

THE FAWU RESEARCH UNIT:

1.1 NEEDS ASSESSMENT

BACKGROUND:

The FAWU research unit has been operating in the Head Office since 1998. It has established a resource centre and has two people working in it at this time – Thandi Yoli and Viva Mtai. The unit was jointly conceived in 1996/97 by FAWU and the Labour Research Service (LRS). The relationship between the two organisations continues presently, and will last until the research unit is properly established and resourced within FAWU's head office.

The LRS successfully applied for funding for the project in 1996/97 from the FNV-Holland. This money goes to paying the salaries and overhead costs incurred by the LRS for providing a senior researcher (Reza Daniels) to supervise and establish the research unit in FAWU. It is a three-year project and we are currently in the third year of the project. We are, however, going to apply for an extension of the project (to the FNV-Holland) so that it is completed by the end of the year 2000.

The original aim of the project in 1996 was to assist FAWU to increase its bargaining capacity by developing a research unit that was targeted to producing sectoral reports that could assist the bargaining department. It was felt that FAWU lacked the research capacity to fully support its bargaining structures because of several factors. Some of these included:

- That due to the legacy of Apartheid, black people were denied the educational opportunities required to create a pool of research talent.
- That the consequent shortage of skilled people in South Africa led to large salaries being offered to them, preventing unions from attracting sufficiently qualified people.
- That funding for the research department was lacking and therefore required foreign donor assistance.

Some of the issues that FAWU felt were also important (notwithstanding the sectoral issues) included:

- The effectiveness of school feeding schemes.
- The impacts of deregulation on the sector.
- The establishment of centralised bargaining fora in food sectors.

- The development of wage policies for the various food sectors.

The form of research backup was envisaged to include the following elements:

- Scrutiny of documents submitted by management and other parties such as government departments.
- Critiques of proposals presented by government.
- Identification of information needed by FAWU.
- Liaising with employers and government departments to obtain required information.
- Preparation of information and arguments in support of FAWU positions and proposals.
- Preparation of research reports on issues identified by FAWU.
- Presentation of research findings to FAWU structures.
- Conducting workshops for the union.
- Establishing an independent research unit for the union.

Since the original drafting of the proposal, several refinements were made. These related primarily to the requirements of FAWU which have changed somewhat from the points listed above.

By the end of 1998, the project achieved the following:

- The establishment of an independent research unit had been completed, housed at the FAWU head office.
- The development of a catalogued resource centre was also established at the FAWU head office. However, further development of this centre still has to take place.
- The researchers had started a monthly publication called "Organisers Update", and were evaluating the feasibility of using social responsibility criteria for bargaining purposes.
- Training was completed for Thandi Yoli on the Actual Wage Rates Database.
- There was consistent involvement of researchers in the formulation of reports with respect to sectoral issues.
- There was assistance provided to the FAWU delegation at tripartite forums (including the workplace challenge, cluster studies and commodity forums).
- There was assistance provided in interpreting all the major policy initiatives by government that affected the sector.
- A number of workshops were conducted for the union with respect to pertinent issues facing the union and how to respond to them.

TARGET GROUPS:

The following target groups are the primary beneficiaries of the project:

- The beneficiaries of the research unit are particularly members of the bargaining department and the education department. However, the entire union will also benefit, owing to the fact the products of the unit reaches all tiers of union members through close collaboration with the bargaining department.
- The beneficiaries of the resource centre is the entire union, though its establishment in the Cape Town head office hampers its utility to members based elsewhere in the country.

1.2 DESIGN OF ACTIVITIES

OBJECTIVES:

1. To strengthen the capacity of the bargaining department
2. To collaborate with the education department
3. To produce one research report for the unit per month for the remainder of the project.
4. To employ another senior researcher for the project.
5. To assume full financial control of the research unit by the end of the year 2000.

OUTPUTS/PRODUCTS:

1. Strengthening the capacity of the bargaining department:

OUTPUTS/PRODUCTS:

- Interpretation of financial statements and preparation of bargaining notes for negotiators when bargaining takes.
- Formulation of wage reviews across all sectors in the economy

- Developing the ability to compile key social benchmarks (e.g. medical aid benefits, housing benefits, education programs, provident funds, etc.).
- Establishment of a database that measures FAWU membership in the food industry.
- Providing policy support to FAWU members engaged in tripartite forums

2. Collaborating with the education department:

OUTPUTS:

- Assisting with gathering and developing materials for education
- Assisting with information gathering of different organisational documentation within FAWU and COSATU (e.g. policies, resolutions, etc.), and ensuring that the Resource Centre is kept up to date with these documents.
- Working collaboratively with the education department of key projects.

3. Producing monthly research reports:

PRODUCT:

- Producing a research report on each sector of the food industry per month, focusing on the present economic environment and the future policy directions likely to be followed.
- Assisting the bargaining department with direct representation of the union at commodity forums, the agricultural trade forum, and other government initiatives (in other words, where the above monthly reports are targeted).

4. Employment of a research unit manager:

OUTPUT:

- The LRS will help find a suitable person to manage the research unit.

5. To fully control the research unit by the end of the year 2000:

OUTPUT:

- This will require the union to fully finance the research unit. Once this is achieved, the unit will be fully integrated into the FAWU head office.