

“Educate to Liberate”

A Proud History of Struggle

**The Namibia National Teachers Union (NANTU)
1989 – 2000**

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements

Introduction

Chapter 1: The historical background to the formation of NANTU

Chapter 2: NANTU's first decade

- 2.1 1989: A year of struggle
- 2.2 New challenges after independence
 - 2.2.1 Promoting equity and quality in education
 - 2.2.2 Representing all teachers
 - 2.2.3 Improving conditions of service
 - 2.2.4 Promoting professional development of teachers
 - 2.2.5 Promoting gender equality
 - 2.2.6 HIV/AIDS
 - 2.2.7 Promoting cultural development
 - 2.2.8 Promoting sports
 - 2.2.9 Membership benefits
 - 2.2.10 Building democracy: NANTU's decision-making structures
 - 2.2.11 Moving towards financial self reliance
 - 2.2.12 NANTU's national and international relations

Chapter 3: The challenges ahead

- 3.1 Gender equality and women empowerment
- 3.2 Teachers unity
- 3.3 Quality leadership
- 3.4 Benefits for NANTU members
- 3.5 Collective bargaining
- 3.6 Agent for social change
- 3.7 Political relationship
- 3.7 Conclusion

Appendix: NANTU's national executive committees

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This booklet draws on the wealth of information contained in NANTU documents and on the information provided by former and current NANTU leaders and activists. It is our hope that this booklet will reflect the collective efforts of thousands of teachers who built NANTU into one of the strongest unions in Namibia. Unfortunately most of them cannot be named here, but we want to firstly acknowledge their dedication and contribution to NANTU. This booklet is dedicated to all of them.

A word of thanks goes to the following people who set time aside to be interviewed and share their experiences with us for the benefit of this booklet. They are (in alphabetical order): Erago Thaddeus Erago, Gerson Bendos //Garob, Johannes Geingob, Marco Hausiku, Andreas Hoinoseb, Theo Jankowski, Markus Kampungu, John Kandombo, George Kaiyamo, Redemptus Kamari, Josef Konjore, Marius Kudumo, Princess Luthuli, George Mayumbelo, Samuel Mbambo, Eta Mbuye, John Mutorwa, John Nakuta, Doufi Namalambo, Isaac David Nashumba, Gerhard Ngalangi, Roderick September, Kenneth Nsundano Tebuko, Hiskia Tjindere, Norman Tjiriange, Tangeni Tobias, and Vilbard Usiku

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Introduction

Last year NANTU celebrated its first ten years of existence and looked back at a decade which saw the organisation grow into one of the strongest and most powerful trade unions in Namibia. Many of the guests and former union leaders who attended the celebrations remembered the early years when NANTU was formed. They also recalled many of the achievements made since then. At a subsequent strategic planning workshop, NANTU leaders reviewed the union's past activities and tried to map the way forward. They noted that NANTU's history should be documented and preserved for future generations. This led to the idea of producing a booklet about NANTU's history, achievements and challenges ahead.

This booklet cannot claim to cover all events surrounding NANTU's first decade of existence. Instead, it will highlight some of the events that led to the birth of the union and sketch the union's achievements over the years as well as the challenges it faces. It would be an impossible task to mention everyone's contribution and we are aware that there are hundreds of teachers who are not mentioned in this booklet but whose dedication and commitment made NANTU what it is today.

We trust that this booklet will keep alive the memory of how NANTU was built and what we achieved over the years. It is our wish that this booklet will be an inspiration to all our members to continue building on the solid and principled foundation that was laid in the first decade. While being proud of NANTU's achievements, we are aware that there is no room for complacency and that we will have to show the same vigour (that characterised NANTU's early years) to face the challenges ahead.

Chapter 1:

The historical background to the formation of NANTU

NANTU's early history is closely linked to the political history of Namibia. In line with the colonial policy of divide and rule, Namibian teachers were divided into ethnic teachers associations that dealt with their respective ethnic administrations. In the second half of the 1980s, there were numerous attempts by such associations to unite and to form a national organisation. One such conference was convened in Windhoek in May 1986 and attended by representatives of NAMOV, NOV, OTA and other ethnic teachers associations. The organisations were divided over the question of forming a united teachers union or a federation of existing unions. Redemptus Kamari recalls how the white teachers association, the Suidwes Africa Onderwysersvereniging (SWAOU) objected to a single Namibian union and propagated for a federation. This was unacceptable to OTA and NAMOV who pointed out that: "A federation will never unite us".

However, SWAOU pushed ahead with its plan to form a federation. Theo Jankowski who was at the time the treasurer of NOV explains:

"The white union was dominant because they had offices and resources. Their interest in the federation was based on the fact that the transitional government of that time had told them that they needed 5000 teachers in order to be recognised. This is the reason why they started coming to us. There was no real desire to achieve unity. If they could reach the 5000-mark on their own they would not have bothered with us".

In 1987, a delegation of the federation came to Oshakati to attend the OTA conference in an attempt to convince OTA to join. This mission failed as the federation was seen as collaborators and because the teachers wanted a unified national teachers union.

By 1988, Namibian teachers still had no national teachers' organisations that could represent their interests and articulate their aspirations at national level. By contrast, political parties, the churches (through the Council of Churches – CCN) and students (through the Namibia National Students Organisation - NANSO) had already established national organisations that did not only articulate their members interests, but also played an active role in promoting liberation and national independence. Teachers, however, could only participate in their individual capacity (for example as party members) but had no organisational vehicle to address the burning political and socio-economic issues of the day. George Kaiyamo who assisted with the formation of industrial unions under the NUNW recalls the difficulties in organising teachers:

"There were organisations like NAMOV which were already well established but lacked the liberation ideology. They were tools used by the Boers to continue

with the status quo. Teachers were really afraid, they thought of their salaries and possible promotions. But our motto was “everything for the struggle”. As they say in Oshikwanyama: Eso nohulepo ashishe shimwe (death and poverty are all the same)”.

The dilemma of teachers not having an organisational vehicle through which they could articulate their views emerged sharply in 1988. John Kandombo remembers:

“The South African Defence Force put up military camps close to schools. There was a camp at almost every secondary school and they were apparently trying to prevent learners from moving out and establishing contact with the freedom fighters. The parents and students rejected the camps near schools. When freedom fighters attacked a camp near the Ponthofi Secondary School, some innocent learners were killed in the crossfire. This outraged the other students who questioned the use of camps and the presence of soldiers who killed students instead of protecting them. The students demanded the removal of the camps and linked this demand to other related issues in education. They also identified the lack of unity among teachers as a problem as teachers remained neutral in that struggle for better education.

Many teachers were harassed during that time. Especially in the north, teachers were arrested, nobody knew where they were held and some teachers even disappeared completely. There was no legal way to protect the teachers. Teachers then began to realise that they had no political or educational agenda and that they were just serving as tools of the old administration”.

The protests and school boycotts that started in the North soon spread to other parts of the country. Students staged marches and demanded the removal of South African troops which was linked to the demand for independence. On Kasinga Day, 4 May 1988, students under the leadership of NANSO organised a protest march that was supposed to lead from Katutura into Windhoek. Thousands of students gathered at various schools and prepared for the march to town. As they approached the Katutura police station they were met by rubber bullets, teargas and button-wielding policemen. One student was shot and had to be rushed to hospital. The march was broken up by police brutality and the community was up in arms. Students, parents, teachers, community activists, representatives of the churches and trade unions met several times to discuss the education crisis which formed part of the broader national, political crisis. The trade unions under the National Union of Namibian Workers (NUNW), called for a three day national stay-away in June 1988, to lend support to the students’ demands. Despite open intimidation and police harassment the stay away was a huge success and showed the determination of students, workers and the community to stand up against colonial education and oppression that had caused so much hardship for the Namibian people.

Teachers had no organisation through which they could address this crisis at a national level. The inadequacies of ethnic associations was clearly highlighted and teachers could only participate in national politics in their individual capacity, either as party members

or by supporting their students. More and more teachers felt that the absence of a national teachers union through which teachers could raise their concerns was unbearable. They had no confidence that the proposed merger of ethnic teachers associations could bring about a truly national teachers union, capable of placing the educational crisis in its broader context.

The first step towards the eventual formation of NANTU was taken by NANSO. In a letter that was delivered to teachers who had supported the students in their struggle, NANSO's national education secretary Bisey Uirab invited some teachers to discuss the educational crisis. In his letter (see box 1), Uirab outlined the extent of the crisis, with 60% of black students being unable to write their final exams. He also pointed out that teachers had remained passive due to the absence of democratic structures through which they could have played a 'meaningful role in our oppressed society'.

About 30 teachers met on 8 October 1988 in Katutura. They all agreed that the situation had become unbearable and that teachers could no longer rely on unity talks among the ethnic associations. The meeting felt that the time had come to investigate the possibility of forming a national teachers organisation, capable of addressing the education crisis and placing it in a proper perspective. Due to the urgency of this matter, the teachers appointed a small committee to take the process further.

A follow-up meeting was then arranged on 22 October 1988 at the Andreas Kukuri Centre in Okahandja. Teachers from various regions attended to discuss the educational crisis and the establishment of a progressive teachers union. The participants identified the lack of political direction, the tribal and ethnic orientation and the lack of seriousness in addressing national and educational problems as the main shortcomings of existing teachers associations. Such organisations tended to promote elitism and individual interests, thereby supporting the status quo and the role of teachers as tools of colonial education. In particular, the younger generation of teachers who had been activists of the national students movement (NANSO) before, found it difficult to join an ethnic association. Marius Kudumo remembers:

We were fresh from the colleges and universities where we belonged to NANSO and were now faced by a situation of teaching under an ethnic administration and belonging to an ethnic teachers association. This contradicted our ideology of belonging to a national organisation. This contributed to the formation of NANTU."

The meeting felt that there is an urgent need to form a progressive teachers union with the following aims:

- *"To unite all teachers of Namibia into a non-racial, national teachers organisation that will seek to channel all democratic demands of teachers.*
- *To raise critical consciousness among teachers and prepare them to play a meaningful role in society.*
- *To organise the teachers into a national body that will strive towards a relevant, non-racial and democratic form of education.*

- *To be part and parcel of the liberation struggle in our country and to promote links with progressive forces such as the labour and students movement.*
- *To promote students', teachers' and parents' democratic involvement in the education process.*
- *To act as the mouthpiece for teachers in Namibia and seek to protect the genuine interests of teachers”.*

These guidelines indicated the shape and direction that a new, progressive teachers union was expected to take. There was unanimous agreement that such an organisation would need to fulfil a broader role in the national arena, by contributing to a democratic education system as well as to the liberation of Namibia from colonial oppression. This was clearly spelt out in the ”specific guidelines” adopted in Okahandja, namely:

- *“To support and pledge solidarity with the people’s national actions such as workers’ stay-aways and student actions.*
- *To fight together with the students for the implementation of English as the medium of instruction in schools.*
- *To fight for one education system in the country.*
- *To have regular information bulletins, newsletters and to stimulate progressive cultural activities among teachers and students.*
- *To fight the military involvement in the education process such as cadet training, camps etc.*
- *To seek a contextualisation of the curriculum, and strive towards developing alternative forms of teaching that are relevant to our context.”*

The meeting also decided that individual teachers all over the country should be consulted to establish the level of support for the idea of establishing such a union. Emphasis was placed on consulting individual teachers at grassroots level and encouraging them to set up local teachers committees. The meeting then appointed a steering committee to hold meetings in all regions and report back to the next meeting, scheduled to be held in Tsumeb in December 1988.

The members of the steering committee faced a huge task. They were all full-time teachers who had to use evenings and weekends to meet teachers in all corners of the country. As there were few resources, they had to make do with whatever was available. Josef Konjore recalls:

“We used our own cars and our own money for fuel and food and would sleep anywhere during trips. I remember how we once spent a night in Rusten Mogane’s red Corolla, just a few kilometres outside Uis after a meeting in Walvis Bay. We were exhausted after the day’s activities in Walvis Bay and decided to overnight in the car thinking that Uis was still far away. The next morning we discovered that Uis was just ahead of us.”

The steering committee received some support (petrol money) from the National Union of Namibian Workers (NUNW), NANSO and the Council of Churches in Namibia (CCN). The group was committed to fulfill its task and spent every week-end on the

road, travelling from North to South, from East to West. The political situation at that time was very tense. Many teachers were intimidated by principals and education authorities who perceived the idea of a progressive national teachers union as a threat. In addition, several of the ethnic teachers organisations warned their members to stay away from the steering committee.

The situation was particularly tense in the North where the war was still raging at the time. John Kandombo recalls:

The conditions were difficult at the time. On the one hand people had expectations and on the other hand our activities were closely monitored. We could not even get buildings for our activities because the colonial authorities said that we are too political. We had to meet under trees or during the night as a 'social function' where we actually organised NANTU. After many meetings and discussions, the teachers realised that the formation of a national teachers union was the only solution to our problems."

The response to the idea of forming a new national teachers union was overwhelmingly positive in all regions and the steering committee prepared its report for the meeting in Tsumeb, which took place on 10 December 1988. Teachers from various regions attended and reported about the views and aspirations of their respective constituencies. This meeting paved the way for the formation of NANTU.

The meeting pointed out once again that teachers had failed to play a meaningful role in the struggle for liberation from colonial oppression. They had been unable to intervene in the national education crisis and the ethnic teachers association had failed to bring about national unity. The meeting therefore decided that the new union should not be a federation of ethnic associations, but a completely independent trade union that recruits teachers on an individual basis. The delegates at the meeting felt that a federation of existing associations would only widen regional differences and that the rivalry between existing teachers associations would prevent meaningful unity.

The meeting also decided that there should be no links between the new teachers union and the bantustan education departments. Instead, the union should establish permanent working relations with NANSO and the NUNW. The delegates also discussed the question of how to encourage the democratisation of education and resolved:

- that teachers must recognise the formation of Students Representative Councils (SRCs);
- that students must be given tasks to perform and not just be spoon-fed;
- that teachers must actively promote the drawing up of relevant and democratic syllabi of which parents, workers, teachers and students would be part of; and
- that educational conscientisation programmes must be conducted.

The meeting concluded by setting up a 13 persons co-ordinating committee (of Windhoek based teachers due to logistics) assisted by two contact persons from each region. This committee was given the task to 'organise the unorganised regions', to disseminate information about the envisaged national teachers union, to make the arrangements for

the launching of the union, to raise the necessary funds, to prepare a draft constitution and to seek funds for the launch.

This again was a huge task, but the committee worked with enormous dedication and commitment, organising fundraising ‘braais’ and fundraising soccer matches. In addition, the CCN and the NUNW were asked for financial assistance and both responded positively. Regional trips were arranged and carried out to visit the Western, Eastern, Southern, Northern, North-Western and North-Eastern regions. Pamphlets for the meetings were prepared in English and Afrikaans and a draft constitution was prepared. The committee also established contact with a progressive teachers union in South Africa, the Western Cape Teachers Union (WECTU) which gave valuable advice and assistance. The launching date was set for the 11 March 1989 at the A. Shipena School in Katutura.

The news spread quickly through the regions and provoked a response by some of the ethnic teachers associations. The Namibia Onderwyser Vereniging (NAMOV) had already tried to bring the ethnic teachers associations (like the Kavango Onderwyser Vereniging – KOV, the Namibia Profesionele Onderwyser Vereniging – NAPOV, and the Namibia Onderwywer Vereniging - NOV) together under one umbrella. NAMOV requested a meeting with the NANTU Co-ordinating Committee which took place on 26 January 1989. The NAMOV executive expressed their support (in principle) for the idea of a national teachers union. However, they felt that the initiative to establish a new union was driven by students who dictated to the teachers. The NAMOV executive believed that there was no need to start a new union and suggested that instead NAMOV should just re-emerge under a new name and become the national teachers union. The Co-ordinating Committee stated that this idea was unacceptable to the teachers it had contacted in various regions and the meeting ended without agreement.

In the meantime, the preparations for the launch of NANTU went ahead. Despite a lack of funds and continuous intimidation of teachers by the colonial authorities, teachers committees in the regions managed to spread the message about the need for a national, progressive teachers union. Over 450 teachers and guests came to Windhoek to attend the launching congress, some of them walked and hiked over 1000 kilometres to reach the capital. The congress was opened by the late father Jackey Basson and addressed by speakers from NANSO (Paul Kalenga) and NUNW (Ben Ulenga) (see table 2). The congress also received solidarity messages from a delegation of the Western Cape Teachers Union (WECTU) and the World Confederation of Organisations in the Teaching Profession (WCOTP) which represented 11 million teachers across the world at the time.

The congress resolved that NANTU must join hands with other progressive forces to liberate Namibia from colonial oppression and work towards economic and political independence. NANTU urged its members to participate in the election campaign and pointed out that politics and education are inseparable. The union also committed itself to be part of the broader labour movement by affiliating to the National Union of Namibian Workers (NUNW). During the closed sessions, the congress delegates debated and

finalised the NANTU constitution and elected the first national executive committee, headed by Marco Hausiku as president.

Chapter 2: NANTU's first decade

2.1 1989 - A Year of Struggle

The first year of NANTU's existence was shaped by the Independence process under United Nations (UN) Resolution 435. 1989 was a year of excitement and intense conflicts as Namibians had for the first time the opportunity to elect a government of their choice. The year brought joy and sorrow as many Namibians returned home after many years of exile while others lost their lives on the eve of independence. The worst incidence occurred on 1 April 1989, when over 300 People's Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN) fighters were murdered by the South African army in Northern Namibia.

NANTU was facing enormous challenges in its first year of existence. The union had virtually no resources but had to establish a head office as well as regional and local union structures all over the country. This was only possible thanks to the enormous dedication of both the union leadership and the membership. Teachers all over Namibia joined NANTU in their thousands and within a few months NANTU had a membership that was far larger than the combined membership of the ethnic teachers associations ever was. NANTU also managed to get assistance from outside, mostly from sister organisations like the All Africa Teachers Association (AATO) and the Norwegian Teachers Union (NL). This enabled NANTU to forge ahead and become the dominant teachers union in Namibia.

The excitement of teachers was also visible in the good attendance of NANTU meetings at all levels. NANTU members formed school committees, branch committees and regional committees that gave the union an organisational presence all over the country. Kandombo recalls:

"We had certain contact people in various areas like Ombalantu, Okahao, Oshakati, Eenhana etc. At that time we made sure that we were represented at every secondary school. At that time we were not even using phones – we only used our bush communication methods to reach each and every person who wanted to join us. People were very enthusiastic to join. They were very happy that something is coming up to alleviate the pain and the trouble they had."

Raphael Mbala remembers the recruitment in the Caprivi region:

When we went back to Caprivi, we tried to convince other teachers in the region to join NANTU. There was a regional teachers association at that time called Caprivi Teachers Association (CATA), so we wanted to go through these people to avoid division, and to organise the teachers, but they were reluctant. Eventually we managed to hold a meeting with other teachers including the executive of CATA, where we explained the aims and objectives of NANTU and

possible replacement of the association, which was regional. There was resistance from CATA, especially those who were DTA members, but we eventually convinced most teachers. I was chosen regional chairperson of the union at a later stage. We managed to recruit about 75-80% of the teachers in the region.

Eta Mbuye and other NANTU activists used to ride on trucks and sleep in the corridors of buildings during their recruitment campaigns. She recalls:

“I went back to my region to organise school committees and regional meetings. Teachers were frustrated at that time, because they were not represented. CATA did not address teacher’s burdens and was more of a social club. Most CATA members who had an interest in the liberation struggle of Namibia joined NANTU.”

However, there were many obstacles to overcome. The colonial administration caused many problems for NANTU and tried to intimidate NANTU members. Some were fired from their jobs, some were threatened with dismissals and some were warned that an involvement with NANTU would threaten their career prospects. However, most teachers were determined to join NANTU and to play an active part in the transition to independence. As Marco Hausiku explained in an interview with Students Voice in 1989:

“The role of teachers in this situation will be to join the masses of our people and organise and campaign for the coming elections to ensure that apartheid colonialism is defeated at the ballot box. This should also be defeated in their daily teaching practices.... Education should be democratic, liberating and relevant to our context. Education should be non-racial, non-sexist, free and compulsory at primary and secondary levels, as part of the struggle for a non-racial society, free from exploitation and oppression.”

The Owambo Teachers Association (OTA) and the Kavango Onderwyser Vereniging (KOV) disbanded shortly after the formation of NANTU to enable their members to join NANTU. However, some of the other ethnic associations responded to NANTU’s birth by making frantic attempts to establish a rival union. NAMOV, NAPOV, NOV and SWAOU still tried to form a combined union in July 1989. In a circular to all schools, NAMOV chief secretary, Mr. Mara, requested all headmasters to send a list of all NAMOV members as well as a list of all NANTU members at their respective schools. NAMOV’s dissolution was set for 3-4 June, to be followed by the formation of a new union on 5-6 June 1989. NAMOV criticised NANTU’s political stance and expressed the desire to form another union that will serve the teachers of Namibia in a ‘responsible and professional manner’. However, most NAMOV members joined NANTU and it was not until May 1990, that a rival union under the name of Teachers Union of Namibia (TUN) came into existence.

The year 1989 was a time of intense political turmoil. After the killing of the PLAN combatants on 1 April, NANSO called a national one-day stay-away. The colonial authorities responded with repressive action, for example by suspending student activists from the Paresis Secondary School in Otjiwarongo. At the Cornelius Khoraseb High School in Khorixas, the arrest of two teachers sparked a mass class boycott. 131 students were expelled from the school after they demanded an explanation from the principal about the arrest of the two teachers. One hundred and nineteen (119) of these students were later re-admitted while the others were permanently expelled after being identified as 'ring leaders'.

At the Drimiopsis Secondary School near Gobabis, students went on a week long boycott in protest against the dismissals of two teachers. At the same time, students at Okakarara boycotted classes in support of a (black) teacher who had been fired by the (white) principal, supposedly for not speaking fluent Afrikaans. Meanwhile, education in the North came to a complete stand-still. In May 89, SADF helicopters attacked the Oluna Secondary School, the Onaanda Combined School and the Ekundu Combined School, firing smoke grenades at pupils before parachuting soldiers onto school premises to assault students. Some teachers were also arrested and assaulted. The SADF questioned students, teachers and other civilians about the presence of PLAN fighters in the area. This sparked an indefinite class boycott of tens of thousands primary and secondary school children in protest at the breach of the Resolution 435 Agreement which confined South African soldiers to base. They demanded:

That the SADF must remain in their camps in Oshivelo and Grootfontein;
a stronger presence of UNTAG to protect Namibians against Koevoet and SADF;
an end to the propaganda reporting of the SWABC;
a formal ceasefire between PLAN and the SADF;
and further UN assistants to ensure free and fair elections.

More than 3 000 students from the Ongwediva Training College, the Mweshipandeka High School and the Senior Secondary School Gabriel Taapopi left their hostels and vowed not to return until all SADF members had been confined to their bases. The students also indicated that it would not be safe for Namibian refugees to return home as long as the SADF was not confined to base and as long as Koevoet members were not removed from police units. The Owambo and central administrations responded to the boycott by presenting students with an ultimatum: "Go back to classes or that is the end of your education this year". The colonial administration decided to crack down on "politics in the classroom" in line with an order of the South African Administrator General (AG), Louis Piennar who prohibited political activities on educational campuses. However, this heavy-handed approach backfired as the boycotts snowballed, supported by trade unions and the community. NANTU came out strongly, slamming the AG's instructions to civil servants as political intimidation: "We reject the clause stating that government officials should not take part in public political debates". The union described this as a violation of teachers' rights of freedom of speech and association and vowed to take up the issue with the AG as well as the UN representative Martti Ahtisaari.

The NUNW came out in full support of the students demands and rejected the AG's attempts to restrict the political activities of teachers and students. The federation threatened to paralyse the economy if the demands were not met. At the end of May 1989, all schools were hit by the boycott. Almost 80 000 students participated and their teachers joined them to back their demands. Defying all threats by the colonial administration, the students had the full support of their teachers and parents.

The boycott only ended on the 19 June after a meeting between NANSO, parents and teachers. Although not all their demands had been met, they had successfully defied the threats by the colonial authorities and returned without having to fulfill any of the conditions that the administration had tried to impose such as re-registration.

In the Kavango region, seven teachers had been suspended and faced dismissal by the colonial authorities. The regional NANTU committee convened an emergency meeting with teachers to discuss the matter. The teachers demanded that their colleagues must be re-instated and that such acts of intimidation against teachers must be stopped. They gave the administration a deadline by which to respond. As the administration failed to respond in time, teachers went on strike. The crisis widened after the Rundu Technical Institute and the Teachers College in Rundu were closed followed by the announcement of employees at the Administration for Kavangos that they would join the strike until the seven teachers were re-instated. The NAPWU general secretary at the time, Petrus Ilonga pointed out that the strike showed parents' concern about the education of their children and a high level of unity between teachers, workers and students in the struggle for self-determination. In the end, the AG had to give in and announced that he would reconsider the reinstatement of the seven teachers. In return, NANTU and NAPWU called off the strike to give the AG a chance to show "his good faith". The seven teachers were then reinstated. Samuel Mbambo who was the regional chairperson at the time recalls:

"We challenged the AG's action through lawyers and he withdrew the case. For us it was a major victory and it gave NANTU a very strong image, especially among those teachers who hesitated to join."

Tensions continued to characterise the months to come. In July, the communities in the North, spearheaded by NANTU and NAPWU announced a three day strike unless minimum conditions for free elections were met, including the withdrawal of Koevoet members from the police. Despite threats and legal action by the AG, the strike began on 5 July. The Times of Namibia reported on the 6 July that *"...our corespondent at Oshakati confirmed yesterday that all workers and teachers in Owambo are on strike. Institutions hit [affected] are the Owambo administration, Post and Telecommunication and all the banks in the region. There was also a possibility that the strike would continue until the AG met their demands, residents said"*.

These events indicated the conditions under which NANTU had to operate in its first year of existence. The union contributed actively to the election process, particularly in the area of voter education. This undoubtedly contributed to a high voter turn-out and to the high level of valid ballot papers.

At the same time, NANTU also started to build its structures at all levels to enable teachers to actively participate in the union's activities and to shape its direction. NANTU was determined to break the hierarchical top-down approach that had characterised the ethnic teachers associations.

In July 1989, NANTU convened a special congress under the theme "Liberation education towards nationbuilding" at the Shifid Hall in Katutura. Invited speakers included the SWAPO education secretary Nahas Angula, the NUNW secretary general, the late John ya Otto, and the Reverend Zephania Kameeta. The congress resolved to "relentlessly break away from tribal and racist fragmentation in our schools and society at large". NANTU reaffirmed its close relationship with progressive trade unions and 'declares itself as part and parcel of the liberation struggle and calls on all teachers to inform the students, parents, as well as the community as a whole, truthfully about all the events leading to the election, such as registration procedures'. The congress further resolved to fight for the democratisation of education and for the rights of teachers to express their political views freely and to join any political party of their choice.

NANTU made a significant contribution to Namibia's first free and fair elections. It recognised that education and politics are inseparable and encouraged teachers as respected members of their communities, to actively participate in issues affecting the community. During the election campaign, NANTU members played an important role in educating their fellow-citizens about election procedures. John Mutorwa recalls:

"During registration, our members were involved in explaining the registration process and the requirements to qualify for registration. This was necessary especially in areas with high illiteracy rates. When UNTAG members held information meetings on various aspects of the independence process, NANTU members actively participated. Teachers also played a very important role at their respective schools and in the communities by verifying the age and documents of students as required by the registration law.

Individual NANTU members, NANTU school committees and branch executive committees in collaboration with the regional executive committee organised voter education seminars throughout the region (Kavango). These seminars were very successful and helped many of our people to understand the complexities of the electoral rules, laws and procedures.

Many teachers acted as interpreters, observers and polling agents. NANTU was even involved in the counting of votes. I recall vividly that members of the national executive committee from the region were even counting agents. What a commitment!"

2.2 New Challenges after Independence

After independence, NANTU was determined to play an active role in the reconstruction of Namibian society which was characterised by huge inequalities. This was seen as the main task immediately after independence and NANTU's particular focus was the education system. John Kandombo recalls:

“After independence, NANTU was assisting the education reform process. There was a close co-operation between NANTU and the Ministry of Education and Culture. NANTU had a vision and an agenda and knew exactly which changes the new government should put into place. Minister Nahas Angula consulted with NANTU at all levels. There were also many meetings at regional level between the ministry and NANTU to discuss teacher training programmes, educational policies, teacher upgrading programmes etc. Any problems affecting teachers were negotiated between the regional office and the regional NANTU committee. At that time it was easy to work with NANTU because there was no leadership crisis. NANTU was informing the Ministry what is happening at grassroots level. Ineffective school managers and teachers were identified and problems were addressed. Unfair and unprocedural dismissals were brought to the Ministry's attention and reversed”.

However, the relationship between NANTU and the government was not without problems. At national level, NANTU raised the issues of racism and inequalities in schools and also pointed out that teachers were underpaid in comparison with other civil servants. NANTU also raised the need to implement affirmative action in the civil service and alerted government to the fact that the union had not been granted stop-order facilities.

At the beginning of 1991, teachers all over Namibia became impatient with the slow process of change. The problems of overcrowded classrooms, the lack of teaching materials and bad working conditions remained unresolved and NANTU released a strongly worded statement. It criticised the admission policy at former white schools who kept black children out through high school fees. NANTU also demanded the provision of education for former PLAN combatants who fought for independence and were now denied the opportunity to improve their qualifications and obtain meaningful jobs. NANTU also called on government to take a stand on the future of the 'Academy' (higher education institution) and questioned the government's intentions regarding the future of under- and unqualified teachers. NANTU reminded the Ministry that these teachers “tolerated low salaries, long working hours and sometimes humiliation to educate 90% of the Namibian nation”. It demanded that the Ministry should provide in-service training to those teachers instead of trying to dismiss them. The other issues raised by NANTU were the need to speed up the implementation of English as the medium of instruction, the recognition of teachers qualifications obtained abroad, and the exodus of qualified teachers from the profession. NANTU reminded the Ministry that it had promised to review the salary structures of teachers but that nothing had been done. The union warned that teachers were now running out of patience and demanded action as well as proper consultation from the Ministry.

2.2.1 Promoting quality and equity in education

Overall, NANTU always understood its role as an agent of change and a critical partner to government in all attempts to improve education for the benefit of Namibia's disadvantaged majority. As an independent union, NANTU always made it clear that it expected real changes that could be felt at grassroots level. Despite being such a critical voice, the Ministry of Education (mostly) appreciated NANTU's constructive contributions and dedication towards fundamental change in education.

The questions of bringing about quality public education while reducing educational inequalities have remained key concerns for NANTU ever since the union was formed. NANTU was represented on most commissions dealing with educational questions and made its voice heard regarding new school syllabi and their implementation. The union was also party to the formulation of a "code of conduct" for Namibian schools.

The issues of equality and quality public education have remained high on NANTU's agenda and were also raised in NANTU's submission to the Presidential Commission of Inquiry into education in 1999 which was set up to make an assessment of the entire education system. NANTU proposed the practical implementation of free and compulsory education through:

- allocation of more financial resources to build more schools;
- mainstreaming of marginalised groups through the provision of specialised education programmes; and
- a specialised evaluation to determine the rate of access so far achieved in the country.

In order to improve the quality of education, NANTU proposed:

- The speedy enactment of the long-awaited education act;
- the provision of sufficient pre- and in-service training opportunities for teachers;
- the provision of sufficient teaching facilities at school;
- policy reforms regarding promotions in schools;
- a code of conduct for teachers and
- the establishment of a Teaching Service Commission.

Regarding equity, NANTU proposed the enforcement of affirmative action to rectify past disadvantages. The union also suggested to design educational programmes for the implementation of affirmative action. NANTU also called for enhancing democracy in schools through the establishment of school boards in all schools and by ensuring greater involvement of parents and the community.

2.2.2 Representing all teachers

Despite the resistance of some leaders in the ethnic teachers association and despite the formation of a rival teachers union in 1990, NANTU has achieved a high level of teachers' unity and has recruited the vast majority of Namibian teachers as its members. Within a few months, NANTU had already recruited over 5000 members and this figure had doubled by 1991. NANTU's paid-up membership today stands at about 10 215.

Despite having had huge problems with the implementation of a stop-order system to collect membership fees, NANTU established itself as the leading teachers union in Namibia. In terms of the Namibian Labour Act of 1992 which states that the trade union representing the majority of employees in a bargaining unit, NANTU was duly recognised as the sole bargaining agent for Namibian teachers and signed a recognition agreement with government in 1995.

However, NANTU was not satisfied with representing the majority of teachers. Its stated aim was (and still is) to represent all teachers. In line with the resolutions passed at the third national congress of 1993, NANTU entered into unity talks with other public sector unions around the question of unity and collective bargaining. The aim was to explore the possibility of achieving unity among unions that target the same constituency.

NANTU and the Teachers Union of Namibia (TUN) entered into unity talks in October 1993. It soon became clear that TUN had major problems with NANTU's affiliation to NUNW which in turn was (and still is) affiliated to SWAPO. TUN claimed that NANTU could not be independent under such conditions. Vilbard Usiku recalls:

Although some people in TUN agreed with NANTU, there were also powerful elements in TUN that did not want the two unions to merge. This group won at the end of the day as TUN deliberately put obstacles in the way of unity and NANTU was not prepared to meet these conditions, for example that NANTU should disaffiliate from NUNW. TUN argued that through this affiliation, NANTU was affiliated to SWAPO. However, NANTU argued that it benefits a teachers union to belong to a national labour centre. TUN was aware that they could not expect NANTU to disaffiliate from NUNW but it was convenient for them to come up with this pre-condition."

The NANTU delegation explained the union's position and pointed out the benefits of NANTU's affiliation to the national labour federation (NUNW). NANTU also explained that the decision regarding the NUNW's affiliation to SWAPO was taken at the NUNW congress and that NANTU (as a democratic organisation) had to accept the majority decision there. When the first phase of the unity talks ended, the TUN delegation indicated that they believed that teachers unity was possible.

The unity talks then resumed in May 1994 with the stated objective to look at concrete mechanisms to achieve the desired unity of all teachers. TUN proposed that both unions should disband and start a completely new union. NANTU, however, pointed out that this would mean starting afresh with stop-orders which had taken years to come into effect. NANTU also pointed out that there was no guarantee that all teachers would join the new union and some might decide to form a rival union once again. NANTU argued that it would be better to build on the achievements made so far. However, TUN categorically stated that it could not join NANTU as long as it was affiliated to the NUNW. Although the NANTU delegation explained that it could not revoke any decision regarding NANTU's affiliations, the TUN delegation was not prepared to compromise which resulted in a deadlock of the unity talks.

NANTU regretted the failure of the unity talks as a wasted opportunity. It noted the apparent lack of communication between the TUN leaders and their members which became evident as members of the TUN delegation frequently contradicted each other. NANTU then decided to seek separate recognition as the majority representative of the Namibian teachers. However, NANTU still strives for teachers unity and does not rule out the possibility of further unity talks in future.

2.2.3 Improving conditions of service

NANTU raised the issue of poor service conditions for teachers with the Ministry of Education and Culture immediately after independence. NANTU pointed out that teachers conditions were worse than those of other civil servants and consequently many teachers (especially the qualified ones) would leave the civil service.

In May 1991, the government announced an increase in the salaries which was meant to benefit especially lower paid public servants. NANTU responded by welcoming the increases but also raised some concerns:

'We take cognisance of the limited resources of the government but feel that the increase will in absolute numbers not narrow the existing gap. We draw attention to the fact that:

- a) Some of our members earn as little as R 5 000 per annum. An increase of 27% will therefore only raise their yearly income to R 6 350. This is way below a living wage.*
 - b) The salary increase of 8 – 12% for those in the R 5 886 to R 33 711 annual income bracket is not an increase in real salary if one considers the present inflation rate of 15%. We therefore call on the government to take the following steps:*
- 1) To completely review the salary structure for public servants with the aim of substantially narrowing the existing income gap.*
 - 2) To introduce a living wage for all and to grant salary increases which keep pace with the inflation rate.*
 - 3) To cut the salaries of highly paid administrators in the various ministries with the aim of uplifting the salaries of those at the bottom of the scale.*
 - 4) To carefully differentiate the salary increases from one level to another. An increase in broad categories will only increase the income gap, e.g. an increase of 10% for those who earn R 8 000 per year would mean an additional R 800, whereas the same percentage increase would mean an additional R 2 000 for those who earn R 20 000 per year. This illustrates how an across the board increase broadens the income gap.*

In conclusion, NANTU would like to see the labour code [Labour Act] passed very soon to enable trade unions to enter collective bargaining processes. Through collective bargaining, workers and teachers can achieve a fairer deal. As the representative of the majority of Namibian teachers we owe it to our members to improve their living and working conditions and to enhance the quality of education.

NANTU strongly believes that social and economic justice can be done only if the existing income gap is narrowed and the majority of Namibians benefit from the fruits of independence.'

However, it still took many years before collective bargaining resumed in the civil service. Although the Labour Act was passed in November 1992 with the provision that the trade union which has a majority membership has to be recognised as exclusive bargaining agent, the lack of stop-order facilities for NANTU members delayed NANTU's official recognition until 1994. Until then, NANTU raised the issue of poor service conditions repeatedly with the Ministry but also through the media in an effort to gain public attention.

NANTU conducted a survey of teachers and announced in 1994 that since independence over 500 teachers had left the teaching profession in Katima Mulilo, Khorixas and Keetmanshoop alone while the national figure was around 2000. NANTU pointed out that this was mainly due to poor working conditions, including low salaries, lack of housing (especially in rural areas) and other benefits. NANTU also pointed out that teachers who went for further studies were unlikely to remain in the profession unless the conditions of service would be improved. NANTU indicated that together with other public sector unions, it 'will seek an audience with the public Service Commission (PSC) to make recommendations to Cabinet for a general salary increment in the public service which will address this sensitive, exploitative and disturbing issue'. NANTU also accused the Ministry of Education of not addressing the issue of maternity leave as many teachers were forced to use their accumulated leave days as maternity leave at that time. NANTU also called on the PSC to amend the medical aid scheme which discriminated against women who (unlike men) could not register their dependants.

Due to the absence of a formal recognition agreement, it was difficult for NANTU to address these issues in a systematic manner. This changed finally in 1994-95 when the government accepted that NANTU represented the majority of teachers and agreed to sign a recognition agreement. One of the first key issues that NANTU managed to influence through collective bargaining was the new salary and benefit structure proposed by the Wages and Salary Commission (WASCOM). While welcoming the attempt to set up new and uniform pay structures for the civil service, NANTU pointed to some shortcomings of the WASCOM recommendations. These included the proposed exemptions of civil servants from some sections of the Labour Act, the call for a drastic reduction of the civil service, and the new pay structure which would have left about 13 000 of Namibia's 16 000 teachers worse off. NANTU also questioned the proposal to abolish the 13th cheque (bonus) and the huge income gap between the management cadre and the lower ranks of the civil service. NANTU called on government to refrain from any unilateral decision regarding civil servants' conditions of employment. Instead, the union called on government to enter into negotiations with representative trade unions.

In large parts due to NANTU's intervention, a compromise was reached to ensure that no teacher would be left off worse after the implementation of the WASCOM proposals. The WASCOM provisions affecting teachers were only implemented in 1996 after NANTU reached a conclusive agreement at sub-committee level with the Ministry of Education. This agreement elevated Namibian teachers among the best-paid in Africa.

Unqualified teachers

Another key issue that NANTU repeatedly spearheaded (even before the signing of the recognition agreement) was the question of under- and unqualified teachers. NANTU pointed out to the Ministry that this group of teachers suffered not only from low salaries but also from a lack of benefits and job security. NANTU repeatedly called on the Ministry to recognise the contribution made by those teachers (often under very difficult circumstances) and to create opportunities for them to upgrade their qualifications. NANTU proposed that their job security should be coupled with opportunities to obtain professional qualifications and the Ministry of Education made substantial concessions to this demand in 1994 when it declared that under-qualified teachers would be treated as permanent employees as from 1995. The same concession was made for unqualified teachers who hold at least a Senior Certificate (or equivalent qualification) plus five years teaching experience.

In 1999, NANTU commissioned a reputable academic from UNAM to develop a position paper on teacher education and training in Namibia. This paper was presented at the World Assembly of the International Council for teaching (ICET) held in Windhoek in July 2000. The paper recommended an increase in the tempo of teacher education programmes and activities at all levels. The paper further stressed the need to create the necessary conditions that will enable teachers to attain professional qualifications, either on a full-time or part-time basis or through open learning modules.

This draft paper on teacher education and training needs will be tabled at the upcoming National Congress for endorsement. If endorsed, the paper will become NANTU's White paper and will be presented to the Ministry of Basic Education, Culture and Sport.

Staffing Norms

NANTU agreed with the Ministry of Education on the need to redress the huge inequalities that still characterise Namibia's education system. However, the union disagreed with the Ministry's 'staffing norms' as a suitable strategy. The Ministry plans to establish a teacher- learner ratio of 1:40 in primary schools and 1:36 in secondary schools by the year 2002. The stated aim of this exercise is to achieve financial sustainability, to enhance the quality of education and to bring about equity among regions and schools. However, a technical committee set up by NANTU to investigate the Ministry's proposals found that the attainment of financial sustainability was the main motive. This observation was supported by the projected savings of over N\$100 million resulting from the implementation of the staffing norms. NANTU pointed out that the Ministry envisaged the teaching corps to be reduced (from 16 500 to 14 000) although an additional 3000 teachers were needed to achieve the proposed ratio of 1:36. NANTU questioned how the quality of education could be improved by increasing class sizes and by reducing the number of teachers.

NANTU pointed out that equity and quality in education can not be brought about by quick fix measures based on financial considerations. It also pointed out that learner-centred education will not be possible in large classes. Instead the union proposed that

basic education facilities (including schools and teachers accommodation) need to be built in neglected areas and that more teachers will need to be employed to address the backlog in education. NANTU proposed a teacher-learner ratio of 1:30 for secondary schools and 1:35 for primary schools. NANTU also proposed that alternative ways of redressing inequalities in education should be explored and that re-deployment of teachers should happen on a voluntary basis.

NANTU insists that the issue of staffing norms must form part of the agenda for collective bargaining and criticised the Ministry of Basic Education, Sport and Culture for trying to implement the proposed norms before any such negotiations take place. NANTU is determined to raise this issue at the bargaining table and does not rule out the possibility of industrial action if no compromise can be reached regarding the staffing norms.

2.2.4 Promoting professional development

This has been another key area of NANTU activities in its first decade. NANTU realised the urgent need to provide teachers with educational opportunities that they had been denied in the past. Although this was identified as being primarily the responsibility of the Ministry of Education, NANTU decided to play a pro-active role by offering additional skills training programmes to supplement those offered by the Ministry.

NANTU decided to establish a Professional Development Department to assist its members to develop their professional skills and qualifications. The department identified weaknesses within the teaching profession that needed immediate attention, and implemented projects to address them.

TELSIP

The first programme introduced was the Teachers English Language Skills Improvement Programme (TELSIP) which aimed to upgrade teachers' English language skills to enable them to teach in English. This programme was first launched in December 1990 and received financial support from the British Columbia Teachers Federation (BCTF), Oxfam-Canada and the Finish Teachers Union (OAJ). NANTU provided the logistical and administrative support to external and internal resource persons. Since 1993, NANTU has commissioned the Council of CCN to run the TELSIP workshops in the region as the union did not have sufficient human resources.

Erago Thaddeus Erago recalls:

“After the Ministry of Education introduced English as the medium of instructions in schools, NANTU saw it proper to introduce the TELSIP project because most teachers in the former Owamboland, Kavango and other “bantustans” had a very poor command of English. The TELSIP project helped teachers to communicate better in English in both the classroom and the community they serve”.

The TELSIP project aimed to supplement and complement the government's efforts to ensure that the teachers are competent and able to teach in the official language. After about six years in operation, NANTU felt that the project had served its purpose. Teachers had improved their communication skills in English and the project was phased out in 1999 to allow NANTU to concentrate on other issues of professional development.

Training of NANTU School Committees (NSCs):

This programme started operating in 1994, with the assistance of BCTF and Oxfam-Canada, and it is one of the biggest operations of the secretariat. Its objective is to train members of school committees at schools through workshops on a variety of topics relevant to its day-to-day operations.

NANTU has also developed a cadre of facilitators, who are able to run the workshops. Since 1998, five facilitators have been on an attachment to the BCTF in Canada for four weeks.

The NSC programme also produced a school committee kit (training manual), which was completed in October 1999. The information in the NSC kit includes the information on the Labour Act, the role and functions of the NSCs etc. NANTU has recognised the importance of these workshops and has decided to make them part of the union's core activities, for example by attaching the workshops to different secretariats.

Winter School

In co-operation with the Namibia Mathematics and Science Teachers Association (NAMSTA), NANTU organised the first winter school in May 2000 for teachers in mathematics, biology, physical science, life science and English. The course was held in Ondangwa to help teachers in those subjects where learners experience problems, especially mathematics and science at grade 10 and 12 level. The Ondangwa East and West regions were chosen for the first winter school because they have the highest number of under- and unqualified teachers in the country. This contributed to high failure rates of learners in grade 10 and 12 each year, especially in mathematics and science.

About 40 teachers from different education circuits attended the winter school which was judged to be a major success and a very practical contribution of NANTU towards the professional development of its members. The Ondangwa winter school was a pilot programme that will be followed by similar initiatives in other regions in future. NANTU also plans to start tutorial classes for teachers who are busy upgrading their qualifications. The union aims to have all teachers professionally qualified by 2007.

Other activities

NANTU established tutorial centres in Oshakati and Rundu to assist under- and unqualified teachers who are busy upgrading their qualifications through distance education institutions. The subjects covered are mathematics science and English.

NANTU plans to establish more tutorial centres in other regions. NANTU also gave 100 bursaries to under- and unqualified teachers in 1999.

A pilot “Beginners Teachers Conference” was held at the Windhoek College for Education in 1999 to give advise to final year students who are about to enter the teaching profession. This conference was very successful and will be repeated at various teachers training colleges in future.

Since 1999, NANTU has an arrangement with ‘Die Republikein’ newspaper to publish a weekly education page on different subject areas. The page contains examination questions on the one day, followed by the correct answers on the next day. This is a joint NANTU/NAMSTA project and serves to prepare especially grade 10 learners for their examinations.

Overall the Professional Development secretariat has implemented many projects and has achieved good results. It plans to take on new projects in the years to come, for example on curriculum delvelopment.

2.2.5 Promoting gender equality

NANTU regards the issue of gender equality as a key issue to be addressed in the union as well as in society as a whole. At its second annual congress in 1991, the union created the post of secretary of women affairs to give special attention to the concerns of women teachers in NANTU. Doufi Namalambo, who was the only women on the steering committee in 1988/89 was elected as the first secretary. She recalls:

We travelled all over the country, unfortunately there were very few women involved, I was available because I was free at Dobra and was still a student activist. I just came from NANSO, I didn't want to miss any action. But it was rather difficult for other women, most probably due to culture and household responsibilities. I was single without a child, so I had all the time which I could sacrifice in and as a result I was the only woman who join the male colleagues who were working on the establishment of the union. It was good working with them as I felt protected and they were very supportive and I really appreciated that. What was good amongst us is that we all had the same value, thinking, understanding and vision...

I did not have a clue, what was expected from me in my new portfolio but I had to deal with it. As I am looking back now, I wish I could have done things differently, but it was a good exposure. My role was to ensure woman representation and participation in the union. We received money specified for activities, which targeted women only. We ran workshops to encourage woman to stand for leadership positions but these workshops where not well designed or planned. I was not that gender sensitive to really know what to do. The women caucus was just an additional mechanism to strengthen woman participation, it was meant to take place especially just before congresses and before any other leadership

election. The caucus was meant to bring women together and talk to each other about who wants to stand for election and how they could support each other.

The quota system come in after the third congresses when we realised that we did not really make an impact. The quota was introduced as a mechanism make sure that at least a number of leadership positions (on the NTC) are occupied by women.

About 60% of all teachers in Namibia are women and they also constitute the majority of NANTU's members. Despite their majority representation in both the teaching profession and union membership, women are not proportionally represented in NANTU's decision-making structures. Only eight of the forty NANTU National Teachers Council members and three of the eight NANTU Management Committee members are women. Women are also under-represented throughout Namibia's education management system.

Fortyfive (45) percent of all women teachers do not have formal teacher training qualifications, and the majority of all unqualified teachers in the country are women. Thus women are the lowest paid in the profession. Women teachers are often not active participants in union activities which is one of the reasons why they tend to be overlooked when it comes to the elections of leadership positions. NANTU is concerned about the poor participation of women in the union and hopes to bring more women into the leadership structure by introducing a quota system. Plans have also been made to introduce assertiveness training for female union members.

The union realised that its vision for gender equality was rather vague, and that it needed a guideline to have a clear vision on gender. In 1997 a NANTU Gender Policy, based on the National Gender Policy was drafted with the assistance of the Department of Women Affairs and it was adopted in 1999. The preamble of the policy states that: "*The union (NANTU) believes in the equality of humankind and thus advocates for the equal participation and involvement of women in all union activities and society as large*". To ensure that this mission statement is adhered to, the union has a gender co-ordinator throughout its structures, as provided for in the gender policy. Currently all gender co-ordinators are women.

One significant principle in the gender policy is to "*raise the education consciousness of both men and women on gender disparities and how to combat such disparities, both within the union and at the workplace*". Princess Luthuli explains:

"Gender equality and thus women empowerment, can only come about through education and gender awareness campaigns to make the society gender sensitive. This is something that the secretariat has been doing all along. We have conducted workshops and seminars in the regions on gender equality and the rights of women teachers and all women in society. In principal the union has opened its doors for women to participate in all union matters and in all structures, but it is still up to us women to initiate and make use of the opportunities given. Women should be available and committed to the union, and for that, one really need a very understanding family to support you, as one will

at times abandon the family to attend distant conferences, workshops and seminars”.

The union has invested in gender education through workshops and seminars to increase the society's gender sensitivity. Today, women's participation in and contribution to NANTU have significantly increased compared with the initial stages of the union. In an effort to further promote and encourage participation in and attendance of union activities by women, NANTU has introduced the Child Care Policy. This policy makes provision for the union to make arrangements for young children to be taken care of, while their mothers attend meetings or other union activities, as this is often a major obstacle for women to participate in union activities. NANTU also recognised that women especially in Namibia's rural communities are still marginalised with few chances to obtain a decent education. To combat this problem, NANTU has introduced the Rural Women Scholarship Grant, which serves to assist women teachers to improve their qualifications.

NANTU has formerly had a woman serving as its secretary-general, which is quite an achievement considering the general trend in Namibian trade unions where this position is usually occupied by a man.

The gender secretariat with the financial assistance of the British Columbia Teachers Union (BCTU), facilitated workshops on conflict management, where teachers are trained how handle conflicts in both the classroom and the staff room.

2.2.6 HIV/AIDS

NANTU recognised AIDS as a world-wide epidemic, with a hazardous socio-economic impact, particularly in the Sub-Sahara African region. The gender secretariat was delegated to develop the union's HIV/Aids Project. NANTU now conducts workshops where selected teachers (most of whom are women) undergo intensive training. Secretary General John Nakuta explains:

“We felt that teachers should also be involved in the fight against AIDS. NANTU has therefore trained teachers with the assistance of USAID as HIV/AIDS councillors.”

The 'graduates' then serve as HIV/Aids councillors for their colleagues, learners and the community as large. This training is of high professional standard and participants are required to carry out practicals in hospitals and homes. They also have to write a thesis on a case study in their respective regions.

Realising, that more is still to be done, the union drafted its HIV/Aids Policy in 1999, which is to be adopted very soon. One of the goals stipulated in the draft is *“to provide psycho-social support for those infected and affected by HIV/Aids”*. A goal the union is already working on.

2.2.7 Promoting cultural development

Namibia's cultural heritage is one of the dimensions that NANTU has committed itself to help develop at its founding congress in 1989. NANTU's secretary for culture, Immanuel Muatara, explains that culture was identified as one of the significant components any society should cherish and preserve, especially in today's world that is rapidly changing due to scientific and technological discoveries. Therefore the union created a secretariat to work on that commitment.

NANTU's policy on culture emphasises that Namibia has its own cultural identity. Namibia has many different indigenous tribes and therefore a variety of cultures. The NANTU culture desk identified all indigenous Namibian communities (including Afrikaans and German speaking communities) as components of the Namibian culture.

NANTU has created “cultural regions” according to current regional boundaries. Within each cultural region there is “cultural village”, which is often situated close to a school. Otjinene in the Omaheke region was the first to have a cultural village. Cultural villages are places set up and managed by the locals (with the assistance of teachers) where local communities and cultural groups meet for cultural activities, i.e. basket weaving and pottery, traditional cooking and brewing, cultural dances and sports, etc. To further promote such cultural activities, NANTU introduced regional trophies. These trophies are located in each cultural region with a functioning cultural village. Groups within the region compete in various cultural activities to win the floating trophies. The regional group winners then compete for the NANTU national trophy among each other at national level, normally during congress.

NANTU's culture desk has another specific objective regarding music and songs. The union is determined to revive and assure continuity of cultural music and songs. The culture secretariat has acquired musical instruments worth about N\$33,000. A music band was created and a teacher in the Karas region runs the project. The culture desk is also involved in promoting cultural sports and games. First on the list is the "Osholo" (Oshiwambo) game, a well-known game enjoyed by elders of local communities throughout the African continent. It is also locally known as "Onyune" (Otjiherero), "//Hus" (Nama/Damara). Other sports on the list are "Onghandeka", "Okapumba" (Oshiwambo), etc. The NANTU culture secretariat is currently working on a booklet covering all popular cultural sports and games. This booklet will interpret the different sports and games, and will also serve as a manual. Art and craft is promoted at the culture villages. Local residents are invited to bring their cultural artwork, crafts and clay pots to the culture village for exhibitions. The artist with the most attractive work is awarded the regional trophy, and may compete with other regional winners for the national trophy. During these art exhibitions and other cultural activities, school learners and other children are invited to get acquainted with their cultural heritage.

All these activities are only successful in some regions, due to lack of funds for the projects (from donors) and low budget allocation to the culture secretariat. The secretariat also experiences transport and organisational problems to arrange cultural activities. The challenge now is to ensure that all the regions have functional culture villages and that cultural sports and games are developed.

2.2.8 Promoting sports

The secretariat for sports was re-activated after the 1997 congress in Outjo. NANTU's secretary for sports Johannes Geingob has prepared a draft sports policy which was already circulated among the union leadership and the National Teachers Council. This policy is expected to be formally adopted soon.

As a mechanism of implementation, a steering committee (consisting mostly of NANTU members around Windhoek for logistical reasons) was established. This committee will be replaced by a NANTU standing committee on sports, once the policy has been formally adopted. The standing committee will have members from each region who will be responsible for the NANTU sports activities in their respective areas.

In 1999, NANTU's secretary for sports attended a SATO sports indaba in South Africa. SATO will hold biannual sports events for its affiliates and the first event will take place in September 2000 in Johannesburg, South Africa, covering soccer, netball, athletics and chess. Volleyball will be added as a discipline at the sports event in 2002 which will be hosted by NANTU in Namibia.

National teams of the participating teachers unions were selected at the end of June 2000 and NANTU will field strong teams in all disciplines, including some of the national soccer stars.

The NANTU department of sports has also applied for membership with the National Sports Council (NSC). Once accepted, the NSC will assist NANTU with coaching, transport and financial support for sports activities.

2.2.9 Membership benefits

NANTU's policy on membership benefits operates at local and national level. Negotiations for benefits at local level (covering a specific town or region) take place between the NANTU branch and business people who operate in that particular area. In addition, NANTU negotiates for benefits at national level. Besides salary increments and benefits related to conditions of service (which are addressed through collective bargaining) this includes discounts at some shops, death benefits, a study loan scheme and the credit union which is about to be launched. At Waltons Stationers, for example, all NANTU members receive a 15% discount if they present their membership cards. This applies to the purchase of all goods that are not on special price already.

The NANTU branches are expected to try and negotiate discounts for their members, for example with big supermarkets, building companies, tyre shops etc. NANTU believes that the local union leadership is in the best position to negotiate such benefits as they are familiar with businesspeople and the local conditions.

At national level, NANTU is about to launch an ambitious project – the credit union. A task force comprising of the national secretary for membership benefits and marketing and all regional chairpersons was set up and charged with preparing for the establishment of the credit union. A constitution was prepared and will be presented to the Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Rural Development for registration. Once registered, NANTU will encourage all its members to join the credit union which will be called 'Likwafela'. A board of directors was elected to govern the organisation. It is envisaged that the credit union will be up and running by January 2001.

The credit union is an attempt by NANTU to assist its members in economic matters and give them a greater say over financial services. At the moment, many teachers are forced to borrow money from 'cash loan sharks' who become rich while teachers are caught in a continuous cycle of debt. The establishment of the credit union will provide NANTU members with an alternative source of credit. The credit union is a NANTU project, owned and administered by teachers on behalf of NANTU members.

2.2.10 Building democracy: NANTU's decision-making structures

Since its inception, NANTU's stated organisational practice was to entrench the principles of membership participation and accountability throughout its structures. Unlike the ethnic teachers associations that had existed before independence, NANTU was determined to build a union where members take decisions and where leadership is held accountable through union structures.

The various organisational structures are equally important and depend on each other. At school level, NANTU has school committees, which represent members at their workplaces. The school committees are critical for disseminating information among members and for providing them with a structure through which they can raise their concerns. At town level, NANTU has branch committees which bring together the school committee members in a specific town. Here the representatives of the various schools discuss any issue of importance not only in their specific area but also in the educational field in general.

NANTU divided the country into 11 educational regions. They are:

The Far North 1 region

The Far North 2 region

The Far North East region

The North East region

The North West region

The West region

The Central region

The Eastern region

The Hardap region

The Karas region

And the Near North region.

Each region has its own structures, namely the regional conference which takes place once a year, bringing together representatives from all branches, and a Regional Executive Committee (elected by the branch conference). The regional executive committees take up educational issues with the respective offices of the Ministry of Education but also express themselves on national issues. The chairpersons of each region are also represented on the National Teachers Council (NTC) which is the highest decision-making structure of the union between National Congresses. The other national structure of NANTU is the National Executive Committee, which is elected at congress, deals with national issues and supervises the work of the NANTU secretariat in the head office.

The active participation of teachers at all levels within the NANTU structures is perhaps the most critical element building a strong union. Jomo Tjitjo wrote in 1993:

“The importance of the participation of regional structures in the activities of the union cannot be overemphasised. It is in the regions where the gravest educational problems are experienced. Local structures must therefore act as the heartbeat of NANTU. It is inconceivable to think that a national teachers union such as NANTU can be run from the head office. To do this, is to make a mockery of the principle of participatory democracy which is so cherished not only in NANTU but also in Namibia at large. We believe in NANTU that we are all equal, that we do not speak of bosses, that we are all friends and comrades. It is therefore important to put this belief into real practice.”

Although it is at times difficult to motivate teachers to attend union meetings, NANTU is determined to continuously build and re-build its structures to ensure that the union represents the interests of its members at all times. This is particularly critical during the process of collective bargaining at national level. During such negotiations, the NANTU delegation is forced to consider government proposals while trying to achieve the best deal possible for its members. Union negotiators may find themselves in difficult positions and run the danger of agreeing to a compromise that might be unacceptable to their members. Only the continuous process of feed-back to and receiving mandates from NANTU members (through the union's structures) will ensure that the agreements reached meet the expectations of NANTU's membership.

2.2.11 Moving towards financial self reliance

Initially NANTU received outside financial assistance from organisations like the Norwegian Teachers Union (NL). Three of the NL's regions, namely Gudbrandsdal, Vest-Agder and Aust-Agder spontaneously responded to the call to support NANTU and collected funds that enabled NANTU to cover its costs in its early days. The NL then extended its support to a five-year programme continuously phasing out its own contribution while expecting NANTU to becoming increasingly self-sufficient.

Today NANTU covers 80-90% of its costs from its own resources, especially membership fees. Unlike other NUNW affiliated unions, NANTU's membership fee is not 1% of the member's salary, but a fixed monthly amount which currently stands at N\$20.

The remainder of NANTU's income consists of financial support for specific projects (mainly training programmes) received from sister organisations like the Norwegian, Finnish and Canadian teachers unions.

NANTU plans to diversify its revenue sources in the years to come. The union has just bought a new office complex in Windhoek which will be named Kasingo House after the late Aron Kasingo who was the chairperson of the steering committee that established NANTU. He was also the union's first director of publicity, information and research and designed the NANTU logo. The new NANTU head office has additional space that will be rented out as a source of income for the union.

The impressive achievements made by NANTU in terms of achieving financial self-reliance are illustrated in tables 2 and 3.

2.2.12 NANTU's national and international relations

The importance of building unity of purpose with like-minded organisations inside and outside Namibia, featured prominently throughout NANTU's existence. The guiding principle regarding the establishment of organisational links was contained in Article 2 of NANTU's constitution, which sets out one of the union's aims as follows:

'To foster closer co-operation with other progressive organisations which share NANTU's ideals both nationally and internationally'.

NANTU's history would look different without the contributions made by organisations like NANSO, NUNW, AATO, NL and others. Especially in its early stages, when NANTU was faced by a lack of resources and organisational capacity, coupled with a hostile (colonial) government administration, the support rendered by international sister organisations was critical. This included financial support, programme support, leadership training and other capacity building programmes. Tom Bediako recalls how he as the secretary general of the All Africa Teachers Organisations (AATO) tried to establish contacts with Namibian teachers since the late 1970s:

"My colleagues and I became anxious to find ways and means of getting in touch with our colleagues in Namibia. I met the late secretary general of the NUNW, John ya Otto, at meetings of OATUU, the ILO and liberation struggle gatherings. Every time we met, ya Otto stressed the need for AATO and OATUU to assist Namibian workers, especially teachers. We were overwhelmed by the stories of segregation and racial education systems as well as other political, social and economic problems facing teachers".

Over the years, AATO held many discussions with the Norwegian teachers union NL and other member organisations of the World Confederation of Organisations in the Teaching Profession (WCOTP) regarding the situation of teachers in Namibia. The NL indicated that Namibia was one of the priority countries for Norway. Tom Bediako wanted to visit Namibia to meet teachers but this was impossible as his passport was invalid in South Africa and Namibia (then South West Africa). The NL with WCOTP and the NUNW then decided to arrange two workshops outside Namibia in 1989. The participants came from Namibia as well as from the refugee camps in Zambia and Congo. One of the workshops served to prepare Namibian teachers to play a positive part in the country's first democratic elections. The second workshop consisted of training for NANTU's newly elected leadership.

NANTU always understood its role as being part of the struggle to bring about social justice and to build a broad and united front of all those who are still exploited. Consequently, NANTU has been affiliated to the country's largest trade union federation, the **National Union of Namibian Workers (NUNW)** since its inception. The NUNW has 8 affiliated unions representing workers in almost all sectors of the economy, including domestic workers and farm workers. The NUNW's affiliates represent 60 – 70 000 of Namibia's 220 000 workers in the formal sector. The federation articulates labour's position on labour as well as broader socio-economic issues and NANTU is represented on all decision-making structures of the NUNW. NANTU's former national chairperson, Tjekero Tweya, served as NUNW president from 1991 – 1993, while the current NANTU president Elia Manga serves as acting NUNW vice president.

NANTU also maintained a close working relationship with the **Namibia National Students Organisation (NANSO)**. Although the collaboration is no longer as intense as

it was during the early years of NANTU's existence, the two organisations consult each other on educational issues and sometimes embark on joint campaigns. An example of such co-operation was the recent campaign for global education between NANTU, NANSO, the NGO Forum (NANGOF) and the students organisation NASEM.

On the international front, NANTU has been affiliated to the World Confederation of Organisations in the Teaching Profession (WCOTP) which merged with other global teachers organisations to form Education International (EI) in 1993. NANTU also built links with several teachers organisations who shared the union's vision and aspirations. These included the regional teachers organisation (SATO), the All Africa Teachers Organisation (AATO), as well as national teachers unions in the SADC region, in Ghana (GNAT), Norway (NL), Finland (OAJ), Germany (GEW), Canada (CTF and BCTF).

The specific programmes supported by NANTU's sister organisations are as follows:

1. Norsk Laererlag (NL)

Cooperation with NL started immediately after the formation of NANTU. The NL assisted NANTU to set up links with other teacher organisations in the SADC region and made it possible for NANTU to attend seminars and workshops there. Between 1990 and 1997, the NL assisted in the following areas:

- Institutional support, for example assistance to purchase the current NANTU head office, a vehicle and to cover administrative costs;
- Initial payment of staff salaries;
- Support for training programmes for women and union leadership through the provision of resource persons and finance.

2. Opetusalan Ammattijarjesto (OAJ)

The Finish teachers union OAJ assisted NANTU mainly in its professional development efforts. This included funding for the Teacher English Language Improvement Programme (TELSIP) which aimed to improve the English language proficiency of Namibian teachers. This was identified as a priority after English was introduced as the official medium of instruction in Namibian schools. Initially, the programme was coupled with an initiative called 'Library on Wheels' which aimed to serve as a mobile reference and research resource for the implementation of the programme. The TELSIP programme was terminated in 1999, when all parties felt that its objectives had been achieved.

The OAJ also provided "seed funds" for a Kindergarten project in Katima Mulilo. Due to a lack of suitable infrastructure, this project has not yet been implemented. The current REC in the region is still pursuing this project and the NTC approved the release of additional funds for its implementation.

The OAJ is supporting the Martti Ahtisaari School Project since 1997. This project targets a primary school in Katutura by providing assistance to improve the teaching and learning facilities at the school. The OAJ's support is channelled through NANTU.

3. Canadian Teachers Federation (CTF)

The CTF co-funded the TELSIP programme and also supported the professional development programmes. The CTF provided technical assistance in the form of TELSIP trainers and also financed the attachment of selected national NANTU leaders to the Thomson Fellowship in Canada.

4. British Columbia Teachers Federation (BCTF)

The BCTF supported the training of NANTU's school committee members since 1995. BCTF provided financial support and resource persons during the initial years. The programme aims to equip union leaders with various skills in the fields of advocacy, grievance handling, dispute resolution and mediation at school level. Since 1998, the BCTF and Oxfam Canada sponsored the Attachment of project facilitators to BCTF in Vancouver, Canada.

The BCTF also donated office equipment, building materials, water tanks etc. to various regional offices and to schools in the north.

5. Oxfam Canada

Due to NANTU's relationship with the BCTF, Oxfam Canada also supported the TELSIP programme with specific focus on the Kavango region. This support entailed the donation of a pick-up van ('bakkie') for the project.

Since 1997, Oxfam supported the training programme for NANTU school committees and now funds the attachment of four facilitators to the BCTF in Vancouver, Canada from 1999 – 2001.

6. Gewerkschaft Erziehung und Wissenschaft (GEW)

The German teachers union GEW donated a Volkswagen Combi which served the union well from 1990 – 1999. During NANTU's 10th anniversary celebrations, the union also committed itself to supporting NANTU's study loan scheme.

7. All Africa Teachers Organisation (AATO)

AATO through its secretary general Tom Bediako played and continues to play a crucial role by establishing links between NANTU and various co-operating organisations. This enabled NANTU to obtain funding and support, first through the World Confederation of Organisations in the Teaching Profession (WCOTP) and then through its successor Education International (EI). The AATO secretary general also provided guidance and advisory services to NANTU's leadership since the inception of the union.

AATO also provided technical assistance for various NANTU activities, for example facilitators for the TELSIP programme who designed and implemented the programme in its initial years.

8. Southern African Teachers Organisation (SATO)

NANTU is a founder member of this regional teachers body and benefits mainly for regional training programmes. NANTU also established strong working ties with some SATO members like ZIMTA (Zimbabwe) and SADTU (South Africa). The NANTU national organiser and the secretary for marketing and membership benefits were attached to ZIMTA in 1993 and 1998 to understudy ZIMTA's successful credit union scheme.

ZIMTA also provided a trainer for the study circles project in 1998 to assist NANTU in editing and designing a study circle manual. Also in 1998, SADTU sent its chief negotiator to Namibia to train NANTU's negotiation team.

NANTU is highly appreciative of the support it has received from friendly organisation in Namibia, Africa and beyond as a sign of practical solidarity and encouragement. On its part, NANTU has been a key player in the establishment of a SADC-wide teachers organisation, the Southern Africa Teachers Organisation (SATO) which was launched in Botswana in May 1993. NANTU's former national organiser, George Mayumbelo remembers:

“NANTU has played an important role in the establishment of SATO. When the SATO constitution was drawn up, I was part of the committee that drafted the constitution. SATO is important to achieve teachers solidarity in the region and to advance professionalism.”

In 1998, NANTU made an extra-ordinary financial contribution to AATO which experienced financial difficulties at the time. A year later, NANTU provided financial support to the Botswana Teachers Union (BTU) whose offices had burned down resulting in heavy losses for that union.

NANTU also made a donation to the Katutura Old Age Home and to people living positively with AIDS through the Catholic Aids Action Group. In addition, NANTU provided support for the Namibia Domestic and Allied Workers Union (NDAWU) to hold its national congress.

Chapter 3: The challenges ahead

NANTU is proud of its achievements over the years. However, there is no room for complacency as NANTU members expect their union to remain vibrant and defend their interests. NANTU will also have to remain vigilant as a watchdog over government policies, particularly in the field of education which is still characterised by huge inequalities. The education director of Ondangwa East, John Kandombo, pointed out some of NANTU's social obligations when he stated that:

“I was expecting NANTU to shift its mission from confrontation to discussions, especially regarding the training of teachers. It seems that NANTU now is only addressing the interests of the teachers while failing to address the plight of the learners. The question is: are our teachers effective enough to teach our children? Can the products of our schools compete in the international market? These questions have not yet been addressed.”

NANTU's ability to effectively address issues of educational inequality alongside the conditions of service of teachers will to a significant extent depend on the union's ability to involve its members - not only in its activities but also in the decision-making process. In the words of one of NANTU's founder members, Josef Konjore:

“This is a challenge to NANTU to get teachers actively involved in union activities like meetings and workshops. You find that these activities often occur during weekends and during holidays and not everyone is prepared to sacrifice their time. The union needs loyal members who are prepared to sacrifice their time for the union. The union officials should always realise that the members are the union.”

Marius Kudumo adds:

“Trade unionism has become a profession and with new challenges emerging it should always adjust. The union should invest in human resources and information technology to operate more professionally and communicate more effectively with its members. The union should make all structures functional to allow membership to participate in decision making. When NANTU was launched it was clear that we stand on two legs: trade unionism, which is collective bargaining, improving working and living conditions. And professionalism, which is improving of the delivery of services to our clientele. Before independence it was easy to just stand up and make radical statements and everybody follows. Now, NANTU's role is engagement you have to research and provide alternatives. There is no point of rejecting if you don't provide an alternative .We have shifted from confrontation to engagement which is a challenge”.

Some of the other challenges that NANTU is facing in the years to come are the following:

3.1 Gender equality and women empowerment

Despite the achievements made in promoting the participation of women within NANTU, there are still significant gender imbalances in the composition of the union's structures. The present National Teachers Council, for example, consists of 40 members of whom only 8 are women. NANTU is now considering the introduction of quotas to ensure a fair representation of women, especially at national level. At present, there is only one gender quota, which stipulates that at least half of the ten 'additional' NTC members must be women. This is inadequate as NANTU secretary general John Nakuta explains:

“We are thinking of constitutional amendments to make provision for specific quotas to ensure that women are well represented, especially in the top national structure. In Norway, for example, there is a provision in the constitution which says that either the president or the deputy president has to be a woman. This could also be implemented in NANTU”.

NANTU realised that it can set an example in terms of empowering women, not only within the union but also within society. NANTU will therefore have to form links with other progressive organisations and play its part in promoting gender equality as a concern not only of women, but of society as a whole.

3.2 Teachers unity

NANTU is still committed to the achievement of teachers' unity in Namibia. Despite the failure of previous unity talks with TUN, NANTU still hopes to unite all teachers under its roof. Although the chances of uniting the two rival unions seem slim at present, NANTU remains open for discussions. In case union unity will be impossible to achieve, NANTU is determined to recruit all remaining teachers that have not joined the union yet. However, TUN has gained some support in some of the country's regions and it will be up to NANTU to show that it is the best organisation to promote and defend the interests of Namibian teachers. This will be essential if NANTU wants to increase its membership to 14 000 (about 90% of all teachers) by the end of 2004 as set out in the unions' strategic plan. The chairperson of NANTU's Near North region, Tangeni Tobias, explains how this was achieved in his region:

“There were some teachers in the region who did not understand what NANTU was all about. They thought that NANTU was just there to make noise but not to solve problems. Once we explained NANTU to them, they have started to co-operate. We have liberated their minds and they now have a really positive attitude towards the union.”

3.3 Quality leadership

NANTU has produced excellent leaders over the years that are today serving in government (both at cabinet level and in the civil service), the private sector, research institutions and other organisations. Since independence, hundreds of NANTU leaders have left the union, a process which is sometimes referred to as a 'brain drain'. However, as NANTU's first president Marco Hausiku pointed out:

“Leadership comes and goes, but what is important is that the policy guidelines that led to the successful operations of the organisation should always be preserved.”

Undoubtedly, NANTU has a rich base from which to draw new leaders. In the words of the former NANTU president Vilbard Usiku:

“NANTU has a membership of high quality from which it can draw new quality leaders. It is a question of identifying people with the necessary skills and vision to lead the organisation”.

This is the task facing the congress of August 2000 which has to elect a leadership that is capable of taking NANTU further, building on the achievements of the past while improving the accountability and efficiency of leadership at all levels. This will involve capacity building of NANTU leaders at all levels as well as incentives that will enable the union to retain dedicated and experienced staff.

3.4 Benefits for NANTU members

NANTU wants to improve the tangible benefits for its members. This entails firstly that the union will have to be a vocal and determined agent of Namibian teachers. It needs to service its membership well and contribute to the solving of problems that teachers experience. Through its structures, NANTU will also have to provide its members with an avenue of influencing educational policies. NANTU members expect their union to be vocal and use its influence to their benefit.

The continuous implementation of teachers upgrading programmes will remain a key service of the union and should be intensified in the years to come. These programmes have significantly contributed to building NANTU's image in the regions. Hiskia Tjindere from the Eastern region explains:

“A few year ago there were many TUN members in the region but through our education programmes, our teachers have started to have trust in NANTU. Many of them joined NANTU and about 90% of teachers in the region are now NANTU members.”

NANTU's role in professional development is also appreciated by the Minister of Basic Education, John Mutorwa, who stated that:

“NANTU should continue to put emphasis on the professional development of teachers. Although it is the responsibility of government to train teachers, it is also the responsibility of the union to motivate them. They should always be reminded by motto of the union – educate to liberate.”

3.5 Collective bargaining

The recent negative publicity around the wage agreement between NAPWU/NANTU and the government has shown the difficulty of negotiating wage and salary increases in the face of dwindling government resources. Although NANTU has managed to achieve significant gains over the years for its membership, the last agreement has shown the urgent need to report back to members during negotiations and not to sign agreements before they are endorsed by the membership.

NANTU should also use its status as exclusive bargaining agent to forcefully advocate not only its members interests and concerns but also issues affecting educational developments and the promotion of a quality public education system. NANTU needs to continuously communicate with its members and the general public through the mass media as well as through the union’s newsletter.

3.6 Agent for social change

NANTU has to remain a driving force in the struggle for social change. This implies strengthening NANTU’s links with the rest of the labour movement in Namibia, the region and beyond. NANTU also needs to nurture its links with other civil society organisations who share NANTU’s vision and ideals. The union will also have to place more emphasis on concrete South to South solidarity, particularly in light of developing countries’ continued marginalisation in the globalisation process. NANTU will have to be visible and articulate in political and social issues and debates ranging from globalisation, to HIV/Aids, child labour, and decentralisation policies.

The union has already shown how it can contribute towards overcoming problems like tribalism. Kenneth Nsundano Tebuho cites the example of the Caprivi region:

“People in our regions were first divided along tribal lines which were linked to specific political parties, for example Masubia-SWAPO. NANTU then embarked on membership education to show teachers that it does not matter from which tribe or political party you are when it comes to NANTU. We all are affected in the same way when it comes to conditions of service or the failure rate in the region. We have managed to address the issue of tribalism in the region and the learners as well as the community now accept teachers from the other area. We now accept each other and concentrate on the educational development in the region. We now look at where we go in terms of our children’s education.”

3.7 Political relationship

This topic has been with NANTU since its inception. As part of the broader liberation struggle, NANTU was seen by its opponents as a SWAPO union. Markus Kampungu, NANTU's former secretary general explains:

“Because of our affiliation to the NUNW we were seen as belonging to a political party as the NUNW is affiliated to SWAPO. However, we only affiliated to the NUNW because NANTU is a workers union just like any other union. The indirect link to a political party was the main reason why other unions did not want to join us. However, NANTU's policy is clear that individual members can belong to political parties of their choice. We, as an organisation, do not participate in political campaigns for any party.”

NANTU has asserted its independence over the years and at the last NUNW congress in 1998, NANTU proposed that the union federations should disaffiliate from SWAPO and establish an alliance on specific issues instead. This proposal was, however, rejected by the other NUNW affiliates.

The issue of political affiliation needs to be handled very carefully as it already divides the Namibian labour movement and may even result in further divisions in future. Marius Kudumo explains:

“The issue of affiliation needs to be discussed and put in perspective. The affiliation of NANTU to the national labour federation – NUNW - is currently an international trend among unions. A teachers union should not be seen as an elite organisation that has nothing to do with other workers unions. The basic philosophy of any trade union movement is solidarity, and by affiliating to the NUNW we give an indication that we believe in the solidarity of workers.

Some people argue that NANTU should not be attached to NUNW because of its affiliation to SWAPO. It is incorrect for NANTU to decide on that, because this issue should be debated within the NUNW structures and at congress. The NUNW and its affiliates should encourage open debate on the question of the federation's affiliation to SWAPO. The arguments for and against affiliation should be heard and the workers must be allowed to decide democratically on the basis of the advantages and disadvantages of a party-political affiliation. Once this issue is decided democratically then let it be. Otherwise we are defeating the principle of solidarity and democracy that underpins any trade union movement”.

NANTU's former president Vilbard Usiku agrees:

“NANTU's position on political affiliation must carry the blessing of the entire NANTU membership'. It should not be a decision of the leadership but carry the approval of the rank and file membership. It will be problematic if the leadership takes a decision on behalf of the membership without their approval. This issue

should already be debated during regional conferences and the decision and recommendations need to be noted. On the basis of these debates and recommendations, the national leadership can then take a position regarding the NUNW's affiliation to SWAPO."

3.8 Conclusion

Everybody who contributed to this booklet agreed that despite having made impressive achievements, NANTU cannot rest on its laurels. The union needs to be visible and active, with functioning structures that facilitate active membership participation. NANTU also needs a clear vision and understanding about its own role in the transformation of Namibian society. NANTU must prove that it is capable of solving the problems of its members and at the same time of addressing challenges like the continued inequality in Namibian society. This will only be possible if the organisation will be able to further build its own strength, capacity and financial independence. Nobody summed that up better than Tom Bediako who said:

"The history of NANTU demonstrates how determined people and organisations can improve the quality of their own lives and look out for pitfalls along the way. We cannot afford to be complacent and think that development assistance (or diplomatically put development co-operation) can bring us manna. At best, it can help us to search and create our own manna."

Appendix: The NANTU National Executive Committees

Year Congress Venue	1989	1990	1991	1993	1995	1997
	Windhoek	Windhoek	Windhoek	Ongwediva	Swakopmund	Outjo
President	Marco Hausiku	Redemptus Kamari			Vilbard Usiku	Elia Manga
Vice President	Redemptus Kamari	Josef Konjore				
Secretary General	Markus Kampungu	Markus Kampungu	Markus Kampungu	Markus Kampungu	Christine Gontes	John Nakuta
Deputy SG						
National Secretary	Doufi Namalambo	Herbert Jauch	Herbert Jauch	Vilbard Usiku		
Vice National Secretary	Nick De Voss					
Treasurer	Jacobus van der Westhuizen	Jacobus v.d. Westhuizen				
Vice-Treasurer		Theo Jankowski				
National chairperson	Tjekero Tweya	Tjekero Tweya				
Vice National Chairperson	John Knadombo	Bella Cupido				
Secretary for Sports		Ben Awoseb				
Secretary for Culture		Eta Mbuye				
National Organiser		George Mayumbelo				
Secretary for Women Affairs						
Director of Publicity, Information and Research	Aron Kasingo					Peter Gwarada
Additional members		Marius Kudumo; Doufi Namalambo ; B. Hammond				