

THE ROLE OF THE WOMENS COMMITTEE IN BUILDING THE YOUTH LEAGUE

INTRODUCTION

The society in which we live in is a patriarchal society. Men are regarded as the stronger sex and women as the weaker sex. Women low into the low level or non participation of women in political organisations, especially in the democratic formations, can be traced to as far back as the formation of the ANC.

The founders of the ANC influenced by traditional social compositions did not involve women in the formative stages of this organisation. Participation of women in the ANC was only allowed after 1921.

This trend influenced the development of west organisations till to date. Most of the constitutions of political organisations always mentions women as if they are separate entities to that body which is formed e.g. the phrase "together with our women folk" is mostly use.

The highest level of womens participation in political activities are in issue orientated activities or in action which will benefit them most e.g the 1956 march against the issuing of passes to women attracted more than 20 000 women throughout the country. That is a victory never too be forgotten.

Women also participated in activities like in repression forums and support group for victims of repression most women in these forums will be attracted by the fact that one or more of their members is either detained, jailed, exiled or killed.

PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN ORGANISATION

There seems to be a blanket problem covering all political organisations as far as the level of participation and development of women is concerned. I made reference to political organisation because in as far as religious and social organisations are concerned the picture is different. There are more active women in church organisations\forums than men and its is equally so in social organisations\forums e.g. burial societies as cultural groups and choirs.

The low level of participation by women in political organisation has been attributed to the so called womens tendencies e.g gossips, jealousy etc. If this women are found but this seems only to be so in political organs. What then happens to all these tendencies when it comes to other forums where women are found e.g church choirs, organisations like youth clubs etc.

Maybe what we need to look at is whether the participation of women in other formations which are our allies is better of or whether they also experience the same problems.

STUDENTS

Students organisations, especially at tertiary level, also seem to have the same problem although it should have been different

because they are found at the same vicinity viz the college\university residences.

Women students are also victims of the social system under which we live, being a student does not change her form perceiving herself as being inferior to men. The student organisations with a broad programme which encompasses politics, is not attractive to them because some of them will actually say that politics is not for students because they have come to attain their degree\diplomas and they after that see whether to follow a political career or not. The latter is always the case.

The only time women students act cohesively is when they deal with an issue at hand at that time e.g Sexual harassment\rage or expulsion of a pregnant fellow student and after that everything is normal again.

A general meeting of all students, which should address eg. a racist and sexist lecturer who fails students purposely is mostly attended by male students and those women who are affected; which might be less than 5% of the students womenfolk.

Womens forums on campuses mostly attract women on issues like contraception, abortion and sexual harassment. Immediately political aspects of the above is mentioned then be sure to gradually lose their attendance. Women in student organisations have tried to workout programmes which they as women believe can draw more women but to no avail. Who knows what women want if women cannot identify it?

WORKERS

In 1988 COSATU held a historic conference which focused on building women worker leadership and subsequently formed the COSATU womens sub-committee; till to date the sub-committee members are still struggling to form forums in COSATU affiliates because of the male dominated nature of the federation and mainly due to the constraints placed on women by society.

It has been reported that there are instances where membership to these womens forums is decreasing gradually instead of increasing. These forums address issues which affect women in the workplace, at home and even socially but still women seem not to be attracted to the. After identifying issues which affect them at the workplace, home and socially, they end up complaining that the others want them to lose their jobs or destroy their family and social lives. There is this believe among working women that those in womens forums are still young, single and thus without much responsibility.

YOUTH

Youth is a stage which stretches across all sectors and social groupings. The participation of women as students and in the workforce affect the youth as well and within the youth ranks you find the unemployed also. Women who are working believe that those who have time to belong to womens forums are young, single and without much responsibility. Although it might be true in some cases the state of our organisation as regards the

participation of women regrades that notion. One would expect that unemployed young women would readily take belonging in the YL as some of work or extra mural activity but this is not so.

During the formative stages of building youth organisations womens participation was very very weak or even non-existent in some localities. This was further emphasized by the number of women delegates at the Sayco launching congress - where only eight women were present amides more than 300 delegates. Although the constitution of Sayco made provision for a woman's organiser; congress could not elect one because even those who were present did not even know each other-it was their first encounter.

It was only after nine months that the first Sayco womens workshop was hosted. It was an eye opening workshop, only six of the their ten Sayco regions attended the state of womens participation was thoroughly analysed and a structure for the womens department adopted. An elaborate POA was also adopted which took into consideration the concerns of the components of the youth organisation because present at the workshop was young working women, students, the unemployed and those who were working mothers, student mothers and unemployed mother.

When working out the programme cognisance of all aspects was taken but because by then repression was at its worst the POA could not be implemented as detention were the order of the day.

With the release of most activists and the defiance campaign Sayco once more put the organisation of women firmly on the agenda and a consistent programme of action which was evaluated every two months in a national womens sub-committee meeting.

The womens sub-committee was constituted by two consistent representative per region and they were delegated tasks which needed the participation of the entire REC. In so doing the women had anticipated a situation where the concerns and problems of women would be those of the youth organisation in general and this was gradually taking shape.

Sub-committee meeting and womens workshops were to be rotated to acquaint member of the committee with the conditions and state of organisation in all our region and through this women could help each other in instances where the REC members were not cooperative and know other women in our regions. Women knew each other and could build each other up; identify one another's weaknesses and strengths. Meetings were characterised with open criticisms of one another and self-criticism.

With the beginning of the process of building the ANCYL women were also part of making recommendations on the structure of the YL and also made presentations to the ANCWL task force on how the young women think the WL should be structured and how the WL need to draw up their POA. They managed to link the WL task force with women in areas where there the youth was organised but no womens organisations.

The womens sub-committee had identified women resource persons - who would from time to time make inputs to our programme. People whom the committee could delegate tasks to although they were not part of the youth or who were youth with professional skills. Every sub-committee gathering had a focus point eg. Working women, women and the law etc. Every region had a topic to compile and prepare packages and the head office also had a how share of the tasks to coordinate in all respects material resources, human resources and keep all records of the sub-committee and to liase with other organisations to keep women informed of developments at NEC level.

The above is in an outline of the good work that the womens sub-committee was doing although there were some shortfalls also e.g. meeting not taking place on scheduled dates; lack of financial resources to implement whatever programme had been adopted e.g. media kills training workshop and the computer training programme. Initiatives on hosting a national young womens conference, which was to involve all our allies and friendly organisation was stalled by the whole debates surrounding the re-launching of the YL and this was finally abandoned. Reason unknown.

Most regions never managed to complete the packages they were supposed to because with the re-formation of the YL new people were appointed into the YL structures and thus there was continuity from Sayco to the YL.

FROM SAYCO TO YOUTH LEAGUE

Tech re-emergence of the YL brought about some instability, especially our regional collectives. With all the problems and slow pace of building the participation of women combined with the interim nature of the structures from locals to national level; the continued uncertainty on when the actual launch will take place this affected any other department.

Most regions when forming PRYC's did not have women as secretaries for women. Those that did have women lost their participation. Whereabouts thereafter and reasons are always unknown to the PRYC.

All initiatives at a national level to get women secretaries together always fall through due to lack of resources (January and February 1991), the launching of regions which might change people and thus not have those who were part of the drafting of POA to implement it (May 1991) and lastly this time when PNYC is meeting (August 1991).

The womens department as part of the department of organisation need to be a solid, strong and cohesive force within the YL. When focusing on building the YL as an organisation we need to look what other organisations have done and are doing and take out the good aspects which the YL might use to building the womens department into a formidable force which in turn will build the YL.

WOMEN AND THE YOUTH LEAGUE

In our paper on gender equality we tried to outline problems which affect mostly young women and what we need to do is to identify what exactly the YL can do to address them. Amongst these which have a direct bearing on the YL is: the high rate of teenage pregnancy and backstreet abortions; oppressive traditional values and norm.

TEENAGE PREGNANCY AND ABORTION

This social problems affects the YL members more than anything social clubs, professional organisations and cultural organisations have ben trying to attend to this problem as early as the 1970's but instead of decreasing it is escalating at an alarming rate. Because YL members are also members belong to the same social order most of them are also befallen by this tragic situation of ending up being mothers before age and the physical or mental state allow. There are quiet a number of boys who are fathers as early as fifteen but because they did not undergo any physical change or have denied paternity as in most cases are still regarded as children whilst the opposite is for girls.

Teenage pregnancy is a social catastrophe we cannot wish away and therefore the YL need to cater for the victims of this situation by not denying them the youthfulness of those who did not fall prey but to accommodate them and all their problems. The programmes that we engage upon should not covertly or overtly seek to isolate them.

In as far as abortion is concerned we need to have a definite policy which will serve to influence the drafters of the new constitution of our country. We need to make women aware that they have the right to determine their fertility and the right to decide on when they actually want children.

CULTURAL AND TRADITIONAL VALUES AND NORMS

There are some traditional and cultural values which are still very exploitative and oppressive in regard to women and young women are the most vulnerable to these.

LOBOLA OR BRIDE PRICE

As some form of compensation to the brides family for losing a member over to another family of late it has been seen as buying the women which resulted in women being regarded as commodities which can easily be acquired and disposed off at will or be used in anyway deemed it by the one who paid the lobola.

Parents also exploit the situation by charging exorbitant amounts and thus participate actively in the exploitation of their children.

Members reach marrying age whilst still in the YL formations and therefore the YL need to also guide the society on this issue.

EDUCATION It is common knowledge to everyone on how education has been used to exploit the humbleness of women-girls giving priority to boys to get educated; thus still being practised

especially in rural areas. The DPEC need to workout formal education and literacy programmes which will involve our student counterparts in redressing the situation of these women. It is only then seeing the good that YL did for them that they will be able to fully identify with it.

THE ROLE OF OTHER DEPARTMENTS

1. Pioneer the full participation of girls should be enhanced at this stage and therefore the pioneer programmes should focus on building women leadership in their early developmental stages.
2. Culture Sport: this department need to focus also on limitations these fields place on women and adequately address the.
3. DPE women issues should also be priority when drawing up the political education programme and help in identify topics for resource packages and also resource people whose help we can call in times of need.

