation of government, transformation of the workplace - we never talk about transforming ourselves. We need to transform ourselves and our organisation before we can transform society. We need to make ourselves effective."

This chapter of the Commission Report is about transforming ourselves, our organisations and the way we work.

COSATU's goals are to defend worker rights, improve working conditions and wages, and contribute to the transformation of society. These goals are described in detail in earlier chapters of this report. But to achieve these goals, COSATU needs to build *effective, democratic* and *dynamic* organisation. In doing this it can draw on its history.

Over the past two decades COSATU has been extremely *effective* as an organisation. It grew in the face of vicious repression from employers and government. It won trade union and worker rights, it improved wages and conditions. Politically, it challenged the apartheid regime and eventually, together with other forces, compelled it to capitulate.

From their beginnings COSATU and its affiliates have operated according to the *democratic* principle of workers' control. This was central to its effectiveness - to its survival, its ability to build unity among workers, to protect its leaders and mobilise its members.

COSATU's affiliates have always been extraordinarily *dynamic*. They have continuously invented new ways of organising, new tactics and campaigns. They have managed to make creative use of institutions established by their opponents - the law, industrial councils, for example - and turned them to their own

advantage. They created new structures, such as shopsteward committees and shopsteward locals, which became centres of worker creativity. Their history is a history of dynamic energy, of innovation, of empowering workers to take initiatives. They would never have survived and grown without this.

Are COSATU and its affiliates still effective, democratic and creative? In many ways, yes they are. Membership is still growing. They have great influence in South African society. They have been highly effective in negotiations over the LRA, and the struggle against the lockout clause, for example.

However, we believe COSATU's organisations are much less effective, democratic and creative than they could or should be. Some of the reasons for this are:

- the end of apartheid has led to a weakening of the vision and shared ideology in the unions
- the establishment of democracy has forced the unions to engage with a tremendous range of issues, many of them more complex than in the past
- conditions of struggle have changed: during the 1980s unions were driven by mass militancy and creativity from below, whereas now the emphasis has shifted to national negotiations with government and employers
- they have lost experienced staff and worker leaders to government and business
- the unions have grown into very big organisations in which it is more difficult to sustain democracy, effectiveness and creativity
- the rapid growth of a black middle class in society, and the culture of self-enrichment that has accompanied this, is undermining the traditional culture of solidarity of the trade unions
- there are worrying organisational trends - lack of service, lack of skills, lack of discipline, lack of commitment - that could generate a crisis if not addressed.

As a result of these changing conditions, COSATU and its affiliates run the danger of losing strategic capacity and vision. They often operate in an *ad hoc* way, reacting to initiatives of others rather than taking initiatives themselves. This kind of *ad hoc*, reactive and inefficient unionism can be called *Zigzag unionism* (see Chapter 2, *Options*).

But COSATU cannot allow its unions to become victims of the transition which they fought for. There are many steps they can take to overcome organisational problems and increase their effectiveness, democracy and creativity. In this chapter, we analyse some of the problem areas in the organisation, and present our views on how they should be transformed.



COSATU needs to build dynamic organisation at the grassroots - Photo: William Matlala

## 2. Options

COSATU and affiliates have three options for trying to solve these organisational problems.

### **2.1 Piecemeal changes**

COSATU and affiliates could implement piecemeal or *ad hoc* changes in an effort to improve the effectiveness of their organisation. This approach is likely to be ineffective. Efforts to implement changes will be neutralised by old habits and by resistance to change. Organisational problems are interlinked, and problems that are left untouched will undermine efforts to solve other problems. The result is likely to be *Zigzag unionism*.

### **2.2 Technocratic change**

COSATU and affiliates could seek technocratic solutions to organisational problems. This would mean employing experts and professionals at market-related salaries - economists, lawyers, managers, engineers, researchers - in an effort to "professionalise" the union. The emphasis would be on "efficiency". This kind of technocratic approach could change the culture of the union, alienating and disempowering worker leaders. Trade unions are working class organisations, and they must be careful not to adopt capitalist concepts of efficiency which cannot foster democracy or empower workers. The result would be weaker organisation.

### **2.3 A programme for organisational renewal**

COSATU and affiliates could adopt a systematic and long-term programme for organisational renewal, focusing on building *effective, democratic* and *innovative* organisation. Such a programme would be driven by the federation and affiliate leadership, and the entire union movement would be aware of their commitment to it. It could include employing more professionals and specialists, but this would not be regarded as the key to solving organisational problems.

## **3. Our vision**

We propose that COSATU and affiliates adopt the third option above - a programme for organisational renewal, a programme for transforming the union movement. Throughout this report we have developed our vision of *socialunionism*. Social unionism engages in proactive struggles to consolidate and extend democracy, to redistribute wealth, income and power, to transform the public sector, to democratise the workplace, and to organise new workers and sectors. COSATU will be unable to implement this programme of social unionism if it becomes an *ad hoc*, reactive, *Zigzag* trade union movement. It needs to build the strategic capacity to develop and implement long-term programmes.

COSATU's goal in renewing its organisation, in transforming itself, should be to build *effective, democratic and innovative* organisation in the new conditions of a democratic South Africa. It should draw on its traditions in this project of self-transformation. It must also be prepared to adopt new methods, new structures and new ways of working where these will strengthen it and enable it to deal with new realities.

**Organisation must be effective:** to be effective, a trade union or federation must have *clear goals*, policies and strategies to *achieve* those goals, and the ability to *implement* its policies and strategies. Finally, its policies and strategies must be *appropriate* for achieving its goals.

If a union has clear goals, but no policies or strategies for achieving them, it will be ineffective. If it has clear goals and policies and strategies, but lacks the capacity to implement them, it will be ineffective. If the union *does* have the capacity to implement its policies and strategies, but the policies and strategies themselves are wrong, the organisation will still be ineffective in achieving its goals.

To be effective, a union must have structures that perform their roles. Policies and strategies must be developed and assessed on an ongoing basis. Work must be planned. Programmes must be implemented and monitored. Administration must work efficiently according to systems and routines. The necessary information must be available to those who need it. Staff and worker leaders must be skilled, knowledgeable, creative and work as a team. Scarce resources - human, material and financial - must be effectively utilised.

**Organisation must be democratic:** democracy is a *means* for building strong, effective organisation. A trade union is based on the unity, solidarity and knowledge of workers. This can only be built through democracy, where leaders are elected and accountable, and members, through their elected

representatives, shape policies and decisions. The result will be committed and knowledgeable members and officials, able to implement those policies and decisions.

Democracy is also a principle. It is a way of empowering workers. It is a way of empowering workers. Workers' democratic control over their organisations is a step towards citizens' democratic control over their society. They cannot transform and democratise society unless they build democracy in their own organisations.

**Organisation must be dynamic:** dynamic organisation entails innovation, initiative and creativity at all levels - from the shopsteward committee to the local to the national office bearers (NOBs). There are many reasons why unions should encourage this kind of dynamism. Firstly, the unions do not have the staff and resources to drive all activities from head office. If they are to make maximum use of their resources, everyone has to be equipped to take initiative.

Secondly, national policies and agreements have to be interpreted in workplaces with widely differing conditions and problems. Managers in different workplaces use different strategies, and shopstewards need to be able to respond appropriately. In other words, in order to be effective, shopstewards and organisers need to be innovative.

Thirdly, grassroots activism is essential for democracy. There cannot be worker control or grassroots participation unless there is initiative, empowerment and creativity at the grassroots. This is what distinguishes a trade union from an army or a capitalist corporation.

Finally, a dynamic union movement with the capacity to take initiative and be innovative at all levels is central to our vision of transforming society. In a democratic society there are many centres of power - from the national state, to town councils, to different workplaces. In order to contest power in these many places, unions themselves need many centres of innovation where activists can analyse the situation they are faced with, develop strategies and implement them.

## 4. Problems and recommendations

In this section we discuss building effective, democratic and dynamic organisation from a number of different angles.

### ***4.1 COSATU's organisation is not effective***

#### **The problem**

According to the results of a survey of union staff conducted for the September Commission, large numbers of staff believe that structures are not functioning properly and that unions are not using their resources or their staff effectively. The results are shown in the table below:

Question	Agree	Not sure	Disagree
The union has clear goals/common vision	54%	35%	12%
The union has workable strategies	46%	41%	13%
NOBs are in touch with staff/members	36%	28%	36%
The union uses its resources/staff effectively	30%	38%	33%
Union structures function properly	30%	35%	36%
Shopsteward committees are strong	34%	31%	35%
Members are happy with service	34%	34%	30%

These are the subjective views of union staff, but they do suggest a low level of effectiveness and efficiency in COSATU's organisations. These views are supported by the reality of frequent complaints by shopstewards about poor service. The growing number of small splinter unions also indicates dissatisfaction amongst the membership in a number of areas.

There are *external* reasons why organisation has become less effective. Transition has posed new problems and demands for the unions (see Section 1, *Current reality*, above). But there are also many *internal* causes of inefficiency. Answers to questions in our staff survey suggest that poor administration, and the lack of managerial and administrative skills of the respondents, are part of the problem. Another major cause is poor management of the organisations, and inappropriate structures. Organisations and structures do not just run themselves. They need to be actively managed to ensure they are effective.

### Recommendations

The lack of organisational effectiveness is why, as the comrade in the regional meeting told the Commission, COSATU and affiliates need to transform themselves, their ways of working and their organisation. Otherwise their goals of transforming society will remain a dream.

We recommend that COSATU and affiliates should commit themselves to a *campaign for organisational renewal*. This should entail the following aspects among others:

- i. *Leadership commitment* to lead a process of organisational renewal. Leadership commitment to change, and will to drive change, are essential preconditions for the success of a programme to make its organisations more effective, democratic and innovative.
- ii. *Designating a transformation team* - which must include the general secretary and president - to drive the process of organisational renewal in each union. Current habits and problems are deeply embedded in the culture of the unions. These will only change if a strong team is formed to focus on analysing the needs of the organisation and ensuring that decisions are implemented.
- iii. *A process of discussion at all levels*, initiated by the transformation team, to debate problems and solutions. All staff and shopstewards should be aware of the campaign for organisational renewal so that they can actively participate and contribute.

- iv. An assessment of the *structures of worker participation and control* in each affiliate, and restructuring of these if necessary (see Section 4.5 below). The Commission has made such proposals for Federation structures in Chapter 10.
- v. Strategies for *improving the management* of union organisation (see Section 4.4 below).
- vi. Developing the capacity for *organisational development (OD)* in the labour movement (see Section 4.10 below).
- vii. *Developing a programme* for improving the skills, creativity, work practices and job satisfaction of *staff* (see Section 4.2 below).
- viii. Developing and maintaining *efficient administrative systems and routines* (see Section 4.3 below).
- ix. Launching a *campaign of shopsteward education* with the slogan, "every shopsteward a trained shopsteward..." (see Section 4.6 below).

We have outlined an ambitious programme in this report. But COSATU and its affiliates have limited resources - roughly 1 600 staff and 1, 9 million members. If COSATU does not utilise these resources effectively it may as well abandon the programme. Currently COSATU does not utilise them effectively. We believe it is possible to improve the effectiveness of the organisation, and so implement bold and ambitious programmes. But to do this the unions need to adopt a campaign for organisational renewal, a campaign to transform themselves.

## **4.2 Staff morale and working conditions**

### **The problem**

The same staff survey revealed a high level of staff turnover and staff dissatisfaction with their work. This is not surprising. Staff morale is bound to be low if they feel their organisation is ineffective, as their answers to the questions in Section 4.1 above indicate.

Of the staff who answered the survey questionnaire, 20% said they were unhappy with their jobs and 40% said their job satisfaction was "average" - but every one of that 40% also filled in reasons why they were unhappy with their jobs. This suggests that fully 60% of staff are relatively unhappy with their jobs. Their reasons were low salaries and benefits, lack of training and career paths, and lack of recognition for the work they do.

This unhappiness is reflected in an extremely high turnover. Only 20% of the respondents were working in the unions during the 1970s and 1980s, and 56% have worked in the unions for less than four years! This rate of turnover seems set to continue: 28% of respondents expected to work for the union for another 1-2 years, and another 37% expect to leave the union in 2 - 5 years! It seems relatively few trade unionists see trade union work as a medium or long-term career or commitment.

The survey suggests an extremely serious problem for the unions. More than any other organisation, a trade union relies on people - on its staff and its members. A trade union is built on the activity, commitment and morale of its members and staff. Without them it is impossible to build solidarity or unity. A factory can continue to produce even if its staff and workers are unhappy, as long as the machinery keeps running - in fact, most factories in South Africa are like this! But in a union the staff *are* the machinery, and if they are not happy or effective the machinery will break down.

### **Recommendations**

Ideological confusion and loss of vision generated by the transition, and relatively low salaries in the context of opportunities for high salaries elsewhere, contribute to the problem. But if people are well-managed, feel their work is useful and recognised and that they can improve their skills and advance their

careers, and know that they are part of a movement for social justice, it should not be difficult to find and keep committed, high-quality staff, even if they could earn higher salaries elsewhere.

- i. It is clear that unions need to be *more active in managing their staff*. This entails helping them overcome problems they experience, ensuring that the environment supports their work (for example, that administrative and information systems are effective), ensuring effective lines of discipline, accountability and authority, and helping them plan and prioritise their work.
- ii. It is also clear that unions need to *develop meaningful human resource development strategies* so that staff can continually learn and improve their skills. The importance of people to the effectiveness of the union means that it is extremely important for those people to have the knowledge and skills they need in order to play their role effectively - whether that is advising shopstewards on how to handle the issue of teamwork, or managing finances in a branch office, or taking a case to the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration (CCMA). Currently most officials are "jacks-of-all-trades". Unions should consider whether to increase the specialisation of staff - for example, organisers could become specialists in health and safety, in workplace democracy, in retirement funds, or in liaising with COSATU structures and programmes. Such specialisation should entail training, apprenticeship/mentoring inside or outside the union, secondment to relevant outside institutions, etc. An essential part of human resource development is creating career-paths for staff, along with the necessary training, grading and remuneration policies. Increased specialisation would create clear career-paths.
- iii. Unions need to develop *new work practices*. Currently most staff work in a reactive manner. For example, if an organiser has some free time, he or she will use it to read the newspaper while waiting for a phone call about a crisis in one or other company, rather than planning his work or thinking about proactive strategies. How can the *union* be proactive if its *staff* are not proactive in their own work? COSATU's unions have a culture of 'ad hoc-ism' and 'last-minute-ism' - leaving everything until the last minute. They need to develop a culture of planning, of taking initiative and of taking responsibility at all levels and in all their offices. Linked to this is the need to develop teamwork in the union. Teamwork can build collective support, accountability and responsibility, and so boost the capacity and effectiveness of the union.
- iv. Unions need to assess their policies on *pay and conditions*. Unions cannot match government and private sector salaries. They also cannot create too wide a gap between the wages of their staff and the wages of their members. However, some affiliates have very low salaries and poor conditions, and these should be improved. All affiliates should provide medical aid and retirement benefits. Most important, all affiliates should improve the working conditions of their staff. Improved workloads and working environment, effective management, recognition, and access to training and career-paths, should all help improve staff morale and motivation. Unions should concentrate on recruiting shopstewards as officials, so that union work becomes an attractive career path for shopsteward activists.
- v. In the past, unions were able to successfully recruit from among student activists. Some affiliates are currently recruiting highly skilled former students and SASCO activists. This is a tendency which should be encouraged by forging closer links between COSATU and SASCO. The alliance with intellectuals is of great importance.
- vi. Unions will have to find ways to *accommodate a continuing high turnover of staff*. We have recommended a number of ways to improve morale and motivation among staff, and this should reduce the high turnover of staff. However, we expect a high turnover to continue for as long as there is a large demand for skilled trade unionists in government and the private sector. Unions need to find ways to work creatively with this reality. They need to find ways to encourage such

staff to stay for a longer rather than a shorter period in the unions. They need to ensure that they benefit as much as possible from those who stay for a relatively short period.

- vii. The unions should consider forms of *staff representation or committees*. The union leadership needs to consult and negotiate with union staff. We all know that worker organisation alerts management to problems and allows for their resolution before they become a crisis. In the same way, staff representative structures could make a valuable contribution to identifying and resolving organisational problems in the unions. In the union environment this need not be an adversarial relationship, but a way of building a team.

### **4.3 Poor administration**

#### **The problem**

Many of the problems of morale, motivation, management and skills noted above apply to administrators as well. Administrative systems in the unions are generally weak. There may be a number of reasons for this, ranging from a lack of skills among administrative staff, to a lack of proper systems, to a tendency among non-administrative staff to ignore administrative procedures and so undermine the administrative staff.



Training administrators: a step toward effective administration - Photo: William Matlala

#### **Recommendations**

- i. As with other staff, the solution lies in *active management*. Systems need to be set up and maintained, and staff need to be supported and managed.
- ii. A proper programme of *skills upgrading and career-pathing* needs to be implemented. Unions should consider multi-skilling administrators with basic information on union and workplace issues, so they can handle basic queries from shopstewards and relieve organisers of this work.
- iii. The role of administrators in the unions is frequently under-valued. We recommend that administrators should be participants, along with organisers, in basic training courses on the role

and functioning of trade unions. Administrators and other staff need to appreciate each others' roles so that they can work together effectively.

- iv. Most administrators are women, and they are subject to the same gender oppression as other women. Education programmes for administration staff should include sections on gender oppression and women's rights.

#### **4.4 Weak management**

##### **The problem**

Many of the problems outlined above indicate a lack of effective management in the unions. We note that too often union leadership fails to prioritise organisational and management issues, is not willing or able to follow or implement a long-term developmental strategy, does not supervise staff and is not committed to changing its own practices.

Too many senior staff with managerial responsibilities abandon their responsibility to manage the organisation and its staff. Some foster a top-down, hierarchical and undemocratic form of organisation which disempowers staff and stifles creativity. Others adopt an unpredictable, *ad hoc* style which permeates the union. Many spend the most of their time in policy meetings, negotiation and political activities, and very little in ensuring that the organisation is functioning effectively.

The result of this kind of management may be enormous inefficiency, low morale, lack of teamwork, lack of implementation, lack of innovation or initiative, and "ad hoc-ism" and "last minute-ism" at all levels of the organisation. The problem of weak management tends to remain invisible, since unions are working class organisations and tend to see management as the enemy. However, large organisations do not manage themselves - they need to be actively managed at all levels.

The culture of these organisations - like most other organisations - is resistant to change. This resistance exists at the grassroots level, at the middle levels and at the top. This means that organisational renewal or transformation will only take place if the senior leadership - by which we mean the general secretary and the other NOBs - are committed to it and drive it.

##### **Recommendations**

- i. The *management function must be made visible in the unions*, so that it can be analysed, debated and strengthened. The general secretary is the senior manager of the organisation, accountable to the NEC. The regional/branch secretaries are managers of their regions/branches, accountable to their BECs. They must have the necessary authority and duties. They represent their office-bearers to the staff, and they should also report staff concerns or wishes to the office-bearers. Secretaries and their office-bearers should take the lead in discussing their role as leaders and managers, and develop a common perspective on how to play that role most effectively.
- ii. Those responsible for managing the union *must take responsibility for the entire development of their organisation*. they should constantly assess structures and functions, and ensure that everyone understands them. Questions they should be asking are: Are lines of accountability and authority clear? Is performance monitored? Is discipline exercised consistently? Is it clear who is managing the organisation? Does management keep itself informed about problems staff are

experiencing, and help solve those problems? Is there proper preparation and planning for meetings? Is it clear who will implement decisions, and who monitors this? Do leaders and staff double-book themselves and become unreliable? Does anyone have the role of monitoring the effectiveness of structures and procedures in the organisation and of planning how to make them more effective? Does the organisation have clearly defined structures for developing strategy? Does it implement strategies, and if not, why not? Is there sufficient innovation and initiative? How can this be fostered?

- iii. The *leader is a manager*: she or he must plan properly, prepare for meetings, delegate tasks and monitor implementation. The leader must not tolerate inefficiency in herself or in others.
- iv. The *leader is an organiser and an educator*: she or he must motivate people and encourage creativity and initiative. The leader must foster teamwork and co-operation in the organisation.
- v. The *leader is a supporter*: she or he must be available and accessible to staff. She must support and recognise their efforts and qualities, and create opportunities for them to develop.
- vi. Ditsela and the COSATU education department should arrange *seminars, workshops and training programmes for union secretaries, NOBs and other union managers* to share ideas, and develop a new concept of union leadership (see Section 4.9.b.2 and 4.9.d below).

#### **4.5 Democracy and worker control**

##### **The problem**

As the unions have become bigger and more complex organisations, it has become more difficult for worker structures to monitor, guide and control them. In many cases worker structures feel disempowered, and there are often complaints about a widening gap between the leadership and the membership.

Democracy cannot be the same in an organisation of 10, 000 as in an organisation of 150, 000. In addition, a gap between leadership and membership is inevitable when both are dealing with such different realities - on the one hand negotiating at NEDLAC or at a bargaining council, on the other working in a factory under conditions that have changed very little. As the number of complex issues increases, it becomes more difficult to keep all layers of the union involved and informed.

Union democracy is also affected by the changing conditions in our country. In democracies generally, there is a lower level of mass activism and participation among workers. As citizens in a democracy, workers have avenues for participation or improving their lives besides trade unions. We are beginning to see these trends in South Africa, as attendance is weaker at various union meetings and structures.

The result of these problems is that very contradictory attitudes towards democracy are developing in the unions. On the one hand, leadership pretend they are still operating according to the same model of union democracy as in the 1970s or mid-1980s, or that it is possible to do this. On the other hand, they don't believe that it is possible to run their unions on this model, so they become cynical about democracy and only pay lip-service to it. If this continues democracy will die in the unions. COSATU needs to have a frank and open debate about workable forms of democracy in big unions under new conditions, and develop a common perspective on this.

Democracy is essential for unions, both as a principle and because their organisational power and effectiveness depends on it. This is discussed in Section 3, *Our vision* (p 170) above.

## Recommendations

- i. COSATU and affiliates need to recognise that the old forms of mass participatory democracy are no longer realistic, and that they need to accept movement towards a more *representative form of democracy*. This means that the elected leadership are empowered to make more decisions (within the framework of union policy). Our recommendations for Federation structures in Chapter 10, *Building the engines of COSATU* are consistent with this approach.
- ii. At the same time, there are many ways to strengthen the functioning of democracy in COSATU and affiliates. The most important is *that the role of democratic structures at all levels needs to be clearly defined*, so that they focus on the major issues of organisational direction, policy, campaigns and mass action, and holding general secretaries and regional/branch secretaries to account.
- iii. *Information and knowledge* is critical to the effective functioning of democracy and unions need massive improvement in this area. Unions should consider employing a dedicated information manager whose task is to ensure that the right information reaches the right structures and individuals, and in a concise form. Unions should also conduct or commission research to ascertain how different forms of information are used, and what the information needs are at different levels of the organisation.
- iv. As with all other issues, *the role of union management is critical*; if there is weak management of the union - lack of preparation for meetings, lack of clarity about their purpose, lack of follow-up and implementation - democracy and worker control will be seriously undermined and ineffective. Management needs to be strengthened as recommended in section 4.4 above.
- v. Debates on union democracy often focus on the question whether locals are fully informed about national issues, for example NEDLAC negotiations, and whether they have participated in national decisions. While this is important, we do not believe it is possible for locals to keep up with all such national issues. As important - or even more important - is that *grassroots levels of the union and federation are active and dynamic, and are empowered to take initiatives and engage in struggle*. Such grassroots empowerment, activism and initiative are the most important aspects of democracy in the unions.
- vi. *Worker office-bearers are often disempowered* in relation to full-time officials, because they are unable to familiarise themselves with all aspects of the organisation. Unions should consider increasing the number of full-time office-bearers to overcome this problem and increase the capacity of leadership.
- vii. Deliberately *employing more shopstewards as officials*, and ensuring that they can continuously upgrade their skills, will keep the organisation close to the interests and experiences of members.
- viii. Unions need to commit themselves to a *massive programme of shopsteward training and education*, so as to equip shopstewards to play an active role in their organisation and in their workplace. This will contribute to democracy in the union.

### **4.6 Shopstewards and servicing our members**

#### **The problem**

As pointed out in 4.1 above, only 35% of staff believe their shopsteward committees are strong, and only 30% believe their members are happy with the service of their union. These views are supported by complaints voiced in Worker Forums, complaints by members, and the increasing number of splinter unions. Shopstewards faced by new management strategies also accuse organisers of avoiding their companies because they don't know how to handle these issues.

The transition to democracy is also destabilising the shopsteward committees. The most experienced and skilled shopstewards are often promoted into management. This robs shopsteward structures of the cream of their activists, and also creates distrust of shopstewards among members. (This problem is discussed in more depth in Chapter 6.)

### Recommendations

- i. COSATU and affiliates should launch *an education campaign with the slogan: "every shopsteward a trained shopsteward"*. By one year after the 1997 Congress of COSATU (ie, by the end of 1998), every shopsteward should have attended a basic shopsteward training course. At least one shopsteward per workplace should have attended a more advanced programme, and reported back to his or her comrades. COSATU should also have produced a set of basic manuals covering all aspects of a shopsteward's role and duties, and distributed these to all shopsteward committees.
- ii. The *Shopsteward magazine needs to be more effectively utilised* by the Federation. It should carry more stories and case studies on workplace struggles and campaigns, tips from experienced shopstewards, etc. Its distribution should be increased and improved.
- iii. Unions should consider a *dedicated 'advice line' that shopstewards can phone* for advice on dealing with specific problems.
- iv. The various measures to enhance efficiency, skills and organisational development (OD) should *focus on improving service to shopstewards and members*. Service targets should be set.
- v. Affiliate locals should revive their function of *shopstewards assisting each other to overcome problems*. Shopstewards could present case studies of disputes, struggles and negotiations for analysis and debate at local meetings.
- vi. The OD programme recommended in section 4.10 *should focus on an assessment of the functioning of branch offices and their delivery to members*. On the basis of this it should draw up a programme for improving the effectiveness of branch offices and their service performance, and implement this in pilot projects in chosen branches. After the pilot projects have been assessed, the programme should be extended across the Federation.



## 4.7 Strengthening policy capacity

### The problem

Many affiliates, and COSATU, have developed broad policy on a wide range of issues. As they enter into concrete engagement and negotiation with employers and government on specific issues, however, their broad policies often need more detail and complexity. Policies also need to be regularly re-assessed as to whether they are actually achieving the goals they claim to be achieving. For example, a union may have policies for increasing the work skills of its members, but the way those policies are implemented by management in the workplace may actually *reduce* their members' skills. The practical implementation of policies sometimes also requires more expertise. For example, a union may have a broad policy on reducing the number of grades and broad-banding them. When it comes to actually implementing this in a specific workplace, and re-grading and grouping the jobs that workers perform there, the union will need much more detailed and complex policy expertise.

The unions and the Federation therefore need to strengthen both their policy capacity and their expertise on specific issues. This does not mean the unions have to employ dozens of experts and professionals to develop their policies and import 'expertise' into the organisation. Worker organisations have their own rich sources of expertise, knowledge and ideas to draw on. However, they also need to find ways to draw on the knowledge of professional experts.

### Recommendations

- i. It is important for each affiliate to establish a consistent and sophisticated policy capacity. This can be done by *establishing a team (or teams) of staff and worker leaders to analyse key policy issues in depth*, develop policy options, engage consistently with government and employers, participate in the implementation of those policies, and regularly assess the effectiveness of the policies. The members of such a team need to be able to devote sufficient time to this work to develop their own expertise. They also need to find ways to access the necessary professional expertise to supplement their own knowledge.
- ii. Each affiliate needs to *identify the priority areas* on which it needs to focus its policy resources. The Commission suggests three priority areas for each affiliate: industrial strategy (see Chapter 4 and Chapter 5), workplace transformation and democratisation (see Chapter 5 and Chapter 6), and training and skills development. These areas are as important for public sector unions as for private sector unions.
- iii. The above recommendations imply that affiliates should focus their policy capacities on sectoral issues. *COSATU has a much wider-ranging and broader policy-making role*, ranging from co-ordinating the Federation's industrial development policies, to the range of policy issues raised at NEDLAC and parliament, to local and regional development issues, to public sector transformation, to the politics of the Tripartite Alliance (these areas are discussed in detail in various chapters of this Report). COSATU therefore needs to develop its policy capacity accordingly (see Chapter 10 for some proposals on this).
- iv. Each union *should employ at least one trained and experienced professional policy analyst*, with a background in economics or sociology for example. The role of such a person is not to act as a *researcher* for the union (the union can commission outsiders to actually do research), but to help develop policy capacity in the union, to analyse policy proposals put forward by government, employers, etc., and to develop the union's access to expertise on specific issues by networking

with research institute, academics, consultants, etc. This will enable the union to develop its own *internal expertise*, as well as develop its access to *expertise outside the union*, and in addition contribute to *shaping policy work* and research in a range of areas.

- v. The National Labour and Economic Development Institute (NALEDI) is a crucially important policy and research institute for COSATU and affiliates. It should be a priority for COSATU *to nurture, support and build NALEDI*.
- vi. In all the recommendations above, it is important to avoid concentrating policy expertise in the hands of a small number of professionals. In all cases *shopstewards should be seconded to work with policy teams or policy departments* to ensure that policies take workers' interests and knowledge into account, and that workers develop their own policy expertise.

#### **4.8 Implementing and co-ordinating strategies**

##### **The problem**

The strategic capacities of the unions could be improved. In general COSATU and its unions are quite good at developing strategies. The main problem is that the unions have weak structures for implementing and co-ordinating decisions. Too many resolutions, policies and decisions are never implemented. If they are implemented there is a lack of consistency, co-ordination and follow-up so that they do not yield results.

##### **Recommendations**

- i. The *most important job of the union leadership* is to continually monitor and assess their organisation's *strategic capacity*, on the one hand, and its ability to *implement* strategies and decisions on the other. If a union fails in either of these areas, it will never be strong and effective.
- ii. Unions need to *strengthen their structures and capacities for implementation and co-ordination*. The solution will differ from organisation to organisation, depending on the issues. For COSATU as a federation we have recommended a restructuring of Exco so that it becomes a powerful team for co-ordinating and implementing decisions, increasing the number of full-time NOBs from two to six, as well as strengthening the head office departments. We have made similar recommendations for structures at other levels of the Federation. (see Chapter 10, *Building the engines of COSATU*). Affiliates need to debate whether similar changes to their structures are necessary for them to become more effective as organisations.
- iii. Unions need to *assess whether they are staffed appropriately* to ensure implementation. Such an assessment should include staffing levels, responsibilities and goals, structures, skills and staff management.
- iv. Affiliates should consider whether to *set up their own 'think-tanks'* (like the September Commission) to assess their policies, strategies and capacities on an ongoing basis, as part of a programme of organisational renewal and "transforming themselves".

#### **4.9 Creativity and initiative**

##### **The problem**

The unions are less creative than before, especially at a grassroots level. In some ways COSATU's organisations have become bogged down in structures. Union leadership comes together in structures to make policy and other decisions. But, as noted above, there is a lack of capacity for co-ordination and

implementation - and as a result there is a lack of practical creativity in organising, in campaigning and in mobilising.

At a grassroots level too, the organisation has less capacity for dynamic and creative initiatives. The locals have become bogged down in administration and bureaucratic procedures, dealing with endless reports from national level and reports from meetings with local government, the Alliance and whoever. They seldom discuss issues facing their members, solidarity or local campaigns

Shopsteward committees still respond creatively to management initiatives, but in an *ad hoc* fashion. They are unable to develop their own proactive strategies because their union lacks policy on major new workplace issues, and they receive little support from organisers who also fear getting out of their depth on new issues. The shift to centralised bargaining has also reduced the scope for shopsteward activism and creativity as collective bargaining no longer takes place at enterprise level.

This chapter has already touched on a number of reasons for the loss of creative capacity in the unions: changing conditions of struggle, weak management, ineffective structures, a lack of resources and capacity at regional, branch and local levels of organisation. They need to rediscover their tradition of grassroots activism. This will help them build strong, dynamic and democratic organisation. We argued at the beginning of this chapter that it is crucial for the unions to encourage initiative and creativity at all levels (see **Organisation must be dynamic**, p 171 above). If they fail, they will be unable to meet the many challenges they face in different regions, towns and workplaces.

## Recommendations

- i. A central goal of COSATU's programme of organisational renewal must be the *empowering and equipping of grassroots structures - regions, branches, locals and shopsteward committees - to take initiatives*, to be creative and to become activist structures again. Many of our recommendations for union management (Section 4.4), improving skills and motivation (Section 4.2), empowering shopstewards and developing branch efficiency (Section 4.6) aim to do this.
- ii. Union head offices have a critical role to play in encouraging and supporting grassroots initiative and activism. The task of national officials is not only to convene national policy workshops or national training programmes - but to implement pilot projects at local level, support grassroots initiatives, and help to spread successful experiences across the union. In order for the unions to become proactive and innovative, they need structures or centres that can experiment, drive projects, and invent new strategies. In many cases it would be useful for the union to establish a project team at head office (including officials and shopstewards from regions and locals) to drive a specific programme, or implement pilot projects. In other cases, permanent departments should be established at head office level - but these should continually co-opt officials and shopstewards from other levels to work with the department for a specific period so that skills are imparted. As examples, we have already recommended elsewhere in this report:
  - o a team/department to focus on workplace democratisation, targeting certain pilot projects to experiment with (chapter 6)
  - o a team/department to focus on industrial development strategies (chapter 4)
  - o a nucleus of gender co-ordinators to focus on campaigns against gender oppression (chapter 8)

- public sector unions to establish a team/department focusing on the transformation of micro-institutions such as hospitals and schools (chapter 5)
- we have also proposed that COSATU's organising department should play such a supporting and dynamic role in relation to COSATU regions and locals (chapter 10).

Establishing active organising structures such as these at national level should facilitate the re-emergence of dynamism and creativity at local and shopfloor levels, revitalising our organisation.

- iii. *Focused and well-organised campaigns are the most effective way of combining national co-ordination, national unity and grassroots activism and creativity.* In Chapter 10 we make several recommendations about COSATU's ability to implement campaigns. Affiliates could also adapt some of these recommendations for their own campaigns. Every affiliate should be focused on a clear campaign at all times. Campaigns should have clear goals and time-frames, should be ongoing, should provide a focus for grassroots activism, and should be understood by every member and official.

#### **4.10 Organisational development (OD)**

If members want to implement a systematic programme of renewal and transformation in the unions, they need to develop the theory and practice of OD as it applies in unions. By OD we mean something different from 'building organisation'. 'Building organisation' is the traditional focus of trade union activism - building structures, mobilising members, launching campaigns. By OD we mean a more specific focus on internal organisational issues - such as organisational management, communication systems, financial management, staff development and working relations, administrative systems, etc. This is an area trade unions have tended to neglect - but it is essential for building effective organisation.

It is also necessary to be cautious when adopting an OD programme. OD was developed as a theory and practice in business organisations - with a very different culture, goals and internal relations. It has generated a huge literature and numerous consultancies, with a language, jargon and concepts of its own. There is a real danger that unions find themselves talking a language, and trying to implement a programme, that is alien to their own goals and needs. Trade unions need to make use of OD in a critical way, modifying and adapting it to their own goals and needs. That is why we argue below that the labour movement should develop its own OD capacity.

Many of the recommendations we have made in this chapter are recommendations for organisational development. In this section we outline some of the elements of a systematic OD programme.

#### **Recommendations**

- i. The labour movement should establish an OD capacity.

The unions and the Federation do not currently have an OD capacity internally. It is likely to be a waste of money - or even dangerous - to call on external OD consultants who have developed their expertise in assisting private sector companies, government departments or even NGOs. Trade unions have their own specific structures, goals and values, and organisational development needs to take account of these. The challenge facing them is to develop a body of practice and theory of organisational development for trade unions - with the goal of increasing

effectiveness, democracy and dynamism. To do this the union movement needs its own institutions and practitioners.

Ditsela has already been mandated to work on OD for the labour movement. We propose that Ditsela become the lead organisation in a cluster of education organisations, research organisations and OD consultants. For example, NALEDI and the Sociology of Work Programme (SWOP) could be part of such a cluster. Ditsela could develop relations with one or two progressive OD consultants who are prepared to commit themselves to ongoing work with trade unions, as part of the project of developing theory and practice in this area.

ii. COSATU should adopt a 3 - pronged strategy

1. **Develop an analysis of the problem, a vision of change and capacity to implement it**

The September Commission, and the debate we hope to provoke, is a first step in this process. Developing the capacity to implement our proposals, and so to deepen understanding of OD in trade unions, is the next essential step (see Recommendation 4.9.a above).

2. **Develop leadership capacity**

Leadership commitment to change, and will to drive change, are essential preconditions for the success of a programme of organisational renewal and transformation. Given the critically important role leadership plays in organisational change, we believe resources should be devoted to helping leadership develop their analysis of organisational problems in their unions, and their vision of organisational change. They will then be able to identify the skills they and their unions will need in order to drive the change. As a first step, we propose that Ditsela convene an executive seminar for union general secretaries. The seminar should combine presentations by international experts on OD, collective analysis of organisational problems and workshopping solutions. The seminar should become a regular event, where general secretaries can critically evaluate their progress and engage with new ideas.

3. **Select do-and-achieve projects**

Since organisational development is a long-term process, and implementing a programme for changing the whole organisation may seem overwhelming, it is important to select a series of smaller problems at a grassroots level and pilot changes there. For example, helping a local office establish an efficient filing system and set up routines for maintaining it. Such pilot projects should address pressing problems, and be achievable.

The process for such a pilot project would:

- start with identifying the issue
- bring in a specialist in union OD (see Recommendation 4.10.a above) to diagnose the problems and suggest solutions

- provide ongoing support with the OD specialist helping the union people concerned to implement the solutions.
- The spin-offs would be:
- staff and members would see that organisational change is possible and delivers results
- a pilot project is a form of organisational learning, and it could be transferred to other parts of the organisation, and also to other unions
- it would also be a form of learning for the specialists in union OD, and contribute to the development of theory and practice in this area
- change in one part of an organisation can trigger changes in other parts of the organisation.

We recommend in Section 4.6 above that the OD programme should initially focus on union branch offices and their service delivery to members.

- iii. The lack of effectiveness in our organisations is a *complex* problem. The union movement has to adopt *holistic* strategies to increase their effectiveness - in other words, they must see the situation as a whole rather than tackling bits and pieces. The process of change has to be a *continuous* process and a *long-term* one - it will take a union at least three years to implement changes that are long-lasting and yield results.

For example, some unions have invested in advanced computer technology to keep track of membership. But they have found that the systems do not work because the administration of the union is unable to regularly update the membership figures for each workplace. There are many reasons: there are weak administration systems and routines, administrators lack the skills, organisers do not give the information to administrators, no-one is trying to manage the administration system, there is no-one in the union with adequate computer skills or interest, etc. Because of these problems, an attempt to solve an information problem with new technology fails. A *series of interlinked problems* needs to be addressed before the technology can meet its potential.

All elements of an organisation are linked, and a holistic strategy should address them all. If only one element is addressed, while others are left alone, the organisation will not change and the effort will have been wasted.

- iv. A comprehensive and focused training and development programme is needed. This is an important part of organisational development. People - staff and shopstewards - are the basis of the union. The union will only be as knowledgeable, proactive and creative as its staff and shopstewards. Education programmes are therefore crucial. Many affiliates pay lip-service to the importance of education, but fail to commit the necessary financial and human resources to building a strong and dynamic education department. One result is that in many big companies, shopsteward training is being taken over by management - which is extremely dangerous for the union.

Affiliates need to adopt policies that recognise the central importance of training:

- every union should commit itself to dedicating 10% of its income to training and education for staff and shopstewards
- every union should outline a programme for building a strong, dynamic education department and education programmes
- an NOB in every affiliate should be allocated the portfolio of education and training
- unions should concentrate resources on negotiating sufficient time off for shopstewards for training and ensure that this time is used
- every organiser is an educator - all organisers should be equipped with basic education skills so that they can help train shopstewards as part of their daily work.

Training programmes should not just be seen as a way of imparting skills, but as a forum for workshopping, comparing and sharing ideas and experiences, and developing new solutions to problems. Also, in the trade union movement, education programmes provide a place where shopstewards or officials can come together and discuss the challenges facing their union, and its policies and strategies. In other words, it is a form of communication and information sharing - and can help deepen democracy in the organisation.

Courses should be developed

- for leadership and management development at national, regional and local levels, focusing on general and regional secretaries
- for worker office-bearers at all levels
- to develop staff skills and specialisation, including that of administrators, with the aim of strengthening union capacity and providing attractive career paths
- to empower shopstewards ("every shopsteward a trained shopsteward")
- to give every organiser basic education skills ("every organiser an educator").
- Training programmes on their own will not change the way an organisation functions. Training needs to be integrated with other aspects of OD. Too often in the unions we imagine that training and education will solve all capacity problems. There must be support and follow-up to ensure that people are able to apply what they have learnt, and to help them solve practical problems. In other words, the organisation itself must be a learning environment, and the learning that takes place in practical work in the organisation is probably as important as that which takes place in a formal programme.

Training must be seen as a *strategic function*. It should be integrated into the overall strategy of the union - its organising strategy, campaigns, collective bargaining programmes, etc.

- v. The importance of information and knowledge to effective trade unionism means that it is essential for unions to develop an effective communication system and strategy. A trade union is a complex, dynamic organisation. This means different structures and different levels of the organisation need different kinds of information. For example, the shopsteward local, the branch organiser, the regional administrator, the national organiser and the general secretary all need different kinds of information, or similar information in different forms.

There is also a wide range of sources of information - COSATU, the union NEC, the national employers' organisation or bargaining council, the industry pension fund, companies where the union is organised, the union's locals, etc.

There is, in other words, a complex web of information sources, flows and destinations. This means that information/communication is a strategic function for the trade union, and it needs to be actively managed. We recommend that each affiliate analyse its communication and information needs, and decide who should take responsibility for managing them. If necessary, a position of communications manager should be considered. A range of forms of communication should also be considered - from newsletter to fax to e-mail.