

Organising Workers in the Informal Economy: The Experience of the Self
Employed Women's Union, 1994-2004.

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¹ This research was conducted for a joint School of Development Studies and Centre for Civil Society Project on new social movements in the post apartheid period. This is a more detailed research report produced for the project, a shorter and updated version of which will appear in *Globalisation, Marginalisation and New Social Movements in South Africa*, which is edited by Ballard, R., Habib, A. and Valodia, I. and will be published by University of KwaZulu-Natal Press to be launch early in 2006.

1. Introduction

Worldwide there is a growth in the numbers of people working in the informal economy, either self employed in unregistered enterprises or as wage workers in unprotected jobs. This is part of a documented international process of the informalisation of work (see for example, Standing 1999). Currently between 25% and 30% of the South African labour force is working in the informal economy (Devey, Skinner and Valodia, 2003a). This is one of the few areas of employment growth since the democratic transition. Individual incomes in the informal economy tend to be extremely low. International experience however demonstrates that collective action can result in significant improvements in working and living conditions. One of the best examples of this is the Self Employed Women's Association in India. It is this collective action around work based issues for those active in the informal economy in South Africa that this research project seeks to explore.

Traditionally, in South Africa trade unions were seen as the primary arena for organising the working poor. Given the process of informalisation of work, the traditional formal economy worker belonging to a trade union is becoming a smaller and smaller proportion of the workforce. The trade union movement has had difficulty in dealing with this issue and in organising informal workers into the ambit of the formal trade union system. Some trade unions have become 'social movement unions' speaking on behalf of those in formal jobs, but also the unemployed and informal workers. Allied to this, and partly as a result of their dissatisfaction with the formal trade union movement (even so called social movement unions), informal workers have begun to organise themselves. These new informal economy workers unions are an interesting component of new social movements in South Africa. The type of organisation, the issues fought, the means of organisation, the links to other social movements, differ substantially from traditional trade unions. This study offers the broader project an insight into this arena of social action.

This study focuses on the Self Employed Women's Union or SEWU. SEWU was launched in 1994, at the time of the political transition. SEWU's constituency is self employed women working in the survivalist end of the economy – largely street traders and home based workers. As will be argued in the paper, SEWU is somewhat of a model. It focuses on empowerment of members, through leadership training and experience as well as training relevant to members' businesses. At a local level SEWU has lobbied for its members to secure rights to operate and access to infrastructure. It is active in national and international policy making forums. So far there has not been a comprehensive account or analysis of SEWU and its activities from its inception to date. This project aims to document the 10 years of SEWU's activities and by so doing to make a contribution to the literature and understanding of the informal economy in South Africa as well as broader discussions about the nature of social movements in post apartheid South Africa.

The paper starts with a brief reflection on the research methods employed in the study in section 2. In section 3 we analyse the context from which SEWU stems and the context to which SEWU responds. In this we review recent

labour market trends and the policy environment that SEWU is operating in. Section 4 outlines the experiences of the organisation on which SEWU is modelled - the Self Employed Women's Association or SEWA in India. SEWA's activities and achievements are outlined as a point of comparison for the SEWU case study. Section 5 reflects on organising in the informal economy in South Africa, particularly what progress has been made by the union movement in organising those working in the informal economy. The bulk of the report is constituted by section 6 which documents and critically analyses the organisational structure, membership trends and activities and achievements of SEWU over the last 10 years. Section 7 synthesises the findings by concentrating on the successes and failures of the organisation.

At the time of writing SEWU was confronting serious funding problems that threatened their long term sustainability. SEWU's membership numbers are small. Although SEWU does not see itself as a social movement its significance is important given not only the growth of informal employment and its associated problems, but the traditional role that unions have played in times of mobilisation for social changes. SEWU is an organisational response to marginalisation in post apartheid South Africa that has experienced some success in empowering a group that is particularly marginalised. We argue that SEWU holds some lessons for other social movements in South Africa. These are outlined in the conclusion.

2. Research methods

The research commenced with a comprehensive literature search and review. This review focused on four broad areas. First, a context analysis – particularly focusing on labour market and policy trends in the post apartheid period – was conducted. Second, previous research on SEWU was assessed with a view to identifying critical gaps (see for example Lund and Skinner, 1999; Motala, 2002 and Bennett, 2002). Third, a scan was conducted on literature detailing the activities of other organisations organising informal economy workers in South Africa. Finally, the substantial literature on the Self Employed Women's Association in India was reviewed.

This literature review laid the foundation for the primary data collection process. This process consisted of documentation analysis and key informant interviews. SEWU has a comprehensive set of annual reports, reports to funders, newsletters for members as well as submissions to national commissions and policy processes. Further there have been organisational evaluations. All these documents were collated and assessed.

Twenty six key informant interviews were conducted from the beginning of February to the end of May 2004 (see Appendix 1 for details). A lengthy interview was conducted with the founder and first national general secretary of the union. All staff both in the national office and the regional offices were interviewed. Key office bearers – the current president, the executive committee chairs of both the KwaZulu-Natal and Mpumalanga regions were also interviewed. These interviews were open ended and concentrated on, among other issues, the past and present activities of the union, a critical reflection on strengths and weaknesses of the organisation, their link with

other organisations and analysis of what the future holds. These interviews were conducted at the SEWU national and regional offices. Telephonic interviews were conducted with staff from other regions.

In total 15 interviews were conducted SEWU members. Other than in the interviews with leaders, with a few exceptions, the SEWU regional organiser directed us to the interviewees. These interviews are thus likely to be biased towards reflecting the experience of members who feel satisfied with SEWU's activities. This project however did not intend to be an evaluation. The objective was to glean the lived experience of a small group of members. Interviews with members concentrated on their experiences of the organisation and the impact of SEWU on their past and present activities. These interviews were conducted at their place of work.

Finally there has been correspondence with the co-ordinator of the research and activist network WIEGO, the head of the Financial Service Sector Campaign, a former employee of SEWU's main funder who conducted an evaluation of SEWU in 2003 and the drafter of Durban's Informal Economy Policy. This correspondence aimed to either fill information gaps or provide an external perspective on the activities of SEWU.

3. Context from which SEWU stems; the context to which SEWU responds

As noted in the introduction, SEWU emerged at the time of political transition in South Africa. On the one hand this was a time of policy dynamism. A new constitution was being formulated, women's issues were being addressed through the establishment of a variety of structures within the new state, the labour relations system was being reworked and numerous other new policies were being formulated. This has opened up opportunities for organisations like SEWU to influence policy processes. On the other hand, South Africa responded to pressures to open their economy to global markets. This reinforced processes of informalisation of work. In this section we briefly review international and South African statistics and reflect on the policy environment SEWU is located in and has, to some extent, engaged with.

3.1 Labour market trends and South African informal economy statistics

Worldwide there is a growth in the number of people working in the informal economy. Table 1 below reflects recent statistics on the size of the informal economy in Latin America, Africa and Asia.

Table 1: Size of the informal economy internationally

	Latin America	Africa	Asia
% of Total Employment:			
Excluding agriculture	45	31	19
Including agriculture	66	90	90
% Non Agricultural Employment	57	75	63
% Urban Employment	25	61	40-60

% New Jobs	83	93	n/a
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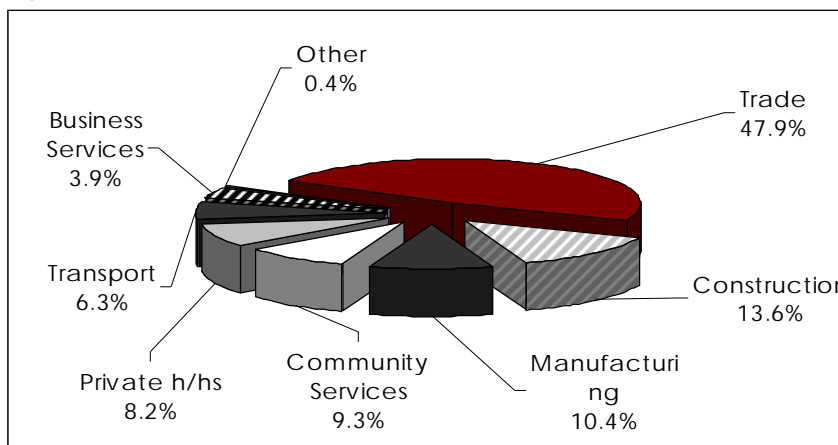
Source: Chen, 2001:72

The table indicates that informal employment in most contexts is the norm. Further given that between 80% and 90% of new jobs are being created in the informal economy, this trend is unlikely to be reversed. Although there are fewer statistics reflecting the size of the informal economy in the developed world, there are a number of case studies that demonstrate that informal activities are on the increase. (See Skinner 2002 for details.)

In South Africa, according to the September 2003 Labour Force Survey, 25.1% of those working in South Africa, operate in the informal economy. This is constituted by 1 899 000 people operating in the informal sector (which Stats SA defines as those operating in unregistered firms and their employees) and 1 022 000 domestic workers. This percentage excludes a further 350 000 people who work in subsistence agriculture. (Stats SA, 2004). Although the figures fluctuate, informal work is one of the few areas in post apartheid South Africa where there has been growth in employment. (See Devey et al, 2003a for further details.)

Figure 1 shows the distribution of informal workers by industrial sector. From this it is clear that informal employment in South Africa is concentrated in trade, with just under half of all informal workers located in this sector. Further, there are significant numbers of people working in construction, manufacturing and services. South Africa's informal economy, in comparison to other developing country contexts, is disproportionately dominated by trade. (See the ILO, 2002 for further international statistics).

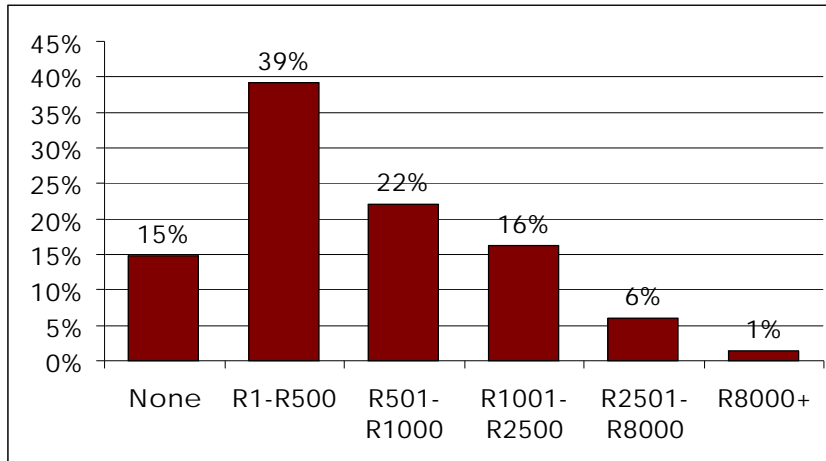
Figure 1: Employment in the informal economy in South Africa by industry, September 2003



Source: Adapted from StatsSA, 2004:vii

Figure 2 below is a graphical representation of the monthly incomes in the informal economy. It is clear from the figure that 54% of those working in the informal economy earn R500 or less and that 92% earn less than R2500. This suggests a correlation between being poor and working in the informal economy.

Figure 2: Monthly income in the informal economy in South Africa, September 2003



Source: Adapted from StatsSA, 2004:27

There is a gender and race dimension to the informal economy in South Africa. It is clear from the table below that although more men than women work in the informal economy the difference is less than is the case for the formal economy. It is also clear that the overwhelming majority of domestic workers are women. Within the informal economy more qualitative work indicates that women tend to be over represented in the less lucrative tasks. (See for example Lund, Nicholson and Skinner, 2000 on street trading.) Finally, it is also clear from the table that the majority of those working in the informal economy are black.

Table 2: Workers in South Africa, by sex and race

	Formal	Informal	Domestic Work
Sex			
Male	61.40%	56.20%	4.40%
Female	38.60%	43.80%	95.60%
Race			
Black	58.80%	89.50%	90.51%
Coloured	14.40%	5.70%	9.20%
Indian	5.20%	1.10%	0.00%
White	21.60%	3.50%	0.00%

Source: Adapted from StatsSA, 2004:23

The statistics demonstrate that the informal economy is an important and growing component of the South African labour market. They also show that this is an area of work where incomes are extremely low.

3.2 Implications of recent policy for those in the informal economy

Three aspects of national government policy have particularly important implications for those working in the informal economy – trade and industry

policy, small business development policy and labour market policy. These will briefly be reviewed. With respect to the first, since the political transition the South African government has been pursuing a path of rapid integration into the global economy. Valodia (2001) points out that trade and industry policy has rapidly exposed the industrial sector to international competition. This has led to employment losses in the formal sector, particularly in manufacturing. He argues that this has also led to a process of restructuring within firms – the introduction of more flexible forms of work arrangements – the informalisation of work.

One of the Department of Trade and Industry's (DTI) core responsibilities is supporting small businesses. In 1995 the DTI released the White Paper on Small Business Development. The Paper distinguishes between four categories of small businesses - medium, small, micro and survivalist. Those working in the informal economy largely fall in the survivalist category. The White Paper details different support strategies for each category except survivalists. In the subsequent years Ntsika Enterprise Promotion Agency (NEPA) and Khula Enterprise Finance have been established. NEPA provides non-financial support services for SMME promotion and development, largely through a network of local business service centres or LBSC's. Khula Enterprise Finance provides wholesale financial support services to retail financial intermediaries. These support structures have been fraught with internal dynamics and implementation challenges. A survey conducted in 2000 of services available to those working in the informal economy in Durban found that few if any of these DTI services were available to this group (Skinner, 2000a).

Labour market policy in South Africa is one departure from an orthodox macro-economic stabilisation package. The core pieces of legislation are the Employment Equity Act, Basic Conditions of Employment Act (BCEA) and the Labour Relations Act (LRA). Employment equity both aims to ensure non-discrimination in the workplace and to address past racial and gender imbalances as well as discrimination against those with disabilities. The Act stipulates that employers submit employment equity plans outlining affirmative action targets with time frames. The BCEA covers all workers and provides minimum standards so is of relevance to atypical workers. The problem with both these pieces of legislation is that there is little capacity within the Department of Labour to monitor their implementation. Finally there is the LRA, which encourages centralised bargaining at industry level and sets up work place forums. It essentially aims to institutionalise a shift from more adversarial to co-operative relations between business, labour and government. For this legislation to have any effect on those working in the informal economy workers in the informal economy have to be organised into recognised unions.

Another aspect of labour market policy is the training. The Skills Development Act of 1998 established a system of Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) and the National Skills Fund. As has been argued elsewhere (see Devey, et al, 2003b) neither of these structures are adequately servicing those working in the informal economy. The SETAs prioritise the needs of formal economy enterprises since they are the ones paying skills levies. The National Skills Fund does not provide training but rather relies on incentives to attract

training service providers to offer training. Trainers, even not-for-profit trainers, are often reluctant to service those working in the informal economy.

Since the political transition, local government has been given significantly more autonomy and responsibilities. One of local governments' new responsibilities is promoting economic development. Given that this level of government not only provides essential services like housing, water and electricity (which are critical for home based workers) and controls access to public space (which determines whether or not traders can operate), this is a particularly important level of government for those working in the informal economy. The experience in South Africa thus far has been mixed, with some cities engaging with the challenge of incorporating and managing those working in the informal economy more creatively than others (see Skinner, 2000b for details on, for example, different cities' approaches to street trading).

It is thus clear that the policy environment for those working in the informal economy in post apartheid South Africa has been mixed. Some policies have led to the increase in the numbers of those working in the informal economy under much more precarious work conditions. While more progress could have been made at national level with respect to support services, there are opportunities secure support at a local government level.

4. The Self Employed Women's Association in India

SEWU is modelled on the Self Employed Women's Association or SEWA. SEWA is the largest trade union in India with over 700 000 members. Rose (1992: 16) points out, SEWA has challenged traditional trade union ways of thinking by creating an association with the power to mobilise and empower large numbers of marginalised women in the informal economy. SEWA's positive impact on membership as well as influence in development debates and discourse has been widely documented (see for example Chen, 2003, Datta, 2003, Lund and Vaux, 2003). Given this impact and the relationship between SEWA and SEWU, this section details the origins, current membership, philosophy, institutional structure and impact of SEWA.

SEWA was formed in Ahmedabad city in the state of Gujarat in 1972. A group of women cart pullers and head loaders approached Ela Bhatt, who was head of the Textile Labour Associations Women's wing, and asked her to help them secure some of the benefits of unionised workers. Bhatt helped these women to organise, and from here 'SEWA grew organically, slowly absorbing more and more trades, rooting itself in the reality of poor working women' (Rose, 1992:19-20).

SEWA brings women from diverse backgrounds and trades together crossing lines of religion and caste. SEWA members come from both rural and urban² areas and are very poor. Membership can be divided into four major categories on the basis of their work - home based workers, vendors or traders, labourers and service providers and small producers (SEWA, 2002:1).

² In 2002 31% of members were urban and 69% rural (SEWA, 2002:1)

Members are either self-employed or work as casual day labourers or they work for others for a piece rate under subcontract. SEWA has members in seven states in India, although this membership tends to be concentrated within the state of Gujarat.

Gandhian thinking has fundamentally shaped the philosophy and the strategies of SEWA (SEWA, 2002:4-5). Chen, (2004:66) explains that SEWA is committed to the pursuit of what Gandhi called India's 'second freedom' which is economic freedom or freedom from poverty and hunger. The two components of economic freedom are full employment i.e. workers have full security and self-reliance i.e. women are autonomous and self-reliant in their decision making and their economic activities. Self-reliance needs to be achieved not only as an individual but also organisationally. SEWA organises women to achieve these goals through the joint strategy of struggle and development. The struggle is against structural constraints imposed on women in society while the 'development activities strengthen women's bargaining power and offer them new alternatives' (SEWA, 2002: 4).

The founding institution of SEWA is the Union, which recruits and organises SEWA's membership at a national level. As a trade union SEWA offers its members a combination of services including organisation into trade groups, co-operatives or producer groups, collective bargaining and opportunities for members to develop local leadership abilities. In urban areas SEWA's early street vendor campaigns were based on organisation and mobilisation, and focused on negotiations with the local state and suppliers. More recently SEWA has assisted members such as the chindi stitchers and paper pickers through the formation of co-operatives and through negotiating with the state for better prices on raw materials (Datta, 2003: 351-356). In rural areas SEWA initially tried to use traditional union strategies to organise but soon realised that these strategies were ineffective. Because SEWA's rural membership had no bargaining power, they began to lose whatever low paid work they already had. SEWA then had to develop suitable strategies to increase its rural members' bargaining power by increasing local employment opportunities for these members (SEWA, 2002:15-16).

From the outset SEWA concentrated on developing institutions to provide financial services, social security, child and health care to its members. Fair credit was the most popular demand from all the trade groups that came together in SEWA. In response SEWA decided to form its own bank in 1974. SEWA Bank is founded on the Union's commitment to increasing the assets of its members and securing assets in the names of its members. SEWA Bank provides credit, savings and insurance to members. SEWA Bank currently has more than 202,000 depositors in 10 districts of Gujarat (Chen, 2004:56 and 29). SEWA Social Security provides health and childcare services (Chen, 2004: 4). While the Gujarat Mahila Housing SEWA Trust provides housing services (Chen, 2004:4).

SEWA also provides a number of market development and skills training services to its members. Design SEWA provides product development and market orientated design training to craftswomen to develop them as master crafts persons. The Gujarat State Mahila SEWA Co-operative Federation Ltd

was formed in 1992 to strengthen the bargaining power of SEWA's co-operative societies. The federation helps members to find national and international markets for their products. (SEWA, 2002). Finally SEWA Academy, which includes SEWA Video, is responsible for research, training, and communication.

The primary organisational principle of SEWA is control by membership. This results in the empowerment of members. SEWA's day to day operations are managed by local leaders. Furthermore all SEWA members are voting members of the SEWA union. SEWA Union, SEWA Cooperative Federation and SEWA Bank are all democratically elected membership based organisations, which are governed by elected representatives of SEWA members. Consider the Bank for example. Self employed women shareholders own SEWA bank and the bank also has its own elected board of women workers who make the institution's policies (SEWA, 2002: 28). As noted in their 2002 annual report, SEWA believes that the basis of development and progress is organising and building workers' organisations (2002: 6). SEWA helps its members to form these organisations and builds capacity among its members to enable them to manage these organisations independently (Chen, 2004:6, 32).

There have been many studies measuring the impact of different aspects of SEWA's activities (see for example Vaux and Lund, 2003 on SEWA's response to crises, see Datta 2003 on empowerment of members). Chen, Khurana and Mirani (2004) provide the most comprehensive synthesis. They draw on both external and internal evaluations. They conclude that the major share of SEWA members reported that the regularity or security of their work had increased or that they had diversified their economic activities. Membership to SEWA had also improved the physical well being of women. SEWA members were more likely to have savings accounts, to have these accounts in their own name, and to prepare for the future compared to other working class women. An important share of SEWA members, particularly rural members, reported having made housing improvements in recent years. They note that members felt more secure now than they had in the past and more confident about continuing with their current occupation.

Chen et al (2004:62) conclude that over the past three decades SEWA's interventions have led to structural changes, which have contributed to the mainstreaming of women's issues in development discourses and planning. She goes on to argue that SEWA has had a tremendous impact on the wider environment at local, national, and international levels. SEWA is an interesting case of what is possible but also a useful point of reference for our analysis of SEWU.

5. Organising in the informal economy in South Africa

As noted in the introduction since the 1970's in South Africa the trade unions were seen as the primary arena for organisation for the working poor. South Africa's strong trade union movement played a key role in the anti apartheid struggle. The informalisation of work however has posed a significant challenge to the formal union movement. This section starts with a brief reflection on the difficulties of organising those working in the informal

economy, it then goes on to consider how the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) and their affiliates have dealt with this issue. The section ends off with a reflection on other organisations that organise informal economy workers.

5.1 Challenges in organising those working in the informal economy

As Goldman (2003a:57) in her synthesis of four sectoral case studies of organising in South Africa's informal economy notes:

'Organising is never easy. It is even less so in the informal economy where work is irregular and irregularly paid, employment relationships are often ambiguous or disguised and individuals are generally vulnerable as workers and citizens.'

Organising those in the informal economy poses a particular challenge for, among others, the following reasons:

Spatial location of workers: Those working in the informal economy are often spatially dispersed. They are in both rural and urban areas. In urban areas they operate not only in commercial parts of town but also residential areas. This is in contrast to, for example, organising factory workers. This requires more effort from organisers to find members.

Previous experience of organisations: Former union members who have been retrenched by formal business are often suspicious of worker organisations feeling that the unions did not do enough to stop their retrenchment. (This is an issue raised by Bennett, 2002 and Motala, 2002 in their case studies on organising informal workers in the clothing and street trading sector respectively.) Those who have never been formally employed often have had bad experiences with fly by night organisations that have taken their money, not fulfilling any of their original commitments (Lund and Skinner 1999, found this among street traders). Organisers thus have an added challenge to overcome these suspicions.

The lack of an employer to negotiate with: There is often no employer and if there is an employer they are often disguised. Organising in the informal economy therefore requires different and often particularly creative strategies in terms of finding bargaining partners to negotiate with as well as forcing them to negotiate. In the case of street traders local authorities often shape the environment that traders operate in and so are logical negotiating partners. In the case of home workers suppliers of materials and work sometimes provide a negotiation opportunity.

Diversity of activities: Further there is huge diversity of work - people operate in different activities (trade, service, manufacturing) and even in the same activity within different sectors (traders for example sell a variety of products). Organising strategies and inventions often need to be tailor made to the specific needs not only of the activity but the sector. Interventions that would support the activities of craft sellers for example are very different from that of traditional medicine traders/dispensers.

Dynamics between informal operators: Those working in the informal economy are often in competition with each other. There are employment relationships within the informal economy that are often particularly exploitative. Further there are unequal gender dynamics with men tending to dominate more lucrative activities in the informal economy. Organisations have to negotiate these dynamics.

5.2 The formal union movement's response to informal work

The September Commission report on the future of trade unions in 1997 identified the informalisation of work as a key challenge for the COSATU. However, it was only at COSATU's seventh national congress held in September 2000 that a strategy on organising this group was tabled and adopted. The document outlines a two fold strategy of organising informal/home workers and attempting to extend legal protection to those working more informally. The strategy lists in an appendix what COSATU unions had done so far. Most affiliates listed what the challenges were, with few outlining any progress made. The exceptions were the South African Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers Union (SACCAWU), the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) and the South African Clothing and Textile Workers Union (SACTWU). The activities of these unions and others will briefly be considered.

SACCAWU (COSATU, 2000) reported doing 'extensive research' on the area of organising in the informal economy in the retail industry. Given that the statistics on informal employment demonstrate that a high proportion of those working in the informal economy are involved in trade (see figure 1 above), this is a critical area for organising. It however appears that the focus of SACCAWU's activities has been the formal retail industry where, as the report itself states, 'the majority of workers are casual or piece workers'. NUM similarly reported organising workers who were operating in areas of work which the mining industry was increasingly outsourcing (for example blasting and maintenance functions). The focus of NUM's activities has been to represent these workers in matters related to their employment conditions. More recently Goldman (2003b) outlines how NUM is devising a strategy to organise informal construction workers.

The union that seems to have made relative progress is SACTWU. The clothing and textile industry has been particularly hard hit by rapid trade liberalisation which has resulted in a process of informalisation of work (see Skinner and Valodia, 2002 for more details). At their 1999 national congress, SACTWU took a formal decision to actively recruit informal economy workers dedicating human and material resources to achieving this. Since this resolution those working informally in the clothing and textile industry are entitled to join SACTWU. If they pay monthly union fees, they can access the benefits available to other members most notably funeral benefits, primary health care and bursaries for dependents. SACTWU aims to develop a register of unionised informal operators. The union would then be in a position to pressurise formal clothing manufacturers and retailers to only subcontract work to those on the register. There are pilot projects on organising industrial outworkers in Cape Town. Numbers of informally employed members

however are still fairly small. What the union has had more success with is extending bargaining council services and functions to cover those working informally. (See Bennett, 2002 for further details.)

Another union that appears to have had some success in organising those working informally is the South African Transport and Allied Workers Union or SATAWU. Since its establishment in May 2000, SATAWU has embarked on a strategy to organise in the taxi industry. The minibus taxi industry is a significant segment of the informal economy both in terms of employment (estimated to employ 185 000 people) and turnover. The taxi industry is characterised by highly exploitative employment practices. As Barrett (2003:32) notes SATAWU has a membership of approximately 10 000 taxi workers mostly drivers, 2 500 of which are paid up. Much of the unions activities thus far have been directed towards putting pressure on government for institutional change and legal protection for workers. (See Barrett, 2003 for further details.)

As outlined in Section 3.1, in South Africa over a million people work as domestic workers. There is a troubled history of attempts to organise this group. In the early 1990's, with COSATU's assistance, the South African Domestic Workers' Union (SADWU) was established. SADWU however was faced with a number of organisational and financial problems and in 1996, on advice from the COSATU leadership, SADWU was disbanded. In April 2000, given the lack of progress with alternative organisational strategies some domestic workers and former SADWU organisers decided to form a new union. After several workshops and discussions, mostly around what went wrong within SADWU, a new union, the SA Domestic Service and Allied Workers' Union (SADSAWU) was launched in April 2000 in KwaZulu Natal. SADSAWU has also been confronted with internal problems but still operates in the Western Cape and KwaZulu-Natal. It is not as yet affiliated to COSATU.

It is thus clear that, although the formal union movement is now paying some attention to the challenge of organising those working in the informal economy, progress has been slow. It should be noted that, given high levels of retrenchments, unions are overstretched even in their traditional areas of competence. Further, as noted above, organising this group is particularly challenging. It requires a shift in the mindset of trade union officials (away from the position that informal workers are simply a threat to formal workers), different organising strategies (given that the employer is often absent or difficult to find) and a different set of services to what formal unions are used to supplying.

5.3 Other organisations

Other than formal unions there are a group of organisations that focus just on organising informal workers like street trader organisations. In 1998/9 Lund and Skinner (1999) conducted a review of the structure and activities of 22 street trader organisations operating in five South African cities and one small town. This research indicates that trader organisations are often not formally constituted. In many cases they are vocal when issues arise but are often difficult to find in between. In other cases they focus on providing business

services like bulk buying. In most cases they are led by men. More recent research on for example the trader associations operating in the centre of Johannesburg indicate that not much has changed (see for example Thulare, 2004).

The new generation of social movements is oriented towards service delivery and land access issues and tend not to deal with labour related issues generally or the informalisation of work specifically. Although these movements often operate in residential areas where there are high concentrations of informal activity (as well as exploitation), although aware that informalisation may be a key determinant of their members' predicaments, they have rather chosen to respond to service delivery issues.

6. Documentation and critical analysis of the SEWU experience

6.1 Formation and structure of SEWU

The Self Employed Women's Union was founded by Pat Horn. Horn has a long history of organising in the formal union movement in South Africa first in the Paper, Wood and Allied Workers Union and later in the Chemical Workers Union. She (Interview 27/02/04) explains the origin of SEWU as follows:

'I was on a sabbatical in early '91 in Montreal. I was doing research on what happens to the status of women in times of political change... In my literature searches I read about SEWA. In the women's committees of the unions which I'd been in, we became aware that most women who were working were not in unions because they were in the informal economy. I just assumed, like so many people do, that you could not unionise those in the informal economy. This was until I read about SEWA. SEWA made me realise that it was possible.'

Horn detailed the practicalities of organising women in the informal economy for a paper presented at the Centre for Basic Research. She notes that she did not intend to establish the organisation herself as this would entail fundraising, something she had little experience with. However on her return to Durban, she realised that if she did not establish the organisation no one else would. She was supported and encouraged by fellow activists particularly from the gender journal – Agenda. Once Horn had drawn up a funding proposal, the Dutch funders HIVOS agreed to support the first year of SEWU's activities. Having hired organisers and organised a number of branches in the Durban area, SEWU was officially launched in 1994.

SEWU structure is informed by Horn's union history. She (Interview 27/02/04) notes 'in the unions we were always very strict about workers controlling their own organisation'. SEWU is designed on the principle of direct democracy and its organisational form is similar to formal unions. The organisational structure is outlined in detail in the SEWU constitution (SEWU, 1994a). In brief members are organised into branches. Within branches members elect trade leaders and trade leaders collectively form trade committees. Trade committees elect two members to represent them regionally in the Regional Executive Committee (REC). The RECs meet monthly and are responsible for

overseeing the activities of branches and regional staff. Four representatives from each REC are elected to the National Executive Committee (NEC). The NEC is responsible for management of the union as a whole in between annual conferences. As noted in the SEWU Constitution however the governing body of the union is the annual conference to which branches are entitled to send one delegate per 20 members. The conference is where key policy decisions are made and the national office bearers – the president, vice president and treasurer – are elected. SEWU's structure of direct democracy is very different from other organisations that organise those working in the informal economy. Skinner and Lund's (1999) review of street trader organisations found, for example that very few of them had constitutions or regular meetings.

As outlined in the Constitution SEWU membership is open to all adult women involved in 'an economic activity' and who 'earn their living by their own effort, ' without regular or salaried employment' and 'who do not employ more than three persons on a permanent basis' (SEWU, 1994a:1). SEWU is thus targeting the poorer end of the informal economy. It also excludes men, a organisational position that some, most notably COSATU is critical of. SEWU's decision to organise only women is informed by a commitment to confronting not only a patriarchal society but also the gendered nature of informal work. It is informative that leadership in formal unions, even those unions whose membership is largely women like the clothing and textile workers union, is still dominated by men. This holds true for organisations in the informal economy like street trader organisations (see Lund and Skinner, 1999).

6.2 Trends in SEWU membership

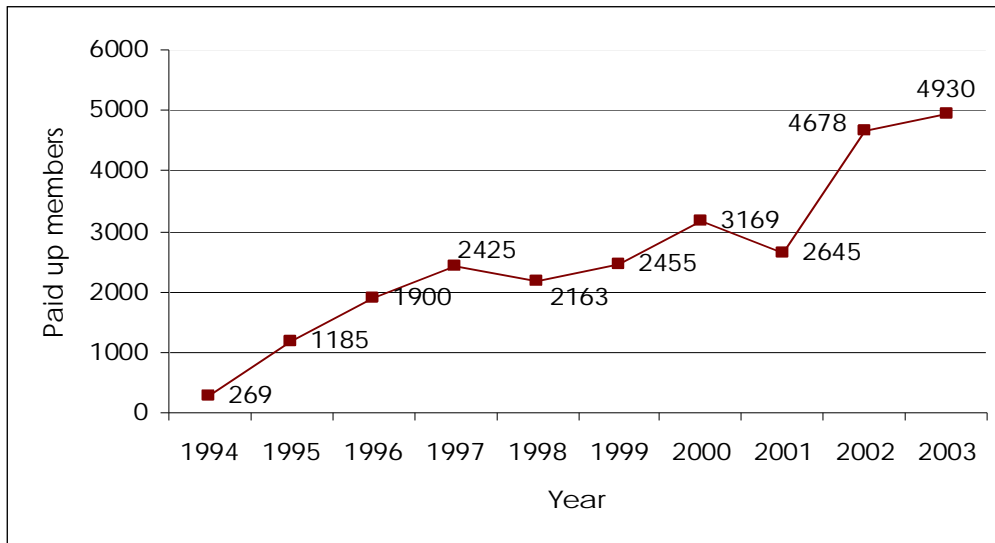
SEWU's membership consists predominantly of black³ women situated in the survivalist end of the informal economy. The membership surveys that have been done indicate that members' incomes are extremely low (see for example James, 1997). Members activities over time can be broadly divided into the following categories - home based production including the making of clothing, crafts, catering, baking and block making; small scale farming including vegetable gardening, poultry and pig farming and the growing of traditional medicinal plants; street trading in fruits, vegetables, foodstuffs, African crafts, clothing and traditional medicines and part time domestic work. Members' are often engaged in more than one of these economic activities.⁴

Figure 3 below represents membership numbers from 1994 to 2003. These figures reflect paid up membership at the end of the given year.

³ Initially SEWU membership was 100% black. With the establishment of the Western Cape region in 1997, SEWU's membership included a number of coloured women. In addition SEWU has also organised a few Indian members in one of its Stanger branches in KwaZulu-Natal (Bennet, 2002:35).

⁴ In 1995 there was a decision to organise commercial sex workers. By 1997 no progress had been made and it was decided that organisers should abandon this area of work. Failure to organise this group is likely to be because of a strong commitment to Christen values from SEWU's leadership and staff.

Figure 3: SEWU paid up membership, 1994-2003



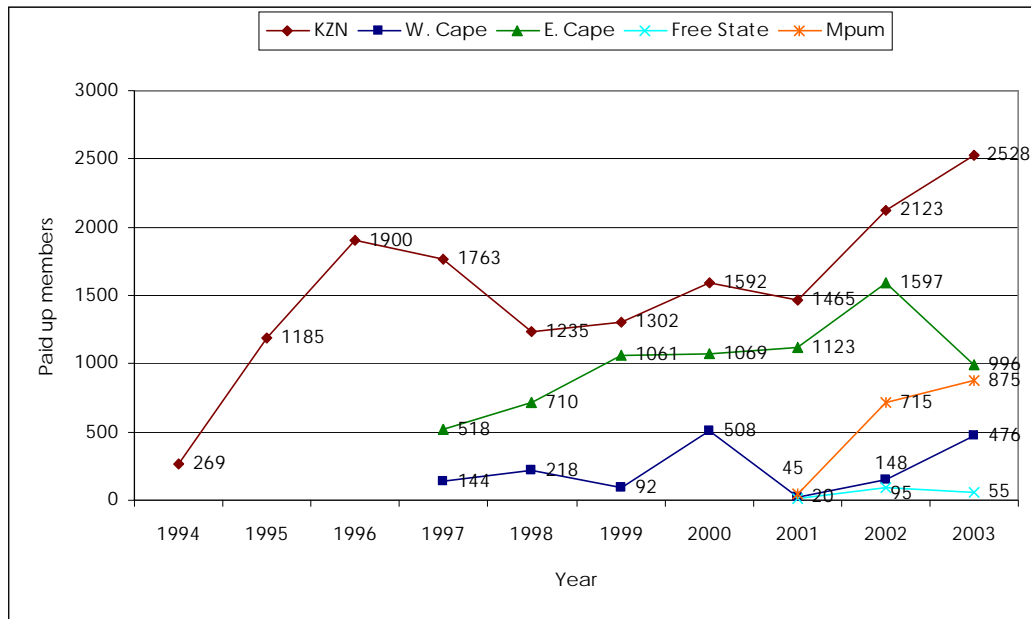
Source: SEWU Annual Reports, 1994-2003

It is clear from figure 3 that SEWU's membership increased steadily between 1994 and 1997. Between 1998 and 2003 SEWU's membership fluctuated. During 1998 SEWU experienced a drop in membership largely as a result of the shift to a debit order system of payment for membership fees. Over the following two years, the union was again able to recover and slowly rebuild its membership base. However, in 2001 SEWU again experienced a significant drop in membership. The union increased its membership in 2002 and 2003. At beginning of 2004 however, SEWU's membership only stood at a total of 1 967 paid up members, suggesting another recent and significant lapse in membership.

Figure 4 presents the membership breakdown by region giving further insight into fluctuations in numbers.

Figure 4: SEWU Regional Membership Figures⁵

⁵ Membership figures for the Western Cape were only available from the SEWU Half Yearly Report i.e. June 2001. This may have caused a slight distortion in the representation of membership figures in the Western Cape during this period.



As is implied in the figure, SEWU launched regional branches in the Western Cape and the Eastern Cape in 1997 and the Free State and Mpumalanga in 2001 respectively. Fluctuations in membership at regional level are often related to problems within the regional offices. For example in 2001 there was mismanagement in the Western Cape and in 2002 there was a corruption case in the Eastern Cape office.

Analysis of the annual report over time indicate that there are three major, inter-related membership trends over the last 10 years. SEWU has undergone a shift from a mainly urban to a mainly rural membership with the exception of the Western Cape, which only has urban based members. The union has also experienced a shift from a predominance of street vendors to predominance of home based workers. In addition there has been a significant weakening of a strong and concentrated SEWU membership in the Durban inner city and beachfront, which defined the movement in its early years. New points of strength however have been established as membership spreads to other areas and provinces. These shifts have had significant implications for the way in which SEWU has chosen to organise and the kind of strategies and services that it provides to its members.

SEWU defines a member as lapsed if they have not paid their subscription fees for more than six months. Lapsed membership has been an issue for SEWU from the outset as indicated by its frequent mention in the annual reports.⁶ As noted in one report this is partly a result of expedience by members – ‘members allow their membership to lapse frequently only re-joining when they experience difficulties’. Staff identified the introduction of the debit order system as a significant factor contributing to lapsed membership. Lapsing membership has

⁶ We have been unable to obtain regular and consistent figures of lapsed membership. Where figures are available there is no clear criteria for how they have been calculated. Some of these figures seem to be unrealistically high. For example in 2000 it was calculated that SEWU had a total of 3 169 paid up members and 8 351 lapsed members (SEWU, 2001:1).

also been a growing concern for donors who are keen for SEWU to develop a large enough membership to be in a position to cover the costs of its core activities. Frequent lapsing of members seems to suggest that women are joining SEWU to address specific short term needs or crises. The challenge is for SEWU to find ways to develop long term and sustainable commitment amongst its members.

6.3 Staff strategies and dynamics

SEWU has always had paid staff. Although similar to the formal unions this is different from other organisations organising informal workers like street trader organisations (see Lund and Skinner, 1999). SEWU is structured on the principle of control by members. The paid staff are the employees of the union members and do not have voting powers. Staff however, in reality, often have a lot of decision making influence. Staffing strategies and dynamics are critical to how the organisation functions. This was an issue addressed in interviews with both staff and members. Four issues stand out – the importance of getting the right kind of people as organisers, the success of SEWU's staff development strategy, the related issue of the exit strategy of the founder and how SEWU has dealt with cases of staff corruption. Each of these will be dealt with in turn.

In discussions with staff and members a number of issues were raised about organiser-membership dynamics. The national administrator (Interview 18/02/2004) for example emphasised the importance of staff not looking down on members because 'they cannot read and cannot write'. The issue of the relative strength of formal union versus informal work experience was raised. The importance of understanding the specificities of the informal economy, and the different recruiting strategies it requires, was emphasised. One staff member argued that someone who has worked in the informal economy themselves is more likely to understand what effects members and the challenges they face particularly with respect to household demands. A number of staff raised the issue of emphasising the long term empowerment vision of the union. The KZN regional organiser for example noted the importance of not taking organising short cuts where the material benefits, particularly the training subsidy was used as main incentive to get people to join the union. The General Secretary (Interview, 12/02/2004) identified this as a problem and a contributing factor to lapsed membership.

Originally SEWU employed staff with formal economy union experience. In more recent times there are increasing numbers of staff who were originally members and have worked their way up the ranks. An explicit part of SEWU's staffing strategy has been building the capacity of staff, both through mentorship and training courses. The leaders who have worked their way through the ranks are very strong and articulate leaders and thus a testimony to the success of this strategy. SEWU differs somewhat from SEWA in this respect. Although ordinary members of SEWA often become organisers the intellectual leadership of the union tends to come from upper caste professional women with tertiary educations.

Most social movements have a powerful, charismatic founder member. The role of such a founder in the longer term trajectory of the organisation is an issue many organisations and movements face. SEWU is no different. This is another aspect of SEWU which is markedly different from SEWA. Bhatt only recently retired from service and continues to remain a figurehead of SEWA 32 years on. In contrast Horn's exit strategy was discussed from when the union was first launched in 1994. Horn (Interview, 27/02/2004) explains how this was critical to SEWU being an empowering organisation. There was clearly resistance to her going. She argued that this was partly because staff and members did not want to take responsibility for difficult issues like how to make the union financially self sustainable.

'Everybody was treating SEWU like a charity organisation...They were not taking responsibility for the Union's self -sustainability because they felt they could just rely on me to raise more funds' (Interview, 27/02/2004).⁷

Horn withdrew from SEWU slowly but systematically. Having served a three year term as regional secretary, she withdrew from the regional office to establish a national office in 1997. Having served two terms as national general secretary she went part time. SEWU created the position of an assistant general secretary partly on the advice of an external evaluation. An assistant general secretary was then elected. Horn explains:

'The assistant general secretary was physically in the office doing the work and I was training her in a very intensive way... she took on more and more of the work and practice. Although I trained her, part of it was just in-service training, just doing the job. By the time 2001 came I said I was not going to stand again for elections.'

Since 2001 Horn has assisted the union in an informal capacity advising the staff and leadership on strategic matters and representing SEWU in labour dispute matters.

Horn looks back on this decision with no regrets. She notes that her exit ensured that staff and leadership took more responsibility, focused on the broader vision of SEWU and started to think more strategically. With respect to staff, for example, she notes:

'They have the ability to do a whole lot of things that I used to always have to. They've hired people, they've fired people, and they've gone to the CCMA on their own, all of that they didn't have skills for before. They've made decisions about control of finances, they've made fundraising decisions, they have made decisions about downsizing and retrenchments. I don't know many organisations where the actual grassroots elected leadership can do that. Most NGOs have boards consisting of professionals who make those decisions.'

Horn's leaving was not easy for the new staff leaders. Members were slow to develop trust and confidence in the new staff. In interviews with members it is clear that many of them saw Horn's departure as a watershed. As one

⁷ Race dynamics in the new South Africa partly informed Horn's decision. Horn relays how Ela Bhatt questioned her on the decision to leave, to which she (Interview, 27/02/2004) replied 'politically in South Africa I can tell you one thing that a white person running an organisation, having this degree of dependence is a bad thing, it will not last'.

member noted 'It's not the SEWU I know, it's a different SEWU'. Even today when speaking to SEWU members and office bearers, who are dissatisfied with aspects of the current staff and leadership, there is an idealisation of the founder and her leadership in the Union. These members feel that her withdrawal from the union marked the end of a particular era in SEWU and that SEWU's leadership and ability to address the needs of its members have not been the same since.

Over the years SEWU has had to deal with a disproportionate number of cases of corruption with staff misappropriating funds. What is noteworthy is the high levels of transparency with which SEWU has dealt with these cases. Corruption has been reported to membership through the SEWU newsletter. The union has disciplinary procedures. Where misappropriation has been proved, staff have been dismissed. SEWU has proactively put financial systems in place to minimise opportunities for mismanagement. From 1998 regions were required to send monthly reports to head office before receiving their monthly allocations. Also the introduction of the debit order system of collecting membership subscriptions made it more difficult for staff to mismanage funds. Further, in 1999 SEWU established a Financial Sustainability Committee to monitor and approve financial requests from its regions. Despite this there have been recent cases of corruption. Over the years corruption has contributed to the high staff turn over in the union, which has in turn slowed down the building up of staff capacity.

6.4 Financial sustainability and relationship with donors

Financial sustainability has been an ongoing challenge for SEWU. SEWU's approach has been from inception informed by a formal union logic that to be independent, unions have to be self sufficient. SEWU members pay a joining fee of R10 and monthly subscriptions of R8. Due to a case of an organiser being robbed as well as internal corruption, at the 1998 Annual Conference a decision was taken to move to a system of membership fees being paid by stop order. From then on there was a big drive to assist members to get bank accounts. The banks however are notorious for being unwelcoming to poorer clients. For example if a client has insufficient funds to pay her stop order at ABSA she is charged R95 penalty. The regional organiser (Interview, 05/03/2004) noted that these kinds of penalties have lead to some members accumulating large debts. This obviously has implications for sustaining membership. SEWU has experienced such significant problems with the stop order system that they re-introduced collecting subscription money by hand.

SEWU is still dependent on donor funding. As noted in section 6.3, SEWU was established with assistance of funds from HIVOS, the Dutch non governmental organisation who are largely funded by the Dutch Ministry for Development Co-operation. From that point on funds from the international trade union movement were sought. This was part of a strategy to secure the acceptance of the principle of SEWU within the trade union movement. FNV Mondiaal, the Dutch Trade Union Federation's development wing, has been SEWU's longest standing and largest donor. More recently SEWU has sourced funds from elsewhere e.g. Ford Foundation and Breadline. There have been

changes over time with respect to negotiating power with funders. In the mid 1990's SEWU turned away funding from one donor whose agenda was small enterprise development rather than individual and collective empowerment through trade union structures. In more recent times SEWU has struggled to secure funding. In 2003 they had to retrench half of their staff due to funding shortages. This is partly an upshot of trends in funding globally.

SEWU has raised funds on the proviso that as an organisation they are moving towards being financial self sustainable for running costs of the organisation. Donors like FNV have been very supportive of SEWU but have been clear that the organisation has to demonstrate progress to this end. In reality little progress has been made. Financial sustainability is likely to be an issue for any organisation of informal economy workers. This was a critical problem, for example, the South African Domestic Workers Union. Financial self sustainability depends on sustaining and increasing membership. Members' incomes are at best precarious. SEWA's approach to this is informative. Their membership fees are only 5 rupees a year. Their institutions however like the bank are now self sustaining. They have achieved this through reaching scale.

On our estimation however SEWU has set reasonable targets. As indicated in Section 3 incomes in the informal economy in South Africa, as is the case elsewhere, are low. As is clear from figure 2 (pg.6), 54% of those working in the informal economy reported earning below R500 a month, with 15% reporting earning nothing. R8 a month would be too onerous for those earning nothing but potentially manageable for someone earning R250 or more a month. The KZN regional organiser estimated that the regional offices total annual expenses, including staffing costs were R300 000 (Interview, 05/03/2004). On subscriptions of R8 a month, there would need to be sustained membership of 3 125. This may have to be increased to 4 000 to sustain the activities of the national office as well. The problem lies with getting to scale.

6.5 SEWU's activities and achievements

This section considers SEWU's activities and achievements over the last 10 years. It draws on SEWU's annual reports, interviews with staff and members as well as other stakeholders. SEWU's organising strategies over time will be documented and critically analysed. Where appropriate, comparisons will be made with SEWA.

6.5.1 Negotiations and collective bargaining

From inception to the late 1990's a significant focus of SEWU's activities were negotiations. With the high proportion of membership being street traders, most negotiations have focused on local government⁸. This was a period where local governments were trying to make sense of how to deal with street traders. The apartheid states' response to traders had largely been to violently remove them. During the transition new legislation was passed allowing street traders to operate. SEWU emerged during the period of local

⁸ For membership based in rural areas there have been cases in KZN and the Eastern Cape of negotiations with traditional leaders mainly about access to land.

governments trying to re-regulate trading activities. Negotiations have largely focused on street trading bylaws and provision and regulation of infrastructure - water, toilets, shelter and storage facilities - as well services like child care and overnight accommodation.

SEWU initiated and participated in both bilateral and joint forum negotiations with the Town Councils of Eshowe, Stanger and Matatiele regarding the regulation and provision of facilities for street traders. For example in 1996 in Matatiele the local city Council agreed to SEWU's demands for shelters for street traders. These shelters were completed during the course of the year. When they were built a number of male waged workers applied for the use of them, however, 'SEWU was successful in persuading the Council that existing street traders should have preference and preventing the women from being pushed aside by men' (SEWU, 1996:4). In 1997 SEWU was also able to initiate bilateral and joint forum discussions regarding regulations and facilities for street traders in central Cape Town and Mitchells Plain.

The city where most SEWU negotiations have occurred and where there has been greatest success is Durban. This is partly because of the predominance of SEWU membership operating as street traders in Durban in SEWU's earlier years. In 1994 SEWU negotiated with the Durban City Council to install water supplies and temporary toilet facilities at points identified by SEWU members. In 1995 the Durban City Council started to formulate new street trading bylaws. SEWU was represented on all the committees and forums established about the new bylaws. The 1995 Annual Report SEWU managed to raise 'women's voices very prominently in the consultation and negotiation process' (SEWU, 1995:3). These initial engagements led to a sustained working relationship.

Between 1995 and 1998 on the streets SEWU's elected trade leaders became recognised as representatives in different areas, providing channels for greater influence on decisions affecting their work and livelihood. SEWU also established monthly bilateral negotiations with the Informal Trade and Small Business Opportunity Branch of the Council. As recorded in their 1996 report through these meetings SEWU was successful at getting a number of specific issues onto the Council's agenda these included overnight accommodation, storage and child care facilities (SEWU, 1996:4). In this period shelters were built for traders throughout the inner city and a new market for traditional medicine traders was planned and started. Although SEWU was not solely responsible for these interventions, not only did they significantly contribute to the pressure to incorporate traders into city plans, but their sustained engagement ensured that interventions were appropriate to women traders' needs. (For detailed evidence see, for example, Nesvag's (2000) analysis of the role SEWU played in the redevelopment of the traditional medicine market.)

SEWU has not maintained a day to day negotiation relationship with the city. However, in a five South African cities' approaches to street trading conducted in 1998/9 (see Skinner, 2000b) Durban stood out as the city that had made the most progress in integrating street traders into urban plans. Durban's approach to incorporating and managing street traders stands in

contrast to, for example, Johannesburg's where most of the inner city has been declared a prohibited trade zone. Looking back at SEWU's 1996 demands for overnight accommodation, storage facilities and child care, is informative. Durban has established a cheap overnight accommodation facility in the inner city. There is a crèche for traders' children bordering the densely traded Warwick Junction area and there are council storage facilities in the inner city. No other South African city has provided such a comprehensive set of services.

In more recent times negotiations have been less of a focus of SEWU's activities. In the last few years there have been ad hoc negotiations with national government departments (welfare, agriculture), but not sustained negotiation relationships. This is likely to be due to a combination of factors. As noted in the previous section SEWU's membership has changed over time and shifted with there being more home based worker members than street trader members. There are fewer negotiation opportunities for home based workers. For the remaining street trader members there is less policy dynamism as the city's approaches have become more entrenched. Finally, the complex task of negotiation and collective bargaining in an informal economy context was a particular skill and focus of the first general secretary. Since her leaving, there is less capacity (and maybe passion) among staff to engage in ongoing negotiation processes.

6.5.1 Policy influence and interventions

Over the years SEWU has placed much emphasis on policy interventions at local, national and international levels. At a local level once again SEWU's efforts have experienced most success in Durban. In the mid to late 1990's, as outlined above, SEWU influenced the way the city approached street trading matters. In 2000 Durban initiated a comprehensive informal economy policy process. Two researchers who had worked closely with SEWU since 1998 were employed to assist the city in developing in the policy. In the process SEWU staff were interviewed, membership consulted and SEWU alongside StreetNet gave detailed written comments on the draft. The person responsible for drafting the policy noted how the experience of the SEWU commissioned research and SEWU input in the process informed her thinking (telephone correspondence, 15/07/04). The policy was adopted by the Unicity Council in 2001. This policy is looked to as an international best practice (see Chen, Jhabvala and Lund, 2001).

SEWU's interventions have doubtlessly contributed to securing a progressive policy approach to the informal economy in Durban. The founder and former general secretary, reflecting on the leadership role that Durban has come to play with respect to informal economy policy, argued that SEWU could take some credit for this. Although noting that there was a 'political moment' given that the ANC had been elected into power on the basis of improving the lives of the poor, SEWU had provided the city councillors and bureaucrats some pointers as to how to do this.

'(SEWU) showed (Durban City Council) a way of dealing with the working poor ... which was not a small business approach ... but an approach based on ongoing negotiation. SEWU gave them a route and a direction... (The Council) have now provided a much bigger

developed model. SEWU certainly cannot take responsibility for all of it but I think SEWU's intervention within this process has been important. I think it was coup.' (Interview, 27/02/2004).

SEWU's early years are marked by active engagement in the post 1994 elections flurry of national government policy making. SEWU's agenda was to ensure the needs of those working in the informal economy were addressed. SEWU made written submissions to the following national government structures:

- Department of Labour on the new Labour Relations Act
- Department of Trade and Industry on small business policy and their budget vote
- Treasury on gender sensitive budgeting
- Commission of Enquiry on the Provision of Rural Financial Services
- Commission on Gender Equality
- Department of Home Affairs on international migration.

Given that policy making processes are dynamic and unpredictable, more detailed analysis is required of the extent to which SEWU has shaped these policy processes and structures. SEWU by their own admission, experienced mixed success. They note for example that while their submission to the Department of Labour on the Labour Relations Act was 'largely ignored', that in the case of their submission to the Department of Trade and Industry on small business policy 'SEWU's less radical recommendations subsequently appeared in the White Paper' (SEWU, 1996). SEWU has not made any written submissions to national government for some years now.

SEWU has been involved in international forums. Two SEWU members attended an international workshop on the legal position of street vendors in Bellagio, Italy in November 1995. This workshop was largely initiated by SEWA and resulted in the International Declaration on the Regulation of Street Vending. This is also a case of where these international engagements contributed to local change. The meeting coincided with Durban's process of formulating new street trading by-laws. As noted in SEWU's 1995 annual report SEWU information gleaned at Bellagio informed SEWU's suggested amendments and the discussions about the implementation of these bylaws.

SEWU has been involved in the development of International Labour Organisation (ILO) policies on labour standards and practices in the informal economy. Over the last 10 years there have been a number of ILO processes focusing on the informal economy. In 1994 SEWU 'lobbied widely among the mainstream trade union movement and the new government for support for the ILO Convention on Home-based work' (SEWU, 1994: 10). SEWU then went on to participate as technical advisors in the ILO committee on Homework at the 1995 ILO Annual Labour Conference. SEWU again participated in the ILO Committee on Homework at the 1996 Conference. This conference resulted in the 1996 ILO Convention on Home Based Work. In June 2002 the General Secretary attended the International Labour Conference of the ILO in Geneva to participate in the Committee on Decent Work in the Informal Economy. (SEWU, 2002:14). This conference, not only raised the profile of this issue in ILO structures and internationally but also resulted in a significant shift in thinking about the informal economy.

6.5.3 Skills training and education and training

A key focus of SEWU's activities over time has been membership training. Given the national government's approach to training outlined above, SEWU's role in enabling its members to access training is particularly important. SEWU distinguishes between skills training and education and training. Skills training refers to training in skills related to a member's income generating activities. This training is accessed through externally accredited trainers and members contribute to cover costs. Education and training refers to training in broader empowerment and development issues. This training is conducted internally in workshops organised by SEWU and is free to all members. These two forms of training are assessed in turn.

Skills training

SEWU's has had to work alongside trainers to ensure the training provided by these trainers is appropriate to their members' needs both in terms of training times, mode of delivery and course content. For example it is critical that courses are offered part time and that thought is given to child care issues. One of the benefits of SEWU membership is that members are offered R500 worth of skills training annually. Although SEWU offers a wide range of skills training their strategy is to encourage members, through their subsidy structure, to acquire skills in traditionally male dominated areas of employment which often have far greater income generating potential. With training in traditionally female skills such as sewing, SEWU covers 50% of the costs of training and members pay the remaining 50%. For traditionally male areas of employment such as wire fence making, block making and electrical wiring SEWU pays 80 % of training costs with the members cover the remaining 20 %. (Interview National Education Secretary, 18/02/2004).

Table 3 below records the skills training SEWU members have undertaken between 1995 and 2003.

Table 3: SEWU skills training by type and numbers of members attending, 1995-2003

	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	Total
Sewing	106	53	68	52	95	80	33	26	1	514
Building		20	26	17	159	108	43	47	12	432
Glue appliqué	77	62		25	84	34			2	284
Poultry farming					104	88	24	6	45	267
Business skills			7	77	4	116		17	4	225
English / ABET	43	34	35	6	32	24	30		10	214
Catering					14	32	32	39		117
Wire fencing					54	46			16	116
Fashion design		44				7	4	4	37	96
Baking					48	11		1	10	70
Arts and crafts						12	7	11	14	44
Tourism						37				37
Driving					4	7	2	13	9	35
Childcare		8		4	3	8		15	2	40
Other	7	0	14	54	13	13	4	3	14	122

Total	233	221	150	235	614	623	189	182	166	2 613
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Source: SEWU Annual Reports

The coverage, range of skills offered and types of skills are noteworthy. From the table it is clear that SEWU has facilitated for members to attend over 2 600 courses over the 8 year period there is information for. On average 327 courses have been attended by SEWU members in a year. There are however clearly annual fluctuations with over 600 SEWU members attending courses in 1999 and 2000 respectively. What is also clear from the table is the range of skills SEWU has organised access to. Further incorporated in the other category is carpet making, candle making, electrical installation, recycling, carpentry, upholstery, herbalist training, computer training, hairdressing, baking, piggery, security, auto electrical shoe making, plumbing. This indicates that SEWU has gone out of their way to find appropriate training demanded by their members.

Further, SEWU has clearly had some success in encouraging members to train in traditionally male dominated skills. Of the total of 2 613 courses SEWU members attended, 879 were in areas which are dominated by men. The second most frequently attended course is in building more specifically block making. A member from the Umzinyathi branch described how the branch was currently running a block company, which makes and sells blocks to the local community and the eThekweni municipality (Interview, 06/04/2004). Nearly 120 members have been trained in wire fencing. In an interview with a member it emerged that one of SEWU's branches in Jozini, in northern KZN, has been able to use their training in wire fence making to develop a small business and complete orders for fencing from farmers and the local hardware store (Interview, branch member 6/04/2004). There is clearly a trend over time for more up take of these kinds of skills. Compare for example the trends over time between sewing courses attended and block making courses completed.

SEWU has made some progress in providing English and literacy courses. Although the individual courses numbers are not high these courses are often very comprehensive. For example in 1995, SEWU assisted 28 of its members to attend the first year of a two year literary course organised by the English Resource Unit. During the same year 15 members of the Executive attended a six month English course through English for Africa (SEWU, 1995: 20). In 2002 SEWU introduced ABET classes. Members have been trained as Adult Basic Education Training tutors (SEWU, 2002:3). In 2003 SEWU secured support from the University of South Africa (UNISA) to subsidise learning and facilitation material of both the tutors and learners.

According to SEWU's financial statements in eight years for which there is information SEWU has spent over R380 000 on skills training. SEWU staff noted that it was increasingly difficult to secure funds for training. At the time of the interviews SEWU was looking to ways to access government funding particularly from the Department of Labour for its skills programmes.

Education and training

With respect to education and training, workshops are conducted at a branch level twice a year. In more recent years, because of financial difficulties this training has been conducted on a less regular basis. In terms of content this training has concentrated on the five broad areas. First, workshops on building the organisation and organisational skills like lobby and negotiating skills. Second, business skills training is offered covering issues like understanding the economy, business management and marketing. Since the introduction of the stop order system training has also been provided on savings and bank account management. Third, SEWU's training has concentrated on understanding the law. Fourth, workshops have been offered about sexual harassment and domestic violence. Finally workshops have been offered about health issues specifically occupational health and HIV/AIDS. In June 2001 SEWU employed a national education officer specifically to design and implement suitable training and education workshops.

The impact of these kinds of training initiatives was mentioned in interviews. A SEWU member in Durban said that she decided to become a member of SEWU because 'SEWU opens your mind and teaches you how to take care of yourself as a woman' (Interview, 15/03/2004). The regional Administrator for the Eastern Cape relayed the case of a SEWU member who had recently inherited a portion of land. A relative also claimed the land. Having been trained about the law, this member wrote a letter to the chief to say that she owned the land. The regional administrator claimed that it was through SEWU's training and empowerment that this woman had developed the skills and confidence to be able to take this action to save her property (Interview, 7/05/ 2004). SEWU training was identified by members as giving them greater financial self-sufficiency and confidence in their households and domestic relations. A SEWU craft seller and home based producer, emphasised 'a lot has changed in my household since I've joined SEWU. I've helped my brother to pay lobola and am now preparing to build my own house in Ntumuzma and buy furniture for this house' (Interview, 15/03/2004). Another member said that SEWU had made her confident and enabled her not to rely on men. 'I can now pay school fees without asking for money from other people and can buy food to support my family' (Interview, 17/03/2004).

In recent times SEWU has had some success in assisting members to access new markets. This combined with skills upgrading / training can increase members' incomes. Two cases emerged in member interviews. In 2002 the Embalehle branch in Mpumalanga initiated the Sinithemba Women's Project. This project has recently won a government tender to build 200 houses. SEWU assisted this branch to access more information about the tender and gave them a workshop on tendering. SEWU also organised and supported these members to receive skills training in building and construction (Interview Regional Chairperson, Mpumalanga, 05/02/2004). Another branch in Mpumalanga is successfully involved in the farming of chillies, which it sells to a local market. The regional office commissioned some market research and it was suggested that SEWU members farm chillies. The regional office then selected a suitable piece of land in a rural area for a farm. Business management training was given to members of this branch (Interview Regional Administrator, Mpumalanga, 5/05/2004).

It is thus clear that SEWU's skills training and education and training services are an important and widely accessed service. Skills training has assisted a significant number of members to better establish themselves in their work and has opened up new opportunities. The education and training has given members the confidence and skills to be able to negotiate with different authorities and speak out for their rights.

6.5.4 Access to credit and savings facilities

Both the Durban and Johannesburg surveys of those working in the informal economy found that firm owners identified access to credit as the key constraint to growth (Skinner 2003 and Chandra and Rajaratnam, 2001). There are few service providers willing to service this group as they are seen as risky and the transaction costs are high. Commercial banks see this group as unprofitable and, as argued above, the DTI's interventions have up till now met with little success. Where credit institutions, like the international micro-finance organisation FINCA, do accommodate those working in the informal economy they tend to use group lending techniques. Group lending devolves the risk of default to fellow group members who are often the least able to cope with it. In previous interviews with SEWU members it was noted that, for this reason, they disliked the group lending techniques (Skinner, 2000:13).

SEWU has assisted a number of its members to obtain loans. Table 3 below indicates the number of members who obtained loans through SEWU's assistance. For this is it is clear that in a nine year period just under 600 members received loans.

Table 4: Number of SEWU members who have accessed credit through SEWU

Year	No. of members
1994	83
1995	80
1996	66
1997	32
1998	*
1999	96
2000	54
2001	*
2002	85
2003	100
Total	596

* = figures not available

Source: SEWU Annual Reports

SEWU's strategy has been to work with existing institutions to make them more accessible to their members. Between 1994 and 1998 SEWU negotiated and worked with a number of different institutions. The Independent Business Enrichment Centre (IBEC), the Small Business Development Centre (SBDC), Get Ahead Foundation, KwaZulu Finance Corporation (KFC) are mentioned in SEWU annual reports. Only KFC (now Ithala) still operates and most of them used group lending techniques. Through trial and error SEWU discovered that the Land Bank step up loan scheme was the most appropriate to those

working in the informal economy. The Land Bank offers individual loans of between R250 and R6000 in a graduated programme which allows recipients to progressively take out larger loans once they have paid back their previous loan. SEWU has used the Land Bank almost exclusively from 1999 onwards.

In interviews with members, SEWU facilitating access to credit was identified as a critical intervention. Land Bank loans have assisted a number of SEWU members to access capital to buy stock or items of equipment essential to their business. For example a member from the Durban beachfront branch reported how a Land Bank loan had enabled her to buy beads to make the jewellery she sold (Interview, 1/03/2004). Another SEWU member from the Amatikwe branch, involved in a sewing project, had been able to buy her sewing machine (Interview, 5/03/2004). It was clear from interviews that Land Bank loans did not satisfy all members' needs. One member noted that you 'need to do something with quick returns to be able to pay the loan back monthly, you couldn't do something with slow returns like gardening' (Interview, 5/03/2004). Further, there are branches or initiatives where larger injections of finance are required. For example one branch had a thriving block making business. The key obstacle to further growth was access to a small truck that could transport blocks to the client. (Interview, 5/03/2004).

There is a tendency for SEWU members, like others working in the informal economy, to identify access to credit as a blanket cure for all their problems. Access to credit is access to debt and, if not well managed, can sink initiatives. When a business analysis is conducted it is often found that other interventions are required. SEWU is well aware of this. SEWU's General Secretary (Interview 12/02/2004) articulated this as follows:

'When the business is not growing it's not that the business needs a loan. It's like a headache, if you have a headache it doesn't mean that you need a painkiller. You have to think about all the causes of the headache'.

SEWU combines access to credit with comprehensive training programme listed above. There is also an emphasis on savings. The international literature, informed by the experience of institutions like the SEWA bank, is placing increasing emphasis on the importance of savings (Morduch, 2000). SEWU has made important interventions in this regard first, by their involvement in a campaign to reform commercial banks and second, through their negotiations with Post Bank.

The Financial Service Sector Campaign (FSSC) is a campaign backed by the South African Communist Party, COSATU, the African National Congress and a large number of non-governmental organisations. The campaign aims to transform financial institutions making them accessible to poor people. The problems SEWU experienced while trying to implement the debit order system have been a crucial empirical base on which to strengthen the campaign's arguments. SEWU has played a key role in the campaign's work. The campaign has experienced considerable success particularly with respect to criteria for first time bank account holders and penalty payments. (Telephone interview, FSSC co-ordinator, 29/06/2004).

In 2003 SEWU's negotiations with the Department of Communications led to SEWU being involved in a Savings Campaign with Post Bank and the Department of Communications, which has continued into 2004. The aim of this campaign was to assist SEWU members and informal traders at large to open savings accounts with Post Bank (Interview General Secretary, 12/02/2004). SEWU has negotiated with Post Bank to ensure that its savings accounts are more suitably tailored to the needs and limitations of those in the informal economy. Bank charges are significantly less than those of the commercial banks. No minimum bank balance is required and empty accounts can be kept open for three months. (Telephone Interview General Secretary, 22/06/2004).

It is thus clear that SEWU has both facilitated access to credit for its members and contributed to more affordable and accessible savings for informal economy workers. These services still have some limitations as they are, in contrast to the SEWA Bank, not tailor-made to the needs of women informal economy workers. SEWA's banking services are likely to contribute to securing loyal membership. For institutions to provide credit and savings facilities to the poor, in a financially sustainable way, they need to reach scale i.e. have large numbers of clients. SEWU has not managed to secure enough members to consider establishing their own bank. Ironically if SEWU did have their own bank, members would be less likely to lapse but SEWU cannot provide such a service because of lapsed membership.

6.5.5 Developing leaders

The SEWU Constitution states that one of the union's objectives is 'to build leadership among women in the lowest strata of the wider working class' (1994:2). SEWU is carefully structured to satisfy this objective. As outlined in Section 6.1 SEWU allows for the development of leaders at branch, regional and national level. This three tier structure provides opportunities for members to develop and move from one level to the next. The union's approach to the development of leaders operates at two levels. First, women are given the opportunity to be leaders. Many of the members elected to positions in SEWU would have few, if any, other opportunities to be in positions of authority and thereby develop their leadership skills. Second, women are supported in these roles through leadership training. International field trips have also played a part in leadership development.⁹

In interviews with both ordinary members and leaders we were struck by the effectiveness of this strategy. Ordinary members are now often in a position to negotiate with government themselves. A member of the Russell Street Branch in the centre of Durban said 'SEWU has taught me to speak for myself, to speak in front of others and not to be shy and because of this now I'm the chairperson of Sizamimpilo¹⁰' (Interview, 16/03/2004). The emergence of leadership ability is also expressed through involvement in other organisations. The chairperson of the SEWU branch in Amatikwe in KZN, for example started a soup kitchen in her community. Recently she negotiated with the

⁹ SEWU leaders and members have also been on a number of visits, study trips and conferences to countries including India, Ghana, Philippines, Korea, Israel, Germany, Netherlands, Italy and Switzerland.

¹⁰ This is an initiative to set up a traditional medicine company run by traders.

Department of Welfare to support this initiative. The regional chairperson of Mpumalanga has recently become involved in an UN HIV/AIDS Project, which will work together with South African trade unions on HIV AIDS issues.

SEWU's current leadership bears testimony to the organisation's ability to build leaders. SEWU's current national general secretary started in the organisation as a home based worker. She now is a leading strategist in the organisation. She negotiates with funders and lobbies government. She has represented SEWU in national and international forums. She has been invited to sit on boards and local government project committees. In reflecting on what SEWU has done for her she summed it up by saying 'my eyes were opened by SEWU' (Interview, 12/02/2004). SEWU's current president is another case in point. She is a trader at the traditional medicine market in the centre of Durban. She is a formidable negotiator. Despite there being articulate male traders in the market, she chairs the muthi market committee, the main point of contact between the council and the traders. She has also played a key role in a project which aims to set up a company run by traders that will address some of the key problems within the market specifically and the traditional medicine industry generally – wastage, denuding natural resources and a lack of processing (see Institute for Natural Resources, 2003 for further details).

6.5.6 Research

Over the years SEWU has conducted and participated in a range of research projects that have had a number of positive spin offs. SEWU conducted two membership surveys in 1995 and 1997. The primary purpose of these surveys was to enhance SEWU's praxis by giving the organisation an in-depth profile of their membership. In 1995 SEWU commissioned the Labour Law Unit at UCT to conduct a study of home-based work in South Africa. This study was distributed at the ILO conference focused on home based work, and the committee preparing for the United Nations women's conference in Beijing (SEWU, 1995: 11). This research also influenced the committee preparing the questionnaire for South Africa's 1996 Census 'to include more questions to be able to identify informal sector workers', which were not previously recognised (SEWU, 1995: 11).

SEWU continued this trend of commissioning research in the late 1990's. SEWU staff were instrumental in establishing and supporting the international research and advocacy network Women in Informal Employment: Globalising and Organising or WIEGO. SEWU was tasked with commissioning and overseeing the pilot study for WIEGO's urban policy programme. SEWU designed a project on street trading in South Africa and approached the School of Development Studies at the University of Natal to conduct the research. This resulted in a two year project producing three research reports, an accessible book, four local policy dialogues, a national policy dialogue and a regional policy dialogue. Similar studies have been completed in Kenya, Ghana, Ivory Coast and Zimbabwe. As mentioned above the SEWU/WIEGO street trading research led to the researchers from the School being commissioned to assist the Durban City Council to an informal economy policy for the city. As discussed above, the research has also resulted in an informal economy research and policy stream within the School

of Development Studies, which has had substantial impact not only on local policy but also provincial and, to some extent, national policy processes.

6.5.7 International, regional and local alliances

SEWU has been successful at developing strong international linkages that have given the organisation an international profile. SEWU is also affiliated to several international trade unions¹¹. Further SEWU has a long standing relationship with SEWA that has included many exchange visits involving both leaders and members. SEWA has been instrumental in establishing a number of international networks which SEWU has subsequently become involved in. First there is the international alliance of home based workers or HomeNet. This network was established in 1994 and has affiliates world wide. In 1997 WIEGO was established. Not only did SEWU oversee the pilot study of WIEGO's urban policy programme, as mentioned above, but SEWU has attended all the WIEGO annual meetings. SEWU has participated actively in the formation and development of the international alliance of street traders or StreetNet. SEWU's founder and former general secretary is currently the StreetNet international co-ordinator. SEWU has also been able to successfully develop a number of regional links with other trade unions and informal economy unions in Southern Africa, including the Association of Informal Operators in Mozambique or ASSOTSI, the Swaziland Federation of Trade Unions, and the Workers Education Association of Zambia. This has given SEWU a regional presence. These international and regional linkages have played a role in the raising the education and awareness of SEWU members and office bearers and have helped to foster a regional and international sense of solidarity and collective identity among SEWU members and leaders.

Locally, given that SEWU sees itself as a worker's organisation, the focus of SEWU's attention has been COSATU. From the beginning the founder stressed that it was strategically necessary to position SEWU and its aims within the rest of the trade union movement. SEWU has a complex and multifaceted relationship with COSATU. SEWU's national staff and office bearers have experienced significant difficulty trying to initiate discussions with COSATU, which has made the national office dismissive of COSATU as they feel the Congress is not taking the informal economy seriously (Interview with General Secretary, 1/03/2004).

In fact it was crucial that SEWU obtain the approval of the trade union movement, particularly COSATU, before their donors, Nordic Dutch Group, would agree to fund them. From the beginning COSATU did not take an official position on the matter but acknowledged that they had been approached and were aware of the initiative and that they did not have any problems with the idea of SEWU. This 'opened the door' for donor support. Acknowledgement by COSATU was also necessary in order for SEWU to be accepted by the international trade union community and to help SEWU build relationships with trade unions in other countries (Interview Former General Secretary, 27/02/2004).

¹¹ SEWU has applied for conditional affiliation to the International Federation of Food and Plantation Workers Union (IUF), the International Chemical, Energy, Mine and General Workers Union (ICEM), the International Federation of Technical, Commercial Workers Union (FIET), and the International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers Federation (ITGLWF).

To cement its relationship with the Congress, SEWU has looked for opportunities to work with COSATU. SEWU sat on National Economic Development and Labour Council (NEDLAC) in the community constituency and used this as an opportunity to create an alliance between the community constituency and the labour constituency. In the beginning SEWU went to a number of meetings of COSATU locals 'and some of the affiliates to talk about the informal economy' SEWU consistently offered their services to COSATU to discuss how to organise in the informal economy (Interview Former General Secretary, 27/02/2004). SEWU has not as yet affiliated to COSATU. Initially SEWU felt that it was premature to affiliate, however, over the last few years especially with the Union's financial difficulties, there has been growing support for affiliation. Even SEWU's president who is a strong IFP supporter has expressed the importance of affiliation with COSATU. In the opinion of the Founder SEWU is also now ready for affiliation and would be able to 'bring in some major women's leadership that would really take COSATU by storm' (Interview Former General Secretary, 27/02/2004).

There is however a tension between SEWU and a certain constituency in COSATU around the fact that SEWU does not organise men. Both the Western Cape regional administrator and the KwaZulu-Natal organiser felt that COSATU was not willing to allow SEWU to affiliate unless they started organising men (Interview Regional Administrator, Western Cape, 12/05/2004). This could be a major stumbling block as SEWU tries to initiate negotiations around affiliation.

SEWU seems to have a good working relationship with COSATU at a regional level. With the exception of the Eastern Cape all of SEWU's regions have had some contact with COSATU affiliates. The strongest relationship with COSATU exists in Mpumalanga, where SEWU is treated as a 'sister union' and several COSATU affiliates have assisted the SEWU office. SACCAWU assisted SEWU to set up their office in the region, shared their office space and equipment with SEWU, and has helped SEWU with the training of its members. SEWU had used NUMSA's boardroom for their REC meetings and POPCRU has helped SEWU to conduct workshops (Interview Regional Administrator, Mpumalanga, 5/05/2004). The Free State also had a significant amount of co-operation from COSATU. All the interviews for this region's staff were held in the offices of the local COSATU union. The KwaZulu-Natal and Western Cape regions had also had some contact with COSATU or COSATU affiliates.

SEWU has had fairly limited contact with other social movements and where contact has taken place it tends to be quite limited, generally involving networking rather than sharing strategy, training or planning. SEWU's National Office attends meetings of the Treatment Action Campaign and the Landless People's Movement once a month (Interview with General Secretary, 1/03/2004). In SEWU's regions most contact with social movements has been developed through referrals. For example several of SEWU's regions refer members to Black Sash for assistance with government grants. The Western Cape region appears to have the most active contact with a number of NGOs. SEWU regions seem to have the most contact with women's organisations such as the network on Violence against Women, Women on

Farms Project, FAMSA and other organisations that deal with domestic violence and rape.

7. Successes and failures

The ten year review of SEWU's structure, activities and achievements highlights some successes and failures. In terms of successes we would argue that there are many. From the perspective of individual members through negotiations SEWU has secured in many cases appropriate infrastructure especially for street trader members. SEWU's interventions have strengthened their members' income earning capabilities both by developing their existing livelihood activities (business skills training, access to credit, savings facilities, access to new markets) and opening new opportunities by for example re-training (especially in traditionally male dominated occupations like block making). There has also been a broader empowerment of members, from knowing their legal rights to knowing how to conduct a meeting. SEWU has developed a new group of in many cases formidable leaders and negotiators – through training and organisational experience. At a policy level SEWU has raised the visibility of women working in the informal economy locally (especially in Durban) and to some extent nationally and internationally. By organising just women, SEWU has instilled a gender consciousness in members and lead to gender informed interventions. From the perspective of the labour movement organisationally SEWU has set a precedent. SEWU has successfully organised those working in the informal economy – an extremely difficult task. SEWU is run true to its constitution, a functioning membership controlled organisation that builds capacity of members. This organisational form in and of itself is a success.

In terms of failures, despite 10 years of experience, SEWU has not been able reach scale. Membership numbers are still low and lapsed membership is a real problem. Given the context where more and more South Africans are being forced to seek work in the informal economy, it is surprising that SEWU does not have more members. We attribute the problem of lapsed membership and the numbers not increasing to a variety of reasons. First, there have been internal problems like cases of corruption that have led to membership attrition. Second, although there are policy opportunities, SEWU has been operating in an environment that is at times unaccommodating to the informal economy. Their experience with the commercial banks in instituting the stop order system is a case in point. More significantly however is that people working in the informal economy are mostly very poor and thus are forced to be expedient with their money. SEWU in comparison to SEWA does not offer members as comprehensive a set of support interventions. As noted above, ironically they are not able to do this because they do not have enough members. Membership numbers and support interventions to sustain membership are thus inter-related issues. Members however are also at fault. A number of staff identified a problem with the ethos of the organisation where members see SEWU as a 'charity' (i.e. an organisation offering hand outs) rather than a trade union that belongs to them and is their responsibility to grow. This is partly a result of what some identified as recruiting short cuts. The final problem that threatens the very existence of the

organisation is financial sustainability. SEWU is still dependent on (increasingly reluctant) donors.

8. Conclusion

In conclusion, we reflect on SEWU in comparison to other new social movements in post apartheid South Africa. As the overall project demonstrates, social movements embrace a multiplicity of organisational forms, and it therefore problematic to generalise. To narrow the discussion we focus on issue driven movements like the Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee and the Concerned Citizen's Forum who organise similar constituencies.

SEWU's democratic, representative and accountable structures means there is a direct relationship between membership and representation. This ensures that SEWU's interventions are driven by the needs of its members. SEWU's last ten years are testimony to how time consuming and at times difficult the process of building representation that is meaningful is. Many social movements have yet to engage with these representational issues. Because there is not a signed up membership behind many of these social movements there are no clear lines of representation and accountability, and it is easier for the leaders to talk on behalf of the poor, rather than as legitimate representatives of the poor.

SEWU's strategies and interventions are geared towards enabling its members to become an active group who are able to engage in political and policy processes themselves. SEWU brings the voices of its members into the negotiation process where these voices can be used towards negotiating constructive, pragmatic and sustainable solutions and changes to improve the lives of the union's members. One of the strengths of issue driven social movements is their ability access the voices of the poor and marginalised. There is however often too much of a focus on voice and on speaking out as a form of resistance as an end in itself. Social movements can loose control of these voices and narratives once they are in the public sphere. These voices offer criticism and opposition but they do not necessarily offer practical solutions.

This is reflected in the different ways SEWU and these other social movements relate to the state and to a larger political project. SEWU tends to use constructive engagement, engaging on a number of levels with the state. SEWU has a holistic approach offering its members a broader range of services that acknowledge the crucial link between domestic and economic issues, rather than focusing on one specific issue. Issue driven social movements tend to be more aggressive and confrontational and are often eager to reject or destroy whatever imperfect forum exists rather than seeking to improve it. Further SEWU has a specific gender agenda. The majority of supporters in many of the issue driven social movements tend to be women yet most of the leaders and strategic thinkers in these organisations continue to be men.

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Appendix 1: Interviews Conducted

Interviews with Staff (Past and Present):

Date of Interview	Interviewee	Position	Place of Interview
12 February	Khoboso Nthunya	General Secretary SEWU	SEWU National Offices, Durban
18 February	Nelly Malembe	National Education Secretary SEWU	SEWU National Offices, Durban
18 February	Sibongile Buthelezi	National Administrator SEWU	SEWU National Offices, Durban
27 February	Pat Horn	Founder, former general secretary and currently International co-ordinator of Street Net	Street Net Offices, Durban
1 March	Thandiwe Xulu	KZN Regional Secretary SEWU	SEWU KZN Regional Offices, Durban
7 May	Mandisa Mrwedi	SEWU Regional Administrator, Eastern Cape	Telephone interview
12 May	Nobubele (Milly) Mcosana	SEWU Regional Administrator, Western Cape	Telephone interview
5 May	Thembisile Sibanyoni	Regional Chairperson of SEWU Mpumalanga	Telephone interview
5 May	Pretty Nkosi	SEWU Regional Administrator, Mpumalanga	Telephone interview

Interviews with SEWU Members:

Date of Interview	Interviewee	Position	Sector Operating in	Place of Interview
16 March	Zodwa Khumalo	SEWU President, previous chairperson Russell St Branch	Street vendor: traditional medicine and traditional healer	Muthi Market, Durban
5 March	Betty Mazibuko	SEWU member, Amatikwe branch	Gardening, running a soup kitchen and sewing	Community hall, Amatikwe
5 March	Cleopatra Kolisang	SEWU member, Amatikwe branch	Sewing and gardening	Community hall, Amatikwe
5 March	Mildred Ngidi	SEWU member, Umzinyathi Branch	Block making and sewing	At her home in Umzinyathi
12 March	Mrs Shinga	SEWU member and chairperson of Beachfront branch	Craft maker and seller	Tropicana Hotel Durban beachfront
15 March	Doreen Luthuli	SEWU member beachfront branch	Craft maker and seller	Durban beachfront

15 March	Thandiwe Zungu	SEWU member beachfront branch	Craft making and selling as well as Sewing	Durban beachfront
15 March	Vumeleni Khomo	SEWU member beachfront branch	Craft maker and seller	Durban beachfront
16 March	Virginia	Chairperson Russell Street Branch	Street trader: traditional medicine	Muthi Market, Durban
17 March	Anonymous SEWU member	Member of Russell Street Branch	Street trader: traditional medicine and traditional healer	Muthi Market, Durban
17 March	Nozandile Koko	Vice chairperson KZN region and previous chairperson Berea Station branch	Street trader, sewing catering	Berea Station, Durban
6 April	Abigail Ndlela	Chairperson of Makoba branch, Matatiele	Sewing, gardening and fence making	SEWU KZN Regional offices, Durban
6 April	He Nkhosi	Chairperson of Ntando branch in Jozini	Fence making and selling	SEWU KZN Regional offices, Durban
6 April	Duduzi Nxumalo	SEWU KZN Regional Chairperson	Gardening and sewing	SEWU KZN Regional offices, Durban
6 April	Toko Mbele	KZN regional treasurer, SEWU		SEWU KZN Regional offices, Durban

The Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) is a membership-based organization created in 1972 from a combination of the labour, women, and cooperative movements, to organize self-employed women in the informal economy and assist their collective. Women in India has expanded to include 130 cooperatives, 181 rural producer groups, and numerous social security organizations within its structure. The self-employed can be further disaggregated into employers, own account operators and unpaid contributing family workers.⁴ Women informal workers are also more likely than men informal workers in most regions to be own account workers, who have lower incomes, on average, than informal employers. The working poor in the informal economy, especially women, need to organize to overcome these structural disadvantages, as organizing would give them the power of solidarity and a way to be seen and heard by decision makers with the power to affect their lives. WIEGO and member informal workers' organizations were very active in the Organizing informal workers is therefore seen as a drain on union re-sources with inadequate financial return in the form of union dues. Organizing Informal Workers. 5. Today, informal workers are organized in a variety of ways despite the difficulties they face, and their organizations are growing. The Self-Employed Women's Association (sewa) in India has over one million informal women members and uses a twin strategy of struggle and development. It is a trade union (struggle for rights), yet has over 100 cooperatives run by its members combined in a federation of cooperatives (livelihood development).