Investigating the workplace

A powerful and challenging approach to airport organising

Union split in SAA
+ SAAT
resulted in loss
of SS + w/place
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New l'ship/ss
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Introduction

Between mid-2011 and early 2014, Naledi (a labour research organisation) and the IHRG (an organisation supporting workers' health and safety), undertook a project with the South African Transport and Allied Workers Union (Satawu) and its organisers and shop stewards from the OR Tambo International Airport (ORT).

The Project took place in the form of workshops and research activities, with the aim of building union and shop steward capacity. Shop stewards investigated their workplace asking:

- What is this workplace?
- Who works here and under what conditions?
- Who makes the decisions in the workplace?
- How does the union organise in the workplace?

The workshop programme allowed shop stewards to collect and share workplace information about the jobs, wages, organisational rights and conditions of employment of different groups of workers.

They gained knowledge about workers' rights and labour law, and learnt to use tools that could help them gather information and do research in the workplace. After every workshop the participants carried out research tasks in their workplace and shared their findings in the following workshop.

The Project used a participatory action research (PAR) approach. This encouraged shop stewards and workers to participate in the investigation of issues in the workplace that are important to workers. It challenges them to take action based on what they find, so as to improve employment contracts and working conditions in the workplace, and to challenge the fragmentation strategies of the employer.

The investigation activities were not just research tasks. They were organisational activities that helped to build the union. The Project linked training, research and organisational activity in the process of investigating the workplace. Each aspect supports and builds the other. All are necessary for building democratic worker controlled organisation.

This resource document shares the Project experience. It is arranged into three sections. The first is *What's been done*, it describes what was done in the workshops and what shop stewards did to investigate the ORT workplace. The second section, *Worker-friendly overview of the method*, explains the approach used in the Project. Lastly, *What are the lessons? Successes and challenges* outlines the achievements of the Project and identifies the major challenges that it faced.

The experience, method and lessons of the Project would not have been possible without the active participation of shop stewards from Satawu and their representation of the problems and challenges facing workers at ORT.

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This project challenges workers to take action based on what they find, so as to improve employment contracts and working conditions in the workplace.

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What is our strategy to strengthen our access to organise in the workplace (ORT)?

→ What kinds of access do we need?
→ What steps must we take to secure this access?

Putting aviation workers at the heart of research and action

Aviation workers worldwide have faced attacks on their working conditions, wages and trade union rights. The associated decline in union density and power in the global aviation industry over the last decade has forced ITF aviation unions to rethink our organising strategy.

This educational resource documents a new, powerful and challenging approach to airport organising. It emphasises workers' participation in investigating the workplace and their conditions as the basis for building democratic worker organisation and unity.

In this material you will come across a strong emphasis on the need for a collective inquiry into the issues which are important to workers, as the basis for building action. Both the inquiry and the action evolve throughout the process and address questions and issues which are significant for those who participate as co-researchers.

The ITF Executive Board recently approved Airport Organising as a priority project. Employers at airports, supported by increasingly anti-worker legislation, have been on the offensive against their workforce. The workforce at airports has been fragmented, outsourced, mechanised and even pushed into informality. Decent work and organisational rights are enjoyed by only a minority of airport workers.

The case study in this document is inspiring. It shows how we can develop workplace strategies to support the organisation of precarious airport workers, and build unity between different sectors within an airport to confront a common client. The material is full of useful lessons and practical tips for unions in other countries.

The ITF would like to thank SATAWU (the South African Transport and Allied Workers Union) for sharing their story, and Naledi (a labour research organisation) who facilitated the project and put together this resource with the IHRG (an organisation supporting workers' health and safety).

Gabriel Mocho Rodriguez
Section Secretary, Aviation

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Decent work and organisational rights are enjoyed by only a minority of airport workers.

What's been done?

Who we worked with

Between mid-2011 and early 2014 Naledi (a labour research organisation) and the IHRG (an organisation focused on supporting workers' organisation around health and safety) worked with Satawu (The South African Transport and Allied Workers Union) organisers and shop stewards from companies operating at the OR Tambo International Airport (ORT). Satawu is an affiliate of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu) and the ITF. The Project tried to support and build shop steward and union capacity to build democratic worker organisation in the workplace.

The workplace:
OR Tambo International Airport

The OR Tambo International Airport is the largest and busiest airport in South Africa. It is located in Kempton Park (Ekurhuleni), close to the major cities of Johannesburg and Pretoria (Tshwane) in the Gauteng Province. Some 20,000 people work daily at the airport. The ORT is an important transport hub for domestic and international flights, with commercial shopping and restaurant areas commanding some of the highest rents in the country.

Outside Departures Terminal B at OR Tambo International Airport.

The Airports Company of South Africa (ACSA) controls and operates ORT and other South African airports. It is a commercial company owned by the South African government through the Department of Transport. Aviation service companies need to have licences from the ACSA to run their business at the ORT.

Airlines and other businesses (like shops or restaurants) that run from ORT sign agreements with the ACSA. These agreements cover how much the company will pay the ACSA, and set rules and standards on how the company will behave at the airport. The ACSA controls who can enter the airport, which includes determining rules about who can have a permit to enter the more secure parts of the airport.

ACSA sets the rules and controls access to all parts of the airport.

There are many international airlines that fly in and out of the ORT. The largest airline is South African Airways (SAA). Like the ACSA, SAA is owned by the South African government. SAA has a number of subsidiaries: Mango and SAX (smaller airlines), SAA Technical (SAAT) (which repairs and maintains aircraft), and Airchefs (which produces food and meals for flights).

Three large international companies are licensed by the ACSA to do ground handling for the different airlines at the ORT. These companies are Swissport, Menzies and Bidair (owned by the South African conglomerate Bidvest – whose previous chair is now South Africa's Deputy President).

These companies do ramp services such as baggage handling, passenger stairs, refuelling, refilling water, draining sanitation and tugging an aeroplane. They are also responsible for cleaning, catering and for replacing linen in the aircraft, as well as for providing passenger services such as bus transport to the airport.

In addition, there are at least another nine companies doing contract cleaning and five or more providing security in and around the airport. Both the large aviation service companies, and the focused cleaning and security companies (large and small), enter into agreements (contracts) to provide services to a client. The client might be an airline or it could be the ACSA.

The airport is a divided workplace, occupied by many employers and a few dominant clients (ACSA/SAA). Many cleaning and security companies came from, or were created by the ACSA and SAA after they privatised these services. The ACSA is also involved internationally in privatisation, for example in Brazilian airports.

There are different and competing trade unions organising at the ORT. Aside from Satawu there is the Aviation Union of South Africa (AUSA), which has its main membership in SAA; the National Transport Movement (NTM), a break away from Satawu with a presence in Morena (contract cleaning) and SAA; and the Cosatu affiliated National Education Health and Allied Workers Union (Nehawu), which is the largest union amongst ACSA employees. More recently both the Amalgamated Mining and Construction Union (AMCU) and the National Union of Metal Workers of South Africa (Numsa) - the expelled Cosatu metal affiliate - have begun organising at the airport.

The Project worked with Satawu shop stewards in companies based at the airport. The Project began with contract cleaning shop stewards from Morena, Bidair Grooming and Menzies.

Later it expanded to include shop stewards from the security companies of Reshebile, G4S and Protea Coin; aviation services companies, Menzies, Bidair and Swissport; the catering companies Air Chefs and LSG; the Civil Aviation Authority; and the domestic airline SAA (including SAA Technical). Sometimes the national organisers of the Satawu cleaning, security or aviation sectors attended workshops.

Shop stewards from the ORT belong to the Satawu Kempton Park Local Shop Steward Council. This structure is part of the Gauteng Province, the largest of the Satawu provincial structures.

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ORT is an important transport hub for domestic and international flights, with commercial shopping and restaurant areas commanding some of the highest rents in the country.

Satawu organising strategy

Satawu organises workers in the union according to sectors. Cleaning workers are part of the cleaning sector, and security workers fall into the security sector. Other workers at the airport (who provide other aviation services or are employed by the airlines), are defined as part of the aviation sector.

The Satawu strategy is to organise enough workers in each sector to be able to set up national bargaining councils for each sector. In South African law a national bargaining council can be set up by parties representing a majority of employers and workers in that particular sector. Agreements made between employers and unions in the national bargaining council can establish the legal minimum wages and conditions for the whole of that sector.

Satawu also tries to organise a majority in a particular company so it can bargain in that company. While these are useful strategies, Satawu has not developed a workplace organising strategy. This means it does not have a strategy to build unity among workers at a workplace who are fragmented between many employers (and sectors), which are subcontracted to a dominant client(s).

Neither the sector nor company strategies of Satawu assist workers to confront the employer's workplace strategy of subcontracting where the client (ACSA or SAA) holds power over decisions in the workplace. While employers subcontract as a deliberate strategy to lower wages and working conditions, and make it more difficult to organise workers, the union has not developed a counter-strategy to build workers' unity and engage the client who holds workplace power.
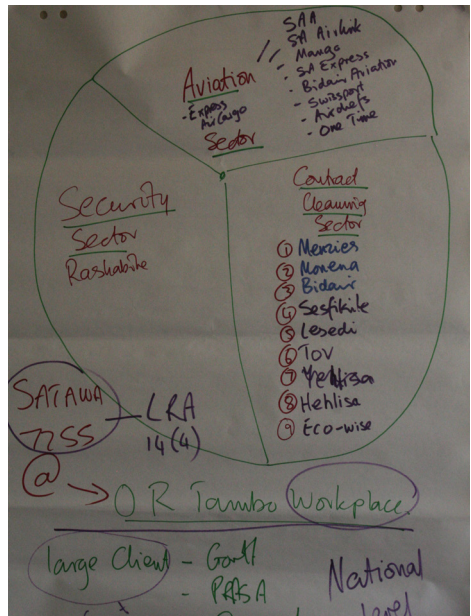
This chart records information from workshop participants about different groups of workers and the various companies operating at OR Tambo.

Training and capacity building through workshops

Project organisers met Satawu and explained the Project before each of the three phases of the project. Together they formed a reference team to sort out logistics (who can attend, when, where do we meet, etc.) and to allow the union to learn from and review the Project as it developed. While the reference team provided the union with an opportunity to drive the Project in support of its organising programme, the team mainly looked at logistical questions.

Workshop participants and facilitators.

Satawu shop stewards employed at OR Tambo share experiences.

The Project helped to train and build the capacity of shop stewards to develop workplace organisation. The first workshops were held as sector workshops. They only included participants from each of the sectors separately: i.e. there were separate cleaning, security and aviation sector workshops.

Each of the sector workshops explored the same topics and questions. These included organisational rights; wages and working conditions; health and safety as well as take-home tasks – such as participatory action research. After the initial workshop, shop stewards from all of the sectors came together in joint workshops to share their reports and work collectively.

Organisational rights

In the introductory sessions participants were asked to share why they joined the union and what the union does for workers. They held strong views that the union should be democratic, "worker driven" and based on the mandate of members on the ground. This outlook then helped them to evaluate their rights at the workplace.

Following this, participants began looking at what rights they had to organise in their workplace.

a) First they looked at what the law says about their rights as shop stewards, and also looked at agreements that the union has with the company. Their understanding of the law was complemented through input from the facilitator. Participants were continually challenged to interpret the law in a way that favours workers and their needs.

b) Participants were asked to go beyond the law, and talk about the role and duties of shop stewards based on their workplace knowledge and experience. This is shown in the picture that records the responses of shop stewards in one of the workshops.
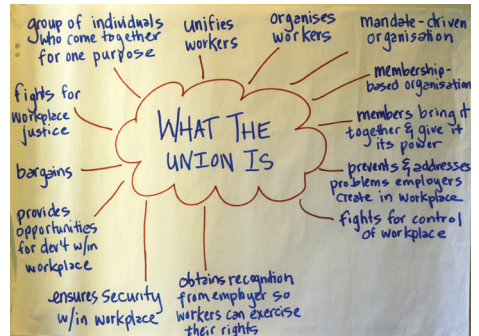
Record of how participants see the role of their trade union.

c) Participants were asked to discuss the different challenges and obstacles they face in the workplace when they do their work as shop stewards. They had to ask if the rights that they have and practice help them to build the union inside the workplace.
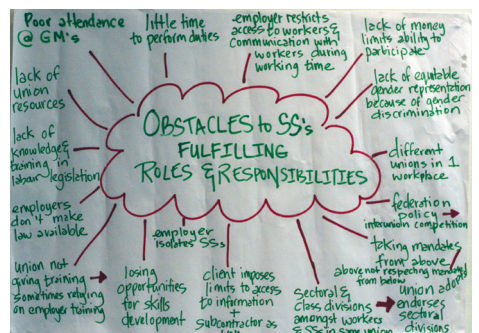
Participants identified the obstacles that prevent them from carrying out their shop steward duties.

Participants recognised different kinds of challenges. Some challenges come from employers and the client (ACSA). They stop workers in sub-contracting companies from holding general meetings at the workplace; refuse to give workers access to information; or stop workers from entering the workplace by not issuing them with permits.

At the same time, shop stewards recognised weaknesses in the way the union organised and supported worker struggles. For example, "the union is not giving training" or "we adopt this division created by the employer" between the sectors.

d) Finally, participants were asked what rights and skills they require in order to overcome the challenges. Participants talked of the need for time for workers to hold a general meeting so they can give the union a mandate ("a sort of instruction from workers"). They said they needed time for shop steward training and to develop their skills to listen and time for shop stewards to listen to workers in the meeting.
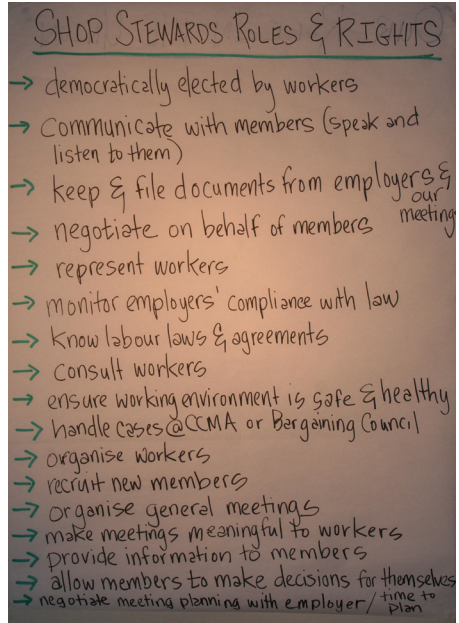
Participants shared their views on the role of shop stewards.

They said that they need rights to be with workers and hear their stories individually or in groups. They need to be able to gather information from workers, from the union, from the company and they need to be able to share this with one another as shop stewards.

In talking about their role as shop stewards, participants were able to compare what the law offers with what actually happens in the workplace. Then they were also able to define how they see the union, in terms of a democratic, worker-controlled organisation driven by mandates. The question then arose of what workplace organisational rights do workers need in order to build this kind of trade union.

Shop stewards were encouraged through this process to see that if they wanted to investigate the workplace, and if they wanted to build powerful workplace organisation, they needed to practice and extend their organisational rights – to meet, recruit members and gather information. Organisational rights are tools to help build organisation.

At the same time, shop stewards were challenged to analyse what they needed to do to change this, and what obstacles stood in the way. This encouraged addressing the divide and rule strategy of companies and attitudes like, "we don't pay you to be a shop steward." It also allowed an honest reflection about the union's weaknesses, and a review of its organising strategy.

These included the lack of shop steward training, "top down mandates" from head office and the absence of a union organising strategy to guide the building of the union in the workplace and confronting the power of the client.
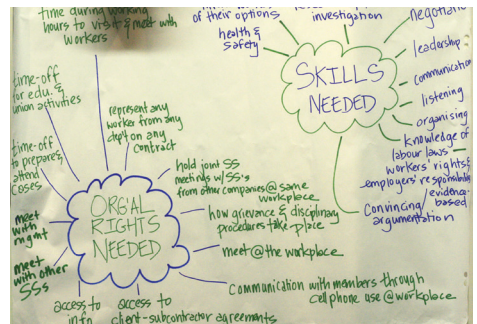
Participants discussed what organisational rights and skills they need to build their union in the workplace.

Organisational rights are tools to help build organisation.

Wages and working conditions

In the second aspect of the sector workshops participants looked in detail at the work their company does in the airport, the different jobs and the minimum wages and conditions of workers. They worked together in groups of shop stewards coming from the same company. To help, the facilitator asked them to draw their workplace. Groups later reported back to the workshop plenary.

Each participant had a file that contained basic information about the minimum wages and conditions in their sector. This served as a reference that shop stewards could take away with them. It also helped in the workshop when they did not know something, or when there were

two or more opinions about a particular minimum condition. At first, shop stewards reported about their company and their job. But they were also asked if there were other workers in the workplace who did the same type of work and what their wages and conditions were.

Through this process a more detailed picture (though still with gaps) began to develop about the workplace. Cleaning workers, for example, shared how they cleaned the inside and outside of aeroplanes; replaced linen; drained toilet waste; provided fresh water; served food, cleared plates and ironed for first class passengers; and did basic aircraft maintenance. In the aviation sector workshop, participants from SAAT explained that their company employs "appearance" workers who clean the inside and outside of aircraft. Later participants added that there are workers employed by the ACSA to carry out what is called "ramp maintenance." They collect rubbish and empty dustbins. This information showed workers doing the same jobs but employed under very different wages and conditions.

Participants also strengthened their understanding of the importance and contribution of their work to the essential functioning of the airport, and to the

A shop steward explains the different jobs and conditions in the workplace to the other workshop participants.

ability of air transport to carry passengers safely and in comfort. Cleaning the outside of planes, for example, increases the plane's efficiency. From one flight to the next, the interiors of aeroplanes are cleaned and stocked with refreshments.

Programme participants, particularly in cleaning and security, examined their union's collective bargaining strategy in relation to their conditions of employment. They found there is a single minimum rate of pay for all cleaning workers (and a few notches for security workers), with very little link to the diverse and specialised work that they do in the airport. The process helped participants to develop deeper insight into their workplace, but also raised new issues for them.

Most of the cleaning sector participants did not know the wages and conditions of unorganised workers, nor did they have a proper picture of all cleaning companies working at the airport. More broadly, the union did not have this kind of information about the workplace and the companies operating in it across all of the sectors. The activities of shop stewards in investigating the workplace, and in collecting this information, helped to inform new ideas for union organising strategies in the workplace.

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This information showed workers doing the same jobs but employed under very different wages and conditions.

To encourage the process of gathering information and to fill in the gaps in their collective knowledge, participants agreed to do take-home tasks.

For example, one of the SAA shop stewards went away and spoke to the porters working for a company called Renaissance. He found that they were the lowest paid of all workers employed at the airport, earning R1,000 per month. Renaissance has a contract with the ACSA.

A group of Reshebile security shop stewards spoke to policemen and the ACSA security workers. They found it important to gather this information because they do the same work as workers employed by security companies. Their findings were reported to the next workshop and are shown in the table on the next page.

Company	Contract with	Job	Wage/ month	Experience	Danger/ NKP allowance
SAPS police officers stationed at ORT	–	Access control	R10,307.34	No experience	R1,000/month
ACSA permanent worker	–	Access control	R7,500 take-home	6 years'	?
Reshebile sub-contractor worker	SAA	Access control	R2,905; R13.97/hour		?
Reshebile sub-contractor worker	SAA	Screener	R3,425; R16.47/hour		R119/month
Reshebile sub-contractor worker	ACSA	Screener	R 2,905; R13.97/hour		R119/month

Recognising the importance of gathering information about client-company contracts, shop stewards were tasked to gather information about the services offered to the client, the date of starting the contract and when it would terminate.

There was discussion at different points in the project about how important it was to get a copy of the contract between shop stewards' companies and the client (e.g. SAA or the ACSA).

Health and safety

A third aspect of the workshops built shop steward capacity around health and safety by providing information about health and safety law, and by encouraging participants to share their work experience and take part in group activities. Shop stewards learnt how to undertake the exercise of body mapping. Participants had to mark on an outline of a body where they felt pain when they are at work. They then analysed this map, looked at what hazards at work cause this pain, how workers become exposed to these hazards and what they could do to prevent this exposure.

They explained that the airport is very noisy and the pain in their ears comes from their exposure to noise from the aeroplane's engines. Facilitators then refered to the law and the health and safety rights workers have if their workplaces are very noisy.

It became clear that companies like SAA seem to follow the law and provide regular hearing tests for their direct employees. They keep records of these tests to be able to identify any hearing loss over time, and they provide workers with proper safety equipment. However, cleaning and other subcontracted companies did not protect workers in the same way.

Satawu shop stewards employed at OR Tambo share experiences.

Nor did these workers have the same access to medical support, such as a clinic at the workplace. Security workers contracted to SAA (the client) say "you can't even get a headache pill" from the company.

> **Cleaning and other subcontracted companies did not protect workers in the same way.**

A shop steward presents a body map to the workshop explaining what caused workers' body pain and how this could be prevented.

Some shop stewards gathered information from groups of workers by implementing the body map exercise with them. When many workers in the group pointed to the same pain, this encouraged a discussion of a shared experience, and of the need to develop collective solutions to such problems.

Participants were encouraged to come to the next workshop with their pockets full – to collect information and bring evidence.

They brought different things. One brought a set of gloves and earplugs so that the workshop participants could examine their usefulness; another brought a photograph of a warning from the ACSA to a company that had overloaded a truck. It said that the overload could contribute to foreign object debris (F.O.D.).
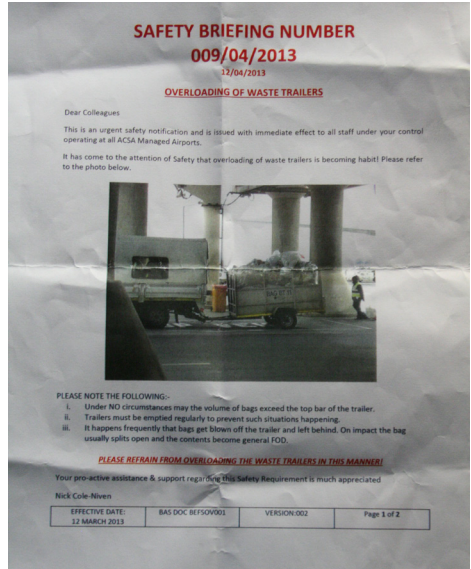
ACSA issued this Safety Briefing because the trailer was overloaded. Does the ACSA have minimum standards for the safe transport of workers around the airport?

This could cause expensive damage if the rubbish was sucked into a jet engine. The shop steward pointed out that the ACSA warns about F.O.D., but does not seem to worry when cleaning workers are packed into broken vehicles, which expose them to the cold and the rain. It did not seem that the ACSA had minimum standards for the transport of workers in the workplace.

Participatory action research
During the workshops participants planned how they would do some research about their workplaces as a take-home task. They would report what they found to the next workshop. Participants were provided with tools to help them carry out their research.

These included making a plan about what information they needed to gather, and how to undertake the research. The research was planned using a template of questions and these were discussed. An example is shown below.

Issue to Research	Research Question	How will you do the research? (Method/s)	Who will do the research?
• Wage inequality between employees of subcontractor & SAA employees; (include SA Police (SAPS); • Why contract security workers work more hours (12 hours) than ACSA security officers (8 hours); • Why SAPS officers get better treatment than subcontracted security stuff (e.g. wearing reflectors)	What are the differences in wages, benefits & hours between permanent security workers in SAA, the ACSA & SAPS & subcontracted security workers?	Speak to SAPS officers, ACSA & SAA workers. Compare hours worked & hourly rates & compare monthly take home pay between the grades; interview SAA shop stewards	S, F & T

In reporting the results at the next workshop, participants were challenged to look at how they could report their findings to the union. This also involved discussing how to involve workers in these issues.

They identified further questions and issues to research. These areas are found in the template on the right.

The Project was based on participatory action research (PAR). In this approach workers and shop stewards themselves identify what they want to research and how to carry out the research. Unlike traditional research, PAR is not just about recording people's needs and how they see their problems. It emphasises the process of the participants sharing and developing knowledge from their own experience and then taking action to make changes, based on that knowledge. It links knowledge with action, knowing with doing.

By gathering information and investigating the workplace, shop stewards not only learnt more through the training and research, but were also engaged in organisational activities: speaking to workers to find out their wages and conditions, mapping differences for the same work and finding out about an ACSA or company policy.

What we found

Key issues to take up in the Union

How we will take up these issues

How we will involve workers in understanding the issues & taking action on them

What we still need to do

Further areas to research/ new questions that we have

This helped to build a picture of the workplace. The workshops and activities strengthened shop steward understanding of the employer strategy to divide workers using subcontracting. By gathering information participants learnt how employer strategy had the effect of lowering workers' wages, and undermining their conditions of employment and rights to organise. They saw that the "clients make us fight amongst ourselves," and this challenged them to review Satawu strategy because "we adopt this division created by the employer" in only looking at sectors and not focusing on workplace unity.

Coming together across sectors in the joint workshops

The first joint workshop of shop stewards from all three sectors came earlier than planned. Menzies (which is part of the aviation and the cleaning sector) had started a process of retrenchment, and participants agreed to convene the first joint workshop, partly to provide a chance for Menzies stewards to talk, and possibly to build solidarity against this attack. Five companies working at the airport were represented by shop stewards at the workshop. Each gave a brief report of their challenges and problems, drawing from their previous work and activity.

It was a historic gathering, the first time that these Satawu shop stewards, who all worked in the same OR Tambo workplace, had come together to discuss their common problems. The introductory remarks from shop stewards expressed this new opportunity for unity.

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**We look forward to hear and learn from your working environment and hope when we walk out of here we speak in one language.**

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We are pleased to have this kind of session to share problems encountered in the workplace.
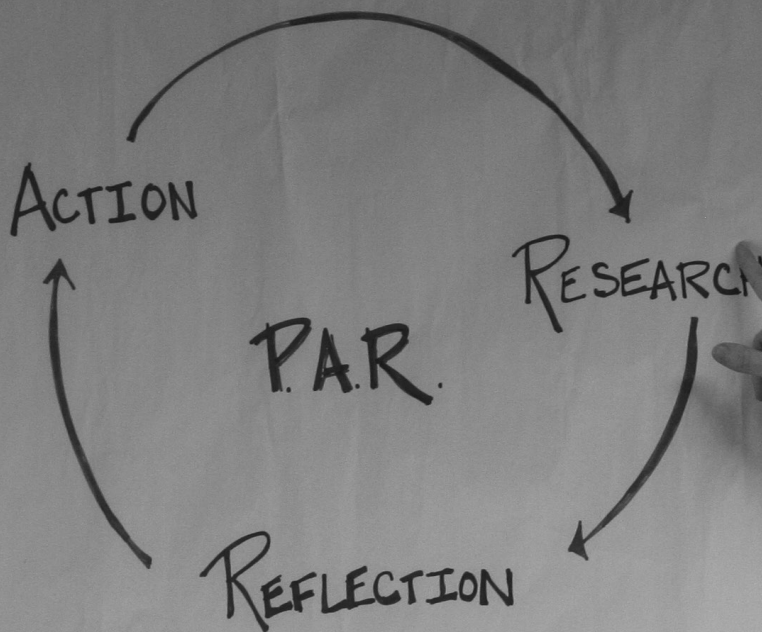
ACTION

RESEARCH

P.A.R.

REFLECTION

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PAR is not just about recording people's needs and how they see their problems. It emphasises the process of the participants sharing and developing knowledge from their own experience and then taking action to make changes, based on that knowledge. It links knowledge with action, knowing with doing.
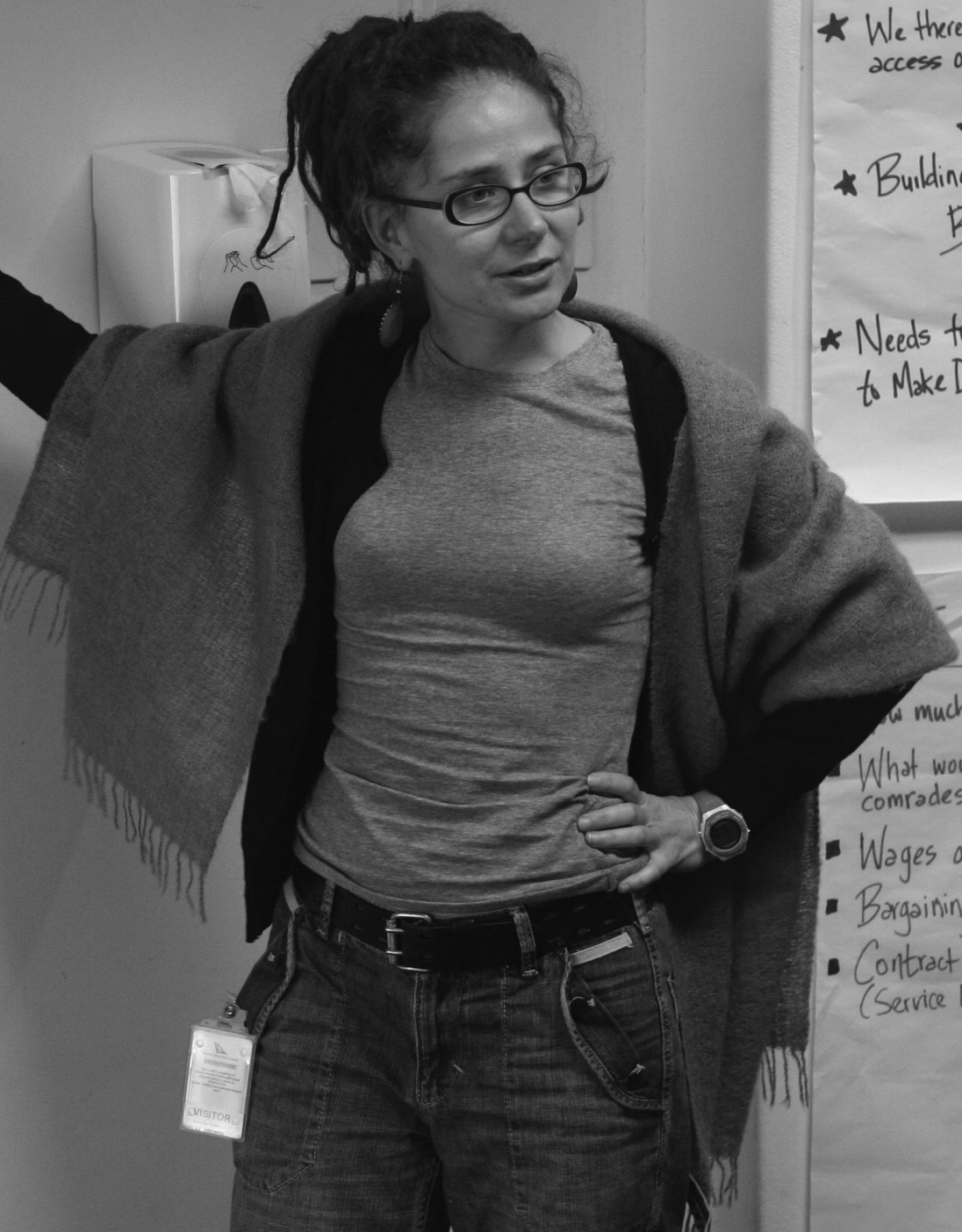
Participants from each company were asked to provide information about their company's workforce at ORT, the Satawu membership and number of shop stewards. This information was used to construct a table of Satawu's organisational strength in the airport. This is shown in the table which was developed with the participants during the workshop.

Participants were challenged to reflect on how they could use this information as a tool to organise and build wider unity if they had a common strategy around organising the workplace. They listed the Satawu organised companies who were not present, and agreed to bring them to the next workshop. They debated

the best ways to attract and organise non-members. For example, could representing them in a case encourage workers to join the union?

Shop stewards from the various companies had the chance to share their problems and challenges. For example, security shop stewards related how they carry out access control and screening, but that "the main employer (ACSA) is getting away by not paying for the tasks." Or, we are "all Satawu members but SAA members (are) treated different as client staff" compared to the "subcontract staff" at work and in the union. The union rushes to answer the problems of SAA workers first, but takes time to address the problems of cleaning and security workers. This reflected a common view that there is a hierarchy of sectors in the union.

For the first time other shop stewards heard how the Menzies employers planned to turn both cleaning and baggage handlers (ramp agents) into Permanent Hourly Paid (PHP) workers. This meant "merging cleaning and ramp" work and reducing the pay of handlers from R32 to R14 per hour. They would reduce guaranteed monthly hours of work, and allow employer "discretion" about when "you want to work." This increases employer flexibility to schedule workers while making them "more vulnerable."

Company	ORT Workforce	Members	Non-Members (Satawu)	SSs	FTUR
SAA	± 3000	650	2350	13	2
SAAT	± 2500	1040	1460	12	2
G4S A.	300	250	50	3	1
Reshebile SAA	847	300	547	2	1
Menzies A.	470	350	120	6	0
Menzies C.	147	147	0 !:)	3	0
Reshebile ACSA	500	400	100	7	0
Total	7764	3137	4627	46	6

Workshop participants provided information about their company's workforce, union membership, shop stewards and full time shop stewards.

This flip chart records the key problems that workshop participants say they face in the ORT workplace.

Participants explored the need to place demands on the ACSA for a set of minimum standards across the workplace (as a strategy): "If there were standards... management would not have a way to make [Menzies workers] do the two tasks."

The workshop created the opportunity for shop stewards to share their pressing problems and learn from the experiences of others. For example, security workers have their access permits withdrawn if they are charged with misconduct, but they learnt that this does not happen in SAA where a case cannot proceed if workers have not had adequate time to prepare a defence.

Participants were able to reflect that their struggles and strikes in the past have often been isolated from one another. They called for workplace unity to overcome divisions created by the bosses' strategy of subcontracting:

"We belong [to] one workplace, though [we] affiliate to different clients or the same clients." They also recognised the need "to engage members" who do not yet feel that they "belong together... to one workplace."

Participants recognised that they all contribute to the aircraft travelling safely and efficiently

The feeling was that, "we are all aviation workers. Security and all other things, it is just semantics, as we are serving the aviation industry. All of us. It is just that we have different functions in this industry." Participants recognised that all of the workers contribute to the effective functioning of the airport and to the safe air transport of millions of passengers – government, business, tourists etc.

They said that if there are problems in the workplace they should "come together and do one thing and not consider which department it is." They discussed and recognised that the "main priority... (is) to set certain standards in the aviation sector" and to direct these at the ACSA, the company controlling the workplace.

Reflecting new organisational activities, workshop participants resolved:

• to form an ad hoc committee with one shop steward from each company to co-ordinate their efforts and win approval from the union structures.
• that shop stewards at ORT should come together once a month.
• that shop stewards should attend one another's general meetings.
• to start a social media platform to communicate with each other cheaply and easily.
• to strengthen a prior Satawu resolution for Reshebile workers to march against the ACSA about the withdrawal of airport access permits, by saying that the other companies should include their demands on the ACSA.

These activities were implemented over the next few months.

Taking what we learnt into the union
Shop stewards took their understanding of the need for a workplace strategy into the Kempton Park Local Shop Steward Council, but they were not always able to convince other shop stewards or the union leadership, who resisted.

For example, in calling for a workplace strategy or in defining themselves as aviation workers, cleaning and security stewards were told, "you are dividing the sector" and there is "already a split in the union."

The ORT shop stewards also took part in several marches directed against the ACSA (as shown in the pictures). In one of the marches a memorandum of demands was submitted to the ACSA. However, there was no response from the ACSA and no sustained union follow-up or plan to engage the ACSA.

Shop stewards demand that the ACSA take responsibility for Menzies Aviation, which was restructuring its workforce.

Extract from the Satawu memorandum to the ACSA:

We demand ACSA as a landlord to set the standard of minimum wages and to compel all contractors to meet those minimum standards before they are even allowed to render any service in the airport. These will minimize the situation where companies that pay better salaries are forced to reduce wages in order to be competitive. This cannot be allowed to continue happening.

As an organization which organizes workers in your premises, we strongly believe this, our members' workplace, and therefore their representatives should be given unlimited access in terms of section 12 of the Labour Relations Act (LRA) in order to effectively carry out their duties and responsibility in line with section 14 of the LRA.

Without access to the workplace, the airport worker leaders are automatically prejudiced and they cannot be able to carry out their duties as outlined in the labour laws of this country. We are not asking for a favour, we are making a reasonable demand that is in line with the law.

Satawu members from various companies in the airport brought their demands together and targeted the ACSA.

What minimum standards and organisational rights do we want in the ORT workplace?

In the next phase shop stewards from across the different union sectors attended the same joint workshops. Follow-up by Project facilitators, and enthusiasm and hard work from some participants, led to higher attendance at the workshops. Attendance at the joint workshops increased from five to ten companies with new shop stewards attending. Shop stewards felt that this showed that they were effecting some improvements in their workplace.

What's happening at your workplace?

This phase of workshops began by asking each company to give a report to the workshop on the following two questions:

- What am I doing as a Satawu shop steward now to organise in my workplace?
- What are the major issues facing workers in my workplace?

The reports covered a number of areas:

a) Strategic issues requiring union attention

They included:

- reviewing the SAA and SAAT strike actions.
- the use of secondary strike action.
- the union's approach to subcontracting.

It was not possible for the workshop to fully discuss the reports. To encourage further discussion in the union, the issues were recorded and later summarised as a briefing document (like a newsletter). This was given back to participants in the next workshop, reminding them of what they said and showing them the need for further work.

Extract from Key issues from the ORT Organisational rights workshop (23-25 October 2013):

Strategic discussion: The denial of skills to workers at subcontractors

SAAT shop stewards are trying to register workers under section 28 of the Skills Development Act. This may allow operators who do some painting to get recognised as painters. But using s28 is not open to the subcontracted cleaner if they clean and do some painting. They are denied this pathway of skills and the opportunity in law to use their experience at work to get a trade.

Can we open this (training) for the subcontracted worker?

b) Discussion with national organiser

One report reflected that workers affected by a particular wage settlement were very unhappy: "...members resigning (from the union) because the leaders are telling us what to do." Later participants had the opportunity to engage the national organiser who was directly involved in the settlement. The facilitated discussion centred on who is the "majority" who can settle a strike:

- Is it the majority of striking workers?
- Or is it the majority of provincial structures?

In this exercise participants were also taken to the union's constitution and challenged to take the discussion of accountability further in the union if they found it was lacking.

c) Common issues across companies

For example, in "OR Tambo the company is using [a polygraph] to dismiss workers", even though it is not accepted in court and doesn't prove a worker's guilt. Participants were challenged to consider what is ACSA policy on fair labour practices? There were diverse responses: "the ACSA says they have nothing to do" with how a subcontractor acts; or that "the ACSA as an employer is hiding behind another employer," because it requires them to use the polygraph.

Group discussion about some of the common issues facing workers at OR Tambo.

This confronted participants with the need to gather accurate information about ACSA policies, without which they would not know if one employer was hiding behind another.

Workshop organisers wrote a short document about the ACSA labour standards which was distributed to participants. Based on the ACSA's own statements, collected off the internet, it showed that in the past ACSA had terminated a contract with a company because the low wages and insecure jobs were a threat to overall airport security. Shop stewards said they did not know about this. They were again challenged to find definite evidence about ACSA policies and where possible to find ways to use these (as arguments, as evidence) in support of their own current problems and solutions.

The issue of access is an important right for unions to establish at OR Tambo.

What's the difference between a cleaner and a technician?

The polygraph also raised the need for participants and the union to develop proposals for fair procedures that would apply to all workers equally. This was shown through the following example. If something goes missing from the aeroplane, the first suspect is the cleaner. When a technician takes something from an aircraft "he's moving it but when the cleaner does it, they are stealing… take out the polygraph!". As participants engaged with this they drew organisational conclusions - the need for solidarity between different groups of workers at ORT. For example, technical workers need to be made aware of how cleaners often face unjust accusations and that they may need support.

What do we mean by access? Extending our organisational rights

One workshop activity called on participants to spell out what different kinds of access they need to build organisation. This challenged participants to look beyond seeing the meaning of access as access for union officials to enter the workplace (a common submission drawn from the law), and to include what workers need in order to:

- get access to their union.
- get access to their shop stewards.
- get access to one another as workers (e.g. a general meeting).
- get access to the workplace to inspect workers' conditions.

The results of the discussion were represented in the workshop record.

What's the workplace and why is it important?

Workshop organisers produced a document called *"What's the workplace and why is it important?"* This aimed to bring together all the previous inputs from participants about the workplace, and as far as possible, in their own words, to reflect this back to them. The document was read aloud in the workshop.

In responding to the document participants spoke about the need for different and new strategies to rebuild the union and to focus on the workplace. "This is the strategy we could use to rebuild members."

Participants were encouraged to affirm the need for:
- shop stewards to attend each other's general meetings.
- one workplace general meeting of all workers.

- common minimum standards and organisational rights.
- the involvement of other unions.

Developing our policies for permits and communication

A section of the workshop focused on developing more detailed policy on permits and communications because they were important issues in the workplace. The ACSA restricts workers' access to parts of the airport as well as their use of cell phones. Without clear policy it would be difficult to place a demand on the ACSA.

Shop stewards worked in small groups to answer:
- What should our policy be on access? and,
- What should our policy be on communication?

Each group reported their views and these were discussed. Shop stewards felt they needed access to all areas of the workplace. They wanted to be able to communicate with both workers and members at all times. They needed these rights in order to monitor employer compliance and to build their organisation.
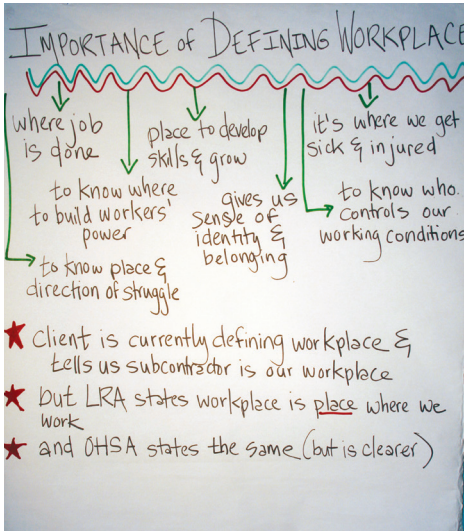
Workshop participants explore the importance of defining the workplace from a worker perspective.

As a way forward, some shop stewards were tasked to consolidate the different group report backs into a common document for further discussion. This was never done.

Further discussion on organisational rights led to the need for "facilities for having meetings [meeting places]." It reflected unequal access in the workplace to places to meet. Participants again found part of the solution in solidarity, "We can help subcontractors to have meetings" at the workplace by booking them a venue.

What minimum standards of work and organisational rights do we want at ORT?

Through different activities participants further developed their understanding and positions around what minimum conditions and organisational rights they want at the ORT workplace.

Participants broke into groups to discuss the following questions:
• What are organisational rights?
• What are minimum working conditions?
• Why do we need organisational rights?
• Why do we need minimum working conditions?

Participants then broke into pairs to list what issues require minimum standards. Their answers were used to develop ten headings with subheadings of rights and standards. These are shown in the table on the right.

	Rights and standards Does the ACSA or the Company have a policy on this?	To consider
1.	**Job security** which means employees must have a permanent job	
2.	Eliminate the **polygraph**	Eliminate or develop fair procedure for use?
3.	Standards and provisions for personal protective equipment, medical surveillance and check-ups	
4.	**Organisational rights** that give the shop steward access to members and to the employees	
5.	**Staff transport** after finishing a late shift so we don't sleep in the building; and on airside when we move from one air-site to the other.	
6.	**Standards for working conditions** - Include minimum living wage: no company at ORT can pay workers less than a particular rate - Set minimum wages for different jobs in the airport - Allowances to include risk (danger allowances) like transport of chemicals - Facilities: which includes toilets, showers, staff canteens, free drinking water	Does this include workers at restaurants/ shops? May want to consolidate amongst members first and then go to other sectors
7.	Joint workplace **health and safety committee**	
8.	Standards to regulate/standardise the **permit system**	
9.	Minimum standards and compliance in relation to developing **skills** and having skills recognised	Are you stuck as a cleaner for life - how to be able to develop?
10.	**Reduce multiple contractors** of aviation services to one contractor	Reduce competition and also lower management costs

Participants again divided into smaller groups. Each group was allocated one or more of the headings on rights and standards and asked to develop these in greater detail. They were also asked if either their company, or the ACSA, had any policy on that particular issue.

As each group gave their feedback there was opportunity for additions or differences from other participants. Sometimes the proposals were uncontroversial and accepted by other shop stewards without much comment. Other issues were debated.

What minimum wage?
For example, what should the minimum wage at the airport be? What should the minimum wage be for each of the different jobs at the airport? What should guide this?

• If the union's federation, Cosatu, says there should be a national minimum wage of R4.500 or R5.000 per month, have we taken this to workers?
• What do the workers think of this minimum?
• Should we settle for a minimum wage level that is below what the ACSA pays to their workers for doing the same job? Or should the wage paid by the client for a particular job become our standard?

Participants worked in groups to identify the minimum rights and standards they need at the airport.

• If we have a minimum wage for the airport, won't this lower the wages of workers who already earn higher than this? No, we are discussing the minimum that any worker should be paid, not the maximum. No worker should earn below this, but this does not stop workers earning above this.

This process helped participants to clarify their ideas and develop stronger demands. It also identified gaps in information, which needed further work.

Participants held similar active and fruitful debates around their proposal for criteria to guide a joint health and safety committee covering the entire airport:

- All must be represented including subcontractors. There should be a representative from every company working at the airport.
- Representatives should be elected at a general meeting.
- Representatives must include members (for wider participation) and some shop stewards (for linkage to the union).
- "If you take everything and centre around the shop steward then it will be a shop steward union … let us not deprive the members" of representation.
- Members should be trained about the Health and Safety Act so they can participate.

Organisational rights included: "Access to participate in the organisation and attend all organisational activities… right to toi-toi in the airport as it's our workplace" and "shop stewards to meet and engage the ACSA monthly."

These reflected a broader understanding of the importance of the workplace and how the ACSA exercises power in the workplace. It also showed that participants were thinking of using organisational rights both to deal with employers and workplace problems, and also to assist them to participate

fully in their own organisation. As one shop steward observed, the workshop is "talking about organisational rights at the ACSA whereas we don't have access to our own organisation."
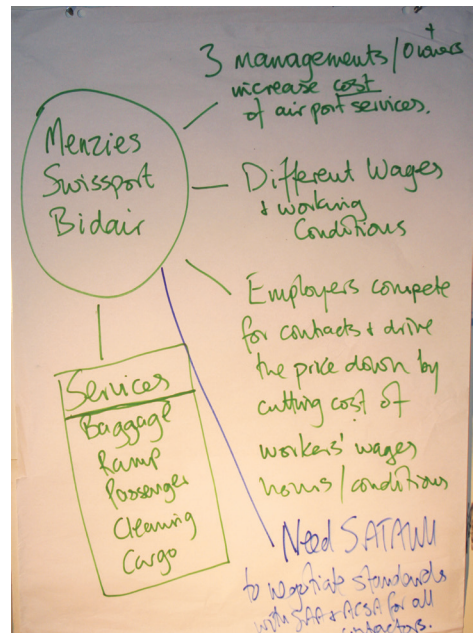
Group discussion about some of the common issues facing workers at OR Tambo.

How will we involve the workers?
As well as developing the standards, each group also had to answer:

• How will you get a mandate from workers around these standards? and,
• How will you facilitate worker involvement so they can add or amend the standards?

To deepen participant discussion and thinking around how to get a mandate, and to go beyond simply saying "call a general meeting," participants engaged in further group work specifically looking at:

• What is a mandate? and
• What is a political decision? (A term shop stewards regularly used)

"A mandate is demand coming from workers, you can call it an instruction." As compared to the "political decision," which was described as "do(ing) things without members and the decision comes from upper structures downwards."

Based on this, participants were challenged to consider how they could create an environment in the union and at the workplace where workers are encouraged and invited to bring their views, and where these are listened to with respect. It is not possible for workers to give their mandates if they do not have a place to participate.

The final workshop: consolidating the minimum standards into one document
All the demands and proposals on organisational rights, wages and conditions were recorded during the workshop. Facilitators put these together into one document. Where a policy or a union position had not been developed this was noted in the document. For example, neither the shop stewards nor the union had a position on what the minimum hours of work should be (an issue directly arising from the restructuring at Menzies). The document also included proposals made by participants in earlier workshops (particularly from the first phase of the Project, which largely involved cleaning shop stewards).

In the next workshop participants read through the document in groups and corrected mistakes and/or added other issues. These were also recorded and in a similar process the standards document was amended and again given back to participants as the next draft.

This activity formally ended the Project and called on participants to find ways, supported by their union, to continue the process.

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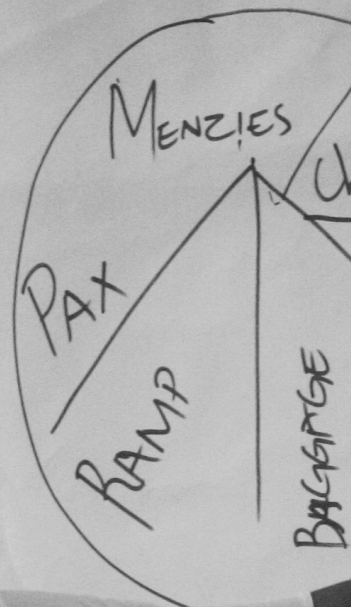   ...egy to

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Worker-friendly overview of the method

Investigating the workplace

The Project supported shop stewards in their investigation of their workplace. Broadly the questions that shop stewards used in their investigations were:

- What is this workplace?
- Who works here and under what conditions?
- Who makes the decisions in the workplace?
- How does the union organise in the workplace?

Shop stewards gained knowledge about workers' rights and labour law, and learnt to use tools that could help them gather information and do research in the workplace. After every workshop the participants agreed to undertake research tasks in their workplace. They came back to the next workshop and shared the information that they had collected. This included information from workers about their conditions, finding out a company policy or making sure that shop stewards came to the next workshop.

These investigation activities were not just research tasks, they were organisational activities that helped to build the union. In this way the Project linked training, research and organisational activity in the process of investigating the workplace. Each of these aspects supports and builds the other.

Even if someone did not do their task, the workshop discussed the reasons: "I did not have time; the workers would not speak to me". Shop stewards and organisers were then challenged to find ways to overcome this.

A typical workshop setting with participants reading aloud to the group from their files.

Who should be involved in the workplace investigation?

The approach of the Project was that union officials, shop stewards, members and workers had to be involved in this workplace investigation. It is important that union officials and shop stewards collect information because they have access to workers and the workplace. Shop stewards have experience and knowledge about the workplace because they work there and are in daily contact with workers and conditions in the workplace.

They also need to be involved because it is an important part of the job of the shop stewards and the union to collect information about wages, conditions in the workplace and employer strategies to undermine workers' rights and divide the workforce.

By collecting this information the participants and the union start to think about:

• What kind of minimum standards does the workplace have: wages, conditions, health and safety?
• What kind of rights do workers have to organise: rights to represent members and workers, to meet and plan, to learn and to monitor the employer? and

• Does the union have a strategy to counter the divisions employers create in the workplace and strengthen collective bargaining?

Principles and practices to guide the workshops

The workshops became important places for learning and sharing. Facilitation of this process is key to the success of the workshops. Some key principles/areas that guided facilitation of the workshops included:

• **Encouraging everyone to participate in the workshops.** This could mean planning workshop activities for smaller groups of shop stewards.

• **Encouraging shop stewards to listen** to each other even if they disagree, and having activities to show that listening is an important skill for shop stewards and unionists. Listening is a skill of connection and communication and is key to hearing the voice of workers on the ground.

• **Using the experience and knowledge that the participants already have** to build activity, discussion and learning. If the session was looking at exploring organisational rights then a starting point might be: What rights do you have to access workers in your workplace?

Small group discussion around shared concerns encourages participation.

Or in looking at wages and conditions: What are the minimum wages and conditions of cleaning workers in the workplace? Participants then share what they know already with each other and with the facilitator. The facilitator can bring in knowledge about the law on organisational rights or the law on minimum wages. But this is not a lecture. This information adds or builds on what the shop stewards and other participants contribute.

- **Providing each participant with a resource file**, which contains resources and information that can later be of use to them.

- **Conducting sessions with a continual process of questions**; probing the responses of shop stewards and challenging them to give more or explain; and checking if other participants agree or not. This allows partial answers to be part of building a bigger picture and encourages participants to contribute and share their knowledge.

Example of continual process of questioning:

Facilitator: What brings you together as workers?

D: The arrogance of the employer

F: Because of the union

Facilitator: Which employer is bringing the pain?

X: G4S and Reshebile (these are subcontracted security companies)

Facilitator: Something else unites us – we all work at the workplace not at the employer. We find ourselves at the workplace. Where's the workplace?

X: ACSA, OR Tambo International Airport… Airways Park

N: Who brings the real pain?

S: ACSA as the client…

Facilitator: But we direct all our power at the employer who has no power.

Z: The client is always right

Facilitator: Think about the power of the client. What kind of power does this client have that you can't touch? How do they put something in the way so that when you are brought together in the workplace you don't direct anger at the workplace and the client? And if you unite in the workplace, you only unite amongst some of you e.g. as Reshebile (one security company). You don't unite to deal with the workplace. You don't unite with the cleaning worker who works at another subcontractor.

• **Encouraging discussions and questions that help to connect with what participants think are important issues.** For example when exploring organisational rights the starting point was the role and challenges facing shop stewards. Shop stewards could comfortably share knowledge about their experience and about particular problems they had. This was used as a basis to explore further the question of organisational rights in the workplace.

• **Allowing participants to raise issues that are outside of the workshop agenda.** For example, at one workshop each company gave a report about the workplace. Shop stewards raised many important issues in their reports. These included their comments and unhappiness about recent strikes in SAA and at the SAAT; challenges of organising at Bidair; and what strategy the union should use to deal with subcontracting. Instead of calling the issues "out of order," these issues were recorded and listed as strategic issues. These needed to be discussed fully and resolved by the union outside of the workshop. To help this process the workshop organisers wrote a simple report called "Key issues from the ORT Organisational rights workshop (23-25 October 2013)." This briefly summarised each of the issues to help participants take these into the union. (See extract under the section called *What's been done*)

• **Give back to the participant's information that they bring to the workshops.** Such contributions need to be recorded and given back to them as far as possible in their own words. Every discussion is summarised on flip charts on the walls. This helps the shop stewards to think further and add more knowledge. It also allows them to reflect on their contributions and see the value of what they have said. The recordings on the flipcharts act as a visual document which participants or the facilitator can go back to later.

• **Take detailed notes and photos** of the flip charts and of various workshop activities, both for the purpose of keeping a record, and for later providing feedback to the participants.

• **Producing briefings and case studies.** These can act as educational materials in another workshop, or as reports to the union. For example, workshop organisers wrote down the "Menzies story," where employers forced baggage handlers and cleaning workers to take lower wages and hours and combine the work of baggage handling

and cleaning. The story that was written was first checked by the Menzies shop stewards. It was then read aloud in one of the workshops to encourage learning and discussion about this struggle.

- **Using photos in order to share the story.** Photographs were taken throughout the Project, in the workshops and in the workplace. These are important ways of capturing experience and bringing stories to life. These photographs are used as a record of the Project experience. They are also useful for sharing the ORT project with workers at ORT, and with Satawu, Cosatu and the ITF. Photos help to bring the story alive.

- **Facilitating agreement at the end of each workshop about what take-home tasks** participants will do before the next workshop. Presenting and discussing participant tasks at the next workshop became an important part of the workshops. Even when a participant said they could not do their task, this was discussed. We explored why they could not do the task. Perhaps there was not enough time or the workers were afraid to speak to the shop steward, whatever the reasons, these became a finding as well as another challenge to explore.

Workshops have to be places to share without fear

For the workshops to be places of sharing and learning, shop stewards need to share their views freely and be able to voice their frustration. They should not fear victimization or hold back views because they think union leaders might not want this. As shop stewards asserted: "In yester years members were able to control union officials, because worker's controlled the organisation... To be quite honest we are not so close... to members... there's still that division from our side."

They spoke of their frustration in the union: their contribution being called out of order in a union meeting; a negative judgement about their argument because the chairperson said it sounded like a union that split from Satawu (NTM); or being told: don't bring your company problem to the local union structure, even where there was no other place or opportunity to talk about this workplace problem. By placing problems honestly on the table we have a chance to look at them and develop solutions.

In one instance the facilitator challenged the manner in which one male cleaning shop steward spoke to a woman SAA shop steward. They had disagreed about how they understood a leadership

struggle in the union. But the male shop steward spoke to her with disrespect as if he looked down on her, and had no hope that she could change. At the time she had been one of the few SAA shop stewards expressing solidarity with the cleaners. Instead of deepening this he was chasing her away. It is not possible to establish a place for sharing without a lot of time and effort.

Building confidence

The methods described above help to build confidence among the shop stewards through supporting and working from the experience they already have – they have information about the workplace and the union. It also builds their confidence by encouraging them to do things, such as go and collect information or speak to a worker. We learn by doing.

The facilitators were not neutral

Opening the space for workers to guide the process with their own knowledge and experience does not mean that the facilitators are neutral. They support an approach that seeks to build workers unity and to see things through the eyes of workers. For example, the approach to the law was that shop stewards need to interpret the law from the point of view of workers. If the law says that shop

stewards have a right to training about health and safety, this should not mean that employers train or decide who trains the shop stewards. We need to give it an interpretation where the union ensures training that places the health and safety of workers before anything else.

Facilitators supported the building of workers unity, not through backing one leader or another, but by challenging shop stewards to find the problems of workers and develop solutions. While shop stewards had the space to be critical and to voice frustration with the union, they were also challenged:

"You say there's no shop steward training, what have you done to develop a proposal for training and to take it into the union? You say that the higher leadership are not listening to the mandate of workers. When you raised the issue about your workplace in the shop steward local, was this the mandate from your members or do you also speak without the workers? When you spoke of the Menzies struggle you said that your leaders did not bring newspapers and publicity. Do we want the newspapers, or do you need to develop your own story about Menzies to help workers build solidarity?". In this way, but without making judgement, shop stewards were challenged to think

self-critically, to take responsibility and to take control of their own organisation based on the mandate and support of membership. This is another aspect of how the approach helps to build shop steward confidence.

"I have learnt that the mandate must be from the members on the ground not from upper structures and members should be involved with every decision made."

Discovering things for themselves
The method or approach adopted in the Project allowed participants to discover things for themselves and to come to their own conclusions. This is important because we are building organisation and it is workers that need to decide what needs to be changed in their workplace and how to do this. This is shown by the following examples:

In finding out about the workplace each group of shop stewards brought a part of the picture: information about baggage handlers; the experiences of cleaners or cabin crew. It was only when they came together and shared this information that they could see the whole picture, the whole workplace. And when they did this they started to call themselves aviation workers, all contributing to getting the plane off the ground.

"It gives us the picture of understanding that we are divided and we still need to work hard to unite ourselves and workers, to understand that we are all working to achieve one goal. To understand that we are at the same workplace and if we can organise ourselves we can make it as we are all Satawu members."

"I have contributed to other shop stewards the importance of security and make them realise that everyone is important no one is better than someone we are all important. The workshop has changed me and now I know that I am an aviation worker."

"The way we used to see each other's jobs was not assisting us… We need to accept that each and every individual's job is important. No sector can function without the other sector."

The experience of sharing work experiences with one another led some workers to "see" one another for the first time. At the beginning of the Project one of the SAA participants did not even know the name of the company that cleaned her office. By the end of the Project the comrade was defending cleaning workers against abuse by her manager. She felt the "pain" of this worker.
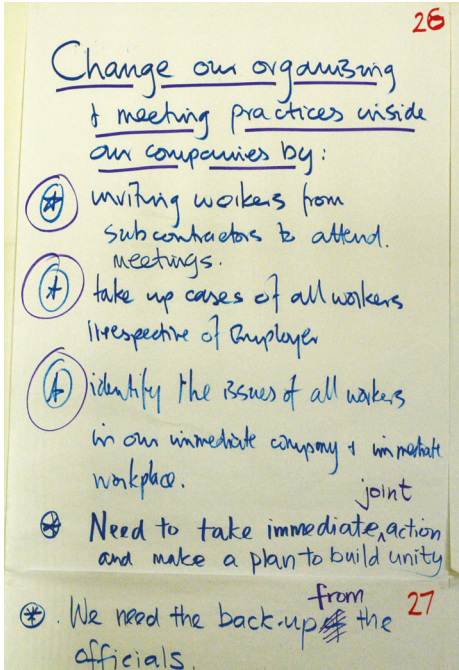
In discovering themselves as aviation workers participants saw new ways to organise.

In discovering themselves as aviation workers, linked but divided in the same workplace, shop stewards began adopting new ways of organising, including:

- Using social media to support shop steward communication – this is very cheap and everyone can afford this;

- Forming an ad hoc committee with one representative from each company organised by Satawu at ORT. This was to co-ordinate between the companies and win approval from the union's structures;
- Attending one anothers' general meetings as a way of showing other workers their common experiences and the unity that they were building; and
- Holding a joint march against the ACSA bringing together demands from different companies – to stop the restructuring at Menzies, to issue permits to Bidair or Reshebile workers. Beyond this was the demand on the ACSA for it to set minimum standards in the workplace which would apply to all employers.

The method or approach adopted in the Project allowed participants to discover things for themselves.

Occupational health and safety helped participants to explore their collective workplace experience. This provides a foundation for union organising in the workplace

The focus on occupational health and safety in workshops helped to build dialogue in the Project and encourage investigation. Discussing health and safety seems to connect closely and concretely with workers' experience and pain at work. Using tools like the body map encourages participants to speak directly to their physical work experience. Body mapping calls on participants to record on the body map where they feel pain. Thus cleaning workers record pain in their ears, or pain in their backs. When a group of workers identify pain in similar places it lays the basis for questions around:

• What (hazard/s) causes the pain? And,
• What can workers do to eliminate the hazard?

Such discussions gave rise to further questions. Participants were prompted through this initial discussion to carry out deeper investigations at the workplace. Health and safety issues encouraged the investigation of issues such as the condition of workers transportation and facilities (changing rooms, drinking water), the length of shifts and rest periods, and protection during maternity and early child-birth. Bringing shared experience of these problems to light gave rise to the need for collective solutions and the development of union policy.

Another important aspect to investigating health and safety experiences and issues in the workplace, is that it draws the attention of the union, union organisers and shop stewards, directly to concrete day-to-day issues in the workplace. This has the potential to encourage the union to revive workplace level organising work. Apart from the value of health and safety investigation for this Project, that activity can become an essential trade union organising activity.

There are hazards that are experienced by all workers at the airport. Exploring the hazards facing different groups of workers showed clearly that there are differences in the way workers are protected against common hazards that they face at work. For example, all workers on the airside are likely to be exposed to the noise of jet engines. Yet discussion and investigation showed big differences between the conditions of workers employed by sub-contractors, and those workers who are permanently employed by the client. SAA workers have better personal protective equipment like ear muffs and have regular documented ear tests.
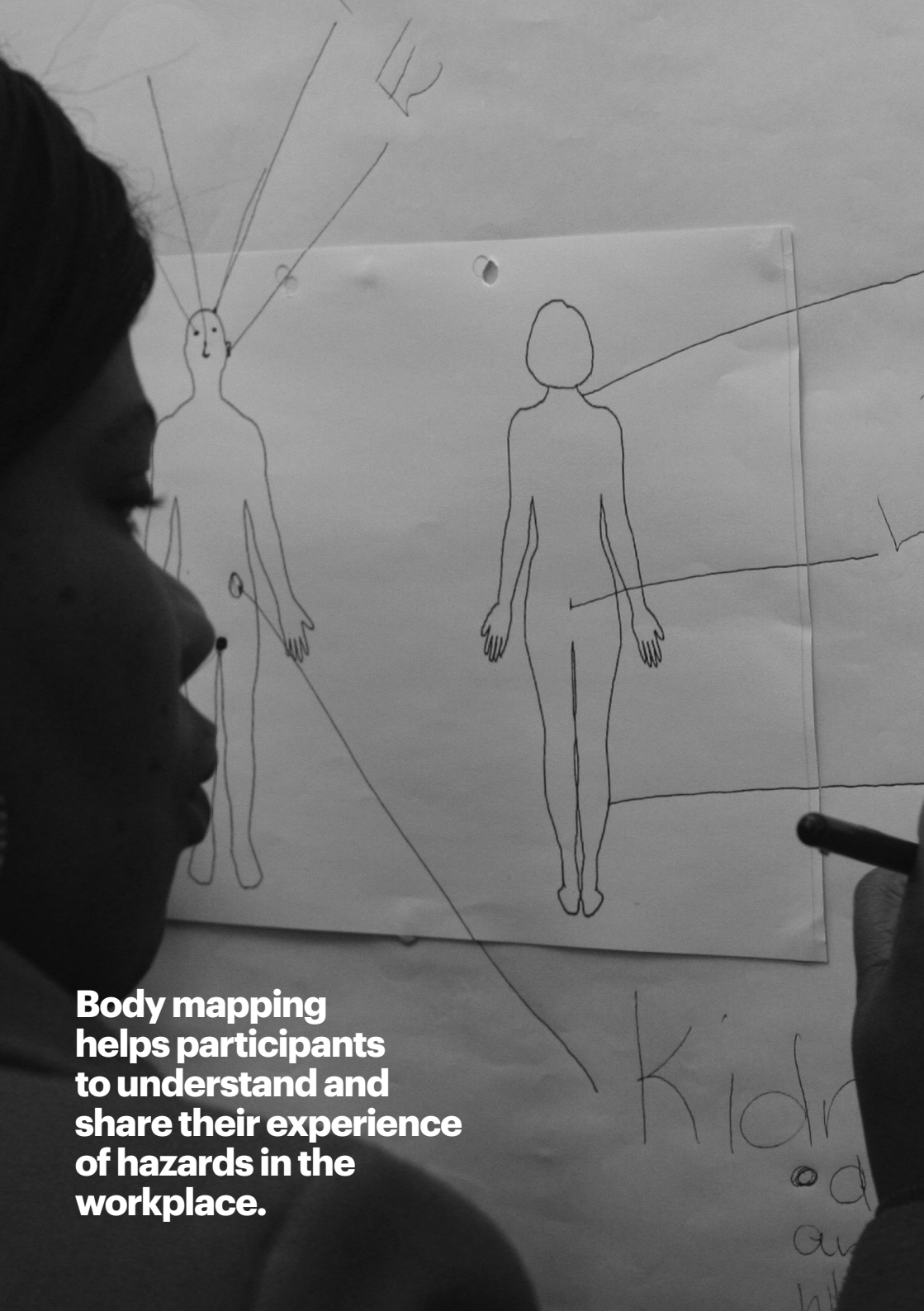
Body mapping helps participants to understand and share their experience of hazards in the workplace.

Facilitators helped to equip participants with other tools through examining parts of the law on health and safety. This deepened the focus on the principle employer (like the ACSA) and its responsibilities in the workplace. At the same time, by examining certain clauses in the law, participants were encouraged to assess if these were being implemented. For example, the law says that workers should be able to access fresh drinking water but for most workers this is not possible in parts of the airport. It also says workers have rights to be protected against bad weather, which led to the question: how adequate is this protection, such as the guard huts?

In thinking how they could implement their rights under the Occupational Health and Safety Act, participants had to ask: what organisational rights do I need to implement workers' health and safety rights? For example, if shop stewards have specific rights aimed at protecting their hearing, shop stewards will need organisational rights to check if the employer complies with this law. They will need to be able to speak to workers (for example, about ear-testing and protective equipment and the hazards they face in general); gather information from the employer (their health and safety policies, records of medical testing); as

well as have the training (and time) to be able to do all of these. Securing such organisational rights is an essential task of trade union activity in the workplace.

Health and safety issues may also assist workers to identify and speak to one another about the common hazards and risks that the employer exposes all workers to. The fire that breaks out will not distinguish between the permanent aviation worker and the sub-contracted cleaner or security. It may kill or injure all of them.

Application of a variety of PAR tools

The Project was based on participatory action research (PAR). In this approach workers and shop stewards themselves identify what they want to research and how to carry out the research. Unlike traditional research, PAR is not just about recording people's needs and how they see their problems. It emphasises the process of the participants sharing and developing knowledge from their own experience and then taking action to make changes change, based on that knowledge. It links knowledge with action, knowing with doing.

Participants learnt and applied a variety of tools towards understanding their workplace, these included:

- Body mapping
- Drawing a map of your work
- Examining wage and organisational rights agreements
- Examination of what participants bring as evidence: a picture of an overloaded truck, a notice from the employee…
- Participatory action research skills
- Using questionnaires

Brief notes on other activities and materials

The following are some of the materials that were read out aloud or shown in the workshops, and formed resource material to inform workshop activities:

- **A case study of Menzies.** This article was based on information provided by shop stewards. Before using it at the workshop it was circulated to the Menzies stewards who made additions and corrections. It was read aloud by participants in a workshop. A Swissport shop steward who was present said that "90% of the story" was also happening at Swissport.
- **A briefing paper on ACSA policy.** The article was based on information found on the internet. It showed that the ACSA had previously got rid of a company that employed short term contract workers at low wages as it viewed such conditions as a threat to security.

In other words the ACSA had in the past set some labour standards for companies doing work in the airport. This enabled shop stewards to explore the question: can we use this now?

- Why the workplace is important. Article drawing on the workplace information that shop stewards shared in the workshops. This reflected the importance of the workplace as the place where workers work, come together, organise, get hurt and are exploited. It showed how important the contribution of all workers (including cleaning and security) was to getting an aircraft off the ground.
- Set of photos reflecting on different work done at the airport. This was shown to the workshop, and participants were asked what the worker was doing. They were also asked if any of the jobs contributing to getting the aeroplane off the ground had not been shown in the photos.

Steps towards implementing a similar process of participatory action research as part of union organising work

Step1: Win union approval and support

Involve union leadership in stating what they think is important and what they would like to achieve.

Set up a reference committee to plan, implement and review the project. Plan a series of workshops with sufficient time between workshops to allow participants to gather information about their workplace or to carry out other take-home tasks and activities.

Time the workshops so they do not clash with other union activities or processes that could prevent officials and shop stewards participating in the workshops. Find ways to connect with the union's ongoing work and rhythms. Activities such as meetings and workshops could be places to feed into and report to.

Agree on how the union will help workshop participants between the workshops so that they do their take-home tasks.

Step 2: Decide on participants and how to structure the workshops

Structure different workshops according to how the different pockets of worker leadership at the workplace are currently organised. For example, in ORT we had separate cleaning, security and aviation workshops. Aim to bring them together into the same workshop as quickly as possible.

There may also be concerns because of different levels of organisation. For example, workshop organisers at ORT had also been concerned that shop stewards from aviation might dominate the cleaning shop stewards and restrict their participation. Pay attention to any concerns like this that might prevent or close down participation.

Step 3: Agree on and collect information to assist the workshop process

Collect information that can serve both to equip the workshop facilitator and, where possible, act as a resource that participants can use in the workshop and afterwards. The information falls into two categories: information such as collective agreements or law outlining organisational rights (which we could

get from the union, from the internet, etc) without involving the participants; and other information gathered from participants through a questionnaire before the workshop. This could provide information about the participants and about their understanding of the workplace.

Step 4: Plan core activities and questions that will encourage participation and learning in the workshops

Plan activities around key themes and issues such as the role of the shop steward, what the law or the workplace agreements say about organisational rights, the different jobs and wages and conditions in the workplace. Plan questions around these themes and issues so that participants are encouraged to contribute their experience and knowledge. Plan what resources could be used to support the dialogue such as a copy of the law or the wage agreement. Consider using techniques such as small groups, body maps, drawing the workplace or completing a questionnaire to encourage greater participation. Consider how to give back to participants the information they provide (records, flip chart, briefing document).

Step 5: Encourage participatory action research (PAR) activities with each part of the worker leadership in that workplace

Encourage and help participants to gather information about the workplace. Allow them to define the workplace, including the employer's strategy, the problems and needs of workers and a sense of what organisational rights they have and how useful these are to meet the challenges facing workers.

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Find ways to connect with the union's ongoing work and rhythms.

Step 6: Provide union official support to strengthen and build the organisational activities that participants carry out in between workshops

Participants have take-home tasks at the end of each workshop. These are tasks to investigate the workplace. For example, they will need to gather information on a company's policy, speak to workers about their wages and conditions or use a body-mapping exercise with workers to understand their problems and suggested solutions.

The union official needs to provide support to the participants, encouraging them to complete the tasks on time and assisting them if they are stuck.

Step 7: Bring all participants from the different workshops together in one workshop so that they can share and report what they have respectively found.

Bring participants from different workshops together to discuss questions such as: What is the union? What are the obstacles to building the union?

Exploring their various experiences of that workplace will start to raise questions and help to identify the different experiences and rights of different groups of workers. This allows for the development of a deeper insight into the workplace, and for the uncovering of shared experience as the basis for unity.

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What are the lessons? Successes and challenges

What were the successful achievements of the Project, and what challenges did the Project face?

Successes

The Project gave participants an unusual opportunity to investigate, share, and learn from the experiences and problems that workers face in the ORT workplace. Through their investigations and workshop discussions, they built a picture of their workplace and developed a clearer understanding of how the employers' strategies divide workers and undermine their organisational rights.

Participants gained insight into their different, and common, workplace experiences and conditions of employment, and recognised that they all contribute to getting aeroplanes off the ground. Through this process they looked beyond their "sectoral" identity (as for example cleaners or security) and redefined themselves as aviation workers. This allowed them to explore how best to build the unity of workers in the workplace.

There are a number of examples that show how the Project achieved these developments:

- The workshops gave shop stewards the space and tools to listen to and explore the different problems they face in the workplace. This was not something they had experienced in the union.
- Participants investigated their workplace in new ways. For example, they used body mapping to gather information from workers.
- They agreed on the issues and questions which they needed to investigate and they decided how they would carry out the investigation.
- Shop stewards found new solutions to their problems by sharing their problems and offering each other support. This included the shop steward from one company defending a worker from another company; or permanent workers booking a venue at the workplace for a meeting when workers from a subcontractor company are denied venues to meet in the workplace.

- Participants used new and different ways of organising. These included attending one another's general meetings, communicating through social media, and setting up an ad-hoc committee with representatives from each company at the workplace.
- They marched together and placed a shared set of demands on ACSA as the principal employer to establish common standards for the whole workplace.
- A national organiser visited the workplace for the first time, recognising the importance of knowing the workplace if he was to lead negotiations on organisational rights.

Challenges

Participants were unable to secure wider trade union support for their activities. The involvement of organisers in the project was never prioritised by the union. This meant that the participants did not receive ongoing support and encouragement from their organisers. Nor did the union assist them to build space inside the union to review their activity and agree on the best way forward.

Thus, for example, there was no systematic follow-up after the march on ACSA. Nor was there a turn to build deeper support amongst workers for the demands and process developed in the Project. The workshop methods encouraged participation, listening and dialogue.

Learning and discussion started from the experience of participants and what was important to them. The findings of research and investigation had to contribute to building organisation so as to change the lives of workers. It is more difficult for participants to implement these same methods amongst members and workers in the workplace. For shop stewards to be able to build and sustain these investigation and organising practices in the workplace, it is necessary for them to have active support and assistance from the union.

There was an attempt during the restructuring of Menzies to make contact internationally through the ITF. It did not seem that the foundation was there in the organisation of workers at the workplace to be able to build on this international contact.

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Participants recognised that they all contribute to getting aeroplanes off the ground.

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