Women Empowerment in the Mpumalanga Office of the Premier, South Africa

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ABSTRACT

The post 1994 South African Constitution, coupled with some legislations and policies, is an inclusive statute that promotes gender equality and the empowerment of women. Despite the enabling policies and laws, and the fact that women meet have the necessary qualifications, skills and experience, they still face a mammoth task of overcoming the male dominance as far as occupying senior positions in the workplace is concerned. This article is aimed at identifying impediments in the promotion of women to management positions in the South African public service with specific reference to the Mpumalanga Office of the Premier. A quantitative approach was utilised to solicit perceptions from sixty randomly selected employees of the unit of analysis. Data collected through questionnaires indicate that although women are ready and willing to take managerial positions and lead in the workplace, cultural prejudice and the dual responsibilities of women serve as barriers. The study also revealed that although there are pieces of legislation in place to support the advancement of women in the workplace, the lack of implementation thereof perpetuates women’s marginalisation. It therefore becomes imperative that government does not give lip service but act and ensure that implementation of legislation does take place. Again there is a need to call those in management positions to decisively act against those failing to adhere to empowerment policies by holding them accountable.

Keywords: equity, equality, management, empowerment, discrimination

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Introduction

Public institutions should be guided by principles of fairness, accountability, justice, equality and non-discrimination in the promotion of gender equality and women’s empowerment in the civil service workforce (United Nations Development Programme, 2014). The global shift from patriarchal dominance to the realisation that women’s rights as part of human rights need to be observed in the workplace was prompted by the need to curb the injustices of discrimination based on gender. As
stated by Moghadam (2004), there is a need for societies to move from a patriarchal supremacy zone to a more democratic one where partnership is embraced, and males and females treated and valued alike.

Ernst & Young Limited (2014) states that in half the G20 countries, women constitute more than half the public sector’s workforce. However, despite a decreasing pool of women in the overall public sector workforce, the people leading the public sector continue to be largely men. For the past 40 years, governments across the world have put in place measures to address gender inequality in the workplace and have introduced equal opportunity legislation to ensure that discrimination against women in the workplace is eradicated. These pieces of legislation give guidelines on how to remove the barriers that impede the advancement of women in the workplace.

While an anti-discrimination legislation that prohibits discriminatory practices has proven to be progressive in eliminating forms of discrimination globally, such as direct pay discrimination, it has encountered less success with the subtler forms such as occupational segregation (United Nations Development Programme, 2013). For instance, across the G20 major economies, women account for around 48 percent of the overall public sector workforce, but they still represent less than 20 percent of public sector leadership (United Nations Development Programme, 2014).

This is an indication that despite all the measures taken globally to uplift women they are still underrepresented in decision-making positions, being concentrated at lower levels and lower-paying jobs worldwide. This is despite the golden age of women that was ushered in by the Berlin Conference in 1995, and the fact that women are becoming more qualified and holding more jobs worldwide than before (Maseko, 2013).

Drawing from the above, it is safe to conclude that internationally women have not yet managed to penetrate the glass ceiling and walls that prohibit them from accessing certain occupational categories and levels. It therefore becomes imperative that institutional policies need to have equal opportunity clauses to ensure that the employment of people need not be prejudiced against race, colour, ethnicity or sex.

Some Southern African Development Community (SADC) countries, as part of the global family, have made a noteworthy improvement in affording women an opportunity to occupy important positions in public institutions. As attested by Maseko (2013), women representation levels show that only four SADC member states have reached more than 30% representation in parliament, with South Africa being the highest at 45%, followed by Mozambique at 39.2%, Angola at 38.6% and Tanzania at 36%.

**Background of the Study**

Prior to 1994, the South African public service was characterised by racial imbalances in favour of the white minority. The designated groups (Africans, Indians, and coloureds), women and people with disabilities have been historically and culturally marginalised. These classes of people were deprived of job opportunities, let alone high positions in any institution. The post-1994 South African government sought to redress these imbalances left by the apartheid regime by promulgating laws that are aimed at promoting equal opportunities and fair treatment in the workplace (Meyer, 2012). Mello & Phago (2007) state that although there are laws in place that seek to promote women advancement, a number of obstacles tend to counter the noble intentions of such legislation, as most women continue to endure occupational segregation in the workplace, and hardly ever break through the glass ceiling. Maseko (2013) indicates that this is a cause for great concern as it reinforces the existing stereotypes of women’s ability to perform at the top level of public life and thus perpetuates a vicious circle of marginalisation and disempowerment of women.

Tabane (2014) states that only two of the 55 national and provincial departments surveyed in 2014 complied with basic standards of employment equity in South Africa. This is despite the aim of the Employment Equity Act, no. 55 of 1998 (hereafter referred to as the Employment Equity Act) to ensure equal representation of the designated groups in all categories and levels in the workplace.

A directive from the Department of Public Service and Administration makes provisions for minimum targets of designated groups in the workplace with 50% for women in senior management and 2% for people with disabilities. However, government departments are struggling to meet the requirements of employment equity (Republic of South Africa, 2006). A recent government report by the Parliament of South Africa (2015) states that the Portfolio Committee on Public Service and Administration/Performance Monitoring and Evaluation notes with grave concern that only 40.5% of the positions within the Senior Management Services (SMS) are occupied by women.
The Mpumalanga Provincial Government Employment Equity Report 2013 reveals that the Mpumalanga Provincial Government had 36.5% women in senior management positions in the 2012/13 financial year and the Mpumalanga Office of the Premier’s 2013/14 Annual Report 2014 shows that only 29.4% of women within the Office of the Premier were senior managers (Republic of South Africa, 2013; Republic of South Africa, 2013).

The Mpumalanga Office of the Premier (MOTP) currently has a total of 58% women staff across all levels. While progress has been made in terms of total numbers of women in the MOTP, both glass ceiling and glass walls continue to present challenges to women’s career progression into senior management levels. This raises the question, ‘Does the MOTP have a clear succession plan, particularly with regards to commitment to promoting the career progression of women?’ (Republic of South Africa, 2015). This means the public service is not tapping into the full potential, capacity and creativity of the country’s workforce (United Nations Development Programme, 2014).

**Aim of the Study**

The aim of the study was to identify and analyse impediments in the empowerment of women to management positions in the Mpumalanga Office of the Premier. The objectives were to determine the perceptions of employees on the transformation in the employment of women in management positions in the Mpumalanga Office of the Premier to ensure equity, and to ascertain if the Mpumalanga Office of the Premier adheres to the country’s legislative framework in addressing the empowerment of women.

**Understanding Employment Equity**

Steyn (2010) defines employment equity as an attempt to achieve equality in the workplace so that no person shall be denied employment opportunities or benefits for reasons unrelated to ability and, in the fulfilment of that goal, to correct the conditions of disadvantage in employment experienced in the past by designated persons. The concept of employment equity is focused on the eradication of unfair discrimination in the form of hiring, promotion, training, pay benefits and retrenchments in line with the Constitutional requirements. Naidoo and Kangolo (2004) describe the purpose of employment equity as promoting equal opportunity and fair treatment in employment through the elimination of unfair discrimination and the implementation of affirmative action measures to redress the disadvantages in employment, to ensure equitable representation in all occupational categories and levels in the workforce.

Mello (2014) states that employment equity in the workplace has the purpose of achieving equity through the promotion of equal opportunities, fairness, elimination of unfair discrimination and implementation of affirmative action. Employment equity aims at empowering the designated groups through affirmative measures by attracting, developing and retaining individuals from previously disadvantaged groups, including women. Naidoo & Kangolo (2004) state that one of the main objectives of employment equity is to break the glass ceiling that has prevented black women from further accessing jobs that were once only meant for their male counterparts. The glass ceiling can be broken through affirmative action as a tool of employment equity. Steyn (2010) states that employment equity measures such as affirmative action were designed to introduce a representative number from minority groups into relatively homogenous organisations. Employment equity is more than treating persons in the same way, it also requires special measures to accommodate differences in order to advance those that were previously disadvantaged.

The South African government has inherited a public service that was characterised by disparities and racial imbalances that favoured men and the white minorities. Although the status of women in top management in the country has somehow improved in the past few years, breaking through the glass ceiling still remains a challenge. South Africa has enacted policies and legislation that aim to tackle the barriers that hamper the employment and promotion of women in the workplace. Employment equity policy is a tool that compels employers to tackle gender issues and remove all the obstacles that hinder women from accessing employment, promotion or any employment benefits.

**Table 1: Population distribution trends for the senior management level in South Africa from 2002 to 2012 by gender**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>78.5%</td>
<td>76.4%</td>
<td>72.4%</td>
<td>71.9%</td>
<td>81.1%</td>
<td>69.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>21.6%</td>
<td>23.7%</td>
<td>27.4%</td>
<td>28.3%</td>
<td>19.0%</td>
<td>30.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 shows that males occupy more than double the positions occupied by females at this level. Male representation decreased from 78.5% in 2002 to 69.2% in 2012 and female representation increased from 21.6% to 30.7% over the same period. It will take many decades before any gender equity is reached at this level.

According to StatsSA (2018), in the second quarter of 2018 only 43.8% of total employed population were women, and only 32% of those in managerial positions were women. The occupations where females dominated were the domestic worker, clerk and technician at 97%, 72% and 55% respectively, and those occupying managerial positions were at 32%.

South African women, irrespective of their racial identity, have always been side-lined, not only in society but in the workplace too. The pre-democratic policies and laws deliberately favoured men, particularly white men. Women were discriminated against in education and the workplace, making it difficult for women to reach decision-making positions. Reaching top-level positions is still uncommon for South African women, as the corporate environment is not yet ready to accept women as professional equals, resulting in government legislation and policies working against women’s growth and advancement (Mathur-Helm, 2005).

Women of all races suffered under the apartheid system, but in different ways, depending on their race, with white women better off than their black counterparts. Naidoo and Kongolo (2004) affirm that although all women undoubtedly suffered from gender discrimination, white women had access to better paid and higher status jobs, whereas Indian, coloured and black women were concentrated in the lower paying, menial jobs. Meyer (2012) indicates that white women occupied clerical and secretarial jobs while those who pursued higher education were found in teaching and nursing, coloured women were found working in the food and clothing factories while African women occupied positions as cleaners and tea ladies. Mathur-Helm (2005) states that employment equity through affirmative action has allowed women entry into jobs, but it has not determined their progress into senior positions. Strategies and programmes to empower and advance women into decision-making positions need to be strengthened. Employment equity forms the basis of women empowerment.

The Concept of Women Empowerment

Ogato (2013) explains women empowerment as an instrument meant to assist women to be able to make decisions about issues that concern them and take control of their lives economically and socially. Economic empowerment has to do with access to and control over resources and therefore should be at the core of institutional programmes. If women have such exposure to resources, it may lead to economic independence and emancipation.

According to Duflo (2012), women empowerment is about improving the ability of women to access the constituents of development which are health, education, earning opportunities, rights, and political participation. Women can take control of their lives, set their own agendas, gain skills, increase self-confidence and make decisions. Rahman (2013) states that women empowerment is a process of positive change that improves women’s fall-back position and bargaining power within a patriarchal structure, and it identifies different causal pathways of change; material, cognitive, perceptual and relational.

The UN Women Report (2011) states women’s participation in decision making at all levels of life is a critical vehicle for empowerment, and if women are given an opportunity to play an important role in an organisation, their development is guaranteed. Women’s economic participation and empowerment are fundamental to strengthening women’s rights and enabling women to have control over their lives and to exert influence in society.

There have been many positive developments in women empowerment throughout the world over the past decades. However, many workplace issues have not been adequately addressed over the years and barriers that hinder women from progressing to senior management positions still exist. This is despite women’s improved qualifications and skills. As indicated by Lahti (2013), from 2004 to 2012, the percentage of women in senior management has risen five per cent at most, between 2009 and 2011 the number fell from 24% to 20%, in 2012 it stood at 21%, and in 2013 it rose again to 24% globally. Even though the number of women in senior management has risen globally, this has happened at a very slow pace. Aguirre et al. (2012) espouse the notion that women are poised to play a significant role in the global economy in the coming decade, yet this has not received sufficient attention in many countries from governments, business leaders or other key decision makers.

A report by United Nations Women and the UN Global Compact (2011) indicates that despite the progress, women continue to confront discrimination, marginalisation and exclusion, even though equality between men and women stands as a universal international precept, a fundamental and
Women Empowerment in South Africa

South Africa still faces challenges in women empowerment in terms of mainstreaming women into key positions in both the private and the public sectors. Mathur-Helm (2005) argues that South Africa has not evolved enough to share managerial and leadership responsibilities and capability with women. Although there is evidence of transformation of the work force, the implementation of the Employment Equity Act as a women empowerment tool is often reduced to a question of legal compliance. Patriarchy still prevails in South African organisations preventing women from achieving professional roles as decision makers and authority in organisations. Women who aspire to become leaders are not given equal treatment and opportunity to develop in South Africa (Mathur-Helm, 2005). The DPSA Strategic Framework 2006-2015 mentions that women find themselves stuck at some positions, especially in SMS (Republic of South Africa, 2006). Mathur-Helm (2005) further states that it appears that South African organisations have not evolved enough to share managerial and leadership responsibility and capability with women. Bullock (1994) indicates that most women find themselves on the same level with men colleagues at an early stage in their careers, but in later years chances are that most of those men will have advanced to more senior management positions than women, regardless of initial qualifications, ability or experience.

Maseko (2013) states that both the private and the public sectors have to interpret the challenges they face and align them to the process that would ensure efficiency and effectiveness of women’s leadership positions. The existence of patriarchy still prevails in South African organisations, public and private alike, preventing women from reaching leadership roles as decision makers in the workplace. Goko (2013) indicates that in the private sector women hold only 12% of senior and top management positions, which indicates how marginalised women are, even in the public sector.

The DPSA Strategic Framework 2006-2015 states that as at March 2006, of the total of 6 727 SMS employees, 2 017 (30%), were women. While there are 64.8% women in the professional occupational category, they tend to be concentrated at the lower levels. Women are still confronted with glass ceilings in their career advancement, as the environment of South African organisations is still not women-friendly (Republic of South Africa, 2006). Parcheta, Kaifi and Khanfar (2013) define the glass ceiling as a transparent ceiling that hinders women and minorities from reaching upper level management levels in the workforce. The DPSA Strategic Framework 2006-2015 indicates that while theoretically women currently have access to a broader scope of positions in the labour market, these new opportunities are accessible to a narrow pool of women who have had access to skills development, education and training. Although more qualified women enter the job market, very few women make it to the decision-making positions. In large measure, women’s employment remains either within the traditional female occupations or within the domestic and farming sectors, all too often as casual workers. Women are concentrated within positions that are low paying and that have high rates of turnover (Republic of South Africa, 2006).

Table 2: Workforce profile at the senior management level by gender in South Africa 2010-2019

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>2014</th>
<th>2017</th>
<th>2018</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>81.0%</td>
<td>69.2%</td>
<td>67.9%</td>
<td>67.4%</td>
<td>67.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>19.0%</td>
<td>30.7%</td>
<td>32.1%</td>
<td>32.6%</td>
<td>33.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Although there was an increase of 11.7% in female representation between 2010 and 2012 as depicted in Table 2, females are still under-represented at the senior management level, where males continue to dominate. This confirms that while gender equity
and affirmative action legislation have been implemented in South Africa, inequality in career advancement still remains.

The proportion of women in South Africa’s parliament increased ten-fold from before the 1994 elections to immediately thereafter – 2.7% to 27% – and today this figure stands at 44%, while 42% of cabinet members are women (Ramage, 2015). This makes South Africa’s legislature and cabinet among the top ten most representative in the world. However, if one looks at overall employment statistics in South Africa, a different picture emerges (Botman, 2014). Although women constitute half of the total population, they are poorly represented in management.

The Commission for Employment Equity Report mentions that women comprise 43% of the skilled workforce, 42% of those with professional qualifications, 30% of senior managers, and 20% of top management (Republic of South Africa, 2013). The trend is clear: the higher up you go on the workplace ladder, the fewer women you find (Botman, 2014). A report by the Department of Trade and Industry mentions that gender mainstreaming is an effective strategy for promoting gender equality and women’s economic empowerment. However, it requires regular and careful planning and monitoring. Implementers should be more proficient at reporting on equity targets and gender auditing. The report further states that mainstreaming should be supported by the provision of women-specific programmes that focus on leadership skills, personal development skills, and mentor support (Republic of South Africa, 2011).

The DPSA Strategic Framework 2006-2015 points out that women face many barriers with regard to their mobility in the workplace, particularly barriers of access to entry into management. Government institutions have the challenge of changing their culture in order to be more responsive to the needs of women politicians and civil servants. South Africa has adopted sophisticated rights-based legislation and policies with explicit reference to gender equality. A challenge remains in making these rights accessible to all women by the provision of information and the development of the knowledge and skills that women require to avail themselves of the mechanisms inherent in the legal remedies (Republic of South Africa, 2006).

Research Design and Data Collection Method

Primary data was collected through questionnaires that were distributed to and collected from forty participants by researchers. Participants had to answer questions on their perceptions of the promotion practices of women in the Mpumalanga Office of the Premier based on their observations. As mentioned by Brynard and Hannekom (2006), this data collection method was preferred because of time constraints, and researchers had the advantage of reaching a large number of people at once.

Respondents had two weeks to respond, ample time to think about the answers provided. For secondary data sources such as, among others, books, journals, dissertations, government magazines and reports, and the internet were utilised. Other sources of information were government documents, such as annual reports, employment equity policies, employment equity plans, employment equity reports and other official government publications.

Population and Sampling

The total staff establishment of the Office of the Premier in Mpumalanga is 258, including management. As it was not possible to engage all employees in this study due to time constraints, only 40 officials at lower levels were sampled as the source of primary data. Elements of the sample were randomly selected (Brynard & Hannekom, 2006). The forty respondents were of mixed composition (males and females) as the study was to solicit their perceptions on the promotion of women practices and the challenges thereof in the Mpumalanga Office of the Premier. Data was analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), a computer software package that allowed the researchers to calculate the values of different variables and check variations (Devare, 2015; Le Roux, 2011).

Findings

This section highlights the major findings of this study. The current state of senior staff composition of the Mpumalanga Office of the Premier is presented, followed by the factors that hinder promotion of women in the institution.

The Current State of the Mpumalanga Office of the Premier

Despite the employment equity policies, all 40 respondents agree that representation of females in the senior management positions in the MOTP is not at the desired level as required by the Department of Public Service and Administration. The MOTP was to reach the target of 50% of women in senior management services (SMS). As at 13 February 2017 out of the 34 senior management positions in the MOTP, only 29.4% are occupied by
females, as indicated in Table 3 below. These statistics therefore show that as the management levels grow higher, the number of women decreases.

**Table 3: Senior management staff establishment in the Mpumalanga Office of the Premier**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sms Salary Level</th>
<th>Total Filled Posts in Sms</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>34</strong></td>
<td><strong>24</strong></td>
<td><strong>10</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Factors hindering women from advancing to senior positions

The following are identified factors that contribute to marginalisation of women in the workplace:

**Attitude towards Employment Equity**

Fifty-seven percent (57%) of respondents indicate that despite the fact that the country’s current legislation is biased towards women, the MOTP is still male dominated in senior management positions. It appears that men are given more opportunity and support to ensure their upward mobility in their career as compared to women. While men may be able to fast track their way to the top, women are more likely to have their qualifications and experience scrutinised. Although opportunities are there, in some instances those with befitting qualifications, who have competence but lack adequate experience, are unlikely to secure promotions. This view is supported by Moumakoe (2013), who states that there is indeed a lack of promotion into leadership positions for women, albeit the fact that women have the same necessary educational qualifications as their male counterparts.

**Gender and Leadership Qualities**

Ninety-six percent (96%) of respondents agree that both males and females can lead as long as they have leadership qualities, education, skills and capabilities. Women do possess the leadership qualities required to perform in senior management positions, as shown in Table 4 below, therefore gender has nothing to do with leadership qualities.

**Table 4: Leadership qualities in order of priority, according to participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leadership Quality in General</th>
<th>Leadership Quality Displayed by Females</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Honesty</td>
<td>Empathy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4 clearly shows that the respondents agreed that women have the required characteristics to be good leaders. Women also bring morals and integrity to the organisation. They are compassionate and responsive. Unfortunately, this is perceived as a weakness in the workplace. According to the table above, confidence is not one of women’s strong points, a view shared by Wallace and Smith (2011), who point out that lack of confidence/bravado is one of the obstacles that inhibit women from applying for leadership positions.

**Dual Responsibilities a Hindrance**

Ninety-two percent of the respondents indicated that societal culture and its prescriptions have an influence in the work environment, hampering the career lives of women. Society expects women to put their families first, before their careers, and therefore they are expected to take their family responsibilities more seriously than their work. Participants indicated that women are less likely to be promoted because childbearing responsibilities inhibit them from taking promotional positions in their careers. In other instances, a woman may be required to work longer hours and this becomes a problem for most women. Another factor mentioned is that natural motherly instincts instantly kick in when a family crisis arises. This finding corresponds with what Shames (2013:3) calls a “motherhood penalty”, where women have greater maternal involvement in childcare, dedicating their time, effort, medical care, and breastfeeding to the upbringing of their children. This uneven distribution of family responsibilities in raising a child means that women have to spend far more time in home-and-child-care than men do. Participants also indicated that women miss opportunities to be promoted because of their unwillingness to move out of their comfort zones; when an opportunity for promotion presents itself elsewhere other than family homes, women do not find it easy to relocate.

**Cultural Expectations**

Fifty percent (50%) of respondents stated that things have changed in the societies they live in, and therefore patriarchy is not practised as it used to be twenty years ago. On the contrary, the other 50%
stated that society is still patriarchal and therefore quite often women tend to worry about how society will perceive them if they lead or manage men. The patriarchal practice dictates that men should work for their families, and they are therefore given more opportunities to lead. This compromises their assertiveness as they will be mistakenly labelled as aggressive and disrespectful. Women continue to face challenges in leadership in the MOTP as there is a degree of reluctance by males to be led by a woman. Women are often undermined and sabotaged by their male counterparts, who make sexist remarks. The negative criticism of women by men negatively affects women’s morale and discourages them from taking up leadership/management positions. These views are supported by Lunyolo et al. (2014), who affirm that women are sometimes reluctant to portray their assertiveness and confidence, as they will be regarded as too forward and disrespectful. Women find it difficult to exert authority over males since society still suffers from the myth that women are too emotional and weak for senior management positions. Malan (2014) states that male-centred ergonomic working conditions and the risk of violence and harassment are some of the challenges that negatively affect women’s advancement in the workplace.

**Lack of Good Support System**

Eighty percent of participants indicated that female leaders are not given support by either their male or female colleagues. Women also tend to look down on each other and do not support each other. The persistent stereotyping that assumes that managers are males is a key obstacle to attaining gender equality in management positions. As Lunyolo et al. (2014:27) and Zimmerman (2017:1) put it, this “think-leader-think-male” or “think-manager-think-male” syndrome is a barrier to women’s advancement.

**Political Interference**

Sixty-one percent of participants agree that there is political interference in the employment of women in senior positions through cadre deployment. This cadre deployment exposes men to more promotion opportunities because of their political connections. More often than not female candidates with qualifications and experience are overlooked while those without proper qualifications and who lack the appropriate experience but know politicians get senior positions. Political influence and nepotism often come into play during recruitment to senior positions. Eleven percent of participants stated that political influence in recruitment has become a norm and cannot be curbed.

**Capacity Building**

Eighty-three percent of participants stated that both women and men are given the platform to improve their skills through Personal Developmental Plans (PDP) in the Performance Management and Development System where employees identify career paths and developmental needs. However, the MOTP should ensure that it implements the approved Workplace Skills Plan informed by the PDPs to capacitate its workforce as legislated. Participants acknowledged that the MOTP has programmes specifically aimed at empowering women, such as Women’s Conference, Women Empowerment Week and the SMS Women Summit taking place annually, and therefore women should take advantage of these programmes.

**Educational Programmes**

Sixty-five percent of the respondents showed concern over the type of developmental programmes offered; they indicated that the focus is on short courses that do not add value. Quite often education and training programmes offered are not linked to much needed skills, experience and knowledge. If properly planned these programmes should specifically be designed to meet women’s career needs and improve their skills and knowledge. It also became apparent that there is no clear mentorship programme in place to ensure that senior managers, especially women who have made it to the top, prepare those in lower level positions to be managers.

**Complying with Legislation**

Eighty-three percent of respondents identified one of the barriers in woman empowerment as the lack of compliance with the legislative framework such as the Employment Equity Act, the White Paper on Transformation of the Public Service of 1997, and Affirmative Action by the MOTP. Moumakoe (2013) states that what needs to be done to bring about change and obtain equality is not only to pass legislation, but rather to walk the extra mile by ensuring that women with leadership and management potential are identified and harnessed.

**Conclusion**

It has become evident from the study that there is still a challenge facing the MOTP in the employment of women in senior management positions. A huge disparity is found between the percentage of men and women in decision-making
positions. Although women in the MOTP make up 58%, they only occupy 33% of the senior management positions.

Data collected revealed that although legislation to support women’s advancement is available, there are other ways to accelerate the development of women that include giving recognition to capable women in the workplace and supporting them. The executive management should commit to supporting women in their endeavour to occupy senior positions in the workplace. Women who qualify and have the ability to perform managerial duties should be given the opportunity to lead. Cadre deployment should not be a scapegoat for the appointment of incompetent officials; skills and qualifications should always be considered, and women with qualifications be given priority.

Furthermore, there is no consequence management and accountability for lack of implementation of government’s policies that address equity and equality. The executive management is not held accountable for not reaching the promotion targets set for women to reach senior positions, and this implies that authorities are not committed to the advancement of women to fast-track them into senior management positions through a systematic and developmental approach. Development and advancement of women to senior management positions should be a continual concern until the targets are met.

Lastly, the study shows that women empowerment should not be only the government’s endeavour, women should also take charge of their advancement and utilise every opportunity that is at their disposal to empower themselves. Women should be prepared and be confident in taking up these challenging positions in the workplace as nothing will be given to them on a silver platter.

**Recommendations**

The fact that the MOTP is struggling to appoint 50% women in senior management positions shows that government still has a lot to do to advance women. Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

- It is an imperative that appointments should always be based on education, qualifications and competence. Appointments should not be finalised by the Executive Council as those are politically motivated, they should rather be based on people’s qualifications and competence, and not because of political connections.

- To increase opportunities for the advancement of women will require employees to be given opportunities and necessary support to study for the career of their choice. Women should have clear career paths and take advantage of these opportunities to study further.

- Women must have the support and commitment of executive management, who have the power to influence change across the organisation. Government should support women who wish to venture into senior positions by exploring the options, such as, flexible working hours, reduced workweeks and changing the number of days in the workweek while keeping the hours the same. This will help women to balance their work and family responsibilities.

- Since the country has progressive policies on equality and equity, all that needs to be done is to strengthen the implementation and the monitoring mechanisms. Policies need to be implemented appropriately and consistently. Regular monitoring of the targets is not sufficient. Stringent measures should be imposed and there should be sanctions for those who do not reach the targets that have been set.

- Women must not wait for opportunities but rather take it upon themselves to empower and advance themselves. They should be ready to take the bull (discrimination) by its horn and assertively claim their position in both society and workplace.

**References**


