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## RESEARCH REPORT

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# QUOTA SYSTEMS AS A STRATEGY FOR STRENGTHENING WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP IN TRADE UNIONS: *The International and South African Experience*

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**PROCESSED**

*While all Naledi publications adopt a pro-labour perspective, their conclusions do not represent the policies of COSATU.*

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## Introduction

*The intention of this paper is to highlight debates and issues regarding the use of quota systems in strengthening women's leadership in the labour movement. The paper is aimed at broadening the debate from mere acceptance or rejection of the quota. Debates on the use of quotas tend to be heated and controversial and can lose sight of the central objective, which is the development of strategies for women's empowerment.*

A large proportion of trade unions internationally have adopted forms of the quota system as a strong measure to deal with the ongoing under-representation of women in leadership. The quota system has also been introduced effectively in a number of parliaments all over the world, including South Africa. The countries with the highest representation of women in parliament have all had to use quotas to achieve this.

The paper draws from a review of some of the international literature, as well as interviews undertaken with trade unionists and parliamentarians (see Appendix A for a list of interviewees). This paper will also highlight some examples where quota systems have been adopted, including three COSATU affiliates, namely CWIU, NEHAWU and SAMWU.

The paper begins by discussing the use of quotas in trade union federations internationally. The second section draws from the experience of the ANC in parliament in the use of the quota system. The third section looks at the

representation of women in COSATU and affiliate leadership structures. This is followed by a discussion of the September Commission recommendations and union views regarding the use of quotas as a strategy for strengthening women's leadership. The three case-studies of the use of quotas in COSATU affiliates are contained in Appendix B to this paper.

## **The International Experience of Quota Systems**

*Overall, the international experience shows that a significant number of labour federations and unions globally are making use of quota systems, and that they are seen as a key strategy in strengthening women's leadership in trade unions and achieving greater gender democracy. Many benefits arise from this, and the focus on women's leadership and concerns has become an important survival mechanism for unions globally. Information for this section was drawn from extensive research and reviews of the international literature carried out by various writers.<sup>1</sup>*

### **What are quota systems?**

Internationally quota systems are used as a central part of a multi-pronged strategic approach aimed at strengthening women's participation in trade union leadership and enhancing women's decision-making powers. This strategic approach is based on the principle of positive action that recognises that special measures are needed to redress gender discrimination. Quota systems involve forms of arranged representation in union decision-making structures, with the overall objective being the attainment of gender democracy.

### **Why are Quota Systems Necessary?**

From the international experience it can be concluded that the strengthening of women's participation in union leadership is virtually impossible to achieve without structural change in the form of quota systems. Unions around the world have realised that in order to successfully deal with the problem of poor representation of women in leadership positions, drastic change is necessary. A key strategy in achieving the necessary structural changes has been the introduction of quota systems. A study of the factors mitigating against women's empowerment and leadership in trade unions globally points towards massive barriers having to be surmounted, with traditional trade union organisation and structures acting as severe impediments. —

Where women are heavily outnumbered by men in decision-making structures, and a certain 'critical mass' is not achieved, it has been found that women feel too suppressed to play a role. Black and ethnic minority women tend to be doubly excluded. This results not only in the under-representation of women as a sex, but also it results in certain groups of women being made invisible. Strong interventions are therefore required involving fundamental structural change.

### **Objectives of Introducing Quota Systems**

A number of key organisational and political objectives can be identified from the

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<sup>1</sup> Principally by Anne Trebilcock of the International Labour Organisation and Cynthia Cockburn of City University, London.

international experience and literature. Strengthening women's participation in trade union leadership is the organisational goal of quota systems held by labour movements in countries around the world. This includes both increasing numbers of women in leadership positions, and placing women at all levels in the union. Politically, the aim is to enhance women's decision-making powers through the full integration of women in decision-making processes. Redressing gender discrimination, mainstreaming women's work and securing a gender perspective in union decision-making are important overall objectives.

There are many benefits to strengthening women's leadership, according to global studies. Overall, it is argued that with the full integration of women into leadership layers and decision-making, trade unions will be in a stronger position to meet the challenges they face. There is evidence that the presence of more women leaders leads to greater attention being paid to the special concerns of women workers. The global trend is towards increasingly large numbers of women being employed into waged work, and it has become increasingly important for unions to focus on women in recruitment drives and strategies. International research shows that women in leadership positions are particularly committed to recruiting women and may provide an important symbol to potential women members that the union works for women. This role model effect may also be significant in encouraging greater participation of existing women members in union matters and may prove especially important in promoting the emergence of female shop stewards.

Strengthening women's leadership has therefore become an important survival mechanism for unions in many countries, where women account for the highest rate of growth in membership. This holds true for example in Canada, Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands, Sweden, United Kingdom, Germany and the United States. Strengthening women's leadership results in a greater level of democracy and creativity in unions.

## **Strategies Used to Implement Quota Systems**

Labour movements around the world have used a combination of strategies to strengthen women's leadership. This includes regularly scheduled women's conferences, strengthened women's or equality committees, women's departments or equality officers, quota systems, new approaches to conducting union business, and workers' education. A key dimension to this multi-pronged approach has been the adoption of quota systems to achieve structural change. A number of types of quota systems have been used. The principal forms are reserving seats for women on executive structures, reserving positions on candidate lists in union elections for women, and guarantees of proportional representation.

However, there have been difficulties in implementing these strategies. Many unions in Europe, for example, have committed themselves to implementing positive action programmes, but even where the will exists, it is difficult to achieve. Even where the quota system has increased the numbers of women in leadership positions, they often tend to be concentrated at the lower levels of union leadership. Reserving seats can also lead to women being treated as token figures and being placed in marginal roles. Proportional representation and reserved seats in mainstream decision-making bodies, along with strengthening of women's structures, are seen as the key steps to take in overcoming these difficulties. In addition, specific strategies need to be tailored to each union's

particular circumstances, and sufficient financial and political support must be given. It is also essential that such positive action programs are linked to set goals, fixed timetables and designated monitoring mechanisms to track the progress made towards strengthened representation of women in union leadership. Methods used by trade unions to implement these strategies are now described.

### **a) Reserved Seats**

Reserved seats have been one of the most important changes implemented by trade unions globally in increasing and strengthening women's leadership. Various methods have been used to implement this approach, including reserving seats by earmarking any vacancies that arise for women. It has been shown that an important part of implementing this approach is to combine the reserving of seats with measures to support women once in leadership positions. This has included women working closely with more experienced officials to receive on-the-job training.

Overall, the international experience indicates that reserved seats have a "positive snowball effect", with women who started out occupying reserved seats going on to win elections in their own right. This in turn has resulted in women being elected into structures in the same union even where there are no reserved seats. This points towards the importance of changing traditional stereotype perceptions of women. There is thus a ripple effect, with the first step leading to steadily increasing numbers of women occupying leadership positions.

### **b) Proportional Representation and other Changes to Election Rules**

Guaranteed proportional representation on executive structures, candidate lists, and delegations have been widely practised to increase the number of women leaders in labour movements globally. It has been found that to be successful, the goals set must be realistic, and they must be instituted vertically and horizontally at all levels in the union hierarchy. In some instances space has been created on executive committees for women by limiting terms of office. In other cases seats have been added.

## **Experiences of Quota Systems**

Since the early eighties a growing number of unions have been refining their strategies to strengthen women's participation in trade union leadership, with promising results. Revisions to union constitutions, rules and traditional practices have occurred across the globe. While problems do prevail, as described above, there is evidence from numerous union federations that the number of women holding leadership positions is steadily increasing. Over one-third of national affiliates of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), for example, have reserved seats for women on their executive bodies. A further example, is the case of New Zealand, with one-third female union membership, women's representation is mandated at the local, regional and national level, and by 1989 women constituted 26% of the NZCTU executive committee. In trade union federations in Austria, Canada, Fiji, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the Scandinavian countries, women are now represented on the governing boards approximately in proportion to female membership.

## Conclusion

Trade unions around the world are recognising that drastic measures are needed to address the problem of poor representation of women in leadership positions. Significant barriers to strengthening women's leadership and decision-making powers prevail, and strong interventions requiring fundamental change are necessary. Internationally, quota systems are seen as a central strategy to achieving change, along with other structural and organisational changes. The political will for change, and effective support mechanisms need to be in place for quota systems to have the necessary impact. Increasing women's participation and striving for greater gender democracy are important steps in meeting new challenges faced by the labour movement internationally, and in its continued survival and growth.

## The use of the quota system by the ANC in Parliament

*The ANC made history in 1994 when it adopted a quota system for the election list to Parliament. The result has been that South Africa has one of the highest levels of participation of women in parliament internationally.*

The adoption of the quota system had been a controversial debate in the ANC for some years, and has not yet been adopted in relation to the ANC's own organisational structures. Nevertheless, this was a very important step, which ensured far higher levels of participation of women than would otherwise have been the case. This section will briefly discuss some of the lessons that can be learnt from the use of the quota in parliament, based on interviews with two women activists and members of parliament.

Pregs Govender, the Chair of the Parliamentary Committee on Quality of Life and Status of Women, has made the following evaluation of the use of the quota system in Parliament:

*“The quota ensured a significant number of women in parliament (25%) and not just the typical middle-class white women of the old days. The diversity of women from the ANC represented rural women, women with disabilities, women workers/trade unionists, young and old women, African, Indian, Coloured women, professionals and women activists. A significant number of women now occupy positions: Deputy Speaker, Chairs of Committees, Ministers, Deputy Ministers. In addition, some of us, through workshops have been involved in helping establish the gender machinery (e.g. the Commission for Gender Equity, Office for the Status of Women, the gender desks in provinces and departments etc.) as well as to support initiatives at local government level. This has been important in translating the numbers into introducing a gendered analysis (raced and classed) of the unequal roles and power relationships (particularly of women as often unacknowledged carers of the young, old, disabled, providers of food and cleaners of homes etc.) in addition to their roles as worker, trade unionists, party member etc. The gendered analysis has been reflected in the work of the constitution, legislation that has been introduced and on the budget (e.g. the Women's Budget).”*

It is clear from the above assessment that many gains have been made through the greater participation of women in parliament. Nozizwe Madlala-Routledge (MP) assesses the processes as follows:

*“Quotas are a good idea, an important form of affirmative action, they bring to the attention of the decision-makers a section of society that is usually left out and overlooked. However, the struggle for equality is far from over, since we are not just seeking equality at the lower levels. Women’s representation must go all the way up to the highest office. Thus, it is important to maintain pressure and to continue to lobby decision-makers.”*

There are examples of other countries where quotas made a difference, such as Argentina, which had a legislated quota and had the highest number of women (21.8%) in parliament in both North and South America.

According to Madlala-Routledge, the disadvantage of the quota system is that people can get stuck with a number, for example the ANC set the quota at 30%, and could remain so for years, whereas the aim is *equal* representation. There should be a programme in place to set clear targets and goals with time-frames for ultimately achieving equal representation. The quota will help to move towards equality, but 30% is still far from this. In fact, research indicates that 30% is the lowest proportion where the target group can make a difference.

In South Africa there is real possibility of the numbers of women in Parliament declining because there has been virtually no institutional change to encourage women’s full and effective participation. Women in parliament have been engaged in a process of transforming the institution to accommodate women’s needs. For example, many women MPs have experienced problems regarding late night meetings, the additional load of family and household responsibilities, and the debating style in parliament. All of these issues need to be addressed to ensure that women are fully included. There is a need to look at the electoral system, whether for parliament or an organisation, to ensure that it is conducive for the implementation of a quota. Some argue that quotas interfere with democracy, however because of society’s socialisation there is a need for intervention, because otherwise women would continue to be overlooked. For Madlala-Routledge, “the heart of the matter is power, since for every woman that takes a seat in parliament there is one less position available for a man.”

Pregs Govender emphasises that the quota system should be linked to other strategies for transformation:

*“It is vital that clear programmes to build women’s leadership are accompanied by changes in the institutions themselves and in the people who make these institutions - men and women, to develop a culture that is co-operative, supportive and takes effective action. A strong women’s movement uniting women on a progressive basis motivated by the needs of the poorest women in South Africa, is critical in sustaining the gains women make.”*

Drawing on the lessons of Parliament for the union environment, Govender argues that:

*“The quota system, like any other tactic, can become equally open to abuse and patronage by powerful men in leadership (elevating those who*

are compliant above those who are critical). To avoid this it has to be seen as one part (a significant part) of a comprehensive strategy to build women's leadership in the trade union movement to empower women in the factories, farms or in domestic work."

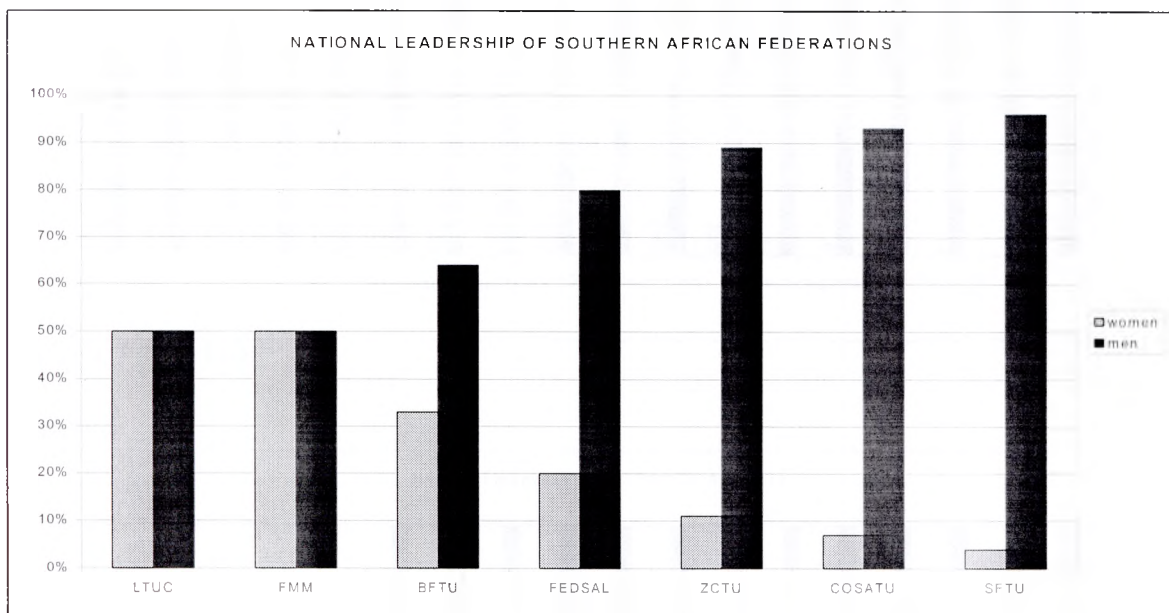
## Women's Leadership in COSATU

The issue of women's participation and leadership in COSATU has been on the agenda since its launch in 1985. At the last COSATU Congress in 1994 delegates noted that "COSATU's long-standing resolutions around gender inequality issues have not been effectively implemented." The Congress resolved to implement a number of strategies over a period of four years, including the following:

*"Special measures will be put in place to ensure that women are effectively represented in all decision making structures of the federation. The CEC will be empowered to ensure that in this regard office bearers at a national, regional and local level will be assigned to build women's leadership and ensure proper representation of women in all structures of the federation."*

The following graphs illustrate the serious under-representation of women in leadership at all levels. Chart One shows the levels of women's leadership in trade union federations in the Southern African region. COSATU, the biggest federation in the region has the second lowest proportion of women in leadership.

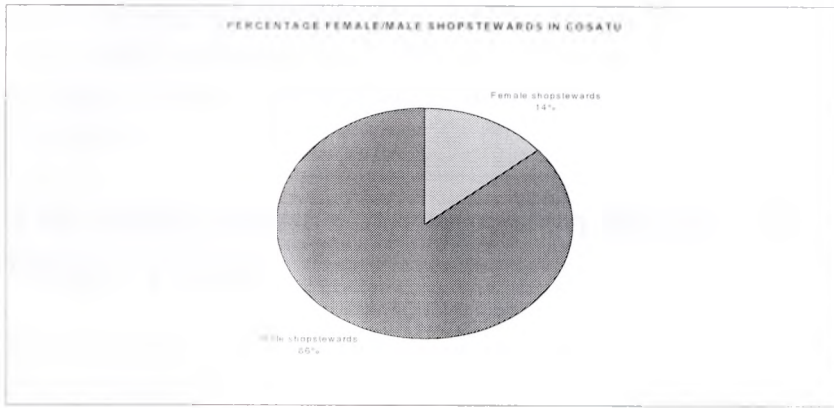
**Chart 1**



Source: Nyman and Naudascher, 1996

Chart Two reflects the estimated proportion of female shop-stewards in COSATU according to a survey undertaken by Pityana and Orkin in 1991. Of the approximate figure of 25 000 shop-stewards, there are only 3 500 (14%) women. This disadvantages women from taking up leadership at all levels within the union, since the position of shop-steward is arguably the most important step in leadership development and an important recruiting ground for other leadership positions in the unions.

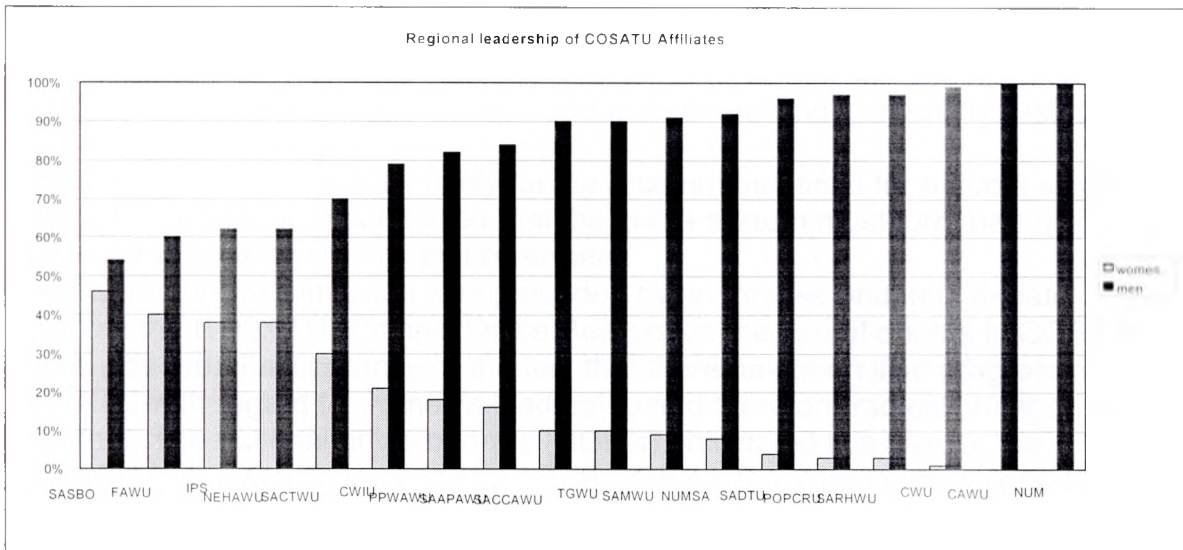
**Chart 2**



Source: Pityana and Orkin, 1991

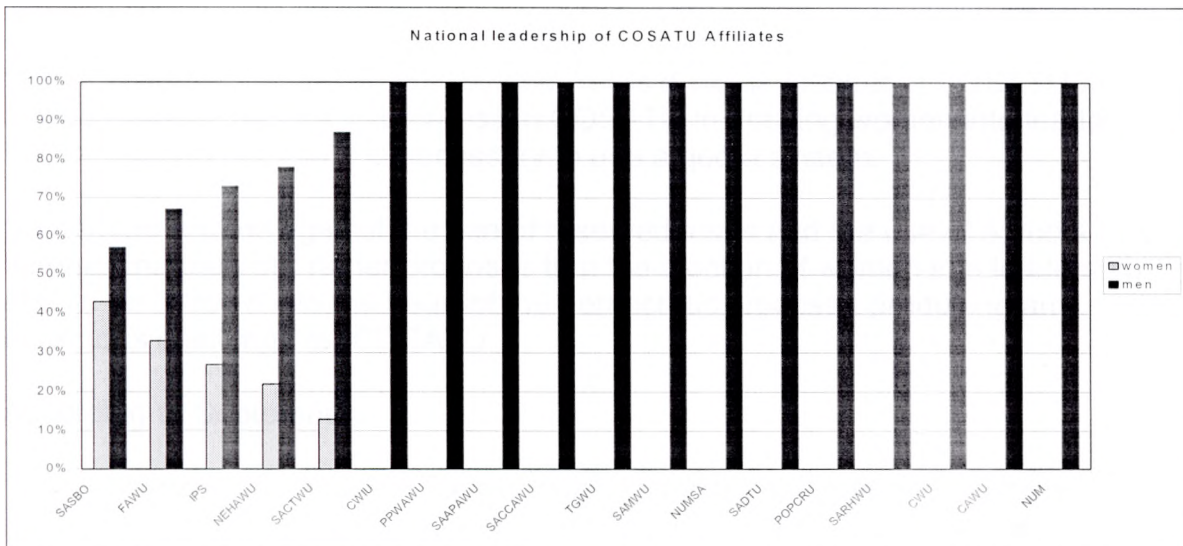
Charts Three and Four show the gender breakdown of national and regional leadership figures (office bearers) within COSATU affiliates. These graphs strikingly illustrate the male-dominated leadership of many affiliates. The lack of women in leadership is vividly demonstrated at the national level, with 13 out of 18 affiliates having no women at all.

**Chart 3**



Source: Filita, 1996

**Chart 4**



Source: Filita, 1996



These charts have demonstrated the disturbingly low numbers of women in leadership positions in COSATU despite resolutions committing the federation to building women's representation and leadership. This points to the need for drastic measures.

## The September Commission Recommendations and Union Views

This section discusses the views of some of the affiliates on the use of quotas in the context of the September Commission recommendations on building women's leadership. *The September Commission makes clear recommendations regarding the use of a quota system in the federation and affiliate structures:*

- COSATU and affiliates should adopt a quota system for electing worker representatives and office-bearers. The target should be 50% representation by women in all COSATU and affiliate structures by the year 2000, starting at this year's Congress with the election of at least three women office-bearers
- COSATU and affiliates should also adopt a phased quota system for employing organisers and other staff to ensure a more gender-sensitive interface with members
- The Federation and affiliates should ensure that conditions under which shop-steward elections take place are conducive to electing women shop-stewards

This discussion will focus primarily on the recommendations for a quota system, although it should be emphasised that the quota system must form part of an overall strategy for women's empowerment.

The September Commission was preceded by an intense and long debate amongst the COSATU National Office Bearers on the use of quotas in COSATU. There was broad acceptance of the fact that there has been little progress in COSATU with regard to women's leadership and therefore radical changes are required. The national office bearers (NOB's) articulated this view at the COSATU Policy Conference in May. The NOB's have agreed on the need for a quota system as a mechanism for women's empowerment.

In an interview with Connie September, Second Vice President of COSATU and convenor of the September Commission, she revealed the fact that her own position has shifted on the need for a quota. Historically, many affiliates and unionists have argued that quotas amount to tokenism. Connie September was of this view herself, however, her experience as a woman leader in COSATU and her analysis of the lack of progress in COSATU in drawing women into leadership has convinced her that it is necessary to use a quota system.

September argues against the use of reserved seats and the use of a quota in a tokenist manner, but rather proposes that the election of women into leadership should be "thrown into the heart of the democratic process", producing an enormous challenge for COSATU.

According to September:

*"In as much as COSATU has fought against apartheid and capitalism COSATU must commit itself in real tangible ways to the eradication of the legacy of the oppression of women. This legacy does not only exist in*

*relation to the representation of women in leadership structures. It also exists with regard to: organising strategies, with the result that domestic and seasonal workers do not have a home in COSATU; collective bargaining - there has been no coherent strategy to take up issues that affect women in particular (e.g. negotiating child care); campaigns, for example, the campaign against the Apartheid Wage Gap has not highlighted and prioritised the particularly low wages of women; and NEDLAC, which displays the lowest level of women's participation despite the fact that it is an important vehicle for change."*

Thus, the issue is broader than one of the representivity of leadership, but in fact is about integrating a gender perspective and the struggle for women's empowerment into the life of the federation. The quota system, which would lead to the increasing participation of women at leadership levels, is likely to facilitate the inclusion of these concerns on the COSATU agenda.

The motivation for the figure of 50%, as stipulated in the September Commission recommendation, is the argument for *equal participation*. Connie September argues that the September Commission has not adopted the approach of catering for different affiliates on the basis of the proportion of female membership, since there is no evidence to suggest that there is greater participation of women in leadership in those affiliates where women are in the majority. "Policies can be reassessed in relation to the material conditions at a particular time, however, presently all 19 affiliates are showing a problem, therefore 50% is the correct figure for equal participation in order to ensure a women's perspective", argues September. Thus, for example, in those affiliates where there are very few women, using proportional representation would mean that the representation of women would be so small that they would be in danger of marginalisation.

Thus, unions such as CAWU and NUM are challenged by this proposal, both to draw women into their structures but also to challenge the notion of male-dominated industries, and to challenge the view that women cannot perform certain tasks. COSATU's view is that it should be possible for both women and men to enter the labour market in all industries. Thus, male-dominated unions are encouraged to put strategies in place to ensure the consistent development of women leadership whilst also campaigning for higher levels of employment of women.

Some unions have expressed the view that the proposal is too bold. Connie September argues firmly, however, that regardless of how one phrases this proposal it is threatening by its very nature. There is a strong reaction to the proposal on the quota system because it aims at the top levels of power in the unions. September argues that:

*"... as long as we all agree that COSATU belongs to everyone including men and women, we have to accept that we have a legacy to overcome with regard to women. COSATU managed to nominate and support women for the ANC lists to Parliament and local government, and to push strongly for affirmative action in the workplace, but why not when it comes to the structures of the federation?"*

The September Commission argues for an integrated approach to the empowerment of women, using a combination of strategies alongside the quota system, including effective gender structures, grassroots activism, the

employment of gender co-ordinators and female organisers, education, campaigns and clear implementation and monitoring mechanisms. Furthermore, the practical barriers to women's full participation in the unions and workplace must be acknowledged and broken down.

## **CWIU<sup>2</sup>**

CWIU was the first COSATU affiliate to adopt a quota system. CWIU has recently increased its quota to 25% with the aim of reaching 50% representation of women. The assessment of the leadership is that the quota system has been effective in developing women's leadership and in placing the issue of women's representation in all forums firmly on the agenda. CWIU's view is that there should be debate in Congress on this matter with the aim of formulating a common position. In some male-dominated unions there would be a need to take up a campaign to increase employment levels of women, in order for a quota to be effectively introduced.

## **SACCAWU**

SACCAWU's last National Congress did not support the adoption of a quota system. The union's approach to women's empowerment includes an education programme and an informal acceptance of the need for a gender balance. The quota is viewed as "artificial". The SACCAWU Gender Co-ordinator, Patricia Appolis, highlights the fact that there is a view that focuses on education as the only means to women's empowerment, which relies on women progressing organically through the ranks of the organisation. However, she notes that women do not automatically get elected - if the culture of the union is male-dominated, women will not be given the same opportunities. Education programmes should target women that are potential leaders and that are in positions in the union where they can use what they have learnt. Strategies for ensuring progressive policies on women include the necessity of involving leadership and the need for education and awareness-raising amongst the broader membership.

## **SADTU**

SADTU does not have a position on the use of quotas in the unions since there is no agreement on the issue. There are those that strongly support the need for a quota system, however, this is not generally accepted in the union. There will be further discussions on this matter in preparation for the COSATU Congress. The debate has been in progress since 1995.

SADTU has two women at national level. However, there is not one chair or secretary at national or regional level. Thus, the women that do sit on decision-making structures are not in influential positions. According to the Vice President for Gender, Fundi Nzimande:

*"The union is united on the issue of affirmative action with regard to race and gender in the workplace. There have been positive steps in this regard for women, particularly in relation to promotion procedures. However, when it comes to affirmative action in the union, this is where the problem*

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<sup>2</sup> See Appendix B for full details of CWIU's quota system.

*lies. There are female comrades that are strong and can deliver even at this time, but they are not given the opportunity.”*

### **SAMWU<sup>3</sup>**

SAMWU has adopted an innovative quota system that demarcates a women's constituency within each local government structure, which then elects a woman shop-steward. The union has branch women's committees and regional women's committees as constitutionally recognised sub-structures of the branch executive committees and regional executive committees. SAMWU is of the view that increasing the employment levels of women should be a central component of the campaign to strengthen women's leadership. In terms of implementation, Roger Ronnie (SAMWU General Secretary) argues that the emphasis should be on the need for regions to develop layers of women leadership and the CEC and NEC's would then start to become more representative of women.

### **T&GWU**

T&GWU does not support the use of quotas. The union prefers to emphasise capacity building through training in leadership skills. The argument is that through training, women leaders will emerge. According to the General Secretary, Randall Howard: *“female comrades with potential should not be put into positions where they become swamped and overwhelmed because little support is provided - the result is disempowering and does not build leadership”*.

T&GWU took a resolution at its last Congress in 1996 on the development of gender structures and women's leadership and the employment of a full-time gender co-ordinator. The gender forum has made further proposals regarding the inclusion of gender issues on the bargaining agenda, the inclusion of at least one or two women in branch delegations to the NEC and gender-balanced representation at workshops, conferences and education programmes. Furthermore, resources have been allocated for the gender education programme (5% of monthly income). The resolution to employ a full-time gender co-ordinator has not yet been implemented.

According to the General Secretary, T&GWU has not been “as successful as we could have been” in implementing these resolutions. Representation to the NEC is extremely low, with a maximum of 4-5 women out of 54 (8%). Howard acknowledges that women face barriers to full participation in the union. Sexual harassment has been a particularly serious problem in the union, which has been disempowering for women and has thus affected their participation in the union, both for union members and staff. Howard adds that: *“There has been a lack of support for women leaders in the past, with the result that women often feel quite isolated in leadership. There must be support amongst women for each other but also from leadership at every level.”*

### **SACTWU**

At the last COSATU Congress SACTWU opposed the resolution on the quota system. SACTWU is still in the process of discussing the September Commission recommendations in preparation for the COSATU Congress.

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<sup>3</sup> See Appendix B for full details of the quota system adopted by SAMWU.

The SACTWU Congress in August took a resolution on the establishment of gender structures in the union. This resolution represents a major shift in SACTWU's perspective on gender issues. The resolution did not deal with the quota system, although it was discussed at the Congress, but not conclusively. It appears that there was not strong opposition to the use of a quota system although this remains to be seen. SACTWU has always maintained that it does not need special measures for women, since they are in the majority as members and shop-stewards. However, this does not translate itself into female-dominated leadership. In fact, whereas women make up between 70-80% of the union's membership, at a leadership level men are in the majority by 60%. The General Secretary's report to the National Congress acknowledges that women in leadership are *"in the minority if we take into account that such a large proportion of our membership are women. SACTWU identified various problems women were experiencing that hindered their active participation in the union. We believe that this problem is not just a woman's problem to deal with but rather that it is a union's problem that must be dealt with by all of us, men and women."* According to Connie September (SACTWU Treasurer, and the only female national office bearer) the SACTWU position on the use of quotas may shift with the acknowledgement that the numbers of women in leadership are actually decreasing.

## **NEHAWU**

NEHAWU adopted a quota of 50% representation of women in all structures in 1993. The motivation for adopting the quota system was the recognition of the fact that 62% of their membership are women. Secondly, research on NEHAWU's sister unions internationally showed that most unions used strategies such as reserved seats or quotas to increase women's representation. NEHAWU supported the use of quotas in COSATU and affiliates at its policy conference. In its policy document NEHAWU resolves as follows:

*"The gender sub-committee of COSATU should play a more active role in the work of affiliates and report to the Executive which should ensure compliance with agreed positions by all affiliates. One of the concrete steps we are proposing is the immediate implementation of the gender quota system in the election of office bearers, in appointment of officials and election of delegates within the federation and affiliates."*

The NEHAWU quota system uses an interview panel as a mechanism to ensure all factors are taken into account in the democratic process, including gender issues. The interview panel has the power to make recommendations to Congresses. The General Secretary, Neal Thobejane expressed the necessity for all affiliates to be on board and ready to implement the quota system. He argues that it would be fruitless to force the issue, as this is not something that should be voted on otherwise it will not achieve its objective.

## **NUM and NUMSA**

Both NUM and NUMSA argued against the use of quotas in the last COSATU Congress. Both unions have highly male-dominated leadership. The national and regional leadership of NUM is 100% male, and NUMSA has 90% male leadership at a regional level and 100% at a national level.

## Conclusion

This paper has demonstrated that quota systems can be used effectively to strengthen women's leadership. The international experience shows that without radical measures, such as the use of quotas, there is unlikely to be adequate representation of women in trade unions and other institutions. Furthermore, the experience of a number of federations internationally has been that the adoption of a quota system has led to a "snowball effect". This includes the fact that a number of women go on to win elections in their own right, there is increased organising of women into the unions and greater attention is paid to gender issues. Increased women's participation is also seen as an important step in meeting new challenges faced by the labour movement internationally. The experience of the ANC in parliament also demonstrates that without strong measures to ensure the inclusion of women, it is likely that women will be marginalised by the democratic process. Furthermore, an important lesson that can be drawn from women in parliament is that measures such as quotas must be accompanied by institutional change to facilitate the full and effective participation of women.

COSATU's leadership figures show that the representation of women in the decision-making structures of the federation and its affiliates is disturbingly low. COSATU has passed a number of resolutions reflecting its commitment to increasing the levels of women's representation in the federation, but this has not resulted in the desired changes. This has led the national office bearers, the September Commission and some of the affiliates to conclude that special mechanisms need to be implemented to confront this problem head-on. There are examples of COSATU affiliates that have adopted quota systems, using creative and innovative mechanisms to increase women's representation.

There is a great deal that can be learnt from these experiences. The debate on the use of quota systems is still unfolding in COSATU. This is an important debate that must be engaged in as part of the process of developing strategies to build women's leadership in COSATU, and ensuring that the federation is a home for women workers.

# APPENDIX A

## List of Interviewees

<b>Patricia Appolis</b>	Gender Co-ordinator, South African Commercial Catering and Allied Workers Union (SACCAWU)
<b>Chris Bonner</b>	Director of DITSELA, Former Education Officer, Chemical Workers Industrial Union (CWIU)
<b>Randall Howard</b>	General Secretary, Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU)
<b>Nelson Mthombeni</b>	Assistant General Secretary, Chemical Workers Industrial Union
<b>Simphiwe Nanisa</b>	National Union of Mineworkers (NUM)
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# APPENDIX B

## Case Studies: The Use of Quotas within the Unions

This section will discuss the implementation of quota systems in three of the COSATU affiliates, namely CWIU, NEHAWU and SAMWU. The three affiliates have each developed their own unique programmes with some differences and some similarities. What is common to all three unions is that the process of adopting a quota system involved long and intense debates amongst members.

### CWIU

The union's policy is in support of the quota system. CWIU was the first union to pass a resolution on the quota system in 1991. The resolution stated that every structure should have 12% women delegates. This figure was arrived at as corresponding to the proportion of the female membership in the union. The latest resolution taken at the 1997 Congress resolved to implement a quota of 25% with the aim of working towards 50%. CWIU also put forward a resolution on the need for a quota system at the last COSATU Congress.

While there have been arguments that women should not require "special treatment" and that men and women are equal, CWIU's resolutions have indicated the need for women to have different strategies as a result of their historical oppression.

The leadership believes that the quota system has largely been successful in encouraging structures to ensure that there is sufficient representation of women, and drawing attention to the matter - it is always raised and questioned if delegations fall short of the quota. The quota is usually met in constitutional meetings such as the NEC and NCC. CWIU now has a woman as first vice president (elected in June 1997).

However, CWIU does not have mechanisms to enforce the resolution and operates according to democracy of elections. The view in CWIU is that the quota system "should not compromise democracy", thus the elections should be left open to a democratic process. This view is in order to counter the arguments against tokenism. Thus CWIU argues for the quota and democracy. However, as reflected in the figures, particularly at national level, this may mean that the quota is not actually implemented. According to Chris Bonner, Director of DITSELA and former CWIU Education Officer, it was much easier to implement the resolution of having gender co-ordinators sitting on constitutional structures than it is to enforce the election of female office bearers. While reserved seats are useful in exposing women to decision-making structures and facilitating their policy input, this does not give women access to the most powerful positions in the union. Bonner emphasises the importance of implementing the quota at lower levels as this encourages the organic development of women's leadership.

According to Nelson Mthombeni, the Assistant General Secretary, the adoption of the quota system has led to the building of women's leadership at all levels. However, there is a trend for women leaders to be in the treasurer or vice-president position, while the presidents and general secretaries are usually men. The staff compliment at head office is approximately equal, with women in positions other than administrative.



Other strategies employed by CWIU in empowering women include the establishment of women's structures, representation of women in all structures and the monitoring of delegations. The education programme of CWIU has played a major role, there are consistent workshops for women specifically and there is a budget for women's activities. CWIU follows the view that there is a need to hold separate education programmes for women to avoid a tendency for male comrades to dominate and divert the agenda.

CWIU has recently passed a resolution on child care facilities, providing child care for shop-stewards and officials during meetings and transport for meetings held after hours. Furthermore, the resolution calls on employers to provide child care facilities and parental leave, and commits negotiators to take up this issue in collective bargaining. CWIU also has a Code of Conduct on sexual harassment. The CWIU resolution also calls for 50/50 employment of women in the industry. Thus, there is also a link with the call for increasing levels of employment of women.

According to Chris Bonner, part of the reason for CWIU's relative success in adopting progressive policies regarding women has been the activism of a core group of women since the mid 1980s, who pushed gender issues strongly. Bonner argues that unions need to have "champions" of gender issues to ensure that there is progress and transformation. Bonner adds that it is also critical to have a full-time gender co-ordinator that is able to raise issues consistently. The link between the education structures and the women's empowerment programme is important. CWIU also gave prominence to high-profile election campaigns – shop-steward elections would all be held at the same time and the importance of electing women would be highlighted.

## **NEHAWU**

In 1993 NEHAWU adopted a quota system which stipulated 50% women leadership. The basis of adopting the quota was an acknowledgement of the fact that 62% of NEHAWU's membership are women. Secondly, research on sister unions internationally, particularly in Europe and the US, showed that most unions used strategies such as reserved seats or quotas for women's representation. Thus, the resolution in the quota system was the result of international engagement and NEHAWU's membership balance. Furthermore, this was located in the context of the increasing empowerment of workers and worker control, of which building women's leadership constitutes an important aspect.

NEHAWU's quota system was linked to other strategies. A resolution was taken on the provision of child care facilities - all constitutional structures are required to provide child care, the union makes a contribution towards toys and a child-minder. The quota does not only apply to the election of office bearers, but also to delegations to conferences, congresses and overseas trips. NEHAWU has also focused on developing its education programme.

At a branch level implementation has been smooth and easy to achieve, since the majority of shop-stewards are women. At the provincial level implementation has been very difficult, because it is viewed as a 'new concept' and there were not adequate preparation processes leading up to the provincial congresses. Members used the argument that the union should "work towards" the policy

rather than implementing it immediately. Thus, the quota was not enforced in 1994 in all provinces - 5 out of 9 did not comply.

The 1995 National Congress was affected by the failure to implement the policy in the provinces. The argument that the union should work towards implementation became a dominant motivation, while others argued that for the policy to be successful it must be enforced. Delegates continued to argue that the process would take longer at a national level, while it was easier to implement at a branch level. In provincial caucuses approximately half the provinces did not want to implement the quota, while the other half felt that the Congress should implement the quota at a national level with immediate effect. The Congress was thus divided on the issue and ultimately did not elect any women to the national structure.

According to Thobejane, the Congress thus ended on a note of demoralisation for a number of provinces, who felt that the union was simply paying lip service to the issue of building women's leadership. The first CEC dealt with the demoralisation in the union by drawing up a process of realigning the union structures. While the implementation of the quota at a branch level had broadened the base of women leaders, it was felt that the numbers were still low. Thus, it was decided that there was a need to broaden the leadership base by dividing each branch into five sectors. Thus, where there were previously four BOB's there would be twenty covering five sectors. It was maintained that the quota would apply for the new structures. Secondly, the CEC decided that the Education programme should integrate a gender perspective. This is an important aspect of leadership skills development. The Media Department is also informed by the need to build a base of women's leadership for Congress not to have excuses when coming to elections. Thirdly, the National Gender Core Group was set up as a substructure of the CEC, with a role of monitoring. Fourthly, an interview panel was established for elections. This was not a replacement of the democratic process, but a mechanism to inform the electorate. At the same time it would influence the process since the panel has the power to recommend, although the final decision would lie with the Congress. The interview panel was empowered within the following framework:

- a) 12 areas were identified as criteria for leadership
- b) areas of strength and weakness were identified in nominees (to highlight education requirements)
- c) The term of office was extended from 1 year to 3 years -due to the frequency of changeover it was difficult to build leadership consistently

Realignment produced a broad-base of women leaders. Thus, the quota was very successful at a branch level. Of the approximate figure of 268 BOB's 60% are women. At the provincial level 6 provinces have 50%, while the other 3 have not complied. In the Northern Province all four office bearers are men.

Thus, while the use of an interview panel assists in directing the process, ultimately Congress can have a different outcome on the basis of the voting, despite recommendations made by the interview panel. Thus, the current provisions have shortcomings in practice. The Gender Core Group is seriously discussing strategies for the implementation of the quota system in all provinces.

The composition of the CEC reflected a male-dominated leadership in the past. Interestingly enough, it was a male-dominated CEC that took a resolution on the

need for a quota system. Presently about 50% of branch representation is female, but there is an imbalance in provincial representation, because very few provinces have female chairs or secretaries. Women tend to be elected to the less influential positions of Treasurer and Vice Chair. Thus, the NEC has poor levels of representation of women, since this is comprised of the provincial secretaries and chairs.

According to the General Secretary, the increase in women leadership has assisted in enforcing compliance and seriousness regarding gender issues, to the extent that they are now regarded in the same light as other union issues. This is largely due to the firmness and strength of women in the union.

There is thus clear monitoring on all of these issues. If delegations to conferences and congresses do not comply with the quota the list of delegates is sent back for alteration. NEHAWU has a strong view on ensuring an integrated approach, which is argued to be the only solution. The argument is that it is pointless to agree to approaches where the organisation is not on board and where there will be a lack of commitment to implementation as a result.

## **SAMWU**

SAMWU has adopted policies for women's empowerment within its constitution, including a quota system and a programme for women's leadership development. The union's premise for dealing with this issue is that the empowerment of women in the union and the workplace should be dealt with on a day to day basis as an issue for union organisation. Secondly, the success of strategies for women's empowerment depends on a campaign to increase the levels of employment of women.

SAMWU leadership argues strongly for the mainstreaming of gender issues in the union, nevertheless there is acknowledgement of the need to create a special dispensation for women. The Constitution recognises regional and branch women's committees as constitutional structures. SAMWU has developed a system for electing women shop-stewards by creating a specially demarcated constituency of women, which then elects a woman shop-steward to represent them. In cases where union membership is low, such as in rural settings, allowance had been made for a number of local authorities to elect one woman shop-steward. The woman shop-steward becomes part of the shop-stewards committee, with the same rights as other shop-stewards but with an extended constituency of women, whose interests she represents.

The BEC and REC then elect the Branch Women's Committee and Regional Women's Committee from the women shop-stewards. The BWC and RWC are constitutionally recognised subcommittees of the BEC and REC. The quota system operates by creating additional seats on the constitutional structures. Thus, for example, if the total number of worker delegates is 20, an additional 10 seats are created for women, thus ensuring that a minimum of 30% of BEC and REC members are women. The number of women may come to more than 30% since some of the other worker delegates may be women.

The GS points out that a total of 15% of employees in their constituency are women, of which the bulk are in clerical jobs and are generally organised by other unions. Thus, there is a need to embark on a campaign to increase the numbers of women in employment in local government.

SAMWU is presently in the process of implementing this policy, having adopted its new constitution in 1997. It is in the process of setting up new union structures and of setting up RWC's and BWC's. The CEC will be making an assessment of progress in implementation; the deadline is the end of September for the formation of new structures, and the holding of elections and establishment of women's committees. The progress is fairly uneven in regions thus far. In some regions where there have historically been active and strong women leaders the process had gone quite smoothly, with women's leadership blossoming in certain areas. In those areas with few active women, and few women members the process has been more difficult to implement.

In the assessment of the General Secretary, some of the difficulties in implementing this policy have included the following:

- The issue of demarcation - in constituencies where the employment levels of women are particularly low, there is uncertainty about the constitutionality of structures that do not meet the requirements stipulated in the Constitution.
- The historical difficulty of encouraging women to avail themselves for election.
- In large constituencies where there are two shop-stewards one representing the women's constituency specifically and the other representing all SAMWU members, there is some confusion regarding the delineation of tasks and duties.
- On the whole SAMWU has not received reports of opposition or resistance to the process, however some female members argue that the process is taking too long to be implemented.

The SAMWU General Secretary accounts for the union's relative success in passing a fairly progressive policy on the basis of earlier attempts to set up women's structures. In retrospect some mistakes were made in this process, but it placed the issue on the agenda. Another important factor has been that in most regions there have been pockets of consistently strong and vocal women leaders. Thirdly, SAMWU's commitment to taking up a parental rights campaign has assisted in developing women leaders and has kept gender issues on the agenda, whilst contributing to making the union more sensitive to women. Fourthly, SAMWU has placed an emphasis on using its education programme as a means to empower and support women in the union. The union allocates 20% of its national and regional education budgets to women-specific education programmes.

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