

Service Station Workers in Namibia

Prepared by the Labour Resource and Research Institute (LaRRI)

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Abbreviations

ASSO	Association of Service Station Owners
BP	British Petroleum
FNV	Netherlands Trade Union Federation
FOS	Fund for Development Cooperation, Belgium
LaRRI	Labour Resource and Research Institute
MANWU	Metal and Allied Namibia Workers Union
MUN	Mineworkers Union of Namibia
MVA	Motor Vehicle Accident Fund
NAFAU	Namibia Food and Allied Workers Union
NAFAWU	Namibia Fuel and Allied Workers Union
NAMCOR	National Petroleum Corporation of Namibia
NLF	Namibia Liquid Fuel
NUNW	National Union of Namibian Workers
NWRWU	Namibia Wholesale and Retail Workers Union
RFA	Road Fund Administration
RLS	Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, Germany
SASK	Trade Union Solidarity Centre, Finland
SASOL	South African Coal and Oil
TUCNA	Trade Union Congress of Namibia

Introduction

In 2001, the Labour Resource and Research Institute (LaRRI) was requested by the National Union of Namibian Workers (NUNW) to investigate the possibilities of minimum wages for petrol attendants, security guards, domestic workers and farm workers. LaRRI then carried out a snapshot survey, which revealed that these workers were amongst the lowest paid in Namibia. They received very few benefits and often had to endure long working hours.

Last year, the president of the Trade Union Congress of Namibia (TUCNA), Paulus Hango, pointed out that the working conditions of these groups of workers were still among the worst in the country (New Era, 12 July 2007). Other trade unions supported this view and indications are that working conditions for vulnerable workers hardly improved over the years.

In 2006, LaRRI carried out studies into the living and working conditions of workers on farms and in the informal economy. This was followed by a study on domestic workers in 2007. During the same year, LaRRI was approached by TUCNA and some of its affiliate unions to conduct a study into the working conditions of workers at petrol stations.

This study was carried out in 2007, using a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods. A structured questionnaire was used to collect data from service station workers. Interview guides were developed to collect information from service station owners, the Ministry of Mines and Energy, trade unions and the Association of Service Stations Owners (ASSO).

Objectives

The main objective of the study was to examine the working conditions of workers at service stations countrywide with a particular focus of exploring the possibility of introducing a minimum wage. Specifically the study aimed to:

- Examine the working conditions of petrol attendants, including working hours, overtime pay, disciplinary procedures and dismissals;
- Determine the wage levels of workers at service stations;
- Explore regional differences with regards to wages and working conditions at service stations;
- Assess the health and safety risks associated with work at service stations;
- Assess the possibilities of introducing a minimum wage in the industry;
- Examine the role played by the Association of Service Station Owners;
- Investigate trade union recruitment at service stations;

- Investigate ownership changes and economic trends at service stations;
- Explore the relationship between oil companies and the individual owners of service stations.

The study covered service stations in the Khomas, Kavango, Caprivi, Erongo, Hardap, Otjozondjupa, Oshana and Oshikoto regions. Interviews were conducted with 192 workers, 4 trade unionists, 30 service station owners, the Ministry of Mines and Energy, and the Association for Service Station Owners.

The economics of petrol stations

The Namibian government through the Ministry of Mines and Energy regulates the price of fuel and the relationship between petrol dealers and wholesalers (oil companies), including licences for dealers in the fuel industry. The Ministry also acts as a "referee" if there is a dispute between the oil companies and the dealers. However, the government does not regulate the rental and franchise fees charged by oil companies.

The Namibian government plays a critical role in the provision of fuel through the National Petroleum Corporation of Namibia (NAMCOR), which was established in 2002. Wholesalers (oil companies) are required to buy 50% of their fuel from NAMCOR and can purchase the rest elsewhere. NAMCOR in turn buys fuel from different companies, based on the allocation of tenders. For the past 3 years, Namibia obtained all its fuel from South Africa through SASOL and Namibia Liquid Fuel, which were awarded the contracts to supply fuel.

Currently there is no specific formula to determine the "dealer's margin", that is, the portion of the petrol price that is retained by the service station. In the past, government determined the dealers' margin taking into consideration the costs of fuel, inflation etc. Last year, the Ministry and the Association of Service Station Owners (ASSO) commissioned a study to investigate petrol dealers' revenue and costs with a view to establish a formula to determine dealers' margins in future (Interview with I. Nghishoongele, Ministry of Mines and Energy).

The composition of fuel prices in 2007 is reflected in table 1 below:

Table 1: The composition of fuel prices, November 2007¹

Fuel pump price, November 2007		N\$ 6.91
1. Dealer's margin		N\$ 0.43 cents
2. Customs & Exercise duty	Government	N\$ 0.4 cents
3. National Energy Fund (NEF)	Stabilisation fund used to subsidise local fuel prices when there is fluctuations in the international oil prices. The NEF acts as a buffer to fluctuating oil prices to protect Namibian fuel prices against fluctuations in the international market. However, it is not always possible to absorb the fluctuating oil prices and thus fuel prices have to be increased.	N\$ 0.23 cents
4. Road User Charge	Paid to the Road Fund Administration for the upkeep, maintenance and construction of roads	N\$ 0.88 cents
5. Fuel Tax	Paid to the Ministry of Finance	N\$ 0.12 cents
6. MVA levy	Paid to the Motor Vehicle Accident Fund	N\$ 0.20 cents
7. Service differential	Paid to wholesalers (oil companies) for depot costs, storage, handling and transport costs within a 20 km radius.	N\$ 0.11
8. BFP Walvis Bay	This is the price of fuel before levies	N\$ 4.42 cents
9. Industry margins	Profit for the oil companies. This is assessed in relation to the returns on the assets of the oil company. A return of around 10 – 15 % is considered as fair.	N\$ 0.36 cents

Source: Ministry of Mines and Energy

The dealer's margin, which stood at 43 cents per litre in 2007, is the only income for petrol stations arising from the sale of fuel. Revenue thus depends directly on the turnover of a particular service station. The dealer's margin has to cover the costs for franchise fees, rentals, wages and administrative costs. Petrol stations essentially operate like sub-contractors for oil companies, selling their products and carrying the risks associated with the business.

Closer investigation of income versus expenditure at petrol stations revealed that petrol stations need to sell about 260 000 litres a month to reach break-

¹ The field work for this study took place in October/November 2007 and thus the fuel price during that period is reflected in this report. In May 2008, the fuel price was almost 30% higher.

even point. In the words of a service station owner: “If you sell less than 300 000 litres per month, you are in trouble because overhead costs stay the same”. A service station owner in Walvis Bay who explained that the town sells about 1, 5 million litres per month confirmed this dilemma. The total sale is shared amongst 14 petrol stations. Thus many petrol stations will not be able to sustain themselves due to a low turnover.

Service station owners emphasised that their income directly depended on the turnover. The amount of petrol sold varied greatly between the service stations covered by our study, ranging from 60 000 – 500 000 litres per month. There was no clear regional pattern as large differences could be found within towns such as Ongwediva where some dealers sold 400 000 litres a month while others sold only 70 000 litres.

Most service station owners resorted to operating shops at petrol stations as an additional source of income. In some instances, the shops have become the main source of income whilst the franchise fees are the main expenditure incurred. They can account for over 50% of total expenditure. In some instances, franchise fees paid to oil companies amounted to N\$ 50 000 per month.

In other cases, the dealers rented the service station from another owner or from an oil company. Rental fees varied greatly, ranging from N\$ 3 700 up to N\$ 37 000 per month. A dealer in Windhoek paid monthly rentals of N\$ 37 000 plus about N\$ 50 000 in franchise fees for the shop. Another dealer in Otjiwarongo, paid an average of N\$ 100 000 per month to the oil company for franchise, advertising and rental fees. In most instances, franchise fees were determined on the basis of the shop’s turnover. As another dealer explained: *“The oil company gets 10% of the total turnover per month and a fixed monthly rental fee of N\$ 33 000... After franchise and rental fees are paid, the retailer is left with very little money to pay decent salaries, thus workers end up earning very little money despite working hard and long hours”*.

Service station owners gave conflicting information regarding wages as a percentage of overall expenditure. Some indicated that wages accounted for about 13% of expenditure while others claimed that 90% of their expenditure went towards payment of staff. Overall, around 20-25% of service station expenditure seemed to be attributable to wages.

A petrol station owner in Swakopmund provided us with the monthly income and expenditure statement as shown in tables 2 and 3 below.

Table 2: Income and expenditure (in N\$): Petrol sale only

Net Income	84 800 (Sale of petrol and diesel)	
Expenditure	Rental	9 332
	Franchise fee	3 800
	Water & electricity	16 500
	Telephone	3 800
	Cleaning	2 500
	Administration	6 500
	Other	6 800
	Wages	18 300
	Insurance	4 200
	Total	71 732

Table 3: Income and expenditure (in N\$): Shop

Net Income	85 000	
Expenditure	Packaging	2 500
	Franchise fee	42 000
	Water & electricity	7 500
	Telephone	3 000
	Cleaning	1 000
	Administration	5 000
	Other	5 200
	Wages	12 800
	Insurance	3 500
	Total	82 500

These figures indicate that the oil companies are the main beneficiaries of petrol sale. Besides receiving their share of the petrol price per litre (see table 1), they also benefit from franchise and rental fees. Furthermore, as pointed out by a dealer in Otjiwarongo, dealers have to pay 1% of their turnover to the oil company as advertising fees and rental fees on equipment. According to the dealer, the advertising material is printed in South Africa and of little relevance to Namibian consumers.

ASSO believes that an increase in the dealer's margin would be a precondition for the introduction of a minimum wage in the industry. The association pointed out that higher wages would be unaffordable at the current level of 43 cents per litre (Interview with J. Pieterse). A petrol station owner in Otjiwarongo pointed out that the dealer's margin in South Africa was 58 cents per litre and appealed to the Namibian government to adjust Namibia's margin accordingly.

The role of oil companies and ASSO

The Association for Service Station Owners (ASSO) was formed in 1990 and emerged out of the Service Advisory Committee. It represents service station owners countrywide and all service station and garage owners as well as garage tenants are eligible for membership. Membership fees are determined by the amount of fuel sold per month, ranging from N\$ 1045 to N\$ 2640 per year.

At the end of 2007, ASSO represented 170 of Namibia's 200 fuel retailers. If a member owns more than one service station with separate trading licences, then the member is required to obtain a separate membership for each service station. ASSO represents its members in negotiations with the Namibian government and advises on relevant legislation. It also establishes ethical and professional standards for its members and assists members on contractual disputes with oil companies as well as on labour issues. However, ASSO does not involve itself in the internal activities or disputes of any service station. The association has no mandate to bargain with any workers' organisation or union on labour matters. ASSO can only play a consultative role if approached by members (Interview with J. Pieterse). Thus the owners determine labour relations and working conditions at petrol stations - either unilaterally or through negotiations with workers and their unions.

ASSO does not support the idea of a minimum wage in the industry as it considers the dealer's margin as being too low. The association believes that a minimum wage can only work if the dealer's margin is increased, thus accommodating the higher expenses for wages (Interview with J. Pieterse).

Despite being the main beneficiaries of petrol sales in financial terms, oil companies play a very limited role in the daily operations of service stations. They supply the petrol, receive franchise, advertising and rental fees, but have no influence on the wage levels, not even in the form of guidelines. However, some oil companies (such as BP, Engen, Shell, and Total) provide health and safety policies which their wholesalers (service stations) are supposed to implement. In some instances, the oil companies provide health & safety training to staff at service stations.

At several petrol stations, owners were unaware of the oil companies' health and safety policies and thus did neither have appropriate policies nor health and safety committees in place.

Workers' experiences

The sample

We interviewed a total of 192 workers at different petrol stations, engaged in various types of work. Our sample covered 8 regions and 17 towns as reflected in tables 4 and 5. The largest numbers of respondents were in the Khomas, Otjozondjupa, Oshana, and Erongo regions (table 5).

Table 5: Region where the interviews were conducted

	Valid Percent
Region Oshana	15.7
Erongo	14.1
Khomas	25.7
Hardap	11.5
Oshikoto	5.2
Caprivi	5.2
Kavango	5.2
Otjozondjuipa	17.3
Total	100.0

Table 6: Towns where the interviews were conducted

	Valid Percent
Town Ondangwa	8.4
Tsumeb	4.7
Katima Mulilo	5.2
Windhoek	25.7
Rehoboth	4.2
Mariental	7.3
Oshakati	7.9
Rundu	5.2
Okahandja	5.8
Karibib	1.0
Walvis Bay	4.7
Swakopmund	6.8
Usakos	1.0
Ongwenda	.5
Otjiwarongo	6.8
Otavi	1.0
Grootfontein	3.7
Total	100.0

The vast majority of workers (76, 6%) in our sample were between 20 and 40 years of age; most were male and either never married or cohabitating with a partner. Just over 20% of our respondents were married while a large number (almost 30%) were cohabitating (see tables 7, 8 and 9).

Table 7: Age of the respondents

		Valid Percent
Age	16 - 20 years old	4.2
	21 - 30 years old	44.3
	31 - 40 years old	32.3
	41 - 50 years old	14.1
	51 and above	5.2
	Total	100.0

Table 8: Sex of respondents

		Valid Percent
Sex	Male	72.9
	Female	27.1
	Total	100.0

Table 9: Marital status of respondents

		Valid Percent
Status	Never married	49.5
	Married	21.9
	Widowed	.5
	Cohabitating	28.1
	Total	100.0

Education levels varied significantly amongst petrol station workers. Half completed junior secondary education (grade 10), while a third completed senior secondary education (grade 12). Most others had some primary school education (see table 10).

Table 10: Levels of education

		Valid Percent
Education	Primary education	14.6
	Junior secondary	50.0
	Senior secondary	33.9
	Post graduate certificate	.5
	Never been to school	1.0
	Total	100.0

A gendered analysis of educational levels revealed that women employed at petrol stations had significantly higher levels of education than men. More than half of all female employees had completed senior secondary education compared to only 27% of their male counterparts (table 11).

Table 11: Levels of education by sex (Cross tabulation)

		Sex		Total
		Male	Female	
Educational qualifications	Primary education	25 13.0%	3 1.6%	28 14.6%
	Junior secondary	74 38.5%	22 11.5%	96 50.0%
	Senior secondary	38 19.8%	27 14.1%	65 33.9%
	Post graduate certificate	1 .5%	0 .0%	1 .5%
	Never been to school	2 1.0%	0 .0%	2 1.0%
Total		140 72.9%	52 27.1%	192 100.0%

Our respondents hailed from various regions in Namibia as reflected in table 12. The number of their dependants varied greatly and it is important to note that almost a third had 10 or more dependants to take care of (table 13). Dependants were not just the workers' own children but also relatives that stayed with them. Most workers had 1 – 4 children of their own (table 14).

Table 12: Region of origin

		Valid Percent
Region	Caprivi	6.3
	Kavango	15.2
	Ohangwena	16.2
	Omusati	20.4
	Oshana	17.3
	Oshikoto	4.7
	Otjozondjuipa	7.3
	Omaheke	1.0
	Erongo	2.6
	Khomas	2.6
	Hardap	3.1
	Karas	2.1
	Kunene	.5
	Angola	.5
	Total	100.0

Table 13: Number of dependants

		Valid Percent
Dependents	One	3.6
	Two	7.8
	Three	8.9
	Four	8.9
	Five	8.3
	Six	9.9
	Seven	6.8
	Eight	8.3
	Nine	3.6
	Ten and more	32.3
	None	1.6
	Total	100.0

Table 14: Number of own children

		Valid Percent
Children	One	22.9
	Two	17.2
	Three	13.0
	Four	9.9
	Five	4.2
	Six	4.2
	Seven	3.6
	Eight	2.6
	Nine	.5
	Ten and more	4.2
	None	17.7
	Total	100.0

Working conditions

Workers at petrol stations are employed for a variety of tasks. Our sample covered the range of jobs carried out although the vast majority (73, 2%) were petrol attendants (table 15). More women than men were employed as cashiers whereas the opposite was the case for petrol attendants and supervisors. Thus there is a sexual division of labour at petrol stations (table 16).

Table 15: Occupation

		Valid Percent
Occupation	Cashier	13.4
	Cleaner	1.7
	Petrol attendant	73.2
	Storeman	.6
	General laborer	1.1
	Supervisor	7.3
	Baker	.6
	Driver	.6
	Car wash attendant	.6
	Administrator	.6
	Stock controller	.6
	Total	100.0

Table 16: Occupation by sex (Cross tabulation)

		Sex		Total
		Male	Female	
Occupation	Cashier	8 4.5%	16 8.9%	24 13.4%
	Cleaner	0 .0%	3 1.7%	3 1.7%
	Petrol attendant	104 58.1%	27 15.1%	131 73.2%
	Storeman	1 .6%	0 .0%	1 .6%
	General laborer	2 1.1%	0 .0%	2 1.1%
	Supervisor	12 6.7%	1 .6%	13 7.3%
	Baker	1 .6%	0 .0%	1 .6%
	Driver	1 .6%	0 .0%	1 .6%
	Car wash attendant	1 .6%	0 .0%	1 .6%
	Administrator	0 .0%	1 .6%	1 .6%
	Stock controller	0 .0%	1 .6%	1 .6%
	Total	130 72.6%	49 27.4%	179 100.0%

The duration of employment at petrol stations varied greatly, ranging from less than a year to over 10 years. Over 20% of our respondents had been with the petrol station for more than 7 years while almost 20% had been employed for less than a year. The latter category consisted mostly of workers who were 30 years or younger while the longer-serving staff members were older (tables 17 and 18). This indicates a relatively high level of permanence among service station workers.

Table 17: Length of employment

	Valid Percent
Employment Less than one year	19.8
1 - 3 Years	33.3
4 - 6 years	24.0
7 - 9 years	9.9
10 - 12 years	7.8
13 years and more	5.2
Total	100.0

Table 18: Age by length of employment (Cross tabulation)

	Length in employment						Total
	Less than one year	1 - 3 Years	4 - 6 years	7 - 9 years	10 - 12 years	13 years and more	
Age 16 - 20 years old	5 2.6%	3 1.6%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	8 4.2%
21 - 30 years old	25 13.0%	36 18.8%	20 10.4%	4 2.1%	0 .0%	0 .0%	85 44.3%
31 - 40 years old	7 3.6%	19 9.9%	16 8.3%	11 5.7%	7 3.6%	2 1.0%	62 32.3%
41 - 50 years old	1 .5%	5 2.6%	8 4.2%	2 1.0%	6 3.1%	5 2.6%	27 14.1%
51 and above	0 .0%	1 .5%	2 1.0%	2 1.0%	2 1.0%	3 1.6%	10 5.2%
Total	38 19.8%	64 33.3%	46 24.0%	19 9.9%	15 7.8%	10 5.2%	192 100.0%

Change of ownership at petrol stations is not a frequent occurrence as over 70% of our respondents indicated that they worked for the same owner since they commenced work (table 19).

Table 19: Has the ownership changed since you started working here?

	Valid Percent
Ownership change Yes	26.0
No	73.4
Don't know	.5
Total	100.0

Almost half of the respondents indicated that they had a written employment contract (table 20). However, there was a huge difference between different towns as reflected in table 21. In Ondangwa, Rundu, and Swakopmund, most of our respondents had written contracts. On the other hand, most

respondents in Tsumeb, Rehoboth, Mariental, Oshakati, Windhoek and Usakos had no written contracts. In most cases it was the decision of the owners of service stations to enter into written contracts or not. There was no clear pattern based on the oil company supplying petrol or based on towns or regions regarding the use of employment contracts (tables 20 and 21).

Table 20: Do you have a written employment contract?

		Valid Percent
Contract	Yes	44.0
	No	54.5
	Don't know	1.6
	Total	100.0

Table 21: Town by possession of a written employment contact (Cross tabulation)

		Do you have a written employment contract?			Total
		Yes	No	Dont know	
Town	Ondangwa	11 13.3%	3 2.9%	1 33.3%	15 7.9%
	Tsumeb	1 1.2%	8 7.7%	0 .0%	9 4.7%
	Katima Mulilo	5 6.0%	5 4.8%	0 .0%	10 5.3%
	Windhoek	20 24.1%	29 27.9%	0 .0%	49 25.8%
	Rehoboth	0 .0%	8 7.7%	0 .0%	8 4.2%
	Mariental	2 2.4%	12 11.5%	0 .0%	14 7.4%
	Oshakati	5 6.0%	9 8.7%	1 33.3%	15 7.9%
	Rundu	9 10.8%	1 1.0%	0 .0%	10 5.3%
	Okahandja	5 6.0%	5 4.8%	1 33.3%	11 5.8%
	Karibib	0 .0%	2 1.9%	0 .0%	2 1.1%
	Walvis Bay	5 6.0%	4 3.8%	0 .0%	9 4.7%
	Swakopmund	8 9.6%	5 4.8%	0 .0%	13 6.8%
	Usakos	0 .0%	2 1.9%	0 .0%	2 1.1%
	Ongwendiva	1 1.2%	0 .0%	0 .0%	1 .5%
	Otjiwarongo	7 8.4%	6 5.8%	0 .0%	13 6.8%
	Otavi	1 1.2%	1 1.0%	0 .0%	2 1.1%
	Grootfontein	3 3.6%	4 3.8%	0 .0%	7 3.7%
Total		83 100.0%	104 100.0%	3 100.0%	190 100.0%

Workers at petrol station carry out a multitude of tasks as reflected in table 22. At some petrol stations owners deliberately embark on a strategy of “multi-skilling” which enables them to employ workers both at the “foreshore” (petrol pumps) as well as in the shop.

Table 22: What are some of the duties you perform in your current job?

	Valid response
Supply cars with fuel, lubricants and parts	15.5
Cleaning windshields	15.1
Checking water levels	15.1
Checking oil levels	14.2
Putting pressure in tyres	13.8
Handling payments	12.8
Installing car parts and accessories	0.2
Selling groceries	1.8
Cleaning the shop and toilets	6.7
Packing goods	0.7
Serving in the takeaway	0.3
Guarding the premises	0.3
Receiving stock	0.1
Washing cars	0.3
Taking stock	0.3
Off-loading goods	0.4
Supervising petrol attendants	0.4
Baking	0.2
Driving	0.2
Ordering fuel	0.1
Administration	0.1
Cashier	1.3
Total	100

Although the Namibian Labour Act limits the maximum number of daily working hours to 12, most workers had a working day of 11-15 hours as reflected in table 23. In case of shift workers, we found that some employees had to be on duty for 24 hours before being relieved. The usual working week at petrol stations consists of 6-7 days, resulting in weekly working hours of up to 66 – 90 hours which is significantly more than the maximum of 55 hours as set out in the Labour Act (Table 24).

Table 23: Working hours per day

	Valid Percent
Working 6 hours - 10 hours	34.6
hours 11 hours - 15 hours	55.5
16 hour - 20 hours	1.0
21 hours - 24 hours	8.9
Total	100.0

Table 24: Working days per week

	Valid Percent
Valid 2 days	1.6
3 days	8.9
4 days	6.3
5 days	13.7
6 days	35.3
7 days	34.2
Total	100.0

Working night shift is a common occurrence at petrol stations since most of them are open for 24 hours each day. It is common for workers to work 3-4 nights a week although about a third of our respondents indicated that they work 6-7 nights per week (table 26). Shifts usually last for 11-15 hours but may last for 16-24 hours.

Table 25: Do you work night shift?

	Valid Percent
Valid Yes	76.0
No	24.0
Total	100.0

Table 26: If yes, how many nights do you work per week?

	Valid Percent
Valid 1 night	3.4
2 nights	6.2
3 nights	37.7
4 nights	12.3
5 nights	5.5
6 nights	14.4
7 nights	20.5
Total	100.0

Overtime work is a regular occurrence at petrol stations but over 40% of our respondents indicated that they did not receive extra pay for their overtime. They were simply expected to work the extra hours as part of their “normal” work. Thus more than half of our respondents who worked overtime indicated that they did not receive extra pay, which is a violation of the provisions of the Labour Act (tables 27 and 28).

Table 27: Do you work overtime?

		Valid Percent
Overtime	Yes	83.8
	No	15.7
	Don't know	.5
	Total	100.0

Table 28: If yes, do you receive extra pay for overtime?

		Valid Percent
Overtime pay	Yes	56.1
	No	42.1
	Don't know	1.8
	Total	100.0

Wages and benefits

The monthly income earned varied greatly between towns and regions but also between men and women. Most workers earned between N\$ 500 and 1 500 per month but women were concentrated in the lower income categories of N\$ 250 – 1 250. Most men earned N\$ 750 – 1 500 per month.

A regional breakdown revealed wage differences. In Oshana, Hardap, Oshikoto, Kavango and Otjozondjupa most workers earned below N\$ 1 000 per month while wages above N\$ 1 000 were the norm in Windhoek, Swakopmund and Walvis Bay (tables 29 – 32).

Table 29: Monthly income

		Valid Percent
Valid	N\$ 251- N\$ 500	8.9
	N\$ 501 - N\$ 750	17.3
	N\$ 751 - N4 1000	37.7
	N\$ 1001 - N\$ 1250	14.1
	N\$ 1251 - N\$ 1500	10.5
	N\$ 1501 - N\$ 1750	4.2
	N\$ 1751 - N\$ 2000	5.2
	N\$ 2001 - N\$ 2500	2.1
	Total	100.0

Table 30: Monthly income by sex

		Sex		Total
		Male	Female	
How much is your monthly income?	N\$ 251 - N\$ 500	9 4.7%	8 4.2%	17 8.9%
	N\$ 501 - N\$ 750	23 12.0%	10 5.2%	33 17.3%
	N\$ 751 - N\$ 1000	55 28.8%	17 8.9%	72 37.7%
	N\$ 1001 - N\$ 1250	17 8.9%	10 5.2%	27 14.1%
	N\$ 1251 - N\$ 1500	17 8.9%	3 1.6%	20 10.5%
	N\$ 1501 - N\$ 1750	6 3.1%	2 1.0%	8 4.2%
	N\$ 1751 - N\$ 2000	10 5.2%	0 .0%	10 5.2%
	N\$ 2001 - N\$ 2500	2 1.0%	2 1.0%	4 2.1%
Total		139 72.8%	52 27.2%	191 100.0%

Table 31: Monthly income by region

		Region								Total
		Oshana	Erongo	Khomas	Hardap	Oshikoto	Caprivi	Kavango	Otjozondjuipa	
How much is your monthly income?	N\$ 251 - N\$ 500	5 2.6%	2 1.1%	2 1.1%	2 1.1%	2 1.1%	0 .0%	3 1.6%	1 .5%	17 8.9%
	N\$ 501 - N\$ 750	7 3.7%	6 3.2%	2 1.1%	2 1.1%	3 1.6%	1 .5%	2 1.1%	10 5.3%	33 17.4%
	N\$ 751 - N\$ 1000	7 3.7%	12 6.3%	22 11.6%	11 5.8%	5 2.6%	3 1.6%	4 2.1%	8 4.2%	72 37.9%
	N\$ 1001 - N\$ 1250	4 2.1%	3 1.6%	10 5.3%	1 .5%	0 .0%	1 .5%	0 .0%	8 4.2%	27 14.2%
	N\$ 1251 - N\$ 1500	3 1.6%	1 .5%	6 3.2%	3 1.6%	0 .0%	1 .5%	0 .0%	5 2.6%	19 10.0%
	N\$ 1501 - N\$ 1750	1 .5%	1 .5%	4 2.1%	0 .0%	0 .0%	1 .5%	0 .0%	1 .5%	8 4.2%
	N\$ 1751 - N\$ 2000	0 .0%	2 1.1%	3 1.6%	3 1.6%	0 .0%	2 1.1%	0 .0%	0 .0%	10 5.3%
	N\$ 2001 - N\$ 2500	3 1.6%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	1 .5%	0 .0%	0 .0%	4 2.1%
Total		30 15.8%	27 14.2%	49 25.8%	22 11.6%	10 5.3%	10 5.3%	9 4.7%	33 17.4%	190 100.0%

Table 32: Monthly income by town

			How much is your monthly income?							Total	
			N\$ 251 - N\$ 500	N\$ 501 - N\$ 750	N\$ 751 - N\$ 1000	N\$ 1001 - N\$ 1250	N\$ 1251 - N\$ 1500	N\$ 1501 - N\$ 1750	N\$ 1751 - N\$ 2000		N\$ 2001 - N\$ 2500
Town	Ondangwa	Count	0	2	5	3	3	0	0	3	16
		% of Total	.0%	1.1%	2.6%	1.6%	1.6%	.0%	.0%	1.6%	8.4%
	Tsumeb	Count	2	2	5	0	0	0	0	0	9
		% of Total	1.1%	1.1%	2.6%	.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	4.7%
	Katima Mulilo	Count	0	1	3	1	1	1	2	1	10
		% of Total	.0%	.5%	1.6%	.5%	.5%	.5%	1.1%	.5%	5.3%
	Windhoek	Count	2	2	22	10	6	4	3	0	49
		% of Total	1.1%	1.1%	11.6%	5.3%	3.2%	2.1%	1.6%	.0%	25.8%
	Rehoboth	Count	0	1	5	1	0	0	1	0	8
		% of Total	.0%	.5%	2.6%	.5%	.0%	.0%	.5%	.0%	4.2%
	Mariental	Count	2	1	6	0	3	0	2	0	14
		% of Total	1.1%	.5%	3.2%	.0%	1.6%	.0%	1.1%	.0%	7.4%
	Oshakati	Count	5	5	2	1	1	1	0	0	15
		% of Total	2.6%	2.6%	1.1%	.5%	.5%	.5%	.0%	.0%	7.9%
	Rundu	Count	3	2	4	0	0	0	0	0	9
		% of Total	1.6%	1.1%	2.1%	.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	4.7%
	Okahandja	Count	0	1	3	4	3	0	0	0	11
		% of Total	.0%	.5%	1.6%	2.1%	1.6%	.0%	.0%	.0%	5.8%
	Karibib	Count	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	2
		% of Total	.0%	.0%	1.1%	.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	1.1%
	Walvis bay	Count	0	0	5	1	0	1	2	0	9
		% of Total	.0%	.0%	2.6%	.5%	.0%	.5%	1.1%	.0%	4.7%
	Swakopmund	Count	0	6	5	2	0	0	0	0	13
		% of Total	.0%	3.2%	2.6%	1.1%	.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	6.8%
	Usakos	Count	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
		% of Total	1.1%	.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	1.1%
	Ongwendiva	Count	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
		% of Total	.0%	.5%	.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	.5%
	Otjiwarongo	Count	1	3	3	3	2	1	0	0	13
		% of Total	.5%	1.6%	1.6%	1.6%	1.1%	.5%	.0%	.0%	6.8%
	Otavi	Count	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	2
		% of Total	.0%	.5%	.0%	.5%	.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	1.1%
	Grootfontein	Count	0	5	2	0	0	0	0	0	7
		% of Total	.0%	2.6%	1.1%	.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	3.7%
Total		Count	17	33	72	27	19	8	10	4	190
		% of Total	8.9%	17.4%	37.9%	14.2%	10.0%	4.2%	5.3%	2.1%	100.0%

In terms of wage levels by occupational category we found that cashiers tended to earn N\$ 500 – 1500 per month while most petrol attendants earned less than N\$ 1000. Supervisors had monthly incomes of N\$ 1 000 – 2 000 (table 33).

At two petrol stations in Oshakati, petrol attendants' wages were determined by the amount of petrol sold. They received between 1 and 6 cents per litre sold, with the lowest amount applicable for sales of up to 10 000 litres. This system resulted in some petrol attendants earning less than N\$ 100 per month (E. Luigi).

Table 33: Monthly income by occupation

		How much is your monthly income?								Total
		N\$ 251 - N\$ 500	N\$ 501 - N\$ 750	N\$ 751 - N\$ 1000	N\$ 1001 - N\$ 1250	N\$ 1251 - N\$ 1500	N\$ 1501 - N\$ 1750	N\$ 1751 - N\$ 2000	N\$ 2001 - N\$ 2500	
Occupation	Cashier	1 .6%	4 2.2%	7 3.9%	7 3.9%	4 2.2%	1 .6%	0 .0%	0 .0%	24 13.5%
	Cleaner	2 1.1%	0 .0%	1 .6%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	3 1.7%
	Petrol attendant	12 6.7%	23 12.9%	52 29.2%	16 9.0%	13 7.3%	5 2.8%	7 3.9%	2 1.1%	130 73.0%
	Storeman	0 .0%	1 .6%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	1 .6%
	General laborer	0 .0%	0 .0%	1 .6%	0 .0%	1 .6%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	2 1.1%
	Supervisor	0 .0%	0 .0%	3 1.7%	2 1.1%	2 1.1%	1 .6%	3 1.7%	2 1.1%	13 7.3%
	Baker	0 .0%	0 .0%	1 .6%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	1 .6%
	Driver	0 .0%	0 .0%	1 .6%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	1 .6%
	Car wash attendant	1 .6%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	1 .6%
	Administrator	0 .0%	0 .0%	1 .6%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	1 .6%
	Stock controller	0 .0%	0 .0%	1 .6%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	1 .6%
	Total	16 9.0%	28 15.7%	68 38.2%	25 14.0%	20 11.2%	7 3.9%	10 5.6%	4 2.2%	178 100.0%

Length of employment also influenced workers income as the vast majority of those workers employed for less than a year earned below N\$ 1000 per month while the majority of workers with 10 or more years of service earned above that amount (table 34).

Table 34: Monthly income by length of employment

		How much is your monthly income?								Total
		N\$ 251 - N\$ 500	N\$ 501 - N\$ 750	N\$ 751 - N\$ 1000	N\$ 1001 - N\$ 1250	N\$ 1251 - N\$ 1500	N\$ 1501 - N\$ 1750	N\$ 1751 - N\$ 2000	N\$ 2001 - N\$ 2500	
Length in employment	Less than one year	7 3.7%	11 5.8%	10 5.2%	6 3.1%	3 1.6%	0 .0%	1 .5%	0 .0%	38 19.9%
	1 - 3 Years	4 2.1%	13 6.8%	28 14.7%	10 5.2%	4 2.1%	1 .5%	2 1.0%	1 .5%	63 33.0%
	4 - 6 years	2 1.0%	8 4.2%	22 11.5%	5 2.6%	5 2.6%	1 .5%	1 .5%	2 1.0%	46 24.1%
	7 - 9 years	2 1.0%	0 .0%	8 4.2%	3 1.6%	2 1.0%	3 1.6%	0 .0%	1 .5%	19 9.9%
	10 - 12 years	1 .5%	0 .0%	3 1.6%	2 1.0%	5 2.6%	1 .5%	3 1.6%	0 .0%	15 7.9%
	13 years and more	1 .5%	1 .5%	1 .5%	1 .5%	1 .5%	2 1.0%	3 1.6%	0 .0%	10 5.2%
	Total	17 8.9%	33 17.3%	72 37.7%	27 14.1%	20 10.5%	8 4.2%	10 5.2%	4 2.1%	191 100.0%

Workers at petrol stations received only few benefits as reflected in table 35. The most common benefits were annual leave, paid sick leave (which are compulsory in terms of the Labour Act), assistance when in need and bonus pay (“13th cheque”).

Table 35: Which benefits do you receive?

	Valid response
Paid annual leave	27.4
Paid compassionate leave	11
Paid sick leave	22.8
Paid maternity leave	4.8
Housing allowance/subsidy	0.2
Transport allowance	3.1
Medical aid	1.3
Pension	3.9
13th cheque	9.9
Assistance when in need	13.1
None of the above	2.6
Total	100

Most of our respondents were registered with social security, which is a legal requirement. However, only about 10% were registered with employee's compensation, previously known as "workmen's compensation" (tables 36 and 37). Both schemes are compulsory by law and thus should have been implemented at all service stations.

Table 36: Are you registered with social security?

	Valid Percent
Social security Yes	85.3
No	12.1
Don't know	2.6
Total	100.0

Table 37: Are you registered with workmen's/employees' compensation?

	Valid Percent
Employees' compensation Yes	9.4
No	72.9
Don't know	17.7
Total	100.0

Views and Expectations

Most workers received salary increases since they started working for their current employer but less than 10% of our respondents were satisfied with their current income (tables 38 and 39). They made suggestions regarding what they would see as fair wages. Based on the current wages, these suggestions differed vastly. Those who currently earn extremely low wages,

would already be satisfied with N\$ 750 – 1 000 per month. Others proposed N\$ 2000 – 3 000 per months (table 40). A breakdown of expectations according to occupations confirmed this trend. Petrol attendants varied in their perception of fair monthly wages between as much as N\$ 500 and N\$ 5 000 while most cashiers considered N\$ 750 – 2000 as fair (table 41).

Table 38: Did you receive a salary increase since you started working at your current workplace?

		Valid Percent
Salary increase	Yes	59.2
	No	39.8
	Don't know	1.0
	Total	100.0

Table 39: Are you satisfied with your monthly income?

		Valid Percent
Satisfied	Yes	8.9
	No	91.1
	Total	100.0

Table 40: What would be a fair wage for the work you do?

		Valid Percent
Fair wage	Less than N\$ 250	.5
	N\$ 501 - N\$ 750	1.6
	N\$ 751 - N\$ 1000	10.9
	N\$ 1001 - N\$ 1250	9.8
	N\$ 1251 - N\$ 1500	23.5
	N\$ 1501 - N\$ 1750	7.7
	N\$ 1751 - N\$ 2000	20.8
	N\$ 2001 - N\$ 2500	16.4
	N\$ 2501 - N\$ 3000	6.6
	N\$ 3001 - N\$ 3500	.5
	N\$ 4501 - N\$ 5000	1.6
	Total	100.0

Table 41: Occupation by perception of a fair wage

	If no, what would be a fair wage for the work you do?											Total
	Less than N\$ 250	N\$ 501 - 750	N\$ 751 - 1000	N\$ 1001 - 1250	N\$ 1251 - 1500	N\$ 1501 - 1750	N\$ 1751 - 2000	N\$ 2001 - 2500	N\$ 2501 - 3000	N\$ 3001 - 3500	N\$ 4501 - 5000	
Occupation Cashier	0 .0%	0 .0%	3 17.6%	3 17.6%	7 18.4%	1 7.7%	5 14.3%	1 3.3%	1 8.3%	0 .0%	0 .0%	21 12.4%
Cleaner	0 .0%	0 .0%	2 11.8%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	1 2.9%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	3 1.8%
Petrol attendant	0 .0%	3 100.0%	12 70.6%	13 76.5%	27 71.1%	11 84.6%	24 68.6%	26 86.7%	9 75.0%	1 100.0%	2 66.7%	128 75.3%
Storeman	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	1 2.9%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	1 .6%
General laborer	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	2 6.7%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	2 1.2%
Supervisor	1 100%	0 .0%	0 .0%	1 5.9%	3 7.9%	0 .0%	2 5.7%	1 3.3%	2 16.7%	0 .0%	1 33.3%	11 6.5%
Baker	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	1 2.9%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	1 .6%
Driver	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	1 2.9%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	1 .6%
Car wash attendant	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	1 2.6%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	1 .6%
Stock controller	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	1 7.7%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	1 .6%
Total	1 100%	3 100.0%	17 100.0%	17 100.0%	38 100.0%	13 100.0%	35 100.0%	30 100.0%	12 100.0%	1 100.0%	3 100.0%	170 100%

Workers at petrol stations overwhelmingly supported the idea of minimum wages for the industry (table 42). However, they differed significantly as far as the amount is concerned. They based their proposals largely on their current earnings, and suggested vastly different amounts as minimum wages. About half of our respondents suggested minimum wages of N\$ 750 – 1500 per month (table 43).

Table 42: Do you think a minimum wage should be introduced in the industry?

	Valid Percent
Minimum wage Yes	94.8
No	5.2
Total	100.0

Table 43: If yes, what should be the minimum wage?

		Valid Percent
Minimum wage level	Less than N\$ 250	1.7
	N\$ 251 - N\$ 500	1.1
	N\$ 501 - N\$ 750	4.4
	N\$ 751 - N\$ 1000	17.8
	N\$ 1001 - N\$ 1250	11.7
	N\$ 1251 - N\$ 1500	21.7
	N\$ 1501 - N\$ 1750	.6
	N\$ 1751 - N\$ 2000	29.4
	N\$ 2001 - N\$ 2500	8.3
	N\$ 2501 - N\$ 3000	2.8
	N\$ 3001 - N\$ 3500	.6
	Total	100.0

Health and Safety

The most common health risks faced by workers at petrol stations were robberies, inhalation of fuel fumes, fires, and reckless drivers (table 44).

Table 44: What are the health and safety hazards you are exposed to in your work?

	Valid response
Drunk customers who want to fight	8.5
Robbery	28.9
Fire	11
Rude customers	4.1
Hot water in radiators	1.9
Exposure to rain and cold weather	2.5
Reckless drivers that can cause accidents	10.7
Customers ignoring safety hazards	8.5
Lack of adequate sleep	0.6
Inhalation of fuel fumes	21.1
None	1.9
Lack of security	0.3
Total	100

Only about 20% of our respondents received any kind of training on health and safety issues. Amongst those who did, more than half received training during the past 12 months. Others received training only as a once-off event. The most common areas of training were the use of fire extinguishers, first aid and handling robberies. Health and safety committees hardly existed at petrol stations (tables 45 – 49). This indicates that health and safety issues were not regarded as a priority at service stations.

Table 45: Have you received training on health and safety?

		Valid Percent
Valid	Yes	20.8
	No	79.2
	Total	100.0

Table 46: If yes, when was the last time you received this training?

		Valid Percent
Time of training	Less than 3 months ago	26.3
	4 - 6 months ago	5.3
	7 - 11 months ago	10.5
	12 months ago	18.4
	More than 12 months ago	7.9
	More than 24 months ago	5.3
	More than 36 months ago	23.7
	When I started the job	2.6
	Total	100.0

Table 47: If yes, how often do you receive training in a year?

Frequency of training	Valid Percent
Once in 3 months	8.1
Once a year	45.9
Once since I started	37.8
Twice since I started	8.1
Total	100

Table 48: Which health and safety issues are covered in your training?

	Valid response
Using fire extinguisher	49.1
First aid	20.8
HIV/AIDS	3.8
Handling robbery situations	15.1
Handling fuel and other lubricants	11.3
Total	100

Table 49: Is there a health and safety committee at your workplace?

		Valid Percent
Health and safety committee	Yes	6.5
	No	93.5
	Total	100.0

Trade union membership

About 40% of our respondents were trade union members (table 50). About half were members of the Namibia Fuel and Allied Workers Union while the others were divided amongst 6 other industrial unions (table 51). However, 2 of the unions mentioned by workers could not be identified. The fragmentation of the Namibian labour movement into competing rival unions is clearly evident at petrol stations.

Table 50: Are you a member of a trade union?

		Valid Percent
Union member	Yes	41.9
	No	58.1
	Total	100.0

Table 51: If yes, which union do you belong to?

		Valid Percent
Union	Namibia Wholesale and Retail Workers Union	3.8
	Mineworkers Union of Namibia	13.9
	Namibia Fuel and Allied Workers Union	49.4
	Metal and Allied Namibia Workers Union	13.9
	Namibia Food and Allied Workers Union	13.9
	NAFIFWU (?)	3.8
	NAMSO (?)	1.3
	Total	100.0

The majority of workers (about 60%) at petrol stations did not belong to any trade union. The most common reasons for not joining were a lack of knowledge about trade unions; a lack of confidence in trade unions to effectively represent workers; concerns about the poor service given by trade unions; and discouragement by the employer (table 52). There is certainly a great potential for trade union recruitment as over 80% of the non-unionised workers indicated their willingness to join a union (table 53).

Table 52: Why are you not a member of a trade union?

	Valid response
There are no unions in this sector	4.7
Don't know anything about trade unions	11.8
Don't know enough about trade unions	21.3
Trade union fees are too high	4.7
No confidence in trade union's ability to represent workers	15.7
My employer discourages me from joining a trade union	9.4
Trade unions do not give good service	12.6
I do not need a trade union	2.4
Unions are too political/racial and ethnic oriented	3.9
Not yet decided	3.1
No union representative at the service station	2.4
Do not have time to join the union	3.1
Discouragement from co-workers	1.6
Still waiting for a response to my application	1.6
Still planning to join	0.8
Afraid of the unions	0.8
Total	100

Table 53: If you are not a member, would you like to join a trade union?

	Valid Percent
Want to join? Yes	81.0
No	19.0
Total	100.0

Our respondents clearly expressed their expectations regarding trade unions. They expect union support for the classical “bread and butter issues” like salary increases, better working conditions and employment benefits as well as support in cases of unfair dismissals (table 54).

Table 54: What are some of the issues you would like the union to help you with?

	Valid response
Unfair dismissal	18.7
Employment contracts	8.7
To educate workers on labour legislation	1.3
Job security	2.6
Negotiate for transport	3.4
Salary increment	24.5
Dispute resolution at work	5.3
Employment benefits	14.2
Training on health and safety	0.3
Better working conditions	19
None	1.8
Total	100

The most common challenges faced by workers were low salaries, a lack of benefits and job security, and ill-treatment by employers (table 55).

Table 55: What are some of the challenges you face in your current job?

	Valid response
Low salary	24.7
Lack of benefits	23.8
Lack of job security	20.1
Long working hours	19.1
Ill-treatment by employer	8.1
Shortages deducted from workers salaries	1.2
Drunk and rude customers	0.3
Racism	0.3
Salaries not paid according to time worked	0.5
Customers driving away without paying	0.3
No resting rooms for workers	0.8
No sick leave and unpaid leave	0.3
Unfair dismissal	0.1
No uniforms	0.3
Employers threatening workers with weapon	0.1
Total	100

Experiences of petrol station owners

On average, the service stations covered by our study employed 28 workers, either as petrol attendants, cashiers, cleaners, and administrative staff or in the shop. The number varied greatly between individual service stations, ranging from 7 to 55. Assuming that Namibia's 200 fuel retailers operate a total of about 250 service stations countrywide with an average of 28 staff, the total number of employees at service stations stands at about 7000.

Most service station owners adopted the health and safety policies of their particular oil company without paying much attention to health and safety issues at the workplace. This is borne out by the fact that only three of the service stations we visited had a health and safety committee in place. Several owners had no idea about the health and safety risks faced by their employees and only a small minority took out an insurance cover for their staff. One owner even declared that there were no risks involved for staff at petrol stations.

Petrol station owners confirmed that working hours at service stations tend to be very long for petrol attendants. In some cases they work 3-day shifts, followed by 3 night shifts and then 3 days off. In other instances, petrol attendants work 6 days per week at 12 hours each. Working hours for staff in shops tend to be shorter, both in terms of hours per day as well as working days per week. Shift work is common at petrol stations, as most of them stay open for 24 hours per day.

Petrol station owners confirmed the wage levels indicated by workers. The lowest wages were around N\$ 400 and the highest N\$ 2 800 per month. There were significant differences between various towns and several owners indicated that they set the wage levels in line with those paid at other petrol stations in the same town. This, however, was not the case everywhere as we also found significant differences at petrol stations within the same town.

Some petrol stations pay their staff an hourly rate of between N\$ 2, 50 – 5, 50. At a petrol station in Ondangwa, workers were paid on a commission basis. Thus workers' income was based on the amount of petrol sold. In the words of the owner:

"We were paying the workers based on a commission and then the union (MUN) decided that we should pay the workers a fixed salary. After a month, the worker came to us to go back to the commission system because they realised that they were getting paid less".

In terms of benefits, petrol station workers tend to receive only the minimum benefits as prescribed by law such as annual leave, sick leave, maternity leave, social security benefits and employees' compensation in case of accidents. Few petrol stations provide additional benefits such as food at work, uniforms, loans, bonuses or insurance against accidents.

Most petrol station owners that we spoke to were not opposed to the introduction of minimum wages. However, they were concerned about a

uniform amount for all service stations due to the large differences in turnover. Thus, owners of petrol stations with a relatively small turnover suggested monthly minimum wages as low as N\$ 350 while the owner of a petrol station in Walvis Bay suggested as much as N\$ 2000 per month. Those owners who paid hourly rates suggested minimum wages of N\$ 3.00 – 3.50 per hour.

Trade union organising

At least 5 trade unions are currently organising workers employed at petrol stations. These are the Mineworkers Union of Namibia (MUN), the Metal and Allied Namibia Workers Union (MANWU), the Namibia Food and Allied Workers Union (NAFAU), the Namibia Wholesale and Retail Workers Union (NWRWU) and the Namibia Fuel and Allied Workers Union (NAFAWU). The first three unions are affiliated to the National Union of Namibian Workers (NUNW) while the other two are affiliates of the Trade Union Congress of Namibia (TUCNA).

The unions only managed to conclude recognition agreements with a small number of individual petrol stations. For example, MANWU has a recognition agreement with 9 service stations, NWRWU has recognition agreements with 6 service stations, NAFAU has wage agreements with 4 stations and MUN has a recognition agreement with only 1 service station. Thus, only a very small number of workers at service stations are covered by collective bargaining while the vast majority is not represented by any trade union. The multitude of unions operating in the industry has certainly not benefited the workers concerned!

A significant number of workers (around 30%) at petrol stations expressed their dissatisfaction with the performance of unions and their service to members. Although there are only about 7000 potential members for the 5 unions, collaboration between unions is almost non-existent. The only discussions regarding organising at petrol stations took place between unions of the same federation, that is MUN, NAFAU and MANWU on the one hand and NWRWU and NAFAWU on the other. MANWU and NAFAU, for example have agreed that when the majority of workers at a petrol stations are petrol attendants, then MANWU would organise that particular workplace. At service stations where shop workers are the majority, NAFAU would organise. However, no such agreement was reached with the MUN and thus MANWU and MUN compete for membership at service stations. This led to tensions between the sister unions and the matter was referred to the Central Executive Committee of the NUNW.

In the case of the TUCNA unions, the NWRWU agreed to “hand over” their membership at service station to the newly formed Namibia Fuel and Allied Workers Union, which is meant to organise service station workers countrywide. Amongst the interviewed service station workers that were unionised, almost half belonged to that union which is the most representative in the industry.

Trade unions are well aware of the challenges that petrol station workers are facing. They often experienced a hostile reception by petrol station owners. In the words of Daniel Imbili: “Out of 10, you have 3 employers who are co-operating”. MANWU tried to engage ASSO on the issue of an industry-wide minimum wage but no agreement was concluded. All unions support the idea of a minimum wage for the industry, although the suggested amounts differed, ranging from 1 300 – 1 800 per month. MANWU suggested an hourly

minimum wage of N\$ 8, which would bring service station workers close to the minimum wage applicable in the construction industry. Based on a 45-hour working week, MANWU's proposal would translate into N\$ 1559 per month.

Due to the low levels of organisation at service station, very few workers' committees and shop stewards are actively operating. Thus most workers are at the mercy of their employers who tend to determine conditions of employment unilaterally. Procedures for dispute resolution are ignored and many of the basic conditions of employment (such as limits on working hours) as set out in the Labour Act are not implemented. None of the unions in the industry has managed to have a significant impact on working conditions outside some individual cases such as a few service stations in Walvis Bay.

Conclusion: Possibilities for intervention

This study found that workers at Namibian service stations are part of the country's large number of vulnerable workers. They endure long working hours – in many cases significantly more than the 45 "ordinary" hours per week plus 10 hours of overtime as stipulated in the Labour Act. Working days of 11-15 hours are common and the requirements for overtime payment as set out in the law are often not adhered to. Service station workers enjoy few benefits and issues of health and safety are not considered adequately.

Wages paid at service station differ significantly between towns and range from about N\$ 300 – 2 000 per month. Wages are usually determined by the service station owner primarily based on the wage rates at neighbouring stations but also dependant on the station's turnover. Collective bargaining is virtually absent in the industry and only takes place in a few isolated cases.

The main beneficiaries from the sale of petrol are the oil companies, local suppliers (such as Namibia Liquid Fuels), government and parastatals (such as the Motor Vehicle Accident Fund and the Road Fund Administration) as well as the companies selling the franchise for shops and fast food outlets at petrol stations.

The multitude of trade unions organising in the industry is detrimental to the interests of the workers employed. They would be better served by one strong trade union that represents the majority of workers at petrol stations in Namibia. A single, dedicated union to this industry seems to be the best vehicle to achieve centralised, industry-wide bargaining that will set minimum standards of employment. This should include a minimum wage as supported by all trade unions as well as hours of work and health and safety measures.

Agreeing to one strong union for service stations would require an agreement between the unions currently organising the industry. This might prove difficult due to the entrenched divisions between various unions and their federations. Based on our research findings, we would still recommend that such trade union unity should be sought in the interest of workers at petrol stations. We hope that the relevant unions will show the necessary political will and maturity to find a solution in the interest of the workers they are meant to represent.

In case that trade unions cannot find sufficient ground to agree to one common union for the industry, they could negotiate as a group of unions as was done by South Africa's public sector unions last year. Alternatively, unions may utilise the route of a wage commission to achieve a minimum wage for the industry. This option, however, would reduce the role of the union to that of mere spectators as the decision would rest solely with government, based on the recommendations of a tripartite wage commission. Thus the option of establishing a strong, powerful union that can set conditions of employment for the whole industry through collective bargaining should be the preferred solution.

Determining a minimum wage for an industry where payments and conditions of employment differ significantly is a challenge. Service station owners rely on the “dealer’s margin” from the sale of petrol as their source of income from which they need to cover all their expenses. Thus their income is directly linked to the turnover, that is, the amount of petrol sold. Petrol stations with a large turnover are thus in a much better position to pay decent wages than those in outlying areas and those with small service stations where turnover is low. Most service stations have established shops and fast food outlets on their premises to diversify their income. Workers employed as petrol attendants and those employed in shops usually have the same employer and trade unions should thus cover all employees irrespective of the actual work they do.

An increase in the dealer’s margins could pave the way for better wages and trade unions might use this link strategically. For example, they could support ASSO’s call for a higher dealer’s margins on condition that ASSO agrees to a national minimum wage for workers at service stations. Most workers and their unions would welcome a minimum wage of around N\$ 1 500 per month and this could be a starting point for industry-wide bargaining.