
PSI Southern Africa Office hosts a successful SUBRAC Meeting – 09th – 11th March 2016 in Booyesen’s Hotel - Johannesburg

The Sub-Regional Advisory Committee (SUBRAC) Meeting started on a high note on Wednesday, 09th March 2016 at the Booyesen’s Hotel, in the South of Johannesburg – South Africa. As has always been the PSI practise, both the Women’s Committee and the Young Workers’ meetings preceded the main SUBRAC Meeting, which eventually started on the following day, the 10th March 2016. Gathered at the SUBRAC were over 50 participants together with invited speakers representing 9 countries in the Southern Africa region.

Both the Women’s and Young Workers’ meetings had to engage on group work in order to facilitate deep, thorough and broad-based discussions to highlight existing challenges, identify key priorities and isolate important areas of action for the meeting structures.

The Women’s committee meeting explored, through a group-work, participatory process, a number of pertinent issues relating to privatisation, gender-based violence (GBV), capacity-building for women and maternity protection. The campaign on ‘Equal Pay’ was also flagged as a key campaign activity which needs, just like other campaign activities, improved mechanisms to ensure delivery of effective and sustained women’s campaigns in the sub-region. Capacity-building and leadership development were also isolated as primary cornerstones for successful campaign work and building a strong network of women activists in the sub-region and within affiliates. Inarguably, campaigning has been identified as the critical driver of the interests of women in the public and other sectors, including in communities in general. Improving the campaigning abilities of affiliates on issues of women and others is therefore an imperative in taking to higher levels people’s interests and defending the cause of the public sector/service which continues to be facing unabated attacks in the Southern African sub-region.

The Young Workers’ meeting, also by way of group interaction and participation, also focused on the various challenges facing young workers, in and out of the public services in Southern Africa. These include increased youth unemployment, contractualisation and casualisation of young workers, increased participation of young workers in the informal, as opposed to the formal economy, sexual harassment, HIV/AIDS infection, poverty leading to possible migration out of their countries or into cities thereby creating further congestion in urban centres and a strain on the public services, not being recognised within unions as key players, being viewed with suspicion by senior leaders, and others. It also touched on the key proposals that need to be advanced as a means to pursue young workers interests within PSI and its affiliates. Prominent amongst the various proposals are issues of the constitutionalization of the Young Workers’ structure within PSI, and the conscious development of young worker leaders today through mentorships, education and training, or capacity-building, through enhancing their organisation and participation in union activities, and through the initiation and implementation of comprehensive leadership development and succession plans within unions. In all these issues, young workers in the meeting were preoccupied with finding effective ways of sharing information, knowledge and skills amongst themselves in the sub-region for improved campaign-work and international solidarity.

The main SUBRAC meeting further picked up the momentum when it started on the following day, the Thursday, 10th March 2016. The introduction and opening session of the meeting was informed by addresses from the Chairperson of NCC South Africa, Pat Mphela, and the PSI Vice President for Africa and Titular for Southern Africa, Thandeka Msibi, the PSI Vice President for Africa, Peters Adeyemi, the PSI Deputy General Secretary, David Boys, as well as the Regional Secretary, David Dorkenoo. Most of the key addresses delivered focused on the importance of having such a meeting; which presents

an opportunity to reflect on the current obtaining realities that public service unions continue to face and the significance of indentifying ways of common action on these. In that light, the speakers explicitly mentioned the necessity of enhancing PSI visibility and ensuring that affiliates do recognise the value for being a part of the PSI family.

Most speakers showed their appreciation of the efforts of the Sub-regional Office, under the capable leadership of Acting Sub-Regional Secretary, Comrade Patrick Malatji, to host the meeting at such a crucial time. Furthermore, speakers also touched on the importance of a robust discussion on strategy and methods of effectively organising public service workers and building the effective capacities of unions under PSI. All these statements marked the commencement of the main SUBRAC Meeting of the PSI Southern Africa Sub-region in March 2016. Such an appreciation of the efforts of the organisers of the meeting was also shared by the external/invited guests who came in as panellists. They stressed and reiterated the importance of scheduling meetings of this nature as the SUBRAC, which they said are meetings critical for reflection and moving forward in all agreed action and timelines.

One of the undisputed climaxes of the meeting was the session of the presentations by the various panellists, including PSI Deputy General Secretary, David Boys, who presented on the ‘Experiences of privatisation, Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) and Climate Change issues’. The other two presentations were on ‘Tax Justice and Stopping Illicit Financial Flows (IFFs)’ by COSATU International Secretary, Bongani Masuku and ‘International Solidarity and Regional Integration: A Worker-driven Approach to Regional Campaign & Solidarity’ by the SATUCC Executive Secretary, Austin Muneku. As was witnessed later in the meeting, all these three presentations informed the rest of the deliberations of the meeting till its logical conclusion. This was evidenced by the consistent reference to the presenters’ quotes, statements and facts right through the meeting, as these are primarily PSI thematic areas.

Common challenges facing PSI affiliates and trade unions in the sub-region in general were teased out by the Acting Sub-regional Secretary’s report, Patrick Malatji, together with the project coordinators and these were later corroborated by country reports. The common thread flowing through all these reports is the issue of continued trampling upon of worker rights by governments and/or employers in the sub-region – like in Malawi, Swaziland, and Zimbabwe, as well as the depletion of organisational capacity of most affiliates, either in qualitative or quantitative terms. Other issues that continue to plague the sub-region include privatisation, leading to a shrinkage of the public sector, and non-payment (or delay in payment) of public sector wages, for instance, in Zimbabwe where for about 18 months now public service workers are owed their salaries, amongst others. Collective bargaining remains a highly contested space as most governments in the Southern African region undermine the collective bargaining agreements (CBAs) they have in force with trade unions. Unilateralism by governments is, in some cases, effectively curtailed, while in some it tends to rear its ugly head again. Countries where this problem of unilateralism seems to be on the surge despite earlier efforts to avoid such include Botswana, Malawi and again Zimbabwe. Alongside these issues are concerns of trade union relations with political parties. The independence of unions seems to be on the decline in some countries, like Mozambique and South Africa.

In engaging the Road to Geneva 2017 – Constitutional proposals and the PSI Affiliation fees and payment issues, the SUBRAC Meeting conducted, yet again, group-work discussions. These constitutional discussions pertained to issues of governance within PSI structures, policy, procedures and the reconsideration of the minimum fee for affiliation payment. The robustness characterising the constitutional processes and proposals discussions indicated yet another epitome of the SUBRAC. In relation to the various aspects under deliberation, amongst others, the following was primarily agreed upon:

- The SUBRAC was unequivocal on the importance of retaining SUBRAC Meetings as spaces for sub-regional interaction and exchange, as well as opportunities for solidarity. The only

elaboration given was that the PSI Constitution should however clarify such powers that the SUBRAC should have.

- Leaderships should be elected at ‘Regional Congresses’, instead of the current Regional Conferences. This is therefore a proposal for a constitutional amendment to change from ‘conference’ to “congress” to give it the elective and other powers.
- The Young Workers’ structure should be constitutionalised within PSI, and such an inclusion in the PSI Constitution should also be in consonance with the PSI gender requirement of equal representation in all structures. In short, of the 30% young worker representation, half of those should be female young workers.

Both the Vice President of PSI, who is the also the Southern African Titular, Thandeka Msibi, and the Regional Secretary of PSI, David Dorkenoo commended the level of discussions within the SUBRAC, something which they said does provide a positive projection for the future of PSI in the sub-region.

On the overall but in addition to what had been resolved above, SUBRAC deliberated on the many other aspects of PSI work, particularly in relation to the context and priorities of affiliates and agreed on the following specific areas of work for the sub-region going forward:

- a. Young workers to guarantee the commemoration of the International Youth Day on the 12th August 2016.
- b. Affiliates through their WOC committees to advance the ‘Equal Pay Campaign’ across the sub-region.
- c. Capacity-building, education and the conscious development and retention of spotted young leaders within the young workers’ structures to be a central aspect of all affiliates in the sub-region.
- d. In reaction to requests for exemption of payment of affiliation fees and changes in fee payment indexations, from Zimbabwe and NEHAWU (South Africa), respectively, the SUBRAC gave these two countries a period of two (2) weeks – until 25th March 2016 - for them to develop clear requests and forward these to the PSI Sub-Regional Office for consideration of AFRECON in April 2016.
- e. Campaign work to remain a central pillar of international solidarity, particularly to countries that continue to remain under the yoke of oppression, repression and violation of worker (and human) rights, like Swaziland and Zimbabwe.
- f. Creation of networks should underpin the work of affiliates in the sub-region, particularly through innovative means and platforms like social networks in order to share information, knowledge and experiences.
- g. On the rotation of SUBRAC Meetings, it was agreed that the PSI Sub-regional office is to develop a costs analysis of hosting each of these meetings and share with affiliates, in order to identify possibilities of affiliates hosting and contributions that could deliver these meetings.

PSI Southern Africa Office
15th March 2016

Below: 2016 SUBRAC Meeting Delegates pose for a group photo after the meeting.





Above: PSI Deputy General Secretary, David Boys delivering his opening address at the SBRAC Meeting, 10th March 2016.



Above: COSATU International Secretary, Bongani Masuku making his presentation at the SUBRAC Meeting.



Above: SATUCC Executive Secretary, Austin Muneku making his presentation at SUBRAC 2016.



Above: PSI Africa and Arab Regional Secretary, David Dorkenoo delivering his Regional Report at SUBRAC Meeting 2016.