



## Exploring the Gap Between Male and Female Employment in the South African Workforce

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### Abstract

*Women in South Africa have for decades, experienced discrimination in the workplace because certain positions such as top and senior management posts were predominately given to men. If women were employed, they were mostly offered positions at the lower levels of the organisation, or specific jobs such as secretaries or administrative jobs. To address such discrimination, to ensure gender equality is promoted and women are offered equal employment opportunities, the South African government has since 1994 adopted different anti-discriminatory laws to expedite equal employment to improve the position of women in the workplace. To explore the extent to which the position of women in the workplace has changed – if at all – since the dawn of democracy, this paper provides an analysis of women's employment standing in 2014 in the South African workforce. The goal of this study is to identify employment gender gaps both in terms of employment numbers, as well as employment in different sectors. To explore this objective, the study first provides an overview of some of the anti-discriminatory laws that were put in place by the South African government to promote equal opportunities for all South Africans, especially women. Second, the study develops a conceptual framework based on an analysis of the literature on gender equality and its link to equal employment for women. Finally, the study provides an overview of the South African labour force as at 2014, showing the gap between male and female employment. The findings confirm that despite South Africa's progressive legislative and policy measures, women remain underrepresented in the workplace, meaning that progress in redressing unfair discrimination has been slow and/or uneven. The findings also reveal that men continue to dominate the workforce, especially in top and senior management positions.*

**Keywords:** Gender Equality, Equal Employment, South Africa, Workforce, Women.

### 1. Introduction

Globally, women have been subjected to all forms of discrimination, and for decades, their access to the workforce was limited. In areas where women had access, they were mostly employed in positions linked to the lower occupational levels of organisations. In the quest for a non-racial, non-sexist and democratic society for all, in 1994 the South African government implemented various anti-discriminatory laws. These were also aimed at bringing in more women into the workforce and ensuring that they have similar employment opportunities as their male counterparts. Under the apartheid government, the South African workplace was characterised by many cases of inequality, unfair treatment and unfair discrimination, especially against women. Since women's issues such as equal rights, equality, welfare and empowerment came to the forefront after the democratisation process, it was important for the government to institute measures to address discrimination against women, including in the workplace (Naidoo and Kongolo, 2004).

In accordance with the South African Constitution of 1996, the government has continued

pushing for equality and equal employment for women and this is evident in policies like the Employment Equity Act of 1998, the Broad Based Black Economic Empowerment Act of 2003 and its amendments, and the National Policy Framework for Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality of 2000. It can thus be seen that South Africa has adopted legislative directives to embrace a new and broader agenda for equal employment opportunities for women in an attempt to improve women's standing in the workplace. According to Sarwar and Abbasi (2013:208) employment is essential for individual and collective well-being, it enhances quality of life, not only to the employee but also to related people. Therefore, investing in women's employment is essential for economic growth and the development of human resources. If implemented correctly, these anti-discriminatory directives implemented by the South African government will allow women to have a chance to enter the workplace in an equal manner, not only as a form of empowerment for women, but also to contribute equally to economic growth and capacity building within the country. In turn, giving women equal employment opportunities will increase their social and economic standing, therefore addressing gender inequality and discrimination.

The South African government argues that extensive progress has been made to ensure equal employment opportunities for women. For example, a report by the Department of Women (2015) highlights that the country has achieved considerable progress in many aspects of women's economic empowerment through, inter alia, increases in educational attainment; labour market participation; access to credit, land and properties; reduced poverty and inequality, and in sharing of paid work. The report further argues that ensuring economic empowerment for women – who account for half of the South African population – will not only contribute to economic growth, but can also help advance women's human rights. In the same report, President Jacob Zuma confirmed that extensive progress has been made to advance women, saying:

*'There has been much progress in the empowerment of women. The number of women participating in politics has increased. For instance; we have women judges and magistrates; we have many more in senior management positions in the public service. In the labour market, women are now able to work in sectors that were previously white and male dominated, such as mining, construction and infrastructure development' (Republic of South Africa (RSA) Department of Women, 2015).*

Despite government's claims about the progress made to better women's employment position, literature shows that progress towards parity in the workplace in South Africa is insufficient and slow; there is still widespread poverty and extreme inequality (RSA, Department of Labour, 2015). The United Nations (UN) (2015) confirms this statement saying, although it's more than 20 years since the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, several pledges remain unfulfilled and gender equality progress in the workplace has been slow in many countries, including South Africa. In support, Sarwar and Abbasi (2013:208) observe that women have always contributed to the country's economic and social well-being, and although immensely undermined, their participation in the labour force remains imperceptible because most women work in the informal sectors of the labour market. The UN (2015) reported that in the economic arena the number of women who have entered the labour force progressed from 40% to 48% in 20 years, this means only 8% growth in eight years. This progress is remarkably slow, and if this pace continues, it will take 50 years to achieve parity in Africa.

Within this context, it is important to explore the extent (to) and levels at which women are represented in the South African workplace.

## 2. Methodology

The primary data used in this paper was sourced from the South African Department of Labour's 14<sup>th</sup> Commission for Employment Equity Annual Report, which is based on 24,291 reports received from different sectors, with a total of 7,018,881 employees. The data consists of the following number of employees: national government 157,365; provincial government 639,528; local government 174,676; private sector 5,162,074; non-profit organisations 437,946; state owned companies 173,758; and educational institutions 273,531. Secondary data was obtained from

books, journals and relevant government departments.

### 3. Conceptualising Gender Equality

This section of the study defines gender equality, explains why it is needed, and why it's necessary in the workplace. According to Yehualashet (2010) the case for gender equality and equal rights for women can be traced back to many decades of hard work by women's rights' advocates, humanitarian organisations and development agencies. This rights regime was born in response to horrific violations of human rights prior to and during World War II, and the tragedies of the 1930s and 1940s, which gave impetus for establishing and institutionalising a global human rights regime dedicated to the promotion and protection of human rights (Farhoumand-Sims, 2009). Equality between men and women has been a UN goal since its inception, and this is reflected in the adoption of the Charter of the United Nations (1945) and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), which served as foundations for equal rights. These documents have inspired a large number of treaties, conventions and customary laws addressing a wide range of human rights issues and topics (Farhoumand-Sims, 2009). According to Devlet (2006) the United Nations Charter is significant in that it helped individuals or groups to gain access to the international law system. It provided them with the restitution rights of international law, and as a result, contributed to expanding the state-based discourse of international law.

Defining gender inequality, Dorius and Firebaugh (2010) posit that it occurs if the distribution of females and males deviates in some characteristics (e.g. life expectancy, education, labour force, political power and economic wealth) from their ratio in population. The authors contend that the participation of women in economic activities outside their homes can help them achieve political and social liberation. They further observe that employment of women is linked to low fertility rates and greater trends of family planning, thus helping to control the population. Women working outside their homes gain more self-confidence, independence, influence over families, awareness about health and enhanced social activities (Dorius and Firebaugh, 2010; Kabeer and Mahmud, 2004; Iversen and Rosenbluth, 2006). De Waal (2006:209) observes 'Gender equality refers to women having the same opportunities in life as men, including the ability to participate in the public sphere. It assumes that once the barriers to participation are removed, there is a level playing field'. Devlet (2006: 25) points out that the achievement of gender equality has become a central goal of good governance; it is impossible to talk about human rights, democracy or empowerment if half of the population of a country is discriminated against. Thus, governance plays a determining role in realising gender equality in a given society, ensuring that the voices of the poorest and most marginalised, which are mostly women, are heard.

McCloskey and Zaller (1984: 342) remind us that equality has been one of the most standout values in the democratic tradition, but this notion clashes with the real world since no society has ever achieved this. In addition, they observe that the theory of democracy rests on the notion that all people are of equal worth, are equal before the law and are supposed to enjoy equal rights and opportunities. An earlier study by Dahl (1971:1-3) indicates that although a core part of democracy is the responsiveness of government to the preferences of its citizens, theory and practice differ and gender inequality continues to pervade many aspects of society. The UN (2002:1) states that:

*'Equality is the cornerstone of every democratic society that aspires to social justice and human rights. It often means women having the same opportunities in life as men, for instance equal access to education and employment, which does not necessarily lead to equality of outcomes'.*

During a round-table discussion for senior UN officials on 'Democracy and gender equality' held on 4th May 2011 at the UN headquarters in Washington, it was reiterated that all governments across the globe should address and advance equal participation for women in decision making, noting that democracy and gender equality are interlinked and mutually reinforcing. At this discussion, the then Secretary General, Ban Ki-Moon demanded gender equality should be treated as an explicit goal of democracy building, not an 'add on'. He stated:

*'While women's political participation improves democracy, the reverse is also true; democracy is*

*an incubator to gender equality. It provides public space for discussion of human rights and women's empowerment, it enables women's groups to mobilize, it makes it easier for women to realize their political, civil, economic and social rights. Experience shows that democratic ideals of inclusiveness, accountability and transparency cannot be achieved without laws, policies, measures and practices that address inequalities'.*

Human, Bluen and Davies (1999) view equal employment as the provision of an environment that allows all individuals to realise their full potential. They argue, if talent was dispensed throughout society at random, societies which gave equal opportunities to all citizens would gain more from the variety of talent released. Equal employment opportunity will be accomplished when all gaps between diverse employees have been erased and disadvantaged people brought to a level where they can compete equally and be given equal opportunity to do so without any form of discrimination. Armstrong (2006) posits that it is important that an organisation's equal opportunity policy spell its determination to provide equal opportunities to all, irrespective of sex, race, creed and marital status. According to Rabe (2001) equal opportunity in the workplace suggests that all people should be treated similarly, free from artificial barriers or prejudices or preferences, besides when particular distinctions can be explicitly justified. Specific to employment, the concept of equality requires that important jobs should go to those 'most qualified', to persons most likely to perform ably in a given task, and not for arbitrary or insignificant reasons such as circumstances of birth, upbringing, friendship ties to whoever is in power, religion, sex, ethnicity, race, caste, or 'involuntary personal attributes' such as disability, age or sexual preferences.

#### **4. Statutory and Regulatory Directives - Ensuring Gender Equality in the Workplace**

This section focuses on statutory and regulatory directives instituted by South Africa to address gender inequality, specifically with regard to advancing this issue in the workplace. South Africa's inequalities have been addressed in its highest authority, namely the Constitution, Act 108 of 1996, whose overall purpose is to create and build a society where women and men are equal, regardless of race and other distinctions. The right to gender equality is critical in respect of South Africa's unique history, as it is stated in section 9(3) of the Constitution that neither the state nor any person may discriminate directly or indirectly on the grounds of gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status or any ground or combination of grounds listed or unlisted in section 9 (3). In this regard, the Constitution, 1996 highlights equality as the full and equal enjoyment of all rights and freedoms. The adoption of the Constitution was a vital step towards a strategy to address historic legacies of inequalities between men and women in South Africa (Scribner and Lambert, 2010). Similarly, Bauer and Taylor (2005:249) add that 'the South African Constitution incorporates individual rights along with a wide array of social and cultural rights, and establishes a clear commitment to overcoming past injustices, while recognising diversity'. Gouws (1996) observes that it was not until the introduction of the 'Bill of Rights' that all women in South Africa received formal recognition as equal citizens.

Another important legislation is the Employment Equity Act, no. 55 of 1998, which recognises that as a result of apartheid and other discriminatory laws and practices, there are disparities in employment, occupation and income within the national labour market. These disparities created pronounced disadvantages for certain categories of people that it cannot be corrected simply by removing discriminative laws, therefore this Act was adopted to increase equal opportunities in the workplace with the purpose to do away with unfair discrimination. This could be done by implementing affirmative action measures to redress the disadvantages in employment experienced by previously designated groups (blacks, women and people with disabilities), ensuring equitable representation in all occupational categories and levels in the workforce. It is expected of organisations to take positive employment equity measures, to show what steps have been taken to train, develop and retain people from designated groups, and through these measures; create equal employment opportunities, especially for the previously disadvantaged groups. The Act requires companies to be socially and morally mindful to their employees, and react to their legitimate rights and claims according to ethical standards of fairness and justice (RSA,

Employment Equity Act, 1998).

Coetzee and Vermeulen (2003:18) note that affirmative action is the purposeful and planned placement or development of competent or potentially competent persons. They suggest affirmative action requires proper planning to ensure that appointment is done on a competency basis, reflecting the demographics of the country. Mc Gregor (2006:387) observes that the purpose of affirmative action is to ensure the achievement of substantive equity through the long-term goal of reducing inequality. This author suggests that the promise of the equal-opportunity approach is a legal right afforded to all South Africans, especially women who were part of the disadvantaged group. The right to equal opportunity should be woven into the fabric of every organisation's strategic planning to offer persons from disadvantaged groups the opportunity to equal employment. This piece of legislation should be instituted by organisations as a supportive strategy for the advancement of employment equity objectives with the vision of transforming the work environment, ensuring that persons from designated groups such as women maximise their full potential (McGregor, 2006).

The Commission on Gender Equality Act, no 39 of 1996 is an equally important document, which was adopted to monitor and evaluate policies and practices of all organs of state at all levels, to promote gender equality and make recommendations to parliament where the commission deems necessary. A further function of this Act is to develop, conduct or manage educational programmes to foster public understanding of matters relating to the promotion of gender equality. South Africa also has the Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act, no 4 of 2000 in place to prevent or prohibit unfair discrimination. This Act gives effect to the basic principles of the Constitution; and promotes the values of non-racialism and non-sexism. Its purpose is to also educate the public and raise awareness of the meaning of substantive equality, including measures to protect or advance persons or categories of persons disadvantaged by unfair discrimination; it focuses on redressing past discriminative practices.

The South African democratic dispensation acknowledges the role women play in the economy, and has committed itself to do away with gender discrimination and to improve the status of women in the workforce by introducing the National Policy Framework for Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality, 2000. This framework is in place to guide the process of developing laws, policies, procedures and practices to ensure equal rights and opportunities for women and men in all spheres and structures of government, the workplace, community and family. According to Mvimbi (2009) this legislative framework proposes that gender issues be prioritised and included at the centre of government agendas and not relegated to secondary status. This means that gender equality needs to be the focus of transformation processes within all the structures, institutions, procedures, practices and programmes of government, its agencies and parastatals, civil society and the private sector. Ruppel (2008:21) concurs with this statement saying,

*'The overarching goal of this framework is to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of both female and male persons, and in this respect, the policy framework provides mechanisms and guidelines for all sectors and other stakeholders for planning, implementing and monitoring gender equality strategies and programmes in order to ensure that these would facilitate gender equality and women's empowerment'.*

In acknowledging the under-representation and participation of women in local government in South Africa, the Department of Provincial and Local Government launched a Gender Policy Framework for Local Government in 2007 to give guidance and support to local government around gender mainstreaming and the empowerment of women (Hicks, 2011). This policy framework outlines a comprehensive institutional arrangement to address and implement gender mainstreaming, it recommends a women's caucus to act as an empowering forum for women councillors as well as a gender equality committee at council level to provide political oversight to municipal gender mainstreaming processes. The purpose of this framework is also to provide clear and concrete guidance on how and when councils should integrate or mainstream gender in their internal functions and procedures in order to establish and implement an enabling environment for all municipalities and other local government stakeholders.

What this means for local government is that every policy or strategy that is developed should be able to address gender mainstreaming in its policies and practices, ensuring gender equality is promoted and employment opportunities for women are created. The ultimate goal of this framework is to assist local government with the delivery of its developmental mandate, ensuring women does not stay in disadvantaged positions. This framework also advocates for the establishment of institutional arrangements in particular gender focal points in municipalities, it requires that these processes be budgeted for with a clear stipulation of performance targets. Furthermore, the framework makes provision for fair and equitable selection and recruitment, career pathing and the overall improvement of working conditions for women in municipalities. The Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality Bill was adopted in 2013 to promote equal representation and participation. It's also intended to prohibit unfair discrimination against women and provided sanctions for non-compliance. However, this Bill was scrapped, as it was viewed as a duplication of other relevant legislation (Hartley, 2014).

At a national level, South Africa subscribes to the global framework for gender equality and is presented by a number of international, regional and sub-regional instruments. One of the most important frameworks is the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women adopted in 1979. This convention defines the right of women to be free from discrimination and sets the core principles to protect this right. It establishes an agenda for national action to end discrimination, and provides the basis for achieving equality between men and women through ensuring women's equal access to, and equal opportunities in political and public life as well as education, health and employment. (UN, 1979).

The adoption of this convention is attributed to the work of the Commission on the Status of Women which was established in 1946 to monitor the promotion of women's rights. It is firmly rooted in the objectives of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and reaffirms the faith in fundamental rights, the dignity and worth of a human and the equal rights of men and women (Ntlama, 2010). This convention has been ratified by 180 states, making it one of the most ratified international treaties. In 1995, the Beijing Platform for Action generated global commitments to advance a wider range of women's rights. This platform affirms nation's commitment to the inalienable rights of women and girls, their empowerment and equal participation in all spheres of life, including in the economic domain. It identifies women's role in the economy as a critical area of concern, calls attention to the need to promote and facilitate women's equal access to employment and resources as well as the harmonization of work and family responsibilities for women and men (UN, 2010). As part of constructing its new democracy and the institutionalisation of gender mainstreaming, South Africa demonstrated its commitment and ratified to the Beijing Platform for Action in 1995, adopting the strategy as a way to promote gender equality in this country (Jahan, 1995).

South Africa is also part of the South African Development Community (SADC) Gender and Development Protocol which was adopted in 2008. It compels SADC member states to expedite efforts towards gender equity in the region. The protocol identified a target of 50% parity with men in all areas of decision-making by 2020, with an incremental approach adopted by each country. In order to expedite gender equity it is has been agreed that all member states take measures to ensure the effective participation of women in decision-making; they must adopt indicators for achieving this. Member states also agreed to an elaborate multi-faceted approach to capacity building that includes empowering women and engaging men. Another instrument South Africa has agreed to is the United Nations Millennium Development Goals. These goals sought to halve poverty and unemployment by 2014, with goal 3 especially tracking key elements and indicators of women's social, economic and political participation, guiding the building of gender equitable societies. The centrality of gender equality and women empowerment in the Millennium Development Goals also emanates from the fact that women constitute approximately half of humanity, yet their potential is underutilised, their aspirations undermined, and their rights to access opportunities marginalised. Ntlama (2010) posits the protection of human rights requires countries such as South Africa, (who have become international role models) ensure other states adhere to the prescripts of the international community. The adherence to international norms is important for the actual enjoyment of the rights enshrined in the conventions.

Given the above, it can be seen that South Africa has created a platform for gender equality and equal employment opportunities in the workplace through the implementation of various legislative frameworks. Although it is important that the necessary legislative frameworks are in place to ensure gender equality and the equal employment of women, having documents in place will not change women's positions, it is only the effective implementation thereof that will do so.

## 5. A Global Picture of Women in the Workplace

In an attempt to understand whether the world made any strides to advance women's standing in the workplace, this section provides information on the global status of women in the workplace. According to the International Labour Organisation (2008a), worldwide, 1.2 billion women were working in 2007, almost 200 million more than in 1997. By 2008, women accounted for 40 % of all employed people worldwide, but of this figure 46.9% were employed in occupations related to the services sector. With the evident growth of women's employment in services, it has been noted that a new gender gap is appearing. According to Bezbaruah (2008) it is less about the differences between male and female participation rates, and more about 'inequity in the quality of employment' – with women generally segregated in 'poorly - paid, insecure home based or informal employment' Further, Bezbaruah (2008:38) observes that despite the numerical rise of women in managerial and professional jobs, few women make it to the top of the occupational hierarchies, and the under-representation of women in senior managerial positions is a recurring theme across the services sector.

The World Economic (2014) indicates in the nine years, 2006 to 2014 of measuring the global gender gap the world has seen only a small improvement in equality for women in the workplace. This report highlights that the gender gap in economic participation and opportunity stood at 60% worldwide, up from 56% in 2006 when the forum first started measuring it. It also emphasises the persisting gender gap divides across and within regions based on the nine years of data available for the 142 countries measured. While the gender gap in economic participation and opportunity lags stubbornly behind, the gap for political empowerment, the fourth pillar measured remains still wider, standing at 21% – although this area has seen the most improvement since 2006. The report shows that Iceland continues to top the overall rankings in The Global Gender Gap Index for the sixth consecutive year, Finland ranks in second position and Norway holds third place. Sweden remains in fourth position and Denmark gains three places and ranks in the fifth position. Northern European countries dominate the top 10, with Ireland in eighth position, while Belgium (position 10), Nicaragua (position 6), Rwanda (position 7) and the Philippines (position 9) completing the top 10. However, much of the progress on gender equality over the last 10 years has come from more women entering politics in the workforce (World Economic Forum, 2014). While more women and men have joined the workforce over the last decade, more women than men entered the labour force in 49 countries. In the case of politics, globally there are now 26% more female parliamentarians and 50% more female ministers compared to nine years ago.

According to the UN (2010) although there has been an increase of women in the labour market, women are predominantly and increasingly employed in the services sector (e.g. retail, food services, call centres) and wage gaps and occupational segregation continues to persist throughout the world. The services sector accounts for at least three-quarters of women's employment in most of the more developed regions, in Latin America and the Caribbean. In contrast, agriculture still accounts for more than half of the employment of women and men in sub-Saharan Africa (excluding Southern Africa), and of women in Southern Asia. In those regions, the majority of workers – women to a greater extent than men – are in vulnerable employment, being either own account workers or contributing family workers. The UN further indicates that part-time employment is common for women in most of the more developed regions and some less developed regions – and is increasing almost everywhere for both women and men.

Statistics of regional trends show that women had between 2002 to 2007 higher unemployment rates than men in Africa, South East Asia and Latin America, while in East Asia, Central and Eastern Europe and more recently in advanced economies, there were gender gaps in unemployment rates (female unemployment rates higher than male rates). Globally, between 2002

and 2007 women's employment to population ratio remained constant at about 49% compared to 73% for men. The data further shows that globally gender gaps in the economic indicators of unemployment and employment trends towards convergence between 2002 to 2007, but with reversals coinciding with the period of the crisis from 2008 to 2012 in many regions. The gender gap in participation examined over a longer period of the last two decades shows convergence at the global level in the 1990s, no convergence over the subsequent decade, with increasing gaps in some regions like South and East Asia and Central and Eastern Europe (International Labour Organisation, 2012).

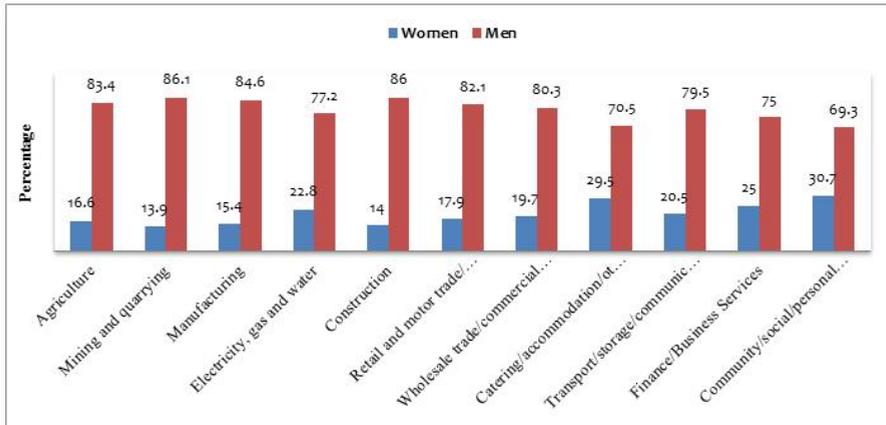
Several factors such as a higher prevalence of temporary contracts among women, differences in educational attainment, and labour market segregation explain the unemployment gap. Workers on permanent contracts usually have better unemployment benefits, severance pay, notice periods and other elements of employment protection legislation. Since the incidence of temporary contracts is significantly higher among women than men, this partly explains differences in employment rates between men and women. Another factor behind higher unemployment rates for women is that women are more likely than men to exit and re-enter the labour market due to family commitments. Career interruption for child-rearing results in longer periods of unemployment, while men are more likely to move directly from one job to another. Interruptions in attachment to the labour market could also lead to skills obsolescence and reduced employability (International Labour Organisation, 2012).

According to Bezbarauah (2012) despite the narrowing of the gender gap in labour-force participation rates, this has not resulted in the elimination of gender inequalities in work and employment and labour market outcomes. The author argues that wage disparities between men and women persist, horizontal and vertical segregation remains entrenched, and women are over-represented in part-time and informal-sector work. While there has been a notable increase in the presence of women in previously male-dominated professional occupations such as banking, finance; law and medicine, as well as in managerial positions, they remain under-represented at top and senior levels. While women are increasingly entering professional and managerial jobs, there has also been an increase in women's employment in part-time, low-paid jobs – and horizontal and vertical segregation persists. Despite the numerical rise of women in managerial and professional jobs, few women reach the top of occupational hierarchies. Under-representation of women in senior managerial positions is a recurring theme of studies across the services sector – from law and accountancy, to banking (Bezbarauah, 2012).

The data above shows that although globally there are small improvements in women's positions in the workplace, there are still huge gaps between men and women's employment. Although women around the world had reason to expect change following the global Beijing Platform for Action conference which set targets to transform the lives of women across the world, change has not come fast enough and little has changed. The data proves that despite progress and achievements made in terms of adopting various statutory and legislative directives, women around the world face major challenges and obstacles when it comes to equal employment in the labour force.

## 6. Reflection of the South African Workforce

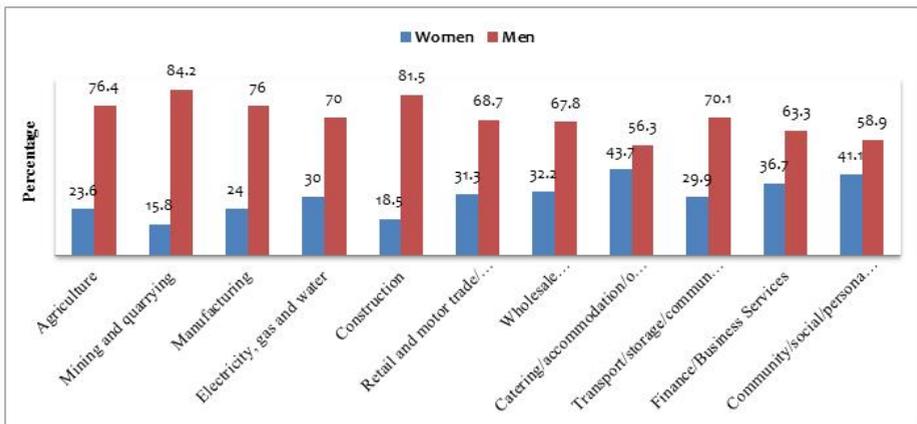
As discussed above, South Africa has various pieces of legislation in place to advance women's position in the workplace, but whether these directives have brought equal employment for women, is a question that will be answered in this study. The recognition of gender equality legislation should be evident in women's positions not only in society, but also in the workplace. The Department of Labour (2015) in its 15<sup>th</sup> Commission for Employment Equity Report, indicates that women are still vastly under-represented in all sectors. Evidence illustrating this announcement is reflected in the figures and discussions below and is based on analysing the employment data of 4,984 companies, covering 5.6 million of the 8.5 million employees in the informal sector, and reflects the 2014 reporting cycle. The said report also indicates that the pace of transforming workplaces in South Africa is very slow, and that men continue to dominate all occupation levels and across various sectors. The figures exclude foreign nationals.



**Figure 1:** Workforce Profile by Sector – Top Management  
**Source:** Adapted from Department of Labour (2015)

Figure 1 (above) shows that in 2014 in almost all the sectors women accounted for less than 30% of top management positions, and across all sectors, more than 69% of the top positions were filled by men. In the agriculture, mining and quarrying, manufacturing, construction, retail and motor trade/repair services and wholesale/ commercial sectors, men dominated the workforce with an astonishing total of more than 80%.

The largest percentage of women employed was in the catering/accommodation/commercial (29.5%) and the community/social/personal services (30.7%) sectors. These two sectors are traditionally viewed as sectors dominated by women (cleaners, domestic workers, community workers etc.) This figure shows the majority of top management were men.

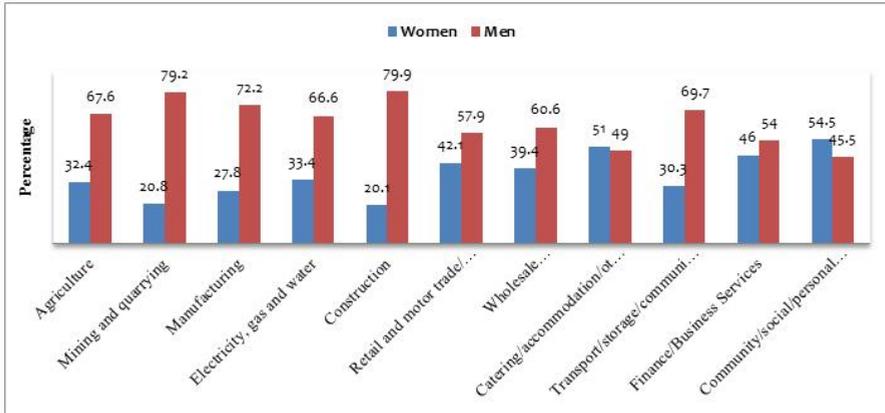


**Figure 2:** Workforce Profile by Sector – Senior Management  
**Source:** Adapted from Department of Labour (2015)

Figure 2 (above) shows that at senior management level, women were hugely under-represented, although the situation is slightly better than at top management level.

At all the different sectors at this level, women occupied less than 50% of the positions. For example, in the manufacturing sector men were employed in 76% of the positions compared to

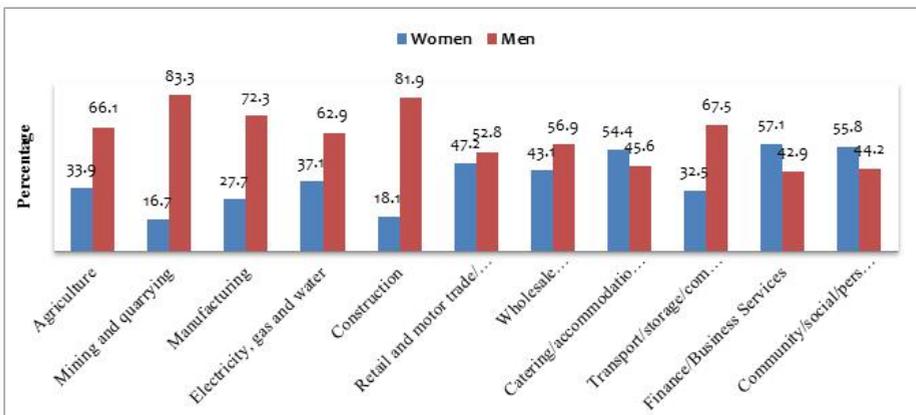
24% by women. In the gas and water sector men were employed in 70% and women accounted for only 30% of the positions. The community/social and personal services and the catering/accommodation/other trade are the only two sectors where women were employed in more than 40% of senior management positions. As with the top management level, men dominated the majority of the sectors. The data shows as with the previous level, equal employment for women at this level has not taken place. Although the data shows a higher representation of women at this level, it is far from equal employment.



**Figure 3:** Workforce Profile by Sector – Professionally Qualified  
**Source:** Adapted from Department of Labour (2015)

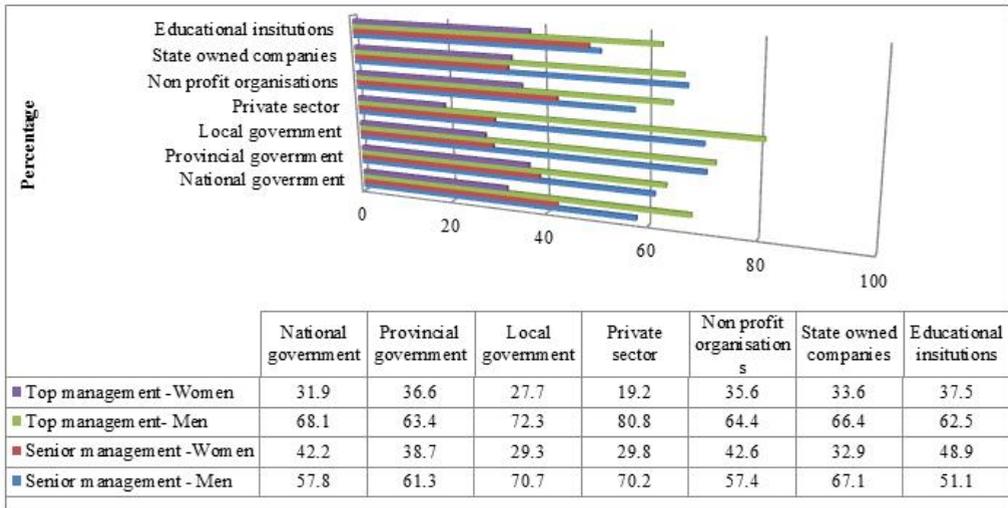
Figure 3 (above) shows that at the professionally qualified level, men continue to dominate the workforce almost in all the sectors, except for the community/social/ personal services sector where women accounted for 54.4% of the workforce. Interestingly, the percentage of women employed in the so-called male dominated sectors such as mining and quarrying, manufacturing and construction, are extremely low.

Although the situation does not look as bleak as the senior and top management levels, huge discrepancies still persisted between male and female employment.



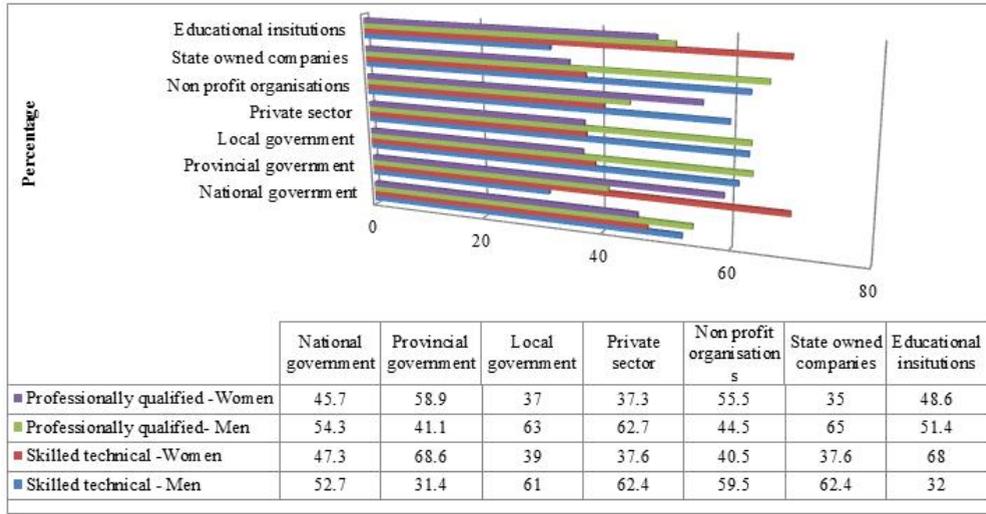
**Figure 4:** Workforce Profile by Sector – Skilled technical  
**Source:** Adapted from Department of Labour (2015)

Figure 4 (above) shows that the skilled technical level, women occupied less than 50% of the positions. The percentage of women in the mining and quarrying and construction sectors was relatively low, counting for less than 20% of the workforce. The highest percentage of women employed at this level was in the retail and motor/ trade repair services (40.2%), finance/ business (42.9%) and the community/social/ personal services (44.2%). Although there is a higher level of women's representation in this sector, it is not at this level where decisions are made. Therefore, an increase in women's representation at different sectors in the professionally qualified and skilled technical levels has still not achieved equity. Although South Africa has clear affirmative action measures in place, these measures, based on the above data are not implemented effectively. Mathur-Helm (2005:56) state that 'the enforcement of the right to gender equality is critical in respect of South Africa's unique history, which entrenched systemic inequalities and brought pain and suffering to the majority of its people'.



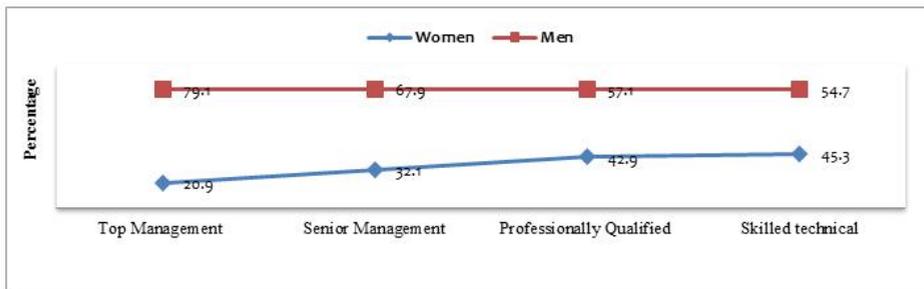
**Figure 5:** Workforce Profile Business Type – Top and Senior Management  
**Source:** Adapted from Department of Labour (2015)

Figure 5 (above) shows in both the top and senior management levels, men dominated the workforce in most business types, occupying more than 60% of the positions. The situation is particularly gloom in local government and private sectors, where men occupied 70% of the positions. The highest percentage of men employed was in top management in the private sector, they dominated 80.8% of the workforce. The highest percentage of women employed was at senior management level in non-profit organisations (42.6%) and educational institutions (48.95%). As with the previous data, women's representation in the indicated business types were relatively low compared to men – this confirms that South Africa needs to do much more to ensure equal employment. South Africa does not perform well at the top and senior management levels and the disparity in employment between men and women has become increasingly evident. Despite women been considered equal citizens in South Africa as enshrined in the country's Constitution, equal employment is not yet offered to them, given the huge gaps between women and men employment at these two levels.



**Figure 6:** Workforce Profile Business Type – Professionally Qualified and Skilled Technical  
**Source:** Adapted from Department of Labour (2015)

Figure 6 (above) shows that more women are employed at the professionally qualified and skilled technical levels in most of the business types compared to the previous data. Although there was still an uneven distribution of male and female employment at most of the business types at both levels, 58.9% of the professionally qualified of local government were filled by women. Furthermore, women filled 68.6% of skilled technical positions in provincial government and 68% in educational institutions. Although more women were employed at this level compared to the previous levels as mentioned in figure 5, it is not at these levels where decisions are made.



**Figure 7:** Workforce Distribution per Occupational Level  
**Source:** The Department of Labour (2015).

Figure 7 (above) illustrates men dominated all the different levels. At the top management level, there were four times more men compared to women. At both the professionally qualified and skilled technical levels, men outnumbered women, although the gap was narrowing. It is evident from the data that men dominated both the top and senior management levels, and the highest proportion of men (almost 80%) was in the top management level. Although South Africa has made great strides in having the necessary policies and directives in place to promote equal representation, it is clear that women continue to be side-lined in decision-making positions, given the fact that they are better represented at the professionally qualified and skilled technical levels

than at the top and senior management levels. The data shows that women have a better chance being employed in non-decision-making positions. The percentage of women in so-called male dominated sectors such as mining and quarrying, manufacturing and construction, is extremely low and South Africa needs to do much more to employ more women in these sectors.

## 7. Conclusion

It has been demonstrated that the struggle for equality for women is an issue that has been long coming and that various international laws were enacted as far 1940s to protect women from discrimination. The 1945 Charter of the United Nations and the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights inspired a large number of treaties, conventions and customary laws addressing a wide range of human rights issues – including the rights of women around the world. Recommendations made by the Commission on the Status of Women led to the Convention on the Political Rights of Women in 1952 – the first international law to clearly recognise women's right to vote, run for election and hold any public office on equal terms with men. Following this, international and regional instruments such as Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination have drawn attention to gender-related dimensions of human right issues. These have further cascaded down to individual countries like South Africa.

After the new democratic dispensation in 1994, equal rights and equal employment aspects were adopted in the 1996 Constitution, and various international and national laws and policies were adopted to redress the gender imbalances of the past. The government of South Africa reinforced its commitment to gender equality in the Constitution, and has enacted and amended various laws and policies to redress the imbalances of the past – including laws and policies to address inequality in the workplace. The Constitution is viewed as the premium document advancing gender equality, along with the National Policy Framework on Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality, 2000, The Gender Policy Framework for Local Government, 2007 and the Employment Equity Act, 55 of 1998. These are just some of the legislative frameworks which give South Africa the opportunity to promote gender equality in the workplace. The percentage of women at this level in so-called male dominated sectors such as mining and quarrying, manufacturing and construction is extremely low, and South Africa needs to do much more to employ more women in these sectors, ensuring gender equality in the workplace.

The study has shown that despite South Africa's commitment to eliminate gender discrimination in the workplace, and although progress has been made to promote women – there are still huge discrepancies between male and female employment in almost all sectors in the workplace, most occupational categories and most business types. There are also different barriers in the workplace which prevent women from enjoying equal employment. In order to eliminate inequality in the workplace it is important that the laws and policies in place be effectively implemented – otherwise equal opportunities in the workplace will remain nothing but a 'hollow slogan' for South African women. While there are several reasons to commend the effort that has been made to integrate women in the workplace, serious attempts should be made to appoint more women in top and senior management positions. There have been changes for women in terms of employment in the last two decades in South Africa, with more women moving into paid employment outside their homes and with that in mind, it is imperative that more women are appointed in decision making jobs and jobs that were in the past, earmarked for men. To address gender inequality in the workplace, transformation should not only be about marking crosses in the right places, it should also be about real change, which is barrier free and without impediments and bottlenecks.

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