



MISTRA REPORT

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Growth, Retention, Unity, and Quality Service to Members





NATIONAL UNION OF MINEWORKERS (NUM) Exploring Pathways to Organisational Renewal

A REPORT BY MISTRA



NATIONAL UNION OF MINEWORKERS (NUM)

Exploring Pathways to Organisational Renewal

Mapungubwe Institute for Strategic Reflections (MISTRA) Research Team,

Betchani Tchereni

David Maimela

Mcebisi Ndletyana

Sedireng Lerakong

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The National Union of Mine Workers (NUM) has encountered organisational problems in recent years. As a consequence, the union experienced a decline in membership. This saw the union losing its long-held position as the biggest union within the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) and being reduced to a minority status in a number of mines, second to the newly formed rival union, the Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (AMCU).

The leadership of the union has not been oblivious to the problems. It has commissioned surveys amongst its members, over the years, to identify the exact nature of the problems and to devise a remedy. The initial survey was undertaken in 1998, another followed in 2005 and the last one was administered in 2010. Whilst highlighting concerns relating to ‘job-grading, discrimination, visibility of leadership and organisers at branch levels’, the initial two surveys indicated that workers were generally happy (NUM –ToR: 2014, p.6).

The last survey, however, revealed a worrisome picture. Members felt that the quality of the service offered to them by the union had deteriorated. It is possible that the subsequent loss of 70,000 members, from March 2012 to date, stems from this poor quality of service. This, however, does not rule out the possibility that retrenchments had contributed towards reduction of membership. There are strong indications, though, that the poor organisational state is primarily at fault in this particular case.

Reduction of membership is actually emblematic of a myriad of challenges that currently confront the NUM. The Secretariat Report tabled at the union’s 14th Congress in 2012, is quite insightful on these challenges. According to the report, the challenges range from organisational incoherence, personality cult to power-struggles and organisational rivalry.

Organisational incoherence manifests itself in two ways: between the leadership



and workers, and amongst the different layers of leadership. The 2012 rock-drill operators' (RDOs) strike at Rustenburg's Impala mine was indicative of the alienation of the branch leadership from its membership. RDOs simply initiated a strike independently of the NUM branch leadership. They would not hear their local leaders and were generally hostile towards the NUM leadership. Instead they sought audience with COSATU's then General-Secretary, Zwelinzima Vavi, the former president of the African National Congress Youth League (ANCYL), Julius Malema, as well as the premier of North West. Clearly members had become resentful of their branch leaders.

Relations amongst the different layers of leadership are not entirely healthy either. Problems at branch level reflect badly on regional leadership. They show lack of monitoring on the part of the regional leadership. The latter is not attentive to the branches. Problems fester to a point of implosion without the region noticing or intervening. Nor is the region responsive to the national office. Some regional leaders simply resist implementing decisions from the national office. This means decisions taken by national office bearers and structures are not carried down to the lower level of the organisation for implementation.

If not experiencing problems amongst themselves, some leaders have themselves become problematic. This was illustrated by an incident that happened in 2010 where a chairperson of the local branch at Lonmin felt he was more important than organisational processes. The individual in question had developed a personality cult. He refused to allow for his position to be contested. This led to him being removed. Workers disapproved of his removal and launched a strike.

Rather than go along with the organisational insistence on democratic processes, workers sided with the defiant chairperson. For going on an illegal strike, without any reasonable grounds, 8,000 striking workers were dismissed. This led to NUM dropping in membership from 66 per cent of the work-force down to 49 per cent.

In some regions leaders have been at loggerheads with each other. The Secretariat Report at the 14th Congress, even noted: 'In the history of the NUM it is the first time that we have experienced a high rate of complaints related to elections. These complaints range from unhappy stewards, shaft committees and appeals against branch conference outcomes'. Some regional conferences did not follow the constitution in the election process. Democracy was simply flouted. Conferences degenerated to factionalist fights. Others turned violent, even raising concerns that the death of some colleagues was related to contestation over positions. The Report ascribed the ugly leadership rivalry to

“a strong perception that these high levels of leadership contestation at all levels stems from a belief that there are some benefits linked to these positions’ (NUM: 2012, p69).

The consequence has not only been loss of membership, but also stiff competition from rival unions, especially AMCU. The latter has even become the majority union in *some* mines, surpassing NUM.

1. Purpose of the Study

The causes of the afore-mentioned problems, as noted above, are multiple. In this study, and as guided by the ToR, MISTRA focused on the following:

- Organisational hierarchy - national, regional and branch - to determine whether it is configured and empowered in a manner that enables the union to meet its objectives and to function optimally;
- Various pillars set up to provide services, both at national and regional levels, to ascertain if they complement each other and there is no duplication of services;
- Relationship between the national and regional offices, to gauge the level of co-operation and identify problems, if any;
- Sub-committees – i.e. education and training, health and safety – at various levels to measure whether they are providing their mandated services and carry out monitoring at the branch level and determine impact and/or success rate;
- Elected leadership to determine their alertness and empathy with day-to-day issues that confront workers, and their level of responsiveness thereto;
- Composition and expertise profile of the branch leadership to determine if it has any bearing, positive or otherwise, on their alertness and responsiveness towards workers’ issues;
- Attentiveness of the organisation to the ‘non-traditional’ sectors of the union (i.e. energy and construction); and
- Term of office – i.e. three years – to gauge whether it is adequate for office bearers to carry out their mandates effectively.

The overall aim of the study was not only to identify the exact nature of the problems, but also, based on the findings, to make recommendations that will enable NUM to undertake a process of renewal. In this regard, the study also gauged the impact of the ‘sins of incumbency’ – in particular the material benefits that attach to leadership at various levels – and proffers possible solutions to this challenge.



2. Theoretical Approach

Institutions are social constructions. Their formation is sparked by the social context in which they are located, their nature embodies the values and dynamics of the time. In other words, there exists a dialectical relationship between institutions and society. A change in society has an inevitable impact on its institutions.

A product relationship to their social context. Their vacillating existence, from their rise, to demise and resurgence, is a reflection of South Africa's changing history and political regimes. None demonstrates this evolving nature of trade unions more than the National Union of Mine-workers (NUM). It is amongst the oldest in the modern generation of trade unions and, until recently, the biggest union in South Africa.

Thus the study employed a sociological and organisational approach; and the researchers analysed the current problems that face the NUM within a historical context. A historical perspective shed further light on the sociological nature of the NUM's problems – i.e. they are a result of the changing nature of the South African society.

of society, South Africa's trade unions have exhibited a similarly dialectical

2.1 Sociological approach

The formation of NUM in August 1982 was enabled by the changing nature of the South African economy and economic elite. In the 1970s, business needed more skilled and cheap labour than was provided by the white work-force. This was a result of the phenomenal growth of the manufacturing sector since the 1960s. Afrikaner capital, which was nurtured by the apartheid government, had also expanded significantly into other areas of the economy including the manufacturing sector. This meant that the interests of Afrikaner capital were no longer similar to those of its working-class counterpart. The former was primarily interested in securing cheap, relatively skilled labour, whilst the latter were still keen to protect their privileged status within the labour market. Denying black workers union rights and barring them from occupying certain jobs shielded white workers from competition and guaranteed them high wages. This is what Afrikaner capital and its political elite could no longer countenance. It stood in the way of increasing profits (O'Meara, 1996).

In addition to the economic imperative, the apartheid government was concerned

about the stability of black labour. The wildcat strikes that had erupted in 1973 in Durban, showed the potentially adverse impact that unregulated labour could inflict on production. To secure cheap black labour and stability in the labour-force, government opted to accept the unionisation of black workers, following on the Wiehahn Commission Report (Naidoo, 2010).

This was a marked change from what had prevailed previously. The South African Union and apartheid governments had not only resisted, but also suppressed unionisation of black workers. The African Mine Workers Union, for instance, after which NUM was named, had been brutally suppressed following its 1946 strike. Then the agricultural and mining interests were at the height of their influence, and both relied solely on cheap black labour. But, industrial expansion and the concomitant burgeoning of Afrikaner capital, weakened the influence of these traditional sectors and thereby improved the bargaining power of black workers whom it needed for further prosperity (Terreblanche, 2002).

Legalisation of black unions, therefore, was a consequence of a changed socio-economic context. It reflected, in part, the fact that production and broader social relations, represented by the system of apartheid, had become a break on the development of productive forces and the pursuit of maximum profit. The regime sought to reform these relations while at the same time trying to protect the existing political dispensation.

The founders of NUM took advantage of that opening. And black workers were in desperate need of union representation. Mine-work is back-breaking, prone to injury, death and diseases, and pays a pittance. Workers were treated shabbily by their white supervisors, were vulnerable to arbitrary dismissal and lived under atrocious conditions. The NUM was just the tool they needed to agitate for a new labour regime. This explains the NUM's phenomenal growth. Its membership stood at 14,000, with nine branches at inception in 1982. A year later it had risen to 53,000 and had spread to 48 mines. In the next two years, NUM membership more than doubled, catapulting it to 120,000 on 85 mines. By mid-1986 the membership stood at a phenomenal 344,000 (Butler, 2007).

However, one should not over-estimate the role legislation played in the growth of the NUM. Legislation did not necessarily yield ideal conditions for organising. Mine managers were especially resistant to implementing the reforms. The first major attempt at unionising blacks, the South African Workers and Allied Workers' Union (Saawu), did not meet with much success. The union targeted hostels to recruit workers and did so clandestinely. But their efforts were met



with fierce resistance from the hostel hierarchy.

The Metal and Allied Workers' Union followed in 1981. MAWU similarly believed in clandestine recruitment, which was especially pursued by its notable organisers. The idea was to follow this strategy until the union had registered critical mass, at which point it would declare a recognition strike. MAWU met similar difficulty as Saawu. Its additional strategy of recruiting workers at home and on buses similarly failed.

The NUM's success was a result of a different strategy. Though also forced on the organisation by the context of the time, NUM's leadership, however, was open to trying different strategies and exploiting opportunities provided by the mining industry. Contrary to their peers, the founding general-secretary and president went for clerical workers, team leaders and personnel assistants at the mine's training centres. This cohort of workers proved effective for initiating a union. They had 'organizational skills and relative freedom' to move around thereby being able to spread the word about the union (Butler: 2007, p141).

Their strategy was assisted by the reform-mindedness of managers such as Anglo-American Corporation's Bobby Godsell. He was keen to reform labour relations along the lines suggested by the Wiehahn Commission. Where others had shunned management for fear of appearing to cosy up with them, the NUM leadership approached Godsell for permission to gain access to the mines and hostels to recruit. They were not concerned with appearing militant or collaborative with management, but keen to build the membership, which would then determine the fate of the union.

Thus NUM avoided confrontation in the initial two to three years of its life, choosing to focus on recruitment instead. Rather than confrontation, it employed courts where opportunities presented themselves to demonstrate the usefulness of unions. As its numbers grew, especially after 1985, it embarked on strikes, using its massive numbers as bargaining power.

Towards the end of the 1980s, the NUM would experience contrasting fortunes. Mining capital thwarted its attempts at establishing hegemony within the sector. Management especially resisted the 1987 strike in a manner that sought to cripple the NUM itself. The NUM survived the assault to become a key player in the transitional period. This gave the organisation a unique position to influence the introduction of a new post-1994 labour regime that is a lot more friendly to workers, than had ever been the case since the formation of the Union of South Africa in 1910.

Whilst representing victory in one respect, the new dispensation simultaneously threw up new challenges of its own. What has happened since democratisation, according to Buhlungu (2001) represents a ‘paradox of victory’. Amongst the gains offered by the post-apartheid settlement was the creation of the corporatist institution, NEDLAC, and a workers- friendly legislative regime. NEDLAC facilitates the contribution of labour to any policy that affects them, before it goes to parliament for consideration. Of the new pieces of legislation¹, the 1995 Labour Relations Act (LRA), for instance:

codifies the right to organize for workers and trade unions, introduces simple and more accessible dispute-resolution procedures, extends coverage to virtually all workers, affirms the right to strike, and puts in place building blocks for workplace democratization (Ibid, p71).

Alongside the benefits, there have also been pitfalls. They include a brain drain, careerism, and loss of a sense of mission. Because of the alliance with the ruling party, the African National Congress (ANC), some of the trade unionists have been drawn into various spheres of government. Just for the inaugural elections alone, COSATU released twenty of its senior leaders to stand on the ANC ticket. Since then, with every electoral round, more have joined government. COSATU has justified this as ‘deployment’ into government to ensure that the ANC-led government remains loyal to the working class.

Part of the consequence of the ‘deployment’, however, has been a brain-drain. Unions have lost some of their best cadres, leaving behind inexperienced leaders. Overall this was partly a reflection of the end of flat social demographics that had characterised black society during apartheid. Then, most blacks were confined to the lower rungs of the economic ladder; and people expressed their revulsion and opposition to apartheid through collective activism in organisations such as unions.

But the onset of a free society also meant ‘freedom’ from the collective efforts that had been imposed by apartheid on black people, to pursue their own individual interests. New values, especially materialism, started to take root. Measured against broader opportunities in society, trade union work became an obstacle to material accumulation. People opted for more lucrative jobs instead.

Within the trade unions themselves, the adverse effect of the onset of materialism

¹ The others are the 1997 Basic Conditions of Employment, 1998 Employment Equity Act, and the 1999 Skills



is that a position of leadership represents a stepping stone towards a better job in government or in management (Hirschsohn, 2011). In the process, von Holdt contends, unions have lost their sense of mission, as one shop-steward put it to him:

The politics of today is about how much money you have, how beautiful your car is. It's no longer about how you develop the economy and how you look at the interests of the poorest. It's about yourself. I also want to be myself. I've been a shop steward for a long time and I have gained nothing from it except the politics and experience I have (n Holdt 2002, p294).

In other words, the displacement of the old values is also a manifestation of generational change. The 'old-style' unionists who were driven into unionism by their commitment to activism, having joined the unions at the height of apartheid oppression, are increasingly deserting them for greener pastures. That kind of commitment is not in abundance amongst the new generation.

What the foregoing tells us is that what NUM is experiencing now is not entirely new nor is it peculiar to the organisation. Rather it is a typical post-apartheid phenomenon, which has afflicted most, if not all, former anti-apartheid organisations.

2.2 Organisational analysis

Societal influence notwithstanding, leaders are not necessarily without agency. The disposition and character of leaders is key in determining the fate of an organisation. Similarly, organisations do shape leaders into what they become.

In his concept of the 'Iron law of oligarchy' Robert Michels, writing in 1911, explained the relationship between organisations and leaders. Focusing on political organisations, Michels argued that the bigger organisations get, the likelier they are to develop an oligarchy. The sheer size of an organisation makes constant consultation difficult. This encourages a situation where a small group of leaders is left to take decisions without the input of the membership. With time, this elite is enthralled by the power it wields and comes to believe that it is solely in charge. It then takes decisions, not in the interest of workers, but to its own benefit, in a manner that consolidates its grip on power. Oligarchic rule thus leads to displacement of membership control.

The preponderance of experts within trade union organisations has also sparked

concerns over the dilution of workers' power. Recruitment of experts is demanded by the complexity of the nature of work and interactions with decision-makers in the private and public spheres. Specialists are required to provide expertise and advise on technical subjects with which ordinary blue collar-workers are not familiar or which they do not readily comprehend. Even amongst elected leaders there may be a bias towards educated individuals due to their superior grasp of issues confronting the union and their eloquent articulation of such, especially in negotiations with an intransigent and cunning management.

Reports suggest that NUM has not been spared both oligarchic rule and technocracy. As noted above, some regional leaders have not been diligent in monitoring and holding local leaders to account; and the latter have similarly been indifferent to the needs of their local members. In other words, leaders have become distant from their members and have instead, become preoccupied with self-interest.

Questions have consequently arisen over the cause of this social distance. It can be argued that, besides organisational typologies described above, the rights that unions have won in the workplace also present new challenges. Election into leadership structures, from the lowest to the highest levels, brings with it material privileges that are not accessible to ordinary workers. For instance, shaft-stewards are afforded offices and other infrastructure and higher pay – by dint of which they lose touch with the mass of workers. This also renders such leadership positions open to intense contestation as others seek to occupy these positions, and as the incumbents resist falling back to a lower standard of living.

In MISTRA's understanding, problems that currently face NUM are neither surprising nor peculiar. They are not a result of any innate defects within the union. These problems are rather typical sociological and organisational phenomena. They are historical and afflict other sectors of the liberation movement, and other organisations the world over. The survival of such organisations depends on adapting to societal dynamics. Organisational form is not preordained nor can it be static. This imposes an obligation on leaders to open up to change, to adapt the organisation to the new challenges that society continues to throw up.

In other words, the solution to these problems requires a thorough diagnosis of the causal factors, an exhaustive analysis of the socio-economic context in which unions are located, and leadership acceptance of empirical analysis and openness to change.



3. Methodology

This research study, carried out over a period of some 12 months between August 2014 and July 2015 followed a qualitative methodology. The method was chosen for a number of reasons. Amongst these was that it allowed the researchers to carry out an extensive exploratory exercise that would have been unsuccessful had they followed a quantitative method. A number of qualitative data collection methods were used and they provided insight into the challenges facing the union. For instance, the methods made it 'easy' for the researchers to gather the opinions and perspectives of almost 'everyone' who forms part of the union – leaders, members, organisers and others.

Wyse (2011) presents this contrast that qualitative research is primarily exploratory research. It is useful for gaining an understanding of underlying reasons, opinions, and motivations. Quantitative research quantifies problems, attitudes, opinions and behaviours. In essence it robs researchers of the opportunity to uncover trends in thought and opinions. It also makes it difficult to dive deeper into issues. The abovementioned challenges were considered before the qualitative methodology was adopted for this study.

With this understanding, the researchers conducted an extensive and detailed literature review. They consulted academic and organisational texts that explain the origins of the union, its development and performance over the years. This included organisational reports, which proved to be a valuable primary source of data. They presented a background to the issues confronting the organisation. This relates specifically to previous analyses of the problems and subsequent remedial measures, if any. Organisational renewal depends just as much on understanding why previous attempts did not succeed, assuming they were ever attempted, as it does on grasping contemporary problems and suggesting new ways of doing things.

One-on-one interviews were conducted with various individuals at the national office. The aim was to capture their views and recommendations on the current state of the union. The Acting President, General Secretary, Deputy General Secretary and Treasurer General were amongst the national office bearers (NOB's) interviewed. The heads of the following structures were also interviewed – Health & Safety and Women's Structure. From the operational side of the union, the following pillar heads were interviewed - Production and Service Pillar as well as Human Resources.

The researchers did not conduct any formal interviews with members of the

youth structure given the fact that the structure is still in its conception stage. However, information was gathered through short and informal discussions with a few young union members when visits to conduct focus group discussions were made. Over and above that, those facilitating the group discussions capitalised on interview sessions that were attended by many young people. In that way, their experiences and views were able to gain expression in this study. Lastly, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were conducted across various provinces in the country. They were targeted at the regional and branch leaders as well as members. This method was used to capture the experiences and perspectives of ‘everyone’, whether young or old, male or female members or leaders in the union. Focus groups are a form of group interview that capitalises on communication between research ‘subjects’ in order to generate data. More importantly, this method is useful for exploring people’s knowledge and experiences. It can be used to examine not only what people think but how they think and why they think that way, (Kitzinger, 1994).

There are numerous challenges with using focus group discussions in a research study. The most commonly cited disadvantage is that, during a focus group discussion it is difficult to have the participants share their ‘real feelings’ towards sensitive topics and this can influence the data output. For this study, the advantages of using FGDs outweighed the disadvantages by far.

The data collection method allowed the researchers to contribute towards a deeper and improved understanding of the various challenges facing the union. It also gave ‘everyone’ in the union a platform to make recommendations that will enable the NUM to undertake a process of organisational renewal. Sagoe (2012) explains that, in an instance where participants are stimulated to discuss, the group dynamics generate new thinking about a topic which results in a much more in-depth discussion. Kitzinger (1994) describes focus group discussions as a method that facilitates the expression of criticism and the exploration of different types of solutions. The use of FGDs, he adds, is invaluable if the aim of the research is to improve services (Kitzinger, 1994).

The interviews probed the following issues:

- Relations amongst the three levels of structures;
- Effectiveness of sub-committees across the various levels and co-operation amongst themselves;
- Range of services and state of programmes implemented at branch-level for the benefit of the membership;



- State of the organisation at the regional and branch levels – i.e. frequency of meetings, activities, implementation and follow-ups on resolutions, etc;
- Whether each sector of the union experiences a satisfactory level of representation and articulation;
- Democratic practices across all the levels of the organisation, and how such practices are impacted by the material conditions of the leaders and the workers; and
- Profile of branch (and regional) leaders.

3.1 Selection of regions and participants

Over thirty four focus group and other forms of discussion were carried out in six of South Africa's provinces, namely North West, Gauteng, Eastern Cape, Free State, Northern Cape and Mpumalanga. These group interviews were conducted over a period of approximately seven months beginning in September 2014 until March 2015. The one-on-one interviews with the various NOB's started in the last quarter of 2014 and concluded in the first quarter of 2015. These activities were preceded by a literature review and contextual analysis, and the data from the discussions was then processed over a period of three months.

The selection of respondents was a two-part exercise that required cooperation between the union and the researchers. For the group interviews, the researchers developed the schedule and the list of respondents that were grouped into different categories. The union and its staff members were responsible for organising the various respondents. In other words, they had to make sure that the correct groups of participants were available to be interviewed on the day of their interviews. The schedule for the one on one interviews was guided by the availability of the individuals at the national office.

The participants in the group interviews were members from the various sectors that the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) represents - energy, mining and construction. The mining sector category included participants from the coal, diamond, platinum and gold sectors. Each focus group had to have a minimum of eight and a maximum of twelve participants. Moreover, to ensure that the sample was representative of the various regions, sectors and other variables that define the profile of the union, the participants had to be grouped according to their region, sector, leadership position and skills level. Special care needed to be taken to ensure that respondents reflected a healthy mix of all the three sectors, as well as old and new structures.

In selecting the regions, it was important to bear in mind the dominant sector that

the union represents in each region, whether mining, energy or construction. In that way the researchers were able to manage the total number of focus groups conducted and still achieve representation. The FGDs took place in the following regions - PWV, Carletonville, Rustenburg, Eastern Cape, Northern Cape and Highveld. The North West province represented mainly those members working in the Platinum mining sector, Highveld those working in energy as well as the coal mining sector. The Eastern Cape represented those working in the construction sector whilst the Kimberly Region represented those working in the diamond-mining sector.

On the same note, each region grouped the participants into three groups – regional office bearers (ROB's), branch office bearers (BOB's) and members. Both the ROB discussions and BOB focus groups were made up of the following respondents – chairperson, deputy chairperson, regional secretary, deputy secretary, regional treasurer and heads of the following structures: women, health and safety and education. The membership focus groups categorised the respondents based on their skill levels – skilled, semi-skilled and low skilled. In that way, skilled members would form one focus group made up of eight to twelve participants. This was the same for the semi-skilled and low skilled groups.

The regions, sectors and participants selected for the various interviews presented both similarities and differences. They also posed different challenges when it came to representation, gaining their trust and securing interviews with various participants, especially members. The challenges confronted by the researchers during the fieldwork were captured and they were used to explain the state of an organisation aspiring to renew itself.

Generally, most of the participants in the group discussions and one-on-one interviews were elderly males. This resulted variously in over-representation and under-representation of some people who form part of the NUM. There are researchers that recommend aiming for homogeneity within each group in order to capitalise on shared experiences. However, bringing together a more diverse group, made up of males and females as well as young and mature individuals could have helped to maximise exploration of different perspectives within the various group discussions.

At the branch level, ordinary union members were the most difficult to be secured for the focus group discussions. The branch is considered as the member's most immediate contact to the union and the expression of the union's vibrancy. The



challenges faced by the researchers showed signs of an organisation in a poor state. Some branches had to be revisited whilst many others failed to secure the minimum number of (eight) participants to constitute a focus group discussion. In instances where the respondents were less than eight but more than five, the researchers opted to conduct group discussions. And this often resulted in less robust and weak in-depth discussions that may tend to compromise data output because two or three individuals dominated the discussions.

In areas where it was relatively easy to secure participants, the participants had 'research fatigue' especially in regions that had been over-researched or featured a lot in the media. Some leaders and members that have been part of the union for a long time expressed their frustrations by describing the focus group discussions as a waste of their time and money. These members argued that the union had previously commissioned similar projects that delivered no fundamental change to the union and their lives as members.

Moreover, gaining the trust of some participants was not a straight forward process. Some members and regional leaders lacked understanding of the nature and purpose of the research. And this brought to light the fact that there is a poor flow of information through the organisation. For instance, some participants were uncomfortable with signing the participation registry and the idea of going on record. Others were under the impression that their concerns will be reported in the media.

However, the researchers are confident that, through processes of reassurance and in some instances having to reconvene the groups, a sufficiently robust picture has emerged to inform the conclusions and recommendations contained in this report.

CHAPTER 2

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The next chapter deals with the findings of the fieldwork research.

These findings are sifted from data gathered in focus group discussions (FGDs), one-on-one interviews and from the general observations made throughout the course of the fieldwork. The presentation below starts with a general appraisal of the status quo; and it is followed by specific mention of several challenges with which the union is currently confronted. These are: careerism and factionalism; professionalisation of unions; tension between ‘professional’ employees and ‘activist’ employees; hierarchical relations; changing profile of the membership; union rivalry; and changing employment patterns and practices.

It is worth emphasising that the respondents identify different problems and ascribe them to varying causes. The variance is a function of multiple factors, including one’s leadership level, generation, gender, status in the organisation (professional and/or elected official); category of employment; and the sectoral location (construction, energy or mining). This means that members have varying expectations and experience the union differently. Ultimately, the import of the findings lies in their collective meaning.

Equally important to note is that the origin of the problems identified varies. Some emanate from within the organisation as a manifestation of organisational inefficiencies and dynamics. Other challenges stem from outside the organisation, thrown up by the environment within which the union operates. Noting this distinction is critical, for it determines the nature of the solutions suitable for each problem.



Appraisal of the Status Quo

Historical achievements

There is general consensus that the union is not operating at its optimal level. It is credited for past achievements, but berated on its weakness to tackle contemporary challenges.

The NUM membership applauds the union as a pioneer. This sentiment is particularly strong amongst members that joined the union during the harsh days of apartheid. Then the NUM was the only black union in the mining sector that stood for and represented the interests of black workers. It not only fought for workers' rights, but also waged a battle against racism. Management of mining companies was predominantly white and backed by the racist apartheid regime. Racism was rife in the mining sector. Management favoured white workers, and mistreated black workers. One worker put it as follows:

At that time we were told that there is no union anywhere, the union is yourself and therefore you must be responsible for the struggle against exploitation. Things like the food we ate, the working hours, the place we slept... there were no clear working hours regulations that time. Although we were required to work for eight hours, we would be told to work more hours without any request².

NUM provided protection to black workers within an unkind working environment. And, because of NUM's pioneering role, it was easy for the union to recruit members. Its achievements were self-evident and thus encouraged new workers to join the union. For instance, those who saw the reversal of dismissals and improvement of working conditions and in the hostels were persuaded to join the union. The hostel indunas, for example, were imposed upon workers without democratic elections. What was even more disconcerting was that those indunas were appointed on a tribal basis to work principally as agents of management in the mines. NUM changed those despotic structures.

Working in the mines is now a lot safer than it was previously. Mines have safety and health shop-stewards, whose responsibility is to ensure the safety of mine-workers. Accidents are investigated and, where necessary, improvements are made to pre-empt a recurrence. In instances where there are fatalities and/or injuries as a result of negligence on the part of management, shop-stewards ensure that workers are compensated.

² One-on-one interview with one of the Pillar Heads, 14th March 2015.

All these improvements convinced on-lookers that the NUM offered the best protection for mine-workers. The union advertised itself through its own achievements. It is for this reason that some regional co-ordinators cannot even fathom the need, as is presently the case, for the union to have a marketing division. For them the union markets itself through its own achievements. NUM's history is a real source of pride amongst workers, as one put it:

I think the last issue that is also important for me – that we are lacking as the organisation – we don't have a booklet that contains our achievements since the inception of this organisation. So when you listen to some of the professors' political analyses, the media.....I can't remember one of them saying good things about the NUM. And if you remember, NUM did very well in terms of influencing some of the legislation in the country that actually favours the poor workers in the workplace. But we are unable, as an organisation, to have a booklet that actually contains the achievements of the organisation since its inception to date.

And I think once we have that booklet and get popularised.....even to these 'born free' employees who are at the workplace they will start to understand that we were not here in 1994 or post-1994 but this is what the NUM did. For example, NUM influenced the fact that the mining industry was known to be dominated by men. It's the same NUM that said 'Gone are the days where we'll be only working alone. How are the possibilities of employing young people, women and so on'? And that is an achievement³.

The NUM's political activism further endeared it to workers. As noted above, black workers suffered double oppression: exploitation and racism. The union took up the fight not only within the mines, but also onto the streets against the apartheid regime. Involvement in the anti-apartheid struggle bolstered the union's credentials as a genuine advocate of equality. Because black workers were generally predisposed towards the anti-apartheid forces, NUM's affiliation within the mass democratic movement made the union even more popular within their ranks.

Whilst largely praised for historical gains, some members credit the union with recent victories as well. The most prominent of these has been on the gender front. NUM created a tolerant environment for women. Mining was previously a

3 Focus group Discussion with Regional Office Bearers in Kimberly, 4th November 2014.



hostile environment for the employment of women, preferring to employ men only. But NUM changed that prejudice. It encouraged employment of women, including underground, and secured them other benefits, such as maternity leave for four months and breast-feeding rooms. The cause of gender equality was also aided by the formation of a women's structure whose sole purpose is advancing the fight and ensuring that the industry as a whole remains sensitive to gender equity. For example, as one woman narrated:

The women who started working underground in the mines used to wear overalls – full overalls. NUM managed to negotiate that women wear the two pieces. And the change rooms were not neat and NUM negotiated. Now they've renovated them and they're clean and presentable for the ladies.

And the transformation, especially in our area: If you have development in terms of two shift bosses we make sure that a lady is included, irrespective of what. Even if she is not able to present herself in the interviews, we would motivate that she gets in. We motivate the panel; convince them that this particular person is going to be in.

And the other thing is, NUM motivated the part where recruitment should be 50/50; that in recruitment of employees 50 per cent should be women in the mining industries and that is happening⁴.

Then she concluded:

So the reason I chose the NUM is because of its background and what I know of the NUM as a union is that it is able to stand for the workers because before, there were no women in the mines, people that were recognised at the mines were the white people who were in the position we are in today, but through our union, we have women and black people and there is equality in the mines. Even in the management positions, there are black people, there are females because of the union, thank you⁵.

Besides attending to the working conditions, the union is also credited with taking an interest in the training and advancement of its workers and their dependants. It does this through a bursary scheme, the JB Marx Bursary Scheme. This scheme

4 Focus Group Discussion with PWV Gold Skilled Workers on 29 August 2014

5 Ibid

funds students not only for college education, but also for higher degrees such as Masters and PhDs. Members are able to educate their children to the highest level, all because they are paid-up members of the union.

Respondents also attribute the existence of the Mining Charter to the efforts of the NUM. Among other things, the charter advocates for employee shareholding making it possible for mining members to own and have voting rights on governance of the companies. The charter goes further to advocate for special qualification levels similar to the ones administered by SAQA. Along with this, the charter also provides for an upgrade of skills at a special mining training centre. Special hours for those willing to upgrade their educational levels were also allocated after successful negotiations between the NUM and the mining houses. In the energy sector, the union represents well qualified employees in bargaining processes.

Contemporary challenges

Notwithstanding NUMs past successes, presently the union confronts a number of challenges. The apparent failure to address these challenges has consequently weakened the union. The often-cited manifestation of this weakness is the dwindling of membership⁶. This has, in turn, impacted negatively on the revenue flow. Part of the reason why the drop in revenue has not had a debilitating effect on the organisation was the increase in subscription fees. This compensated somewhat for the decline in membership, but it is unsustainable. The membership drop is symptomatic of many ingrained problems, to which we now turn.

Leadership: Visibility, presence and responsiveness

Both members and elected officials, at different levels of the organisational hierarchy, bemoan the general inactivity within the union. One layer of leadership blames the other of being inattentive to workers' issues.

A common complaint amongst members is that branch meetings are hardly convened. The constitution stipulates that they be held once a month. The meetings are a critical moment of interaction. They provide an opportunity for the leadership to share information, updating members on what is going on both within the union and the industry. Through such meetings, workers also bring their complaints to the attention of the leadership and receive feed-back on previous complaints. At those rare occasions when meetings are held, they are

⁶ According to the Secretariat Report presented at the national congress, held on June 3-6, 2015 the NUM has lost about 80,000 members, from 310,000 in 2012 to 230,798 presently. www.bdlive.co.za/national...



poorly attended.

Officials at the higher echelons of the leadership blame the relative inactivity of the branches on poor branch leadership. Regional co-ordinators, for instance, charge that shop stewards lack motivation and members expect the union to do everything for them. National Office Bearers (NOBs) were particularly emphatic that:

There is weak and poor quality leadership at the grassroots level where office bearers are more concerned about re-election than dealing with issues of the union. Consequently, the members feel frustrated because every time there is an issue needing redress, the branch leadership escalates it to the region and then to the national office. In the past, the branch leadership used to give reports about how they dealt and concluded a matter that developed at their branch.⁷

Another NOB added:

When I compare the union from where it was to now, I can say that our union is at its weakest point now. Another thing that shows that we are in a bad and weak state is the fact that we are no longer fighting for ourselves. Whenever we mobilise to go on a strike, the turnout is very low. People don't want to strike, there is a very low morale for activities of the union from the members themselves and I don't know what we have to do to change this.⁸

Conversely, branch leaders dispute the charge that they are unresponsive to union issues. They insist that it is the NOBs that are hardly available to assist them. Their interaction with national leadership, they say, is only through newspapers and television. One respondent explained:

Currently it is still the branches that are handling the challenges. It is the branches themselves that are handling the issue of the rivalry whereby they have their intelligence as to how to deal with that, only when it gets out of their hands, that is, the branch, this is when they sit down and discuss to say, let us escalate this thing to another level. But currently in terms of dealing with the challenges that we are faced with, it is actually the branch

7 One-on-one interview with a member of the NEC, 2nd April 2015

8 One-on-one interview with a member of the NEC, 19th March 2015

*and we are winning. We know that it is difficult but we are getting there*⁹ .

Some members even thought that the leaders of the rival union, AMCU, deal with their local membership better than their own leaders. They are apparently always available on the ground to help and address mass meetings.

One member cited an incident when national leadership was sorely needed, but was not available:

*So, after the strike, comrades were then charged; charges were coming in numbers for our members. The comrades tried contacting the national office and the region, but the national office never came to our branch. We do understand that there are many branches, but we were in trouble and the trouble needed the national office's intervention. The national office had to come to convene because our comrades were losing their jobs. This never happened. And even today, some of them still have their cases at the CCMA, some at the Labour Courts. But still they have lost their jobs. This is the reason why some of our members are losing trust in the union, NUM.*¹⁰

A major cause of the general leadership inactivity is ascribed to complacency. Leaders are said to be resting on their laurels. Rather than attend to the day-to-day needs of the membership, one member elaborated: 'they are now relying on the historical thing about the apartheid era. Now it is democracy. Their minds are still on historical things'. To the members, the leadership has forgotten that the present battles are different. Democracy has also engendered formation of other unions that mine workers can join. As such, the leadership need to consider changing their modus operandi to avoid members leaving to join rival unions.

Some of the NOBs understood why local leaders complain that they are invisible. One reason is that it is simply impossible to visit each branch. The union is too big for them to do that. They also reasoned, though, that the need for their visits to branches also reflects the failure of both regional and branch leaders to perform their duties properly. Firstly, it is regional committees that inform them which branches to visit, as and when there is such a need. Secondly, the outcry that they are invisible shows that local and regional leaders are themselves failing to do their work, hence branch members are clamouring for national leaders to

9 Focus Group Discussion PWEV Gold Supervisors (2 Of 2), 26th August 2014.

10 Focus Group Discussion with PWV Gold Skilled Workers 29th August 2014



avail themselves. One put it as follows:

Look, if branch and regional leadership were doing their work, you hardly would hear members complaining about visibility of the national leadership. There wouldn't be a need for the national leadership to be visible anywhere in the branches because they wouldn't have so many complaints that are not addressed at the local level. Issues would have been sorted out and only reports would have been given to the national office. But if regions and branches will not do their work, I can tell you that members will want someone to come all the way from the head office to come and address them.¹¹

Another NOB added that it is expected that:

Regional and branch committees would deal with every matter that arises in their jurisdictions conclusively. Where need be, the branch leadership would be asking for a special skill and guidance to conclude a particular matter; not to have the national leadership descending to the branch or region to assist with resolving of matters. It is precisely this escalation that leads to the Head Office having a huge backlog of cases to be attended to while having their own responsibilities. As a result, matters tend to take longer to be addressed than expected.¹²

In other words, leaders shrug off their responsibilities. They pass them onto someone else, especially if they involve enforcing unpopular decisions. One NOB, for instance, complained that at one point the organisation agreed to implement cost-cutting measures. This meant cutting down on the use of fuel, air-time, allowances and other means of travel. When it came to implementing, other officials were reluctant to do so because they feared being unpopular. What has tended to happen, therefore, is that matters requiring policy specification remain unattended, which leads to more frustrations among the members and staff.

A popular view is that women's structures are amongst the casualties of organisational inefficiency. They are neither active nor visible. It is feared that this undermines both the cause of women and their recruitment into the union. Women are unlikely to assume prominent leadership positions, respondents argue, if they're not visibly represented in the union.

11 One-on-one interviews with two members of the NEC, 2 April 2014

12 One-on-one Interview with a member of the NEC of the NUM, 27th November 2014.

Careerism and factionalism

Amongst the commonly cited reasons for the inefficiencies within the union is careerism. This phenomenon entails individuals assuming leadership positions, not to advance the collective needs of the membership, but their individual interests. Personal interest is pursued even at the cost of the organisation. One respondent explained the meaning of careerism as follows:

People are fighting now for positions. But the capability of doing the job is not there. Of these full-time positions that the union has negotiated, or these benefits that the union has negotiated – it's where now we are facing challenges. Where we are fighting for positions just to get benefits, not to represent the union.¹³

Careerism takes different forms and manifests at various levels of the leadership. At the branch level, it happens in engagements between shop-stewards and management over workers' needs. Leaders are said to be timid in negotiations with management, but accede to their terms, which are generally detrimental to workers. In such situations, workers' needs are sacrificed in return for personal benefits or promise of employment into management when one's term expires. One member explained the complicity of the branch leadership as follows:

Normally down there they promise you a promotion because the first month you were elected you were so powerful over them or arrogant maybe, if I can put it like that. Then they say this person is a problem, so we would rather give him a promotion. When your term expires after three years you know that this office will be yours. So, now you are going to compromise those who elected you because of the office.¹⁴

An elected office, in other words, is used as a stepping-stone to a more lucrative position. As a consequence, the state of the union and worker's interests suffer. Another member explained the impact as follows:

So leadership does not have a programme in the branches to say that this is the programme that we are going to follow. They have to follow the programme of the management ... And the most difficult thing is the positions that are there are linked with incentives. So if you are elected to a certain position there are certain allowances that are going to be passed

13 One-on-one Interview with a member of the NEC of the NUM, 27th November 2014.

14 Ibid



to you. So you are going to fight for that because you are going to gain, you are not going to lose. So that's what makes it destined to become very weak because you cannot come now and face management and debate the issues openly ... you defend them because there is money attached to you. So that's what makes most of the leaders to become so very weak They have to drive the agenda of the management. For them, if they are removed from those positions, at least management will say that now we'll give you these positions... There is no agenda for the branch to drive. Because this agenda is pro-management, so you must rely on the management.¹⁵

Nor are regional and national office bearers, according to some respondents, immune to careerism. Unlike the local leaders, they largely pursue their career ambitions through the political alliance with the ruling party, the African National Congress (ANC). They target appointments into (provincial) legislatures, parliament and cabinet. As one member put it:

NUM national office bearers have become too concerned about their political future as they take the Union as a vehicle through which they will be appointed to become members of parliament or ministers. They don't have any regard for the masses to the extent that their diaries are fully packed with meetings of matters of less importance to the direct concerns of the membership of the union...they go to attend the ANC meetings more than they attend any mass meeting, at least in my branch, I have never seen any of the top five people coming to visit and address a mass rally.¹⁶

Another member added:

Yes, we know that the three groups, the alliance, when they need someone they can appoint someone from the National Union like [Senzeni] Zokwane who is now in government. Everyone wants to go there, so they compromise us, from the seniors. And that is why the union is now weakened and AMCU is taking over, because they are focusing on the greener pastures for them and not for the workers, employees, people below them at the lower levels. That is the problem we are facing.¹⁷

15 Ibid

16 Focus Group Discussion with Rustenburg Platinum Skilled Workers 09 December 21014.

17 Focus Group Discussion PWV Gold Skilled Workers 29 August 2014

The potential for material gain has, consequently, made elective offices highly contested. Incumbents (and contenders) even resort to extra-ordinary means to either retain or gain office. One such measure is fanning factionalism. This is done through tribalism or disbursement of patronage to build support. Some respondents think that this is particularly rife in the period leading towards elections. Members vote along tribal lines, dividing the union. One decried the impact on the union as follows: ‘... this wastes time for us to try to unify the people again. This weakens the union big time. We know that if you touch person X, you touch a particular faction and factions by their nature act like wolves’.

Factionalism, another member explained, works as follows:

... this Jo’burg thing when it comes to capacitation of the leaders. You find that most times when we go for training, like this year we were going for this training at Bagae, if you are interested in doing maybe law or labour relations, the intermediate courses like computers. I was interested then I gave the secretary the forms and asked him to please file them, process and send them where they are supposed to. I have never attended even one of those courses. The only course I attended was the shop stewards one. I think they were just shutting my mouth. Shop stewards training induction that is the only training I attended this year. The chairperson and his associates attend training, left and right...¹⁸

Another example offered entailed:

You see the problem that comrade is highlighting: there is a branch structure which is the branch leadership, the chairperson and his deputy, the secretary and his deputy and the treasurer and all together they make the top five. Whereas in the constitution of the NUM there is no top five. Now they specify themselves as the top and at the end of the day they want to bulldoze all the sub-structures, I am the chairperson I will do one, two, three, four instead of you as the chairperson of education. As the chairperson of education you must go to the EE, you can’t go there, the chairperson of the branch goes. At the end of the day he is taking his own people.

Like for instance we will go together for the EE meeting as a witness, at the same time you will find a health and safety meeting members will be there

18 Focus Group Discussion Kimberley Branch Members 04 November 2014



and they start to join that same meeting. Now all these structures under the one umbrella of the branch they are being bulldozed by those five people. Then it is no longer 'comrade what is your say in this committee', it is 'you will listen from the head', 'we are going to do this', and this is final, you see.¹⁹

Not only do 'careerists' employ factionalism to get to office, but also threats. According to one regional coordinator, '...some of these leaders threaten to bring rival unions to their branches if they will not be voted into power again....' This is a violation particularly of Section 4.1.2 of the constitution, which states that: 'Only members who are committed to the union, its constitution and its aims and objectives may be elected as shaft stewards'.

Ultimately, the union does not elect the best leaders. Instead members vote along factionalist or tribal lines, regardless of the calibre of the individual. As one respondent commented:

In the past, leadership would be elected based on potential capacity and so on... Now we need to go back and review – I don't know whether I should say the screening – the proper understanding..... whether this comrade is a tried and tested leader who, besides the benefits, will be able to take the organisation from one level to the other level; which is something that I think we are lacking. Now of late, some comrades will be elected based on character assassination, based on the mobilisation. It doesn't matter whether Lucas has got capacity but the fact that Lucas manages to lobby a significant number of people at the workplace, he's able to emerge as the leadership for three years.²⁰

The consequence of bad appointments is that the organisation suffers: 'Now you see the branch finished the whole three years without an action plan, without reaching any agreement to say the union is working better....' And, because leaders come to rely entirely on the elected positions for a livelihood, they then become gate-keepers. They don't groom other leaders, for fear of competition. The problem was explained as follows:

... we don't plan [for] second layer leadership. The other thing is, once I am a Deputy Chairperson, I want to be a Deputy Chairperson until I don't

¹⁹ Ibid

²⁰ Focus Group Discussion Kimberley Branch Members 04 November 2014

*know. I don't think myself I have to consider there is a youth that's coming that has to take this position. I will resist and fight for this position as if I am coming from my family with this position ... and also the problem that, if I am not elected, I tend to be against this person for this position*²¹.

Dependence on positions for livelihoods is so excessive that it even retards self-development. Such leaders can't even imagine themselves doing anything else. They spurn opportunities for personal improvement, as one leader explained:

*The problem with factions is that comrades who take up leadership positions are not interested to develop themselves as they serve as full time shop stewards for example. Now these comrades can become clerks, or they can get some skill that can then necessitate them to move up the ladder when they finish their term in office. We have told these comrades that these positions are not permanent, comrade please go and develop yourself. But comrades do not avail themselves for the formal training programmes to acquire qualifications. As a result they end up not willing to give up the positions. This is what leads to factions because people want to cling to positions and earn a higher income.*²²

In some instances, those who are keen to learn are sent for wrong training. Leaders don't take sufficient care to send others for training that is relevant to their portfolio. One respondent explained:

*...much as we are having yearly programmes on education, each and every shop steward and worker must get relevant training. You must not take a health and safety steward to an arbitration course. I'm just making an example. When is that particular comrade going to learn the health and safety issues? Because at the same time members are suffering. They need your intervention but you are busy getting a course that is irrelevant to what you are doing – what you have been elected for. That is one thing that we need to look into. Maybe organisationally, branches need to also know what is entailed within the training brochure, which can say that on these dates we are having this course*²³.

21 Focus Group Discussion ROB Welkom Free State 21 November 2014

22 One-on-one interview with member of NEC, 2nd April 2015

23 Focus Discussion with Regional Office Bearers, Kimberly Diamond, 4th November 2014.



If not sent for irrelevant training, some are ignored in favour of others:

...you will see in the training, you will see the same faces. The information is not going to the branches. It's for certain individuals. If I don't like you or I don't like your branch, I won't phone you.²⁴

Ineffective leadership, according to one co-ordinator, is encouraged by fear. Members are generally fearful of criticising leaders. This is because, in instances where others have dared to, they've been victimised. Fear of being victimised has consequently engendered silence, allowing for the onset of atrophy. Whilst bemoaning incompetence, some union officials are also weary of professionalising the union.

Professionalisation of unionism

The complexity and increasing variety of services provided by the union has led to a change in the profile of staff. Previously, the union tended to attract activists who believed in the cause of the union. Their service was less about employment opportunities and the monetary benefits, but more a fulfilment of political activism. Apolitical, technical people were hardly attracted to union work, especially because of all the risks attached to unions under apartheid. It was not unheard of for union offices to be raided by the police, bombed or unionist to be arrested.

Now that South Africa is a democratic society union work has become less hazardous. This has made it a consideration for employment among individuals with professional qualifications. And, the range of services provided to members has also predisposed the union towards recruiting professionals. Tension has consequently arisen between the old-style 'activist employees' and the new generation 'professional employees'. The former rose up the ranks, having joined the organisation as activists, whilst the latter were recruited purely on a professional basis.

Regional co-ordinators, for instance, find monetary demands made by other employees especially unsatisfactory. They charge them with seeking unreasonably high salaries, as they are made regardless of how the union is doing in terms of membership recruitment. Staff members demand more benefits but they don't seem to be helping where they have to, the argument goes. They focus on things that do not really grow the union.

²⁴ Ibid

For their part, professional employees consider themselves entitled to full workers' rights and benefits like their counterparts in any corporation. For this reason they are irked that they do not have union representation to advance their interests. Lack of unionisation, they feel, has made it easy for their exploitation.

The tension showed itself in the course of this fieldwork, as researchers sought to organise focus-groups. Some employees expressed reluctance to be combined with a particular group for fear that they will inform on them to their seniors. The level of distrust amongst employees was palpable.

Overall, activist-employees are largely closer to elected officials than they are to their professional counterparts. The affinity is such that they even side with one leader against the other. This makes activist-employees popular amongst some elected officials. Some are even agitating that, instead of recruiting employees from outside, shop-stewards should be encouraged to become union employees.

On their part, some full-time employees complain of insufficient benefits, and lack of proper training and upward mobility. The benefits, they argue, are not logical and commensurate with their experience and level of work. For example, some employees opine that the current housing policy encourages rental over ownership particularly to full-time staff members. Those who rent have a bigger allowance than those who buy. And the car policy 'forces' people to buy cars they do not like. Employees feel demotivated. Nor is there sufficient training to empower employees. Seminars, for instance, have become scarce. This is exacerbated by the absence of upward mobility within the organisation.

Besides the foregoing challenge, there is a general outcry about the dearth of activism. Previously individual members took it upon themselves to recruit other members. The slogan was: 'one member one recruit'. Because of the impact of unionism on people's lives, as noted earlier, members were generally dedicated and believed in the NUM. Union activities were partly their contribution towards liberation.

This has all changed. Members are no longer mobilisers. Instead of contributing towards the union, they generally expect the union to do something for them. The relationship is not as reciprocal as before, but is a unilinear one. It is all about what the union can do for the member. In some instances, members expect officials to drive all the way from national office to do recruitment at mines. Some leaders think that this situation can be reversed through education, to remind members about their roles and responsibilities as it is always mentioned that the



NUM is the people themselves.

Officials vs elected leaders

There were indications of tensions between employees of the union and elected officers in many respects. Relations between regional coordinators/organisers and regional secretaries are particularly tense. Secretaries feel that co-ordinators are encroaching onto their turf. But, co-ordinators insist that they are simply following their job description, whilst secretaries lack a specific outline of their responsibilities.

There's uncertainty over powers of regional coordinators. This confusion is especially pronounced over expenditures. One co-ordinator explained it as follows:

The Constitution [...] will tell you that, though he is working as a coordinator, he is taken as an accounting officer but the very same policies of the union are saying an office bearer, any office bearer, can authorise expenditure within the union. Okay, okay but at the end of the day, they will call you as a regional coordinator to come and account for that expenditure and that becomes a problem.²⁵

In other words, co-ordinators account for expenditure over which they lack authority. For instance, they cannot bar office bearers from using the union's resources, but are expected to account for this. One co-ordinator provided the following example:

We have cars in the region; these are cars for leaders that are elected through the ballot box as X, just put X. You know they come and they misuse these resources; you cannot say a thing because this is the chairperson; he says he is the political head, what is that? ... If this person is consuming a lot of money from the budget, I cannot say a thing, I cannot challenge him, okay because he sees himself as a boss at a regional level and that becomes a problem to us.²⁶

Where they have sought to object to inappropriate use of resources, co-ordinators complain that they have been dismissed by office bearers. This has

25 Focus Group Discussion with Regional Coordinators at Elijah Barayi Memorial Training Centre, Midrand on 20th March 2015.

26 Ibid

created serious tension:

They even come to us and tell us that ‘hey, chief you are an employee’ and I said ‘Chief, I am employed by the institution called the National Union of Mineworkers, not yourself, even if you can be dismissed from the company tomorrow, I will remain here, okay. So you can’t tell me that I am employed here’. So they reduce us to nothing. Sometimes, okay, you have to stand up and fight you see, for your own dignity and integrity otherwise those guys are going to be brutal against you at the regional level.²⁷

In some instances, the tension has escalated to a point of pitting officer-bearers and co-ordinators against each other, as if they are rivals. One co-ordinator explained how he has resolved to deal with office-bearers:

... if also you are a coordinator, become strong and become influential in terms of your staff, it becomes extra threat to them. Because when it comes to the conference, they think, ‘if I am not on good terms with this coordinator, this coordinator might influence the staff to go to the branches and work against me’.²⁸

In other words, the (elected) secretaries feel threatened, especially by coordinators. According to one official at headquarters, this stems from insecurity on the part of office bearers due to inexperience. Some of the officials have been with the union for long, and rose up the ranks from branch regional leadership. They are quite experienced, and this can be threatening to office bearers, especially because they have to rely on the officials. Some are so threatened that they even disapprove of organisers addressing meetings. To them, it looks like, say, an organiser is trying to mobilise support for him/herself. But, added the official, there’s no way that an organiser, in the course of doing his work, cannot address meetings of workers.

They are the face of the organisation and therefore, if their jobs description does not include addressing meetings, that would be a surprise to me. But, really it shouldn’t be a problem at the regional level where a regional co-ordinator should be able to address the membership.

Consequently, there is a strong feeling that the constitution should be clear on the

27 ibid

28 Ibid



nature of powers enjoyed by co-ordinators. They have responsibilities, but lack sufficient authority to execute them. Their sense of grievance is deepened by the fact that they practically run the administration of the regional office. Regional secretaries are not full-time administrators, as is the case at the national office. This leaves day-to-day administrative matters of the office to the co-ordinators and other staff members. Regional secretaries can interfere with those duties without taking responsibility and use their absence from the office as an excuse to absolve themselves of any wrong-doing. This is a grave source of discontent for co-ordinators.

There is also a feeling that elected leaders need some training on how to manage an office. A regional secretary, for instance, supervises officials. Being an elected leader, however, doesn't necessarily mean one knows how to manage or supervise.

You see, when a question of management of the union arises, they don't provide the answer on the basis of knowledge about the organisation, because they are not trained to supervise high level and well trained officers. So it creates a problem. It's much more emotional, not based on knowledge or understanding the function of a supervisor. They believe that, as long as they have said that this and that must be done, it must be done because they are supervisors without the understanding of the implications; just because THEY are supervisors they expect things to be done.

In order for them to become better supervisors, they must be sent for HR training. It is important for them to have a basic understanding of people management etc; not having an understanding of everything but the basics are important. The basic principles of managerial functions are a key²⁹.

Whilst not dismissing the concerns of the co-ordinators, NOBs argue that employees must stick to their role of enabling the elected officials to fulfil their duties. This involves assisting with logistical aspects, over and above advising on the right ways of undertaking responsibilities according to the constitution. One further added:

...elected leadership come and go according to the results of elections every three years as stipulated by the constitution of the NUM. As such it is

29 One-on-one interview with one of the Pillar Heads, March 2015.

important that mutual respect and strict adherence to the job description and constitution of the Union be attained at all times.³⁰

Moreover, elected leaders complain that employees do not always comply with their instructions. They take decisions and rely on officials to carry them through. Instead of carrying through the instructions, officials either delay or question the viability of the instructions. This has generated frustration on the part of elected officials, who feel that employees should just simply follow instructions instead of questioning. One of the regional co-ordinators put it as follows:

You will find that some members of staff have become more powerful than the members themselves, forgetting that it is the subscriptions of the members, which pay their salaries and benefits and themselves do not contribute anything. Sometimes these staff members can even override what the members really want to see happening in the union. They can impose decisions and even have the members respecting them more than the staff members respecting the members who are the owners of the union. Obviously this will bring a conflict.³¹

Hierarchical relations

Relations amongst various layers of leadership are not at their best. Leaders tend to hold a dim view of others at a different level. Branch leadership is seen especially in a poor light by the regional and national leadership, and vice-versa. This hampers effective functioning of the union.

National and regional leaders contend that their weakest link is the branch leadership. This cripples the union as this is the critical level in the organisation. It is responsible for recruitment and servicing the membership. The state of the union, in other words, is largely determined by what happens at the branch level. National and regional leaders feel that branch leadership does not quite appreciate their level of significance in the vibrancy of the union.

A number of instances were provided to confirm what is believed to be a lackadaisical attitude on the part of the branch leadership. In addition to not convening meetings, as noted above, they are said not to attend to their duties. Instead they escalate issues to regional and national offices. As one regional leader complained:

30 Ibid

31 Ibid



... the issue we are having now is that the branches are writing letters to the head office without our knowledge. And the national office will direct the letters back to us to address because they don't want to interfere in the regional affairs. So it is only the branch that will write that letter before we even had a chance to address the problem.³²

In other instances, branches are accused of not being forthright with the membership. This is a particular problem in relation to agreements with management. They either mislead or do not inform the members. This, in turn, builds frustration and distrust amongst workers, which translate into disillusionment with the union.

What is also clear is that there is little interaction between the regional and branch leadership. Regional leaders charge that they hardly know what is happening at the branches. One regional leader explained it as follows:

... we are supposed to get a branch report every month at the regional level. That is not done at all. We'll get one branch or two branches this month. The other month it's another branch. Ignorance about the state of branches is partly a weakness of the inter-organisational mechanisms. According to one regional leader, ...in terms of the Constitution the chairperson and the secretary are RC members³³.

So, they are meant to attend regular meetings at the regional office. It was also common practice for the region to 'send one of their guys to sit in our meetings and just listen. To check how we are running our meetings and our progress. But presently that does not happen'.

Poor interaction seems to fuel hostility amongst individual leaders. For instance, as one respondent said:

You will hear certain groups saying no we don't want this leader of the region, and we can run this branch alone. At the end of the day when things don't work well, we have to revert back to the region. The same region would come and help us. We lose most of the things because the people that should guide us, at times when they come small things that

32 Focus Group Discussion with Kimberly Diamond Regional Office Bearers, 4th November 2014.

33 Ibid.

*we were dealing with would not be small but big when they come – at the end of the day it would be out of our control to deal with it. Then we are forced to explore other avenues like the legal desk of the national office*³⁴.

Because of poor co-operation, branches do not get the necessary support from the regions to attend to their own duties. Nor are regional leaders informed of the urgent needs confronted by branches. Leaders end up trading blame for things that are not happening at the branch level. ‘When you go to mass meetings as regional office bearers’, one respondent narrated: ‘in most cases the leadership of the branch don’t want to take responsibility. They apportion blame to regional office bearers. When we arrive there we will get: “You regional, you failed us. You do this”’.

The research team had direct experience of the poor relations amongst the various leadership levels. Researchers would get to a research site only to find that a focus group had not been organised, and members and branch leaders would claim ignorance of the meeting. Sometimes the meeting would have to be cancelled, whilst at other times means were devised to assemble focus groups, which meant convening a meeting much later than initially envisaged. This showed shoddy co-ordination amongst the different levels of leadership.

Whilst blaming the branch leaders for the poor state of branches, regional leaders also conceded liability, to some degree. Branches by-passing regional leaders to seek national intervention were not entirely unjustified. ‘Maybe it’s the waiting period’, one leader ventured an explanation. He elaborated: ‘... we take a bit of time because of the scattered areas in which we are working. I think that is the cause’. An organiser explained the problem further:

*The other issue that I think is very important is the organisation to review the issue of allocation of the organiser. I’m speaking under correction here. I forget what was the ratio but I think it was 1:1,000, but I’m speaking under correction ... Now you have this area where you are growing in terms of membership but in terms of allocation of organisers, you still remain a certain number. Now as such, it creates challenges where these organisers can be overloaded and be unable to service other mines. And as such, members will complain about service.*³⁵

For some branch leaders, the vastness of their region or space is a hindrance to attending meetings. One regional leader expressed himself as follows:

34 Ibid.

35 Ibid.



The crisis we have on the RC is that we usually leave Port Elizabeth a little late and we arrive in East London at about 10 o'clock. Sometimes, we would fail to discuss or cover all the items on the agenda because of time constraints, because there are also members who come from Transkei. So we sometimes leave the meeting halfway through.³⁶

Each layer of leadership shares the blame. A regional co-ordinator provided the following example about the inattentiveness of his regional counter-parts:

And what you do normally, we write monthly reports and give them branch reports. It is monthly reports. So, we would highlight these things, to say at Lonmin this is what is happening. These are the charges we are facing. We have taken them to the regional committee. When they get to the regional committee, comrades will just say 'noted'. There is no action plan on what they are going to do about the concerns, about that particular comrade, or about that particular branch. But it is noted. It ends there. It is noted, we move on comrades.³⁷

Another elaborated with his own example:

We thought the emails and the phones will be the easier means of communication with our seniors, but it is not happening. Because whenever you send an organiser an email, you cc the chairperson and cc the region, they are not responding to you. But when management sends them an email they are responding. Then you end up not understanding who is who, who is backing who.³⁸

Focus Group Discussion with Regional Coordinators at Elijah Barayi Memorial Training Centre, Midrand on 20th March 2015

Besides the afore-mentioned, there is also a view that poor performance is encouraged by lack of consequences. Respondents decried the difficulty to put non-performing leaders through a disciplinary process. One regional leader complained:

36 Focus Group Discussion with Branch Leadership in East London, 30th September 2014.

37 Focus Group Discussion with Regional Coordinators at Elijah Barayi Memorial Training Centre, Midrand on 20th March 2015

38 Ibid

*I believe there is no clear stance on the discipline factor. If you are a leader and you fail to do this, what is supposed to be done? There is still a problem. You will find where the branch has maybe charged a member or a leader, there will be cross referrals – either a directive from the national office to the region or a directive from the region to the branches. I can relate one case where it was our regional chairperson and it took us more than seven months because there is no clear guidelines what is supposed to be followed in terms of disciplining a member, in terms of our Constitution. It's where we are lacking something. Something needs to be done. Like currently we are having two cases of branch chairpersons – there is no conclusion in terms of the disciplinary procedure.*³⁹

Changing membership profile: Gender and generation

The demographic composition of the union has changed. It includes women and individuals that were born post-1994 and some are professionals. These are not only new categories of members, but also require to be serviced differently than the blue-collar, older, pre-1994 generation. Young and professional members have different expectations of the union and ways of interaction.

Because the young members joined the union after 1994, their stay within the union depends on demonstrable results, not sentimentality. This requires the leadership to be vigilant and attend to their needs:

Young people do not care about the historical achievements of the union; they want benefits now and for them. They are more educated, fast and impatient. Much as they appreciate the history of the NUM and what it has achieved, they want an environment where they can receive the tangible benefits now. They do not care to stay longer in a work place, because they are educated; they are competitive and more open to changing jobs.

⁴⁰

Young people are forcing the NUM to review its communication methods. The union relies on old methods of communication, such as posters and pamphlets. Some of these posters are torn down by rival unions before they're seen by members. Word-of-mouth is not entirely effective either. It is easier if most members live in the same residence, such as a hostel. But now the membership,

³⁹ Ibid

⁴⁰ Ibid



especially the youth, is dispersed in various residential areas, including the suburbs. Social media is the most accessible form of communication. But, the union appears reluctant to use it. One member put it as follows:

*The Union is resistant to change in technology, membership age group, ambitions of the people. Whilst in the past it was easy to mobilise people for mass meetings by just going to the hostels, these days it's difficult because workers now stay in suburbs and they drive cars. They are now married and educated unlike in the past where they used to stay in the hostels and work without their families staying with them.*⁴¹

Technology, however, has its own challenges. Youth are accused of discussing leadership issues on WhatsApp and Twitter. Such practices are frowned upon. They are considered ill-disciplined.

Nonetheless the union has realised that it needs to organise the youth differently to its older membership. This is what prompted the formation of youth structures within the union. The general feeling, however, is that they are not functioning optimally. But this has not deterred enthusiasm on the part of some. In the course of field-work, the youth were particularly energetic at Carletonville, organising the meeting and fearlessly coordinating and inviting members to attend.

That said, other leaders still insisted that the youth must be socialised into NUM's values. They cannot simply be pre-occupied with what the union brings them, but be educated about the history and values of the union. They must be encouraged to appreciate the significance of the union beyond its material offering. This will make them resistant to enticement into other unions on false promises.

Another discernible change in membership is on the gender front. The number of women members, due to their increasing recruitment into underground work, has grown noticeably. This is reflective of the country's progressive belief in gender equity. There are concerns, however, about their level of visibility in leadership. One woman commented:

I think there is gender discrimination. Not only in Kimberley – even to our own union. Because if you think of the national committee – have you ever seen a woman sit there? Because if you go to the branches –

41 One-on-one interview with Member of the NEC, 10th March 2015.

about 80 per cent will be treasurers. Only women treasurers. But above all, we don't know if there is a discrimination. We don't know whether, as women, we don't want to participate or not. But overall, I can say there is discrimination somewhere. But it may be that us, women, don't want to participate either. ⁴²

Whilst there have clearly been some improvements in terms of female representation, there is also lingering prejudice against women working in the mines. One local leader put it as follows:

The role of the woman to come into work places, it was not clarified. What is the role of the women? Because we see them as these women issues of pregnancy, breastfeeding and all that – these were things that were raised after a woman has been employed in the industry. The mine industry was not designed in a way that a woman should be accommodated. The women were meant for offices only. But now they are on the operational side. So it becomes very difficult to deal with some of these issues. And it seems we are limiting some of the things for the women so they can deal with these issues.

So in the Constitution I tried to find, in fact, what impact, what role can they bring to the organisation as women? I could not see it – clarify it. So these issues of women in mining, I tried to see where does it feature in. Because we only see women in mining that are in higher positions – as CEO, as directors. But in operations itself, what is the role that the women can come and show that they can come and play. ⁴³

There is a sense that women's structures in the union are not functional. To some leaders of the union, it is not even clear what these structures are doing. One leader put it as follows:

My problem, organisationally, in these women issues is that they are not available. You will find in the region in terms of the programme, there is a course or whatever. And a woman structure or the woman at mine level will get notice at the last day that she's not going to make it for that course. In most cases, they are not available. It's not to say we are discriminating against them. I'm not sure, organisationally, they are having a knowledge – why should we have a structure like that. But most principle things they

42 Focus Group Discussion with Kimberly Regional Office Bearers, 4th November 2015.

43 Focus Group Discussion with Kimberly Regional Office Bearers, 4th November 2015.



are not available. I'm not sure if it's their husbands or...

So I feel that there is no guidance in terms of the women's structure – what they are supposed to do, what they are not supposed to do. And also the youth as an emerging structure – there is no clarification of their role in terms of what they are supposed to do and what are they aiming to do in these organisations. ...there are clarifications in terms of education and health and safety. We know there are rules and what impact they bring to the organisations. But for the youth and the women's structures – what is the impact, what are the expectations of those structures? So we can understand. Unlike submitting a report, going to meetings without any delivery that they can come across, or any project that they can steer in the process.⁴⁴

The picture becomes different when the operational structures of the organisation are observed. Having spoken with employees at all levels within the union, it was observed that they had more negative sentiments about the elected leadership than union management. To the extent that the leadership frustrates their advisory efforts, staff members' morale is negatively affected.

However, some of the members of the organisation expressed their dissatisfaction with the way some issues are handled by staff members. 'Sometimes the staff members react late, sometimes we don't know who to approach and sometimes we feel that the organisation has been hijacked'⁴⁵.

It was also observed that, although the working relationship among the pillars is generally good owing to effective communication and 'heads-ups' among the pillar heads, activity overlaps sometimes create unnecessary confusion. This is emphasised by one of the pillar heads who stated:

The pillars have their work and responsibilities clarified. Mainly they are meant to support each other.

Of course there are issues of overlaps between the pillars especially regarding their responsibilities. Some of the issues you will see that they will be dealt with in the production pillar when they should have fallen under the service pillar. So we need to amicably resolve the issue of

44 Ibid

45 Focus Group Discussion with PWV office bearers.

overlaps quicker than imagined; it creates confusion in many cases⁴⁶. However, because the relationship between the pillar heads and their staff members is smooth, these issues get resolved quicker without conflicts.

The effectiveness of the service pillar was underscored when some members complained that their issues do not get addressed quickly enough. Some of them found the service pillar provided a below expectation standard. One construction member stated that:

You know this issue of job grading it's a very serious issue I can tell about the construction industry only: we have this Safsec job grading and even the national office they can't even give us direction what is to be done on the job grading because we said we are not happy about the current job grading that is being used. Actually, all the sectors, not the construction sector only, all the sectors were unhappy about the job grading issue but there is no direction as to are they taking the issue very serious or are they implementing it. They have a lot of researchers and service pillar heads, but they don't give us those reports to say in the construction industry we have discovered this with regards to job grading and we propose this should be the implementation going forward. But we don't get reports like that; we just issue out complaints; they are referred to the service pillar instead of them coming back and reporting to us which strategy are they going to implement – they don't do that.⁴⁷

Union rivalry

NUM faces rivalry in some mines. This is relatively new to the union. It has historically been the only dominant union at mines. The new rival, AMCU, has poached members away. Leaders ascribe this to a number of factors: short-term gains, internal weaknesses, failure to conscientise their members and intimidation.

Leaders identified the Marikana Massacre as the turning point. It precipitated an exodus of members into AMCU. They ascribe that exodus to the promises made by the rival union, that it would secure better benefits than NUM. Workers were enticed with short-term gains.

Besides offering immediate gains, leaders also acknowledge that AMCU took

46 One-on-one interview with one of the pillar heads.

47 Focus Group Discussion with PWV Branch Committee of Construction.



advantage of NUM's weakness. NUM was not accustomed to competition. As a result, it had become complacent. As noted above, members complained about branch leaders being absent and inattentive to their needs. AMCU filled the void. Now the tension and violent outbreaks in some mines has made it challenging for NUM to mobilise openly. Both leaders and members alike are wary of even wearing their NUM T-shirts for fear of being attacked by AMCU members. One leader put it as follows:

We are failing to sell the organisation, for instance, in Rustenburg. We are no longer in a position where we can wear t-shirts, articulate our values and mission and achievements to the rest of the people and we are in a state of fear. As a result we now have people losing confidence in the organisation forgetting that for the union to be visible, it takes the very people who shun away from it. It's important to remember that there is no union located in the head office; the union is in the branches and regions⁴⁸.

Changing employment patterns and practises

The nature of the sectors in which NUM operates and the changing identity of employers have a bearing on recruitment. Work within the construction sector and employment to sub-contractors tend to be short-lived. Construction projects last for a few months, whilst sub-contractors tend to victimise workers, making it difficult for them to join unions.

One leader explained the challenges as follows:

Some of these sub-contractors are hiring these people without a fixed contract. It is written there the date when he enters. It does not have the duration, it does not have the what-what. Now you'll come there as the union, organising these subcontractors who happen to be under one licence holder. Immediately when you talk to the company [about] organising rights, they have been called into the office. Those who happen to be pro-union now, who happen to be in a situation of misery and the only solution is the union. The employer will ruthlessly deal with these guys. One, their employment will be terminated there and then. It is then that now the proper thing will be written on that particular paper to say that from today you don't have any job.⁴⁹

48 One-on-one interview with NEC member, 26th March 2015

49 Focus Group Discussion with Kimberly Regional Office Bearers, 4th November 2015

One respondent observed that most of the vulnerable workers employed by the sub-contractors tend to be women. This victimises women even more. He explained:

I think the other problem on the mine is that the mine has not hired enough women. If you look at the contractors, they hire more women than the mine itself. And those women that are under the contractors, they are not free enough. Even their benefits from the owners of the contractors are not the ones that the mines are getting. Like two months back, we had a problem with a contractor. When a woman is pregnant a woman is already being chased away from the workplace. Because they say they don't have alternative jobs and all that. But we as the region, at the branch level, we are fighting that. And at least we have managed. So it's only that we have to implement that and make sure that all the contractors do the same, so that women must be treated the same as women that are working on the mines. But we must also fight that the mine must hire more permanent women.⁵⁰

In instances where the union is able to organise workers, negotiating a living wage and safe working conditions, presents a daunting challenge. They cannot conclude a deal that binds all contractors:

We are organising the contractor with different employers. Now, when one organiser had to come and service the employee of this mine, plus 20 other contractors which are independent.... Remember, you cannot group them under one umbrella when you have to do the collective agreement and so on because they differ in size, they differ in their objectives and so on..... these contractors. Those contractors might be paying R1,000, this contractor might be doing painting and paying R2,000.⁵¹

Even more disconcerting about contract work, in some cases, is the identity of the contractor. One respondent put it thus:

Now, who are the owners of those contractors? Some of the owners of these contractors are the municipalities' employees, they are MECs, they are ministers who are doing these things. That's why we are fighting these battles. Because when you are negotiating in the contractors you end up not knowing who's the owner of

50 Ibid

51 Ibid



the contractors. Some of them are silent partners. So it makes it very difficult.⁵²

Sectoral affiliates: Uneven attention

Members within the newest sectors to be organised by NUM, the energy and construction sectors, complain that their issues are not taken as seriously as in mining, the foundational sector of the union. One view is that the NUM gives the mining sector first priority most of the time.

Sometimes my feeling is that NUM listens to the feelings of the mine workers more than the energy people. If it's a mine you will hear a NUM person talking in the news. If it's energy nothing is said. We are not disappointed by our shop steward. We are disappointed by the people up there.

It's like that. You can listen to the news when there is a strike in Marikana, or at a mine somewhere, in Witbank. You will see the secretary talking, or the NUM chairperson talking. But with us here in energy, you will never see them. Always it's the energy shop stewards who will be talking there.

We put our concerns as artisans. They are not addressed. What discourages me the most, even though we are part of the family, but then it comes to the mines they (NUM leadership) do not compromise there. They are afraid of the members. When it comes to our side we are not getting anything.

The only problem I see, as an artisan, is that our leadership at national see us as nothing. The leadership in our region are undermining us, especially the energy division.

National does not care. Or they do not value us much, because we are Eskom people.

A construction worker felt they were neglected because they did not add much in terms of subscriptions to the union:

I also feel that it sometimes depends on the gross contribution of each industry to the union coffers. Because, in our case, in the brick sector, our salaries are low as compared to manufacturing, our counterparts in the parastatals earn much better than us, and their issues are always prioritised

⁵² Ibid

than ours. I think it has something to do really with the contributions in terms of monthly subscriptions the sector make.

The neglect takes different forms. A branch leader explained what he saw as a sign of indifference from regional leaders:

When I joined that company there were 48 members, and all of them were NUM members, and they were complaining about the issue of t-shirts. The organiser was there and promised the members that he will bring the t-shirts. Even for me I have difficulties because the t-shirts they gave me were not enough and I am not sure what to do, and I can't hand them out now because of that.

In short, the transition to democracy has wrought mixed fortunes for NUM. Democracy represents a breakthrough for the union, which has brought multiple benefits. In pursuing the gains of democracy, leaders have left the union weak and vulnerable to opportunists. The meaning of a union and what it stands for has also been perverted. But the union seems unable to tackle the challenges of a new socio-political context. Rather than adapt, it hankers back to how things were, as it wishes to recreate the past in the present – something that is impossible!



CHAPTER 3 ANALYSIS

Organisations are products of the moment. Their formation, objective, character and modus operandi are all triggered and moulded by the dynamics that obtain at a particular moment in time. Theirs is a symbiotic existence. They feed off the social habitat in which they are located, whilst simultaneously shaping it so that they are able to achieve their objectives.

In other words, organisational life is not an insulated existence. It is essentially relational. A change in the habitat inevitably affects the state of the organisation. Depending on the extent, change may render the organisation futile as the purpose for which it was formed melts away. Alternatively, the mission of the organisation may remain unchanged, but the manner of its operation and character may have to adapt to the changed environment in order to remain vibrant.

The source of the malaise that the NUM currently faces is the change in South Africa's socio-political context. This has consequently thrown up several challenges that are both within and beyond the control of the organisation. Some of the challenges were always inevitable, as they were innate to the life of organisations. Others are a result of a sheer failure to adapt, which itself is a reflection of organisational lethargy.

From Iconic to Normalcy: The challenge of transition

The NUM is a legendary trade union. It earned this legendary status from its mere formation and consequent gains. The formation of the union was a triumph against tremendous odds that were stacked up against unionisation of blacks workers. Formed at the height of apartheid, conditions were not ideal for the

NUM to organise black mine workers. Management could victimise unionists.

The NUM defied the odds, leading the re-emergence of black trade unionism since its unbanning in the 1950s. From its pioneering role, it grew to become a dominant player, not only within the work-place, but also within the anti-apartheid struggle. The union was instrumental in reconfiguring South Africa's labour regime, earning black workers rights and benefits that had been unheard of for decades. As part of the Congress of South Africa Trade Unions, a federation of trade unions in alliance with the anti-apartheid forces, the NUM was also found in campaigns to destroy the oppressive apartheid system.

South Africa's democratic breakthrough was partly a result of the NUM's tireless efforts. Black workers rightfully embraced the union as their unchallenged champion. Democracy gave them the franchise and normalised the labour regime. No longer would workers or blacks be subjected to discrimination or inhumane treatment. Now, operating within a democratic and a human-rights oriented society, trade unions would no longer face similar challenges as they had in the past.

The political transition transformed the NUM into a normal existence. There were not any historical gains to be made. Now the NUM was to function as an ordinary trade union within a democratic society. It did not have to do much more than seeing to the day-to-day needs of its membership.

The challenges manifested themselves internally in terms of leadership, value system and organisational commitment; inter-organisational relations; reconfiguration of staff profile and work and recruitment patterns

Internal Decline

Complacency

Normalcy has proven to be daunting, however, for the NUM. Normal as the conditions have become, the NUM did not see itself as an ordinary union. It revelled in its iconic status. This made it less keen to prove its worth to the members. That it remained the sole, dominant force within the mining industry made the union even more complacent. This partly explains the general inactivity of the union structures, such as the infrequent branch meetings and invisible leaders.

The result of complacency has not only been general lethargy, but members have



also become susceptible to recruitment into other unions. A weak NUM has, in turn, invited rivalry. Historical achievements count for little when immediate interests of paid-up members are not met. The flourishing of the rival union, AMCU, is partly the result of the NUM's organisational decline.

Dearth of activism

Complacency at the same time reflects the relative dearth of activism. Previously trade unionism was a manifestation of activism. Unionists were driven by conviction, not monetary incentives. There were more hazards than benefits. Conviction to the cause of workers' rights and equality motivated trade unionists to take risks and emboldened them to overcome the repercussions of their activism.

Dearth of activism in part reflects declining appreciation of the cause of trade unionism. Instead, being a trade unionist is increasingly becoming about one-self, a fulfilment of one's personal interests.

It is also worth noting that the attraction of individuals with uneven levels of talent to the unions is partly a reflection of the changed nature of South Africa's opportunity structure. Now the opportunities available to black people are wide and varied. They have more options in both the public service and the private sector, than was the case before 1994. As a result, the unions have a limited pool of candidates for leadership, some of whom, because of the availability of abundant talent, would never have been previously considered for leadership positions.

Lack of induction

Especially new members appear to be overly materialistic. There is declining consciousness about the values of trade unionism. This makes their commitment and support for the union fluid. They are easily enticed away and/or quick to lose hope in their union if it fails to meet their financial expectations. This makes the long-term future of the union tenuous.

There is a need for an aggressive educational programme to educate the members about the values of the union, not only to secure short-term benefits, but also as a permanent defence against exploitation. The idea should also be to regenerate the sense of activism that goes beyond the financial gains offered by a union.

Careerism

Careerism has thus replaced activism. This makes leadership a coveted position as a source of livelihood. Leaders put focus more on the material benefits that come with the leadership position to the detriment of the values that have historically defined trade unionism. That is why internal democracy and workers' control have been weakened within the NUM. Shop-stewards accede easily to managers' offers, neglecting their mandates, due to promises of managerial employment once their tenures expire.

If not drawn into management, recruitment into political positions presents another avenue for advancement. This is enabled by the alliance that the NUM has, through its affiliation to COSATU, with the ruling ANC. Trade unionists are included in the election list of the ANC for placement at any of the three spheres of government, including cabinet appointments. Some union members feel that, because such positions are coveted, union leaders dedicate disproportionate attention to alliance activities so as to build a profile to improve their political prospects.

As a consequence of all this, leaders become proprietary about positions. They discourage potential contenders. Collective leadership has become subdued to autocratic control. Other officials within the branch get marginalised. And, because the dominant leaders cannot do everything nor attend to several demands simultaneously, other sub-committees have consequently become moribund. The membership is not properly serviced.

Factionalism

Besides perverting leadership and making sub-committees dysfunctional, careerism has poisoned relations amongst the general membership. Instead of being equal members of a union, they have been mobilised into factions supporting one individual against the other. Membership is pitted against each other, including along tribal lines.

The result has been divisions and exclusion of others. This has created tensions within the union membership. Victims of exclusion consequently lose interest in union activities.



Mediocrity trumps meritocracy

Merit is bound to suffer in the absence of democratic leadership contests. Competent leaders, who either belong to a different ethnic group or do not have patronage to dispense, are overlooked. Those who have assumed leadership are not necessarily the best in the organisation.

The deleterious effects are also manifest in the management of development programmes. In some instances, individuals that are either associated with a rival faction or not part of the dominant faction are denied opportunities to improve their skills. This has the effect of limiting the pool of talent within the union and stifles the general growth of leadership.

The delays in dealing with issues that have been escalated are a cause of frustration among members. Establishments such as the service and production pillar need to be more effective, especially in responding to escalated matters from the branch committees.

Erosion of institutional integrity

The decline has extended to the general state of the organisation. Factionalism displaces rules and procedures. Disputes are not resolved in accordance with rules, but are determined by the identity of the personalities involved. This is common in disciplinary cases. A number of these cases apparently persist unresolved for a considerable period of time, even when there is incontrovertible evidence of an infraction. This is so because the alleged culprits enjoy the protection of senior leaders.

Ill-discipline has consequently become commonplace. Those who enjoy protection act inappropriately with impunity. What has happened, as a result, is that general morale within the organisation has taken a knock.

Leadership relations: Tense and incoherent

Part of the result of factionalism is poor relations amongst the three levels of leadership. There are instances where branch leaders, instead of seeking intervention from regional leadership, have refused doing so because of their dislike of a particular individual. Similarly, NOBs complain that regional leaders do not keep them abreast of challenges at the branches nor do they inform them of branches where their intervention is needed. In other instances, branch leaders do not attend meetings of the regional committees, as constitutionally required. This has severed an important link for easy interaction, flow of information and immediate action as and when it is required. The result is that problems linger unresolved.

Leaders trade blame over culpability. This creates tension, which is not only a function of factionalism, but also of incompetence. In some instances, branch leaders are accused of failing to attend to the most basic needs of members, but refer them to the national office for attention. This apparently over-burdens national office and, as result, it fails to respond promptly. In such instances, instead of taking responsibility, branch leaders berate national office for neglecting them. This makes national office look bad over something that should have been handled by the branch leadership. Instances such as these do not promote cordial relations, and are a sign of disjointed relations amongst the leadership. Each level of leadership in the hierarchy blames the other, and there is very little objective self-reflection .

There are instances where the union's national leaders accommodate top managers and respond to their calls to resolve local problems bypassing regional and branch structures.

The relationship between staff members of the union and the members is not seriously strained. In the main, officers and other senior members of staff, know exactly what is expected of them because they are given a proper job description on which they base their everyday work plans. However, it is members of the union who have feelings that some of the staff members are living large with better benefits compared to the 'owners' of the organisation.

Structural Changes

Besides the internal challenges, the NUM's decline is also a reflection of changes the union has had to deal with both institutionally and within the various industries in which it operates. These changes relate to the size of the membership, profile of the union's employees and membership, and the nature of work.

Organisers and areas of responsibility

Inattentiveness to certain branches is also a function of their size. Organisers are allocated a particular number of members to service, initially put at 1,000 members per organiser. Over the years, however, and as the union grew, that number expanded. Some organisers cover more than 1,000 members. This presents challenges of time and resources.

The territory they have to cover is much bigger. The problem is especially acute



where the membership is spread over a vast area of territory. This requires more time and resources to enable organisers to attend to their duties. Some members have consequently had to go without seeing their organisers. There is clearly a need here for reconsideration of the size allocated to organisers.

'Professional' union employees

The NUM now has certified employees in their employ. It is no longer dominated by 'activist' employees, who joined the union pre-1994 more as an expression of their activism, than as mere employment. This has, in some instances, created tension between the two generations (or categories) of employees. 'Activist' employees feel their 'professional' counterparts are not sufficiently committed to the cause of the union, but are largely motivated by the salary. They make unreasonable financial demands upon the union without consideration of the declining membership, and are not willing to make sacrifices for the cause.

'Professional' employees retort that the conduct of their counterparts is exactly part of the problem. Whilst not underplaying the importance of believing in the cause, they nonetheless feel that their counterparts become too 'political'. They are more political, than professional, in their duties. At times this has even entailed siding with some office bearers over others.

The different backgrounds and understanding of roles has created not only tension amongst staff, but has an adverse effect on how they think the union sees them. A strong view amongst some of them is that the union does not value them as much as their counterparts. This dampens their morale and enthusiasm to co-operate especially with the other colleagues.

Casualisation of labour

Problems within the union are undoubtedly the cause of the declining membership. Beyond this uncontested point, however, is that the changing nature of work in the industry is limiting prospects of membership growth. Mining companies are sub-contracting out some of their activities.

Sub-contracting, in turn, has had a knock on the number of permanent workers employed in the mines. Sub-contractors tend to employ workers on short-term contracts. This category of workers does not lend itself easily for recruitment into the union. It is transient.

A similar limitation obtains in the construction industry. Together with the energy sector, construction is the newest industry in which the NUM organises. But

the union has not sufficiently adapted to this reality, in sectors replete with short-term employment, labour broking and sub-contracting, these additions have not necessarily brought along substantially more members into the union. Employment in the construction industry is short-term, linked to the duration of the construction project. Once construction is complete, employment ends.

Failure to adapt

Part of the cause for the NUMs decline is failure to adapt to the changes both within the union and the industry. The manner in which the union mobilises, how its regional office is configured and the way it represents its members in other sectors are all inconsistent with the changing environment.

Outdated forms of communication

Membership profile of the union has changed dramatically. It has gender representation, counts white-collar workers amongst its members and has embraced young people as members. To ensure that both the youth and the women receive optimal representation, the union went further to create structures that attend to the specific needs of the two categories of workers. This is a mark of a progressive union.

The union has not fully adapted to the changes that have been brought about by its new categories of membership. This relates specifically to how the union communicates with members. The traditional methods of posters or a car driving around with a loud-speaker making announcements have been tested lately. Because of the recent onset of rivalry and tension with AMCU, putting up posters is no longer an effective way of communicating with the membership. Members of the rival union are said to remove the posters. Even in instances where posters are not removed, they are still hard to reach all members. The same difficulty applies to announcements made through roving loud-speakers.

Residential patterns of workers have changed. They are no longer all concentrated in one residential place, such as a hostel. Some reside in suburbs, far away from the traditional dwelling places of mine workers. A mobile loud-speaker is unlikely to reach them.

These challenges require new ways of communicating. A common suggestion was that the union should resort to electronic communication, such as email and social media. There is hardly a member who does not have a mobile telephone. Communicating electronically will optimise prospects of reaching as many members as possible, if not all of them.



Institutionalising roles and responsibilities

There is ambiguity over the roles of regional co-ordinators vis-à-vis regional secretaries. Co-ordinators complain that they have been given responsibilities, but without the authority to enforce them. This is dis-empowering, especially in their interaction with regional secretaries, and their general accountability for the state of the office.

Regional secretaries use the stature of their office as elected officials to over-rule co-ordinators. And these involve matters over which co-ordinators are designated accounting officers, and are generally responsible for running the office, as secretaries are not full-time at the office. Tension between the elected officials and administrators clearly has a great potential to impair the effectiveness of the regional office. Regional co-ordinators play a supporting role to secretaries. Without their support and commitment, secretaries are unlikely to fulfil their roles optimally.

Growth of membership per organiser

The number of members that organisers are assigned to cater for has grown tremendously. The ration is longer 1:1,000. The challenge is not only the number, but also the geographic area that organisers have to cover. Some members are spread out over a wider geographic space that makes frequent presence in each area a daunting challenge.

There is a need to re-demarcate areas of responsibility to organisers. The present size is too vast for organisers to service adequately.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

THE CHANGING NATURE OF THE POLITICAL ECONOMY

The research findings confirm one fundamental reality: the state of the NUM is influenced by the changing political economy both domestically and internationally. Further, internal organisational dynamics, as well as the external environment, have had varying impacts on the legitimacy, performance and success of the Union. In short, the Union exists and evolves in a given social context and time.

At the turn of the 21st century, these changes were becoming clearer and receiving more attention from critical political economy scholars across the world. Since the late 1970s, global capital has been restructuring production thereby affecting organised labour movements and impacting on geopolitics. As Chachage and Chachage wrote in 2004: ‘...internationally, the current conjuncture is one in which the labour movements in many countries are under attack. This is so because of the restructuring of production and the transformation of industrial relations. These processes have entailed the retrenchment of workers as a result of the speculative selling and buying of enterprises, the casualisation of employment, out-sourcing of some operations (given the rise of a so-called “flexible” workforce, which is temporary, part-time and “self-employed”). The latter case, for example, aims at dividing labour, rather than bringing about the growth of employment (as most of the prophets of the current system would like people to believe)’.⁵³

At the same time neo-liberalism was on the rise: ‘the financialisation of the global economy made substantial contribution to the process of globalisation under the leadership of the US. It led to large-scale speculation on global money and

53 Chachage, SC & Chachage, SLC. 2004. ‘Nyerere: Nationalism and Post-Colonial Developmentalism’. *African Sociological Review*. Vol 8, No. 2, p159-179.



foreign exchange markets...(As a consequence), this financialisation of the world economy facilitated the relocation of industrial production from the West to the global South, as well as the replacement of import substitution industrialisation in the South with export orientated industrialisation'⁵⁴, argues Terreblanche. All of this was meant to facilitate deregulation, liberalisation and privatisation as well as the resultant empowerment of multinational corporations at the expense of the workers. And so, 'the global economy was "criminalised" by the neoliberal counter-revolution, by which labour became as powerless against capital as was the case in the nineteenth century'⁵⁵.

In the context of South Africa, as Pons-Vignon and Segatti argue; 'financialisation has further reinforced the system of accumulation centred around the Minerals Energy Complex (MEC), making it even less prone than it was to invest in labour absorbing manufacturing or agriculture...The upshot is that the country has record-high levels of unemployment, hovering around 35% which, combined with rampant labour casualisation, is making the reproduction of the working class increasingly difficult'⁵⁶.

This is the general domestic and global context within which labour has to struggle and organise. The conditions of organising on the shop floor are influenced by the changing nature of global capital and the labour movement must out of necessity continually find ways to adapt. If the Union is weaker inside, the challenge of adaptation is even more daunting. Although in South Africa labour has gained a lot of ground in so far as the democratic labour relations regime is concerned; the labour movement like elsewhere in the world, has had to contend with the effects of global capital restructuring.

In addition, restructuring has also meant that the industrial sector introduces new production technologies; thereby creating a demand for different and higher levels of skill. Given the South African peculiar history of black cheap labour and the migratory system, especially in the mining sector, the introduction of new technologies has impacted on the workforce in fundamental ways. Increasingly, companies may find themselves employing more younger people with particular sets of skills, although some companies implement retraining programmes for their employees.

54 Terreblanche, S. 2012. *Lost in Transformation – South Africa's search for a new future since 1986*. Johannesburg. KMM Review Publishing, p24 & 26.

55 Ibid

56 Pons-Vignon, N & Segatti, A. 2013. 'The art of neoliberalism: accumulation, institutional change and social order since the end of apartheid'. *Review of African Political Economy*. Vol 40, No. 138, p507-518.

Even though South Africa's mining sector has not been as adept as in other countries in technological modernisation, sheer generational attrition rates have resulted in rapid changes in the demographics of the labour force in favour of younger employees. These younger employees have different memories, cultures and expectations; and their educational levels are much different from earlier generations. The Union is required to understand the changing nature of its constituency and membership, better to be able to service their changing needs and aspirations. If the Union fails to understand this dynamic, it may increasingly be rendered irrelevant.

The totality of these circumstances demands a strategy, on the part of the union, which takes into account all the factors that impact on its leadership of workers: sociological, economic, political and organisational. Needless to say, it is precisely this understanding of the multifaceted nature of its environment and societal role which historically rendered the NUM arguably the most effective union, both in the workplace and in broader society. This was a consequence of the objective circumstances in which the union operated; but also, critically, a reflection of the strategic acumen and tactical dexterity of the leadership it spawned. For the NUM to rekindle its relevance and effectiveness in the mining sector and society at large, requires self-reflection of a fundamental kind.

While the mining sector has been declining as a proportion of GDP, there is no gainsaying that it has historically defined virtually everything South African: from land distribution and tenure system, spatial settlement patterns and evolution of the political system, to the development of the labour force and skills base, the evolution of the education system and the structure of South Africa's exports and international relations. Today, taking into account direct mining, backward and forward linkages and the induced effect, the total contribution of mining to the GDP is close to 20 per cent and it accounts for about a quarter of the country's total employment and close to half of export value.⁵⁷ As such, the NUM operates in a sector which, combined with the construction industry, remains fundamental to South Africa's current socio-economic and political life – and this will remain so for many years to come. This objective reality and the subjective factors pertaining to quality of organisational structures and leadership should, by definition, place the NUM at the centre of the evolution of South Africa's socio-economic and political realities.

But this cannot be decreed. It depends on whether the union is prepared to take advantage of its historical capital, honestly interrogate its current weaknesses

⁵⁷ Netshitenzhe, J. 2010 State ownership and the NDR: debating nationalization (Umrabulo No. 33)



and decisively act to renew itself.

SOCIOLOGICAL ISSUES

Struggle credentials and the meaning of freedom

As indicated above, the new generation of employees have a different relationship with the struggle for freedom and have their own conception of self-advancement. The organisational capital of profound struggle credentials of the NUM as well as its leadership may not appeal much to the younger generation. The expressions and understanding of freedom may not merely be confined to political freedoms and the rights to organise and have a voice but also to issues of social mobility and meaningful personal material progress.

The struggle for memory against forgetting is quite an important challenge, not only for the trade union movement, but for the entire liberation movement. Going forward, the union and the liberation movement as a whole will have to find a creative way to preserve memory whilst revising strategies and tactics of recruitment and mobilisation; in order to attend to the changing needs and posture of the emergent workforce. In socialising its demographically differentiated membership, what others refer to as political education, the union has to take this reality into account. This requires dexterity in bringing to life the history of struggle, while at the same time demonstrating its relevance today and in the future.

Besides the many ways in which this can be done – with which the NUM and the rest of the progressive trade union movement are familiar – the question indeed does arise whether among the most effective of cultural renderings, from music to theatre and film, should not in fact be issuing from the NUM and the rest of the progressive trade union movement! This should aim at impacting on the workers and society at large.

Social compacting

As the workplace mechanises and the boom-bust cycles of the commodity sector strikes from time to time, the NUM should find creative ways to ensure the upskilling of workers in the value-chains, so as to cushion the workers against retrenchments and further restructuring. It should be the fulcrum of worker-advancement in terms of skills development and progression in the industry's social ladder, while at the same time advancing the interests of the mass of workers as a whole.

This can be done through an industry-wide social compact with the employers and the state. Two fundamental issues of strategic posture arise in this regard.

The first one is about the long-term trajectory of the mining sector. Quite clearly the current levels of technology, work organisation and labour-sourcing will not survive for long. The union should therefore capacitate itself to play a leading role in defining this trajectory, which will need to combine advanced technology, beneficiation (combining backward and forward linkages), and increasing use of new arrangements in terms of sourcing of labour. In this way, the union will be the 'go-to' organisation on long-term strategic matters, and it will not be reactive in advancing and protecting the interests of workers and its members in particular.

The second issue is about consistent campaigns to address the totality of workers' lives and pursuit of solutions that address the human condition in its broader meaning. Quite understandably, the issue of cash wages will always loom large in the interactions between workers and employers – and this should be central to the union's campaigns. But beyond this, and the other core matters such as safety at the workplace, the union should (beyond negotiation seasons) be seen to be actively campaigning for such rights as contained in the social and labour plans. It should be at the forefront of advancing the demand for broader inclusion, which also embraces such mechanisms as profit-sharing and employee share-ownership schemes that are properly structured, monitored and managed. Lessons from such schemes, both negative and positive, should be distilled and utilised for perfecting their wider implementation.

Career-pathing

As illustrated above, like all other arms of the liberation movement, the NUM suffers from 'sins of incumbency', with major implications for the conduct of elected leaders at all levels and democracy within the union. The 'fear of falling' from the upper rungs of the social ladder to which leaders are materially elevated (whether they be shaft stewards or national office-bearers) breeds the negative tendencies outlined in the body of this report. This cannot be eliminated merely by mouthing slogans about democracy and 'revolutionary consciousness'.

Deliberately and consciously the issue of career-pathing for incumbent elected leaders needs to be thoroughly examined. Various mechanisms need to be considered in this regard. To illustrate, these can include:

- Intensive programmes to educate and skill the elected leadership at all levels to be able to assume other (more senior) positions in the



- workplace, the union's investment arm, other industries, the public sector (bureaucracy) and the political terrain.
- Term limits for all elected positions (or at least office-bearers) starting with the shaft stewards and branch leaders to the regional and national leadership. The limits can be cascaded (e.g. from four terms at the lower levels to three terms at the highest level). This will not only eliminate the glass ceiling, but also ensure the injection of 'new blood' and organisational modernisation in line with the changing demographics of the workforce. Critically, combined with the incentive in the paragraph above, it will go a long way towards eradicating factionalism.

RELATIONS WITH POLITICAL PARTIES AND THE STATE

All over the world and throughout history, trade union movements have had to address the question of relations between political parties in office, political parties in general, as well as the state more broadly. These relations normally take into account the nature of the political economy in a given epoch, as well as the aspirations of workers.

In the context of South Africa, the NUM is part of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) which is in an informal political alliance with the African National Congress (ANC) and the South African Communist Party (SACP). By extension, and as a consequence of its own historical evolution, the NUM has developed strong political ties with the governing party and the SACP. Whereas under apartheid and in the early years of reconstruction, the informal nature of the Tripartite Alliance worked well, new conditions do occasion the necessity to review this arrangement.

The starting point in this regard is that the Tripartite Alliance is a consequence both of history and socio-political necessity. It remains relevant and critical in the context of eliminating the symbiotic relationship between class super-exploitation, racial oppression and gender discrimination – as the basic social fault-lines of South African society. However, the informal nature of the Tripartite Alliance seems outdated in the context of political freedom and the sins of incumbency afflicting the liberation movement as a whole. For instance, as the research findings indicate, union leaders sometimes conduct themselves to be 'noticed' by the ANC as they seek career futures in politics. Without any mechanism of formal regulation, and because political positions are the singular avenue for social mobility and general employment, all manner of schemes and

conduct play themselves out to cosy up to the ANC and individual leaders; which effectively amounts to political capture and loss of autonomy.

Few options exist in terms of moving from an informal to a formal political pact. This is proceeding from the assumption that the union seeks to maintain its autonomy while building and strengthening alliances – both in a manner that enhances its legitimacy among the union’s rank file and the public at large. The following options are suggested based on international experience:

- Except for Brazil, most left parties have had formal relationships with the trade union movement. This has included such elements as: affiliation by the trade unions, rights and duties attached to such affiliation including subscriptions and representation in various leadership and other structures, and agreement on policies to be pursued in government. However, in all instances, the allies have avoided detailed co-determination on operational matters of government. Further, even in instances where such co-operation has been successful, it has been riven by some level of tension.

This option may see NUM motivating for COSATU to enter into a formal tripartite alliance pact with the ANC based on a common minimum platform. It involves formal recognition and formal participation of workers in broad policy-making processes of the ANC and in setting out priorities for transformation. This would be a relatively permanent arrangement.

- Pacts or accords among left allies have often been instruments to deal with particular economic problems and crises, and/or to pursue particular national visions. These have encompassed rights and obligations of each partner and have included detailed issues on, for instance, income policy, inflation and so on. This would constitute the foundation for policy action during a particular phase of transformation. The Australian Labour Accord of the 1980s is one good example of this.

This option may see NUM motivating for COSATU to pursue a pact for the current phase of transition, without formal recognition and formal participation of COSATU in the policy-making process of the ANC. The status quo in terms of the Tripartite Alliance would be retained; but there would be a clear programme of action to attain specific objectives.

- National social accords have also been used to deal with national difficulties or to pursue particular national objectives. As in Ireland, such



accords, which include business and other sectors, have been critical to the reconstruction of such societies.

This option may see NUM motivating for COSATU to mobilise for unity of workers across federations to attain particular objectives such as those in the National Development Plan. This would also entail creative engagement with the business sector in a corporatist arrangement. This may be with or without any of the two options outlined above.

Combined with the overarching generic agreements, there would also be a clear and express understanding of the opportunities that political incumbency would offer the union leaders, as an element, and not the totality, of their career options. As argued above, informality and the politics of a 'wink' do not promote the interests of workers – rather they encourage the opposite, as individual union leaders scurry to attain favours, and as the union movement becomes embroiled in the factional politics of the political incumbents.

In this context, it is the considered view of the authors of this report that the Tripartite Alliance should move towards a formal relationship. If necessary, the other options could be utilised as stepping stone(s) towards that option.

ORGANISATIONAL RENEWAL AND MODERNISATION

Tactic of broad fronts

At industry level, instead of encouraging rivalry and unhealthy competition, the NUM should strongly consider the tactic of organising broad fronts of workers. Such a tactic does not diminish but in fact enhances the role and profile of an advanced organisation in its struggles, campaigns, organisation and mobilisation. Proceeding from this perspective, a broad front of workers in mining and construction would afford the NUM the platform to reach out to and gain the trust of the mass of workers located in the other formations. Through persuasion, proactive and exemplary leadership, strategic acumen and dogged pursuit of workers' interests, the NUM would steadily assume the status of being the 'union of unions', the 'go-to' organisation to attain workers' immediate and long-term interests. The tactic of broad fronts would allow for a minimum and common platform to emerge, and frustrate the attempts of some employers to divide-and-rule.

It should be underlined that the tactic of broad fronts does not necessarily serve the interests of an organisation under all conditions and circumstances. It is in conjunctures such as the one currently faced by the NUM – declining membership, insurgency and populist tactics by an emergent rival, and restricted opportunities for organisation and mobilisation – that an organisation advanced in ideas but weak in organisational reach is able to spread its wings and prove its mettle.

This may result in the NUM regaining its status as the unquestionable representative of the mass of the workers. But the possibility should not be ruled out altogether that a new, bigger and more effective union could emerge from such efforts, informed and inspired by the NUM's basic principles.

Structure of the union and its operations

There is nothing to indicate that the union is not properly structured in terms of its organisational systems and hierarchy. The three levels seem correctly aligned to the spread of the union's membership and how an organisation should attend to its members' needs.

However, organisers are not coping with the size of membership they are delegated to service. This affects the accessibility of the union to members, and the extent to which the regional leadership is able assist branches. The number of members per organiser, together with the spread of the geographical area, should be reconsidered.

The general inactivity of branches has impaired the activities of the organisation. Branches hardly convene meetings. This has had an adverse effect on the sub-committees, which are linked to the branch. As a result, there is a general absence of branch leaders, as and when they are needed by members. The Union should consider a Branch Revitalisation Programme.

Union employees feel undervalued. Their sense of worth and professionalism is not validated. This has a potential to undermine their morale. The Union should continue to professionalise its own work spaces.

Operationally, the Union is perceived as a union of mineworkers only. This creates tension between the various sectors the union organises. The Union should project, in principle and in deed, its commitment to serve and service all sectors. In this regard, the principle of quotas in leadership positions, informed by strength of membership, needs to be considered.



There is operational tension between co-ordinators and regional secretaries. Secretaries assert their political authority, but co-ordinators insist that they manage the regional office, a role that is authorised by the constitution. But, the constitution is also fuzzy on the exact powers of managers to ensure that the regional secretaries account for all that happens at the regional office. The roles of the Regional Secretary and the Regional Coordinator should be expressly clarified.

Electoral reform

The outdated nature of the electoral system in NUM is such that it fails to take into account that, increasingly, the era of ‘big-name men or women’ who are easily known and therefore household names is receding. People are known by rumour and are easily misrepresented by factions and lobbyists who engage in negative campaigning and related activities or by sheer lack of knowledge of the other.

Delegates hardly know nominees from other regions. They have no choice but to believe the informal briefs of caucuses and lobbyists. They are disempowered to make their own judgments. Branches themselves cannot make better informed nomination choices in many instances, based on this deficiency and failure to move with time. The union is marking time when it comes to internal electoral processes and democracy.

One of the potential workable solutions is to formalise primaries or campaign platforms, with clear guidelines, incentives as well as sanctions for deviant behaviour by nominees or candidates, delegates, members and structures of the organisation.

The union should set up a National Electoral Reform Commission to look at enhancing internal democracy, strengthen worker control and introduce a new modern electoral process to elect leadership. In this way, and combined with the other recommendations, the negative aspects of factionalism and the culture of slates may be drastically minimised.

Organising according to trades?

The 2012 Marikana Strike can be used to draw a number of lessons regarding effective organisation. For instance, it has been observed that the ‘bunching up’ of trades in the union sometimes confuses the negotiation parameters in relation to the totality of the membership. When it comes to salary negotiations, for example, the leadership presents needs that are based on grades without

necessarily focusing on particular trades. Such an approach would ensure that, beyond considerations of job grading, the strategic position that a specific trade occupies in the production process, such as rock drill operators, is fully taken into account.

The Union should consider reviewing its organising strategy in relation to the various categories of workers, whilst not undermining worker unity and solidarity. A nuanced strategy that considers the concerns, conditions and demands of a particular category of workers could help the union to provide a focused and detailed service to its membership. In other words, the application of the principle of the general and the particular may strengthen shaft-level organisation.

Communications

Meetings are not held for their own sake. Meetings are platforms of communication, reflection, accountability, decision-making, feedback, and so on. Evidently, members have varying experiences about the purpose of meetings, their success and their regularity.

Meetings and visibility should be seen as part of the bigger communication machinery in the union. The t-shirt issue may appear too small an issue to invest in; however the experience of most of the members interviewed rebuts that idea.

The ordinary members of the union accept responsibilities such as attending meetings on condition that the union performs and delivers on its mandate and promises. In other words, inherent in the mobilisation strategy of the union should be high quality servicing of members.

Critically, the Union should grab the opportunity presented by the evolution of technology and its utility for the youth in particular. It needs constantly to update its outreach methods to meet the expectations of the Information Age and the increasing numbers of youth who depend on a variety of technological platforms and devices, including Facebook and Twitter, to communicate.

Some members identify opportunities in the media that the union has failed to exploit to the optimum. Understandably, the NUM has taken a public image knock during the protracted Platinum Belt Strike of 2012 and, coupled with this, was the heightened offensive from rival unions labelling it as a sweetheart union. These two factors also contributed to NUM taking a dive in terms of media presence and favourability.



The Union should review its media and outreach strategies, and anchor its approach on the principles outlined in these recommendations, combining a ‘fighting’ posture on bread and butter issues and long-term strategic thinking. Care should be exercised in striking a balance between these dual responsibilities.

‘All animals are equal’

Rules are not strictly applied; and members observe that leaders do not feel obliged to follow the rules of the organisation. As a consequence, these leaders do not fulfil their duties; and the institutional integrity of the organisation is undermined. There should be deliberate effort to apply rules without fear, favour or prejudice.

Membership administration

The Union should consider centralising the entire membership system including the administration of membership cards. This can be done through an IT solution. This will help the Union to be more efficient in delivery of services to members because the membership database will be interactive, electronic and include all updatable profiles of members across the country. An added benefit would be the fact that an electronic membership system is difficult to manipulate – for example – for conference purposes. Further, such a system would lend itself to easier communication using IT platforms.

Values and soft issues: The heart and soul of the union

In the fieldwork, members also raised general and cross-cutting issues of principle, values, character, organisational culture and so on. At best these issues can be understood as the best of attributes that members and leaders alike would like to see the union project internally and publicly.

Some of the sentiments, which relate to intangible and seemingly innocuous concerns, do have an important bearing on the legitimacy of the leadership and the union as a whole. Among these, and for illustrative purposes, the following observations deserve noting:

- ‘Members first, members tomorrow and members always...worker control.’
- ‘... there are three certain things which we do not do at the company level: fighting, drinking on the job, swearing at someone, and sexual harassment’
- ‘The commitment of the leadership’ and the need to ‘work together as a collective.’

- ‘As shop stewards let us avoid destructive ways, let us stop stealing, let us stop using drugs, let us stop using dagga, let us stop drinking at work. The members should look up to us.’

CONCLUSION

This report and the accompanying recommendations are based on the fieldwork conducted among members and leaders of the NUM. While drawing from the direct observations in the focus groups and interviews, an attempt has been made to situate these comments within the broader conjuncture in which the National Union of Mineworkers is operating. At the core of this conjuncture is the state of sectors (mining and construction) which currently evince elements of decline but which in reality have the potential to become sunrise industries well into the future. Their critical role in South Africa’s economic development and broader polity cannot be underestimated. By dint of this objective reality, unions operating in these sectors have an important role to play in the evolution of South African society.

The NUM in particular has the historical capital, the corps of cadres and the strategic outlook to play a leadership role in the sector. However, a variety of circumstances – both objective and subjective – have conspired to undermine this. Deriving from both the field work and the conjunctural analysis, the conclusion of this study is that the union can renew itself and reclaim its preeminent position in the industry and in broader society. This will however require tough decisions and difficult choices at a strategic level and in relation to organisational imperatives.

To the extent that, historically, the National Union of Mineworkers has been a trailblazer in more ways than one, it has the potential to initiate corrective action the impact of which will be felt beyond the union well into the nooks and crannies of the liberation movement as a whole.



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