

A Critical Analysis of Women's Involvement and Representation in Leadership Positions within the Trade Union Movement in Trinidad & Tobago: The Experience of the Banking, Insurance and General Workers' Union

By: Ife K. A. Smith (MSc) – Trinidad and Tobago

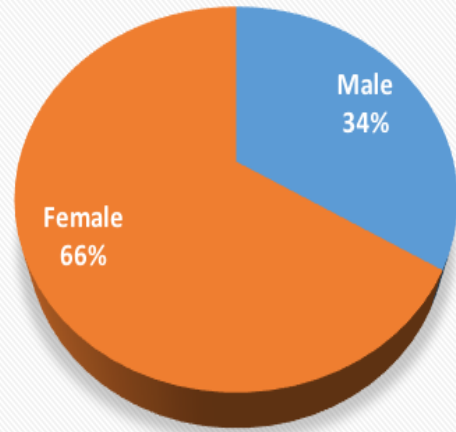
Overview

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Problem Statement

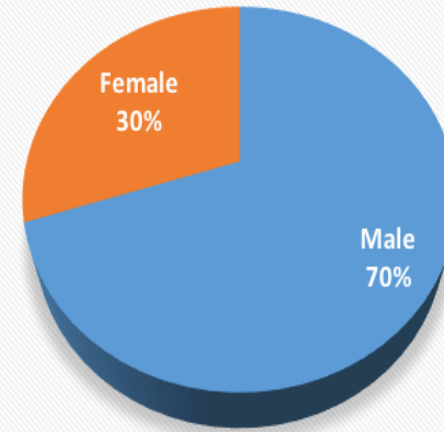
- The purpose of this study is to unravel the reasons why women are not elevated to leadership in BIGWU despite their majority numbers in the membership and invaluable participation in the union and its activities

BIGWU's Membership by Sex (2013)



■ Male ■ Female

BIGWU's Central Executive 2010-2014



■ Male ■ Female

BACKGROUND

Trade Unionism was always male dominated in the Caribbean

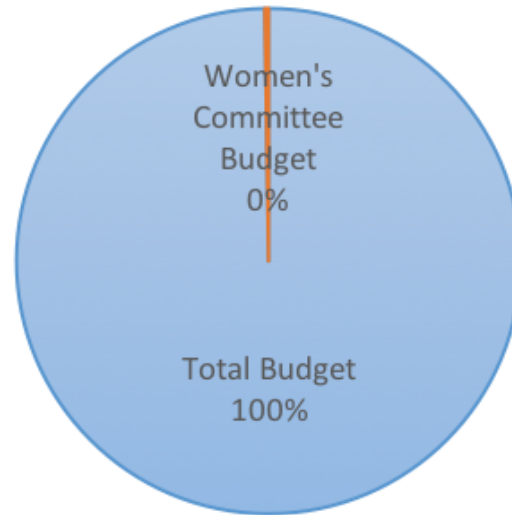
Women were mentioned but as mates to male leaders and lunch/tea providers at picket lines

BIGWU was formed from a merger between BEU and BGWU. No official Elections since its formation in 2000

The MOU guaranteed gender and youth representation

BIGWU has affiliations to NATUC and UNI Americas Global Union (UNI says 40% women by 2015)

BIGWU's Budget 2012



■ Total Budget ■ Women's Committee Budget

Operational Definitions

- Responsible Trade Unionism (Reddock, 1998) – phenomenon that only recognized 'real workers' or waged employees. Women were excluded since they were mainly employed as domestics, piece-rate factory workers, etc.
- Gendered system of leadership (Williams, 2013)
- Strategic needs of women (UNESCO) – fundamental issues related to women's subordinate position
- Practical needs (UNESCO) – immediate necessities such as food, shelter and water
- Colonialism and Slavery and its impact on the social construction of gender
- Sexual division of labour – worked assigned based on sex/gender of an individual
- Legal Authority – power due to official position or rank
- Leadership – ability to influence others, power to exercise authority and authority to make decisions

Theoretical Perspectives

- The Dual Systems Theory (Colgan & Ledwith, 1996) – there are two separate operating systems in society, an economic system and a sex-gender system
- Leadership Theory (Clark, 2013) – Laissez-faire, transactional and transformational
- Ideological v.s. Theoretical/Analytical Barriers to women in leadership (Barriteau, 2001)

Shift from Servicing Model to
Organizing Model

Women's Committee

Why is there a
lack of female
leaders?

Democratizing Role of
Unions

Woman on UNI Global
Executive & UNI's Policy
Position

Research Questions

1. How do male and female union members perceive women in leadership roles in the union
2. What are the key challenges facing women in advancing to leadership in the union
3. What can be done to overcome those challenges

Methodology

- Case Study Design – used because case studies tend to generate answers to 'why', 'what' and 'how' questions. Merriam (2001) also suggested that insights gleaned from case studies can directly influence policy, procedures, and future research
- Sociological Case Study Research Orientation
- Qualitative and Quantitative data collection techniques were employed to facilitate triangulation and increase validity

Sampling

- Purposive sampling – is the process of deliberately selecting a particular sample because it is a source of rich information about a phenomena being investigated

Data Collection

- Surveying Approach
- Questionnaire Instrument
 - Open & closed questions
 - Piloted
 - Administered electronically using Survey monkey
- Semi-standardized interview schedule
- Focus Groups (one female group– 6 members , one male group – 6 members and one mixed -12 members)

Ethical Issues

- Approval was given from the union to conduct the study
- A mediator was present in case of possible disagreements
- Voluntary participation, participants were given the right to withdraw at any time without penalty
- Confidentiality and anonymity was guaranteed and protected , names were never mentioned
- Recordings are kept in a secured place and placed under lock and key
- Minimal physical or psychological risk associated with the study

Limitations

- Very low response rate, only 13 branches responded to the survey out of 63, this made it difficult to make generalizations (general questionnaire)
- Time constraints
- Lack of support from the union with putting together the focus groups
- Some participants arrived after the start time

Data Analysis

- 9 out of 13 branches were headed by women; at the shop floor level in 7 out of 13 branches, females outweigh the males; most branches mentioned women whom they believe can lead the union



“Women are natural leaders” – female

“we live in a society where society tends to push men to lead” - male

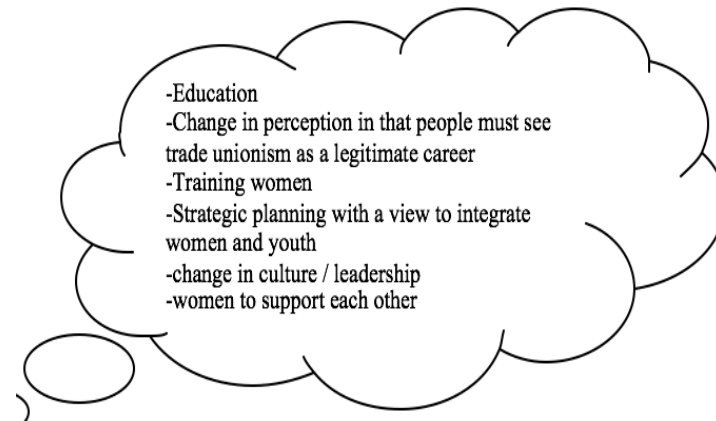
1. How do male and female union members perceive women in leadership roles in the union?
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2. What are the key challenges facing women in advancing to leadership in the union?

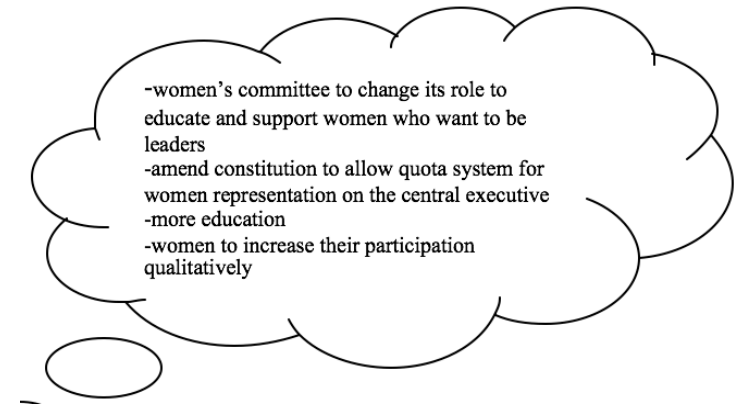
Female Focus Group	Male Focus Group
Women have more house work	Women don't support each other
Women see leadership role in the union as another job	Lack of confidence
Time constraints - Juggling too many things – school, work, union work, relationship, etc	Lack of trust in women to lead
Male chauvinism	Unionism not woman-friendly - Women not prepared to fight and talk back
Cultural norms (women as home-makers)	Not enough incentives and mechanisms for women (policy)
Gender biases/prejudices	Women not aware of avenues to grow in the union
Personal choice	Women fearful of consequence (victimization in workplace because of role in the union)
Lack of qualifications and experience	Lack of support from the male membership
Lack of confidence	
Family commitments (obligations to look after sick family members/siblings)	

3. What can be done to overcome those challenges?

Female



Male



Theoretical Model

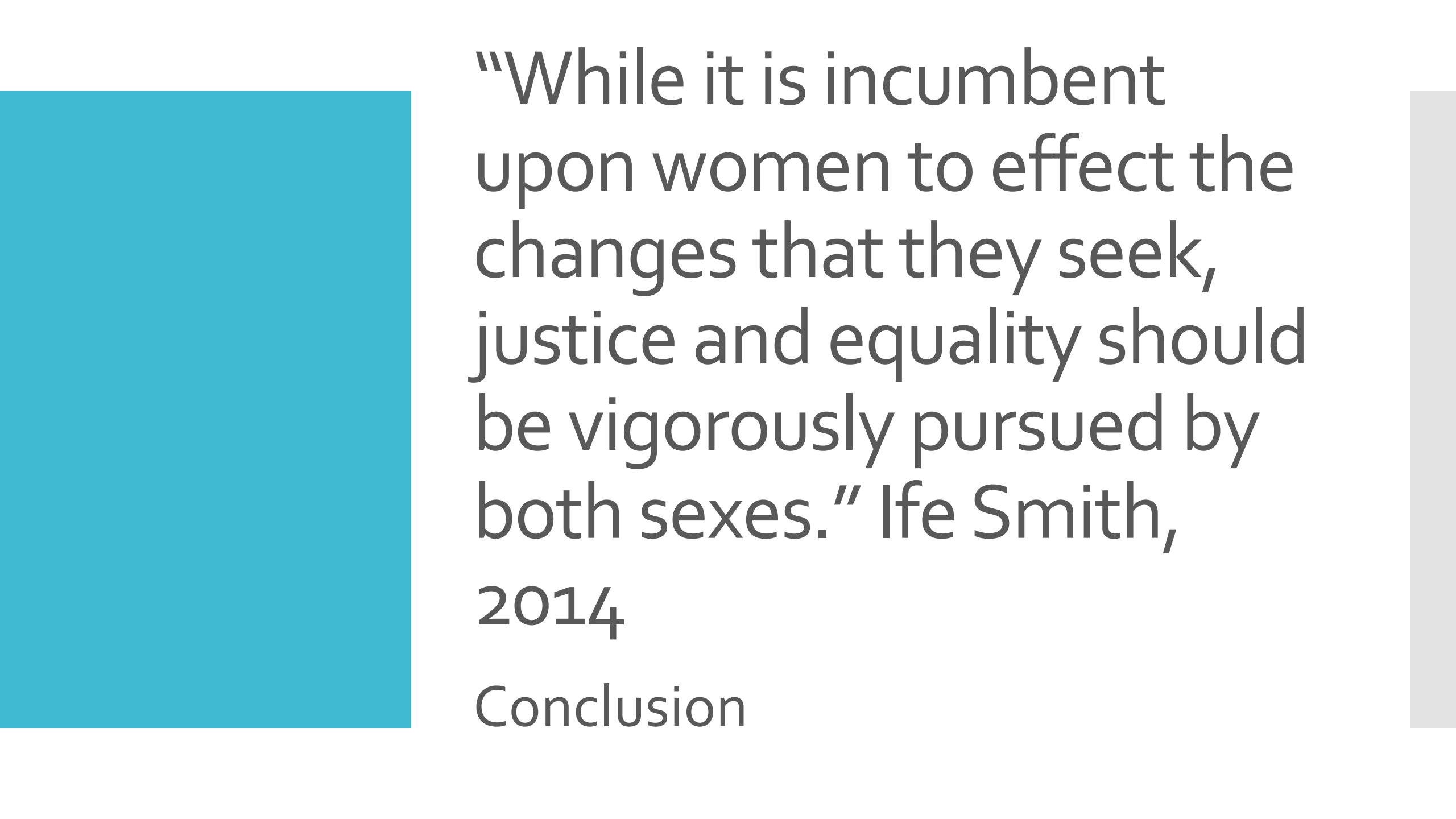
Identify women who want to lead

Train and develop those women identified

Show them how to develop a successful campaign

Recommendations

- Clear policy position on women in leadership, similar to UNI Global
- Increase budget allocations
- Adoption of the transformational type of leadership
- The rise of women's committee – focus on female-only training; education programs aimed at making women better leaders; network with other NGO's to increase capacity and support; and adopt theoretical model developed by the researcher
- Constitutional changes aimed at outlawing slate-type voting
- Succession Planning in view of aging Central Executive
- Strategic Planning for BIGWU as an organization with a clear vision and mission. Planning to incorporate gender mainstreaming
- Strengthening the organizing model through continued education aimed at changing the chauvinistic culture and mindset of its members



“While it is incumbent upon women to effect the changes that they seek, justice and equality should be vigorously pursued by both sexes.” Ife Smith, 2014

Conclusion

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