

Assessing the employee status of women in the City of Cape Town, South Africa

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Abstract

This research report conducts a literature review of gender mainstreaming at international, national and local levels, with a special focus on South Africa. It then uses the City of Cape Town (CoCT) as a local case study to explore this municipality's gender mainstreaming strategy in order to establish whether this strategy has been implemented to ensure equal employment for women. The study assessed the CoCT's employment data of both men and women at the top, senior and middle occupational levels. The findings identify that gender mainstreaming has not reached its intended goal, as women are not equally employed at any of these occupational levels in the CoCT.

Keywords

Gender mainstreaming, women, gender inequality, equal employment

Introduction

In the past two decades, there has been meaningful global growth in the advancement of anti-discrimination and human rights legislation. Many countries have adopted policies and practices aimed at promoting women's rights and achieving gender equality. Yet women all over the world continue to experience inequitable employment in the workplace due to their gender. On average, women remain much less likely to participate in the labour market than men. For example, in 2018, women's global labour force participation rate was 48.5 percent – 26.5 percent below that of men – while the 6-percent global unemployment rate of women was around 0.8 percent higher than that of men; this translates to a 1.2 ratio of female-to-male unemployment rates (International Labour Organisation, 2018). Moreover, according to the International Labour Organisation (2018), not only are women less likely than men to be employed in the labour force, but they are also less likely to be employed in decision-making roles.

As Le (2012) notes, concerns about gender inequality in the workplace have propelled the issue onto working agendas in both international and local spheres. This has seen the subsequent development of feminist theories to inform international and national gender-equality frameworks. These frameworks have laid the foundation for bringing gender considerations to the centre of policy development, with the goals of ending discrimination against women in the workplace and giving women and men equitable access to and benefit from employment development processes.

In 1994, the first democratic government in South Africa inherited a deeply divided society, not only in terms of race, class and power but also gender parity. Since this period, the country has strengthened its promise to promote gender equality by signing various

international agreements, by including gender equality in its Constitution, and by adopting a range of policies and programmes. Despite these strategies, South African women are still unable to enjoy gender equality, which is evident, for example, from their higher rates of unemployment and under-representation at senior and leadership levels. During 2014–2016, women held a mere 20.7 percent of top management positions in the private sector and 30.8 percent in the public sector (South African Human Rights Commission, 2019). At the senior management level, men were similarly overrepresented within decision-making roles in both the public (60.7%) and private (68.5%) sectors. This was evident in all South African provinces. Negligible increases in female representation at the top management level between 2014 and 2016 indicate that there continues to be a lack of opportunities for women in senior leadership roles, which in turn reflects systematic inequality and indirect discrimination (South African Human Rights Commission, 2019).

One strategy used in South Africa to address gender inequality is gender mainstreaming, the aim of which is to transform structures of inequality and to integrate gender perspectives into policies, projects and processes. The advancement of gender equality and the commitment to gender mainstreaming has provided a new platform for the development of a South Africa-wide approach to reducing gender inequalities. However, research has shown that, internationally, gender mainstreaming implementation faces many serious challenges. Moser and Moser (2005, pp. 11-21) argue that there is little evidence to suggest gender mainstreaming has been implemented effectively in local government, despite the visible existence of gender mainstreaming in organisational gender equality programmes, policies and strategies of international development institutions. They further contend that the full integration of gender issues at local government levels similarly faces many challenges; this may be because those most likely to have authority to pass gender equality legislation remain uncommitted to this issue. Likewise, Coe (2008, p. 4) argues that ‘although there is a level of acceptance and commitment to gender mainstreaming among international donor organisations and agencies implementing development projects, this rhetorical commitment evaporates at the planning and implementation stages’. Furthermore, several global organisational assessments have found that the gender mainstreaming strategy has not been systematically and effectively implemented at local levels because of its varied and inconsistent integration (African Development Bank Group, 2011).

The remainder of this research report will provide an overview of research literature on gender mainstreaming at international, national and local levels, focusing particularly on the South African context. It then uses the City of Cape Town (CoCT) as a local case study to explore whether gender mainstreaming has been implemented effectively in this municipality to foster employment equality for women. The CoCT has redirected policies, programmes and projects to contribute towards the goal of gender equality and equal employment opportunities for women at all reporting levels. The research report evaluates how well these gender mainstreaming strategies have worked and how further improvements might be made.

Exploring the concept of gender mainstreaming

The gender mainstreaming strategy emerged at the Fourth United Nations World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, referred to as the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPFA) (United Nations, 1995). Several major international organisations have made some form of commitment to gender mainstreaming, as have government institutions and non-profit and development organisations. The United Nations (2002) defines gender mainstreaming as

the process of assessing the implications for women of any planned action, including legislation, policies and programmes in any area and at all levels (see also Kwigisa & Ssendiwala, 2006). Gender mainstreaming is based on the foundations of human rights, deepening democracy and the recognition of sociocultural differences between men and women. It makes the concerns and experiences of women *as well as* men an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres. The primary goal of this multi-faceted strategy is that women and men can benefit equally, and inequality is not perpetuated. Lee-Gosselin et al. (2013, p. 469) state that gender mainstreaming includes gender-specific activities and affirmative actions, wherever women or men are in a particularly disadvantaged position. Such interventions may focus on women exclusively, on men and women, or only on men, to enable them to participate in and benefit equitably from development efforts. These are fundamental, temporary measures intended to counter the direct and indirect outcomes of past discrimination and to advance equality (Lee-Gosselin et al., 2013).

How does gender mainstreaming compare to other models of tackling gender inequalities? Rees (1998) notes there are three approaches to tackling gender inequality: equal treatment, positive action and mainstreaming. The equal treatment model follows the principle that no individual should have fewer human rights and opportunities than others. Rees (1998, p. 32) argues that this model is flawed because it focuses exclusively on the *formal* rights of women as workers and therefore fails to address the fundamental causes of gender inequality in the informal 'gender contracts' between women and men. Gender contracts refer to a set of implicit rules governing gender relations which allocate different work, value, responsibilities and obligations to women and men. These gender contracts are maintained on three levels: cultural superstructure (the norms and values of society); institutions (family welfare, education and employment status); and socialisation processes, notable in the family (European Commission, 1998).

The second approach that Rees (1998) identifies, namely positive action, shifts from equality of access to creating conditions more likely to result in inequality. More concretely, positive action involves the adoption of specific actions on behalf of women, to overcome their unequal starting positions in a patriarchal society. At the extreme, positive action may also take the form of positive discrimination, which seeks to increase the participation of women (or other under-represented groups) through the use of affirmative-action preferences or quotas (Rees, 1998, p. 37).

The last approach identified by Rees (1998) is gender mainstreaming, which calls for the systematic acknowledgement of gender issues throughout all government institutions and policies. Rees (2005) notes that gender mainstreaming focuses less on individual rights to equality (the equal treatment approach) or ameliorating historical disadvantage (the positive action approach). Instead, it addresses how systems and structures infringe upon those rights and cause a disadvantage in the first place. As a means of embedding gender equality in systems, processes, policies and institutions, gender mainstreaming is thus intended to operate as a complementary strategy to the other two approaches: it emphasises the need for legislation, gender equality and positive action programmes.

Jahan (1995) distinguishes between two types of gender mainstreaming: the integrationist approach, which seeks to integrate men and women into existing frameworks, and the agenda-setting approach, which is far more revolutionary, aiming to transform institutions and existing gender policy paradigms. According to Walby (2004), agenda-setting re-orientates decision-making processes, prioritises gender equality objectives and re-thinks policy ends. In other words, agenda-setting endeavours to change what is currently mainstream. In contrast, the

integrationist approach introduces a gender perspective without challenging the existing paradigm, 'selling' gender mainstreaming as a way of achieving existing equality policy goals more effectively (Walby, 2011).

Walby (2004, p. 3) suggests that gender mainstreaming 'involves at least two different frames of reference: one emanating from a "gender equality" stance, and the other, the mainstream'. Therefore, at its heart, gender mainstreaming is inevitably and essentially a contested process. Walby further argues that, despite this intrinsic conflict, gender mainstreaming typically focuses on those areas of equality where there might be commonality with the mainstream. In policy practice, the duality between gender equality and the mainstream can sometimes be expressed as the holding of two aims simultaneously: first, the promotion of gender equality and gender justice as an end in its own right; and second, making mainstream policies more effective in their terms by the inclusion of gender analysis (Walby, 2004).

Walby's discussion echoes some of the issues raised by the Council of Europe (1998, p. 15), which defines gender mainstreaming as 'the (re)organisation, improvement, development, and evaluation of policy processes, so that a gender equality perspective is incorporated in all policies at all levels and all stages, by the actors normally involved in policy-making'. Accordingly, the Council identifies some characteristics and necessary prerequisites for effective implementation of gender mainstreaming, including political will, specific gender equality policies, sex-disaggregated statistics, knowledge of administration, necessary funds, human resources and the participation of women in decision-making bodies. Gouws (2006) similarly notes that gender mainstreaming, as both a discourse and policy practice, is an attempt to integrate gender concerns into the everyday world of government procedures, policy-making and service delivery, to create a 'women-friendly' state. Pollack and Hafner-Burton (2000, p. 434) concur, adding that 'it is a potentially revolutionary concept that promises to bring a gender dimension into all policies'. Mehra and Guptha (2006) suggest that if gender mainstreaming is implemented effectively, it could support equal employment for all employees and also improve the skills and attitudes of employees. This strategy also invites organisations to review their internal procedures, such as staffing and personnel policies, which could lead to the hiring of more women or appointing a particular percentage of women to leadership positions. It may also include amending the culture of the organisation through gender equality mandates to make the workplace more democratic.

Yet gender mainstreaming is also an extraordinarily demanding concept, which requires the adoption of a gender perspective by all the central actors in the policy process – some of whom may have little experience or interest in gender issues. Thus, in theory, gender mainstreaming has the potential to tackle gender inequality; in practice, however, research suggests that this approach has many challenges. Despite international and national commitments to women's rights and gender equality, such equality often remains a myth (Lee-Gosselin et al., 2013). According to several scholars (Dawson, 2005; Jahan, 1995; Kabeer, 2003, 2005; Moser, 2005; Moser & Moser, 2005; Tiessen, 2004, 2007), one weakness of gender mainstreaming is its vagueness in practice, due to a lack of conceptual clarity, resistance and/or insufficient attention to its implementation, a lack of resources and the absence of an accountability mechanism. Equally, Woodward (2008) and Lee-Gosselin et al. (2013) argue that even though gender mainstreaming is a good governance tool to promote gender equality, it does not always lead to sustainable public reforms. Mehra and Guptha (2006) likewise note that the absence of clarity, responsibility and internal mechanisms to support gender mainstreaming could hamper the effective implementation of this process.

Sainsbury and Bergqvist (2009) and Lee-Gosselin et al. (2013) also note that if the gender mainstreaming strategy is not successfully implemented, it could undermine positive measures

for women. One such problem is the gender pay gap that persists. Across a sample of developed, emerging and developing countries, women are found to earn, on average, 20 percent less than men (International Labour Organisation, 2018). A significant proportion of this gap is due to the over-representation of women in sectors and occupations with a higher incidence of low pay. The persistence of the gender pay gap is also partly explained by the weakness or absence of well-functioning labour market institutions and policies, such as collective bargaining and minimum wages (International Labour Organisation, 2018).

South Africa's legislative framework governing gender mainstreaming

Since the establishment of democracy in 1994, the South African government introduced significant changes for women, brought about by the numerous laws and policies adopted by the national government to accelerate women's positions, especially in the workplace. The South African Constitution creates an enabling environment for effective gender mainstreaming by promoting gender equality. Chapter 10 of the Constitution (1996) states that legislative and other measures are to be taken to achieve equality and to protect or advance all people who were historically disadvantaged by discrimination. The advancement of gender equality and the commitment to gender mainstreaming has provided a platform for developing a nationwide approach towards reducing gender inequalities.

The 1998 Employment Equity Act was implemented by the South African government to promote equal opportunity and fair treatment in employment through the elimination of unfair discrimination. The purpose of this Act is to achieve equity in the workplace by implementing affirmative action measures to redress the disadvantages in employment experienced by designated groups and to ensure their equitable representation across all occupational categories and levels of the workforce. The 1998 White Paper on Affirmative Action in the Public Service (written within the framework of the 1998 Employment Equity Act) provides a policy framework that sets the mandatory requirements and procedures to develop and implement affirmative action programmes as a way of promoting gender equality. The paper also sketches the accountability, monitoring and reporting responsibilities of various players within affirmative action programmes. The goal of this policy framework is thus to encourage the creation of a representative and equitable workplace.

South Africa also adopted the gender mainstreaming strategy promoted by the BPPA. This commitment gave an impetus to the South African government to speed up the process of creating the National Gender Machinery and to review existing gender-discriminatory legislation (Sedibelwana, 2008). Testolin defines a 'gender machinery' as:

an institutional governmental and, in some cases, a parliamentary structure set up to promote women's advancement and to ensure the full enjoyment by women of their human rights. Its main function is to monitor and ensure the implementation of the law, of the principle of non-discrimination and equality between women and men. (2001, p. 5)

South Africa adopted the National Gender Machinery model, designed by feminist scholars and activists, which demonstrates a clear political goal concerning state-driven gender equality programmes. This is well advanced in terms of institutional development (Mvimbi, 2009). The National Gender Machinery comprises key structures in government, such as the legislature, parliament, statutory bodies and civil society organizations (Gouws, 2005; Baden et al., 1998).

After ratifying the BPPA in 2000, South Africa adopted a National Gender Policy Framework for Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality (2000) 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 government structures as well as in the workplace, community and family. According to Mvimbi (2009), this framework proposes that gender issues should be prioritised and included at the centre of the government's agenda rather than being relegated to a secondary status. It recognises that gender equality needs to be the focus of transformation processes within all government structures, institutions, procedures, practices, programmes, agencies and parastatals, as well as in civil society and the private sector. As Ruppel (2008, p. 21) states, the overarching goal of the National Gender Policy Framework is 'to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of both female and male persons'. And according to Hassim (2006), these commitments by the South African government reflect the extent to which it is open to the participation of women and new mechanisms for engagement.

Moreover, in recognition of the under-representation and low participation of women in *local* governance in South Africa, the Department of Local Government launched its Gender Policy Framework for Local Government in 2007, to provide guidance and support around gender mainstreaming and the empowerment of women in the local sector. This policy framework outlines a comprehensive institutional arrangement to address and implement gender mainstreaming. It also 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. For local government, this means every policy or strategy that is developed should address gender mainstreaming to assist the local government in the delivery of its developmental mandates and to ensure that women are not situated in a disadvantaged position. Also, a Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality Bill was adopted in 2013, aimed at ensuring government departments and private companies fill a minimum of all senior and top management positions with women by 2015. However, this Bill lapsed in 2015 and has not been resuscitated as it was deemed to be a duplication of existing legislation (Hartley, 2015).

Given the above, it can be argued that an enabling environment has been created in South Africa to advance gender equality, thus promoting equal employment. However, the implementation thereof will only be successful and effective if there is, for example, equal representation of both men and women in the workplace. To eliminate inequality, the laws and policies that are in place must be successfully implemented, otherwise 'equal opportunities' in the workplace will remain a hollow slogan for South African women and gender mainstreaming will be ineffective.

The City of Cape Town's gender mainstreaming plan

This section discusses the CoCT's gender mainstreaming plan and explains its provision to address women's equal employment standing in the workplace. Gender inequality is viewed as a critical issue by the CoCT. To ensure that women are equally employed and to tackle gender discrimination, the CoCT adopted a Women's Empowerment Strategy in 2009. This strategy serves both as a regulatory document for implementing gender mainstreaming as well as a means to empower women. One of its key objectives is for the municipality to ensure women are equally represented and to appoint more women, especially in managerial positions, which is eventually expected to strengthen gender equality. Gender mainstreaming thus allows for the empowerment of women, using what Tiessen (2007, p. 690) refers to as 'the involvement and the integration of women into existing systems as active participants and changes to the existing systems to reduce gender inequalities stemming from disadvantaged positions in

societies’.

The municipality also has an employment equity policy that includes an employment equity plan and a recruitment and selection policy to address gender disparities. To achieve its gender equity goals and also to give women a fair chance of equal employment, the CoCT applies affirmative action measures. This substantiates the observation by Hebson and Cox (2011) that recruitment and selection are important practices, in that they facilitate the management of employment equity in the workplace. Although the municipality is accountable for achieving a gender balance in its workforce, its recruitment and selection processes give due consideration to finding a ‘suitably qualified person’ within a designated group (i.e. a woman, black person or person with a disability).

Further, this plan suggests capacity building for all employees, such as diversity and sexual harassment training, and awareness sessions on all gender-related issues to ensure that gender perspectives are effectively addressed within the municipality. This training is important to increase officials’ knowledge and ability to transform the gender culture and practices of the municipality, and to create an enabling environment for all employees. Additionally, the plan recommends that gender equality and gender mainstreaming indicators be developed and that they are part of all managers’ job descriptions and performance agreements. The plan also makes provision for the establishment of gender focal points. The main purpose of gender focal points is to promote gender mainstreaming; they are attentive to key issues about gender and are expected to play an active role in the integration of gender in policy, planning and implementation (United Nations, 1995).

The City-Wide Gender Forum was established in 2010 to assist the CoCT in transforming gender relations and to help create and maintain an environment that is free from discrimination against women. This Gender Forum meets monthly to coordinate and monitor gender programmes across departments and directorates. Also, a men’s forum – City Men for Change – was established in 2011 as a support group for men. This group aimed to improve gender education and awareness programmes designed to help men change their attitudes and behaviour about gender stereotypes. This is an important step to gender equality, for as Kaufman (2004, p. 20) notes:

Men are the gatekeepers of current gender orders and are potential resistors of change, and if we do not effectively reach men and boys, many of our efforts will be thwarted or simply ignored. Involving men, by contrast, can generate a broader consensus on issues which have previously been marginalised as being of interest to women only – sexual and reproductive health, for example.

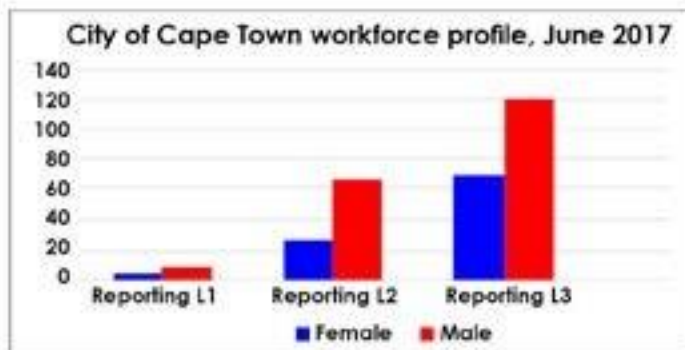
Assessing gender mainstreaming in the CoCT

As part of my research into gender mainstreaming, I assessed the CoCT’s gender mainstreaming strategy, as well as the employment status of both men and women at the top, senior and middle occupational levels (i.e. occupational levels one to three) as of June 2017. These analyses were done to ascertain whether the CoCT actively used a gender mainstreaming strategy to advance women’s employment position and to ascertain whether the strategy had succeeded thus far in its goal, ensuring equal employment for both male and female employees. The CoCT’s Women’s Employment Plan was obtained through the CoCT’s Human Resources office, and the employee data was obtained through the 2016/2017 *Annual Report* (City of Cape Town, 2018).

To assess whether or not the CoCT has used a gender mainstreaming strategy effectively to advance women’s employment standing in the municipality, this section provides data on

the CoCT's employment status as of 2017, comparing women's employment to that of men at the three top reporting levels. At the end of June 2017, the municipality's workforce consisted of 26,856 employees, and the profile of the three top reporting levels were as follows (City of Cape Town, 2017; see Figure 1). Three women (30%) were employed at reporting level 1 (top management) in comparison to 7 (70%) men. At reporting level 2 (senior management), 26 (28.26%) women were employed, compared to 66 (71.74%) men; and at reporting level 3 (middle management), 70 (36.84%) women were employed in comparison to 120 (66.10%) men.

Figure 1: City of Cape Town Workforce Profile, June 2017



Source: City of Cape Town, 2017.

The data shows that in 2017, men dominated the CoCT workforce and occupied more than 50 percent of all three management levels. At reporting levels one and two, men constituted more than 70 percent of the workforce (these are the top two reporting levels within the occupational structure of the

municipality). It is obvious from these data that gender parity was not achieved at any of the three levels, and there were significant variations between the different levels. It is also evident from the data that women did not attain equal managerial positions in any significant numbers, despite the municipality's strategy to improve the status of women and offer equal employment opportunities. Although the CoCT has a gender mainstreaming policy in place and various platforms have been created to advance gender equality in this municipality, a great deal still needs to be done to allow women equitable employment, especially in management positions.

Conclusion

Given the above discussion, it is clear that several factors impede the implementation of gender mainstreaming. This research report has shown that gender mainstreaming is a meaningful strategy that has been developed to advance the interests of women. If effectively implemented, it has the potential to address the challenges that women face in the workplace and enable women to be equally employed, thus reducing employment inequality and gender pay gaps. However, gender mainstreaming should be approached in such a way that it does not sustain or even cause further gender divisions and inequality. It should be a tool to ensure gender parity and equal representation of both women and men.

Although a gender mainstreaming strategy has been adopted by the CoCT to advance the employment status of women and to ensure equal employment for both male and female employees, there are still employment gaps at reporting levels one to three; these are the levels where most decisions are made. The evidence presented in this research report recognises that the gender mainstreaming strategy of the CoCT has not yet brought about equal opportunities or equitable employment for male and female employees.

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