TONGAAT-HULETT BLACK EMPLOYEES'
PERCEPTIONS OF LABOUR ISSUES:
INTERIM REPORT

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1. INTRODUCTION

This is an interim report on the second phase of research being conducted on behalf of the Tongaat-Hulett group of Companies. It reflects the views and perceptions of 62 black employees of the Tongaat-Hulett group interviewed in Hambanati Township and in Tibe and Wewe. The field enquiry will continue and will cover employees in other centres of employment of the group.

These interim results on the employees interviewed at or near Hambanati are submitted as a report on progress and as a basis for discussions with the sponsors on the approach to be adopted in other centres of employment. The report, therefore, is brief and descriptive and no attempt is made to offer a thorough interpretation at this stage. Not all our results are analysed in this interim report.

2. BRIEF OUTLINE OF METHODOLOGY

2.1 Sampling

Respondents were selected in Hambanati using what is termed a "systematic" sample, whereby a fixed sampling interval was decided upon with a random starting point. In this way every fifth house or residence was selected. The method is a form of probability sampling and gives unbiased results since no deliberate selection of respondents by interviewers takes place. Addresses at which no Tongaat-Hulett employees resided were excluded for purposes of interviewing.

2.2 Interviewing

Wide-ranging, open-ended semi-depth interviews lasting well over one hour were conducted by co-author Dhlamini. The interviews were semi-structured in that a

schedule of questions was used as a basis for the inter-
views. The general approach, however, was to encourage
free discussion around each topic raised in the schedule.
A copy of the schedule appears as an Appendix.

2.3 Analysis

Once completed, a content analysis was made of
the spontaneous verbal answers of the respondents, as a
basis for classifying answers into meaningful and dis-
tinguishable categories. These frequencies form the
basis of this interim analysis.

Although the results appear below in statistical
form, the interviews on which these results are based were
wide-ranging, probed, in-depth discussions of the issues
covered.

2.4 Characteristics of sample

NOTE: All percentages are based on the sample total of
62 cases.

Age	%
20 - 30 years	23
31 - 40 years	40
41 - 50 years	24
51 - 60 years	13
	100

Occupational level

	%
Unskilled	18
Machine operators	21
Drivers	16
Other semi-skilled	9
Skilled work (not necessarily of artisan status)	18
Charge-hand and supervisory	8
White collar	10
	100

NOTE: This classification is provisional since the job-grading of respondents has yet to be checked against the Company job-grading scheme.

Educational level

	%
None	5
Sub. A/B	5
Std. 1-3	13
Std. 4-6	35
Std. 7-8	24
Std. 9+	18
	100

Membership of Trade Unions

	%
None	15
Fosatu Union	32
Nsibande/Sugar Union	53
	100

It must be borne in mind that this sample, being drawn from township housing, under-represents unskilled workers. The latter are more likely to be found in hostels or be longer-distance commuters.

3. GENERAL PERCEPTIONS OF THE WORKPLACE

In regard to overall <u>levels of satisfaction</u> with employment in the Company, the employees interviewed emerged as follows:

	%
Very satisfied	13
Fairly satisfied	50
Fairly dissatisfied	18
Very dissatisfied	19

The employees were invited to discuss major problems in the workplace. First of all they were asked to discuss <u>three</u> problems which troubled them most <u>personally</u>, then they were asked to present the problems as <u>most</u> of their work mates would see them.

Problems experienced	Personal %	Mentioned by others %
- Jobs not commensurate with qualifications/experience	68	-
- Wage problems 58% - Other material issues 9%	67	60
- Poor communication with supervisors/ management	45	10
- Job discrimination against blacks 15% - Blacks treated badly/like children 5%	20	73
- Specific mention of poor treatment or discrimination compared with or by Indians	-	53
- Leave/sick leave problems/benefits problems	16	15
- Inadequate job descriptions	11	3

	Personal %	Mentioned by others %
- Transport problems	5	13
- Canteen facilities	5	13
- Management response to Unions/ organised labour	3	5
- New Tax system	-	3
- Lack of housing benefits	-	8
- No black advancement/training for advancement	-	26
- Problems with rules, regulations dismissal and grievance procedures	-	18

Other problems mentioned by less than 2 people

These results present an interesting pattern. A clear majority of these employees are generally satisfied by their work situation. Whether this would be true of unskilled workers in the Company cannot be said at this stage. Further work among hostel-dwellers is necessary.

There is a marked pattern of difference between the problems that respondents mention as personal problems and those they ascribe to their colleagues. The difference is due mainly to the fact that the personal perceptions were obtained early in the interview, when the respondents were still rather cautious. They became more outspoken when describing the problems as seen by their workmates. The difference is also due in part to the fact that the sample was rather more skilled than would be typical in the workplace.

It is clear from these results, however, that a strong perception of anti-African discrimination exists. This is expressed euphemistically as "poor communication with supervisors" and "jobs not in line with qualifications

and experience" under personal problems but is specified
as discrimination against blacks and as problems with
Indian supervisors or as feeling discriminated against
as compared with Indians when discussing the problems
of black workmates. The problem of perceived blocks to
black advancement also comes out strongly in the
second probe.

The other major issue, that of wages, is fairly
typical of worker responses in most industrial situations.
The frequencies are fairly high, which is only to be
expected at a time of economic slowdown coupled with
high inflation.

The major problem is the issue of the oppor-
tunities of blacks relative to those of other races,
particularly Indians. It is reflected in the following
results of a probe on how they rate personal prospects
in the Company:

	%
- Can definitely reach my goals in Company	6
- Can possibly reach my goals	19
- Doubt if I can reach my goals	35
- Definitely will not reach my goals	39

This distribution of replies, compared with
other labour forces in which an identical item was used,
shows a markedly pessimistic perception.

4. SPECIFIC INTERACTION PROBLEMS

We did not wish to ask leading questions about
interaction or supervision. We introduced the topic
simply by asking about the person at work who caused most
frustration. Broadly the people causing frustration

came out as follows:

	%
Nobody	11
White foreman/supervisor	13
Indian supervisor	45
Other Indians	10
African supervisor	5

Generally, the respondents felt that the Indians
were unfriendly and hostile, or often even abusive. Some
respondents mentioned that Indians reported on them un-
fairly, and others, although fewer in number, claimed that
Indians in authority assigned extra and unscheduled tasks
to them such as washing their (the Indians') cars and
carrying parcels.   One person accused an Indian supervisor
of expecting gifts from black workers.

5. COMPARISONS BETWEEN WORKING LIFE AND COMMUNITY
    CIRCUMSTANCES

This topic was introduced by asking employees
whether conditions in their working life and in their
day-to-day life outside of work had improved or deteriorated
over the past year.   The following broad comparisons
emerged:

	Working life	Community life
	%	%
Improved	29	6
Stayed the same	44	42
Became worse	27	52

It is clear that the job situation is relatively
more favourably viewed than the way in which blacks view
their general situation.

Perceived problems outside the workplace centred
dominantly on cost of living and price rises, with housing

problems also featuring fairly prominently.

In giving reasons for the assessment of de-
teriorating working conditions, the following grievances
emerged, in rough rank-order of importance:

Impediments to promotion/advancement
Wages low relative to COL
Supervision problems
Job descriptions
Sick pay
Disciplinary procedures

6. SOME ISSUES RELATING TO INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS

Various topics were discussed relating to
industrial relations and trade unions.   One item
involved enquiring what management should do if they
wished to prevent strikes among black workers. The
following were the types of suggestions received.

Problems needing to be solved if strikes are to be
prevented (more than one answer was frequently given
hence percentages exceed 100)

	%
- Improve supervision and communication with black workers	55
- Equal job opportunity/job opportunity according to merit	45
- Improve wages	36
- Wages for all races on equal basis or according to qualifications	33
- Eliminate race discrimination generally	23
- Wages according to productivity	8
- Assist/assist more with housing	6
- (Roughly 37% of workers also mentioned a variety of more specific problems which are not analysed in this interim report.)	

One cannot but help drawing the conclusion that the communication and supervision interface and the problems of treatment according to race are the dominant issues bearing upon labour relations. Whether the problems are real or simply exist in the perceptions of workers is not the issue. The interviews were forthright and frank, and bearing in mind that the respondents did not hesitate to mention positive elements in the workplace (see earlier job-satisfaction ratings) we have no reason to believe that the employees were fabricating grievances. The perceptions are real enough.

7. TRADE UNIONS AND THEIR ROLE

In order to form an impression of the relative importance and role of trade unions to workers, we asked them to indicate which of a range of "agencies" would be most effective in improving the lives of workers: in the workplace and in their everyday lives. The comparison is given below:

	Work-place %	Everyday lives %
Management/prominent Industrialists	21	19
Trade Unions	39	15
S.A. Government	18	18
KwaZulu Government	16	31
Black spokesmen in media	2	-
White spokesmen/opposition parties	6	13
Overseas organisations/govts.	11	8

Trade unions are certainly very significant in the workplace context, although by no means exclusively so.

Management and industrialists are expected to have a significant role in both work and community contexts. Great expectations exist as regards the KwaZulu government which that government simply does not have the means to meet.

Turning directly to trade unions we asked the respondents about their degree of satisfaction with the trade union they knew best (recall that 85% belonged to one or another union):

	%
Very satisfied	16
Quite satisfied	42
Not satisfied	42

It is interesting that dissatisfaction with trade unions is marginally greater than job-dissatisfaction (see earlier).

We also asked whether they expected support for trade unions to grow or decline —— broadly the results came out as follows:

	%
Grow	55
Not grow/uncertain	45

While unions seem to be solidly located, there is not really what could be termed wild enthusiasm for their future prospects.

The reasons given for an expected increase in popularity are the obvious ones:

settle disputes, etc.
protection from arbitrary dismissal
wage improvements

One interesting function of trade unions
mentioned by some 15 percent of workers was that the
union "revealed facts and privileges kept hidden by
management or the government".

On the negative side, well over 20 percent
of employees said that they had lost confidence in the
unions and an equal proportion did not expect the unions
to be able to achieve improvements in the workplace.

In response to a direct enquiry about what
problems a black trade union could be helpful in solving,
the following emerged:

Problems a union can solve

	%
- Improved wages	31
- Improving pensions/bonuses	19
- Ensuring notice before dismissal	18
- Protection against dismissal without reason	16
- Improve conditions of actual work	15
- Improve communication/supervision	11
- Improving sick pay/IOD	6
- Settle disputes generally without strikes	6
- Other factors (various)	6
- Unions cannot change things	13

Clearly unions are not seen as highly relevant
at this stage to the problems of the race interface and
to black advancement, which workers see as being so
important. As a matter of fact, when probed on what
problems unions could not solve, some 47 percent of
workers mentioned problems of deviant supervisors, job
discrimination and communication between workers and
management.

On another issue, when employees were asked which individuals were most helpful to them in the workplace, only some 23 percent mentioned union figures like shop stewards.

A wide-ranging enquiry was directed at what the workers interviewed felt could bring about improvements in the performance of trade unions, producing the following results:

Ways in which unions could become more effective

	%
- unions should consult workers more	15
- officials should be free to enter factories	13
- government should grant unions more power	11
- employers must accept trade unions	8
- better shop stewards	8
- union officials should attend to specific problems	8
- improve performance on retrenchments/ dismissals/notice periods	5
- (a variety of isolated factors were also mentioned)	

8. VERY BROAD INTERIM CONCLUSIONS

The results above have been very briefly and simply presented, with no attempt to inter-relate responses. This will follow as more work-centres are added to the findings.

At this stage, we can say that while employees are certainly not dominantly dissatisfied, certain problems emerge as being very characteristic of the particular working situation in the Tongaat area. The most serious problems are a perception of job discrimination against blacks, and of favouritism toward Indians,

grievances in regard to modes of supervision and be-
haviour of (mainly Indian) supervisors and impediments
to black advancement.   While wage grievances figure
prominently, this is perhaps only to be expected at
the present time.   This does not mean that wages are
not a serious issue, however.

The workers interviewed have fairly varied
views about the benefits of trade unions at the present
time.   While there is generally solid support for the
idea of unions, there are also widespread perceptions
of the failure of unions to live up to expectations.

What is most important to note is that most
workers at this stage have not, or have not been stimulated
to relate their major problems apart from wages to the
role of the union.   Consequently only very few workers
see the union's role as relating to supervision, race
relations and job-advancement.   One may expect that if
and when the unions realise this they could arouse new
interest among the workers.

Generally, the challenge for the companies
appears to lie at the problems of the race interface on
the shop floor.   These problems can only become more
serious as the constitutional/political development of
Indian people takes its course.