

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **CONCLUSION**

The role of trade unions has been confirmed to be more than just wage bargaining and political mobilisation. There has been evidence throughout the paper of the union's role going beyond the two conventional roles. Although the union may not be physically involved in the fight against HIV, there is enough reason to suggest that it does play a role even if it is a passive role. The union's involvement in the programmes organised by the government and employer groups suggests that the union does recognise the fact that even if it cannot run the programmes on its own, it does have a role to play.

The role of trade unions regarding HIV suggests an underlying role, as Crouch (1982) suggests, a secondary role, a welfare role. A role that suggests to the union member and his family that they can get help when they need it. HIV has been stigmatised through the years, but the union can bring about change of attitudes toward the pandemic. The union can help its members and the employers realise that HIV is a disease just like any other. If the union could talk openly to its members about HIV the stigma would die out. If the union can campaign for the de-stigmatisation of HIV as it campaigns for wages, employers would also treat people living with HIV with dignity.

It has been established that trade unions do have a role to play in society and that they have played a role, however this role has never been established as a role for trade unions. Union involvement in social issues is considered to be their social responsibility and not part of their roles. This is also clear from the truckers' attitudes to what the unions can and cannot do. It was mentioned in the previous chapter that some union members feel that it is not the union's responsibility to care for sick members or to care for their families in the event of the member's death. Truckers themselves feel that the union should not be involved in their private lives. This could be the reason for the union not to be

involved at the truck stops and also not knowing how many of their members are sick from the HI virus or even how many died of AIDS related illnesses.

Even though trade unions do not yet have an assigned welfare role, they are already involved in this role. The fact that members' families expect help from the union already suggests that that role is there, it just needs to be assumed officially by the union and acknowledged by their members. Also, the fact that the union is trying through other organisations to increase awareness about HIV means that the union does recognise that it has a role to play. However the reluctance and the slowness at which this role is assumed could be due to the stigma attached to HIV in most communities. It can also be due to the fact that the union itself does not seem to want to be associated with the disease, based on the absence of an HIV department at the SATAWU offices as already mentioned.

Secondly, the culture of trucking which includes promiscuity, life without a family and the use of sex workers all point to the susceptibility of truckers to HIV infection. In this way, and also based on what existing literature says about truckers and their culture, it is not surprising that truckers are not free to talk about HIV and its effects on the industry and on their families. Even though these views are not necessarily true, it still creates that sense of guilt and stigma. Truckers do have an opinion of who they are and how they view themselves. They see themselves as ordinary men like any others with the same problems, needs and desires and therefore should not be stigmatised because of their profession.

The culture of truckers, as has been established in the preceding chapters, goes beyond promiscuity and the use of sex workers. The culture involves unlearning all the values that the men were taught from a young age. They are put in a situation where they have no wife to cook, clean and wash for them. They are forced to do all the things that are done by their wives. They cannot park a truck

at the end of the day and go home to find a warm meal waiting for them, they have to prepare that meal themselves. Instead of a warm bed, they have to settle for the cab of a truck. For most of them there is no difference between a weekday and a weekend, they are always at work. They are forced to settle for what they can get, either a poor woman who needs someone to help her send her children to school or a sex worker who moves from truck to truck servicing the men for money. Although this culture does not seem to offer anything good, it is the kind of culture that also breaks the tradition of women doing everything for men and men being helpless and unable to care for themselves.

The study also found that the opinions held about truckers, whether based on research or not, do not necessarily have to be true. As mentioned earlier during the research, the study found that there were actually no villages or sex workers near the Tugela truck stop as opposed to what the literature claimed was the case. Most of the truckers were alone in their trucks. There were no women around. This however does not mean that truckers do not use sex workers or that there are no sex workers along the truck routes, it means that these men are not always surrounded by sex workers. Also as already mentioned in previous chapters, most of these truckers are family men and as a result not all of them use sex workers or have extramarital affairs. Some of them because they love their wives and others because they believe that sex workers are HIV carriers, therefore they choose not to be involved with them.

What could be seen by others as the third role of trade unionism is seen by some as a social movement role. Trade unions are formed to bargain for wages and to mobilise workers. However the welfare role of trade unions should not be ignored since, as already mentioned, it is the motivating factor behind the two major roles of trade unionism. The welfare role of trade unions examines the role of unions beyond the workplace. It places the union in the member's family and forces the union to be a part of his family. However as observed in the previous chapter, this is a conflicting role as union members feel that the union should deal with

them as employees while the families would rather have the union being more involved in their lives. Union members view this third role as an intrusion into their private space since it involves the union being involved in their sexual lives, their health, their finances and other areas that are supposed to be private.

HIV/AIDS compels the union to take up a welfare role. Although the union's role does not require it to be involved, the underlying sense of community drives it to be involved. Reasons for this vary from being compassionate to being financial. Trade unions are made up of people, the same people who die of HIV/AIDS and leave their families behind. This part of the role of trade unions forces it to be involved in seeking a solution for the existing problem. The second reason is financial, trade unions depend on workers' contributions to survive. As a result if union members die of the pandemic, the union is going to have financial problem. This then forces the union to be involved in trying to find a solution to this problem, educating its members about HIV, how to prevent it and how to live a productive life with the virus.

Another factor associated with HIV is the question of stigma. HIV is labelled as a result of a promiscuous life and a life of sexual immorality and because truckers as already mentioned, are married men, they cannot afford to disclose their status to their families or to anyone else. As a result the stigma continues and the silences continue to destroy lives. As long as HIV is not perceived to be an illness and not punishment, the stigma will not be removed and people will continue to die. The silences surrounding the pandemic could be due to shame based on the fact that HIV is associated with commercial sex and loose behaviour. The silence could also be resulting from fear, fear of rejection, loss of respect from family, friends, employers and society. It could also be as a result of personal beliefs, the belief that some things are private and therefore should not be discussed publicly. It should be borne in mind that HIV is a sexual disease and discussing it is almost the same as discussing one's sexual life with others.

Existing literature points out to the fact that HIV does not only affect the infected person and his or her family, but it has financial implications for business and the country's economy as well. The more people get sick production is reduced and the economy starts to dwindle under the financial burden of producing far less than is being consumed in medication and production time. It also robs the country of its skilled labour force especially since it affects people at the prime of their lives, between the ages of 20 and 50. Although HIV has been around for over 20 years, it is still one of the most stigmatised diseases in the world. This was also apparent during the research as people of all races and ranks were interviewed for this study. From employers to union officials to workers, interviewees found it easier to diverge to other more pleasant or not so blatant topics. HIV was clearly not a pleasant topic to talk about. While the employers chose to talk about the good work they are doing to ensure their employees' job security, the unions chose to talk about their financial problems. The truckers preferred to talk about the many dangers that they face on the roads on a daily basis.

The stigma surrounding HIV make people choose to rather not talk about it even though they are aware of its devastating results. Those who were affected also chose to talk about more pleasant things than HIV. Apart from the stigma, it is possible that people are afraid to talk about the pandemic because of the suffering that its victims have to endure before they finally die. It could also be the reason why some of the drivers live such reckless lives because they think it would be much better to die in an accident than to die of AIDS. What the research found out is that people are afraid to talk about AIDS and even though they feel that the union should do something to help fight the pandemic, they do not believe that it is the union's role. The reason could be the fact that SATAWU does not have any programme in place to fight HIV and as a result truckers also assume that it is not the union's responsibility. However trucker wives interviewed for this study believe that the union should take responsibility for their dilemma. They believe it is the union's responsibility to ensure that their

husbands and their families are taken care of. While the men seemed to be more concerned with the effects of AIDS on the infected person, the women were more concerned about what was going to happen to them and their children if their husbands died. For that reason they wanted the union to ensure that their children will be able to get education and care.

The employers on the other hand were more concerned about their businesses and the money they were going to lose retraining new staff to replace the ones that are sick and the ones who died. The same sentiment was expressed in most of the research on HIV in the workplace. The main concern was the economic implications. While the union showed some concern for the truckers and their families they were also concerned about the decline in membership and as a result a decline in the amount of money paid into the union's coffers by each employee. Therefore, although AIDS is a threat to human life, the study found that it is also a threat to many other facets of life, skills, workforce, the economy and life itself as more and more people will be having fewer children.

The study found that trade unions have a role to play in the private lives of their members especially now with the HIV threat. It also found that HIV is no respecter of persons, it infects and affects anyone, employees and employers alike. The study found that even though only a handful of people can be infected, the whole nation is affected. Firstly, the family, the spouse, children, the parents and the extended family are affected, some also infected. When the infected person dies, the community may be affected since in some cases children are left alone or with an elderly person who cannot care for them. If the children are left in such a situation the nation is affected in that government will have to make means of providing for the children and ensuring that they get an education.

Secondly, the study found that educating people about HIV is not enough because most of the people who get infected are people who have all the knowledge but refused to use it or did not believe that the information they have

is true. Some truck drivers admitted to unsafe sexual practices among truckers even though they know what might happen. Abstinence is not a lesson to be taught, but a decision to be made, an individual still needs to take responsibility for his/her life. Finally, trade unions need to rethink their role especially now in the face of HIV/AIDS. The wage bargaining and mobilisation role are still relevant, but HIV is urgent. The role of trade unions needs to be extended to include welfare, caring for the members and their families especially in cases where children are left alone.

Based on the information presented in this research report, one can say that the welfare role of trade unions will only be recognised once the union starts playing its role in society, interacting with its members at a more personal level, getting to know their concerns and fears and also getting to know their families and their needs. SATAWU also needs to take a lead in removing the stigma attached to HIV/AIDS. This can be done by establishing an HIV office and having union officials disclosing their status and living positively thereby encouraging their members to do the same. As long as SATAWU is still removed from this reality, the stigma will remain and the union will continue to lose members. In answering the research question on whether SATAWU has programmes to fight HIV, the answer is no. SATAWU is involved in the fight against HIV through the programmes set by employers and government and not by the union. Once this has happened, then one can take a stance and that trade unions do have a third role, a welfare role.