

BOOK 6



COSATU

COSATU 7th Central Committee

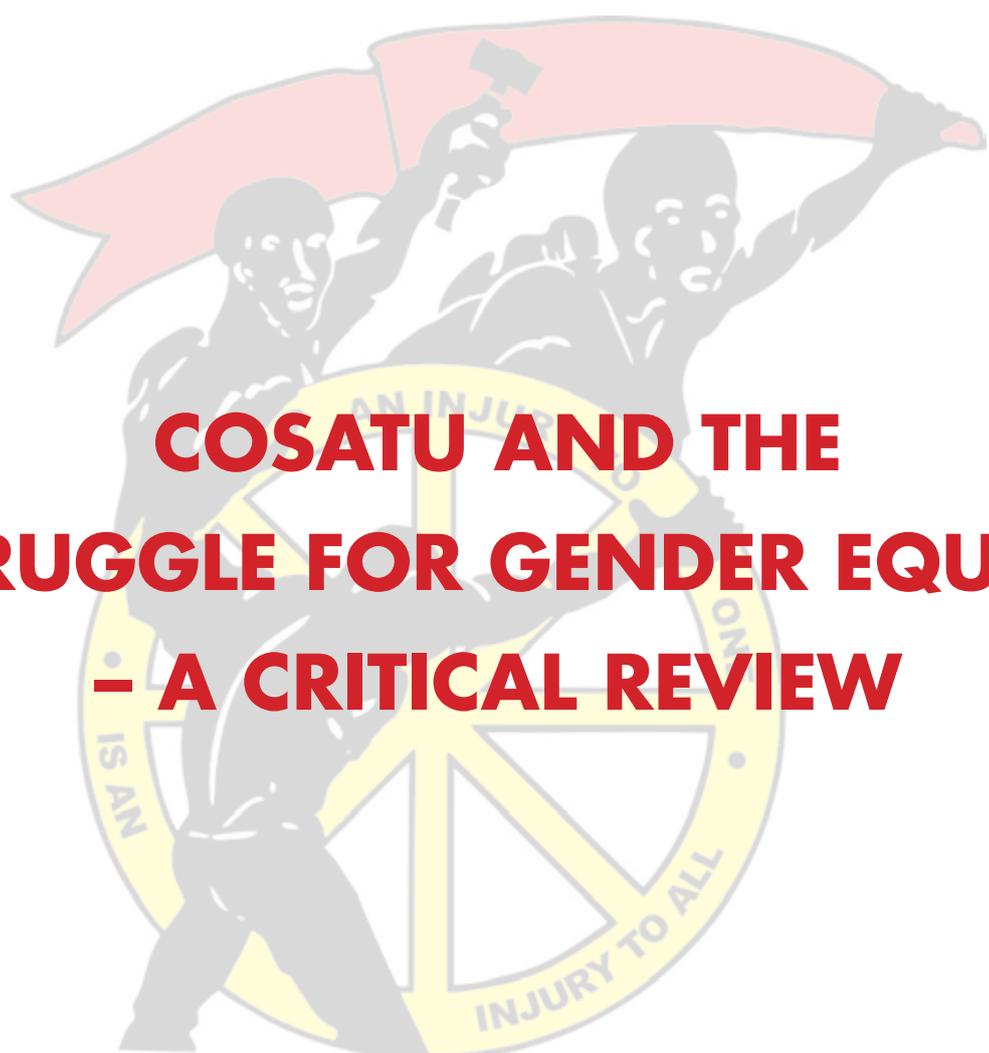
**20-23 September 2021
Virtual**

**COSATU and the Struggle for
Gender Equity - A Critical Review**



35 years of militant working class struggle!

*"Deepen the Back to Basics Campaign, Consolidate the Struggle
for the NDR & Advance the Struggle for Socialism"*



COSATU AND THE STRUGGLE FOR GENDER EQUITY - A CRITICAL REVIEW

COSATU



This paper reflects on the current challenges facing the Federation and its members in terms of the objectives of gender equity and women's emancipation.

The first section analyses the political, economic and social context in relations to gender issues from a working class perspective. The second section reflects on COSATU's gender policy priorities and campaigns with a view to emphasising what must be taken forward vigorously. COSATU has developed policies on a range of gender issues, the key challenge is to take forward concrete actions and implementation.

1. Analysing the political, economic and social context from a gendered perspective

1.1 The advancement of gender equity in South Africa

There have been many positive legislative and policy advancements towards gender equality, and significant progress with women's representation in state institutions in the past 25 years. However, this is not enough to achieve fundamental change towards non-sexism and women's emancipation. Inclusion of women in institutions of power certainly contributes towards creating conditions for the removal of gender inequalities, but it does not challenge the structural basis of these inequalities.

We need to take much more radical steps for far-reaching change. We need to change the economic configuration of society and the structural basis of women's oppression. We need to draw on socialist feminist traditions that point to the fact that central to women's ongoing oppression is the intersection of sexism, racism and capitalist exploitation. Capitalist relations of production depend on the unpaid care work of women and the restriction of women to low-wage sectors of the economy. Women's movements globally and at home have pointed to the ways in which women's bodies are sites of power relations, and the control of women's sexuality, mobility and reproductive capacities are core to the system of patriarchy.

Over the past 20 years the violent exclusion and exploitation of black working class women in the economy and the violence against women in society have not been the central focus of government interventions. Instead, these core issues have been edged out by a version of liberal feminism that delinks formal equality from the actual outcomes of equality. In other words, the focus on legislative change and representation, while important, must be accompanied by structural changes to truly address gender imbalances. We believe it is crucial to address this.

The gains that have been made for women in South Africa are legislative changes that afford equal opportunities and outlaw discrimination. These are important, but have not translated into substantive change for the majority of South African women.

The global neo-liberal capitalist economy has entrenched the structural conditions underpinning social and gender injustice, and liberal democracy cannot address this. Participation of women in political leadership has increased as a result of the quota, however this has not necessarily led to changes in the lives of the majority (black working-class women).

South Africa's political and public institutions have not been substantially transformed in relation to their responsiveness to gender and social inequalities.

Institutionalisation of gender demands (meaning the use of structures and institutions to achieve gender transformation) has depoliticised and demobilised the gender equity project. This has resulted in the dominance of bureaucratic processes and language and the continuation of gender-blind approaches, such as in the NDP, GEAR, ASGISA and other macro-economic and social policies (Gouws, 2014).



1.2 The gendered impact of neo-liberal globalisation and the informalisation of work

Neoliberal globalisation is characterised by increasing global financial trade and integration within a global capitalist economy. Neoliberalism has been described as a global class project to shift the balance of economic and social power in favour of capital and away from labour.

Precarious work is a strategy used by employers to increase profits by cutting back on wages and the costs of direct employment. As the International Labour Organisation (ILO) has put it: “Employers use precarious employment to lower costs and employment standards, and to undermine the strongholds of organized labour.”

Capitalism has always been characterised by precarious work forms, particularly for women, black people and migrants. But there has been an upsurge in the use of precarious work in the past three decades to squeeze profits and docility out of labour.

The capitalist economy “free rides” on care-giving activities which are essential to the reproduction of society, and this work is largely carried out by women.

Between 2000 and 2017, permanent employment dropped from 73% to 61% of formal employment. Non-permanent jobs increased by 371% in this same period (NALEDI, 2018). It is estimated that four out of ten workers in the formal sector are precarious workers. One assessment calculates that they earn, on average, half of what a permanent worker earns in South Africa. This is a far higher wage gap between precarious and permanent workers than in other countries.

Women predominate in precarious work and in the informal economy. This is the result of labour market segmentation, where women tend to occupy lower paid and low status jobs (due to lack of access to education and gender discrimination in pay and employment). It is also due to household responsibilities forming a barrier to formal employment. Some researchers have described this as gendered precarity.

There is a low level of union organisation amongst precarious workers. “Union density” measures the percentage of the workforce that are union members. It has declined in South Africa, from 47% in 1990 to 28% in 2017. This decline is closely linked with the growth in precarious employment. Less than 10% of precarious workers are unionised, compared with 43% of permanent workers in 2017.

Numbers and representation should not override the central goal of building working class power across society. Organising models must be predominantly driven by the principles of worker unity and solidarity as a foundation for union strength.

There is a dire need for union renewal based on working class solidarity and worker control, which will most likely come from below, and for recognition and support of the agency of precarious workers to advance workplace struggles.

1.3 Social reproduction and the crisis of care under capitalism

Social reproduction refers to unpaid reproductive labour in households, social provision of services and paid care work (such as nursing, cleaning and childcare). All three aspects are important in terms of public policy and economic interventions. Asking who does this work of social reproduction, who benefits and who bears the cost, exposes how power operates and how it is experienced in people’s lives. In South Africa this work of social reproduction is mostly performed by black, working-class women, either in their own homes or in a commodified form in the households of the dominant classes as domestic workers.

It is the crisis of social reproduction under capitalism, which places us in the crisis we are in generally, and has also exacerbated the Covid crisis. Under neo-liberal capitalism, public services and social welfare are increasingly cut back and women workers are drawn into low wage labour. Care work is commodified for those that can afford to pay for it, and privatised for those that cannot. Women and communities are forced to bear the brunt of hunger, poverty and the costs of social reproduction.



This also links to the food and hunger crisis, which has been exacerbated by Covid, but has long been an issue in South Africa. In fact, StatsSA reported that in 2019 (pre Covid-crisis) 6,6 million (11%) of South Africans went hungry.

It is black, working-class women who are the shock absorbers of the current climate crisis, experiencing most intensely the health hazards of exposure to carbon emissions and the devastating impacts of rising food prices, water pollution and energy poverty. These factors all mean that women have to work harder to stretch inadequate wages and social grants further.

Nancy Fraser, a Marxist feminist economist has analysed the crisis of care under capitalism, identifying how different phases of capitalism have organised social reproduction in different ways (especially in the North). The core of the argument put forward by Fraser (2016) is summarised here:

The emergence of capitalism intensified the gender division of labour through the physical separation and splitting off of production from social reproduction. Under previous social formations, production and reproduction were not physically separated in the same ways. The intensification of the gender division of labour affected working class women in particular, who were forced to carry the bulk of the load of reproductive labour, whilst also experiencing exploitation in order to earn a meagre wage in productive work.

Production was separated into factories and paid with cash wages, whereas social reproduction was relegated to the private domestic sphere and left unpaid. Social reproduction also occurs outside of the home and some aspects of this are commodified, but the separation is still core.

The gendered separation of social reproduction from economic production constitutes the principal institutional basis for women's subordination in capitalist societies.

Different periods in the history of capitalism consist of different regimes of accumulation – for example, liberal capitalism, state-managed (or social-democratic) capitalism, and neoliberal financialised capitalism – with distinct relations between production and reproduction.

The way in which social reproduction is organised changes under different phases of capitalism.

In the same way that we study trends in patterns of accumulation, it is important to analyse shifting trends in social reproduction for a deepened analysis of social and gender relations.

Under liberal capitalism, social reproduction was privatised in a separate household sphere and left to women in individual households to take responsibility, regardless of their time and resources to do so.

Under state-managed (social democratic) capitalism social reproduction was partially socialised through state and corporate provision of 'social welfare' (although colonies and post-colonies were excluded from this system, and the extraction of their resources helped to subsidise the 'social welfare' systems).

Under neoliberal financialised capitalism social reproduction is commodified and the 'crisis of care' is intensified to breaking point. This neoliberal capitalist regime has relocated manufacturing to low-wage regions, recruited women into the paid workforce, and promoted state and corporate disinvestment from social welfare.

This is the context in which we find ourselves, where women's labour both in the home and workplace is squeezed to breaking point.

We believe that there is a need to for COSATU to lead discussions about solidarity politics and solidarity economics which have emerged from both Socialist and Feminist traditions.

The focus on building the solidarity economy and a political culture of accountability and solidarity will help us to unite society, to include environmentally sustainable approaches to development, to integrate the best of indigenous African knowledge and tradition (especially ubuntu) in taking our country forward with the intention of eradication monopoly, greed and selfishness from our society and all its institutions and homes.



We want an economy that benefits all, and that recognises all. An economy that recognises and acknowledges the invisible unpaid labour of women. The economy and society must recognise the humanity and potential of every human being regardless of gender, disability, sexual orientation and gender identity. The economy needs to be transformed from one that has only a mercenary and utilitarian approach to men and women in the economy. It must be based on mutual and solidarity approaches. If the Covid pandemic has taught us anything it is that we can only survive and thrive in solidarity, in caring and supportive communities.

A wide range of struggles that directly relate to standards of living can potentially affect social reproduction and therefore gender relations. These include wages and working conditions, a living income for all, access to housing, healthy food, and communities and households free of violence. Issues such as climate change and other environmental concerns are clearly connected, inviting alliances.

1.4 The impact of Covid-19 on women and gender relations

We are currently facing a global health crisis, which has resulted in the deaths of many frontline workers, and has starkly revealed the vast inequalities in access to health care in our societies. The UN (2020) has stated that “it is not only a health crisis, it is a human crisis”.¹ We are at risk of undoing decades of progress in advancing women’s employment, as the pandemic plunges the working class into deeper poverty and unemployment.

According to the ILO (2020): “The pandemic has deepened pre-existing inequalities and exposed cracks in social, political and economic systems including access to health services and social protection. Women with care responsibilities, informal workers, low-income families, and youth are under particular pressure. Since the crisis began, there has been a significant rise in domestic violence.”²

The economic impact of Covid-19 on women workers has been devastating. During the hard lockdown, almost 2 million jobs were lost to women (66% of the 3 million jobs that were lost in total). In February 2020, or pre-Covid crisis, 46% of women and 59% of men aged 18 and older reported being employed. In April 2020, or the month of the ‘hard’ lockdown, 36% of women and 54% of men reported being employed (or having a job to return to). This amounts to a 22% decline in the share of women employed compared to a 10% decline in the share of men employed between February and April. The gender gap in employment has therefore grown, thus reversing gains that have been made in women’s employment (Casale & Posel, 2020).

Working hours and therefore income also declined disproportionately. Women’s working hours declined by 35% compared with 26% for men. The impact was highest for vulnerable workers - African women (and men) in low wage jobs. This requires that the ANC government does everything in its power to protect jobs and wages. It cannot be the working class, and working class women in particular that pay the price for Covid-19 whereas others are cushioned.

In addition, more women than men live with children and have greater responsibility for childcare, and have spent more hours on childcare lockdown.

Recent research in Gauteng shows that women are more vulnerable to being infected with Covid-19. Data from the Gauteng Department of Health shows that in December 2020 56% of women were infected with Covid-19, but only 50% of the population are women. By contrast, the death rates for men are slightly higher, which is in keeping with international trends, and relates to different immune response in women and men. The research study which shows higher levels of infection for women in Gauteng highlights a number of factors which contribute to gendered vulnerability to infection.

¹ United Nations (2020) <https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-03/SG-Report-Socio-Economic-Impact-of-Covid19.pdf>

² The COVID-19 response: Getting gender equality right for a better future for women at work (ILO) May 2020 https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/-dgreports/-gender/documents/publication/wcms_744374.pdf



These include:

- Larger numbers of women in higher-contact care and frontline work (such as nurses, cleaners and cashiers)
- Women rely more on public transport
- Women are more likely to live in crowded conditions
- Women are less likely to have access to medical aid
- Women are more likely to visit health care facilities while seeking health care for themselves and those in their care (children and the elderly)
- Women are more likely to be social grant recipients and have to stand in long queues

COSATU and its international union sisters have also highlighted the issue of personal protective equipment as a key vulnerability for all workers. In addition, women face further vulnerability because PPE in hospitals is not designed to fit women's bodies. We have a global problem with PPE that is designed for male European bodies.

Covid-19 has further exposed the huge gaps in social protection and access to paid sick leave. Since women play a larger role in social reproduction in households and communities these gaps impact them disproportionately.

All of these challenges require strong interventions regarding access to quality health care, implementation of universal health coverage through the NHI, access to properly fitting PPE for women workers, access to safe transport, paid sick leave and social protection. Every intervention made by the ANC government will continue to be undermined by corruption, which is the looting of the state. We must deal uncompromisingly with all cases of corruption.

1.5 Gender Equity and Collective Bargaining

COSATU held a Collective Bargaining Conference in 2020, where we re-asserted the point that collective bargaining can make a significant difference for women workers, by reducing the gender pay gap, combatting low pay, valuing women's work and addressing gender discrimination and safety in the workplace. The most critical issues facing our people, and black working class women in particular, are hunger, joblessness, poverty, gender-based violence and the Covid pandemic. Radical responses to these issues must be at the heart of all ANC policies and government interventions. As the ANC NGC document on social cohesion notes, Africa working class and rural women are the main victims of poverty. The document further notes that while poverty decreased after 1994, it has been increasing since 2011. However, what is not acknowledged, is that it is the ANC's neo-liberal and gender-blind macro-economic policies that are deepening poverty and inequality in our country.

Expenditure of public services, in particular public sector employment, since public sector workers are the heartbeat of public services, is a critical economic intervention for gender equity. The quality, availability and accessibility of health, education and social services are critical for women as primary caregivers. Furthermore, the public sector is critical as an important employer of women, precisely because public sector employment usually offers better job security, working conditions and pay than private sector employment. It is the role of the public sector to lead the private sector in terms of its treatment of workers, yet our ANC government is going against its own policies and legal obligations, and encouraging the private sector to disregard collective bargaining, which is a core right of workers. It is deeply disappointing for us as workers, that our ANC government (which states its commitment to represent the interests of the vulnerable and the working class in the ANC NGC documents) has cut black public sector wage expenditure and in effect public services, and has further failed to respond to the crisis facing the working class through its national budget.



The **Gender Wage Gap** is another critical issue that has not been adequately addressed. Women in South Africa earn 70% of what men earn, on average. Women with no education earn half (50%) of what men with no education earn. South Africa has the world's highest wage inequality overall. The average earnings of black people are three times lower than for white people.

Given the over-representation of women in low-paying jobs, minimum wages can also make a contribution to lowering gender wage gaps. Minimum wages work best in concert with strong collective bargaining, to ensure that the minimum does not become the maximum. As mentioned earlier, the attack on collective bargaining in the public sector has a significant impact on the gender wage gap

The demands for Equal Pay for Equal Work and Equal Pay for Work of Equal Value must be taken forward in policies and campaigns. There is no justification for pay inequity between women and men.

While we have parental rights provided for in our labour legislation we still have a long way to go. While we have basic minimum rights enshrined in law, only a few sectors have gone beyond these rights, and most vulnerable workers and labour broker workers cannot access them because they are not able to access maternity pay.

Access to basic rights is essential to address the basic practical needs of women who earn lower wages, yet have greater social reproduction responsibilities. *"The struggle for a minimum wage should be augmented with the struggle for a social wage, and linked with struggles for access to water, electricity, land, food, comprehensive social security, and decent work. Women have limited access to social security rights, and those in the informal economy, domestic work, and farm work are not protected at all when they fall pregnant or lose their income."* COSATU Gender Policy (2015)

The demand for a universal basic income grant is a key element in expanding social protection.

Furthermore, feminist economists have found that providing access to childcare and social services have significant gendered economic impact.

1.6 Gender-based Violence and Sexual Harassment

Gender-based Violence and Sexual Harassment is another key issue that affects women, families and gender non-conforming people severely.

The global pandemic of violence against women, children and LGBTQIA+ has been intensified by this health and economic crisis. Food insecurity and economic insecurity are known to be associated with gender-based violence. GBVF includes physical, economic, sexual, and psychological abuse as well as rape, sexual harassment, trafficking of women for sex, sexual exploitation and femicide.

COSATU Gender Policy highlights the drivers of gender based violence as systemic and institutionalised within the capitalist patriarchal system: "Socio-economic conditions and patriarchal attitudes that justify and perpetuate abuse of women, are driving the staggeringly high rates of domestic violence and rape in South Africa."

Over 2000 cases of GBV were reported during the first week of lockdown, at least 30% more than during the same period in 2019.³ A rapid assessment survey conducted during hard lockdown found that 25% of Thuthuzela care centres (government-run one-stop sexual assault resource centres) were unavailable and 40% of shelters were unreachable at this time.⁴

Since the start of the pandemic, there has been a worldwide increase in domestic violence; online harassment; assaults, threats and abuse of workers by the public, patients and customers; mental, emotional and verbal abuse at work and home; and sexual harassment at work.

³ <https://www.msf.org.za/news-and-resources/latest-news/south-africa-sexual-and-gender-based-violence-concern-during-covid>

⁴ [https://www.amfar.org/uploadedFiles/_amfarorg/Articles/In_The_Lab/2020/IB-GBV-Rapid-Assessment-082520\(1\).pdf](https://www.amfar.org/uploadedFiles/_amfarorg/Articles/In_The_Lab/2020/IB-GBV-Rapid-Assessment-082520(1).pdf)



In South Africa, we have had an ongoing epidemic of gender-based violence for many years. A dedicated GBV population-based study on women in Gauteng (2011) has shown that more than 1 in 3 women (38%) have ever experienced physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence (IPV), 19% reported sexual IPV, and 46% reported economic or emotional abuse.⁵ Many studies show that prevalence rates are actually way higher than reported cases, some estimate that over 50% of women have experienced some form of gender-based violence. Studies show that there are very high levels of sexual abuse reported by children (in one study 46% of sexual abuse complainants were children).

The National Strategic Plan on Gender-based Violence and Femicide

The *National Strategic Plan on Gender-based Violence and Femicide* was adopted in March 2020 after women mobilised in their thousands to end gender-based violence. The NSP GBVF arises from the 24 demands put forward by women who marched across the country in 2018 in outrage against GBVF under the banner of the #TotalShutdown.

The key actions that need to be taken to end gender-based violence, as contained in the National Strategic Plan are as follows:

- Harness ALL to respond to the crisis and ensure **coordination** driven by bold leadership and political commitment to end violence
- Demand **accountability** across the state and societal institutions
- Put in place **prevention** measures to STOP violence before it happens
- Provide **victim-centred**, survivor focused, accessible quality services
- Address the **structural drivers** of GBV, especially poverty, unemployment and hunger
- **Collect** data on the nature and prevalence of GBV to ensure informed responses

The NSP GBVF aims to increase capacity and to coordinate the national response to the crisis of GBVF. This requires resources to be budgeted by the state for the fight against GBVF at all levels of government. We welcome the amended legislation on domestic violence. However, legislation will have no impact without resources for implementation, including training, victim-friendly police stations and courts, accessible health facilities, Thuthuzela care centres (one-stop facilities for victims of rape), domestic violence shelters and legal aid support.

Regarding national GBVF policy, it is critical that we move speedily with legislation to enable the establishment of the National Council against GBVF and with clear budget allocation for the implementation of the NSP. We cannot deal with this pandemic of violence without resources for policing, courts, shelters, health and care centres.

Informal Economy Workers

In Africa, the majority of street vendors are women. In South Africa, 68% of street vendors are women. Street vendors have little protection from violence, harassment, police brutality and theft. Waste pickers work under unsafe and brutal conditions. Domestic workers have little recourse and protection when they are beaten, threatened or raped. All of these workers are informal economy workers. The public and private spaces where they work are often not seen as “the workplace” yet their experiences of violence and harassment are very real. Low earnings, low status, dangerous or poor working conditions, and inadequate living conditions leave informal workers at a high risk of violence in the world of work. Informal workers are commonly excluded from labour legislation. Lockdowns across the world have devastated the earnings and employment of informal workers, and yet they received little or no government support.

⁵ National Strategic Plan to end Gender-based Violence (2020)



Informal workers must be included in social protection measures and government relief efforts. It is also essential that local and national governments improve access to services, including street lighting safe toilets and safe public transport.

ILO Convention 190 on the Elimination of Violence and Harassment in the world of work,

COSATU has been campaigning for the ratification of ILO Convention 190 on the Elimination of Violence and Harassment in the world of work, which covers all workers, including the informal economy. The Convention recognises that violence and harassment can occur during travel to and from work, at social events related to work, or while working outside of the physical workplace. It also recognises that work spaces can be public places and households.

This Convention is significant because it recognises that the definition of the workplace in existing laws and regulations is very narrow. C190 talks about the world of work rather than 'the workplace'. The world of work includes public and private work spaces and the informal economy. C190 covers all workers irrespective of their contractual status – including job seekers, volunteers, interns and apprentices.

The Convention further recognises that there some workers are particularly vulnerable to violence due to the nature of their work, including workers dealing with the public, in hospitality, health, transport and education, as well as workers in isolated environments, such as domestic workers, mine workers and municipal workers, and those working at night.

C190 also recognises that Violence and harassment can occur during travel to and from work, at social events related to work, or while dealing with customers and third parties outside of the physical workplace.

COSATU and its unions have been highlighting the dangers of late trading for workers who end work late and do not have transport to get home safely. COSATU unions have been campaigning and bargaining for years for paid transport from employers and safe public transport from the state. The demand **for accessible, safe and affordable public transport** and employer-provided transport is an important element of the campaign for women's safety in our communities.

By ratifying C190 our government will have to ensure that our legislation is broadened to protect all workers, types of work and working environments. We must pressurise government to sign this convention, noting that they have not signed any new conventions since 2013.

This will ensure that trade unions and employers also negotiate workplace policies with procedures for handling cases of violence and sexual harassment, and put in place preventative measures. We must ensure that we protect all workers, including LGBTQIA+ workers who are also harassed and subjected to violence and discrimination.

The ANC NGC Document (2020) on gender boldly raised the reality that gender-based violence and sexual harassment are cancers in our own organisations, that must be dealt with firmly, without fear or favour and with utmost principle. But this commitment must go beyond a policy statement. The ANC and its Alliance partners must take a firm and uncompromising resolution that no leader accused or convicted of any form of gender based-violence should hold public or political office.

We need to develop codes of discipline that will assist us in taking action when our values are not upheld and implement these disciplinary codes fearlessly.



2. COSATU's Role and Perspectives on Gender Relations and Women's Emancipation

As described above, we have not been able to make a significant impact on unequal gender relations in society. Women continue to be discriminated against both in society and in the workplace. There is ongoing discrimination in the workplace on the basis of gender, race and class. Black women workers are in the most vulnerable and lowest paid occupations. Women continue to experience sexual harassment and gender-based violence at work, at home and in public spaces.

COSATU and its affiliates have large numbers of women members, but leadership continues to be dominated by men. We have achieved parity in the COSATU National Office Bearer structure, with three women and three men. We have elected a woman as President of COSATU for the first time in our history, and this is a significant step forward. But we still have a long way to go in terms of women's representation in COSATU CEC and affiliate leadership.

In this section, we highlight some of the gender policy and campaign issues that COSATU is currently focused on, that require intensification, full implementation and support. First, we reflect on how we analysed the state of gender relations 20 years ago.

2.1 How did COSATU describe the state of gender relations 20 years ago?

Reflecting back on some of the issues raised in the COSATU CEC Discussion Paper on Gender (2001) which was twenty years ago, we can see that there has been some movement in terms of representation of women in leadership, but very little else has changed in terms of gender power relations in trade unions and the workplace. The following extract from the COSATU CEC Discussion Paper (2001) characterising gender relations, remains true today:

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

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

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

Notwithstanding this progress, COSATU's record in the struggle for gender equality has been marred by significant resistance and a lack of political seriousness. Nowadays many male leaders in COSATU are familiar with the appropriate policies and approach on gender issues, but outside of formal meetings they still make jokes about "this gender issue". Debates on gender issues are still characterised by defensiveness and accusations, rather than constructive engagement with implementation strategies. Instead of decisions and action being taken, gender issues are often deferred indefinitely. Most comrades become indifferent when gender issues are on the table, and gender coordinators are blamed for the resultant failures, yet there is a lack of collective leadership and accountability.



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

The above extract demonstrates that we have a long way to go.

We have adopted a range of important policy perspectives on gender, which we highlight below. The key challenge is building an organisational and political movement for change.

2.2 The Vision of the COSATU Gender Policy

COSATU and its Affiliates are guided by a commitment to build a society free of sexism, racism, class exploitation, and other forms of oppression. We want a future where women and men participate equally and without barriers in the Federation, the economy and society. We want a society where women are emancipated from all forms of oppression in unions, the household, the workplace and in broader society. We have a vision of a trade union movement that is a home for women workers.

COSATU's gender perspective

A 'gendered perspective' aims to mainstream and integrate gender struggles, rather than seeing these struggles as women's issues that are taken up in a separate and isolated way.

Within a patriarchal system, while both women and men are affected by gender roles, it is women that are oppressed, and men that have power and privilege. It is therefore important that our central goal is the emancipation of women. The strategy to achieve this involves organising women to come together in solidarity and unity against their oppression, and also recognising the importance of male allies. Gender struggles are union struggles and not women's struggles alone. However, women must take leadership for their own liberation. Male allies in the gender struggle must guard against acting in ways that reinforce their power and privilege.

The struggle for gender equality will bring visible benefits to society by:

- eliminating barriers to women's participation in productive activity,
- making social reproduction a social responsibility, and
- expanding access to basic needs and services for all.

We must clearly distinguish between gender equality and gender equity. **Gender Equity** is not the same as equal rights and opportunities for women and men, it recognises the unequal position of women in relation to men, and that addressing this requires different treatment to ensure equality in access and outcomes (COSATU, 2020).

Gender Equity means "fairness of treatment for women and men, according to their respective needs. This may include equal treatment or treatment that is different but which is considered equivalent in terms of rights, benefits, obligations and opportunities" (ILO, 2000).

2.3 COSATU Gender Policy Commitments

COSATU Gender Policy states that gender inequality will not disappear on its own. We need clear and conscious strategies to eliminate gender inequality within the organisation and society.



This requires specific measures, including:

- building women's leadership and participation in the Federation;
- electing women as shop stewards;
- building activist women's structures and gender structures;
- creating gender-aware unions and policies;
- employment of gender coordinators;
- budgeted gender programmes;
- gendered collective bargaining demands
- the elimination of discrimination and gender stereotyping

The measure of gender equality is women's full and equal participation at all levels of trade union organisation.

2.4 Constitutional Amendments

COSATU has made significant amendments to our Constitution. We have constitutionalised gender structures. We have committed to establishing gender structures at all levels of COSATU. We have stipulated that these gender structures must be represented in all COSATU constitutional structures.

Our Constitution states that the Federation's structures and activities must be composed of at least 50% women. We have committed the CEC to monitoring the implementation of the COSATU Gender Policy.

Gender committees retain power to address any matter of gender discrimination and of failure to implement organisational gender policies.

2.5 Strategies for Increasing Women's Representation in Leadership

COSATU Affiliates have used various strategies to increase women's representation in leadership.

These are some examples:

- Additional ex-officio positions on constitutional structures
- Portfolio positions
- Reserved seats for women in decision-making structures of the union
- Quota systems including fixed and proportional representation
- Representation of sector co-ordinators on constitutional structures
- Company-based gender structures
- Reserved seats for young women in decision-making structures of the union

We have made progress with representation of women in leadership structures, however, women continue to predominate in positions such as Deputy President and Treasurer, and we have not seen a significant change in male domination in union structures.

2.6 The COSATU Policy and Procedure for the Handling, Prevention and Elimination of Sexual Harassment

Gender-based violence, including sexual harassment is a manifestation of unequal power relations between women and men and serves to perpetuate inequalities.



Gender-based violence impacts women’s lives harshly, and it can take place at home, in the workplace or in public spaces. Sexual harassment is a violation of human rights, a form of discrimination, and a health and safety issue. Where it occurs, it should be seriously addressed and the victims protected. Women are primarily the victims of sexual harassment. They are often unaware of their rights and afraid of retaliation or of losing their jobs.

The COSATU Policy advances a three-pronged approach to sexual harassment, which includes:

- procedures for handling cases of sexual harassment
- prevention measures
- strategies for eliminating sexual harassment

The COSATU Policy and Procedure for the Handling, Prevention and Elimination of Sexual Harassment must be popularised and implemented throughout the Federation. This includes education and awareness raising, training of sexual harassment officers and the implementation of clear and proper procedures.

The COSATU Policy and Procedure for the Handling, Prevention and Elimination of Sexual Harassment commits COSATU and Affiliates to specific actions:

- A complaints procedure that will enable and encourage the victim to raise the issue of harassment in a supportive and confidential context, with protection from retaliation;
- Dealing with cases of sexual harassment rapidly and thoroughly through a clear disciplinary procedure;
- Information and education campaigns for all members and staff on the various forms of sexual harassment and the fact that it will not be tolerated.

It is essential that COSATU establishes the Commissions for the Prevention of Sexual Harassment at national, provincial, and local levels (where possible) as set out in the Policy. Commission members expected to provide support and advice, awareness raising, ensure that all allegations of sexual harassment are investigated and that the procedures for handling cases are adhered to.

It is also critical to establish standing disciplinary committees for handling cases of sexual harassment as envisaged by the Policy. This is crucial because we must ensure that cases are handled by persons that have the necessary skills and experience. Disciplinary committee members must be properly trained, and these committees should be chaired by an independent chairperson to ensure fairness.

2.7 Parental Rights, Maternity Protection and Childcare

Fighting for a package of parental rights for all workers is important to ensure that:

- women are not discriminated against on the grounds of pregnancy
- parents are not discriminated against for taking time off work to care for their children
- women and men are able to participate in all aspects of family and working life
- infants and children receive the necessary care

SACCAWU’s mobilising slogan Workers are parents too! articulates the important understanding that workers must be able to balance their work and family lives. Without the struggle by trade unions to fight for various rights for parents, employers will continue to see workers as their tools for profit, and not human beings with families and lives of their own.



COSATU Affiliates must continue to campaign and bargain for the following demands:

- Paid maternity leave
- Paid and unpaid parental leave
- Childcare leave
- Flexible working time
- Provision of childcare facilities
- Breaks and facilities for breastfeeding mothers
- Job security and health and safety for pregnant women

2.8 Organising Women Workers

Women tend to occupy the most vulnerable, lowest status and lowest paid occupations. While some vulnerable workers may have their own associations, many remain unorganised and are therefore unable to defend their rights. COSATU has committed itself to the strategic objective of organising vulnerable sectors and vulnerable layers of workers, which are predominantly women. This requires a shift in mind-set, organising style and approach.

3. Conclusion

Building Solidarity is essential to organising, collective action and bargaining. We can define solidarity as a shared commitment to take collective action for change.

For the survival of trade unions, we must organise and build solidarity for all workers, including and especially vulnerable and precarious workers and women workers.

We need a strong and united trade union movement that is able to advance all workers struggles collectively.

In conclusion, we have argued that the living and working conditions of black working class women must be at the centre of our struggles for women's emancipation and non-sexism. We must advance policies and campaigns to challenge the structural basis of women's oppression and the unequal gender, race and class power relations in our society. We must work tirelessly to challenge sexist attitudes and behaviours, and ensure that we completely eliminate all forms of gender-based violence.

We need a radical shift from the demand for inclusion within the unchanged patriarchal racialised capitalist system, to fundamental transformation of the system as a whole. We need a strong women's movement which seeks to challenge gender roles and advance a democratic vision of society in which gender, race and class are no longer the basis for hierarchies of power and control.



References

- Cock, J. (2018) The Climate Crisis and a “Just-Transition” in South Africa: An Eco-Feminist Socialist Perspective
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/10.18772/22018020541.15.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3A0548ebc657871222ae2e363e9199923d>
- COSATU (2001) Gender: A Struggle within the Struggle. COSATU National Gender Committee: CEC Discussion Paper on Gender http://mediadon.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Gender_struggle-within-struggle.pdf
- COSATU (2020) Gender Equity and Collective Bargaining. Bargaining Conference Resource Document. http://mediadon.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/COSATU-Resource-document-equity-and-collective-bargaining_final-draft_November-2020.pdf
- Fraser, N. (2016) Capitalism’s Crisis of Care. Dissent Magazine. <https://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/nancy-fraser-interview-capitalism-crisis-of-care>
- Gouws, A. (2014) Contextualising the attainment of gender equality in South Africa. Keynote address to Agenda Feminist Dialogue. Retrieved from <http://www.agenda.org.za/report-on-feminist-dialogue-whos-afraid-of-feminism-the-state-of-gender-equality-20-years-after-the-democratic-transition/>
- Hassim, S. (2006) Women’s Organisations and Democracy in South Africa: Contesting Authority. University of Wisconsin Press.
- ILO (2020) The COVID-19 response: Getting gender equality right for a better future for women at work (ILO) May 2020 https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/-dgreports/-gender/documents/publication/wcms_744374.pdf
- NALEDI (2018) Worker Education Consolidated Research Report. Commissioned by HRDC Worker Education Standing Committee.
- Parker, Maree, Gotz and Khanyile (2020). How Covid-19 puts women at more risk in Gauteng. 21 December 2020. <https://theconversation.com/how-covid-19-puts-women-at-more-risk-than-men-in-gauteng-south-africa-150570>
- United Nations (2020) <https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-03/SG-Report-Socio-Economic-Impact-of-Covid19.pdf>



COSATU CENTRAL COMMITTEE 20 – 23rd September, 2021

Programme

DAY ONE – 20th SEPTEMBER 2021		
Chairperson – 1 st Deputy President, Mike Shingange		
Registration	ALL	08h30 – 9h30
• Opening and Welcome	1 st Deputy President	09h30 – 9h40
• National Anthem (e-rendition)	ALL	09h40 – 9h50
• Moment of Silence (to honour those who have departed)	ALL	09h50 – 9h55
• Presentation and Adoption of Credentials	Deputy General Secretary, Solly Phetoe	09h55 – 10h15
• Adoption of the Agenda	General Secretary, Bheki Ntshalintshali	10h15 – 10h30
• Presentation and Adoption of the Central Committee House Rules	Deputy General Secretary, Solly Phetoe	10h30 – 10h45
• Acknowledgement of Guests	General Secretary Bheki Ntshalintshali	10h45 – 11h00
• Confirmation of the Minutes of the 6 th Central Committee (2017)	General Secretary Bheki Ntshalintshali	11h00 – 11h30
• Opening Address by COSATU President	President, Zingiswa Losi	11h30 – 12h15
• Message of Support by the ANC	ANC President, Cyril Ramaphosa	12h15 – 12h45
LUNCH	LUNCH	12h45 – 13h45
• Presentation of Secretariat Report (Political, organisational, Socio- economic and International)	General Secretary, Bheki Ntshalintshali	13h45 – 17h00
DAY TWO – 21st SEPTEMBER 2021		
Chairperson – President, Zingiswa Losi		
• Message of Support by the SACP	General Secretary Dr Blade Nzimande	09h00 -9h30
• Presentation of the Discussion Documents and outline the process of Commissions	General Secretary, Bheki Ntshalintshali	09h30 – 10h30
• Break into Commissions	ALL	10h30 – 17h00
• Resolutions Consolidation & Drafting Begins	Resolutions & Drafting Committee with Scribes and Rapporteurs	17h00 – 20h00
DAY THREE – 22nd SEPTEMBER 2021		
Chairperson – 2 nd Deputy President, Louise Thipe		
• Report back from Commissions and Resolutions Discussions	Chairperson	09h00 – 11h30
• International messages of Solidarity	Fraternal organisations	11h00 – 12h00
LUNCH	LUNCH	12h00 – 13h00
• Report-backs from Commissions and Resolutions Discussions (Continue)	Chairperson	13h00 – 17h00
• International messages of Solidarity	Fraternal organisations	30 mins
• Resolutions & Drafting Committee Continue	Resolutions & Drafting Committee Convenor Solly Phetoe	17h00 – 20h00
Day FOUR – 23rd SEPTEMBER 2021		
Chairperson – 1 st Deputy President, Mike Shingange		
• Presentation of Draft Declaration for consideration	Chairperson	09h00 – 10h00
• Discussions and Adoption of Declaration	Chairperson	10h00 – 11h00
• Closing Remarks by COSATU President	President, Zingiswa Losi	13h00 – 13h30

Head Office

COSATU House, 110 Jorissen Street, Corner Simmonds Street, Johannesburg • P O Box 1019 Johannesburg 2000 • Tel: 011 339 4911