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Inequality within and among nations: causes, effects and responses

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## ***Gender regimes and inequalities in labour markets, pay and trade union leaderships – the case of South Africa***

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### **Introduction**

In a world where women make up around half the workforce and are increasingly constituting the majority of trade union membership, gender inequality nevertheless still underpins global inequalities. This is due to complex and shifting power relations, some of which we explore in this paper.

We focus on the main theme of the GLU conference; inequality through a gender analysis using research with South African women in COSATU as an illustrative case study.

We do so by first drawing on secondary data and statistical evidence published in/by South African organisations, as well as the wider literature. We use the widening gender pay gap as an indicator and outcome of gender segregation and inequality in South African labour markets, both formal and informal, and where the pay gap is being linked to sexual harassment in the workplace and gender-based violence in the broader South African society. We go on to discuss the paradox of such a situation in a state where trade union density remains relatively high and collective bargaining the main method/route of setting workplace pay and conditions.

Drawing on our own empirical research with female [mainly] South African leaders and activists<sup>1</sup>, we discuss the relative absence of women in union positions of power and leadership, and from the negotiating table. This is especially significant since our findings include the view of COSATU activists that collective bargaining is the most important aspect of trade union leadership. Through analysis of questionnaire surveys, group discussions and interviews as well as observations at union conferences and meetings in South Africa, we evaluate union strategies for women's voice and for gender democracy and leadership in trade unions.

Through our analysis we conclude that gender trade union deficits are closely implicated in the gender inequality regimes in South Africa.

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## **Patriarchy, gender, race and power**

Patriarchy as an imperialist power structure; actually, to quote black feminist bell hooks, an "imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy" [2001] characterised South African gender and race politics, describing the interlocking political systems that were the foundation of the nation's apartheid politics, some of which continue to resonate today.

hooks identifies patriarchy as 'a political-social system that insists that males are inherently dominating, superior to everything and everyone deemed weak, especially females, and endowed with the right to dominate and rule over the weak and to maintain that dominance through various forms of psychological terrorism and violence' [2003]. Recognising how these applied under apartheid, and women's part in the anti-apartheid struggle, the South African constitution [1995] puts gender equality as a founding promise of the post-apartheid State<sup>2</sup>, with a range of policies to implement this, such as Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) and Affirmative Action (AA). South Africa's success in bringing about gender equality was seen as most visible in the area of politics and decision making, particularly in national parliament where in 2009 43-45% of MPs and 41% of cabinet ministers were women, and 5 of the 9 provincial premiers are women. Additionally, women's representation in provincial parliaments also stood at 41% and in the private sector 18.6% of executive positions are held by women [Geisler et al 2009, Mbola 2009]. Following a 2010 reshuffle some women ministers lost their portfolios and were replaced by men [Bua News 2010]

But labour unions are seen as less positive, yet the work for gender equality has for many years met with considerable resistance from male members report Geisler et al [2009]. They write that a resolution on the sexual code of conduct was blocked at the 1989 COSATU Congress and it took seven years for COSATU to adopt a policy against sexual harassment. Calls for quotas for women in union leadership have also consistently been resisted. Although COSATU has a National Gender Unit which consists of a National Gender Coordinator assisted by a National Gender Coordinating Committee with representatives of senior management, workers and researchers, the gender coordinator in 2009, reported similar constraints as many government GFPs, such as being in charge of a wide range of activities and facing resistance. In general gender equality goals are not seen as part of policy work in COSATU [Geisler et al 2009]. Despite progressive resolutions adopted at the 3<sup>rd</sup> National Gender Conference [NGC] in 2012, two years later proposals for implementation, such as those against sexual harassment have not been implemented, and this lack of progress has had negative effects within the Confederation. Similarly the Equal Pay for Work of Equal Value declaration has not been actioned.

### **and pay gaps**

So gender and race hierarchies remain, and indeed are seemingly consolidated through hook's patriarchal 'imperialist supremacy'. The race categories used under apartheid continue and race is an important identifier of earnings/wages hierarchies, with whites as the highest earners, then Asians, followed by Coloureds and finally Blacks at the bottom [Allanson et al 2002]. Research carried out in 2009 found a race pay gap of between 30%-

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<sup>2</sup> "the state may not unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone on one or more grounds, including race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language, and birth" (Section 9(1)).

55%, with blacks at the bottom and whites at the top [Maciej and Tyrowicz 2009]. Thus, median wages of white earners are four times as high as those of black earners, of skilled employees six times as high as those of unskilled employees, and of unionised employees twice as high as those of non-unionised workers [SAIRR 2013].

According to Cosatu (2013), the top 5% earners earn 30 times more than the bottom 5% on a monthly basis; white people earn in an hour what African workers earn in a day. Executive directors of the top 40 JSE listed companies continue to increase their salaries and bonuses by almost 25% and 56% respectively. At the same time, the private sector continues to pay white men nine times more than black men and white women nine times more than black women respectively. Moreover, labour brokering has become rampant targeting women mostly in the service sectors of the economy such as retail, hospitality, security, call centres etc. On a positive note, overall, household incomes more than doubled during the 10 years period from 2001 to 2011. However, the University of Johannesburg's Social Change Research Unit, claims that there have been limited gains for the working class in post-apartheid South Africa hence the widened gender wage gaps. Ncube and Treggenna find that the gender wage gap among black South African workers can be located within the 'sticky floor effect' paradigm where the gender wage gap widens at lower levels of the wage distribution. Gender wage gaps have persisted in post-apartheid South Africa [2013]

Black women, on average, are the lowest paid workers. These are women working in private households, not belonging to a union, and aged between 15 and 24 [Statistics South Africa 2013] There are a number of factors involved; black women still have less access to education and other services than white women and the majority of black men. Additionally violence against women is a major characteristic of gender power relations in South Africa where the rate of sexual violence is among the highest in the world; indeed in 2013 it was rated as the highest [Huffington Post]. The United Nations reported in November 2013 that research in Gauteng Province in 2010 found that over half (51.3%) of women had experienced some form of violence in their lifetime and 75.5% of men admitted to perpetrating some form of violence against women at one point in their lives.

In July 2013, the SA Statistician General released a report on National Gender Equity showing that the wage gap between men and women continues to cause concern, with poorly-paid women still most at risk of poverty and violence. The report identified links between the lack of access to education, and observed that the interaction between race and gender placed black African women at a particular disadvantage. In 2012 the ITUC report 'Frozen in Time' on gender pay, identified South Africa as having one of the largest **unexplained** gender pay gaps [ITUC 2012]. In 2013, women earned on average 34% less than their male counterparts, compared to 33% a year earlier. The pay gap is at its lowest in the non-profit sector at 5%. In the public sector it is 27%, with the private sector pay gap rising to 35.5%. When it comes to industry sectors, the trade, transport and hospitality sector pay gap was 24%, followed by commercial services, agriculture, manufacturing and building at 35%.[Hay 2013]. While clearly inequalities are rooted in race, class and gender, the reality is more complex. A recent study of South African farm workers (Munakamwe and Jinnah 2013 forthcoming) attributes wage inequalities to economic sectors and employment status. Indeed, female vulnerable sectors of the economy like agriculture, domestic work, cleaners, security and call centres are poorly paid due to their gendered dimension and men working in such sectors find themselves in the same wage category as those of their female counterparts (see also Cobble 1996).

## Pay and union membership effects

It is well known that trade union membership confers a wage premium on union members. This varies in reports from around 30% to less than 10% and is dependent on a number of variables, including gender and skill level.

Research findings show that in the USA the long-term private-sector union wage premium for men has remained fairly steady at nearly 22% over the period 1990 to 2010. For women, the wage premium exhibits greater volatility, although with no clear downward trend, and is approximately one-half of the male premium [Gabriel and Schmitz 2014].

In other countries, unionisation has been found to lower the male-female earnings differential by increasing female earnings significantly more than that of male earnings (cf. Doiron and Riddell 1994, Aidt and Tzannatos 2002) [Casale and Posel 2008].

So it is in the interests of both genders to be union members. Indeed as mentioned above, pay of unionised workers in SA is twice as high as those of non-unionised workers. However even with wage premia derived from trade union membership, gender and race pay gaps persist. There is an argument that according to the 'equalisation hypothesis', whereby unions attempt to achieve equal absolute pay increases for all workers, the result *should be* a decline in gender and race pay gaps [Wunnava and Peled 1999] [our italics].

Daniela Casale and Dorrit Posel [2008] discuss how studies of the wage effects of unions in South Africa have been largely concerned with the impact of union membership on the wages of African and white male workers. Consistent with findings in the international literature, these studies have concluded that unions compress the distribution of wages in South Africa, and, more specifically, that racial inequality is lower in the union sector compared to the non-union sector. In 2006, 27 percent of female employees in South Africa were unionised, while the comparable figure for men was 33 percent. For both men and women, average hourly wages among union workers were substantially higher than among non-union workers. In the latter half of the period, on average, male union members were earning twice as much, and female union members three times as much, as their non-union counterparts. A much higher proportion of workers in union jobs reports having a written contract with their employer, receiving paid leave, medical aid and pension benefits [ibid: 11].

Yet, Casale and Posel find that contrary to initial expectations, the size of the gender wage gap is higher within the unionised sector than in the non-unionised sector. They attribute their findings to a number of factors, including the kinds of jobs that are unionised and the occupational distribution by gender within the union sector, as well as the bargaining power of unions in these occupations. Unionised jobs are almost all in the formal sector, in the public sector, where women dominate, and in large firms. Unionised workers are also far more likely to be in skilled and semi-skilled occupations. Non-union workers are more likely to be in unskilled occupations, and for women, particularly in domestic work (45 percent of women in non-union jobs are domestic workers). High-skilled unionised jobs which are female-dominated are rewarded less well than union jobs requiring comparable education and in which men are employed. Also, unions in South Africa appear to place more emphasis on securing higher earnings among their lower skilled and less educated members. Consequently, the returns to higher levels of educational attainment and skills are lower among union than among non-union members. Two other important gender differences are that women are better educated than men, although the benefits of union membership are smaller among more educated women than among more educated men. In addition, occupational gendering sees almost half of African women in unionised jobs

crowded in employment in professional, associate professional or technical occupations, mainly in the public sector (the majority of whom are nurses or teachers), compared to just over ten percent of men in union jobs. Men in unionised jobs are much more likely to be employed in craft and related trades or as plant or machine operators.

What all this is telling us is that the gender pay gap persists, and is getting wider, with women, black African women, at the bottom.

A SA Labour Research Service study in 2013 acknowledged a number of these factors, especially the rise of precarious work, identifying a need for a more strategic approach to organising and bargaining; one which involved bringing vulnerable workers and women in particular into the mainstream of rights and security [LRS 2013:5]. Among the 'benefits' of bargaining at Bargaining Council level in nine major industry sectors<sup>3</sup>, were maternity leave where the longest period is 5.1 months and the best level of maternity pay as 47.7% of the basic wage. There was no evidence in the survey of financial support for childcare, and only 3 days paid paternity leave [LRS 2013:12,13]. Among the best agreements are those in the highly unionised mining sector, where there are paid maternity benefits as well as a framework agreement on women in mining. This contrasts with women outside the mainstream formal sector where the Self-Employed Women's Union (SEWU) was active in South Africa but is no longer [Godfrey et al 2007].

### **The BAG – Bargaining Agenda for Gender**

What much of this research does **not** tell us is *who* is involved in the collective bargaining processes, nor what demands other than pay are on negotiating agendas. Tricia Dawson [2014] in her study of collective bargaining and the gender pay gap in the UK printing industry showed how a masculinised, long standing shared understanding between trade union negotiators and employers about the culture and workings of the bargaining process is at the heart of gender power relations, working to exclude and marginalise gender agendas. In her study she found that equality, or 'women's issues' were designated as 'social' rather than political and industrial and thus 'not appropriate' for collective bargaining, concluding that this was a critical factor in the place of equal pay from bargaining agendas and the 'slipping off' of other equality items. For women seek not only to improve pay, but their interests also take into account their reproductive situation at particular times of their lives as well as ways of recognising and compensating for gender difference and disadvantage both external to and internal at the workplace.

Detailed research in Canada showed how it took women members of the negotiating committee at a large state utility, to intensify demands for equal pay and keep up the pressure over the years [Creese 1999]. In the UK Kelly and Heery (1994) also found that female full time union officers [FTOs] were more likely to promote the interests of women in collective bargaining and to prioritise recruiting and organising women. Young, highly educated, white collar, left wing male FTOs were also likely to support gender agendas [Heery and Kelly 1988]. In follow up research Heery [2006] was able to identify a 'vanguard, an active minority of officers [women and younger men] who have engaged in equality bargaining'. [p459]. This and equal pay bargaining were especially successful in the public and health sectors, both of which are feminised.

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<sup>3</sup> Agriculture, Community services, Finance, Manufacturing, Construction, Mining, Transport, Wholesale and retail trade, Utilities.

These findings concur with Linda Dickens' [1998] conclusions that equality initiatives would not have been included in agreements except for the involvement of women; that women need to be involved in the actual negotiations, and that their input behind the scenes, doing research, formulating bargaining proposals and being involved in working parties has also shown to result in equality measures being included in agreements. When women are involved in bargaining, women develop different agendas from the traditional male worker agendas (Dickens, 1998, 34).

In these ways the presence of women can not only transform the bargaining process, the interpretation and implementation of the claims, but can also help challenge and undermine the prevailing masculinised hegemonic ideologies and practices underpinning collective bargaining.

### **Union leadership, gender and bargaining**

However to get onto the bargaining team and/or have input onto the bargaining agenda for gender [BAG], women are likely to be active, visible, and hold a leadership role. And there is much evidence that women are less likely to hold such positions in their unions. [see for example Kirton and Healy 2013, Ledwith and Hansen 2013, Britwum et al 2012, Colgan and Ledwith 2002, Ledwith et al 1990].

Recent findings from the GLU Gender and TUs Research Group research in countries across the developed, emerging and developing economies showed women's lack of proportional representation in positions of power in unions, in spite of union policies aimed at improving gender equality [Britwum et al 2012:50]. Even in unions where women are the majority of members, there was a dearth of women leaders, and where there were, they were generally in subordinate roles such as treasurer or organiser. This pattern was reinforced where unions and/or confederations reserved seats for women, but only as secondary office-holders such as 'second vice-chairperson' [ibid: 52]

The factors at play in this systematic gender subordination stem from both culture and structure of trade unions, each of which interlocks with the other. Culturally trade unions can be seen as masculinised with male traditions setting the framework, the rules both formal and informal, and expectations of leaders and leadership. Since women are not the same as men, and although they share class and other work interests, there are also substantial differences of interest as discussed in the BAG section above. Challenging and changing these is a difficult task.

We can explain some of these factors using a model developed elsewhere of overlapping regimes of closure and power within labour organisations (Ledwith 2006) which involve practices of and responses to exclusion and demarcation, to modes of inclusion, consequences of usurpation, strategies of transformation and coalition. We can see these broadly as structural outcomes of union gender politics which draw on cultural gender norms in society, family relations, the workplace and trade unions.

The idea that a woman's place is in the home remains so strong that her typical paid work in the fields of caring, catering, cleaning, clerical, servicing etc [Britwum et al 2012], reproduces her ascribed domestic role regardless. Her dual role means long unpaid hours of work at home and long low paid hours of work outside the home, leaving less time and opportunity for education, activism and union politics; structural exclusion underpinned by cultural norms. Since as we have seen above, especially in developing and emerging economies, women dominate work in the informal sector, especially domestic work, they have few if any rights at work and are less likely to be unionised – leaving the field of union

leadership clear for their male counterparts. Indeed the International Labour Organization [ILO] Convention 189, on domestic workers June 2011] has only just been adopted by the SA government, at last ensuring that domestic workers will be acknowledged as workers who contribute to the economy [SADSAWU 2014]. The South African Domestic Service and Allied Workers Union [SADSAWU] was actively involved in developing the convention – and is led by women.

Once women have breached these exclusionary barriers things become more complicated in unions as men already in, or aspiring to leadership roles resist usurping challenges from the sisters, using a range of tactics and strategies to maintain male positions. Here when women demand inclusion, cultural gender politics kick in with, as we shall see reported below in our South African research, sexism, bullying, sexual harassment and violence. ‘Pull her down’ is a frequent refrain I heard from African women students in the UK reporting male colleagues’ attitudes and behaviour, and again in our research in SA itself.

These cultural/behavioural responses are still common, even though now in the 21st century in most trade union movements special structures for gender have become a standard key strategy for addressing the democratic gender deficits<sup>4</sup>, including in South Africa. Into this more inclusionary agenda have developed a range of liberal and radical equality policies and practices in unions, such as training, mentoring, childcare, and affirmative action [AA] measures such as quotas for gender and race [Ledwith 2006].

Special, separate structures within the union provide a delicate gender balance in their outsider-insider relationship to the mainstream through women’s committees, conferences, women’s education and so on. Yet it is often these AA measures which while offering the most potential for change also provoke the strongest resistance. As Franzway (2002) comments, if relations of male domination shape women’s subordination, then successful challenges to that domination are likely to be strenuously resisted – as are challenges to homophobic, racialised and dis-abled regimes and discourses. As a result there is also a continuous process of resistance and backlash to confront (Parker 2003; Healy and Kirton 2000). Malehoko Tshaoedi (2002:17) has observed about South African unions, that the closer women’s challenges go to the centre of male power the more vigorous the resistance. South African trade union women are still campaigning inside COSATU for the ‘constitutionalisation’ of the gender/women’s structures, for example decisions of the national gender committee and conference.

Two imperatives are significant here; autonomous women’s organising and ideology. The significance of women’s and diversity structures organisation cannot be overemphasised. They may involve relatively small numbers, but the effects are far reaching. Women’s participation in women’s groups encourages women’s representation in the mainstream and vice versa, and as women’s activism gains visibility it provides models for broader networks of women unionists [Ledwith 2006]. At the same time the dynamics of women’s groups and women’s education are such that the space they offer for women is also key to develop their voice, their confidence and skills, their political consciousness, their feminist consciousness both individual and collective, and develop strategies for challenge and change towards gender democracy [Colgan and Ledwith 2000, Parker 2003]

The entry of socialist feminists into positions of influence, their creation of feminist networks, and their skilled reading of and ‘doing’ gender politics in their unions have resulted in collective gender gains being made, and where such women are in the

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<sup>4</sup> In many countries such structures have been extended to other diversity groups; ethnic and racial groups, the disabled, sexual diversities. In 2013 the ITUC published a target of 40% in all decision-making structures in African unions from the grassroots to the top by the year 2015 and progressively institutionalise this, and encourage affirmative actions.

vanguard, in leadership positions the positive evidence of their gender impact continues to gather momentum [see for example, Kaminski and Yakura 2008, and Ledwith 2009, Ledwith 2013].

### **Women union leaders in South Africa**

In South Africa, it is estimated, following structural change towards public and service sector employment, women now make up about 48%<sup>5</sup> of COSATU members, up from 36% a decade earlier [Bischoff and Tshoedi 2012:49] and a third of the COSATU leadership nationally. In 2012 of the six leader positions in COSATU itself, two were held by women: the second deputy president and the treasurer. The position in the nine provinces is worse, with only three women in positions [18%]; chair in the Northern Cape, deputy chair in Free State and Treasurer in Free State.

As shown in Table 1 none of the 20 affiliates were led by a woman at the time of the triennial gender conference in 2012. Since then two have achieved women leaders; the nurses and doctors unions. Most or all treasurer positions are occupied by women. For those affiliated unions that have women among the National Office Bearers (NOBs), usually they are deputising or are found in less powerful positions. Women are also deputising and unions then can feel comfortable that “at least women are represented”.

Both the South African Medical Association [SAMA] and Democratic Nurses Organisation of South Africa [DENOSA] have women as General Secretary yet only a third of DENOSA’s Provincial General Secretaries are women although the membership is predominantly female. Another predominantly female union, The South African Clothing and Textile Workers union (SACTWU) does not have a gender structure. Again, men constitute the majority of the top executive leadership positions with women occupying the deputy positions. In contrast, the South African Transport and Allied Workers’ Union [SATAWU], in a predominantly male sector, has fully resourced gender structures both nationally and provincially, with comprehensive programmes in place. The same union was the first among COSATU affiliates to develop a workplace sexual harassment policy.

**Table 1. COSATU affiliate positions by gender % 1997**

<b>Position</b>	<b>Men %</b>	<b>Women %</b>
Administration	6	94
Organisers	78	12
Branch and Regional secretaries	89	11
General Secretary	100	0
Research/legal/media officers	75	25
Education officers	90	10

*Source: COSATU Gender Policy report to 11<sup>th</sup> Gender Congress of 2012*

### **Union measures to implement gender parity**

COSATU has a gender policy which aims to increase women’s representation in leadership structures. It expects its affiliated unions to implement this through the following guidelines:

- Additional ex-officio position on constitutional structures.
- Portfolio positions.

<sup>5</sup> This is an estimate as data is difficult to collect. The 2008 figure was 37.1% [Bischoff and Tshoedi 2012:50]

- Reserved seats for women.
- Quota systems including fixed and proportional representation.
- Representation of sector co-ordinators on constitutional structures

Table 2. shows the extent to which these are being implemented.

**Table 2: Gender policies and appointment of full time gender co-ordinators to drive gender programmes in eight leading COSATU unions.**

<b>Union</b>	<b>Gender policy</b>	<b>Full time National gender coordinator</b>	<b>Budget</b>	<b>NOB/designated to gender specific position</b>
<b>CEPPWAWU</b> <i>Chemical, Energy, Paper, Printing, Wood and Allied Workers Union</i>	No	Yes	No	Yes
<b>CWU</b> <i>Communication Workers Union</i>	Yes	Yes	No – funded per activity	Yes. 2 <sup>nd</sup> Deputy President
<b>DENOSA</b> <i>Democratic Nurses Organisation of South Africa</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>NUM</b> <i>National Union of Mineworkers</i>	No	Yes	Yes	Yes. 5 women NOBs designate for the national women's structure
<b>NUMSA</b> <i>National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa</i>	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>POPCRU</b> <i>Police and Prisons Civil Rights Union</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes	2 <sup>nd</sup> Deputy President
<b>SACCAWU</b> <i>South African Commercial Catering and Allied Workers Union</i>	-	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>SATAWU</b> <i>South African Transport and Allied Workers Union</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes. 2 <sup>nd</sup> Deputy President

Source: COSATU Gender Report to the 11<sup>th</sup> Congress of 2012

COSATU has two reporting mechanisms for gender structures in place; through the provinces and the National Gender Committee (NGC). Lack of reporting of activities

undertaken by affiliates is a major problem faced by all provinces, with an average of 5 affiliates sending in their reports per province. However, through the NGC, most affiliates with a gender co-ordinator are able to send in their reports through to the COSATU National Gender Coordinator's office.

### **Bargaining agenda for gender [BAG]**

While we do not specifically know the extent to which women, and especially the gender coordinators, are involved in collective bargaining [CB], given the evidence above about the widening gender pay gap, it is reasonable to assume that there are few. The evidence from the LRS survey referred to above does show that maternity and paternity leave and childcare feature in CB, but women's needs are wider than these.

Here are some of the collective bargaining demands that women in COSATU affiliates wish to be tabled on the bargaining table as reported to COSATU's 11<sup>th</sup> National Congress in 2012:

- The need to ensure that all collective agreements have Occupational Health and Safety
- Workplace Child care facilities / Parental Rights Policy
- Paid maternity leave and paternity leave
- Sexual harassment
- Menstruation leave – to be part of the reproductive rights of women.
- Job security and Decent Employment
- Safe transport especially for those working late hours/shifts in retail or security or hospitality sectors
- Employment Equity Agreements must be implemented and seriously monitored by Department of Labour
- Equal access to Promotions, Training and Skills Development
- Equal Pay for work of Equal Value
- Compassionate Leave
- Confinement Leave

*N.B. the demands are placed randomly without any observance of priority*

An analysis of the above demands would show that demands that benefit both men and women such as pay increments or improvements in working conditions can be won as men fight hard as the majority at the bargaining table. However, those that affect women only, receive little attention because fewer women form part of the bargaining process and have 'little voice' to push for these demands. We show below that although COSATU women leaders see collective bargaining as the most important aspect of trade union leadership, union women are rarely involved in the bargaining process. Yet over a decade ago COSATU was advocating inclusion of women in bargaining teams, developing the role of gender co-ordinators and structures in collective bargaining and development of a strategy to ensure the involvement of women in collecting collective bargaining demands [2000].

### **THE RESEARCH**

Our research was carried out with women and men in South African unions in 2012. They were from the two main confederations; COSATU [Confederation of South African Trade Unions] and FEDUSA [Federation of Unions of South Africa], and fieldwork questionnaire

distribution and interviews and focus group discussions were mainly accessed through the federations, and in the case of COSATU, at their Gender Conference in March 2012. The work built on two main research projects. The first was ongoing work by Sue Ledwith about trade union women and leadership [See Ledwith 2013] and the second the Global Labour University's Gender and Trade Unions Research Group. In practice there was some overlap as Sue Ledwith was also the academic coordinator of the GLU group, and Janet Munakamwe, a GLU alumna and GLU RG member was the main research assistant in South Africa.

A preliminary report was made for COSATU in August 2012 and it is mainly the material and findings from that which are discussed in this paper.

A total of 101 COSATU women and men completed questionnaires, with 80 self identifying as female and 10 as male – eleven did not answer the question. Twenty two self identified as Black, 35 as African, six as coloured and three as white. Thirty five did not identify their race/ethnicity. Of these 52 [65%] described themselves as worker-leaders and 25 were officials/office bearers. Some held dual roles. In terms of age, the largest group of women, just over half, were aged between 36 and 45. A quarter were aged between 26 and 35 and 29% were over the age of 46. Ninety per cent of the women had caring responsibilities, mainly for children [71%].

**Women leaders**

Altogether over 80% of the respondents defined themselves as a leader. Fifty six [70%] were in gender related roles, including four men. An overwhelming 89% of the women also said that they were gender activists even if they were not in a formally designated gender role. Thirty per cent of the women described themselves as feminists. We can describe all of these women and men as a gender vanguard and later will see in more detail what their views are about gender issues in COSATU and their unions.

Fewer than a quarter of the women were in national positions; they were mainly active at regional and provincial levels, which overlap. See Table 3.

**Table 3. Level at which women active**

Level	frequency	percent
National	17	21.25
Region	22	27.5
Province	19	23.75
Branch	13	16.25
Workplace	6	7.5
No answer	3	3.75
Total	80	100

**and collective bargaining**

An important indicator of this gender leadership gap was the proportionately small number of women involved in collective bargaining. Fewer than half the women [44%] reported being involved in collective bargaining themselves, and 42% of the 19 FEDUSA women. This was especially the case among workplace shop stewards, which is important since workplace bargaining is a key aspect of negotiating in South Africa. Of those leaders who

said they were involved in bargaining, only eight took part in drawing up the agenda, nine were lead negotiators, but only four did both of these. Eleven attended negotiations or were involved in some other capacity, but did not speak at the bargaining table. This picture reflects and reinforces how these women saw themselves. As can be seen in Table 4, although they thought their own union valued bargaining most in its leaders, they did not see this as one of the top three aspects of their own leadership role. Yet there were plenty of priorities for collective bargaining agendas that the women wanted to see:

A quarter of the respondents identified bargaining priorities, with two-thirds putting up proposals relevant to women. The demand identified most often was for pay equity, then came maternity benefits and rights, linked with family leave, workplace childcare and time and facilities for breastfeeding, women's safety at work and in the union, and for implementation of existing agreements on sexual harassment, and also HIV and AIDS.

The problem for the women especially would seem to be that they have to rely on male colleagues negotiating to put these items into collective agreements, and as discussed above, they are unlikely to do so. South Africa has a two-tiered collective bargaining structure that includes individual unions bargaining at the plant level on behalf of their workers, and centralised bargaining councils that consist of unions and employer associations within a particular industry, occupation or area [see Godfrey et al 2007]. Clearly it is important that gender leaders, women particularly are in the bargaining seat at both levels.

Yet in answering a series of questions about the most important aspects/parts of being a union activist/officer/leader there was a mismatch between the women's own current role and expectations and those that they saw as their own union's.

**Table 4. Most important aspects/parts of being a union activist/officer/leader?  
Ranked 1-3 in each category**

<b>What respondent thinks are <i>own</i> most important aspects of role</b>	<b>What respondent thinks their <i>union</i> values most in leaders</b>	<b><i>Own</i> main strengths</b>	<b><i>Own</i> most important knowledge, skills and experience</b>	<b><i>Own</i> main difficulties</b>
Strategy/policy	Negotiating/collective bargaining	Advising and supporting members	Communicating;	Time pressures
Campaigns/campaigning	Casework and advice	Communicating	Understanding what the issues are for members	Union bureaucracy
Equality and diversity	Communicating	Strategy/policy	Being up to date with what the union is doing for members	Workload

Especially notable is that the only point of connection between what the women saw as their own important role content, their strengths and knowledge and skills, and what they thought their union valued was *communicating*. And this was also seen as a difficulty,

being linked with problems of getting support from the union leadership. Public speaking was seen as valued by their union, yet the women themselves often found it problematic. While equality and diversity was ranked by the women as of high importance, they did not see this prioritised by their own unions. In addition to the three main difficulties listed in Table 4, were further problems of being away from home, public speaking, communicating, and getting support from the union leadership.

It is also noticeable that the women did not include negotiating or bargaining in their descriptions of what a union leader is and their own key skills as a leader. Four main categories were identified from the accounts which the women wrote, and are set out in Table 5. The first and most frequently identified is solidaristic relations with members – understanding their issues, standing up for them in protecting the members and their interests, and a commitment to the members. The second most frequently mentioned aspects were skills, especially being a good communicator. The third and fourth groups gained about the same level of priority; personal qualities, and their constitutional position, ie that a leader is an office bearer, who has been elected and is a leader with a mandate from the membership.

**Table 5. Reasons for describing self as a leader**

<b>Solidaristic – relations with members</b>	<b>Skills sets</b>	<b>Personal qualities</b>	<b>Constitutional</b>
Represent , fight for what the workers believe in	Communicator	Fight for what workers believe in	Mandates from members
Lead, consult, organise	Give guidance and advice	Qualifications/education in gender issues/matters	Office bearer
Workers seek advice from [me].	Facilitate, coordinate, organise	Commitment. Have vision	Elected to lead –as gender leader
Case work , eg sexual harassment at work	Educator	Self confident, strong personality. Go getter	in dual role as shop steward or similar

In representing the members who elected them, several of the women specifically identified issues of gender, eg

- *Fighting for what workers believe in, eg equal rights for all, gender equality, better living wage.*
- *Members know me, invite me to speak on gender matters .*
- *Case work on sexual harassment within workplaces, on national level. I have a vision to take the gender structure forward.*

The women were also keen to support other women. When we asked *Who would you vote for – woman or man?*, two thirds of the women leaders/gender activists would elect the woman in a union leadership election where both men and women candidates represented their views and position and would probably do the job equally well. Of those who answered this question, 53 of the female respondents said they would vote for the woman, two would vote for the man, nine didn't know and seven said it would make no difference.

The reasons they gave for voting for the woman can be categorised in three ways:

The most frequently mentioned issue was redressing the absence of women in union leadership positions – closing the gender gap. This was expressed variously but all were saying that women are under-represented in male controlled unions where men dominate in the structures. Women were seeking 50-50 parity. As one wrote: *'Sticking to proportionality is unjust and inconsistent to the equal value entrenched by our constitution in South Africa'*. Other reasons given were that women as a gender were not adequately represented; that women had been oppressed for too long; that there were very few women in leadership positions, *'without valid reasons'*.

The next most frequent argument was about women's capacity and abilities – that they were quite capable of taking positions. Indeed in the round table discussions one of the most frequent complaints was that women who were seen to be 'ready' and 'capacitated' for being elected were not supported by the dominant groupings [men], and instead women who did not have sufficient experience were put forward. On their questionnaires, women commented as follows:

- *Women are capable, know leadership skills. Always ready to lead, but always marginalised*
- *As a feminist I will vote for a woman who is competent.*
- *Women are there to build, care and struggle where there is a woman there is hope and life.*

The third main set of reasons given was about empowerment of women, encouraging other women and together challenging and changing unions. For example:

- *Because women are most oppressed in the organisation; they just think of women on the gender or treasurer positions.*
- *There is a need to support our female candidates. Because we live in a male dominated world and female leaders will bring change in the union*

Given the argument above about women's capacity and abilities, and the need for more women vanguard leaders, together with the mismatch discussed above in relation to Table 4, we asked *What does it take to get elected?*

The most frequent answer to this question was a combination of:

- To show commitment to trade union principles
- To have a proven record as a trade union representative/activist
- To have experience of negotiation/collective bargaining with employer/s
- To have a proven record of striking and protests
- To speak up at union meetings and conferences
- To be well known in the union

From the findings presented here so far it can be seen that while women do comply with all of these, some are more difficult to achieve than others. Of significance once again is the issue of collective bargaining where the low level of female involvement is an important gap, and clearly is closely related to having a proven record in negotiation. However, if women are not in key positions in the union structures, and when they are they are subordinate to men, then the gender hierarchy continues to be reproduced and women and women's interests including pay and conditions at work, remain subordinated to the interests of men. Bargaining agendas for gender are thus a critical part of trade union equity work.

## Conclusions

It would seem from the evidence in the research discussed here that women are able and willing to take on more and more senior leadership roles in their unions, but are frustrated in doing so. It is telling that about three-quarters of the women were also active leaders in another sphere, mainly community or church groups, with some being involved in political groups, mainly the ANC [including the Women's League] and/or the SACP. Indeed the overwhelming majority of the women held multiple roles. They had caring responsibilities in the family, mainly for children, as well as holding down a job, being a union activist and a community leader.

Clearly these are women with an impressive range of experience and a high level of commitment, yet in their responses to the questionnaire, and in the round table discussions, many felt thwarted, and indeed discriminated against in what several described as a battle or fight to get able women, including but not solely themselves, into positions in their unions where their voices would be heard on behalf of women, and women's needs and demands taken seriously. This involves union and political leaders to not only make structural change to allow women in, but significantly, to be prepared to make cultural changes in the highly masculinised exclusive and marginalising gendered power relations in unions.

It seems that within many unions, similar to the situation in the national gender machinery, described in Geisler et al's 2009 report, there is a lack of political will to resource, coordinate and support women, although unions potentially have an important role in fighting discrimination and empowering women at the work place and in society.

Additionally, studies (see Burmeister 2010) have shown that improving gender and pay equality is good for business, and increases productivity and economic growth. Closing the male-female employment gap could have huge economic benefits, boosting GDP by as much as 16%. By drawing on the full complement of available talent at all levels of the organisation, particularly in top leadership teams, companies have been shown to produce better financial results, particularly as opportunities grow in the knowledge economy [Osgard Media 2010].

So, we suggest that far from being 'unexplained' as the ITUC finds, and the perverse results of Casale and Posel's work about the wage effects of union membership, it is the deeply sexist and racist culture of SA society, strongly manifest in the union movement, which flows underneath. As Tshoaedi has observed; 'Political power and influence is critical in the definition of politics in the labour movement. Men who occupy positions of power in COSATU leadership define and conceptualise politics and political behaviour in masculine terms.' [2012:105]. Our research concurs, and shows that when the intersections between race, gender, class and power are examined and unpicked and the links made between leaders, leadership and the gender politics of collective bargaining these are key factors in the persistence of the gender pay gap and the wider democratic deficits. Our study was a small one but it does point to the need for further, more detailed research and scrutiny of regimes of gender in the bargaining sphere and more widely in SA unions.

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## **Appendix**

### **List of COSATU affiliates**

CEPPWAWU	Chemical, Energy, Paper, Printing, Wood and Allied Workers Union
CWU	Communication Workers Union
CWUSA	Creative Workers Union of South Africa
DENOSA	Democratic Nurses Organisation of South Africa
FAWU	Food and Allied Workers Union
NEHAWU	National Education, Health and Allied Workers Union
NUM	National Union of Mineworkers
NUMSA	National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa
PAWUSA	Public and Allied Workers of South Africa
POPCRU	Police and Prisons Civil Rights Union
SADSAWU	South African Domestic Service and Allied Workers Union
SAMWU	South African Municipal Workers Union
SASBO	South African Society of Bank Officials
SACTWU	South African Clothing and Textiles Workers Union
SASAWU	South African State and Allied Workers Union
SACCAWU	South African Commercial Catering and Allied Workers Union
SADTU	South African Democratic Teacher's Union
SAMA	South African Medical Association
SADNU	South African Democratic Nurses Union
SAFPU	South African Football Players Union
SATAWU	South African Transport and Allied Workers Union