

LABOUR RESEARCH
SERVICE

Annual Report

2019

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The Chairperson's Report

Nyaniso Siyana, NUMSA, Chair



The work of the Labour Research Service is to provide research, support and learning for trade union development. I know of no other labour support organisation in South Africa that is membership-based. I know of no other labour support organisation that has its member unions elect the board of directors at an annual general meeting. We should be proud of this.

List of member trade unions:

Name	Acronym	Union Membership in 2019
Chemical, Energy, Paper, Printing, Wood and Allied Workers Union	CEPPWAWU	67 960
Democratic Nursing Organisation of South Africa	DENOSA	80 000
Food and Allied Workers Union	FAWU	127 000
Hospital Personnel Trade Union of South Africa	HOSPERSA	68 000
Independent Municipality and Allied Trade Union	IMATU	72 246
Metal Electrical Workers Union of South Africa	MEWUSA	17 000
National Education, Health and Allied Workers Union	NEHAWU	276,508
National Union of Mineworkers	NUM	270 649
National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa	NUMSA	338 000
South African Commercial Catering and Allied Workers Union	SACCAWU	177 000
South African Domestic Service and Allied Workers Union	SADSAWU	7,200
South African Democratic Teachers Union	SADTU	253 039
South African Municipal Workers Union	SAMWU	161 490

South African Transport and Allied Workers Union	SATAWU	101 458
Transport Omnibus Workers Union	TOWU	1 600
Totals	15 Unions	2 123 389

Following the 2019 annual general meeting, the LRS board consisted of six directors and the executive director as an ex officio member.

Monwabisi Gwebityala	FAWU
Trenton Elsley	LRS
Phumzile Mvovo	NUM
Nyaniso Siyana	NUMSA
Thabo Raserope	NEHAWU
Funeka Klaas	SACCAWU
Zandile Phakati	SATAWU

Allow me to remind us all of our approach to representivity on the LRS board of directors.

As far as possible, Directors as a team should be cross-representative of the member organisations of LRS – different federations, different sectors (or at least some private sector, some public sector) and different size unions. As far as possible, the Board as a whole should have a gender balance. The LRS also tries to keep a balance between elected worker leaders and officials of trade unions on the board of directors. These values, gender equality, participation, representation and democracy are timeless.

The LRS was faced with significant funding challenges in 2019 and the organisation and its board were faced with tough decisions. I will take this opportunity to commend the unity of purpose of the board and staff. Their collective ability to navigate the LRS through these difficult moments is a good measure of success and this is why the LRS continues to serve the movement after more than thirty years.

The board of directors of the LRS are not remunerated for their contribution. I wish to thank the board for their excellent service to the organisation in providing an oversight role and grounding the organisation in service to the trade union movement.

I thank the many friends of the LRS within trade unions, for their continued dedication to the cause of workers and for ensuring that this labour support organisation, one of very few in South Africa, is able to make a contribution to the trade union movement now and in the time to come.

Nyaniso Siyana (NUMSA)

Chairperson

Executive Director's Message

Trenton Elsley, Executive Director



In the time between the period under review in this annual report and the time when that report is presented to our annual general meeting, the World Health Organisation declared Covid-19 a global pandemic. As of the 1st of March 2020, the global and national context was dramatically altered in a very short space of time.

South Africa went into a strict lockdown at midnight on the 26th of March 2020, a decision that built on global consensus at that time of what it takes to slow the rate of infection of Covid-19 in the population. The economics of the national lockdown are straight forward. An enormous amount of productive economic activity was halted. The effect on the economy has been enormous. In the absence of an intervention to assist the poorest households, a respectable source estimated a 7% increase in the rate of extreme poverty¹ for all households to 21% and as much as a 16% increase for households with an informal worker to 26%.² It is the poor that have been the hardest hit.

There has been much controversy worldwide around Covid-19 and the relative merits of the different strategies used to respond to the pandemic. The analysis of what constitutes the best course of action in response to a pandemic such as this will continue well after the virus is brought under control in the human population. It is a complex question and one which I suspect invites us to frame the problem differently to how we currently do. This possibility is only just beginning to emerge. Covid-19 has cut through many divisions, but also aggravated existing divisions in society.

The results of the CRAM survey³ provide some of the earliest insights into the effects of the pandemic and the associated lockdown on the welfare of households.

“Women have been more severely affected than men in the early phase of the crisis in South Africa, namely the ‘hard’ lockdown period. Net job losses between February and April 2020 were higher for women than for men, with women accounting for two-thirds of the total net job losses. Among those who remained in employment, there was also a bigger fall in

¹ The percentage of individuals with per person household income less than R580 per month

² <https://theconversation.com/south-africa-can-and-should-top-up-child-support-grants-to-avoid-a-humanitarian-crisis-135222>

³ The National Income Dynamics Study – Coronavirus Rapid Mobile Survey (NIDS-CRAM) is a nationally-representative panel survey of 7000 South African individuals. Each person is phoned monthly and asked a range of questions on their income and employment, their household welfare, receipt of grants, and about their knowledge and behaviour related to COVID-19.

average hours worked per week for women than for men. Compounding these disproportionate employment losses were disproportionate increases in unpaid childcare as a result of the lockdown and school closures.”⁴

“We observe a 40% net decline in active employment compared to pre-lockdown.

Approximately half of this decline is comprised of job terminations as opposed to temporary lay-offs or paid leave, suggesting that labour market impacts are likely to be persistent.

Women, manual workers and those at the bottom half of the income distribution have suffered disproportionately higher rates of job loss.

We estimate that 15-30% of job losers fall into poverty, which corresponds to approximately 1 million individuals. Social protection efforts have provided inadequate coverage to substantially mitigate this poverty impact, with only one in five temporarily unemployed workers receiving the relief designed for them, while other job-losers must rely on the existing social grant system. About one in three job losers had no social protection at all.”⁵

“... social grants are an important source of income relief for individuals in low-income households. We show that these individuals have been disproportionately burdened by adverse labour market effects induced by the lockdown with respect to employment loss, the likelihood of having a paid job to return to, and reductions in working hours and earnings. We show that grants substantially increase the incomes of poor households in relative terms and, through fiscal incidence analysis, we show that the pandemic-induced additional government spending on grants have been pro-poor, especially that on the Child Support Grant.”⁶

This is some of the first evidence, rather than opinion, of the socio-economic effects of the pandemic and lockdown on households in South Africa.

What then are the insights that trade unions can take from the pandemic so far? What are we learning about the ability of trade unions to organise and bargain when traditional face to face interactions are not possible?

Here are some take-aways from the experiences of trade unionists that we work with, a survey of representatives of global union federations in Africa and other research on the pandemic.⁷

⁴ Casale, D. & Posel, D. (2020) Gender & the early effects of the COVID-19 crisis in the paid & unpaid economies in South Africa.

⁵ Jain, R., Budlender, J., Zizzamia, R., & Bassier, I. (2020) The labour market and poverty impacts of COVID-19 in South Africa.

⁶ Köhler, T. & Bhorat, H. (2020) COVID-19, social protection, and the labour market in South Africa: Are social grants being targeted at the most vulnerable?

⁷ S Patel, 2020, Emergency Online Solutions to the Covid-19 Pandemic for African Trade Unions: A report based on interviews with five Africa GUF General Secretaries, International Federation of Workers' Education Associations and Friedrich Ebert Stiftung Trade Union Competency Centre, available at <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/festucc/16239.pdf>

The value of work

1. The idea of 'essential services' has been redefined to include not just health practitioners, but also workers in the production of food and other basic necessities, to include frontline retail workers, and workers in logistics and distribution. Essential services include information and communications technology. This might present an opportunity to 'revalue' work that has been devalued and workers that have been exploited in the past.

The reorganisation of employment relationships

2. The pandemic made it clear that informal economic activity is vital to the livelihoods of many in South Africa. The trade union movement needs to accept and to work with the informal sector. Trade unions are already grappling with the informalisation of employment relationships and the fragmenting of their bargaining units. This is a starting point for developing a fresh understanding of how work is organised, what it means for employment relationships and how to organise those in more precarious forms of employment.

The ability of trade unions to communicate and organise in new ways

3. Trade unions themselves have been in lockdown. Communication at all levels, from the shop floor to national offices and the structures in between was severely affected. In some instances, communication stopped altogether. It is time to repair those lines of communication and to reflect on what strategies we have to keep communication open, even under extreme circumstances such as lockdown.
4. There has been an uneven uptake of online communication tools by the trade union movement in Africa. There is an opportunity to build the skills required to use information and communications for bargaining and organising.
5. The cost of communicating is high for role players in many national settings in Africa, specifically the cost of mobile data. There is an opportunity to build a broad alliance for universal access to information and communications technology and services.
6. The majority of workers are only able to access online information, resources and activities through a mobile phone. We must take this into account when developing and implementing communications strategies.
7. While there are a number of useful online communication platforms, WhatsApp appears to be the medium of choice for many trade unionists, especially as you move towards worker leaders at the local level.
8. Technology does not implement itself. The role of setting up, administering and facilitating each instance of online communications is important. Similarly, the culture of use and the ability to use online platforms like Zoom must be taught and not assumed.
9. The information needed to further develop trade union communication strategies is not always in place. There is an opportunity to consolidate and systematise trade union contact information at the different levels (regional, national and local). This would enable a range of communication strategies.

10. The trade union movement faces heightened financial pressures at all levels.
11. The pandemic has forced many governments to provide financial relief to households and companies. Similarly, the pandemic requires that we provide the trade union movement in Africa with the necessary resources to meet the challenge.

Collective bargaining

12. As the pandemic unfolds, there is a sense that bargaining has become almost continuous, rather than being confined to traditional cycles of negotiation. Trade union negotiators will require a different kind of support in this situation.
13. In the aftermath of the lockdown, it is likely that a shift to working from home will intensify. This will bring with it new bargaining issues (such as time management and communication costs). It may also mark the beginning of the externalisation of a new range of jobs by companies. Negotiators must be alert to employer efforts to push this through collective bargaining.
14. The lockdown made it very difficult for trade unions to maintain connections with workers. For some workers, the union has not been visible these past months. Trade unions need to revive communications with workers across their sectors through whatever channels are available.
15. Lay-offs and retrenchments will place a further strain on trade union representivity in some workplaces. Now is the time to focus on recognition agreements and to support the efforts of worker leaders and officials to rebuild representivity.
16. Health and safety in the workplace is non-negotiable. This pandemic provided further evidence that we cannot rely on employers to implement what is required. Trade unions have a central role to play in promoting health and safety in the workplace.
17. There is an opportunity to popularise agreements that have already been struck in response to the health effects and the economic effects of the pandemic.
18. An accessible online library of agreements can be used to build pressure employers to respond to the pandemic. These agreements provide a precedent for responding, create peer pressure on companies to respond and serve as reference points for defining the kind of responses we want to see in different settings.

Despite the profound shifts of 2020, we believe that the orientation of the LRS in 2019 remains relevant and that it was geared to develop the knowledge and competencies required by the trade union movement to address the challenges of the day.

Trenton Elsley

Executive Director

Our organisation

The work of the Labour Research Service centres on research, support and learning for trade union development.

- Collective Bargaining and Organising
- Building cultures of gender equality in the workplace and in the union
- Responding to gender-based violence
- Transforming Corporate Governance
- Online resources for trade union development
- Building alliances for positive social change
- Cultivating a community of activism

The Labour Research Service measures its influence by way of three main indicators:

1. Our target groups have increased knowledge of their rights.
2. Our target groups have an increased capacity to mobilise to claim those rights.
3. Our target groups have increased their influence in their own context

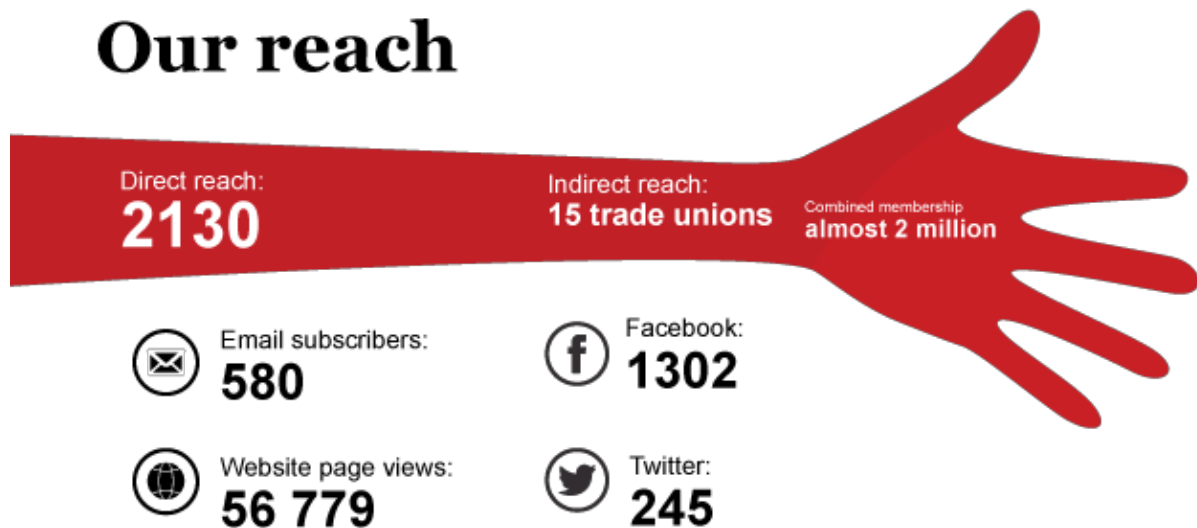
Snapshot of 2019

Here are some of the highlights across our programme work in 2019.

- The participants in the Letsema collective impact initiative in the Vaal have a better understanding of open space technology as a way of working with large groups.
- Teachers unions in South Africa, Zambia, Ethiopia, Uganda, The Gambia, Sierra Leone and Ghana reflected on their knowledge of school-related gender-based violence in writing for a publication.
- We experimented with an online course on gender and trade unions through a partnership with the International Federation of Workers' Education Associations Online Learning Academy.
- The Labour Research Service is partnering with Manchester University in the United Kingdom towards a broader research project looking at replicating the collective impact Letsema process in other communities in South Africa.
- Survivors of gender-based violence are supported and linked to relevant organisations for critical services.

- The Labour Research Service partnered with Gender at Work to put out a podcast with unique downloads of 7,256. The podcast explored building cultures of equality, justice and peace from our experiments in subverting patriarchal cultures from within.
- We worked with UNI Global union to help shop stewards and union officials in regional networks of African trade unions develop their financial literacy.
- UNI Global union affiliates are able to engage large multinational retail companies in a more coordinated way and push for better conditions of work in the African countries in which they operate.
- Trade unions in the retail sector in sub-Saharan Africa have new knowledge of global value chains and reflected on the implications of value chains for collective bargaining and organising.
- Trade union affiliates of the Building and Woodworkers International in the construction sector in Africa had an opportunity to renew their shop floor approaches to organising and representing workers in multinational companies.
- We are supporting domestic workers in their campaign for inclusion in the Compensation for Occupational Injuries and Diseases Act.

Trade unions in South Africa and elsewhere have supporting resources for collective bargaining. There is growing access to Labour Research Service online resources.



Labour Research Service Publications, 2019

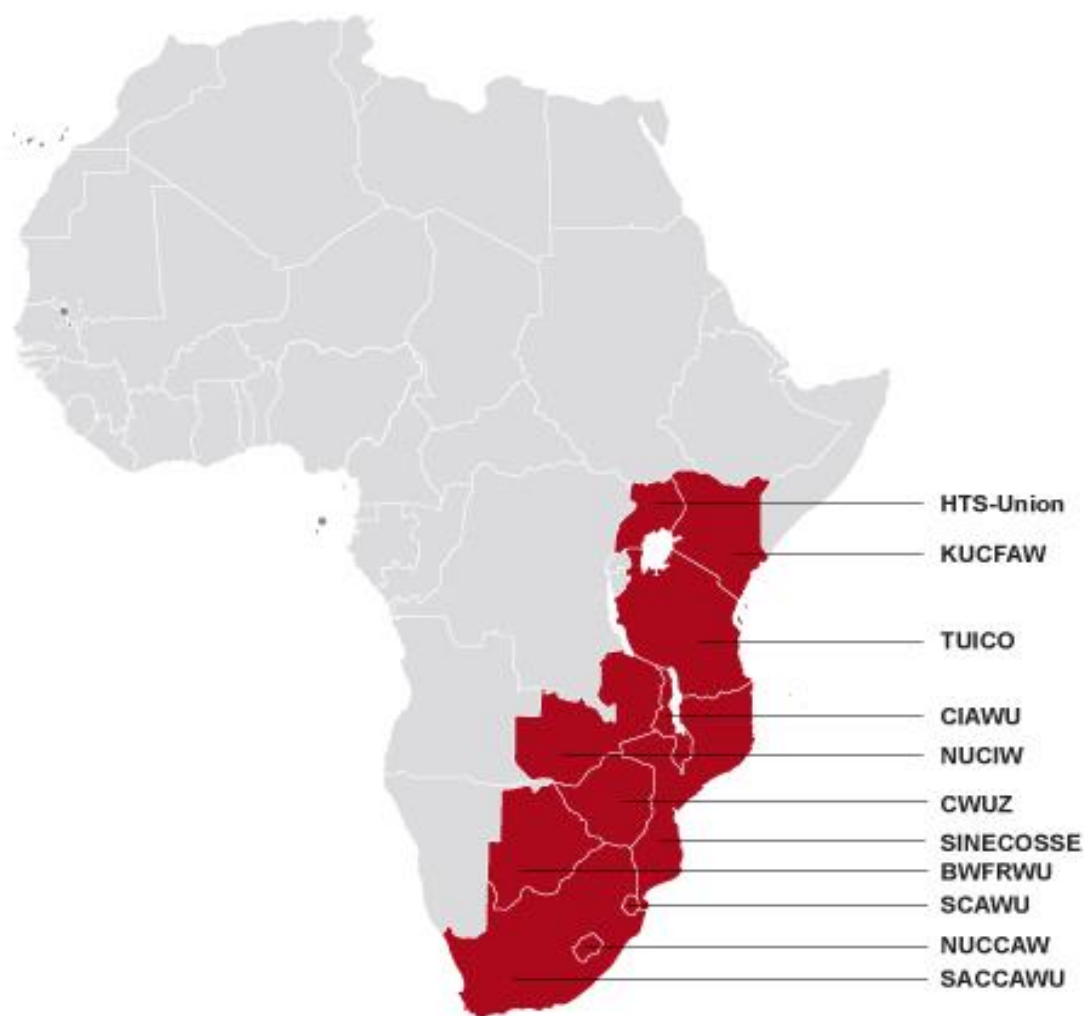
Trade unions in the retail sector in Africa can map workers in value chains and have reflected on the implications of value chains for bargaining and organising.





A workshop with Kenya Union of Commercial Food & Allied Workers, Nairobi, 2019

- A group of community care workers participated in International Labour Organisation training and lobbied for improved conditions of work. The agreement on the standard of remuneration of Community Health Workers was extended in 2019.
- Conditions of work for care workers at the Meadowlands Clinic in Gauteng Province improved by shifting their relationship with their own organisation and the community which they serve.
- We have seen the development of policies and collective bargaining agreements that better reflect needs of women, people living with disability, youth, migrants and LGBTI workers.
- Our work on value chains around the biggest retailers in Africa has influenced the way unions in 10 countries in Africa think about the workplace and the strategies they traditionally use to organise and bargain.



- We have seen an increase in requests to participate in trade union, government and civil society spaces.
- We know that the Labour Research Service produces unique support resources for trade unions in collective bargaining in South Africa. In some instances, officials and shop stewards are sharing draft agreements with the Labour Research Service for consultations before signing the agreements.
- We are developing our understanding of women's leadership and gender equality issues through networking and collaborations with academic and research institutions.
- We ran a peer learning process to draw out experiences and insights that are shaping an LRS resource for trade unionists and other activities to organise and represent worker interests in a changed and changing world of work.
- Teachers unions in South Africa, Zambia, Ethiopia, Uganda, The Gambia, Sierra Leone and Ghana renewed their policy and approach to school-related gender-based violence.



George Mthethwa, Labour Research Service, facilitates a discussion with worker representatives in one of the peer learning workshops in 2019.

- Collective bargaining agreements reflect the needs of women and men and learners. The National Union of Mineworkers is drafting a pregnancy policy with women mine workers participating in the drafting.
- On the 1st of January 2019, the National Minimum Wage Act came into effect in South Africa. Our Executive Director was nominated by a trade union federation and appointed by the Minister of Labour as a commissioner to the National Minimum Wage Commission, representing the interests of organised labour. Although the national minimum wage is set far lower than a living wage, it is a meaningful development that raises the floor for many in South Africa's ultra-low wage economy.
- Trade union activists know more about the human rights of intersex athletes and workers and challenging of discriminatory policy of the IAAFA.
- Fedusa's social justice committee is reviewing childcare policy in the workplace.
- We support the Wits University Transformation Office in its efforts to transform gender equity at the university.
- Shop stewards and union officials from 10 countries in Africa have renewed their strategies for bargaining and organizing by exploring where they are situated in value chains. There is a growing appreciation of more inclusive approaches that counter the fragmentation of the workplace in the value chain.

The year ahead

While 2020 appears to have presented us all with a new set of challenges, a closer inspection suggests many of these challenges are familiar to us already. The Covid-19 pandemic has emphasized and amplified the challenges that the trade union movement is continuously confronting. Chief among them are the ongoing informalisation of work, the precariousness that comes with this and the challenges of organising and representing workers under these conditions. The broad focus of the work of the LRS remains to equip the trade union movement to respond to this central challenge.

The future is a mix of the old and the new and so the LRS will continue with work that remains relevant, while making an effort to extend our support to worker leaders and trade union activists who find themselves in workplaces that look different to the traditional workplace and who are dealing with a new generation of workers.

The LRS will publish a resource for negotiators in 2020 that takes these shifts into account and aims to support the new negotiator, attempting to strike a new bargain for a new collective.

There was a further tightening of the international donor environment in 2019 and it is likely that this trend will continue. The LRS faces tough conditions in 2020 and is pursuing several sustainability strategies.

The initiative by the National Skills Fund (NSF) with the Department of Higher Education (DHET) to fund worker education was a welcome development and we entered into an agreement with them in 2018. There are very few organisational resources for trade unions in South Africa and we urge our member trade unions to lobby the NSF and DHET to consolidate this support for worker education in our democracy.

We are opening up and developing new thematic areas of work. We are actively developing our understanding and ability to talk to trade unions about the future of work by developing research and intellectual resources on the future of work in the retail sector and the gig economy in Africa.

We will build on work we did with IndustriALL global union on a Just Transition for the energy sector in Africa as part of contributing to the trade union understanding of environmental issues and the possibilities for action.

This Africa Continental Free Trade Agreement (ACFTA) has the potential to shape trade and development on the continent in profound ways. It is vital that the trade union movement in Africa understands the implications of the ACFTA and that it is in a position to influence the development of the ACFTA over time. We will partner with the ITUC Africa to explore the implications of the newly ratified Africa Continental Free Trade Agreement (ACFTA) for the trade union movement.

And finally, we plan to take our online resources for trade unions to the next level. Our aim is to allow for the widest possible access to information and resources that help trade union activists do their work, whether it be research, spaces for learning or communication tools.

In Pictures

LRS workshops and meetings in 2019



2019 Annual General Meeting

