

The Strides made by Private Sector in the Advancement of People with Disabilities: A case of South Africa

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This paper examines the analysis regarding employment equity in the advancement of people with disabilities in the private sector in South Africa. A case study methodology was used in this specific study where Commission of Employment Equity Report was analysed and argument generated. The objective of the study is to understand the progress made by private sector in giving people with disabilities an opportunity to advance in their respective careers and to determine whether they are given training. The analysis revealed that there are strides made to advance and train people with disabilities. The trend in these levels shows that there still problems to advance black compared to the whites who are physically challenged. It further highlighted that blacks dominated semi and unskilled job levels. This however, is attributed by historical educational disadvantages created by the apartheid government. In general employment of people with disabilities is progressing well.

INTRODUCTION

Inequalities and discriminatory practices in the work place has been an order of the day in the Apartheid South Africa. Immediately after the 1994 elections, the democratic Government was faced with challenges of addressing the imbalances, *inter alia* with racial discrimination, job reservations, impediment of blacks to perform professional work in the urban areas and the exclusion of people with disabilities from mainstream employment. Historically, throughout various societies people with disabilities were discriminated against. This marginalisation and ignorance has resulted in lack of access to education and employment which resulted in widespread poverty. In this case, will democratic government stamps its authority on the advancement of people who were previously disadvantaged particularly people with disabilities?

Munetsi (1999) asserts that the introduction of discriminatory legislation, such as the industrial Conciliation Act (Act 11 of 1924), through apartheid meant that racial privileges were afforded to certain people particularly white Afrikaners, providing the foundation for the policy of job reservation on the basis of skin colour, and this however constituted racial discrimination in South Africa hence apartheid. According to Kahlenberg (1996); Du Plessis (1995), the legacy of discrimination has caused a concentration of blacks in lower-level positions in the workplace for the following reason: *“Black people were regarded as servants and considered lacking direction for life or as people to whom orders should be given, not from whom orders should be taken.”* In terms of section 10 of the *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa*, (1996) (hereafter referred to as the Constitution) of the South African government, with its role of representing all people in South Africa, was mandated to review all legislations that discriminated against people and to ensure compliance to the legislations. The foundation for non-discriminatory employment and employment practice for people with disabilities is embedded in the Constitution and in the Employment Equity Act, 55 of 1998.

In the quest to address all these imbalances in particular the advancement of people with disabilities, Employment Equity Act (hereafter referred to as EEA), 55 of 1998 was introduced. The Act requires that designated employers to target people with disabilities in order to make the country's workforces more representative of the South African demographics. In terms of Section 1 of the Act, people with disabilities are defined as “people who have a long term or recurring physical or mental impairment which substantially limits their prospects of entry into, or advancement in employment” The EEA

introduces legislative measures to address, promote and manage disability equity. These provision however focuses on the compliance with the EEA's provisions on non – discrimination and affirmative action; workforce profiling policies procedures and training. This however suggests that once affirmation is done, the beneficiaries of the programmes should be exposed to training intervention to enable them to function effectively in their positions. For effective implementation of EEA to take place, The Technical Assistance Guidelines on the Employment of People with Disabilities (TAG) was introduced to assist in the employment and advancing of people with disabilities. The primary purpose of the guidelines is to assist employers, employees, trade unions and people with disabilities to understand the EEA and its code of practice on the employment of people with disabilities. The aims of **TAG** are to assist the people with disabilities to understand:

- Their right not to be discriminated against in all aspects of employment
- The affirmative action measures to which they may entitled to through the provision of the Act
- Their right to the provision of reasonable accommodation if required
- Opportunities that exist to prepare for entering and advancing in the workplace.

In order for all these initiatives, to be implemented and monitored properly, a Commission for Employment Equity was established in terms of section 28 of the Employment Equity Act with the view of advising the Minister of Department of Labour (DOL) about the implementation of Employment Equity Act as well as employers who submitted their equity reports in particular employers with more than 150 employees (DOL, 2006).

In complying with labour legislation, some employers are making appointment just to meet numeric targets. In many occasions they appoint people but such people have no decision making powers. This matter has been pointed out by the following authors Innes *et al* (1993); Mathur-Helm (2006) and Martins and Von der Ohe" (2003) that organisations appoint people with disabilities to higher positions, but their positions are devalued to avoid damage that could be caused by the perceived incompetence of the appointees. They may also expect the candidates to function effectively without assistance forgetting that they were not entitled to same educational and career development opportunities as their white counterparts (Naidoo and Kongolo, 2004). This affects both the self-confidence and performance of the candidates appointed under such circumstances. The implication of this practice is that the candidates could be seen as window dressing in the organisations in the sense that their colleagues could regard them as incompetent and they are appointed because they are physically challenged. At one stage or the other, the appointment of people with disabilities raises some fears or myths that they are not fit for purpose. To alleviate these negative attitudes about their abilities there is a need for vigorous education and training.

This paper aims to articulate on the facts whether the private companies have made progress in the advancement of people with disabilities. The research focused mainly on the analysis of the employment equity report of 2008 from Department of Labour. The rest of the paper covers the research design, analysis and discussion of findings and conclusions as well as implications.

THE OBJECTIVES OF THE PAPER

Based on the background to this specific paper, the following objectives are formulated:

- To determine the extent to which people with disabilities are advanced in the employment in private sector.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND PROCEDURE

The research followed a case study methodology. According to Gillham (2000:21) this methodology is used when the researcher intends to study documents, records, reports and policies pertaining to the subject under investigation. According to Henning, Rensburg and Smit (2007) attest that in a case study the main assumption is that a phenomenon is investigated as a “bounded system” which may be a group of people; a set of documents. In this case the Commission for Employment Equity report (2008) was analysed and interpreted. The focus was only on the private sector reporting.

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

As a result of the analysis, the findings can be briefly summarized in the following table and discussed thereafter.

Table 1: Occupational level by Gender and Racial groups

Occupational Level	Male				Female				Foreign nationals		Total
	A	C	I	W	A	C	I	W	Male	Female	
Top Management	7	6	7	123	4	3	0	27	2	0	129
	3.9%	3.4%	3.9%	68.7%	2.2%	1.7%	0%	15.1%	1.1%	0%	100%
Senior management	28	5	15	145	7	2	6	57	6	2	273
	10.3%	1.8%	5.5%	53.1%	2.6%	0.7%	2.2%	20.9%	2.2%	0.7%	100%
Professionally qualified and experienced specialists and mid-management	55	40	24	376	25	11	15	131	10	2	689
	8.0%	5.8%	3.5%	54.6%	3.6%	1.6%	2.2%	19.0%	1.5%	0.3%	100%
Skilled technical and academically qualified workers, Junior management, foreman and superintendents	621	165	98	995	137	120	33	468	77	3	2 717
	22.9%	6.1%	3.6%	36.6%	5%	4.4%	1.2%	17.2%	2.8%	0.1%	100%
Semi skilled and discretionary decision making	1 502	209	74	463	331	195	62	416	203	0	3 455
	43.5%	6.1%	2.1%	13.4%	9.9%	5.6%	1.8%	12%	5.9%	0%	100%
Unskilled and defined decision making	2 552	173	20	92	176	122	8	38	1 362	2	4 645
	54.9%	3.7%	0.4%	2.0%	5.9%	2.6%	0.2%	0.8%	29.3%	0%	100%
Total Permanent	4 765	598	238	2,194	780	453	124	1,137	1,660	9	11 958
	39.9%	5%	2%	18.4%	6.5%	3.8%	1%	9.5%	13.9%	0.1%	100%

From the table above, it is evident that the advancement of blacks (Africans, Coloureds and Indians) into top management has accounted 15.1% [65.3%] the bracket percentage hereafter denotes 2007 comparison) and this however includes both genders. Black males account 11.2 % of all top management level positions and black females represent only 2.2%. Top management is predominantly white with 83.8% of all employees with disabilities. The white males are dominant with 68.7% and white females 15.1% in the top management in comparison with other racial groups. This raises a serious when considering the implementation of EEA. In general it can be argued that top management levels are predominantly occupied by male.

In the senior management level, blacks made 23.1% [35.3%] of all people with disabilities and white account for 74% (white males 53.1% and white 20.9%). White males are still taking a lead in senior management. The analysis clearly indicates that whites are still dominating the upper echelon in the private sector whether they able and physically challenged.

In terms of professional and middle level management to advance blacks into middle management levels blacks accounted for 24.7% [70.5%] whilst whites represented 73.6% [29.4%] of all employees with disabilities. The results as such do not give positive outlook when considering the implementation of employment equity act since its promulgation in 1998. This shows that there are problems in the companies to seriously implement the Act. As a result of little progress made to advance blacks with disabilities, many questions can be posed. Among the questions that can be posed is: at what level does the Government have authority in the implementation of EEA in the private sector? Is the Government not having unified mechanism to address non compliance?

It is explicit from the analysis that the majority (67.7%) [97.7%] of unskilled employees with disabilities are blacks, and whites accounted for a mere 2.8% [2.3%] of the total unskilled workers. Based on the history of South Africa as contained in the Black Builders Workers Act (Act 27 of 1951), that blacks were prohibited from performing skilled jobs such as plastering, painting, sign writing and plumbing and these jobs were reserved for whites as well as previous exclusions of people with disabilities in terms of access to education and employment. This situation is not pleasing because the result is also applicable even in able people. It is therefore, not a surprise to see such a huge number of employees from blacks being unskilled. This is as a result of the fact that designated people were not allowed to do professional work in the urban areas and not given the opportunity to be educated (Greef and Nel, 2003; De Beer, 1998). These are some of the consequences of apartheid system that was practiced. It is pleasing that all people with disabilities received training interventions to fast track their effective functioning. This however it is in line with the Skills Development Act

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The above discussion articulates the results on the advancement of people with disabilities in the private sector. From policy perspective it is imperative to advance them due to the fact they were excluded in the employment practices. It is pleasing to find that people with disabilities are advanced in different occupational levels. The only challenge that is applicable at all levels is that whites are still dominating the occupational levels. Blacks are still under-represented in the top management. It is noted that the majority of top and senior positions are occupied by whites and this raise a question as to when would other racial groups going to close that gap. White males dominate all levels. It further revealed that male employees from respective racial groups are dominant with and this however, shows little progress in the advancement of women. It can further be concluded that in the professional and middle management level white employees are dominating this level of management. Furthermore, this imbalance could be

attributed by the fact that blacks were not given opportunities to be trained and educated. It can be concluded that majority of semi and unskilled employees are blacks. This is the result of historical educational injustices experienced in the past, where there were two systems of education, namely superior education which was only for the whites and inferior educational which was specifically for blacks. In order for designated groups to close skills gap, radical affirmative action should be imposed to the private sector address this problem. It is also pleasing that the private sector is advancing people with disabilities from other countries.

The implications on the findings is that, government seems to be strict in the public service than the private which however creating a skew implementation of Employment equity Act of 1998. The results suggest that the government seems to have little or no control over private sector.

In conclusion, the discussion in this paper provides valuable information that the government could use to address identified shortfall in the advancement of people with disabilities and to get an understanding why there is still some lag in other levels of employment.

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