

Progression of Women to Higher Management Positions in South African Public Sector: A Differential Effect of Employment Equity

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Abstract: This research examined the extend to which African women have progressed to top management positions in the public sector since the EE Act of 1998. The paper became apposite given the growing call for women inclusion in top management positions to enhance gender equity in South Africa. The paper applied a review approach coupled with a quantitative test to assess the level of difference before and after the gender equity act. Applying a t-test of difference in mean growth of progression to top positions before and after the EE Act review of 2013, results indicate that at $P < 0.001$, a significant progress has been achieved African women progression to top management positions in the public sector since the enactment of the EE Act in 1998. However, it was noted that this progress has not been balanced as progress is slanting toward the sectors that are more prone to black economic empowerment (BEE) enablement. The paper recommends that in order to heighten a balanced progress, African women should strive to delve into other sectors that may not necessarily require the BEE enablement; this requires a continuous strive to acquire higher level education and technical skills to compete in all the sectors of South African industries.

Keywords: gender equity; African women; employment equity; discrimination; women in top management.

1. Introduction

Gender issues in Africa have never been the same ever since the concept of sustainability was introduced over the years. (Chiputwa & Qaim, 2016) This is because sustainability has gender connotations and inclusivity. International Institute for Environment and Development (2016) argues that inclusivity plays an important

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role in sustainable economic growth. Governments should therefore prioritise policies that address social inclusion in economic environment. Thus, a South African government took an initiative in 1998 to introduce a number of legislation and policies that were meant to address the past socio-economic injustices. One of such legislation was Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) and Employment Equity Act.

The South African Institute of Chartered Accountants (2016) states that the purpose of the Employment Equity Act, No 55 of 1998 is to promote equal opportunities, by eliminating unfair discrimination amongst the previously disadvantaged groups. The Act promulgate that companies should submit Employment Equity Report annually. These are the reports that this research envisages analysing so as to get a clearer picture on the status of gender equity in South African companies that are listed on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange (JSE). The analysis of the reports will depict how the Act has been implemented across such companies. Therefore, the main objective of this study is to examine whether Employment Equity Act has made any difference in gender status with regards to African women employed at the top management level in different sectors or industries in South Africa.

The other legislation that was geared towards advancing the interests of women in economic mainstream was the Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (B-BBEE) Act No. 53. of 2003. The Act provided a legislative backing toward the enforcement of BEE. The Department of Trade and Industry (2016) advance that the fundamental objective of the B-BBEE was to instill inclusive economic progress of previously disadvantaged individuals. South Africa.info (2016) affirm that BEE is one of the strategies adopted by the government to ensure that the country realise its full economic potential. No country can succeed economically if other sectors of society are excluded. Therefore, one of the overarching purpose of BEE is to enable black women's progression as managers and owners of businesses and, the way in which they access economic activities and infrastructure. BEE is the economic strategy that is employed alongside Employment Equity Act.

2. South African Legislation Regarding Women Empowerment

Employment Equity Act No, 55, 1998 is one of the legislation framework put together by South African government to redress the past injustices towards women. Furthermore, the South African government has removed all legislation that propagated discrimination in the quest for a free and non-racial and non-sexist

society. (Zuma, 2015) This has been achieved through the establishment of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa which serves as the basis for all the legislation in the country. Therefore, the Employment Equity Act like all the other Acts in South Africa, are enched on the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, No. 108 of 1996.

The Bill of Rights emphasises that the fundamental human rights of all, including women, should be respected, and that South Africa belongs to all who lives in it. Furthermore, the Bill of Rights acknowledged the past injustices and unfair discrimination, wherein women were discriminated double, first on the basis of their race and secondly on the basis of their gender. The South African History Online (2016) states that South African women were tired of being powerless, and of not making any significant change in their lives, as they were discriminated against primarily because of their race, and also because of their class and gender. Africa Institute for South Africa (2017) maintains that women are the corner stone of every society and should therefore be admired and not be ill-treated.

The Bill of Rights speaks against discrimination, and it emphasises equality before the law, and that all people have equal rights and freedom in the country. Therefore, no persons in the country can be discriminated against on the basis of race, colour, religion or gender. The Employment Equity Act and other related legislation were thus instituted to ensure equality before the law in the work places and also to advance gender equity in the work places.

Employment Equity Act No. 55, 1998 was instituted specifically to achieve equity in the workplaces, by ensuring that all occupational categories and levels have an equitable representation of gender and other designated groups. Chapter III of the Act further states that companies are urged to implement affirmative action measures for people who had been previously disadvantaged.

Therefore, companies were mandated by the Act to develop Employment Equity Plans that were to outline the objectives of companies in relation to achieving equity targets. The Employment Equity Plans were to also include the affirmative action measures that the companies were to implement. Companies were also required to become BEE compliant.

Nevertheless, not all companies are happy with the BEE strategy. Writer (2015) laments that the current system of BEE benefits only the elite of society and not all the majority of black South Africans. He further suggested that an alternative system that will be embracing should be found. Another study that highlighted the gaps in

BEE was conducted by Kruger. Kruger (2011, p. 207) conducted a study on the impact of BEE on South African businesses. The study focused on ten dimensions of business performance and 500 managers from small to large companies participated in the study. Most participants in the study concluded that BEE compliance will not improve business performance.

Companies that are rated high on BEE performance have been found to most likely inclined to advance the promotion of women into senior positions. Patel and Pillay (2015) observed that companies that are directly affected by BEE have transformed, because of commercial drive. It should also be noted that other sectors in South Africa have also improved in appointing women at strategic level. Zuma (2015) observed that the status of African women has improved as for example, women are appointed as judges, magistrates and senior managers in the public service. He however also stated that the assessment of the status of African women for the past 20 years, has not changed as rapidly as planned. African women remain the hardest hit by inequality, poverty and unemployment. This implies that companies or sectors that do not have any direct commercial beneficiation to BEE, have transformed to the minimal. They still have fewer women at decision-making positions, despite the government initiatives and incentives for companies and other organisations to empower women. Government wants to see women empowered in such a way that they are also visible in the public space. (Aplein, 2017)

3. Theoretical Framework

This article is embedded on the gender equity theory that propagates that women and men should be given equal opportunities in life. Niemann (2002) consents that women should be given equal opportunities to those of their male counterparts, so as to close the gender gaps that are reflected as not closing any time soon. The gender equity theory acknowledges that the concept gender is a social construct that discusses the role of a woman and of a man as defined by society. The World Health Organisation (2017) agree that gender is a socially constructed concept that defines the characteristics of both men and women, in such a way that it informs their acceptable roles and relationships in society.

The World Health Organization (2017) further states that gender roles can change and that they vary according to different societies. Societies defines the behavioural patterns upon which males and females should conform, any deviation is perceived in a negative light. Niemann (2002) maintains that the problems of modern societies

emanate from the dichotomy that is created between maleness and femaleness. She further states that maleness and femaleness has given rise to masculinity and feminity which tend to be skewed towards males. Males are given more opportunities and privileges than women, in many cultures. Thus, in a traditional African culture, women are expected to be at home taking care of the family, that is, the husband and children. Roobix (2005) pointed out that back in the years, the role of a woman was repressive and constrictive in a number of ways.

Van Zyl and Roodt (2003) also observed that it has been a custom within many societies to ask a woman in a subtle manner to choose between career mobility and family stability. A wife is perceived to be good when she carries out her husband's orders and agrees to every statement that the husband makes. Women in most cultures are prohibited from being vocal or from voicing out their opinions in public. Any woman who is perceived to be too much outgoing and vocal, is treated as a misfit in society, and is prone to be excluded from other social activities because she would be a bad influence to other good wives.

Equity between men and women was non-existence in many African cultures. Thus, both boys and girls were socialised into such culture. Roobix (2005) argues that a child cannot escape the context in which she or he is raised. She or he is likely to be infused in the cultural and behavioural settings. It is therefore not surprising to find out that women in modern societies are still relegated to the household chores that are not directly linked to economic beneficitation. Men are the ones that are expected to fend for their families. Moser (2012) contends that women are subordinated in status to men and that they are still having limited access and control to resources.

Nevertheless, most women are now actively involved in the work that is directly linked to economic beneficitation which is not yet fully accepting them into decision making positions. The playing field for women in the work places is not yet level, men are still given more opportunities to grow and manage in the work than women. It is therefore not surprising even in business, to find that women are still perceived as being misplaced and irrelevant. They are consciously and subconsciously relegated to lower managerial levels, and are also sidelined when senior and decision making positions are advertised. Pretorious, de Villiers Human, Niemann, Klinck and Alt (2002) cautioned that gender inequality has negative implications for organisation, it therefore has to be rectified.

4. Related Literature

Thomas (2003) evaluated the employment equity practices in selected South African companies. One of the major findings of the study was lack of support towards the implementation of employment equity. Nevertheless, the study concluded that there was progress in companies concerning gender equity, even though such progress was slow. On other similar study, Pretorious, de Villiers Human, Niemann, Klinck and Alt (2002) agree that women are still in the minority in most senior positions.

Globally, the European Commission (2016) observed that there are still fewer women in decision-making roles in business and in politics. This is buttressed by Llopis (2013) who maintain that during July 2013, the total number of femal presidents and prime ministers in the world were 19 and that only about 4.6% of CEO positions in the Fortune 500 companies were held by women. Aplein (2017) argues that the low representation of women in the decision-making positions pose as a threat to development of the country. South African organizations also reflect the global trend of underrepresentation of women in leadership positions. HR Future (2015) reports that only about 3.6%, 5.5% of South African women occupy the position of CEOs and company chairpersons. Similarly only about 17.1% and 21.4% of women are in the positions of directors and assorted executive management positions. This seeming marginalisation of women is apparent in different organizations including institutions of learning, non-governmental organizations and companies.

Although legislation is seen as tool for gender equality (McBride & Parry, 2016), but Klein (2007, XXVI) is of the opinion that gender equity should be obtained through education. However, success in gender equity will also be achieved if women can actively avail themselves for promotional posts. Rarieya (2016, p. 10) observed that women tend to be less aggressive than men in applying for promotional posts. They are also reluctant to negotiate better pay as compared to their male counter-parts. The notion of women being less likely to be promoted as compared to men was affirmed by the study which was conducted by Lebowitz across 118 North American companies. The study discovered that women were 15% less likely to be promoted than men. The reason being that fewer women than men aspire for top positions and some fell that their work is being undermined by their males colleagues. The study recommended that there should be institute training to combat gender biasness, and that organisations should set gender targets. Along with setting

of gender targets, the study recommended that the leaders in various companies should be held liable for achieving such targets. (Lebowitz, 2015)

Nevertheless, The United Nations has embarked on Sustainable Development Goals to transform the world. Goal Number 5 of the Sustainable Development Goals to Transform the World states as follows: “Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls”. (United Nations, 2016) Gender equality is an aspect of human right that promotes a peaceful and effective sustainable economic development United Nations (2016). Girls and women should be given opportunity to participate actively in the economy.

Cohen (2006) maintains that women in the Western countries have achieved a significant progress in as far as economic participation is concerned during, the nineteenth and twentieth century. Countries such as North America, Europe and Australia has witness a great emancipation of women in the work place. However, many women in developing countries, and some in the non-Western cultures, have seen women being stripped of their fundamental human rights.

Western countries have made great strides in empowering women. This signifies that women empowerment is an achievable goal. Empowerment of women is a necessary element for strengthening the economy. Zuma (2015) states that the economy grows faster when women are involved in economic activities. When women are involved in economic activities, plans to achieve elimination of poverty and reduction of inequality are achieved quicker than anticipated.

According to Statistics South Africa (2013) states that women make up 51% of the Republic of South Africa population of 49.99 million people. Hence it is imperative that women should be developed and given a space to make significant contributions to society. Empowerment of women also contribute to sustainability and eradication of poverty because empowered women bring about transformation in society. Aplein (2017) maintains that women are the backbone and pillars of strength in households in modern societies. Therefore empowerment should occur at individual, organisational and at the public space Shabangu (2015). The participation of women in the economy is a vital tool for a resilient and sustainable economic growth. (United Nations Women, 2017)

The United Nations Women (2017) advocates that in order to improve women empowerment, women organisation has an advocacy role to play, which includes amongst others, to influence corporate leaders to accommodate gender equality strategy and to promote the education and training of women.

Empowered women increasingly influence the society in a positive way. Women should be trained to be confident and subsequently hold public leadership roles. Thus, for women to participate fully in leadership roles, transformation is necessary. Men should be prepared to mentor and share leadership roles with the women. This is because men are still dominating in holding leadership roles. This is because they still assume lesser responsibilities in the households as compared to women. Rarieya (2017) also pointed out that men predominately hold the organisational power that serves as an advantage on their part, and that they are well established career wise and have social networks that provide them with greater access to information and support. Van Zyl and Roodt (2003) also agree that dominant career model in most companies is based on men perception. Therefore, companies should scrutinize their organisational cultures so as to create a balance in career model perception. Women should be afforded the opportunity to map out their careers successfully and to create a balance between career opportunities and domestic responsibilities. Thus, men should likewise be encouraged to share household responsibilities and to support their partners that aspire for leadership roles.

5. Methodology

Research methodology should be linked with the relevant research objective. (Bryman & Bell, 2015) Two approaches were applied in this paper – qualitative review approach and a quantitative approach to buttress the points raised in the review. Whilst the review section in the literature review has mixed views on the current status of women in top management position in South Africa, the quantitative analysis, which follows, was an attempt to add a brief statistical focus where the women stand in top management currently. Since the objective of this research is to examine whether Employment Equity Act has made any difference in gender status with regards to African women employed at the top management level in different sectors or industries in South Africa, the appropriate analytical methodology is the statistical t-test of difference in mean of scores of African women employed between two periods within the Employment Equity Act of 1998. The scores were retrieved by the researchers from the annual reports of the Commission for Employment Equity (CEE), Department of Labour South Africa. whilst the Employment Equity Act was issued in 1998, the first report which covered the period 1999 – 2001 was released in 2001. The Employment Equity Act of 1998 was allowed to operate for a long period before the amendment in 2013; this long gap was functional to ascertain

the effectiveness and developments required to improve the effectiveness. Therefore, the researchers decided to retrieve data from two key annual reports – the 2012 and 2016 CEE annual reports. The justification for using the 2012 and 2016 CEE annual reports is that the EE Act of 1998 was only amended in 2013 since the promulgation of the act, therefore the authors used the 2012 African women employment scores to represent the African women employment performance for the pre-EE amendment period. Similarly, the 2016 African women EE scores represent the post-2013 EE Act amendment performance. This statistical approach will enable future researcher to replicate this paper with ease – by extending the time period of differential analysis.

The t-statistic Mode:

$$t = [(x_1 - x_2) - d] / SE$$

where:

x_1 = the mean of pre-2013 African women employment scores

x_2 = the mean of post-2013 African women employment scores

d = the presumed mean difference amongst the population means

SE = the standard error.

The t-test result is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Paired two sample for means

Table 1 T-Test: Paired Two Sample for Means (African Women Employed in Different Employment Sectors between 2013 & 2016)		
	<i>AW-2013</i>	<i>AW-2016</i>
Mean	3.9	5.18181818
Variance	11.344	12.1776364
Observations	11	11
Pearson Correlation	0.97112081	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	10	
t Stat	-5.1045427	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.00023048	
t Critical one-tail	1.81246112	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.00046096	
t Critical two-tail	2.22813885	

The analysis in Table 1 was conducted to examine the extent to which African women has progressed in their participation in top management positions in different employment sectors/industries in South Africa. Results from the t-test of difference in mean scores of African women representation in top management between the first phase (1998 - 2012) and the second phase (2013 - 2016) of the EE Act show that African women representation in top management positions has significantly increased with an alpha of $P < 0.001$; this implies that African women representation in top management positions during the post-EE Act amendment has indeed progressed since the promulgation of the EE Act in 1998 especially during the post-2013 EE Act ammendment. The significant increase in mean representation score indicate that the EE Act amendment of 2013 has added a boost toward the enhancement of African women representation in top management positions in different industries in South Africa. The practical implication is that every act that is promulgated to enhance social and economic equity need not be stagnant and/or sacrosanct, it deserves continuous monitoring and evaluation with a view to take advantages of successes while improving upon bottlenecks. Although African women have progressed significantly to top management positions, the progress is tilted when compared to a balanced progress in all sectors and/or industries. The progress so far seem to lean toward the sectors where BEE is more prominent.

6. Conclusion

This research sought to evaluated the extend to which African women have progressed to top management positions since the EE Act of 1998. The approach involved a review of related literature and an empirical analysis of the progress using data from the Commission for Employment Equity Annual Reports. In order to ascertain whether progress has been made regarding African women advancement to top management positions in South Africa, a statistical t-test of difference in means was conducted. (pre and post EE Act review of 2013) Whilst the pre-2013 data represented the progression from 1998 to 2012, the post EE Act represented the progression from 2013 to 2016. The results from the statistical analysis indicate that at $P < 0.001$, a significant progress has been achieved since the enactment of EE Act in 1998 regarding African women progression to top management positions. However this progress has not been balanced as progress is tilted toward the sectors that are more prone to BEE effects. The paper recommends that in order to enhance a balanced progress, African women should strive to delve into other sectors that

may not necessarily require the BEE enablement; this requires continuous strive to acquire higher level of education and technical skills to compete favourably in all the sectors. The women requires the support of government to improve their educational background and to acquire technical and business skills. Given the results above, the paper recommends further research in the near future to assess the balanced nature of women progression to top management positions.

7. References

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