

COSATU

women: organise!

On union membership

* There are no exact numbers, only rough figures. In Actwusa 50 %, CWIU 12 %, NUMSA 10%, SADWU 90 % and FAWU 50 % of membership are women

On participation in campaigns

* Women have become increasingly involved in shopfloor campaigns. The most important has been the battle for parental rights. There is no law which grants maternity rights. But unions have made progress in winning maternity leave with jobs guaranteed back. Most of these agreements have been won at plant level e.g. in the chemical and food industry. Others e.g. in the commercial and catering sector, have been won through national bargaining. Other issues fought on the shopfloor have been: equal pay, scrapping of women's jobs and sexual harassment.

On participation in structures

* Within COSATU there are no formal women's structures. The issue of women structures will be debated at COSATU's 1989 Congress. COSATU's first Women's

COSATU has a strong resolution on the struggle of women workers. But actions speak louder than words and there has been little real progress on women worker issues in COSATU. Three COSATU women comrades attended a women's seminar in Ghana last year to discuss the situation of women in Africa. Each African country gave an update on the women's struggle. These comments are from the report given by our comrades. Let us use the information to organise and mobilise a louder women's voice in all COSATU structures.

Conference in April 1988 decided that Local Women's Forums be set up. There has been little progress in setting up Women Forums. Affiliate unions were also encouraged to set up structures. A number of unions have formal resolutions on women e.g. CWIU, NUMSA and TGWU.

NUMSA has set up Local Women's Committees which elect representatives to regional structures. In CWIU, each branch has elected a co-ordinator for women's issues. She is expected to arrange meetings and seminars. The possibility

of a national co-ordinator is being discussed.

In the mining industry there are about 16 000 women working in admin, hospitals, cleaning etc. In NUM there are no formal women's structures, but women are encouraged to take leadership positions at shaft level. For the past 2 years local branches and regions have been meeting in caucuses which also involve wives of mineworkers. In FAWU there are no formal structures. Some regions have set up Women's Forums in the Locals.*

On leadership of unions

* There are very few women in national leadership positions. In some unions there are 1 or 2 women on the NEC. In other unions, as well as in COSATU, there are no women National Office Bearers.*

On programmes

* The last conference took some good resolutions. But there is really no overall programmes within COSATU. Union programmes seem to focus on 2 key areas. Firstly: practical issues such as maternity, child care, sexual harassment and equal pay. Secondly: deepening understanding of trade union work; encouraging participation and creating structures; relationship with progressive women's structures such as Feddraw, NOW, UWCO; and women in other countries.*

On the reasons why women are not so active

* Men don't help at home, so women have no time. Women are too busy with the children or housework. Other men object to their women partners being involved. Sometimes men don't support women shop stewards because they don't have confidence in them. Many times women themselves lack self-confidence. Women's problems are not discussed in organisations.*



Build Women's Forums!