

'We are a responsible force'

Bulletin: *When and why was UASA formed?*

Bezuidenbout: UASA was formed on 1 April 1998 as a result of a merger between the then largest mining associations – the Administrative, Technical and Electronic Association of South Africa (ATEASA) and the Officials Association of South Africa (OASA). We had so much in common – we had been in the same bargaining unit for more than 83 years. It took a long six years for the merger to take place due to various areas of differences. But we managed to merge and formed an organisation with 40 000 members.

Bulletin: *What sectors do you organise?*

Bezuidenbout: Our membership comes historically from the mining industry; but today we are involved in seven sectors: paper, pulp, chemical, the mining industry, diamond cutting, personal care and manufacturing. We are diversified and are in the process of adding another sector to our membership – being the hairdressers and the cosmetologists. One might ask 'why?'.
The answer lies in something they have in their ranks which we need desperately – females – given that we are a predominantly male-dominated organisation. We are open to all races and were one of the first unions in this

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country to have done that in 1984. At this point in time, 40% of our membership are blacks. Because we are diversified in nature, we believe we can supply proper support mechanisms for smaller unions as well as allowing them the freedom and the opportunity to continue in their sectors. In all modesty, I think we have achieved that design within our structures, so that is not an issue that you will lose your identity; it's a matter of you continue in your sector, the only difference being that you are part of a bigger conglomerate. We foresee a lot of future expansions.

Bulletin: *What does UASA offer members?*

Bezuidenbout: We offer normal union services which includes representation at the CCMA and legal advice from our in-house legal team. We also offer a wide range of benefits over and above normal union service. These benefits are based on what our members need. For example, we

have implemented maternity benefits as a result of a need expressed by our female members. We know that there is a period of waiting before female members who are on maternity leave receive UIF benefits, so we give them a sort of a supplement - cash to tied them over.

We also offer a psychological service where psychologists go out to the respective operations to deal with individuals who are being retrenched, because they are extremely vulnerable and really need help. We focus our attention on two issues - I myself, as an industrial psychologist, focus attention on job placements while the clinical psychologists deal with other emotional matters. We try and secure new employment for those being retrenched.

Last year we placed many people who were retrenched into new jobs and we are able to draw on our good relationship with management to do this. Secondly, we train members to cope with the disappointment and anxiety of being retrenched. The saying in UASA today is - it's not a status symbol anymore to have a nice car or a nice house, but to have a job, that's what counts.

We have another benefit called the unfair dismissals systems fund. Here, we give the individuals who were dismissed for whatever reason, a cash amount to carry them over while we challenge the dismissal. Individuals get different amounts based on family needs. If we successfully defend the dismissal and secure a financial settlement, the individual pays the fund back the money. Of course, if he got a financial settlement of R11 000 and he got R10 000 from the fund, he will not have to pay all the money back.

But some resettlement amounts are in the hundreds of thousands, and the money that goes into the pool is used to help other members. If we lose the case, it's a

risk we take and we don't require that member to pay anything back.

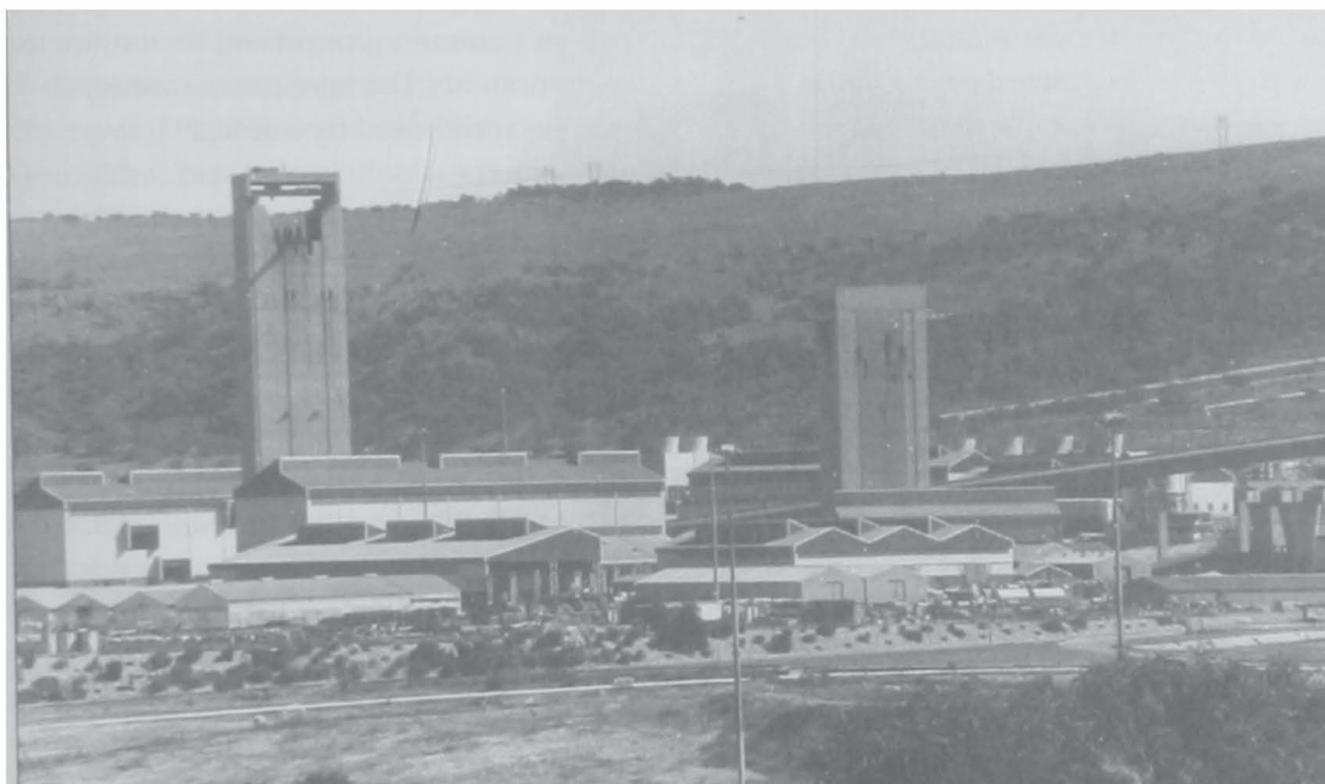
Bulletin: What are you doing to increase membership?

Bezuidenbout: We have a recruitment strategy, and it's based on the fact that you do not enter any new field unless you know how deep the water is. We do not sign on each and every individual, or each and every group. We do not poach each others memberships, and as the vice-president of FEDUSA, I am very against that sort of thing. We are embarking on a national recruitment in the media and at expos.

We have a marketing/communications manager who deals with all media liaison, and with all forms of communication. This means that anything the association is doing goes out via e-mail, faxes and our web site, the very same day. This information and a new way of mandating and negotiating has attracted other workers in the mining industry to move over to us.

We have, for the very first time in our history, decentralised negotiations with respective companies instead of negotiating in the Chamber of Mines. We get individuals from ground levels into a mandating focus group where they bring out what the majority of the members want. We then have a negotiating team. For the first time, people at ground level, at shopfloor level, suddenly know what's going on - its not up to the head office. Everybody who wants to participate has an opportunity.

What is also attracting members is that we approach things in a moderate way. We do not go out there and say, 'okay fine we want to poach you', and give you a little incentive to come. Instead we say 'the only thing we can provide is good service, of quality, and that is the promise we make.



UASA's membership is historically from the mining industry.

Our systems are geared to do precisely that. We have to be proactive in our approaches. In the past we had closed shops which protected us, but the closed shop in the mining industry was cancelled in 1996. This opened the fields and has caused a lot of anxiety amongst mining trade unions. We now have to make sure that we make our members happy or else they will go elsewhere.

We are fortunate in many respects - we have stabilised our membership in today's environment where we have a lot of retrenchments in the mining industry. We have continuation systems as well, where individuals can continue their membership even if they change jobs and move to another sector.

Bulletin: *How do you deal with difficulties that arise from having a diverse membership?*

Bezuidenhout: A disadvantage of being diversified is that it may be difficult to

control. When members want something to be addressed, like flexible working arrangements, we investigate that specific question. We then deal with it by saying to people: 'In order of what you want, the following is what's going to happen. It will automatically increase costs, or will allow lower production as a result. For that reason it's better that we work together, because we've got jobs. And the better the company performs the better your salary will be protected and the better your job environment is going to be.'

The facilitation is based on mutual respect - it's not a matter of I'm white, you black or green or coloured, or you're a cleaner and I'm a manager. No, it's a matter of we are members, and as members the following is required of us. We need to be treated fairly; we need to be treated with respect; and we need to show respect to the other side.'

Last year we spent nearly half a million rand on a massive training programme where we trained nearly a thousand

people, mostly from the lower ranks. We also have structures and discipline. We are an extremely disciplined organisation – the members do not allow dissension amongst the ranks. We believe that if there are differences, the most senior guys will go and sort it out. I say 'It's our organisations that are hurting when we have large differences, so let's work it out.'

Bulletin: *What are your bargaining arrangements?*

Bezuidenbout: We've got 11 regions in South Africa and seven regional managers. Those managers have members from paper to pulp to forestry to mining to petrochemicals and so forth. In respect of negotiations, the regional manager is responsible because we bargain at a decentralised level. We train the branch committees on negotiations, law, reading financial statements and whatever else is necessary. They must understand how a company functions and what the company can afford to pay – not because of what a manager says, but because they have read the financial statements. The branch committee gets a mandate from members and then form a negotiating team with their regional manager who leads them in negotiations.

We do not have a terminology of 'demand'. That word is banned in our organisation. We use the words request, and salary adjustments, and you will be surprised to see how that is perceived. If you go to any organisation, and say I demand to get the following, people will react negatively. We say: 'Guys, we are nice guys, but we are here to protect the best interest of our members and we request you to consider the following issues, because we know your balance sheet reflects the following and because we know that you are in the process of this or

that or the other.' Suddenly they feel they are on common ground and do not see us as opponents. The agreements we reach will be scrutinised by our legal department and divisional staff for fairness, correctness and equity in respect of the process.

Bulletin: *When do you embark on industrial action?*

Bezuidenbout: The membership dictates what to do. They weigh up their options using a SWOT analysis and using their knowledge to decide what is good for them. We have moved away from a bureaucratic approach – I tell regional managers: 'If you have a strike in your region, you will also lose your pay in solidarity with the workers for each day they are on strike.' You then see clever answers coming out. We need to send in negotiation teams that are well prepared and will out-think employers. Some employers may think that unions are stupid, but then we can out-think them. We need to sit down and talk – we both need to compromise and make the problems both our problems.

Bulletin: *Do you have a policy and programme around HIV/AIDS?*

Bezuidenbout: We are presently finalising our HIV policy, but we have been involved in HIV/AIDS programmes on the mines. We have appointed a gender representative on our executive committee and HIV/AIDS is one of her responsibilities. We are embarking on an investigation with FEDUSA on what is the best path of action for the association to take.

Bulletin: *Why do you think it is important to affiliate to FEDUSA?*

Bezuidenbout: Because of the importance of participating in Nedlac and parliamentary processes. FEDUSA is the ideal vehicle for this - it acts as a hands on conduit and engages government and business proactively. It deals with national issues of concern to our members such as the national rates bill. You need a non-political aligned organisation to ensure that you service members - FEDUSA is this and its work is benefiting affiliates. Through our affiliation with FEDUSA, we get international funding for training. FEDUSA also allows us to expand our international exposure - for example, we have attended international mining conferences.

Bulletin: *What are the associations' major strengths and what areas will you be working on to improve?*

Bezuidenbout: Our major strength is that we have got very experienced staff and a low staff turnover. We work on a team concept and Monday morning meetings ensure that managers know what is going on and see how others have solved problems. Managers are responsible and accountable. We are also strong financially as a result of proper investments, a proper investment strategy and financial discipline.

We are working to improve service delivery at all branches. We have training to ensure that we keep up with the times. We also want to have an impact on the macro-issues. UASA must be there saying that we are a responsible force to be reckoned with - you can't walk over us.



'The membership dictates what to do'.

Bulletin: *What is your message to employers?*

Bezuidenbout: Give us an opportunity to have a transparent overview of what you are doing and we'll be more successful together. Share information and treat us with respect.

Bulletin: *What is your message to members?*

Bezuidenbout: Get yourself to training. Believe and trust your instincts. You have a right to have your voice heard. It is you who makes the association - participate actively. ★