

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The Human Immunodeficiency Virus/ Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (HIV/AIDS) scourge in Southern Africa and in the world at large has left researchers and scientists with more questions than answers as to where the virus came from and how it can be eradicated. So far no cure has been found and as millions die, the only hope the world has is to find ways of reducing the rate of infection. As assumptions of who could be responsible for the scourge raged, some population groups were blamed, among them gay men, commercial sex workers and truck drivers. Studies done in Southern Africa (for example, Mwikisa, 2003) blamed truck drivers. This paper examines the role of trade unions in the fight against HIV/AIDS in the trucking industry.

Trade unions are said to be the backbone of most employer - employee relationships. In most cases they offer the lifeline that employees need when facing retrenchments or when they have to negotiate increases. Unions have always been viewed as either institutions of collective bargaining or as political movements, as Freeman and Medoff (1984), Hyman (1975) and Webster (1994) argue for example. Unions provide a platform for workers to voice their concerns and they also serve as a unifying force among the workers. They enable workers to stand together and negotiate for better wages and if that fails, as a union the workers can mobilise and go on strike.

Using the South African Transport and Allied Workers Union (SATAWU), as a case study, this research purposed to establish whether trade unions have another role, a welfare role. To achieve this, the research investigated the role played by the union in the fight against the spread of HIV/AIDS (Human Immunodeficiency Virus/ Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) particularly among truck drivers or truckers as they will be referred to in the study. It will therefore use the union SATAWU as a basis of establishing what unions are doing in this regard.

1.1 Aim and rationale of the study

The aim of the study was to establish whether trade unions, particularly SATAWU, do have another role, a welfare role especially in the face of HIV/AIDS which research claims is high among truck drivers (Fleetwatch, 2005). In order to achieve its aim, the study also attempted to determine the following: Firstly, whether or not SATAWU played a role in the fight against HIV/AIDS, in particular whether there were any measures taken by the union to ensure that their members were well informed about HIV/AIDS. Secondly, the study endeavoured to establish whether SATAWU had existing or future plans, policies and programmes targeted at its members in the trucking industry regarding HIV/AIDS. The study further intended to determine if there were any measures taken by SATAWU to ensure that their members knew what to do to avoid being infected with the virus. It also intended to find out if the union had any measures of ensuring that their infected members lived positively with the virus and had access to medication through the help of organisations like the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC). Finally the study intended to establish whether there were any forms of support provided by SATAWU to a family in the event of a member's death and if there was any kind of support offered the members and their families in the face of HIV/AIDS. This would indicate the extent to which SATAWU played a role in the fight against the AIDS pandemic.

Existing studies (Tabo, 1992; Marck, 1999; Mupemba, 1999) allude to truck drivers as being instrumental in the spread of HIV/AIDS mainly in the rural areas of the Southern African region. This they claim is due to the fact that truck routes pass through areas particularly struck by extreme poverty and a lack of employment opportunities, leading to women in those areas being sexually involved with truckers in order to make money. This is also aggravated by the mobile nature of the trucker's work, the fact that most of these men spend most of their time away from their families (Jackson, 2002; Tabo, 1992). The study therefore purposed to answer the question: *Does SATAWU run any support*

programmes for members and their families in the face of HIV/AIDS? If so, what are the implications of these programmes or lack thereof for understanding the role of trade unions?

In answering the question, the study explored measures taken by the unions and the road freight industry to address the question of HIV/AIDS. It intended to establish whether there were measures taken to determine the rate and state of infection among the truckers. The study also sought to establish whether there were any preventative measures taken by the union to ensure their members' safety regarding HIV infection and if there were any home-based care provisions made for members who are already sick. Home-based care in this case would include ensuring that the sick trucker has someone taking care of him, and that he has access to medical care and caring and providing for the driver's family after his death.

Answers to these questions helped in broadening the researcher's understanding of the gains, and difficulties facing unions in playing a welfare role in addition to the political and economic roles. In other words, it helped to establish the way in which the boundaries between public policy (socio-economic, political) and the private sphere (family, illness, and sexuality) can be overcome. The challenges that this task presents, and how traditional roles and distinctions can be reconciled, played a vital role in understanding certain behavioural patterns especially among truckers.

1.2 The trucking industry

According to the Rail Road Association, the trucking industry is one of the largest industries in this country and it carries most of the export and import material as goods. Trucking is said to have taken over as the main transporter from rail in the 1970s due to a number of factors. Firstly, it is due to the fact that in the 1970s the roads were in a better condition than rail and therefore made it easy for goods to be transported quicker. Secondly, there was pressure from the private sector for

government to deregulate transport and make way for competition with road transport. The deregulation of transport however finally took place in 1989 leading to increased competition between the two transport modes. While rail has the ability to transport heavy goods such as ores and coal for much longer distances, trucking is limited to shorter distances and therefore is faster and can do more business in a shorter time than rail. Rail is better suited for non corruptible goods such as coal and ore, and because of its nature, it carries higher tonnages of freight over long distances (the Rail Road Association, www.rra.co.za).

Trucking, with which this study is concerned, is quite vast and it offers services to other industries such as farming, manufacturing and mining to transport their products. Trucks are used to transport farm produce such as fruit and vegetables to different parts of the country, they also transport manufactured goods such as furniture, motor vehicles and beverages. Furthermore, they are a major transporter of minerals and chemicals mined inside and outside the country. According to Swart¹, there are different types and sizes of trucks for different products, for example the small sealed ones are used for transporting fresh produce and perishable goods. They are light and therefore much faster and so are the usual 22/26 wheelers that transport wood, sugar and other products, even though they are not as fast as the former. The abnormal trucks, which are much heavier, are then used to transport heavy goods such as mine products, machinery and other heavy goods such as rocks and bricks.

The trucking industry in South Africa is mainly controlled by a number of large companies. The four largest of these are Bidvest, Imperial Holdings, Super Group and Unitrans. Of the four, Imperial Holdings and Unitrans together with their subsidiaries are also linked to SATAWU in that they do not only have

¹ An interview with Hein Swart of Truck Africa at his office in Wadeville, 25/10/2004

*** It should be noted that all interviewees were interviewed only once and therefore the footnote will be used on the first instance and all the other subsequent references will be based on that information.**

employees who are members of the union, but are also involved in the fight against HIV/AIDS. Unitrans is the oldest, dating back to the 19th century; on the other hand Bidvest is the only one that does not 'own wheels', but its Bidfreight division controls companies such as Safcor, Safcon and Fedex. Imperial is the largest of the four, with control over 30 companies, a fleet of 5 000 prime movers and 4 500 trailer sets, followed by Super group with 6 000 vehicles (The Rail Road Association of South Africa, www.rra.co.za). These groups are also highly diversified in that they do not only provide transport for goods, but are also involved in car rentals, aviation leasing, passenger transport, logistics, insurance and other activities.

The main routes that the trucking industry uses are along the coast, for instance from Cape Town to Durban via the Eastern Cape through Swaziland to Maputo and also westward toward Walvis Bay in Namibia. The inland routes include towns such as Beaufort West, Harrismith, Musina, Beitbridge, and all the way to Gaborone, Zimbabwe, Zambia and the Congo where mining is the main source of income (Swart, 2004; see also appendix A) .

Research done in the road freight industry found that the industry is not only one of the largest, but it is also one of the most vulnerable to HIV/AIDS and road accidents (Mupemba, 2003; Marck, 1999). This is due to a number of reasons: Firstly, trucking being a mobile industry and in many cases long distance, forces truckers to be away from home and their families for long periods of time. Secondly, due to the highly competitive nature of the industry, truckers spend most of their time on the road because the industry's clients expect their goods to be delivered on time since some of the goods transported by truckers are perishable. Thirdly, the driver's wages are said to be very low and many companies pay the drivers per load and not per hour, therefore drivers try to do as many trips as they possibly can to earn extra money (Hollander², 2004 and Swart, 2004). This makes them more vulnerable to accidents due to tiredness.

² An interview with Louis Hollander of the Road Freight Association, 22/10/2004

Fourthly, because of its nature the trucking industry is easily penetrated by other industries such as the commercial sex industry. In almost all of the trucking routes, there are women either working full time as sex workers or just being there for a time to get some money to support their families, making the HIV infection along the truck routes and in the trucking industry quite high (Mupemba, 2003; Marck, 1999; Tabo, 1992).

1.3 History of SATAWU

The South African Transport and Allied Workers Union, SATAWU, was formed in 2000 after a series of negotiations and smaller scale mergers by unions in the transport industry. SATAWU organises workers in the transport sector as well as security and cleaning companies. The sectors include railways, harbours, parastatals, aviation, passenger transport (buses and taxis) freight (trucking), contract, cleaning and security. It represents about 74 305 workers, of which 10 000 are in the trucking industry (SATAWU, 2000). According to this report, the union started (in 2000) with a membership of 103 218 but as time progressed the membership dropped to the current number of 74 305 workers. Ramakgolo³ claims that the drop in membership is a result of competition with other unions in the same sector, HIV/AIDS and retrenchments.

The formation of SATAWU resulted from mergers between transport unions in response to the call by the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) for 'one industry, one country, one federation' (Musi, 1999:8). COSATU believed that if all unions merged and worked together they would be more powerful and therefore be in a better position to bargain. However the attempts to unite all federations under one umbrella failed. COSATU only managed to have the different trades uniting to form industry unions, for example, the transport industry coming under one umbrella, SATAWU. The merger to form one transport union took place in two stages. The first being the formation of

³ An Interview with Abner Ramakgolo of SATAWU at the SATAWU offices in Johannesburg, 23/09/2004

SATAWU from a merger between the South African Railways and Harbours Workers' Union (SARHWU) with a membership of 35 000, the Black Transnet Allied Trade Union (BLATU) with a membership of 6 324, and Transnet Allied Trade Union (TATU) with a membership of 1 324. At this stage the Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU) with its membership of approximately 50 000 or more was not part of the merger due to a number of issues on which the union did not agree with SARHWU (Musi, 1998).

The merger of these unions was not an easy one and consequently, it took years to actually reach the stage that it is in today. The initial steps towards the merger were taken in the mid 1980s but the actual merger started in December 1998 when Transnet unions heeded COSATU's call of uniting all transport unions to form one industry union. The unions which at the time were formed of members working for Transnet included the SARHWU, BLATU and TATU. These unions which had a joint membership of 47 000 workers, merged to form the South African Transport and Allied Workers Union (SATAWU). TGWU was expected to join SATAWU in June 1999 but the merger was delayed due to some disagreements between SATAWU and TGWU (Musi, 1998).

Some of the problems cited by TGWU in their reservations about the merger included the fact that SARHWU was not happy that they, (TGWU) organised security guards and cleaners, who according to SARHWU were not part of the transport industry. SARHWU wanted the union to be exclusive to transport workers and not include other industries. TGWU had a large following from the two sectors and therefore was not prepared to let them go (Keet, 1992). This problem became a major hold up in the merger of unions in the transport industry, in that even though the other unions merged in 1998 to form SATAWU, TGWU was still left out.

Although BLATU was a workers union within the South African Transport Services (SATS), the workers were not happy with it because they saw as it the

employers' instrument. SARHWU on the other hand was the workers' choice because they felt that it represented their grievances. In March 1987, about 20 000 Johannesburg railway workers went on strike and won the right to resign from BLATU and join SARHWU because SARHWU did not only organise but managed to deliver. SATS workers at the Delmore Hostel in Germiston also organised themselves in support of SARHWU and in July 1987 a major victory was won for SARHWU when permission was granted for the union to have shop steward representation (Matiko, 1987 & Roux, 1987).

Trade unions like SATAWU play an important role in organising workers. They are particularly known for their roles in both political mobilisation and collective bargaining. This can be seen in the history of the union, and the many battles fought for worker rights. The study however investigates the role of SATAWU in the fight against HIV/AIDS, to try and see if there are any existing or prospective plans on the unions' part to fight the pandemic. HIV in the trucking industry is cause for concern due to the large numbers of truckers that die of AIDS related illnesses and the ever increasing number of AIDS orphans in the country (Jackson, 2002; Marck, 1999).

1.4 HIV/AIDS

The Human Immunodeficiency Virus or HIV as it commonly known is the virus that attacks the human immune system, weakening it to the point where the body is unable to fight diseases. The virus attacks the white blood cells in the body by penetrating the nuclei of the cells. It then multiplies rapidly to take over control of the whole cell as a result. Because the virus attacks the cells, it cannot be traced immediately. For the virus to be noticed in the blood system, it will take up to three months, and it does not manifest immediately except maybe in pregnancy, therefore some people live for many years without knowing that they are infected (Jackson, 2002).

Studies of HIV/AIDS in the trucking industry done in Zimbabwe (Maphosa, 2003) and Zambia and the one conducted in KwaZulu Natal point to the fact that there is a link between the trucking industry and the spread of HIV/AIDS in Southern Africa (Mwikisa, 2003; Marck, 2003). Given the nature of the industry, it is not surprising that the pandemic spreads so fast within it. As mentioned earlier, truckers are highly mobile and spend most of their time on the road and as a result spend very little time at home with their families. This makes them vulnerable to infection due to the casual relationships that they have with the women that they meet along the routes including commercial sex workers. Also the dangerous nature of their work contributes to the reckless lifestyle, of indulgence in alcohol and unsafe sex, common among migrant workers such as construction workers, miners and long distance drivers (Mwikisa, 2003; Maphosa, 2003; Marck, 2003).

Although HIV/AIDS is spreading at such high speed, and so much research has been done around the issues surrounding the pandemic, not much research has been done about HIV/AIDS in the trucking industry in South Africa even though trucking is one of the largest industries in the country with a high HIV prevalence (see Appendix B). Most of the studies done about HIV in the trucking or road freight industry so far were conducted outside the country, yet according to Ramakgolo⁴ (2004) and Musi⁵ (2005) of SATAWU, the union is losing membership to deaths resulting from AIDS related illnesses. Moreover in a study done in 2001 among long distance drivers in the KwaZulu Natal midlands, about 56% of the drivers were found to be HIV positive (Fleetwatch, 2005). At one truck stop in New Castle, it was found that of those who were tested, 95% were HIV positive (Business Day, 19/08/2003).

HIV/AIDS is a reality for both employers and employees and the subsequent death of members puts a lot of strain on the families and their resources, which

⁴ An interview with Abner Ramakgolo, SATAWU Road Freight National Director, 23/09,2004.

⁵ An interview with Mojalefa Musi, SATAWU education officer in Braamfontein, 25/02/2005

forces trade unions to play a role in fighting the scourge. When this happens, it may have implications on how the role of trade unions is theorised, and may therefore lead to the redefining of the role of trade unions. The latest statistics of HIV infections in South Africa show an estimate of 5.3 million people living with HIV, with approximately 3 million being women and about 230 000 being children. About 370 000 adults and children die of AIDS every year. An estimated 2.2 million people died of AIDS in 2003 in Sub Saharan Africa and many more have followed since (Statistics South Africa, 2004 – see appendix B). While in other situations pertaining to health matters the unions may make use of medical aid schemes, these services are paid for by union members. However, in the case of caring for a deceased union member's family, the union may have to use or mobilise its own resources to assist the family. The union may also be expected to fill the gap left by government and other institutions in the lives of members and their families. This in turn extends the union's responsibility to the member to then include his family. In order to combat the financial implications that such expectations may lead to, some unions have their own investment schemes, as in the case of COSATU, (Vlok, 1999). In the past, trade unions depended on membership fees and donations to survive, but with the diminishing number of union members and the changing dynamics of the work place, unions were forced to find other means of raising funds to cover their cost (Copelyn, 1997; McKinley, 1999).

1.5 Chapter Outline

Chapter 2 concentrates on the different views held by researchers on the role of trade unions and the different approaches to HIV. The chapter cites the different approaches taken by researchers in addressing the question of the role of trade unions in the fight against HIV/AIDS and what it means to different groups ranging from employees to families, communities, employers, the state and other civil organisations.

Chapter 3 discusses the methods used in collecting the data, the design of the methods used in the research and their significance. It also discusses the instruments used as well as the challenges, limitations and successes of the study and the reasons why particular methods were used and not others. This chapter also examines the interviewees responses, outlines how obstacles were overcome and gives the researcher's interpretation of interviewees' responses.

The findings are presented in two chapters. The first chapter, chapter 4, focuses on the life of a trucker and how the role of trade unions and the trucking industry are perceived by truckers. The chapter is based on trucking, the truck drivers, their jobs, their concerns and the challenges that they face as a group and how this reveals the perceived role of trade unions. It also discusses truckers' perceptions of HIV, their fears and concerns and what they think could or should be done.

The second chapter on findings, chapter 5, concentrates on interventions by SATAWU, the Employers' Association, the National Bargaining Council (NBC), Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), government and other stakeholders in addressing the question of HIV/AIDS, first for the truckers and second for their families. The chapter also includes what the truckers and their families think the union should be doing to help in the fight against HIV/AIDS. It addresses the drivers' concerns as well as those of their families, the urgency with which this should be done given the fact that drivers are dying and many of them also lose their spouses, leaving children to fend for themselves.

The concluding chapter presents the researcher's summation of the study. It summarises the discussion of the findings and the conclusions reached regarding HIV/AIDS in the trucking industry. It also outlines the role of trade unions as it appears in the study including whether or not they have a welfare role as the research set out to find out.