

# **Understanding the Past and Present – Mapping the Future:**

**The National Union of Namibian Workers (NUNW) Facing the 21<sup>st</sup>  
Century**

**Herbert Jauch**

***Labour Resource and Research Institute (LaRRI)***

**1999**

<b>List of Acronyms .....</b>	<b>.ii</b>
<b>Acknowledgements.....</b>	<b>iv</b>
<b>Foreword.....</b>	<b>v</b>
<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>vi</b>
<b>Section 1: Brief History of the NUNW .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Section 2: Membership of the NUNW .....</b>	<b>4</b>
2.1 The Labour Market in Namibia .....	4
2.2 Membership Records and Unionisation Rates.....	5
2.3 Potential Growth Areas .....	11
2.4 Recommendations .....	12
<b>Section 3: Organisational Features.....</b>	<b>13</b>
3.1 Union Leadership and Staff .....	13
3.2 Conditions of Service .....	16
3.3 The ‘Brain Drain’ .....	17
3.4 Union Finances .....	18
3.5 Regional and Local Structures .....	19
3.6 Main Activities .....	23
3.7 The Role of the NUNW .....	27
3.8 Recommendations .....	28
<b>Section 4: Key Issues for the Labour Movement .....</b>	<b>31</b>
4.1 The Struggle for a Living Wage.....	31
4.2 Political Affiliation and Relationship with Government .....	32
4.3 Trade Union Unity .....	35
4.4 Demarcation of Industries .....	38
4.5 Gender Equality .....	40
4.6 Union Investments .....	47
4.7 The Labour Movement as a Social Movement.....	52
4.8 The Land Question.....	54
4.9 Recommendations .....	58
<b>Conclusion .....</b>	<b>61</b>
<b>Appendix: Profiles of the NUNW Affiliates.....</b>	<b>67</b>
Namibia Food and Allied Workers Union (NAFAU).....	67
Mineworkers Union of Namibia (MUN).....	69
Metal and Allied Namibian Workers Union (MANWU) .....	71
Namibia Public Workers Union (NAPWU) .....	72
Namibia Transport and Allied Workers Union (NATAU).....	74
Namibia National Teachers Union (NANTU).....	75
Namibia Domestic and Allied Workers Union (NDAWU) .....	77
Namibia Farmworkers Union (NAFWU).....	78
<b>References .....</b>	<b>81</b>

# List of Acronyms

BAWON	Bank Workers Union of Namibia
CC	Central Committee
CCN	Council of Churches in Namibia
CEC	Central Executive Committee
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (United Nations human rights instrument)
CIF	Construction Industries Federation of Namibia
COSATU	Congress of South African Trade Unions
CTUC	Commonwealth Trade Union Council
EPZ	export processing zone
FAWU	Food and Allied Workers Union (South Africa)
FES	Friedrich Ebert Stiftung/Foundation
FIET	International Federation of Commercial, Clerical, Professional and Technical Employees
FNV	Federatie Nederlandse Vakbeweging
GSSA	Government Service Staff Association
HAN	Hospitality Association of Namibia
ICEM	International Chemical, Energy, Mining and General Workers
ICFTU	International Confederation of Free Trade Unions
IFBWW	International Federation of Building and Wood Workers
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IUF	International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Luxury Goods Workers Union
LaRRI	Labour Resource and Research Institute
LAUN	Local Authority Union of Namibia
MANWU	Metal and Allied Namibian Workers Union
MUN	Mineworkers Union of Namibia
NABWU	Namibia Building Workers Union
NAFAU	Namibia Food and Allied Workers Union
NAFINU	Namibia Financial Institutions Union
NAFTU	Namibia Federation of Trade Unions
NAFWU	Namibia Farmworkers Union
NAIL	New Africa Investments Limited
NALEDI	National Labour and Economic Development Institute
NAMCOL	Namibian College of Open Learning
NAMIC	Namibia Mineworkers Investment Company
NAMIT	Namibia Miners Investment Trust
NANGOF	Namibian Non-Governmental Organisations Forum
NANTU	Namibia National Teachers Union
NAPWU	Namibia Public Workers Union
NASAWU	Namibia Seamen and Allied Workers Union
NATAU	Namibia Transport and Allied Workers Union
NAU	Namibia Agricultural Union
NBC	Namibian Broadcasting Corporation
NBWU	Namibia Building Workers Union

NBWU	Namibia Building Workers Union
NCSTU	Namibia Christian Social Trade Unions
NDAWU	Namibia Domestic and Allied Workers Union
NEC	National Executive Committee
NMA	Northern Medical Aid
NPSM	Namibia People's Social Movement
NTC	National Teachers Council
NTU	Namibia Telecommunication Union
NUM	National Union of Mineworkers (South African)
NUNW	National Union of Namibian Workers
NWRWU	Namibia Wholesale and Retail Workers Union
OATUU	Organisation for African Trade Union Unity
PSI	Public Service International
PSUN	Public Service Union of Namibia
SACTWU	Southern African Clothing and Textile Workers Union
SATUCC	Southern African Trade Union Co-ordinating Council
SWAMU	South West Africa Mineworkers Union
SWAPO	South West Africa People's Organisation of Namibia
TCL	Tsumeb Corporation Ltd
TELSIP	Teachers English Language Improvement Programme
TUN	Teachers Union of Namibia
TUN	Teachers Union of Namibia
UNAM	University of Namibia
WAC	Workers Action Committee
WASCOM	Wages and Salaries Commission
WFTU	World Federation of Trade Unions

# Acknowledgements

The study on which this booklet is based was commissioned by the NUNW and carried out by the Labour Resource and Research Institute (LaRRI). It was made possible through the financial support rendered by Dutch trade union federation Federatie Nederlandse Vakbeweging (FNV) to the NUNW. This support has been a practical expression of trade union solidarity. We are also grateful to the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES) which sponsored a seminar for an enlarged NUNW Central Executive Committee to discuss the findings of this study.

The project was co-ordinated by LaRRI's Herbert Jauch, who also wrote this booklet. Nepeti Nicanor, as well as Alfons Mosimane and Gert van Rooy of the University of Namibia were contributing researchers. Perri Caplan edited the language, Chris Ndivanga did the layout and Lamek Petrus supplied the photographs.

We are grateful to the following trade unionists, who were prepared to be interviewed and share their knowledge and experience with us:

- ™ Karin Amunjela (NAFAU)
- ™ Alfred Angula (MUN)
- ™ Cuana Angula (NAFAU)
- ™ Mr Dausab (NATAU)
- ™ Inge Daved (NUNW)
- ™ Mariane Erastus (NUNW)
- ™ Sylvester Gawaseb (NAFWU)
- ™ Peter Gwarada (NANTU)
- ™ Ranga Haikali (NUNW)
- ™ Bertha Haileka (MANWU)
- ™ Stephanus Heita (NATAU)
- ™ Petrus N. Iilonga (NAPWU)
- ™ Mr Jantjies (NANTU)
- ™ Mr Kakuva (NANTU)
- ™ Israel Kalenga (NUNW)
- ™ Julian Kambunga (NAPWU)
- ™ Adelaide Bobby Kandjala (MANWU)
- ™ Jonas Lumbu (MUN)
- ™ Peter Naholo (MUN)
- ™ David Nanub (NAFAU)
- ™ Hafeni Ndemula (NUNW)
- ™ John Ngolombe (NAPWU)
- ™ Jacqueline Nowoses (NUNW)
- ™ Magano Nangombe (NDAWU)
- ™ John Nuukunde (MUN)
- ™ Abrahan Onesmus (NATAU)
- ™ Moses Shiikwa (MANWU)
- ™ Joseph Jason Shikongo (NAFAU)

<sup>TM</sup> Felix Uirab (NAFWU)

# **Foreword**

The Namibian labour movement has a proud history of playing a central role in the struggle for independence and national liberation. Namibian workers have not been spectators but active participants in the process of transforming Namibia into a free and independent country. Namibian workers have always understood that their struggle at the workplace was linked to the broader struggle for social justice. Namibian workers experienced exploitation at the workplace and colonial oppression as two sides of the same coin.

Eight years after independence, the National Union of Namibian Workers (NUNW) as the dominant force among organised labour felt that the time has come to evaluate not only the achievements and failures of our country as a whole but also to have a critical look at ourselves. We felt that we needed a systematic evaluation of the NUNW and our affiliates in terms of our achievements and shortcomings as well as the challenges ahead. We then approached one of our sister unions, the Dutch trade union federation, FNV, for assistance with this project. Thanks to the generous support received from the FNV we could proceed and I would like to use this opportunity to thank our Dutch comrades for their highly appreciated gesture of international solidarity.

We asked the newly established Labour Resource and Research Institute (LaRRI) to carry out this study and in March 1999, LaRRI presented the first draft report to the NUNW. Heated debate, criticism and self-criticism then followed as a means to make a comprehensive analysis of the report. As a serious and democratic organisation, the Central Executive Committee of the NUNW admitted that the organisation is experiencing significant shortcomings and that the union federation needs to ‘pull up its socks’. Some of the shortcomings identified are organisational and structural weaknesses and a lack of human and financial resources to face the challenges of the new millennium.

After a lengthy discussion and thorough analysis of the report, amendments and alterations were made and a ‘green light’ was given to LaRRI to publish the report. This decision was made on the basis of our principles of transparency and accountability to our members and to the public at large.

The NUNW, as an organisation of the working class, has been and remains determined to forge ahead with the struggle for social and economic justice for all the people of Namibia. We are conscious of the fact that despite the political liberty and national sovereignty we have achieved, the economic liberation remains a long way ahead. We also recognise that the liberation of the Namibian people from the colonial and apartheid legacies remains a formidable challenge for our labour movement.

Ignorance, poverty and unemployment are still the prevalent phenomena in the Namibian society today. It is with this in mind that we regard our basic mission to be incomplete and we pledge to continue our struggle until we have liberated all our people from the bondage of poverty and exploitation.

**Ponhele ya France  
President  
National Union of Namibian Workers**

**September 1999**

# **Introduction**

The National Union of Namibian Workers (NUNW) is the oldest and strongest trade union federation in Namibia. It is composed of eight industrial unions covering almost all economic sectors of the country. A union for workers in the financial and insurance sector, the Namibia Financial Institutions Union (NAFINU), was registered recently and is expected to be launched before the end of the year to become the ninth NUNW affiliate.

If the NUNW is to continue playing the prominent role it has played to date in Namibia's political and economic life, it will need to overcome many challenges in the years ahead. It will have to redefine its role to accord with new and ever-changing political and economic developments in the country. Besides revisiting internal organisational, financial and policy issues, the NUNW must come to terms with the effects of 'globalisation' which manifest themselves in the form of export processing zones (EPZs), industrial restructuring, retrenchments and privatisation. It must also deal with its own organisational weaknesses, rival unions and anti-union sentiments among sections of the business community and government.

This booklet investigates the present state of the NUNW and some of the challenges facing the labour movement as a whole. Section 1 gives a brief history of the federation, and Section 2 examines the membership of its affiliates. Section 3 deals with organisational issues like union structures, staffing, activities and finance – of the federation and its affiliates. Finally, Section 4 looks at some of the key policy issues that the federation and its affiliates need to confront. These include the living-wage campaign, the NUNW's political affiliation to SWAPO, trade union unity, gender equality, union investments, social movement unionism and the land question. The findings of this report are based on the interviews conducted and on the available literature on trade unions in Namibia. As requested by the NUNW and its affiliates, recommendations are made after each section to ensure that this booklet serves as a basis for discussion.

The NUNW has to be praised for its willingness to expose itself to a critical evaluation and to have the findings published. This is a sign of strength and confidence. This booklet identifies the NUNW's strengths as well as its weaknesses, and makes proposals that might be controversial. We hope, however, that all unionists will recognise the supportive spirit in which it was written.

We trust that this booklet will contribute to a better understanding of the NUNW as a key player in Namibia's labour movement. The recommendations following each section and the conclusion highlight the main findings and provide summaries for those who are too busy to read the whole booklet.

Herbert Jauch  
Director

Labour Resource and Research Institute  
P.O. Box 62423  
Katutura  
Windhoek

Namibia  
Tel: +264-61-212044  
Fax: +264-61- 217969  
E-mail: larri@namib.com

## **SECTION 1**

# **A Brief History of the NUNW**

The NUNW's history is closely linked to that of SWAPO as a result of the particular history of Namibia's liberation struggle. Namibian contract workers formed a central component of SWAPO in the party's formative years. The plight of contract workers – mostly from northern Namibia – was first taken up by the Ovamboland People's Congress (OPC) which was founded in Cape Town in 1957 mainly by students and intellectuals. Workers in the Namibian compounds responded enthusiastically to the OPC, which expressed their aspirations. In 1958 the OPC became the Ovamboland People's Organisation (OPO), its central aim being to abolish the contract labour system. The OPO's political demands for 'political, social and economic emancipation of the people' reflected the needs of the workers in the compounds. Its message was also spread to the rural areas through returning migrant workers. In 1960 the OPO was transformed into a national liberation movement – SWAPO. Its aim was to establish a unified, independent and democratic Namibia, free from colonial exploitation and oppression (see Katjavivi 1988: 41-46; Moleah 1983: 98-100; Peltola 1995: 98-105).

Following SWAPO's consultative congress in Tanga, Tanzania, in 1969/70, several new departments were established within the party, including a Labour Department. Although the congress documents did not mention the formation of trade unions, a decision to establish the NUNW in exile was taken on 24 April 1970 (Peltola 1995: 114). Solomon Mifima served as SWAPO's first secretary of labour from 1972-76. In 1976 he was succeeded by John ya Otto, who represented Namibian workers at international fora such as the International Labour Organization (ILO). However, it was impossible to build a labour movement in exile because the most important trade union work has to be done in the workplace. The work in exile therefore focused on training trade unionists under the name of the NUNW. In 1978 eight young Namibian trainees from the trade union school in Moscow formed the Nyango School of Trade Unions. A year later, three young trade unionists established the Kwanza Sul School for Trade Unions in Angola (Peltola 1995: 132-3).

In 1978 the Swapo Central Executive Committee decided to affiliate the NUNW to the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU), which provided a link between the NUNW and the socialist countries. In 1979 the NUNW set up its headquarters in Luanda, Angola, under the leadership of Ya Otto who served as SWAPO secretary of labour and NUNW secretary-general at the same time. Ya Otto prepared a constitution for the NUNW for adoption by SWAPO's National Executive Committee (NEC), but it was never approved. Some party leaders even responded negatively to the union initiative, fearing a strong and independent labour movement after independence (see Peltola 1995: 14, 133).

For Namibian workers inside the country the class struggle was intertwined with the struggle against racial discrimination and minority domination. The class struggle waged by workers was seen as one and the same as the liberation struggle waged by SWAPO (Peltola 1995: 93). Most of Namibia's trade unions have been established inside the country since the mid-1980s. Although there were several earlier attempts to form unions, all were suppressed time and again by the colonial regime. These earlier efforts, however, laid the foundation for the later emergence of the NUNW and its affiliates (see Peltola 1995: 167-197; Bauer 1997: 69).

By the mid-1980s over 100 000 troops controlled by South Africa were inside Namibia, and 80% of the population lived under emergency regulations. Thousands of Namibians were removed from their homes along the Angolan border, and fields in the north were destroyed by soldiers who were brutally harassing Namibians. In 1985 the South African apartheid government was spending R3 million per day on the war in Namibia.

During this time of repression, community activists started organising at the grassroots level. Community organisations emerged in response to the crises in housing, employment, health, education and social welfare. Workers began to take their workplace problems (e.g. unfair dismissals and low wages) to social workers at the Roman Catholic Church and Council of Churches in Namibia (CCN). The church workers contacted South African church and trade union activists for advice. In early 1985 they assembled a group of workers for a workshop at the Catholic Church in Soweto, Katutura. Almost 100 people attended and formed the Workers Action Committee (WAC) (see Bauer 1994: 132-135).

At the same time, South Africa's National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) began to organise workers at the mines of Namibia's Consolidated Diamond Mines (CDM) and Rössing Uranium Ltd in Oranjemund and Arandis respectively. These workers linked up with the Workers Action Committee and by April 1986 had formed the Rössing Mineworkers Union, which later became the Mineworkers Union of Namibia (MUN) (Bauer 1997: 70).

Another factor that contributed to the emergence of trade unions was the release of Namibian political prisoners from 1984 onwards. Some returned to Windhoek and resumed their work for the SWAPO structures. A decision was taken to reactivate the NUNW inside Namibia, and by April 1986 a Workers Steering Committee had been formed. This body incorporated the Workers Action Committee and all other groups attempting to organise workers around the country.

A group of field workers (Gabriel Ithete, Ruben Ithengula, Loide Kasingo, Jappie Nangolo, and Ben Ulenga) began organising different workplaces. Jointly with Bob Kandetu, Lindi Kazombaue, Anton Lubowski and Barnabas Tjizu, these fieldworkers formed a steering committee to oversee the establishment of trade unions under the umbrella of the NUNW (Interviews with J. Nangolo and J. Shikongo). The response was tremendous, and in September 1986 the NUNW's first industrial union was launched, this being the Namibia Food and Allied Workers Union (NAFAU) led by John Pandeni, one of the former Robben Island prisoners (Bauer 1997: 70). Shortly thereafter the Mineworkers Union of Namibia (MUN) was launched, led by another former Robben Island prisoner, Ben Ulenga. In 1987 the Metal and Allied Namibian Workers Union (MANWU), led by Barnabas Tjizu, and the Namibia Public Workers Union (NAPWU), led by Petrus Iilonga, were launched. The Namibia Transport and Allied Workers Union (NATAU) was launched in June 1988, led by Willy Matsi, followed by the Namibia National Teachers Union (NANTU) in March 1989, led by Markus Kampungu, the Namibia Domestic and Allied Workers Union (NDAWU) in April 1990, led by Sarah Nambahu, and the Namibia Farmworkers Union (NAFWU) in May 1994, led by Silvester Gawaseb. These unions are the affiliates of the NUNW today.

The exiled and internal wings of the NUNW merged during a consolidation congress held in Windhoek in 1989. At that time the NUNW unions inside Namibia had already established themselves and were a formidable force among grassroots organisations. They enjoyed tremendous support, even beyond their membership. At the consolidation congress John ya Otto was formally elected as NUNW secretary-general, and John Shaetonhodi as the federation's

first president. Following Namibia's independence in 1990 Ya Otto was appointed as ambassador to Angola and Bernard Esau, a long-standing union activist of the MUN, succeeded him as secretary-general. In 1994 Esau was elected to Parliament and his successor, Ranga Haikali, still serves as secretary-general.

In the international arena, following its 1998 congress decision the NUNW joined the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU). The federation is also affiliated to the Southern African Trade Union Co-ordinating Council (SATUCC) and to the Organisation for African Trade Union Unity (OATUU).

## **SECTION 2**

# **Membership of the NUNW Unions**

This section examines the membership of the NUNW-affiliated industrial unions. To establish accurate figures for the unionisation rate in each industry covered by an NUNW affiliate, the paid-up membership as well as the estimated total membership of each affiliate was compared with the total number of employees in the industry (as established by the 1991 Population and Housing Census and the 1997 Labour Force Survey). The system used to record the membership of each union was also examined.

### **2.1 The Labour Market in Namibia**

According to the 1997 Labour Force Survey, there are 833 588 people in Namibia aged 15 years and older, 546 918 of whom are economically active, of whom 356 849 are employed and 190 069 are unemployed. This means that Namibia has an unemployment rate of 34,8%. Among all economically active men, 29% are unemployed, and 41% of all economically active women are unemployed.

Employment in Namibia is concentrated in seven of the country's 13 regions, namely the Erongo, Karas, Khomas, Kunene, Omaheke, Oshikoto and Otjozondjupa Regions. A total of 225 104 workers are employed in the formal sector, and their wages and salaries make up 45% of the national household income. However, there are huge regional disparities in this regard: in some regions (e.g. Khomas) wages and salaries make up over 80% of household incomes, while in others (e.g. Omusati) they make up less than 10% of household incomes.

Namibia's unionisation rate in the formal sector is estimated to stand at 57,65%, with 129 769 members of the total workforce belonging to a trade union. Unfortunately many trade unions do not have accurate membership figures. Union membership in the public sector could be as high as 80%, compared to about 38% in the private sector. This discrepancy can partially be attributed to anti-union sentiments among management structures in Namibia. The 1995/96 Labour Relations Survey found that 9% of all employees in the private sector did not join a union for fear of victimisation by management (see Murray & Wood 1997: 176-177).

The 1995/96 Labour Relations Survey also found that 86% of workers in the private sector and 94% of those in the public sector had permanent employment status. The highest numbers of temporary workers were employed in the construction sector, followed by the fishing and manufacturing sectors. Some unions (e.g. NAFAU and MANWU) managed to recruit temporary workers, and MANWU's centralised bargaining agreement with the Construction Industries Federation of Namibia (CIF) covers temporary workers as well.

Semi-skilled workers constitute the majority of the labour force and labour movement. The 1995/96 Labour Relations Survey found that less-skilled workers are more willing to join unions than highly skilled or professional workers. Most union members are literate, but very few have acquired any form of tertiary education. According to the survey, workers in the manufacturing, mining and public sectors have generally attained above-average educational

levels. The survey also points out that Namibian unions have been highly successful in representing the interests of their less-skilled members (see Murray & Wood 1997: 178-179).

## **2.2 Membership Records and Unionisation Rates**

There is no doubt that the NUNW is the most representative of all trade union federations in Namibia. However, only three of its affiliates have a computerised system for recording membership data. The others rely on the membership payment records of employers to keep track, and this system has several shortcomings. Firstly, members who do not pay their membership fees due to being retrenched or changing jobs cannot be traced by the unions. Secondly, only one union has a precise record of the gender of its members, thus the ratio of male to female union members could not be established in this study. Thirdly, the paid-up membership records do not indicate the date on which the member joined the union, thus it was impossible to determine which union memberships have grown in recent years and which are stagnant or even declining. A declining membership was detected only in connection with a factory or mine closure. An additional problem is that some membership records are kept at regional or branch offices rather than at head offices. This made it impossible to determine the membership figures precisely.

Interviews were conducted with the union leaders before the paid-up members were counted, and they were asked to estimate their membership size before the count. The estimated and actual counts are presented below, and the reader will note the discrepancy between the two in some cases (see MANWU, NAFAU and NAPWU). This indicates that some unions have a significant number of members whose membership fees are not deducted on a monthly basis by their employers. It could also mean that the membership of some unions is smaller than estimated by union leaders.

### **MUN**

The MUN recruits in the mining and energy sectors and has the highest unionisation rate of all the NUNW affiliates. As is the case with all the other affiliates, workers complete a membership form and are issued a membership card. The details of each member are then keyed into a computerised membership database. The MUN is one of the three affiliates that utilises a computerised system, and the system's effectiveness was demonstrated by the accurate figures this union was able to provide. MUN officials were able to explain changes in membership trends because they had direct access to information about their members. The MUN is one of the few unions that could provide all the requested data on signed-up and paid-up members.

The current number of employees in the mining and energy sectors is approximately 8 600. The MUN's membership stands at 5 799, meaning that this union has achieved a unionisation rate of 67,43%, thus two out of three workers in these sectors are MUN members. However, the MUN's membership declined dramatically after 2 000 workers at Tsumeb Corporation Ltd (TCL) mines lost their jobs in 1998. Such retrenchments pose the biggest threat to this industrial union.

### **NAFAU**

NAFAU recruits workers in a wide range of industries: from hotels, restaurants, distillers and breweries to the retail and fishing industries. This union keeps most of its membership forms at its head office, but some are kept at its regional offices, which made it difficult to establish the exact membership figures. The figures provided here exclude the membership in Khorixas, Rundu and Katima Mulilo. Although NAFAU computerises some records, the capacity (memory) of its computer is too low to cope with a large database. The present system makes it very difficult to establish precisely the union's membership at a particular time, and NAFAU relies on monthly deduction lists from employers to keep track of its paid-up membership.

NAFAU estimates its membership to stand at 12 000, with 9 055 paid-up members. The discrepancy can be explained by the fact that a large number of NAFAU members in the fishing industry are seasonal workers. A computerised recording system would enable NAFAU to track seasonal variations in its membership.

The total number of employees in the industries covered by NAFAU is 26 394. This means that NAFAU has achieved a unionisation rate of 34,31%, which could increase to about 45% during the fishing season. The union believes that there is potential for membership growth, but this is threatened by changing fishing quotas and retrenchments. NAFAU also faces competition from one of the largest rival unions of the NUNW affiliates, namely the Namibia Wholesale and Retail Workers Union (NWRWU) which claims a membership of 8 500.

## **MANWU**

MANWU recruits in the metal and construction industries, as well as in businesses such as petrol stations, furniture stores and taxidermists. MANWU has members at about 170 companies in total. Two factors make it difficult for MANWU to recruit and keep track of its members. Firstly, the industries covered by this union are composed of many small companies, a number of which are family businesses. Secondly, of the approximately 22 700 workers in these industries, many in the construction industry particularly are temporary workers. The union leadership estimates a membership of 6 269, but only 3 650 paid-up members were counted. MANWU's unionisation rate stands at only 16,06% but the union indicated that some records are kept at branch offices.

The low number of paid-up members should be seen as a cause for concern and the union should investigate the reasons for the discrepancy between the estimated and paid-up membership figures.

## **NAPWU**

NAPWU recruits in the public sector – government departments, municipalities and parastatals. Membership details are entered into a computer database, and one staff member is solely responsible for registering members and updating the records. NAPWU officials estimated a signed-up membership of 35 000, with 24 065 paid-up members. This makes NAPWU the largest union among the NUNW affiliates and the largest in the country.

The industries covered by NAPWU employ about 48 483 workers, so the union has achieved a unionisation rate of 49,68%. NAPWU's rival union, the Public Service Union of Namibia (PSUN), claims a membership of 25 000 and is therefore strong competition. Membership counting in the public sector is complicated by the fact that a number of NAPWU members are also members of PSUN.

## **NATAU**

NATAU recruits mainly in the transport sector and its membership recording system is based on stop-order receipts from employers. Although this union has no organised system for recording membership data, it does hope to set up a computerised system soon. NATAU says that its membership is declining due to competition from other unions, but it seems the decline is also attributable to retrenchments and NATAU's own lack of capacity.

NATAU estimated a paid-up membership of 2 000 in an industry employing about 9 322 workers. The number of paid-up members counted was 2 717, which translates into a unionisation rate of 29,2%.

## **NANTU**

NANTU recruits workers in the education sector, targeting teachers and education officers such as school inspectors. The union hopes to start recruiting teachers in private schools and pre-primary schools in the near future. NANTU has recently set up a computerised membership database.

NANTU currently relies on payment slips from employers to keep track of its paid-up membership. There is no centralised filing system for the forms of signed-up members, and some membership forms are still filed in regional offices, making it impossible to establish the precise number of NANTU members. The paid-up members were counted on the basis of the slips submitted by employers.

NANTU officials estimated a membership of 12 500, with 9 213 paid-up members. A total of 17 862 workers are employed in the industry covered by NANTU, thus its unionisation rate stands at 51,58%. NANTU's competitor, the Teachers Union of Namibia (TUN), claims a membership of about 2 000.

## **NDAWU**

NDAWU members are domestic workers, cleaners, and employees of businesses such as dry cleaners, hairdressing salons and private kindergartens. The union files its membership forms manually at its head office, and it does not utilise any stop-order mechanisms for fee payments. Most NDAWU members are employed on an individual and informal basis in private homes, and this means that the chances of stop-order facilities being utilised are slim. NDAWU's membership could only be established by counting the completed membership forms.

Without a computerised membership recording system it is difficult to update data and keep track of members who have been dismissed or changed jobs. Union officials estimated a membership of 5 000, but only 3 262 forms were kept at head office. About 20 909 workers are employed in the industries covered by NDAWU, of whom about 15,6% are card-carrying NDAWU members. Union officials indicated that the membership is steadily increasing. However, NDAWU is financially dependent on the NUNW, its other affiliates and certain external organisations, and will remain so for some time. If the necessary support is not forthcoming, NDAWU may not be able to survive.

## NAFWU

This union recruits farm workers and has the most detailed and up-to-date computerised membership recording system of all the NUNW affiliates. The records denote the names, addresses and wages of members, and although some improvements could still be made in terms of the details recorded, the system is certainly the most efficient and reliable of all the affiliates' systems.

The union estimated its membership to be 3 500, of which 757 are paid-up members. Since the total number of farm workers in Namibia is 35 666, NAFWU's unionisation rate is a mere 2,12% – the lowest among all NUNW affiliates. According to union officials the membership is growing, but at a very slow pace. Organising in NAFWU's sector is difficult and expensive as farm workers are scattered around the country on private farms. Furthermore, permission from employers to access their workers is not always easy to obtain. As is the case with NDAWU, NAFWU will need assistance from the NUNW, its other affiliates and external organisations. Without their support NAFWU will not be able to recruit a significant number of farm workers in the near future.

**FIGURE 1: MEMBERSHIP AND UNIONISATION RATES**

Union	Paid-up membership	Estimated membership	Number of Workers in industry	Unionisation rate (%)	Estimated unionisation rate (%)	Estimated membership of rival unions	Estimated unionisation rate of rival unions (%)
MANWU	3 650	6 269	22 727	16,06	27,58	4 000	17,6
MUN	5 799	7 500	8 600	67,43	87,21	-	-
NAFAU	9 055	12 000	26 349	34,31	45,46	8 500	32,2
NANTU	9 213	12 500	17 862	51,58	69,98	2 000	11,2
NAPWU	24 065	35 000	48 483	49,64	72,19	25 000	51,56
NATAU	2 717	2 000	8 519	31,89	23,48	-	-
NDAWU	3 262	5 000	20 909	15,6	23,91	-	-
NAFWU	757	3 500	35 606	2,12	9,83	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>58 518</b>	<b>70 769</b>	<b>189 470</b>	<b>30,89</b>	<b>37,35</b>	<b>NAFTU:45000 NPSM: 14 000</b>	

Total number of formal sector employees in Namibia: 225 104  
 Unionisation rate achieved by NUNW affiliates (paid-up members): 30,89%  
 Estimated NUNW unionisation rate: 37,35%  
 Estimated total unionisation rate in Namibia (including NUNW, NAFTU and NPSM): 57,65%

**FIGURE 2: UNIONISATION RATE OF NUNW AFFILIATES**

To be inserted in laid-out version

**FIGURE 3: DISTRIBUTION OF MEMBERSHIP AMONG NUNW AFFILIATES**

To be inserted in laid-out version

## 2.3 Potential Growth Areas

The NUNW affiliates cover most of Namibia's major industries, but the service sector and white-collar workers are not well organised. The expected launch of a union for the financial and insurance sector – to be called the Namibia Financial Institutions Union (NAFINU) – will be an attempt to organise one of the white-collar sectors not presently covered by NUNW

affiliates. Recruiting in this particular sector may require a different strategy to that traditionally followed in recruiting blue-collar workers.

Namibia's tourism industry also lacks union coverage at present. In particular, lodges, guest houses and bed-and-breakfast providers could be targeted for recruitment. But this will not be easy since most establishments of these types employ only a few workers, and they are scattered across the country so more resources than usual would be required to recruit their workers. However, it may be possible to combine recruitment at these establishments with recruitment on farms so as to maximise the utilisation of union staff and vehicles and to minimise travel costs.

Among the NUNW affiliates the MUN has achieved the highest unionisation rate by far, while all the other affiliates have the potential to increase their membership figures. Even NANTU with a unionisation rate of over 50% should intensify its membership drive. In the industries covered by NAFAU and NATAU, numerous workers are not members of any union. A membership drive combined with the rendering of good services to existing members should enable these unions to move beyond a unionisation rate of 50%. In NATAU's case, however, it will be essential to first address internal problems.

MANWU, NDAWU and NAFWU are the NUNW's weakest affiliates. They have not been able to increase their membership significantly over the past few years. It will be difficult for NAFWU and NDAWU to secure high numbers of paid-up members, but MANWU should be able to recruit a much higher number in its industry. The NUNW will have to investigate all potential means to strengthen these three unions. Alternatively, the possibility of mergers with other NUNW affiliates could be explored. The sectors covered by MANWU, NDAWU and NAFWU are of crucial importance to Namibian society and cannot be left in the poorly organised state that they are today.

## 2.4 Recommendations

There is an urgent need to set up computerised membership data systems for all NUNW affiliates. They should all use the same system and this initiative should be co-ordinated by the NUNW. The NUNW should help its affiliates to obtain an appropriate system that is easy to implement, operate and manage. Each affiliate should then train at least two staff members to enter and update membership data on a regular basis, but this training should be provided through the federation.

Each membership database record should reflect the member's full name, gender, address, occupation, date of birth, region of employment, home language, number of dependants, employer details, date of joining the union, and any other information deemed relevant, such as the member's wage and stop-order payments or the reasons for fees not being paid. Such information would allow for a far more in-depth analysis of membership trends. It would enable the unions to ascertain, for example, the age, gender ratio and regional composition of their memberships.

The findings of this study indicate that several NUNW affiliates need to intensify their recruitment efforts. They should commit themselves to a recruitment drive over a certain period and co-operate with each other to strengthen the weaker affiliates. All NUNW unions need to ensure that they render good services to their members to avoid losing them to rival

unions. The NUNW should assist its weaker affiliates (NAFWU, NDAWU and MANWU) to develop an appropriate strategy for organising their respective sectors.

# **SECTION 3**

# **Organisational Considerations**

## **3.1 Union Leadership and Staff**

### **RECRUITMENT AND QUALIFICATIONS**

Among the staff members of the NUNW affiliates there are significant disparities in terms of educational attainment. Their formal educational levels range from a few years of schooling to a Grade 12 certificate. A few officials have undergone training at tertiary training institutions. Several officials have been employed on the basis of their experience rather than formal qualifications.

Although union posts are sometimes advertised in local newspapers, officials are often recruited through ‘internal’ advertising, for example, by notifying all structures of the union concerned (such as regional branch offices) about a vacancy. Most unions regard formal education as less important than experience of and a commitment to the labour movement:

*We usually look for people with experience rather than qualifications because those with qualifications also look for higher salaries.*

*Qualifications are not important. What is important is the willingness and knowledge and approach of the person.*

*I don't think we are concentrating on qualifications because we are a workers movement and all the years we never looked at qualifications.*

*By advertising in newspapers you will never get the right people because they were never really involved in trade unions. We are looking at the quality of a person who is really committed to helping the workers.*

The only two unions that place an emphasis on qualifications are the MUN and NANTU. Both of these advertise vacancies publicly and then screen the applicants. According to one official, *‘The overriding emphasis has been on qualifications, and to some extent commitment but this was never a clear-cut criterion used.’* The MUN usually seeks employees with at least a Grade 12 qualification, while NANTU staff members should have tertiary qualifications.

### **IN-SERVICE TRAINING**

Neither the NUNW nor any of its affiliates has any ongoing staff development programme. Staff members are occasionally delegated to attend workshops offered by the NUNW, the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES) or international trade unions.

The MUN has demonstrated the clearest commitment to in-service training. To equip its staff with the knowledge and skills relevant to their work, the MUN sends individuals to attend courses offered at institutions of higher learning or to work with sister unions elsewhere.

Training for union officials normally involves skills development in the following areas:

- ™ Leadership/management
- ™ Finance
- ™ Advocacy
- ™ Conflict resolution
- ™ Communication
- ™ Grievance handling
- ™ Negotiation
- ™ English language

Some officials have also received training in the various areas of union specialisation, such as interacting with the courts of law and using legislation to resolve a dispute. An official who has undergone specialist training would possess the necessary skills to appear in court, and know the rules of the courts and the provisions of the Labour Act, the Social Security Act and the health and safety regulations currently in force. The duration of specialist training courses is generally two to seven days. Some interviewees who have received this type of training said it was given only in the form of workshops, and that workshops do not test the ability of the trainee to apply what is learned. Some regional branch officials said the effectiveness of training programmes is often not evaluated or monitored on the ground, and that even after completing training workshops some regional officials still lack the confidence to exercise the skills they have acquired. One official in the south of the country who has attended workshops still relies on the union's head office in Windhoek to deal with labour issues in her region, and she merely acts as a facilitator between workers and head office. A more systematic and practical approach to training would help to improve the performance of union officials.

Another matter of concern to regional branch officials is that information about training courses does not always reach them in time, and it is not unusual for information about a workshop to reach them on the day before it starts. This could be due to poor communication between the NUNW and its affiliates, or alternatively to poor communication between the affiliates' head and branch offices.

Regional officials feel neglected by their head offices in terms of their own requests for skills upgrading. They claim that their requests for courses that are not directly labour-related (e.g. computer courses) are practically never fulfilled. The interviewees were unsure whether this treatment can be ascribed to a lack of funds or a head office's lack of interest in its regional officials.

## **REGIONAL STAFF**

In recruiting staff for a regional office, the NUNW and all its affiliates strive as far as possible to recruit from the region in which the office is situated. The reason for this is that staff members working outside of their region of origin have encountered problems such as rejection from local union officials and members. The affected interviewees generally felt that they had not been accepted because they are not from the region in which they now serve and are not conversant in the local language.

## **NUNW STAFF**

As a rule the NUNW advertises all non-elected posts. Applicants are then screened and interviewed by a small committee drawn from the NUNW and its affiliates. The selection criteria are generally skills and a political commitment to the labour movement. Candidates possessing the required skills and a good understanding of trade unionism are at a distinct advantage in applying for posts with the NUNW and its affiliates.

In addition to cleaning and security staff, the NUNW currently employs an administrator, a financial administrator, two field workers and an education and organising co-ordinator. The field workers were employed on the basis of their past experience with the labour movement, while the others were employed mainly on the basis of their skills. One of the field workers is a trained photographer but his skills are hardly ever used by the federation. The NUNW also employs a regional co-ordinator at each of its regional centres.

The NUNW holds annual evaluation and planning meetings focusing on education and training – not only for shop stewards but also for general union staff. In 1998 computer and financial training was offered to NUNW and affiliated staff in Windhoek.

### **NUNW OFFICE-BEARERS**

NUNW office-bearers are elected at the federation's National Congress. The present leadership comprises four men and three women. However, the key posts of secretary-general, president and both vice-presidents are all occupied by men, while women occupy the posts of deputy secretary-general, treasurer and vice-treasurer. Another issue of concern is that the president and both vice-presidents occupy management posts in the public or private sectors. This might raise the question of worker control over NUNW structures. However, the NUNW points out that union leaders in management positions will only be retained if they are capable and committed to the labour movement.

The present NUNW secretary-general has risen through the ranks of MANWU, which he served as branch organiser, regional educator, education co-ordinator and secretary-general. He became the NUNW education and organising co-ordinator in 1993, deputy secretary-general in 1994, acting secretary-general in 1995, and at the 1998 congress was reconfirmed in his post. Ranga Haikali belongs to the new generation of union leaders that emerged after independence, and he has become one of the most renowned and respected union leaders in the country. His deputy, Marianne Erastus, served as NUNW administrator in the late 1980s before joining NANTU. After a few years in the Ministry of Labour she returned to the labour movement and was elected to her present post at the 1998 congress. Her particular work focus is the promotion of women's issues in the federation.

## **3.2 Conditions of Service**

Since independence in 1990 the NUNW has experienced a high staff turnover largely due to relatively poor salaries. The Department of Women and the Department of Information and Publicity are presently without staff. Conditions of service are determined by the CEC and reviewed from time to time. Over the past three years, salaries have been adjusted six times, a pension scheme was introduced and the federation is now implementing a medical aid scheme. The possibility of introducing a housing allowance is also being investigated. These improved conditions of service have reduced the staff turnover.

Today the NUNW offers better working conditions than do most of its affiliates. Salaries presently range from N\$1 000 to N\$6 000 per month, although cleaning and security staff earn less than N\$1 000. By comparison, most affiliates still pay low salaries, ranging from N\$1 000 to N\$2 500 per month, and they offer few benefits. The exceptions are the MUN which pays a basic salary of N\$2 500 to N\$5 000 per month, and NANTU which pays the equivalent of a teacher's salary, and both offer better benefits than the other unions do. NAPWU is busy implementing new salary structures that will raise the salary range to N\$2 000 to N\$5 000 per month. Due to financial constraints the other affiliates are unlikely to improve their conditions of service in the near future.

A quarter of the regional union officials interviewed indicated that they were not satisfied with their conditions of service because they receive no benefits apart from a salary. The other regional officials seemed satisfied with their conditions of service, as benefits form part of their employment package.

Some officials argued that union staff should not receive benefits at all because '*a union is not a profit-making organisation and therefore is not obliged to give benefits*'.

There is a clear link between the benefits offered and the (financial) strength of the union. Benefits can only be offered if membership fees suffice to cover them. Another matter of concern to regional union officials is that their head offices presented their employment conditions to them without proper consultation. This has given rise to feelings of resentment towards head offices. Regional officials feel that their counterparts at head offices are getting a better deal in terms of salaries and benefits.

Another matter of concern, especially to female regional officials, is that there is a discrepancy between the salaries paid to men and women. According to one official, '*Women workers are oppressed; even their salaries are lower than men's salaries*'.

### **3.3 The 'Brain Drain'**

Overall, more than 60 union leaders and officials have left the NUNW and its affiliates since independence. Some are now members of the Cabinet and/or Parliament while others are employed in the government or private sector. Their reasons for leaving the unions range from political ambition to better employment packages. Regional union officials are often candidates for regional council elections. Many of those elected have served their terms of office as regional councillors and then returned to their respective unions. Several unions have fallen prey to private enterprises snapping up their most prominent unionists to work as industrial relations and public relations managers. Some unionists have declined such offers because they are in the business of serving workers and on principle refuse to 'cross the line'.

Since the unions are unable to prevent skilled officials from leaving for greener pastures in the public and private sectors, some have started to implement leadership training programmes to build a bigger pool of people equipped to take over leadership positions when others leave. But such programmes are not ongoing and Namibia, unlike South Africa, has no trade union school to serve its labour movement.

There is a general view that the 'brain drain' is damaging the unions:

*It is bad because those who are going are taking the knowledge with them and it is hard to recruit someone else.*

*Strong leaders who are supposed to lead the union into the uncertain future have left for greener pastures, thus leaving the union in the hands of inexperienced leaders.*

*It is a very bad thing, because you lose skillful people who leave the union empty. This is economically a disaster because there won't be progress if this continues.*

## 3.4 Union Finances

The NUNW and its affiliates have achieved a remarkable degree of financial self-sufficiency since independence. With the exception of NDAWU and NAFWU, all the affiliates are running their core activities from their membership fees. These activities include, for example, running national and regional offices, providing basic training for shop stewards and holding meetings of union structures. In this regard interviewees said the following:

*We do not receive money from anywhere and finance all activities from our membership income.*

*We are self-reliant and do not receive any funding from outside.*

*About 90% of our budget is financed from our own resources and the rest is funded by sister unions overseas.*

Membership fees are usually set at 1% of the member's income and only NANTU charges a fixed membership fee (currently N\$20 per month). Several NUNW affiliates receive financial support for specific programmes (mainly educational) from the international trade secretariats to which they are affiliated. In addition some unions have invested in unit trusts or they receive group-scheme commissions. NAFAU set up its own catering company in Lüderitz in 1993 which it intends to expand. The company is run by the union's Lüderitz branch, employs NAFAU members and provides food for a local private enterprise.

The MUN has set up its own investment company (see Section 4), but will not use the profits from this venture to run its activities. Instead it will use investment profits to benefit union members and their families by way of bursaries and other schemes.

Each affiliated union must pay 10% of its income to the federation. The NUNW covers all its own salaries, administrative costs and meeting costs from these affiliation fees. The costs for producing discussion papers, visiting the regions, rallying members (e.g. on May Day) and campaigning nationally and locally are all financed from the federation's own resources. In addition the NUNW co-finances some of the projects it runs jointly with the ILO and the Organisation for African Trade Union Unity (OATUU).

One of the main supporters of NUNW activities is the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES), which finances most of the federation's educational activities. Regional union activities in Southern Africa are carried out in collaboration with the Southern African Trade Union Co-ordinating Council (SATUCC), OATUU and the Commonwealth Trade Union Council (CTUC). OATUU and the CTUC also sponsor some educational activities.

The NUNW operates within a budget framework based on income estimates. This framework covers administration, education and investments. The federation does not draw up a formal annual budget because, in Ranga Haikali's words, '*A trade union is forced to react to events. We won't be able to achieve our goals if we say we want to stick to the budget. Our finances are determined by activities.*'

The NUNW emphasises the need for its regional centres to attain financial independence. They are expected to earn an income from hiring out office space at the centres to the affiliated unions and other organisations. The regional centres are also expected to run their own income-generating activities to become financially independent from the national centre. But at times this strategy does not work and funds have to be transferred from head office. According to the secretary-general, the southern and western regions have succeeded in attaining financial independence but the northern region faces problems chiefly because the affiliates do not contribute towards the upkeep of the centre.

### **3.5 Local and Regional Structures**

Most NUNW affiliates have similar structures. The basic and probably most important functions are carried out by the shop stewards, who are elected by their union members at the various workplaces. Shop steward committees or councils (also called local committees) are established at the workplaces, and branch committees are established in various towns. In some unions (NAFAU, MANWU, NDAWU and NATAU) the branch offices are expected to link directly with head office. Other unions (NAPWU, MUN, NAFWU and NANTU) have regional structures to link the branches in a particular region, and the regional structures link directly with their head office.

Functioning structures are the lifeline of any union that takes the principles of accountability, democracy and worker control seriously. As one official explained, '*This is where we discuss the problems that are directly affecting the workers. This is where you solve most of your problems.*'

Unfortunately the NUNW and several of its affiliates experience problems with their regional and local structures. The federation itself expects its regional offices to report monthly to head office on their activities and finances. From time to time meetings of the head and regional offices are held. However, communication is generally poor and rules are often not adhered to, and this applies to the affiliates as well. The lack of communication is one of the serious problems that the NUNW and relevant affiliates will have to address. The 1995/96 Labour Relations Survey already identified this problem. It found that 57% of union members in the private sector and 45% in the public sector attend union meetings at the workplace whenever they are called. Only 19% of members in the private sector and 29% in the public sector never attend such meetings. This shows a high degree of worker participation at the workplace, but weak regional structures lead to poor communication between national leadership structures and shop steward committees, and according to Murray and Wood, '[t]his has resulted in a dilution of accountability: the notion of mandates is stretched to unacceptable levels, with national union policies and strategies not always reflecting the mood on the shop floor' (1997: 184).

Some of the NUNW affiliates are not well represented in the regions and do not participate in the NUNW structures. In the northern NUNW centre only NAPWU, MANWU and the MUN have offices. Likewise, only three affiliates have offices in the southern NUNW centre, and even in the western centre of Swakopmund only some affiliates have offices. Problems in the regions are partly created by the lack of affiliate structures. In many parts of the northern region there are no affiliate branch offices at all, which creates serious problems for the operations of the federation. The long distances between towns is another factor hampering union work in the regions.

Regional officials of NUNW affiliates pointed out that the problems they encounter with their head offices relate largely to the funding of regional offices. Some head offices disburse funds to their regional offices to cover daily expenses, but the bulk do not, and most regional offices receive no running-cost assistance at all. The affiliates renting offices in the NUNW regional centres are supposed to pay a maintenance fee to the NUNW, but these fees are often not forthcoming and the NUNW is therefore unable to maintain its centres. The regional officials concerned hold their head offices responsible for this because despite receiving membership fees from the regions on a monthly basis, head offices still fail to provide operational funds to the regions.

The NUNW is currently experiencing serious problems with its southern and northern centres. Several officials of affiliated unions have questioned the regional co-ordinators' competence for the post, while some no longer attend NUNW meetings called by the co-ordinators. NUNW affiliates in the north are reluctant to contribute towards the centre's maintenance. Officials in both regions are not able to visit their respective areas on a regular basis due to a lack of transport and due to the vastness of the region they are supposed to cover. In the north, only the regional officials of MANWU, NAFAU, NATAU and NAFWU are able to visit easily accessible areas regularly, but outlying areas only occasionally. In the south, NATAU officials seem to be the only ones able to regularly visit their branches and the companies employing their members.

The NUNW is most effective in the western region. Although it is no longer in a position to visit all areas in the region regularly as it previously did thanks to financial support received from outside the country, it still actively supports its affiliates in the west and plays an important role in Walvis Bay especially. However, there are several problems in the region associated with NUNW affiliates. MANWU officials, for example, use the postal service to collect grievances instead of visiting their members regularly. On the other hand, NANTU is among the most effective unions in covering its areas by virtue of its structure: teachers are represented through school committees, branch committees and other regional structures. The MUN is also able to cover all the areas where it has members.

To sum up, the unions that are financially strong, such as the MUN and NANTU, are able to run proper offices with all facilities in the regions where they are active. They can respond to issues affecting their members, whereas those hampered by a lack of facilities are often not in a position to respond. The general impression gained is that the head offices of stronger unions (in terms of their membership and organisational structures) are effective in dealing with requests received or issues referred from their regional offices. On the other hand, some regional officials are of the opinion that directing requests to the secretary-general is in most instances not effective. At times the secretary-general has not been able to respond properly, and several regional officials feel that their union's structures should be revisited to better accommodate regional concerns.

The effective operation of regional and local structures remains a major challenge for most NUNW affiliates. A basic problem that regional and local structures experience with the NUNW structures is head office's slow response to issues referred from the regions. Other matters raised by regional officials are as follows:

- ™ All NUNW affiliates execute their workplace duties through shop stewards, who are the unions' representatives in the workplace and are the first to deal with labour issues affecting union members. However, in the regions there is no link between the shop stewards of different affiliates, and the NUNW shop steward councils meant to forge this link do not exist. Although NUNW co-ordinators in the regions have tried to establish or revive these councils, regional officials of the affiliates are seemingly unenthusiastic. Affiliates in the regions appear to operate independently of the NUNW so their officials see no need to attach themselves to NUNW shop stewards councils.
- ™ Regional officials see the benefit of their NUNW affiliation merely in terms of the convenience of having office space provided at the federation's regional centres. As noted above, the maintenance costs for this space should be shared by the affiliates, but in practice most affiliates in the regions expect the NUNW to maintain the centres on their behalf.
- ™ Because communication between NUNW affiliates is poor, regional officials who are able to visit outlying areas normally do not notify their sister unions of an impending trip. Better communication and co-operation would enable more NUNW affiliates to visit members in outlying areas and share the transport costs.
- ™ Regional officials of the affiliates attend to issues affecting their own union only, and although their sister unions could benefit from their experiences in tackling a particular issue, they do not seem eager to share their experiences.
- ™ In the western region officials of the affiliates do work together on labour issues and often request assistance from the local NUNW co-ordinator. This hardly ever happens in the other regional centres, where the NUNW co-ordinators feel excluded.
- ™ Although regional officials experience difficulties in executing their tasks, they generally share the desire to continue working for the unions. Officials in the north were recently confronted with the closure of the TCL mine in Tsumeb, and they continue to fight for a better deal for the retrenched workers. There is general agreement that the unions' focus in the north can be shifted to the companies emerging in the aftermath of TCL.
- ™ There is consensus among union officials that workers in all industries have become more aware of their rights, and that efforts to recruit and popularise workers' rights must be undertaken in each new company emerging. Thus most union officials are of the opinion that the regional offices do serve a purpose and should continue to exist despite their receiving limited support from their head offices.
- ™ Because union activity was restricted prior to independence, it was difficult for the NUNW affiliates to obtain their membership dues, particularly in the regions. The introduction of the Labour Act after independence enabled unions to implement a stop-order system, and the payment of fees through stop-order deductions has now been achieved in many workplaces.
- ™ Although regional officials are responsible for collecting membership dues for their respective unions, they have no say over how the fees are used. Only officials of some unions (i.e. the MUN, NANTU, NATAU and NAPWU – in all the regions surveyed) are able to utilise a portion of the membership fees to cover the running costs of the local office, while the remainder they must send to their respective head offices. The other

unions must send all membership fees directly to their respective head offices, which in turn provide allowances for running the local offices. These allowances, however, are often insufficient to cover a local office's running costs, nor do they allow for paying the NUNW to maintain the regional centres.

- ™ Female regional officials still have trouble gaining recognition as equals (or superiors) of their male colleagues. In the southern and northern regions where the NUNW co-ordinators are women, men find it hard to work with them or to support their efforts to execute their tasks successfully.

## PROPOSALS FROM THE REGIONS

1. The general conclusion among regional union officials was that there should be closer co-operation between the head offices of NUNW affiliates and their respective regional and local offices. Head offices should allocate more resources and pay more regular visits to the regions to promote the effectiveness and visibility of regional and local offices.
2. Regional NUNW co-ordinators feel that if affiliates in their regions would keep them informed about their activities, an atmosphere of camaraderie will be created.
3. Regional officials feel it is a contradiction that while they are expected to negotiate for better working conditions and benefits for workers, they are not allowed to negotiate a better deal for themselves. Absurd as it may seem, regional union officials feel they need to form their own union if they are ever to enjoy better conditions of employment themselves, but are not allowed to form a union.
4. Communication between the federation, the affiliate head offices and their respective regional and local offices should be vastly improved.
5. Regional officials proposed that their head offices should revisit their respective regional structures. The situation often arises that there is nobody to manage the office in the absence of a regional official who is out attending to labour matters in the region. This situation often leads to conflict between the regional official and relevant head office. Regional officials also proposed that the head offices should revisit their regional demarcations because, for example, officials at the northern regional centre are not able to cover the Caprivi region effectively due to a lack of transport and/or funds.

## 3.5 Main Activities

Most NUNW affiliates are active in the following four main areas:

- ™ Organising and recruiting
- ™ Resolving disputes and grievances
- ™ Collective bargaining
- ™ Educating and training

### ORGANISING AND RECRUITING

Organising and recruiting are ongoing activities of all the NUNW affiliates, but the younger and weaker affiliates like NAFWU and NDAWU are currently focusing mostly on this activity:

*NDAWU's main activity at the moment is organising to recruit members for the union.*

*At the moment NAFWU concentrates on organising, recruitment and creating awareness among farm workers.*

Among the more established affiliates, NATAU – following a period of internal conflict and division – is also devoting much of its time and resources to organising its workplaces and strengthening its membership base: '*Our main activity at the moment is rebuilding the union, re-recruiting lost members, instilling confidence in members and concluding negotiations successfully.*'

## **RESOLVING DISPUTES AND GRIEVANCES**

Labour relations in Namibia are still characterised by conflicts and disputes, and unions are often called in to defend their members' rights and interests. NAFAU, for example, spends about 60% of its time dealing with dismissals and representing its members at the workplace and in district labour courts.

Although grievances should be handled by shop stewards, national and regional union officials are often required to become involved. Regional officials are usually engaged where grievances pertain to unfair dismissals and wage increases.

In handling grievances the grievance procedure applicable to each union is followed. The grievance procedure usually entails the following. First, the shop steward takes up the grievance at the shop-floor level by consulting with floor managers. If these consultations fail to achieve the desired results, a union official is called in to negotiate with management. If a deadlock persists, the union official declares a dispute with the company and registers the dispute with the Office of the Labour Commissioner. Where necessary the dispute is finally referred to the relevant district labour court, in which the union official appears to represent the member/s concerned.

Regional officials are of the opinion that most labour disputes are unnecessary and could be avoided if employers would adhere to the provisions of the Labour Act. According to regional officials the Labour Act is only adhered to when it suits the employer, and when it doesn't the employer tends to claim ignorance of the Act, or otherwise claims to find the provisions confusing.

The time frame for resolving a labour matter depends entirely on how the matter is addressed. If addressed at shop-floor level it can be resolved in a matter of days. If it has to go to court it can take months and even years to resolve. Because many companies try to delay the process it is often very difficult for the unions to resolve matters quickly.

Union officials in the western region find it difficult to deal with companies operating in its EPZ, several of which companies delay matters by claiming that they cannot negotiate with unions before they have consulted with their head office. In the southern region a NAFAU official was confronted with a grievance situation wherein the management of a company that closed its factory overnight had skipped the country and had to be traced before the official

could declare a dispute. In the northern region all 2 000 workers at TCL's Tsumeb mine were retrenched when the mine was closed. The question of its reopening is still in the hands of the liquidators and the MUN has very little influence over the process.

## COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

It is a sign of organisational consolidation and increasing employer recognition that several unions now spend most of their time negotiating for better conditions of service for their members:

*Negotiations take up to 80% of NANTU's time.*

*Collective bargaining is the MUN's central struggle every day.*

*A lot of time is spent on wage negotiations because MANWU has to negotiate with many different companies.*

Virtually all NUNW affiliates negotiate on a company-by-company basis, even in industries where they dominate in all companies. Centralised bargaining takes place only in the construction industry where MANWU has a recognition agreement with the Construction Industries Federation of Namibia (CIF) which represents employers in the industry. MANWU wants to expand centralised bargaining to the metal and woodwork industries to avoid being drawn into many separate negotiations with small companies. As MANWU officials explained: '*Centralised bargaining was identified as the best option because it is more economically viable than travelling from one place to another.*' The MUN and NAFAU are looking at ways to achieve centralised bargaining for the same reason.

However, despite the obvious advantages of centralised bargaining, MANWU has found that it can also have disadvantages: '*It distances you from your members because you are not always with them. They just hear that you have negotiated [on their behalf] but we cannot contact them directly.*' The need to involve members directly was also recognised by the MUN, which wants to equip its shop stewards with the necessary skills to undertake negotiations on their own. NAFAU leaves negotiating to its branch offices, and head office is only called in when the branches fail to achieve the desired results. NATAU also wants its branch officials to negotiate because '*otherwise we will revert back to the old order of one-man shows and autocracy*'.

NANTU and NAPWU have a recognition agreement with the government at the national level and now negotiate on behalf of all their members in the public sector. NANTU wants to broaden its negotiating team to ensure that all regions and teachers at various levels are represented in negotiations. NAPWU has recognition agreements with several municipalities and parastatals. NAPWU and NANTU also have a joint recognition agreement with the University of Namibia (UNAM), but they have not been able to enter into collective bargaining due to weaknesses in the union's structures at UNAM.

The NUNW affiliates have achieved significant successes overall in the area of collective bargaining. Of the 37 collective agreements registered with the Office of the Labour Commissioner in August 1998, 32 were agreements reached with NUNW affiliates. Of the 54 pending agreements, 45 involve NUNW affiliates.

## **EDUCATING AND TRAINING**

All NUNW affiliates have identified education and training as key and ongoing activities. They all train shop stewards to equip them with basic knowledge about the labour movement, the relevant industrial union, the role of the shop steward and the Labour Act. To quote one union leader: '*In the next few years education, which is the basis of success for the activities of the union, will be a central activity. Education must reach everywhere where it is required.*'

NAFAU is currently developing a shop steward manual as a tool for its ongoing training programmes. Some unions are providing training on health and safety issues to equip shop stewards to deal with problems relating to these issues at their workplaces.

Despite these efforts, there are signs that the education and training programmes have weaknesses. The 1995/96 Labour Relations Survey found that many workers are uncertain about the internal operations of their union. Less than half of the workers surveyed knew the contents of the Labour Act. Of those who knew something about the Act, just 46% in the private sector and 24% in the public sector had been informed by their union. Furthermore, shop stewards in the public sector knew no more about the Act than did the workers they represent (see Murray & Wood 1997: 182-186). This is a clear indication that unions have to improve their education programmes, not only for their members but for their shop stewards and officials too.

## **3.6 The Role of the NUNW**

The federation's main functions include the following:

- ™ Co-ordinating the activities of affiliated unions
- ™ Advocating and lobbying around government policies
- ™ Educating union leaders
- ™ Contributing to the drafting of national policies and legislation such as the National Development Plan and the Labour Act
- ™ Promoting gender equality through union structures staffed by and serving women

The NUNW also sees the close monitoring of government practices as an important role: '*We are supposed to be the watchdog to see what is happening in this country. We are supposed to advise the government.*'

Most NUNW affiliates view their affiliation as a clear advantage. The noted benefits include having access to office space and meeting facilities at NUNW centres, the leadership workshops offered by the federation, and the platform it provides for promoting unity among workers in different industries. Affiliates also see the NUNW as their mouthpiece on social, political and economic issues: '*The NUNW is our voice on political and socio-economic issues. It must be able to confront all problems that workers are facing.*'

While recognising the important role played by the NUNW in shaping the Labour Act, affiliates feel that the federation should do more to secure minimum wages for workers, especially farm and domestic workers. Affiliates also want to see improvements made to regional and local NUNW structures, and they expect the federation to find ways to achieve financial self-sufficiency for the labour movement as a whole. Some affiliates feel that they are

not consulted sufficiently by the NUNW and they expect the federation to support the strikes they call. Some affiliates also want to hold more regular meetings with the federation to debate policy issues: '*We would like the NUNW to be more proactive in policy formulation by establishing forums where the affiliates can come together and debate policy positions.*'

The NUNW affiliates expect the federation to provide educational, research and advisory services to them. They also expect the federation's active involvement in resolving conflicts that may arise between affiliates: '*The NUNW must also help solve problems between affiliate unions to make sure that problems will not divide our workers. It is good that the NUNW allows different opinions and debates without its affiliates labelling each other.*'

## 3.7 Recommendations

### NUNW STAFFING AND TRAINING

Although significant improvements have been made over the last few years to NUNW employees' conditions of service, the federation will still find it difficult to attract well-qualified and experienced staff and will thus have to continue relying to some extent on the commitment of its individual employees. Continuous in-service training for staff members is one way to upgrade skills levels for the organisation while simultaneously giving individual employees the opportunity to upgrade their qualifications. In-service training in the NUNW has to some extent already yielded these results and should therefore be intensified.

The NUNW should also look for ways to utilise its existing staff optimally. Seemingly there are periods when staff members are idle, and this problem could be solved by expanding the federation's activities and offering staff incentives for those who take on additional tasks. Regular staff meetings should be held to involve staff members more fully in NUNW activities and to foster a spirit of common purpose.

### WORKER LEADERSHIP AND CONTROL

At present the top three NUNW posts (president and vice-presidents) are occupied by unionists who also occupy managerial posts in the public and private sectors. Their commitment to the labour movement is not doubted, but the NUNW should clarify how it intends to ensure worker control over and leadership within its ranks. It should draw up a policy stating to what extent the composition of its leadership should reflect its membership base.

The recent changes in the composition of the NUNW's Central Executive Committee (CEC) are also cause for concern. This is the highest decision-making body acting between the annual National Congress, and it is required to give direction on organisational, political and educational policy issues. Following its 1998 congress the NUNW introduced the category of 'associate membership' for former unionists who opted to work for the government or in the private sector. These associate members are now serving on the CEC although they no longer have a worker constituency to which they are accountable. This situation could lead to conflicts of interest and undermine worker control over NUNW structures. The danger of compromising the principle of worker control over union structures has to be avoided, thus the federation should look for other ways to utilise the expertise of the associate members, for example, through a 'labour caucus'.

## **THE ‘BRAIN DRAIN’**

The NUNW and its affiliates will not be able to prevent union leaders from leaving for greener pastures. This problem can only be dealt with by strengthening collective leadership and grooming promising unionists for leadership positions, which would require more systematic and practical leadership training programmes to equip dedicated candidates with the necessary skills.

## **FINANCES**

Over the past few years the NUNW has made significant progress towards achieving financial self-sufficiency. The ability to fund core activities from own sources is a cornerstone of organisational independence, and the NUNW has come a long way in its bid to attain this state. Raising additional funds from donor organisations and international sister unions for specific activities (e.g. education and research) would not undermine the federation’s independence. To the contrary, such support can only enhance and strengthen its operations and effectiveness.

It is strongly recommended that the NUNW starts working in accordance with a formal annual budget, and its regional centres and activities should be covered under one national federation budget. An effective national federation has to have an active presence in the regions, and the current arrangement of imposing financial self-sufficiency on the regional centres is clearly not working.

Covering regional centres and activities under a national budget would force the NUNW’s head office and regional centres to develop a strategic activity plan, and such a plan should be flexible enough to provide for unforeseen but necessary expenditures.

## **REGIONAL AND LOCAL STRUCTURES**

It is apparent that the NUNW’s regional and local structures are weak and in some cases non-existent. In addition to including the regional centres in a national activity plan and budget, staff of the NUNW head office should visit the regions on a regular basis. This could help regional officials to feel that they are part of a national federation, which many do not feel at present. It could also help to counter the sense of abandonment that many regional officials presently experience largely because they are practically never included in the decision-making process. The proposals made by regional union officials (see Section 3.5 above) should be taken seriously.

It is crucial for the NUNW to appoint committed and respected regional staff who enjoy the confidence of the affiliated unions in their regions. The NUNW head office should urgently intervene to solve the crises currently facing its Keetmanshoop and Tsumeb offices.

## **ACTIVITIES**

Most NUNW affiliates deal with ‘bread-and-butter’ issues on their own. Many are busy consolidating their positions on the shop floor and some are exploring the possibility of moving towards centralised collective bargaining. At present the NUNW’s role in supporting its affiliates’ collective bargaining efforts is insignificant, and it could play a more prominent

role in this regard by assisting with back-up research and advice. The federation could also assist its affiliates to broaden the collective bargaining agenda beyond the narrow range of issues presently being discussed. The 1995/96 Labour Relations Survey revealed that the important issue of training, for example, was only negotiated with some companies, and according to Klerck and Sycholt (1997: 154-155), less than a third of employees reported that their union had taken up the training issue with management. These facts indicate a need for the NUNW and its affiliates to place more issues on the bargaining agenda and to define the concept of worker participation in the Namibian context.

The NUNW should consult its affiliates on a more regular basis and identify issues of common concern, such as privatisation and subcontracting. It should also spearhead campaigns and other forms of action to address these issues, which would strengthen the federation's role as umbrella and mouthpiece of its affiliates. The NUNW should furthermore become proactive in policy areas, for example it should develop a macro-economic strategy for the labour movement as a whole.

Finally, the NUNW should view the appointment of its new education co-ordinator as an opportunity to intensify its education and training programmes. These programmes should be offered in all the regions and they should cover the full range of topics of interest to unionists: basic organisational topics (e.g. union structures), relevant legislation (e.g. the Labour Act), skills development topics (e.g. bargaining strategies), and topics relating to politics and economics (e.g. globalisation, EPZs, sub-contracting and privatisation).

## **SECTION 4**

# **Key Issues for the Labour Movement**

### **4.1 The Struggle for a Living Wage**

The call for a living wage for all workers in Namibia was one of the key union demands before independence. This was identified as a ‘bread-and-butter’ issue affecting almost all workers and it was strategically linked to the struggle for independence: the absence of a living wage was seen as one of the direct effects of colonial exploitation.

Eight years after independence the fight for a living wage seems to have been abandoned. The issue has disappeared off the table. Unions do not even campaign systematically for a minimum wage for vulnerable workers like domestic and farm workers. According to the NUNW, the living wage issue is now being left to the various industrial unions, which are expected to secure a living wage in their respective industries through collective bargaining. But their task is complicated by the fact that while the Labour Act makes provision for wage commissions to determine minimum wages in specific sectors, this has never happened: *‘The government was very reluctant and hesitant to implement wage commissions. This makes it difficult for us to campaign for it at a national level.’*

A presidential commission of inquiry investigated the living and working conditions of domestic and farm workers and presented its findings and recommendations to the Namibian president in 1997. But to date the government has not taken any action, nor has it even released the report. The NUNW has been silent on the issue: it has not pushed for the release of the report, nor for the implementation of its recommendations.

#### **THE REGIONAL VIEW**

All NUNW regional officials regard the introduction of a living wage as a major objective of the labour movement. However, company managers often do not negotiate in good faith regarding wage increases. A MANWU official in the south said the following:

*For over 16 years petrol attendants have been working at the petrol station and they are still earning a salary of between N\$400 and N\$500. When the union demanded an increase of N\$150, management’s attitude towards workers and the union officials changed completely and they did not want to negotiate with union officials. They even used the argument that neither the MUN nor MANWU were true representatives of the workers.*

Another problem encountered is that workers seemingly find it difficult to comprehend percentage increases and want the increase translated into the exact amount of money they are going to get. Related to this is another problem which a NAFWU official in the north described as follows: *‘Any kind of talk about an increase has a detrimental effect on workers. As soon as the union started to talk about wages, impetuosity led the farm workers into difficulties.’*

Among the NUNW affiliates there is agreement that the fight for a living wage should still be seen as a priority issue since most workers still do not receive a living wage. At the same time the affiliates recognise that the campaign for a living wage has had weaknesses:

*This is a priority but we do not have a direction how to achieve it at the moment.*

*The living wage campaign was not waged properly and was just a slogan. I am not sure which union is clear on what a living wage campaign is.*

*Instead of propagating a minimum wage we should campaign for a living wage.*

Several affiliates believe that the campaign for a living wage should be undertaken by the federation as a national campaign and not be left to individual unions. Officials furthermore admit that the labour movement has failed to define a living wage: '*We have not properly defined what is a living wage and the NUNW should revive and co-ordinate a living wage campaign.*'

## **4.2 Political Affiliation and Relationship with Government**

The NUNW's affiliation to SWAPO continues to rouse emotions throughout the labour movement. This issue was hotly debated during the NUNW's congresses in 1993 and 1998, and both congresses confirmed the federation's political affiliation.

An affiliation accord between the federation and SWAPO was signed in 1997. This accord states that the affiliation shall be based on the independence and decision-making autonomy of both organisations. It also states that consultations will guide the relationship and that both organisations are mandated to work in the interests of their members – subject to the broader principles enshrined in the SWAPO Constitution.

The accord stipulates that the NUNW recognises SWAPO as the senior partner in the relationship and agrees to work jointly for economic reconstruction and social development in Namibia. Both parties commit themselves to the principles of popular mandates from their structures whenever any joint action is taken. In addition, '*The rank and file members of the affiliated industrial unions will be encouraged to participate in the party structures based on the principle of freedom of association.*'

The NUNW defends the affiliation as a useful tool for influencing decision-making within SWAPO. However, the federation also points out that some decisions of the party were not implemented due to weaknesses in the party structures. The NUNW believes it was successful in influencing the drafting of the National Development Plan and amendments to the EPZ Act, as well as the setting up of the Labour Advisory Council. Initially the Labour Act was not made applicable to Namibia's EPZs, but after the NUNW intervened a compromise was reached to the effect that the Act will apply in the EPZs, but not the provisions on the right to strike and the five-year lockout right.

Supporters of the affiliation among the leaders of the NUNW and its affiliates believe that the affiliation has resulted in a positive atmosphere prevailing between the government and federation. They believe the affiliation will assist the federation to influence policies in favour of workers:

*The NUNW must remind the government of the role it has to play. The NUNW must use the accord to guide the government.*

*The affiliation helps the NUNW to influence certain policies because it is easier for the unions to go to the president if they are affiliated to SWAPO.*

*As a union we are independent. We do our own thing without consulting the political party.*

All leaders at the head offices of affiliates maintained that their unions have always worked independently and have ensured that they are at no stage influenced by the government or ruling party. They all agree that a trade union's independence in decision-making and carrying out activities has to be guarded, and that neither the government nor the ruling party should be allowed to influence union decisions. Nevertheless, some affiliate leaders admitted that both SWAPO and the government may try to influence union decisions indirectly: '*Maybe it can be done indirectly by influencing influential individuals. For example, associate members can play an important part in influencing decisions.*'<sup>1</sup>

NUNW regional officials have generally not experienced any problems with the federation's affiliation to the ruling party and in fact hold the following views:

*Disaffiliation will bring conflict with the government.*

*There is still a need for affiliation to the ruling party because we are not yet mature enough to be on our own.*

However, regional officials of NUNW affiliates are split on the political affiliation issue. Some see no problem with the NUNW-SWAPO affiliation because their respective unions are not directly affiliated to the ruling party. But others have experienced the problem that employers with whom they were attempting to negotiate would not negotiate in good faith on the grounds that they wanted to negotiate with a labour union and not with a political party, nor with a union associated with a political party. Such employers create confusion by arguing that workers who are not card-carrying members of SWAPO will not benefit from any kind of deal reached. Problems have also been experienced on the shop floor, where workers who do not support SWAPO also do not support activities proposed by the NUNW affiliates. Some regional officials thus feel that the political affiliation hampers their work: '*The NUNW should disaffiliate from the ruling party. You don't need to be affiliated to a political party to be recognised or to be powerful. Our union is suffering because of this.*'

Some regional officials said they are not consulted or informed on the question of political affiliation, and fear that if they voice their conviction that the NUNW should disaffiliate from

---

<sup>1</sup> The NUNW introduced 'associate membership' after its 1998 congress in an attempt to forge a closer link between the federation and former trade unionists now employed by the government or in the private sector. As a result, four deputy ministers (Loide Kasingo, Bernard Esau, John Shaetonhodi and Walter Kemba) are presently serving on the NUNW's CEC.

SWAPO they will be accused of disloyalty. They also fear victimisation by their ‘comrades’ at the federation’s National Congress, this being the only forum in which the affiliation issue is raised and discussed.

Although most national NUNW leaders support the federation’s affiliation to SWAPO, they identified weaknesses in and potential dangers of this relationship:

*I don’t think workers on the shop floor really debated the affiliation issue. Sometimes issues are only debated by the leadership and not really by the workers.*

*The NUNW has not been very successful in influencing government policies.*

*The affiliation has not been very useful to promote workers’ interests. In many cases those unionists who went to Parliament have become very silent.*

*The affiliation benefits the ruling party which gets its way at the end of the day.*

Nevertheless, even unionists critical of the NUNW-SWAPO affiliation pointed to the danger of splitting unions over the question of political affiliation:

*Disaffiliation will not resolve the problem because it will lead to new divisions. Some people would say that we are betraying the struggle.*

*Although I am in support of disaffiliation at some point it is better to remain affiliated for the time being. Otherwise the unions will split and workers will resign from NUNW.*

The dilemma of splitting workers along political lines rather than uniting all workers under the NUNW umbrella is one of the serious dilemmas that the federation currently faces. Other Southern African labour unions have experienced a similar problem. During a meeting of the Southern African Trade Union Co-ordinating Council (SATUCC) in November 1998, Zambian and Zimbabwean unionists pointed out that they also once maintained a close relationship with their respective ruling parties, but came to recognise the need to be independent in order to defend their members’ interests, which often ran contrary to government policies.

## 4.3 Trade Union Unity

The NUNW is Namibia’s only trade union federation that unites industrial unions across almost all economic sectors under its umbrella. Despite the NUNW’s achievements in uniting Namibian workers, there are about 20 other unions and associations which have not joined the federation. Some of them are very small or based at a single institution.

Besides the NUNW, there are two other trade union federations in Namibia. The **Namibia Federation of Trade Unions (NAFTU)** was formed on 17 July 1998 and constitutes the second biggest federation. It consists of the Public Service Union of Namibia (PSUN), the Teachers Union of Namibia (TUN), the Namibia Telecommunication Union (NTU), the Local Authority Union of Namibia (LAUN) and the Namibia Seamen and Allied Workers Union (NASAWE). NAFTU draws the bulk of its members from the public service, while representation for workers in the retail and manufacturing industries is still small. Its biggest affiliate is the PSUN, which was formed just before independence as the successor to the

Government Service Staff Association (GSSA) which had represented mainly white and ‘coloured’ civil servants (Peltola 1995: 281). The PSUN today claims a membership of 25 000, but this figure seems inflated. In 1996 a referendum was called among civil servants to clarify the question of which union has majority support. The PSUN received 9 267 votes – significantly less than its membership claims. Nevertheless, the PSUN still represents a substantial minority of civil servants and continues to operate throughout the civil service.

NAFTU claims to represent a total of 45 000 union members and although this figure seems inflated, it is indeed the second largest trade union federation in Namibia. Its formation was justified on the grounds that a trade union federation with a party-political affiliation (like the NUNW) would not be an effective watchdog for workers.

Namibia’s third trade union federation is the **Namibia People’s Social Movement (NPSM)**. It is headed by a former SWAPO organiser, Aloysius Yon, who at one time also led the Namibia Christian Social Trade Unions (NCSTU) federation. The NCSTU joined the World Federation of Labour before independence but did not affiliate to any political party. In 1992 the NCSTU renamed itself the Namibia People’s Social Movement (NPSM) (see Peltola 1995: 209, 281). The NPSM is the umbrella body of the Namibia Wholesale and Retail Workers Union (NWRWU), the Namibia Building Workers Union (NBWU), the Bank Workers Union of Namibia (BAWON) and the South West Africa Mineworkers Union (SWAMU). SWAMU collapsed after the closure of the TCL mine in 1998 and the total membership of NPSM-affiliated unions today stands at between 13 000 and 15 000. The NWRWU is the biggest NPSM affiliate. It operates in the wholesale and retail sectors and has about 8 500 members.

The NPSM has offices in Windhoek, Walvis Bay and Oshakati, and plans to open another office in the south of the country. These offices employ a total of 11 full-time staff members and the federation claims to have signed about 50 recognition agreements.

The NPSM does not have its own staff. Instead its affiliated unions make staff available to carry out NPSM tasks in addition to their own. The federation is built around the dominant personality of Aloysius Yon, who serves as secretary-general of the NPSM as well as its three affiliated unions. The NPSM affiliates finance their operations from membership fees, but they also receive some funding for educational activities from outside sources such as the World Confederation of Labour and the Democratic Organisation of African Workers Trade Unions.

The NUNW’s political affiliation seems to be the main reason for trade unions refraining from joining its ranks and even forming their own federations instead. Power struggles for leadership positions are also considered to hinder potential mergers: *‘Some union leaders are opposed to trade union unity and mergers because they fear they will lose their positions.’*

The NUNW still hopes to achieve trade union unity and to this end it initiated discussions with the NPSM in 1996. The two federations agreed that trade union unity should be built at the industrial level. However, unity talks between the public service unions NAPWU and the PSUN, and between the teachers unions NANTU and the TUN, were unsuccessful. Likewise, the unity talks between NAFAU and the Pelagic Motormen Union in Walvis Bay collapsed.

The strongest trade union rivalries are found in the wholesale industry between NAFAU and the NWRWU, in the building industry between MANWU and the NBWU, and in the public service between NAPWU and the PSUN. A regional NAFAU official said, *‘We are enemies because the non-affiliated members don’t know where they belong.’*

Regional officials of NUNW affiliates pointed out that rival unions are only successful where the NUNW unions do not serve their members well. As soon as a union fails to meet its members' expectations, it is in danger of losing them to rival unions. According to NAFAU, '*Members are now moving up and down between the unions.*'

Shop stewards therefore have a crucial role to play as the first representatives of trade unions and the shop-floor eyes and ears for regional officials. A shop steward interviewed felt that '*unions can only go from strength to strength if officials show interest in their workers and their grievances*'.

The survey of unions in the regions revealed that they are sometimes stratified along the lines of language or ethnicity, with workers from certain language groups belonging to certain unions. This has often led to rivalry in the workplace.

The NUNW affiliates still regard the achievement of union unity as an important objective of the labour movement:

*This is a key issue and the federation should make sure that those people outside should come in.*

*Unity of purpose is of vital importance in the struggle of the trade union movement, be it in Namibia or elsewhere. The NUNW should continue trying to bring together different unions to iron out their differences.*

## 4.4 Demarcation of Industries

The NUNW held a demarcation workshop in 1993 and another in 1997 to deliberate on the industrial areas in which its affiliates operate, with the basic aim of ensuring that NUNW affiliates are not competing with each other for members at the same workplace. Although agreement was reached in both workshops on demarcation principles and policy guidelines for dealing with demarcation conflicts in future, not all existing conflicts were resolved. Demarcation conflicts that have occurred thus far are as follows:

### MUN/NAPWU

The MUN and NAPWU both recruited workers at NamPower. Since NAPWU organises in government departments, municipalities and parastatals, it regarded NamPower as part of its constituency. The MUN initially organised in the mining sector only, but amended its Constitution in 1997 to be able to organise in the energy sector as well, thus it now regards NamPower as part of its constituency. The issue was discussed by the leaders of the two unions and NAPWU decided to stop organising in NamPower to avoid competing with a sister union. However, NAPWU feels that this issue was not resolved in a 'comradely' spirit. Conversely the MUN feels that its Constitution defines its areas of operation and its authority must prevail even where there are demarcation clashes with a sister union.

### MUN/MANWU

Regional officials of the MUN and MANWU regard their demarcation conflict – which originated with the inclusion of energy workers in the MUN’s mandate – as a power struggle between the two unions. Both recruit workers employed at petrol stations, and these workers are unsure of which union to join. Although this issue was brought to the attention of the NEC of each union concerned, no amicable solution has been found. Despite a decision taken at one of the demarcation workshops that petrol stations should fall under MANWU’s jurisdiction, the MUN continues to organise at these businesses for the following reason: ‘*A decision taken at the forum of the federation will not change anything because unions are operating within the requirements of their Constitution. We are therefore forging ahead in the petrol station industry.*’ MANWU appears to accept this competition from its sister union: ‘*We can’t stop them from organising and it does not really matter as long as we belong to the same family. It only makes our family stronger and stronger.*’

But this conflict does cause confusion among workers at petrol stations, and furthermore, employers use the situation to their advantage: they refuse to negotiate with union officials and play the unions up against each other by claiming that neither represents the majority of their employees. Regional MANWU officials blame the MUN for this predicament: ‘*The MUN, due to its financial strength, is bullying the weaker union.*’

This conflict between the MUN and MANWU points to weaknesses in the NUNW’s efforts to prevent competition between its affiliates. Although the demarcation workshops raised awareness of the conflict and of the need to resolve it, no binding solution was reached. One union leader even stated that ‘*the NUNW demarcation workshops did not help anything*’.

### **NAPWU/NATAU/NAFAU**

Some demarcation conflicts between NUNW affiliates were resolved amicably at the demarcation workshops. For example, the conflict between NAPWU and NATAU over recruitment at TransNamib was resolved with NAPWU’s agreement that this parastatal should be organised by NATAU. Likewise, the conflict between NAFAU and NAPWU involving overlapping memberships in hotel and tourism parastatals was resolved with NAFAU’s agreement to leave these parastatals to NAPWU. However, this solution may be reviewed in the light of a recent proposal to privatise government tourist resorts.

### **NAPWU/NANTU**

Another outstanding demarcation issue concerns the organising of school secretaries. NAPWU believes that it should organise these employees and that NANTU should organise teachers only. NANTU, however, had been approached by non-teaching staff at schools who wanted to join the teachers’ union. How effective NAPWU would be at servicing school secretaries is the question that remains to be answered. Meanwhile, the two unions have agreed that NANTU will not actively recruit school secretaries. Rather, school secretaries are free to join NANTU if they wish to. The two unions did not want to create any rivalry over the issue of school secretaries and see themselves to be part of a united labour movement working in the interests of all workers in the public service.

### **NAFWU/NAFAU/NAPWU**

Many Namibian farms have been converted into guest lodges and combine hunting and farming activities. Such ventures are listed with the Hospitality Association of Namibia (HAN), whose

member organisations are organised by NAFAU. However, NAFWU organises farmworkers at all farms and this has raised the question of demarcation. The two unions are considering a possible merger, but no decision has been taken yet.

NAFWU also faces a demarcation problem with NAPWU over recruitment on government farms. NAPWU organises workers there on the basis that they are civil servants paid by the government. NAFWU on the other hand claims that all farmworkers belong to its industry no matter who pays them. This dilemma occurs, for example, at farms belonging to the Namibia Development Corporation (NDC). The Aussenkehr farm in the south has signed a recognition agreement with NAFWU but leased part of its land to the NDC which has a recognition agreement with NAPWU. The two unions have held discussions to resolve this dilemma but no solution has been found yet.

## THE ROLE OF THE NUNW

Several union leaders expressed their wish for the NUNW to play a stronger role in resolving conflicts over demarcation: '*The NUNW should look at the constituencies of the affiliates and guide them in demarcating. This will also help to identify where unions should merge.*'

Some regional officials expressed their wish for the NUNW secretary-general to visit the regions more often to promote unity among affiliates in the regions. Some also expressed their concern that the MUN practically 'runs' the federation through its financial strength and large membership base.

Affiliates expect the NUNW to facilitate discussions around mergers that would strengthen the labour movement. Talks to this effect are currently taking place between NAFAU and NAFWU. NAFWU experiences serious problems in organising on farms, while NAFAU experiences the same at lodges and guest houses. Merging the two could make their respective tasks easier and the new union would represent workers in the whole food sector – from agricultural production to food processing. This merger would also alleviate some of NAFWU's financial problems through cross-subsidisation. The leaders of both unions favour a merger but no final agreement has been reached yet.

In 1997 the MUN proposed a merger with MANWU, but this proposal was not accepted by the MANWU leadership, which felt the proposal was premature but would be willing to reconsider in a few years' time.

## 4.5 Gender Equality

Gender equality is a concept still being explored by many sections of Namibian society, including the trade unions, as was shown by the interviewees' differing opinions on the subject. Since the unions use the words 'gender' and 'women' interchangeably, it appears that 'gender issues' are generally understood to mean 'women's issues'. In the few NUNW affiliates with an agenda for realising gender equality, the person responsible is invariably a woman, and men among their employees feel that gender issues are best handled by their female rather than male colleagues.

To date the trade union leaderships have remained male-dominated, but there has certainly been an improvement in the gender balance over the past few years. Today three of the seven NUNW leadership posts are occupied by women, one of whom is the federation's deputy secretary-general. NDAWU's current secretary-general is a woman, and NANTU and NAFAU have both had a woman serving as secretary-general. Women have also served as president and vice-president of NANTU and NATAU respectively.

Activities aimed at achieving gender equality are regarded as 'separate' from the traditional activities undertaken by trade unions and thus they are not integrated into any activities of the NUNW and its affiliates. Most gender-related activities of these unions are directed at women only.

Our survey also revealed very low levels of participation and representation of women in union activities. Leaders questioned about this situation agreed that it is due chiefly to a lack of child-care facilities, restraints imposed by husbands and boyfriends and women's lack of confidence in their own abilities. Regional officials believe that women are hampered chiefly by time-consuming domestic responsibilities that are traditionally theirs to shoulder. Other reasons cited in the regions for women's non-participation and low representation were their apathy in relation to union activity, actual harassment from husbands and boyfriends and cultural convictions such as that women should not be involved in decision-making processes. One unionist had this to say: *'The reason for women's low representation is that they are not interested, even in the women's desk. Often they are afraid of their husbands and use household commitments as excuses for not participating. Men are jealous and do not want their wives to get involved.'*

Thus, few women are elected to leadership positions in the trade unions, but many unions are beginning to take steps to rectify this situation. NANTU, for example, now provides child-care facilities at its meetings and conferences. The NUNW has passed a resolution whereby all its affiliates are required to set up gender structures. An attempt to introduce a women's representation quota system was rejected by the federation's National Congress on the grounds that such a system is sexist. At the time of writing only two NUNW affiliates had set up gender structures. The others have resisted the idea because they do not have the necessary funds to run and sustain the structures and their programmes. But in any case they feel that women should not be set apart or treated any differently to other groups such as white, young or old union members. This sentiment illustrates the variance within the trade union movement in the understanding of and commitment to gender issues.

The fact that most NUNW affiliates have no gender-related policies could be an indication that they have not discussed gender issues in any depth. Only the NUNW has a draft gender policy, and only NAFAU's Constitution stipulates that there will be no discrimination of members on the basis of their sex. The deficit of gender policies in effect means that the unions have no clear vision for dealing with gender issues without rendering them as purely women's issues to be dealt with by women. Neither the NUNW nor any of its affiliates has a budget to cover the integration of gender-related activities into their day-to-day operations, although the NUNW does have a training programme for women in trade unions which is sponsored by the FES.

As pointed out in Section 2 of this report, many of the NUNW affiliates have no record of the sex of their members, thus it was impossible to determine precisely how many members in the different unions are women. Only NAFWU could provide an accurate gender breakdown because it has an up-to-date, detailed and well-organised computer database for recording its

membership. Obviously it should be borne in mind that some industrial sectors are male-dominated, such as transport and mining, while others are female-dominated, such as the domestic work sector. The NUNW affiliates have no concrete plans to encourage women to join their respective industries. The exception here is the fishing industry, which now employs a significantly higher number of women than in the past due to NAFAU's efforts to pressurise companies to employ more women.

In conclusion one can safely declare that Namibian trade unions across the board are still male-dominated and far from achieving a gender balance or gender equality in the labour movement. The lack of individual gender policies among the NUNW affiliates is an indication of their need for in-depth discussion on gender issues which would lead to the drawing up of concrete plans for integrating these issues into their traditional activities. The notion expressed by some interviewees that funds for gender activities should come from external sources indicates a low level of commitment to achieving gender equality.

## **GENDER IN THE NUNW**

According to the NUNW secretary-general, women make up at least 35% of the federation's paid-up membership and 40% of its signed-up membership, and they occupy 43% of its elected leadership posts, including that of deputy secretary-general. Furthermore, having decided that women should be represented at international and national meetings, the NUNW has attempted to ensure that women comprise at least 40% of all delegations to such meetings.

The NUNW has a draft gender policy which has yet to be adopted by the federation's National Congress. The NUNW leadership is concerned that women do not participate enough in union activities and thus has identified a need for concrete action to promote their participation. A decision was taken that all NUNW affiliates should have gender structures in place to see to the integration of gender issues into all union activities. As noted above, only two of the affiliates had set up gender structures at the time of writing. There is a National NUNW Women's Committee responsible for co-ordinating gender issues and organising the National Women's Conference.

The current NUNW deputy secretary-general has been tasked to reactivate gender activities in the regions through women's committees. So far only two regions (western and southern) have set up such structures – in Swakopmund and Keetmanshoop. According to the deputy secretary-general, women need to be empowered separately from men because women do not articulate themselves freely in the presence of men; they are often not assertive enough and lack the confidence to be assertive.

To build capacity among the federation's female leaders, the NUNW is currently running a 'women and leadership' training programme with assistance from the FES. According to the deputy secretary-general, the programme is proving very fruitful and the participants seem enthusiastic.

Thus the NUNW's position on gender equality is undergoing a remarkable change for the better. It is hoped that gender activities will also be directed at the federation's male members so as to change their attitudes too.

## **GENDER IN NAFAU**

About 50% of NAFAU's members are women. This union's previous secretary-general was a woman and its current national educator is a woman. There are presently 3-4 women at the branch executive level, but the majority of women at the branch level are secretaries. NAFAU aims to increase the active participation and representation of women throughout its structures, and its leadership would like to employ a woman at the executive level of its structure. NAFAU is currently establishing gender committees in the regions with the help of two international trade secretariats, namely the International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Luxury Goods Workers Union (IUF) and the International Federation of Commercial, Clerical, Professional and Technical Employees (FIET). NAFAU has a gender policy based on its constitutional stipulation of non-discrimination on the basis of sex. The policy requires each branch office to appoint a gender co-ordinator. NAFAU is currently lobbying for paternity leave, breast-feeding breaks and child-care facilities for employees.

## **GENDER IN NDAWU**

Women constitute 95% of NDAWU's membership, and except for three men in the union's NEC, all its leadership posts at all levels are occupied by women.

NDAWU has found that employers generally regard domestic work as women's work and do not want to employ men as domestic workers. Most domestic workers lack basic literacy skills because they were forced to leave school at a young age due to pregnancy or household responsibilities such as caring for the young. A high proportion of urban households are female-headed, and most women heading households are domestic workers. Because the wages of domestic workers are so low, those heading a household usually have to supplement their income by trading in the informal sector or by whatever other means they can find. Thus many domestic workers need to acquire literacy, financial and business management skills, and NDAWU is currently consulting other stakeholders on ways to co-operate in providing the necessary training to its members.

Since the vast majority of NDAWU members are women, and since child-care responsibilities lie primarily with women, domestic workers need to be granted maternity leave and to have child-care facilities at their disposal, which presently is not the case. Furthermore, discrimination against pregnant workers is rife in the domestic work sector. Thus there is much lobbying work to be done, but NDAWU does not have any established gender structures, nor a gender policy, and due to financial constraints the union has not been able to plan any gender activities to date.

## **GENDER IN NANTU**

NANTU has a gender co-ordinator on each committee throughout its structures, and all the gender co-ordinators are women. The union has recently adopted a gender policy which recognises gender issues as a key component of the struggle for equality. Besides committing itself to addressing gender issues in the education system and in the broader society, the union also wants to actively promote the empowerment of women, as well as a representation of at least 50% women in all executive structures. Women teachers hold a separate meeting just prior to NANTU's National Congress to discuss issues of concern to them, and they then present their recommendations to the congress for discussion.

NANTU has formerly had a woman serving as its secretary-general, which is quite an achievement considering the general trend in Namibian trade unions of the highest office almost always being occupied by a man. This union makes child-care facilities available at its meetings and conferences to enable women teachers to attend and fully participate, and it also runs a scholarship scheme for rural women teachers to improve their qualifications.

There are more women (60,6%) teaching in Namibia than men (see CEDAW Country Report for 1995), and women constitute the majority of NANTU's members. Despite their majority representation in both the teaching profession and union membership, women are not proportionally represented in NANTU's decision-making structures. Only eight of the forty NANTU National Teachers Council members and three of the eight NANTU Management Committee members are women. Women are also under-represented throughout Namibia's education management system.

Of all women teachers 45% do not have formal teacher training qualifications, and the majority of all unqualified teachers in the country are women, thus women are the lowest paid in the profession. Women teachers are not active participants in union activities and therefore are not elected by the National Congress to union leadership positions. NANTU's leaders are concerned about the poor participation of women in the union and hope to bring more women into the leadership structure by introducing a quota system. Plans have also been laid for the provision of assertiveness training for female union members.

## **GENDER IN THE MUN**

The mining and energy sectors are male-dominated, with men constituting over 90% of these sectors' combined workforce. Women are employed in support services in the mining sector and make up 1-2% of the MUN's membership. Women do not participate in union activities for the reasons cited above in the introductory section on gender equality, but mainly, it appears, because their husbands and boyfriends restrict their participation.

The MUN does not have a gender policy but it does have four gender co-ordinators who are in the process of setting up gender committees. The gender co-ordinators are all women and will have transport at their disposal. The union hopes to make child-care facilities available for its members during meetings to enable women to attend.

Women hardly feature in the MUN's decision-making structures. It is hoped that the gender committees will encourage women to take up traditionally male-dominated union posts, as well as to participate in union activities and increase networking among female union members. The gender committees will also deal with issues such as health and safety, maternity leave and gender research.

## **GENDER IN NATAU**

Transport is another male-dominated sector. Over 80% of its employees are men and few NATAU members are women. Most female members are employed by Air Namibia and TransNamib as support staff. NATAU had an elected female president who resigned due to the workload this post entails. NATAU also had a female vice-president, as well as a women's desk (1994-95) which it had to close down due to financial constraints. Two women currently

sit on the NEC and two on the CEC. All leadership positions at the branch level are occupied by men.

The union has neither a gender policy nor gender structures in place. It also has no concrete plan to encourage women to join the sector. Hopefully all this will change in the future.

### **GENDER IN NAFWU**

Most formally employed farm workers are men, although women are also employed on farms as domestic workers and labourers. Women are regarded as the subordinates of their husbands or partners. NAFWU has the most difficult task of recruiting members who are scattered around farms countrywide and who are the lowest paid of all workers.

Most NAFWU members are men and consequently most of the union's leaders are men. One of its regional offices has two women in leadership positions, which is quite an achievement. NAFWU has neither a gender policy nor gender structures in place. It also does not have any concrete plans for dealing with gender issues, as its current focus is on recruiting members. Again, hopefully all this will change in the future as the union recruits more women.

### **GENDER IN NAPWU**

Union officials in the western and northern regions believe that NAPWU is committed to gender balance. Although the union does not have a gender policy, it is committed to gender issues. For example, it adopted the principle that if the chairperson of a structure is a man, then the deputy must be a woman. A top official at head office said that NAPWU wants to work on increasing women's confidence in their ability to attain and succeed in leadership positions. The union identified their lack of confidence as a hindrance to women's access to power in the union.

NAPWU has always had women in leadership positions and at present there are four women in the national leadership. The union also has two gender officers who co-ordinate the Women's Committee. NAPWU has furthermore played a significant role in encouraging women to take up leadership positions in local government authorities.

### **GENDER IN MANWU**

MANWU is the only union with two regional offices (western and southern) co-ordinated by women. However, there is no gender balance in the union's overall leadership structure. MANWU has no gender policy and no strategy for achieving gender equality. According to a top official, gender is not a priority of the union because MANWU is concerned with union matters. The position of women depends on the congress elections and although very few women are elected to leadership positions the union feels it can do nothing about this. MANWU also feels that it has no role to play where difficulties arise between female members and their partners due to their being active in the union. It seems that the MANWU leadership's understanding of gender issues needs clarifying.

## **4.6 Union Investments**

Following its seventh National Congress in 1997 the MUN created the Namibia Miners Investment Trust (NAMIT), which controls the Namibia Mineworkers Investment Company (NAMIC). NAMIC became operational in September 1997 as the first union investment company in the country. Soon afterwards, at its second National Congress in 1998, the NUNW also passed a resolution to establish an investment arm. Although the NUNW has not yet formed an investment trust or company, it is already involved in several business deals.

Union investment companies are a controversial issue within many labour movements around the world. Some have gone into business ventures in full force while others have instead decided to concentrate on the core functions of unions: improving the living and working conditions of their members through collective bargaining and shop-floor struggle. The investment controversy centres firstly around the question of ideology:

- ™ Should unions run businesses in capitalist economies which are built on the exploitation of workers?
- ™ Will union investments destroy the idea of working-class solidarity and collective action?

Once a union decides to go into investments, it faces several practical issues:

- ™ How much time and energy should unions spend on investments?
- ™ Do unions have the capacity to deal with investment decisions?
- ™ How can unions avoid corruption and individual enrichment?
- ™ How can union investments be made transparent and accountable to union members?

## THE IDEOLOGICAL DEBATE

As Ravi Naidoo, director of the National Labour and Economic Development Institute (NALEDI), the research unit of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), pointed out: ‘Investment issues pose a difficult challenge to the union movement: how does a union movement committed to socialism invest in a capitalist economy and remain true to a socialist project?’ A leading unionist of South Africa’s National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) summed up the dominant view within investor unions: ‘You can’t invest in a capitalist economy in a comradely manner.’ (Naidoo 1997a: 2; 1997b: 11)

Although the NUNW and its affiliates have become silent on the issue of socialism in recent years, the labour movement is still the most vocal and organised expression of Namibian workers. The movement is still advocating for the transformation of Namibian society. Its role has been broader than just taking up issues at the shop-floor level, and the NUNW has contributed to the debates on social justice in Namibia such as those around the land question and income inequalities. It is against this background that the ideological question should be debated before unions go into investments.

A basic dilemma is the fact that union investments are supposed to earn good returns which are meant to benefit union members. Good returns are achieved if investments are made in profitable companies. In a ‘market economy’, profitability is often achieved by winning a ‘competitive advantage’ through downsizing and subcontracting. Such practices have a detrimental effect on workers who often lose their benefits, job security or their jobs altogether. Unions in Namibia and elsewhere are fighting against these practices and the labour movement would be seriously compromised if its investment companies were to benefit from downsizing

and subcontracting. Unions would undermine their own struggles if they allow their investment companies to be involved in practices that contradict the unions' interests.

## **CONFLICTS OF INTEREST**

The possible contradictions between union struggles and union investments are evident in South Africa. In one instance, 10 black-empowerment groups, including the NUM investment company, invested R2,5 billion in the mining giant JCI. In 1997 JCI retrenched thousands of mineworkers to improve its financial performance. Thus mineworkers through their union's investments had indirectly invested in their own retrenchments (Sikhakhane 1997). In another instance, the company Premier Foods wanted to retrench 2 000 workers as part of its rationalisation programme, and members of the Food and Allied Workers Union (FAWU) went on strike in protest. But FAWU and four other unions had invested in Johnnic, which controls Premier Foods (Sikhakhane 1997). These examples show how conflicts of interest can emerge between unions as fighters for workers' rights and unions as investors.

The South African experiences also point to the fact that union companies buy into companies outside their own sector, some of whose practices contradict the policies and interests of the unions. For example, unions are opposed to privatisation, while their investment arms are trying to buy into state enterprises. In a critical analysis of union investments, the *South African Labour Bulletin* pointed out that 'through the investment companies, unions are becoming intimately tied up with company management...Unionism is not about making money. It is about social issues, about using worker solidarity at plant, industry and national level to improve living and working conditions... Commercial values tend to squeeze out union values.' (SALB 1996) Critics of union investments (including some COSATU affiliates) have suggested that unions should rather invest in projects that meet social needs, such as housing projects, instead of chasing maximum profits (Koch 1997).

## **DEFENDING UNION INVESTMENTS**

Proponents of union investments, like former Southern African Clothing and Textile Workers Union (SACTWU) Secretary-General John Copelyn, argue that union investment can lead to greater worker ownership of the economy. Copelyn believes that trade unions should build institutions 'which can help working class people with solutions to problems they face in capitalist societies ...' Such institutions include housing corporations that provide affordable houses to union members, crèches, clinics, bursary schemes and financial institutions that provide loans to workers at lower interest rates (Copelyn 1997).

Ravi Naidoo argues that 'Trade unions should be involved in investment. It is not a question of whether or not, but why and how.' (1997b) He believes that unions can change the nature of the economy and the workplace by influencing the investment agenda. However, this can only happen if union investment companies have a clear strategy, based on union principles instead of the 'business is business' approach. According to Naidoo, transformation of the economy has to be the central goal of union investments, and 'could include using a few smaller companies as pilot projects in worker control. This experience could be used to build collective ownership and control of enterprises on a wider scale.' (1997b)

However, investments in worker-controlled companies would also be high-risk investments because capital will see such companies as a threat and try to make them fail. Naidoo (1997b) therefore proposes the following steps for union investments:

1. Unions should have a unified approach and pool their resources to limit the financing of investments through debts.
2. Unions have to develop a strategy to counter the resistance from organised capital.
3. Unions should gain experience of different forms of management.
4. Unions should form an alliance with progressive governments to create space for transformation, e.g. the government should give tenders to worker-owned companies.

## **UNION INVESTMENT AND BLACK ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT**

Union investment and black economic empowerment are often seen as two sides of the same coin. This can be understood against the background of a history of racialised capitalism in Namibia and South Africa. There are, however, some differences between the interests of black workers and those of black businesses. Drawing on the South African experiences, Naidoo points out that a racial definition such as ‘black economic empowerment’, ‘creates space for upward mobility of an already affluent black bourgeoisie or middle-class. A misguided definition allows capable vested interests to secure benefits for themselves, in the process sidelining those who really need empowerment.’ (1997a: 10) Black-empowerment groups like Cyril Ramaphosa’s New Africa Investments Limited (NAIL) adopted the same hierarchical pyramid structure of power (i.e. power concentrated in a small group at the top) that was used by a handful of white families to gain control over the South African economy during the apartheid era. For trade unions, the question is how to ensure that black economic empowerment does not just benefit a new black elite. Instead, union-driven empowerment must be controlled by union members and benefit the black working class. In other words, union investments must also address class inequalities. This means that unions will have to choose their allies carefully and clearly define their understanding of ‘black empowerment’.

## **UNION INVESTMENT IN NAMIBIA**

The MUN was the first Namibian union to establish an investment company. In motivating this step, the union said the following:

Despite the gains that had been secured on behalf of [the union’s] members, it had been unable to provide any direct material social benefits to mineworkers and energy workers, their children and the communities they live in. The MUN also realised that there was a great need for active participation in the development and restructuring of the Namibian economy, hence its decision to adopt a resolution to create an investment company in order to enter into joint ventures with credible and visionary partners . . . [This should be done to] jointly service identified emerging markets and at the same time empower previously disadvantaged groups . . . by teaching skills that will enable them to develop new industries and broaden the economic base that will lead to new job opportunities. (NAMIC brochure: 2).

According to the MUN’s secretary-general, NAMIC’s main aims are to empower members, ex-members and their dependants; and to finance the MUN bursary scheme. He also believes that shareholding will give the union representation on the Board of Directors and in the

management structures of the companies involved. This could enable the union to propagate better working, health and safety conditions (interview on 12.5.98). NAMIC's managing director described the company's philosophy as one of 'black empowerment and economic reconciliation' (*Miners Speak*).

Although the MUN says that 'our approach is different from capitalists', NAMIC aims to make profits and will be run as an independent entity without intervention from the union. The MUN trusts that NAMIC's Board of Directors will be careful to avoid conflicts of interest between the union and its business wing (*Miners Speak*). The MUN also wants to ensure that workers will always be informed about the activities of NAMIC and be involved in the company through the union structures. It remains to be seen how the MUN can balance the possible contradictions between its operations as a union, its accountability to its members and the commercial operations of NAMIC. NAMIC wants to invest mainly in the service sectors, such as the retail, transport, property development, financial services, leisure and food services sectors, but also in select industrial holdings (*Miners Speak*; NAMIC brochure: 4).

NAMIC's investment strategy has three central aims:

- ™ Firstly, to meet the needs of mineworkers by servicing their consumption needs when mining houses are outsourcing non-core activities. Although the union does not want to encourage outsourcing, it says that 'where outsourcing is inevitable NAMIC will always consider the rendering of such services'.
- ™ Secondly, to promote black empowerment by using the opportunities created by the restructuring of state-dominated industries and by the unbundling of conglomerates.
- ™ Thirdly, to serve new and emerging markets and to 'create value where it did not previously exist'.

Mineworkers and energy workers are supposed to benefit from this investment strategy through improved goods and services on the mines; through social benefits from the trust, like bursaries and scholarships; and through direct investment opportunities (NAMIC brochure: 5)

The MUN's NEC appointed former union President Jacob Nghifindaka as the first managing director of NAMIC. The post was not advertised as the union felt that a person who knows the union well and who is prepared to make sacrifices would be the best candidate. The MD's salary package was decided by NAMIC's Board of Directors, which consists of present and former union leaders including Acting Minister of Labour John Shaetonhodi who chairs the board.

## **NUNW INVESTMENTS**

Following the resolution of its second National Congress in January 1998 to establish an investment arm, the NUNW formed the Labour Investment Holding Company, which has two subsidiaries: Pick & Shovel Fishing and Future Construction. Pick & Shovel Fishing is 100% owned by the NUNW, but is still dormant as it did not receive any fishing quotas. The NUNW owns 76% of Future Construction, while former owner Mathew Shikongo retained 24% of the shares. The company wanted to embark on a joint venture with Grinaker Construction but its tender was unsuccessful. NUNW office-bearers serve as directors of these companies.

The other NUNW investments to date are as follows:

- ™ Yetu Investments shares were bought at a cost of N\$2 000.
- ™ Namlife shares at a cost of N\$300 000 were bought on the basis of a soft loan received from African Life.
- ™ The NUNW's Labour Investment Holding has a 25% shareholding in !Aigams Financial Services (director Aron Mushimba), which has a 51% shareholding in Namibia Harvest. The value of the NUNW's shareholding is N\$25 million. The federation was given its 25% stake in the company without any up-front payment, but it will have to pay for the shares at 60% of the prime lending rate from the profits it will earn. Besides !Aigams Financial Services, the South African company African Harvest also holds shares in Namibia Harvest.
- ™ A 22% shareholding was secured free of charge in Namhealth, which entered a joint venture with Northern Medical Aid (NMA) Namibia and is preparing to become a major player in Namibia's medical aid industry.
- ™ A 40% stake in People's Funeral Undertakers and Brokers which became operational in May 1999. The expected benefits of this joint venture with Fedsure include shares for the NUNW, increased commission for affiliated unions whose members join the scheme, more benefits for union members at reduced rates and an improved quality of funeral services for union members.
- ™ A 30% stake in Ituyeni transport services.
- ™ In a recent development, the NUNW signed an agreement to buy shares for N\$ 3,2 million in Namfish.
- ™ Another agreement was finalised with Preferred Management Services to establish three companies to engage in property development and marketing, land servicing and construction.

In an attempt to provide investment advice to retrenched workers, the NUNW has approached Namibia Asset Management for assistance in setting up a 'satellite investment desk' for NUNW members. The idea is to provide free advice to retrenched members of any NUNW affiliate on how best to invest their retrenchment packages.

Unlike the MUN, the union federation has neither set up a trust nor a separate investment company as it does not have the necessary start-up capital. The idea of setting up an investment arm is driven by the desire to become financially self-sufficient.

As the NUNW is presently unable to pay an investment manager, its full-time officials – especially the secretary-general – serve on the boards of the various companies. In addition the NUNW secretary-general serves on several non-investment boards, namely of NAMCOL, the Vocational Training Fund, the Labour Advisory Committee, the Labour Relations Committee and the National Vocational Training Board.

## 4.7 The Labour Movement as a Social Movement

The NUNW played a prominent role in Namibia's struggle for political independence (see Section 1). Some writers have argued that the Namibian labour movement has emphasised its political role at the expense of its shop-floor economic struggle. The view held by SWAPO and the NUNW prior to independence was that workers' interests should only be addressed after independence (Murray & Wood 1997: 166).

Since independence the NUNW unions have concentrated on bread-and-butter issues and extended their organisational presence on the shop floor. In some industries (see Section 2) the NUNW affiliates have achieved impressive membership figures, but the shop-floor strength has not been carried over into the policy-making arena. The NUNW and its affiliates have not yet developed a form of strategic unionism that would allow them to successfully push for a radical programme of social change (see Murray & Wood 1997: 166-168).

The 1995/96 Labour Relations Survey revealed that union members expect their trade union to represent their interests outside the workplace as well. However, ‘the importance accorded to trade unions by rank and file members in taking up socio-economic and political issues outside the workplace is not matched by the unions’ capacities and track records to date’ (Murray & Wood 1997: 195).

The dilemma posed by these high expectations and the limited capacity of the NUNW and its affiliates to deliver is also felt by union officials in the regions. Regional officials are often placed in the situation of having to take part in community activities around social issues while simultaneously carrying out their duties in defending the working rights and interests of their members. As one regional co-ordinator observed: *‘Community members expect the NUNW to attend to issues such as housing and council elections.’* But the officials often feel that they are not able to take up social issues in addition to workers’ issues. Although there is agreement that workers belong to the community and that the community’s problems are also the workers’ problems, most officials feel that unions should deal with workers’ rights and community-based organisations should deal with social issues. Regional officials who take up social issues often do so as individual community members and not as union representatives. A NANTU regional official had this to say: *‘The issue of social responsibility was largely an issue before independence where unions were involved in social issues as part of the struggle for liberation, but this situation changed after independence.’*

Despite the unions’ preoccupation with workplace issues and collective bargaining, there is broad agreement among national union leaders that the labour movement does have to influence the broader social, economic and political spheres:

*The trade union movement is one of the key leaders of civil society. Therefore it needs to play a more vibrant role in articulating issues of social justice.*

*The NUNW should not confine itself to workplace issues. This would be a narrow-minded approach. We should be able to influence policies on national issues.*

*Alliances with other organisations must be formed, especially with the students who are the workers of tomorrow.*

*NUNW should be involved in issues outside the workplace because workers are the community.*

Despite these clear intentions to play an active role in shaping Namibia’s development beyond the workplace, the NUNW and its affiliates lack the capacity to take on this role. According to Murray and Wood, this is because they lack capacity in the areas of research and policy formulation. Namibian unions rarely make meaningful contributions towards macro-economic and national development policy-making. Unlike business and government, unions do not have the necessary funds to ‘buy’ expertise (Murray & Wood 1997: 187).

In 1998 the first step was taken to address the lack of research capacity in the Namibian labour movement: the Labour Resource and Research Institute (LaRRI) was formed to assist the labour movement with research and education projects. Although the institute is still very small due to financial constraints, it is expected to grow to provide a much-needed service to the unions. LaRRI is expected to assist the labour movement to respond proactively to the challenges it faces. Instead of merely responding to events like mine closures, privatisation subcontracting and retrenchments, unions need to develop their own policy proposals, and these must reflect the interests of Namibia's working people in both the formal and informal economic sectors. They have to be fundamentally different to the mainstream, free-market policies promoted by the government and business: these policies have not benefited working people, and it is up to the organisations representing Namibia's disadvantaged majority to develop alternative policies. The NUNW and its affiliates will have to play a critical role in this process: they will have to build strategic alliances with other progressive organisations and link workplace struggles to the broader struggles for democracy, worker control and social justice.

## 4.8 The Land Question

The land question has been high on the NUNW's agenda for the last couple of years. The federation participated in the national land conference in 1991, where it presented its own proposals. The main points made in the proposals were as follows:

- ™ Land should belong to the state on behalf of the people of Namibia. Individuals should only be allowed to own land if they use it productively and protect it as a common resource.
- ™ Compensation should only be paid to present landowners/farmers for the existing infrastructure and development undertakings on the land/farm: 'If we respect title deeds, we cannot redistribute land.'
- ™ Land for redistribution should be taken from farmers with a heavy loan debt, from absentee landlords and from landowners whose land/farm is unused and unproductive.
- ™ Communal lands should be regarded as the minimum social security net for Namibian workers.
- ™ Communal land should be owned by the state, while development projects on that land should belong to the individual or community undertaking them. Infrastructural development will make larger portions of communal land available for the development of rural communities.
- ™ Land taxes should progressively increase with the size of the land-holding to discourage the unproductive holding of large tracts of land. These taxes could be used to obtain more land for redistribution.
- ™ Security of land tenure must be implemented in communal areas.
- ™ An aggressive campaign should be launched to shift the red line to Namibia's northern border.
- ™ Communal land must benefit poor communal farmers and not the rich elite.
- ™ State-funded projects should make land more productive (e.g. co-operatives).
- ™ Restrictions on the subdivision of agricultural land should be lifted to allow for the use of small pockets of highly productive land for crop production.

The NUNW also participated in the NGO Working Committee on Land Reform and has repeatedly called on the government to return the land to its ‘rightful owners’. The NUNW president was particularly vocal on the land issue and even announced a ‘land march’ if the land was not returned by the end of 1998.

Almost all the regional union officials interviewed are of the opinion that the land should be given back to workers and that all disadvantaged persons should be given a piece of land:

*We would like to see the land be given back to the indigenous people of the country. The willing buyer-willing seller idea is not good because people remain landless. The government should take action to acquire land from those with more than two farms, by forcing them to sell or by taking the land.*

However, regional officials are not clear on what the NUNW should do to resolve the land issue. They merely support the federation’s congress resolutions. The NUNW co-ordinator in the western region is of the opinion that the land issue can only be resolved successfully if a study on the utilisation of land is conducted and its findings and recommendations are considered tenable. Other affiliates, such as NAFWU in the northern region, are of the opinion that the NUNW should hear the views of its landless members, who therefore should assist the federation on the land issue. Unionists in the regions suggested that affiliated unions should form pressure groups to draw up plans of action for presentation to the NUNW. In turn the federation can pressurise the government to speed up the land reform process. Northern regional officials said that traditional authorities can play a vital role in this debate, as they deal with land issues on a daily basis. A western regional official suggested that all those affected by the land issue should come together to work out an amicable solution.

Several regional officials expressed reservations regarding the ‘willing buyer-willing seller’ approach. They question why the government should buy back land which had never been bought in the first place, and in their opinion the government should just take land back and redistribute it to its rightful owners: *I personally don’t agree with the willing buyer-willing seller concept. The land was never bought; it was taken, hence, let the land be given to the rightful owners – blacks.* Some regional officials find the willing buyer-willing seller concept ‘strange’, and some do not understand what it means and/or implies.

National leaders of NUNW affiliates who recognise the importance of the land issue had the following to say:

*The war in this country was also over land. It should not be seen as property in terms of the Constitution. Land redistribution is prevented by the Constitution and this must be changed.*

*We were part of the liberation struggle and because we did not win our land back we have to put it up as one of our priorities.*

*We all want our land back; everybody is interested in it. Even after independence, most of our members are living in squatter camps and have no land.*

The NUNW identified four key aspects of the land issue:

1. Land as an important ingredient for diversifying the Namibian economy.

2. Land to alleviate unemployment, since many individuals and communities have all the skills required to earn a living from the land.
3. Land as a politically important component of the liberation struggle.
4. Land as a means to achieve food self-sufficiency.

However, most NUNW affiliates are dissatisfied with the manner in which the federation has taken up the land issue. They feel that the NUNW is not doing enough to influence land policies. Their main criticism is that all the NUNW appears to do is to issue press statements and deliver speeches on public platforms, instead of lobbying systematically. NUNW affiliates also expressed disagreement with the strategy of the federation's president:

*It seems that now only one person is spearheading the return of the land. This is dangerous because we as individuals also have our own interests, agendas and aspirations. Sometimes good collective aspirations and policies can be hijacked by a certain individual for his own interests.*

*The land issue should be seen as being supported by all the affiliates to be taken seriously. Even on the chat shows people are thinking that it is only Ponhele who is concerned about the land issue.*

*Strategies must be formulated collectively and we cannot rely on an individual. It will weaken the course if only one person is seen as spearheading the campaign.*

*The NUNW can only be successful in influencing the land issue if all union members are involved in the campaign. It must not be hijacked by certain individuals.*

Affiliates also identified a lack of consultation as a major weakness:

*I don't think the issue of land was debated properly in the union structures. It was only debated in certain structures but not at the bottom.*

*We must set up a committee that will debate the land issue with our members, the workers. We must educate our members, otherwise they will not know what is going on.*

*The idea of taking up the land issue is good, but there must be meetings with the membership first.*

One union official warned that land alone will not solve all the problems of the poor:

*We really need to give our people skills so that they can get gainful employment somewhere. If we give them the land tomorrow there is not much that they can do because of the continuous droughts. There is only a limited amount of fertile land and we will not be able to satisfy the land hunger of everybody in the country.*

These statements indicate a notion among the affiliated unions that the NUNW needs to go beyond sloganeering to have any influence on the process of land reform. As the land issue affects not only workers, union officials suggested that the NUNW form alliances with NGOs, churches, other community organisations and communal farmers. Such an alliance was formed during the run-up to the 1999 May Day activities. The NUNW, the Namibia National Farmers Union (NNFU) representing 12 regional farmer unions, and the Namibian Non-Governmental

Organisations' Forum (NANGOF) representing more than 70 NGOs and CBOs, presented a joint petition to government. The petition criticised the fact that land ownership has not changed since independence and that government policy has had little impact. The petition demands that government:

- ™ put an end to unfair labour practices and dismissals of farmworkers;
- ™ amend the Commercial Agricultural Land Act in consultation with stakeholders;
- ™ prepare and pass a Communal Lands Act;
- ™ put an end to illegal fencing in communal areas;
- ™ consult with civil society on the composition of the Lands Tribunal; and
- ™ work out a clear plan and strategy for resettlement.

Union officials also suggested that the NUNW should lobby parliamentarians and government offices on the land issue. One unionist suggested that the NUNW should look at the question of utilising the land and assisting people to make a living from the land by, for example, forming co-operatives that could supply schools with vegetables.

## 4.9 Recommendations

### 1. LIVING WAGE

The question of a living wage for all Namibian workers has not been resolved since independence. Although collective bargaining takes place in several sectors of the economy, many workers are still earning very low wages, especially domestic and farm workers whose sectors are difficult to organise and are not covered by collective bargaining. The NUNW should therefore spearhead a campaign for a living wage as well as minimum wages for vulnerable workers. The federation should also push for the publication of the findings of the presidential commission of inquiry into the living and working conditions of domestic and agricultural workers.

The NUNW should take the lead in defining a living wage in the Namibian context and in campaigning for its implementation. A living wage should be defined by region and the definition should take the actual costs of living into account. The NUNW campaign should highlight the gross inequalities that still characterise Namibia today. It should be seen as a step taken to reduce these inequalities.

### 2. POLITICAL AFFILIATION

This topic will continue to be hotly debated. The NUNW should debate the issue throughout its structures at various levels in an open and less emotional manner than was the case at the 1993 and 1998 congresses. It will be crucial for affiliated unions to create platforms for discussion within their own structures before the issue is debated at the federation level.

Political loyalties run deep and will always influence the debate on this topic. However, for the NUNW it will be important to evaluate the costs and benefits of a continued party-political affiliation in a rational manner. There is no doubt that a progressive labour movement has to be political by nature and deal with socio-economic issues beyond the workplace. But, does its present affiliation help the NUNW to advance the interests of workers? Does it help the

federation to influence national policies? So far the NUNW has defended the continued political affiliation as a strategy to achieve economic independence. In the run-up to its next congress the federation and its affiliates will have to assess whether or not this strategy has achieved its aim.

### **3. TRADE UNION UNITY**

This issue is closely linked to the question of political affiliation, which is the main obstacle to trade union unity in Namibia. The labour movement is divided along political lines although other factors play a role, such as the personal ambitions of union leaders. The NUNW will find it very difficult to attract outside unions into its fold as long as it is seen as a SWAPO union. Unity talks are unlikely to succeed under these conditions. However, the NUNW and its affiliates could join forces with other unions around issues of common concern such as the impact of privatisation. This might lead to better relationships and to unity in action with a common purpose.

### **4. DEMARCATON**

There were relatively few conflicts occurring between NUNW affiliates over the question of demarcation. Whenever such conflicts occur, the NUNW should try to facilitate discussions to resolve them. Conflicts between affiliated and sister unions will threaten the spirit of solidarity that should abide and should be avoided.

Although the MUN and MANWU seem to have hardened their stances on the question of organising at petrol stations, the NUNW should explore possible solutions. Also, it should be proactive and initiate discussions on possible mergers in areas where unions are weak or in sectors that are difficult to organise (e.g. farm work). Such mergers could help to strengthen weaker unions and assist in penetrating difficult sectors. The merger talks between NAFAU and NAFWU are an interesting example in this regard.

### **5. GENDER**

The NUNW should integrate the issue of gender equality into its mainstream activities. Although the formation of women's committees among various affiliates and in various regions is an important step, the NUNW should also ensure that gender equality becomes an issue for male unionists. Debates around this topic should therefore take place in all structures of the federation and not be limited to the women's desk. The NUNW structures should discuss, for example, how women's participation in union structures and activities could be promoted. This should include debates on how male attitudes and male dominance can be changed within the unions. The NUNW could provide gender training for union leaders and play an active role in encouraging women to take up jobs in male-dominated industries like mining and transport.

### **6. UNION INVESTMENTS**

The NUNW needs to develop a clear strategy regarding union investments. The federation should debate this issue and its implications through its various structures. It is crucial that the NUNW's membership is fully informed about investment activities. The NUNW needs to ensure that through its structures workers have control over investment decisions.

The NUNW has not yet set up an investment trust. As a result, the secretary-general serves on the boards of various companies and spends a large amount of time on investment-related activities. This weakens the organisational capacity of the NUNW and should not be allowed to continue. The NUNW should take immediate steps to set up an investment trust and devise clear investment criteria. This should help to avoid a violation of union policies by investment decisions. It is also advisable to establish a strict code of conduct for union investors to avoid corruption.

## **7. STRATEGIC UNIONISM**

Most NUNW affiliates are focusing on ‘bread-and-butter issues’ in their activities and expect the federation to be their political voice. Likewise, workers expect their unions to take up issues outside the workplace on their behalf. The NUNW is aware that influencing broader socio-economic policies is an important function of the federation. However, it needs to develop a clear vision of its broader role as an agent for social change. It has to identify the policy areas in which it wants to intervene, and develop a strategy for influencing national policies to the benefit of its membership. It may be useful to develop more practical links with other organisations representing important sections of Namibia’s disadvantaged majority, such as communal farmers. The NUNW’s membership with the Namibian Non-Governmental Organisations Forum (NANGOF) is a step in this direction but more emphasis should be placed on ‘unity in action’. An encouraging example in this regard was the joint petition on land presented to government by the NUNW, the NNFU and NANGOF on 1 May 1999.

## **8. THE LAND QUESTION**

The NUNW, particularly its president, has continuously raised the land question – mostly through the media. However, the federation has not managed to significantly influence the government’s land policies. It seems that public statements alone are not an effective strategy. The NUNW should therefore evaluate its approach. It should consider the possibility of forming alliances with organisations of the rural poor on an ongoing basis. They could jointly develop concrete proposals and campaigns to speed up the process of land reform.

## **SECTION 5**

# **Conclusion**

The Namibian labour movement is fragmented into about 30 different trade unions, and the NUNW plays a leading role as the country's most significant trade union federation. Through its eight affiliated industrial unions it has managed to achieve a degree of worker unity in the country. However, the right to freedom of association entrenched in Namibia's Constitution has allowed for several unions to emerge outside the NUNW. Some of them play an important role in organising workers in certain workplaces, but none of them seem to play a broader role in Namibia's civil society. Nevertheless, among the NUNW affiliates, NAPWU, MANWU and NAFAU face strong rival unions in their sectors. They need to ensure that they are able to attract new members and render good services to their present members.

The NUNW and its affiliates have a proud history of playing a key role in representing the interests of Namibia's disadvantaged majority, and they have shown that they can still play this role today. Time and again the NUNW unions have been the most outspoken critics of the government – criticising self-enrichment, corruption and policies that do not eradicate social injustices. About 25-35% of Namibia's formal sector workers are members of NUNW unions, thus they have achieved an organisational presence that is high by international standards.

Despite these achievements, the federation's internal organisational weaknesses pose a serious threat to its further development. The NUNW does not play a sufficiently dynamic role in uniting its affiliates around common issues of concern on an ongoing basis. The irregularity of staff meetings hinders the nurturing of a team spirit and common vision among NUNW staff. Likewise, head office officials do not hold regular consultations with regional officials and they visit the regions sporadically, which has given rise to widespread feelings among regional staff of being neglected and even abandoned. The NUNW and its affiliates need to re-dedicate themselves to the principles of participatory democracy. They need to counter the threats posed by a growing division between membership and leadership, a decline in worker control over decision-making on major issues, the marginalisation of local union structures, increasing bureaucracy and deteriorating organisational capacity (see Klerck 1997: 375).

The functioning of regional and local union structures warrants immediate attention. Attendance at union meetings outside the workplace declined after independence, partly due to workers' expectations that things would improve automatically after independence. However, attendance at union meetings in the workplace still seems to be relatively high, but because communication between head offices and their regional and local structures is generally weak, workers tend to feel excluded from the decision-making processes of their respective unions. The challenge for the labour movement is to involve all its structures, including its membership, in policy debates. The agendas for branch and regional meetings must therefore deal directly with the problems that workers and their wider communities experience. The only way to increase attendance at all union meetings, and in the process strengthen union structures and internal democracy, is to ensure that all meetings are relevant to the members.

The question of political affiliation still represents the largest stumbling block to trade union unity in Namibia. The NUNW's national and regional officials are aware that the federation's political affiliation to SWAPO is the main issue dividing the labour movement. Among

NUNW affiliates differing views are held regarding the benefits of a continued party-political affiliation, but most national affiliate leaders believe that the NUNW-SWAPO affiliation does benefit workers and therefore the labour movement as a whole. However, the 1995/96 Labour Relations Survey found that only 20% of workers in the public sector and 35% in the private sector were in favour of their trade union federation being affiliated to a political party, while 54% of workers in the public sector and 50% in the private sector were against unions having party-political affiliations (see Murray & Wood 1997: 191).

Statements made by the NUNW during 1998 in open support of the government on issues such as a third term for President Nujoma and Namibia's involvement in the DRC war have raised questions about the NUNW's image as an independent trade union movement. The NUNW might find it increasingly difficult to attract workers who are not sympathisers or members of SWAPO, and it is unlikely to manage to attract outside unions into its fold as long as it is seen as the workers' wing of SWAPO.

Regarding gender relations, it is obvious that Namibian trade unions are still male-dominated and there is much to be done to bring about a gender balance and gender equality in the labour movement. The lack of individual union gender policies is an indication that there is a need for more discussion on gender issues within the unions. This should be conducted in an integrated manner and lead to concrete plans. The fact that unions feel that gender activities should be funded from external sources is an indication that gender equality is not considered a priority issue. Most officials of the NUNW and its affiliates can be described as 'gender blind'. Women are not given sufficient opportunities to develop their capacities and prove themselves as able and worthy leaders, thus they are seldom elected to leadership positions. The only positions to which they are appointed are those on the women's desk, and these positions are in fact strictly reserved for women since 'gender' is seen to be exclusively a women's issue.

On a more positive note, some progress has indeed been made in terms of women's representation in the leadership structures. Over the past few years three NUNW affiliates have had a woman serving as secretary-general, and three of the seven NUNW national leadership positions are currently held by women, but men still hold the key positions of president, vice-president (of which there are two) and secretary-general.

The national leaderships of the NUNW and its affiliates are well aware that they cannot pursue the interests of organised workers narrowly and individually. There have always been very close links between workers and other socially and economically disadvantaged groups in the country. Contrary to the misconception of Namibia's workforce as a 'labour aristocracy', the workers bear a substantial burden caused by high levels of and under- and unemployment in the country. For historical and cultural reasons the vast majority of workers in formal employment share their income – largely by way of remittances – with members of their extended families in urban and rural areas. By virtue of its history as a progressive force during the liberation struggle, the NUNW unions have maintained close links with other organs of civil society that advocate on behalf of the economically and socially disadvantaged. The NUNW's affiliation to NANGOF is testimony to this. However, relationships between the NUNW and other NGOs must be revitalised if the NUNW wants to play a more decisive role in civil society.

There is also a need to discuss the role of the labour movement in the regions. This study has shown that most regional officials do not regard their union as a vehicle for taking up broader

socio-economic issues. They believe that community-based organisations should deal with these issues rather than trade unions.

Independence has created new opportunities for trade unions to consolidate their position, but the new dispensation has not changed the structures of economic ownership and control. The labour movement today is confronted by an ongoing economic crisis, high levels of unemployment and new forms of ‘flexible production’ that threaten union achievements on the shop floor.

This study has shown that there is a need for debate and education around the new challenges facing the labour movement. Regarding EPZs and labour-hire companies, for example, different viewpoints abound within the unions and particularly among regional officials. In the regions where there are no EPZs, union officials have no opinion about them. Some regional officials are either misinformed or wholly uninformed about EPZs and their implications for workers, while some who deal with EPZs on a daily basis see them as disastrous for workers and criticise the government for establishing EPZs without first consulting the NUNW and its affiliates. The basis of this criticism is the belief that workers everywhere need to be organised and their basic right to strike never denied.

National and regional union officials are of the opinion that labour-hire companies should cease to operate or alternatively be rigorously subjected to the provisions of the Labour Act. In May 1998 the NUNW’s western regional centre organised demonstrations against labour-hire companies in Walvis Bay. In a petition sent to the government the NUNW described labour-hire companies as facilitators of a new form of slavery, pointing out that these companies usually receive a commission of N\$6 per worker per hour, but only pay the workers N\$1,50 to N\$2 per hour and retain the difference as profits. This issue has not been resolved but the NUNW is determined to take further action against labour-hire company practices. The federation has also raised the issue at the tripartite Labour Advisory Council. However, the government is unlikely to take decisive action to correct these practices unless the labour movement steps up the pressure through mobilising on the shop floor and intensive lobbying.

The NUNW’s relationships with the government and business are shaped by the government’s notion of tripartism. No joint policy has been formulated on socio-economic issues, but the labour movement is consulted on several such issues. The government regards business and the labour movement as ‘social partners’ and expects them to make informed contributions to the various policy debates and participate meaningfully in tripartite structures. The NUNW presently serves on the Labour Advisory Council, the President’s Economic Advisory Council and the Vocational Training Board. Influencing such bodies and their policies requires the capacity to conduct research and to access information that could swing decisions on a variety of issues to favour workers. Such capacity entails the ability to analyse policy proposals and monitor their implementation.

It is in this area particularly that Namibia’s trade unions need to strengthen their capacity. The present staff of the NUNW and its affiliates already have several tasks to carry out in their day-to-day operations. Many unionists who have risen through the ranks of the labour movement are experienced organisers, and many are trained and experienced in the spheres of collective bargaining and dispute resolution. However, to succeed in influencing national policies they need backup research and training on appropriate strategies to employ in their efforts. Murray and Wood point out that the Namibian labour movement has thus far ‘failed to articulate a strategic vision, which can inform its interaction with employers and the state. As such, the

union movement has been unable to institutionalise the gains it has made at the shop-floor level, and has found itself marginalised from the national policy formulation arena.' (1997: 159).

Provided that the labour movement strengthens its structures and capacity to be able influence national policies, the trade unions will without doubt be among the leading and most vocal of all organisations representing Namibia's disadvantaged majority. In a country characterised by socio-economic inequalities that are counted among the world's worst examples, the labour movement will have to articulate the aspirations of the poor even beyond its own membership. The NUNW will have to develop a strategic vision to guide any programmes it implements to effect fundamental social change. This task, and the task of consolidating their positions in the workplace, pose the key challenges for the NUNW and its affiliates today and over the next few years.

## **APPENDIX**

# **Profiles of the NUNW Affiliates**

## **Namibia Food and Allied Workers Union (NAFAU)**

<b>Date established:</b>	20 September 1986
<b>President:</b>	David Namalenga
<b>General Secretary:</b>	Cuana Angula
<b>Head office address:</b>	* NUNW Centre, Mungunda Street, Katutura ✉ PO Box 1553 Windhoek ☎ (061) 218213 📠 (061) 263714

### **OVERVIEW**

NAFAU was the first NUNW-affiliated industrial union established. It was initially led by John Pandeni, a former Robben Island prisoner and now Governor of the Khomas Region. The union covers a wide range of industrial sectors, its strongholds being the fishing industries of Walvis Bay and Lüderitz, as well as the retail and wholesale and the beverage sectors in Windhoek. NAFAU faces stiff competition from rival unions, especially in the retail sector (see Peltola 1995: 279). Since independence NAFAU has lost about 10 staff members, including its first two secretary-generals, one education co-ordinator and seven organisers. These officials were either appointed to political offices, poached by other unions or employed in the private sector.

### **INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURE**

The National Congress is NAFAU's highest decision-making structure. Initially it was held annually but due to the high costs involved, the interval period was extended – first to every two years and recently to every four years. Between congresses the Central Committee (CC) is the highest structure. Its meetings are convened by the National Executive Committee (NEC), or by the president, or at the request of two thirds of NAFAU's branches. The CC consists of all members of the branch executive committees, the NEC and all union officials. The NEC consists of all office-bearers, branch chairpersons, branch secretaries and regional chairpersons. All department heads employed by the union meet every six months.

NAFAU has divided its area of operation into four regions. Although it does not have regional structures, it has three regional organisers in the west, two in the north, two in the south and three in the central region. The union has established 19 branches across the country and three more branches are expected to be set up soon. Branch offices are expected to hold a meeting once a week and send a monthly report to head office. At the shop-floor level NAFAU operates through shop steward committees. All shop stewards are automatically attached to a particular branch office and full-time shop stewards act as union organisers.

### **STAFFING AND LEADERSHIP**

NAFAU has 14 full-time staff members. With the exception of the general secretary and deputy, all posts are filled by the NEC. Vacancies are advertised internally, although external candidates are free to apply. Applicants are then screened by an interview panel which makes a recommendation. NAFAU mainly looks to its shop stewards to fill vacancies and does not emphasise qualifications in its selection criteria. A Grade 10 qualification is seen as sufficient, but basic knowledge of trade unionism and a commitment to the labour movement are seen as important criteria.

The NAFAU leaders have all risen through the ranks of the union. The present general secretary left the teachers training college at Ongwediva in 1988 to become a NAFAU organiser in Tsumeb. Later he organised workers in Windhoek and Walvis Bay, and became legal officer in 1992. In 1994 he was elected as assistant secretary-general, and in 1997 as secretary-general.

## **MAIN ACTIVITIES**

Fighting dismissals and negotiating with companies are NAFAU's main activities. Since NAFAU represents its members in the factories and in the labour courts, dismissals take up over 50% of the union's time. NAFAU has about 48 recognition agreements with companies and now wants to move towards centralised collective bargaining with larger companies. According to the secretary-general,

*Centralised bargaining was identified as the best option for the union because it is more economically viable rather than travelling from one place to another.*

Head office handles negotiations with larger companies (mainly transnational corporations based in South Africa) and the branch offices handle all other negotiations. Head office is only called in to negotiate with smaller companies when a problem arises that a branch office cannot solve.

The union also assists its members to solve problems that are not work-related, e.g. marital problems, and one NAFAU organiser is trained to counsel HIV-infected members.

NAFAU's educational activities target shop stewards mainly and cover topics such as basic trade unionism, collective bargaining, grievance handling, dispute resolution, labour legislation, women in trade unions and HIV/AIDS. NAFAU has organised four leadership training programmes and participates in NUNW workshops to upgrade its own leadership capacities. In addition, the union recently published a shop steward manual to guide its members and organisers.

## **FINANCIAL RESOURCES**

NAFAU is almost entirely self-sufficient financially and funds practically all its activities from the fees received from paid-up members, who pay 1% of their wages to the union. NAFAU receives a small amount of donor funding for educational activities, e.g. from the international trade secretariats FIET and the IUF. The catering business that the Lüderitz branch office has established (see p.18 of this report) brings in additional funds. NAFAU is in the process of setting up a business arm to be known as the NAFAU Investment Trust (NIT).

# **Mineworkers Union of Namibia (MUN)**

**Date established:** 23 November 1986  
**President:** Eino Ntinda  
**General Secretary:** Peter Naholo  
**Head office address:** \* NUNW Centre, Mungunda Street, Katutura  
✉ PO Box 1566 Windhoek  
☎ (061) 261723 / 215629  
📠 (061) 217684

## **OVERVIEW**

For several years the MUN has been the ‘standard bearer of the workers in Namibia’ (Peltola 1995: 277). It organises in the mining and energy sectors and in early 1990 had a paid-up membership of 12 000 to 13 000. It has very strong branches in Oranjemund (Namdeb) and Arandis (Rössing) and in both places has managed to achieve wage and benefit levels that are unmatched in the country. The minimum Namdeb wage is currently around N\$1 500. Workers at small mines, however, are far less organised and work under far worse conditions (see Peltola 1995: 278).

Over the past few years thousands of MUN members have lost their jobs at large mines. In the latest example, the TCL mine closure cost 2 000 miners their jobs. This has affected the MUN very badly as most of the retrenched workers were its members.

## **INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURE**

The National Congress is the MUN’s supreme decision-making body. It meets every three years and elects the national office-bearers including the general secretary. The shop-floor structures comprise shop steward councils, 50 branches countrywide and regional structures. The MUN has divided its area of operation into four regions (south, west, north and central), and each regional structure holds biannual conferences at which the regional leadership is elected.

The head office consists of the general secretary’s office and the departments of administration, education and research, organising, and health and safety.

## **STAFFING AND LEADERSHIP**

The MUN has 12 full-time staff members. The general secretary and assistant are elected, while all other staff are appointed. Vacancies are advertised in the media and through union structures. The MUN pays more attention to qualifications than most of the other NUNW unions do, and a Grade 12 qualification is usually required.

The MUN offers better conditions of service than all the other unions do except NANTU. As a result the MUN has attracted staff who previously worked for other unions, but it has also lost several leaders to the private sector or government. Fortunately the MUN has a broad pool of experienced unionists who could take up leadership positions when others left. Present general

secretary Peter Naholo joined the union in 1990 as national organiser. He then served as education co-ordinator before being elected as general secretary in 1993.

## **MAIN ACTIVITIES**

The MUN's main activities include collective bargaining, educational activities and dealing with health and safety issues. Retrenchments take up much of the union's time as these are relatively widespread in the mining industry.

The main topics addressed in educational activities include basic trade unionism, trade union rights, collective bargaining, dispute resolution, and health and safety. The union regards education as a crucial activity and wants to expand its programmes to reach all members: it wants to equip members with the skills and knowledge necessary to take up their own struggles so they are less dependent on the union.

The MUN's newsletter, *Miners Speak*, is one of the only two newsletters published by NUNW unions.

## **FINANCIAL RESOURCES**

The MUN finances almost all its activities from its membership fees (1% of monthly wage). Some educational activities are jointly funded by the MUN and the international trade secretariat ICEM, which carries 25% of the costs. ICEM also financially supports some MUN health and safety programmes, but this support will be phased out over the next two years.

The MUN was the first Namibian union to start its own investment company. In July 1997, following its National Congress in April, the union set up the Namibia Miners Investment Trust (NAMIT). The MUN's NEC members serve as NAMIT trustees. The Namibia Mineworkers Investment Holding Company (NAMIC) that became operational in September 1997 was also set up by the MUN and is fully owned by NAMIT

NAMIT's aim is 'to improve the quality of life for mineworkers, energy workers and their children through reinvesting the wealth generated by NAMIC into social programmes focusing on education, training and development of human resources and the improvement of community services where they live'. NAMIT provides guidance to NAMIC, e.g. on which sectors to invest in. NAMIT also loaned NAMIC about N\$600 000 as start-up capital, and this money was raised from the union's membership income. NAMIC's profits will not be used to finance union activities but will be used to provide direct services such as bursary schemes to MUN members.

# **Metal and Allied Namibian Workers Union (MANWU)**

**Date established:** 24 May 1987  
**Acting President:** Jacobus Shirunga  
**General Secretary:** Moses Shiikwa  
**Head office address:** \* NUNW Centre, Mungunda Street, Katutura  
✉ PO Box 22771, Windhoek  
☎ (061) 263100  
📠 (061) 263100

## **OVERVIEW**

MANWU organises in a wide range of industries including the construction, printing, steel, wood, iron, electrical work and karakul industries, as well as service stations. Since its inception the union has faced the problem of having to organise small groups of workers in many different workplaces. Apart from having to overcome financial problems, MANWU also has a relatively strong rival union to deal with – the Namibia Building Workers Union (NABWU).

## **INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURE**

The General Congress is MANWU's highest decision-making body and meets every four years. It elects a 30-member CC that meets at least four times a year. In turn the CC elects the secretary-general and a 10-member Executive Committee.

On the factory level, members elect shop stewards every two years, who in turn form factory-based workers committees, which in turn elect branch committees on an annual basis.

MANWU has four organisational regions, namely Karas (south), Erongo (west), North and Central. In the north and south there is only 1 full-time staff member while the Erongo region has two full-time organisers. These organisers are trained negotiators and meet with shop stewards and branch committees to undertake collective bargaining.

## **STAFFING AND LEADERSHIP**

MANWU has 11 full-time staff members, four of whom are based in the regions. Besides the secretary-general who is elected, all staff are appointed by the Executive Committee. Vacancies are not advertised publicly because the union tries to fill these with suitable staff from its own ranks. A commitment to helping workers is the main requirement for a MANWU post, and the ability to communicate, read and write is a further requirement. Qualifications and specific skills are seen as 'a new issue' and as less important than a proper understanding of trade unionism.

Present general secretary Moses Shiikwa was a shop steward with NAFAU in Windhoek before joining MANWU as an organiser in 1992. He then served as national organiser before being promoted to the position of acting secretary-general in 1993. The 1995 congress then confirmed his appointment as secretary-general.

## **MAIN ACTIVITIES**

MANWU spends most of its time on negotiating wages and organising at different companies. But the union has achieved centralised collective bargaining in the construction industry where it signed a recognition agreement with the Construction Industries Federation of Namibia (CIF). To ease the heavy burden of having to negotiate with each company separately, MANWU plans to move towards centralised bargaining in the metal industry and in the wood and furniture industries. Overall MANWU has recognition agreements with about 24 companies.

MANWU also organises basic shop steward education programmes, but it does not have any training programmes for union leaders at present.

## **FINANCIAL RESOURCES**

MANWU is one of the NUNW's financially weaker affiliates. The financial crisis it faces (which also entails low wages for union staff) has contributed to the relatively high turnover of MANWU secretary-generals. Moses Shiikwa is the fifth general secretary of MANWU since the union's formation.

MANWU was initially supported by the Swedish and Finnish building workers unions, followed by the Finnish Metalworkers Union (Peltola 1985: 280). Today MANWU survives on its membership fees and receives no outside assistance other than for educational programmes funded by the international trade secretariat IFBWW. MANWU spends most of its income on running its offices, negotiating and organising. The income from fees is not sufficient to cover other expenses or activities, e.g. the union wants to open an office in Oshakati but does not have the funds to do so. Unlike the MUN, MANWU does not want to start an investment arm but it might consider making some investments in co-operation with the NUNW.

# Namibia Public Workers Union (NAPWU)

**Date established:** 6 December 1987  
**President:** Risto Kapenda  
**General Secretary:** Petrus Iilonga  
**Head office address:** \* NUNW Centre, Mungunda Street, Katutura  
✉ PO Box 50035 Windhoek  
☎ (061) 262078  
📠 262007

## OVERVIEW

NAPWU is another union whose formation was strongly influenced by a former Robben Island prisoner – Petrus Iilonga, who has served as NAPWU general secretary ever since the union's formation, despite having become a member of Parliament in 1995.

NAPWU organises all civil servants except teachers and personnel of the Namibian army and police. In addition to government departments the union recruits at municipalities, parastatals and private hospitals. NAPWU faces a relatively strong rival in the Public Service Union of Namibia (PSUN). In 1995 a referendum held among civil servants to determine which union they preferred to be represented by. NAPWU received 15 982 votes and the PSUN received 9 267, thus NAPWU is recognised as the majority representative of Namibia's civil servants.

## INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURE

The National Congress is NAPWU's highest decision-making body. It meets every three years and elects the 35-member CC, the 16-member NEC, and the secretary-general and deputy.

At the local level shop stewards form shop steward committees at their workplaces. These committees in turn form the union branches in various towns. NAPWU's operational area comprises six regions: central, southern, middle-north, eastern, northern and western.

## STAFFING AND LEADERSHIP

NAPWU employs 11 full-time staff, of whom four are regional organisers. The union plans to have two full-time staff based at each regional office and is in the process of establishing regional secretary posts.

Non-elected full-time positions with NAPWU are advertised internally and public advertisements are only placed if no suitable internal candidate is found. Qualifications are not a prerequisite for a job with NAPWU, but experience of and commitment to trade unionism are regarded as essential. NAPWU also considers applicants' ability to read and write and their vision for the union and developments in the country.

NAPWU's current staff members have been with the union for a long time, which is partly attributable to the key leadership role played by Petrus Iilonga. He represents the first generation of trade unionists inside Namibia and regards himself first and foremost as a representative of the workers, even after becoming a member of Parliament for SWAPO.

## **MAIN ACTIVITIES**

Collective bargaining and shop steward training are NAPWU's main activities. Since 1994 the union has signed 13 recognition agreements, including agreements with central government, UNAM, the NBC, Telecom and others. Recently, NAPWU was the driving force behind the establishment of a federation committee to look into the issue of privatisation and come up with proposals for a comprehensive union response.

## **FINANCIAL RESOURCES**

Although NAPWU is the largest union in Namibia, it is not the strongest financially because its membership fees are lower than those of NANTU. Some NAPWU members in the government service, at a few municipalities and at private hospitals presently contribute N\$2,50 per month as membership fees. Most members, however, contribute 1% of their salary and are entitled to death, retirement and disability benefits from a special fund set up by the union for its members. NAPWU aims to implement a 1% deduction for all its members in the near future to strengthen the union financially and to include all members in its benefits scheme.

Before independence NAPWU received financial support from unions in Britain and Sweden, as well as from the international trade secretariat PSI. The NAPWU-PSI relationship turned sour when the PSI suggested that Namibia's public sector unions should merge. NAPWU rejected this proposal as outside interference. NAPWU's unity talks with the PSUN failed over the question of the NUNW's political affiliation to SWAPO. Presently NAPWU does not receive any outside funding and finances all its activities from its own income.

NAPWU invests some of its funds with banks and insurance companies. It does not want to set up its own investment companies. It regards union investments as less important than a focus on standard union functions because '*union investments do not solve workers' problems*'.

# **Namibia Transport and Allied Workers Union (NATAU)**

<b>Date established:</b>	5 June 1988
<b>Acting President:</b>	Ujama Kahongoro
<b>Acting General Secretary:</b>	Abraham Onesmus
<b>Head office address:</b>	* NUNW Centre, Mungunda Street, Katutura ✉ PO Box 7516 Windhoek ☎ (061) 218153 / 216153 📠 263767

## **OVERVIEW**

NATAU organises workers in all transport sectors, as well as at security companies and commercial cleaners. The transport industry is dominated by a few large companies which makes organising easier. As there is no serious rival union in the sector, NATAU should have become one of the strongest unions in the country. Unfortunately, however, the union has a history of internal power struggles which have seriously hampered its functioning.

## **INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURE**

The National Congress is the highest decision-making body. It meets every two years and elects the CEC and NEC. At the shop-floor level workers elect shop stewards, who in turn form shop steward committees, which in turn elect branch executive committees.

## **STAFFING AND LEADERSHIP**

NATAU employs seven full-time staff members – three in the regions (based in Walvis Bay, Tsumeb and Keetmanshoop) and four at head office in Windhoek. The secretary-general is elected by the National Congress while all other staff members are appointed. NATAU salaries are low even by comparison to the salaries paid by the other NUNW unions. As a result NATAU has a high staff turnover.

NATAU pays little attention to qualifications in appointing staff. Rather, it sees a dedication to and knowledge of trade unionism as the most important selection criteria.

Acting general secretary Abraham Onesmus worked at Namibia's large parastatal transport company, TransNamib, before taking up his union post. He has been involved with NATAU since its inception in 1988.

## **MAIN ACTIVITIES**

Following several destructive internal power struggles NATAU is now attempting to rebuild its structures, to win back lost members and to conclude negotiations successfully. The union has more than 10 recognition agreements. In the past its head office was involved in all negotiations, but in an effort to reduce dependency on head office the regional organisers and officials are now brought into negotiation processes to learn the ropes.

NATAU runs relatively few education programmes due to a lack of funds and capacity. Up until 1997 NATAU received financial support for its leadership training programmes from the Finnish transport workers union SASK. These programmes have been discontinued. NATAU has an HIV/AIDS project that targets especially truck drivers who are prone to infection.

## **FINANCIAL RESOURCES**

Besides the funds received for specific activities and projects such as education (SASK) and HIV/AIDS (World Education), NATAU finances all its operations from its membership fees. The union has no investments but is prepared to consider the idea provided that investments will create jobs for its members.

# Namibia National Teachers Union (NANTU)

<b>Date established:</b>	11 March 1989
<b>President:</b>	EM Manga
<b>Secretary-General:</b>	John Nakuta
<b>Head office address:</b>	* Tuin Street, Katutura ✉ PO Box 61009 Katutura, Windhoek ☎ (061) 262247 / 215434 ✉ 261926

## OVERVIEW

NANTU was the first national teachers union in Namibia to consciously break down racial and tribal divisions. It emerged after the educational and political crises of 1988 which resulted in school boycotts and a two-day national strike. NANTU's central focus up until the mid-1990s was the improvement of and eradication of inequalities in education. The union followed a broad political approach to education and guarded against a narrow approach of dealing with conditions of service only.

After the first leadership body left the union in 1995, NANTU ceased to play as strong a role as it had as advocate of equality and social justice. The focus was shifted to collective bargaining and conditions of service. The conditions for qualified teachers were improved dramatically, which created a middle class among the union's members. Although NANTU today is less outspoken than it was on social and political issues, it is one of the organisationally and financially strongest unions in Namibia.

## INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURE

The National Congress is NANTU's highest decision-making body. It now meets every three years and elects the National Teachers Council (NTC) which meets twice per year between congresses. It also elects the 15-member NEC. NANTU also has a Management Committee consisting of Windhoek-based NEC members. This committee oversees the day-to-day running of the head office.

NANTU members elect school committees to represent them in the workplace. NANTU has branch committees in all towns, as well as regional executive committees in 11 regions. Members of the branch and regional executive committees are elected at branch and regional conferences.

## STAFFING AND LEADERSHIP

NANTU has 11 full-time staff members, including regional administrators in Rundu and Ondangwa. The union wants to appoint three more regional administrators to have a stronger presence in the regions. Regional administrators are in charge of the regional offices and are expected to visit union members at schools.

Non-elected NANTU posts are advertised publicly, although union members are encouraged to apply. NANTU places great emphasis on the qualifications of its staff members and offers far better salaries and benefits than any other NUNW union.

Present Secretary-General John Nakuta was a NANTU activist and teacher in Gobabis for many years before being elected to his post at the 1997 National Congress.

## **MAIN ACTIVITIES**

Negotiating has become NANTU's main activity since the signing of a recognition agreement with the government in 1995. The union's negotiations centre around the proposals of the Wages and Salaries Commission (WASCOM), staffing norms (student-teacher ratios) and the education bill.

In addition NANTU conducts leadership training programmes and a Teachers English Language Improvement Programme (TELSIP). NANTU also has a Department of Professional Development which aims to assist teachers to upgrade their professional qualifications. The union plans to introduce a bursary scheme on a 'soft-loan' basis for its members.

## **FINANCIAL RESOURCES**

Initially NANTU received outside financial assistance from organisations like the Norwegian Teachers Union. Today NANTU covers 80-90% of its costs from its own resources. Unlike other NUNW unions, NANTU's membership fee is not 1% of the member's salary, but rather it is a fixed monthly amount (currently N\$20).

The remainder of NANTU's costs (mainly incurred by training programmes) are covered by donors like the Norwegian, Finnish and Canadian teachers unions.

NANTU plans to diversify its revenue sources, e.g. by building a new office complex with additional office space for renting out. The union is also considering entering the real estate business.

# **Namibia Domestic and Allied Workers Union (NDAWU)**

**Date established:** 21 April 1990  
**National Chairperson:** Constancia Engelbrecht  
**General Secretary:** Hileni Iilonga  
**Head office address:** \* NUNW Centre, Mungunda Street, Katutura  
✉ PO Box 61560 Katutura, Windhoek  
☎ (061) 263458  
📠 263458

## **OVERVIEW**

The NUNW has been concerned with the plight of domestic workers since long before independence. In 1987 a federation organising committee met a delegation of domestic workers to discuss strategies for organising domestic workers in Windhoek and other urban areas. But before independence this task was extremely difficult and some committee members were even arrested due to their activities. With independence the way was opened for Namibia's first domestic workers' union to be launched (Nangombe 1994: 45-46).

Today NDAWU organises domestic workers and employees at dry-cleaners, kindergartens and hair saloons. The union still faces an uphill battle as domestic workers are extremely difficult to organise. Along with farm workers they earn the lowest salaries and many suffer intimidation from their employers. Although a 1997 presidential commission of inquiry made several recommendations for improving the working and living conditions of domestic workers (and farm workers), the government has thus far not introduced any new measures to protect these workers.

## **INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURE**

The National Congress is NDAWU's highest decision-making body. It meets every three years and elects the 27-member CC and the 12-member NEC. At present NDAWU does not have regional structures, but it has managed to establish about 20 branches across the country. Contact between the branches and head office is telephonic, and head-office and branch officials occasionally visit one another. In addition the branch chairpersons report to the NEC.

## **STAFFING AND LEADERSHIP**

NDAWU has three full-time staff members based at head office in Katutura. Vacancies are advertised internally because NDAWU believes it does not offer salaries high enough to attract outsiders. NDAWU seeks people with experience rather than qualifications because qualified people are unaffordable for this union. The present staff body consists of two experienced female union activists and one relatively new male organiser. Their salaries are among the lowest in the labour movement. The present general secretary, Hileni Iilonga, was instrumental in setting up the union – first as a field worker, then as chairperson and national organiser before taking up her current post.

## **MAIN ACTIVITIES**

NDAWU is still in the process of recruiting members and building its structures in various parts of the country. Its head office provides an advisory service to domestic workers and conducts educational activities for its members. These activities focus on the role of trade unions, the importance of monthly contributions to the union and the Labour Act.

## **FINANCIAL RESOURCES**

NDAWU members pay a fee of N\$5 on receiving a membership card, but very few pay the monthly membership fee. Consequently the union depends almost entirely on outside assistance. Besides the support rendered by the NUNW, NDAWU receives financial support from donors in Finland, Canada and Austria. The low wage levels in the sector and the huge problems encountered with the collection of membership fees will make financial self-reliance impossible for many years to come. NDAWU is exploring some commercial ventures as options for generating income.

## **Namibia Farmworkers Union (NAFWU)**

**Date established:** 1 May 1994  
**President:** Petrus Kanyanga  
**Secretary-General:** Silvester Gawaseb  
**Head office address:** \* Red Cross Centre, Independence Avenue, Katutura  
✉ PO Box 21007 Windhoek  
☎ (061) 263744  
📠 218653

### **INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURE**

The National Congress is NAFWU's highest decision-making body and meets every three years, but a lack of funds prevented the second congress from taking place as scheduled. The congress elects the NEC, which comprises the president, treasurer, deputy-treasurer, secretary and secretary-general. The NEC has been given the mandate to establish regional and local structures. Workers on the various farms elect branch committees, and the various branches in a particular region form a regional committee.

### **STAFFING AND LEADERSHIP**

NAFWU has two full-time staff members at its head office (general secretary and administrator), and regional co-ordinators in the Otjozondjupa/Oshikoto, Erongo and Hardap regions.

Posts were not advertised with the launching of the union because it needed people who could start working immediately, even at very low salaries. Most of the NAFWU staff have been SWAPO organisers in rural areas or union volunteer workers in the past.

The union's general secretary is an experienced unionist who previously worked for the NUNW. Initially Silvester Gawaseb worked in the NUNW Media Department, and thereafter he became NUNW national organiser and regional co-ordinator. He has headed NAFWU since its formation.

### **MAIN ACTIVITIES**

NAFWU is still in the early stages of its development. It concentrates on organising and recruiting farm workers and tries to raise farm workers' awareness about the new labour dispensation in independent Namibia. The union's educational activities focus on the basic role and functions of trade unions, study circles, basic negotiating skills and the Labour Act. NAFWU has concluded two recognition agreements to date and is now trying to establish centralised collective bargaining with the Namibia Agricultural Union (NAU) which represents the majority of commercial farmers.

### **FINANCIAL RESOURCES**

NAFWU is the only NUNW union with an up-to-date computerised membership database, but this has helped little to increase the amount of membership fees it receives, which is very small. Some farms and guest lodges have implemented a stop-order system and forward 1% of

the union members' salaries to the union. NAFWU remains dependent on outside funding and receives financial support from Belgium, Sweden and the Netherlands through the IUF.

# References

- Bauer, G.M. (1994). *The Labour Movement and Prospects for Democracy in Namibia*. Ph.D thesis. University of Wisconsin: Madison.
- Bauer, G.M. (1997). 'Labour relations in occupied Namibia'. In Klerck, G. et al (1997), *Continuity and Change: Labour Relations in Independent Namibia*. Windhoek: Gamsberg Macmillan.
- Copelyn, J. (1997). 'Seizing the moment: union investment companies'. In *South African Labour Bulletin*, Vol. 21, No. 2, April 1997.
- Katjavivi, P.H. (1988). *A History of Resistance in Namibia*. Paris: UNESCO.
- Klerck, G., Murray, A. & Sycholt, M. (1997). *Continuity and Change: Labour Relations in an Independent Namibia*. Windhoek: Gamsberg Macmillan.
- Klerck, G. (1997). 'The prospects for radical social transformation'. In Klerck, G. et al (1997), *Continuity and Change* (op. cit.).
- Klerck, G. & Sycholt, M. (1997). 'The state and labour relations: Walking the tightrope between corporatism and neo-liberalism'. In Klerck, G. et al (1997), *Continuity and Change* (op. cit.).
- Klerck, G. & Sycholt, M. (1997). 'The management of labour relations: Structure and strategy'. In Klerck, G. et al (1997), *Continuity and Change* (op. cit.).
- Koch, E. (1997). 'The new unionist: Suit, silk tie and chequebook'. In *Mail & Guardian*, 24-30 January 1997.
- Mather, C. (1997). *Tackling Transnationals*. Cape Town: ILRIG.
- Mineworkers Union of Namibia (1997). Namibia Mineworkers Investment Holding Company (brochure).
- Mineworkers Union of Namibia (1998). *Miners Speak*, Vol. 8, No. 1, February 1998.
- Moleah, A.T. (1983). *Namibia: The Struggle for Liberation*. Wilmington, USA: Moleah Publishers.
- Murray, A. & Wood, G. (1997). 'The Namibian trade union movement: Trends, practices and shopfloor perception'. In Klerck, G. et al (1997), *Continuity and Change* (op. cit.).
- Naidoo, R. (1997a). 'Unions and Investments'. Discussion paper. Johannesburg: NALEDI.
- Naidoo, R. (1997b). 'Union investment: Can it drive transformation?'. In *South African Labour Bulletin*, Vol. 21, No. 3, pp. 80-84.

Nangombe, M. (1994). 'The Namibian Domestic and Allied Workers Union'. In Martens & Mitter (eds), *Women in trade unions: Organising then unorganised*. Geneva: ILO.

National Union of Namibian Workers (1991). 'Position on Land and Labour'. Windhoek: NUNW.

National Union of Namibian Workers (1998). 'Central Executive Report to the Second National Congress'. Windhoek: NUNW.

Peltola, P. (1995). The Lost May Day: Namibian Workers Struggle for Independence. Helsinki: The Finnish Anthropological Society in association with the Nordic Africa Institute.

Sikhakhane, J. (1997). 'Dilemma over land of milk and honey'. *Business Report*, 5 June 1997.

South African Labour Bulletin (1996). 'Union investment: New opportunities, new threats'. *SALB*, Vol. 20, No. 5, October 1996.