

in focus



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Business and gender equality Lessons from South Africa

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Summary



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Abstract



With the intention of assisting in awareness-raising around gender equality issues among business leaders in South Africa and ascertaining the potential for improving women's workplace conditions, particularly those of poor black African employees, this project aimed to:

- examine gender equality practices among a selection of South African companies
- identify examples of good practice and case studies for dissemination as learning tools
- suggest methods of transferring knowledge and skills between businesses.

Although there was broad consensus that business should be addressing gender equality more proactively, findings showed that there were a multitude of complex factors that underpin this issue in the private sector; the most significant being race and class. The involvement of business leaders in the promotion of opportunities and improvements for women in the workforce, specifically for poor black African women, cannot be examined without unpicking these factors, being more specific in approach and involving other vital partners such as trade unions. In addition, businesses need to be more firmly convinced that gender equality interventions can impact positively on a company's bottom line and bring benefits to them.

The Resource Centre's *In Focus* series highlights key lessons from partnership action research projects aimed at business, civil society, governments and international agencies engaged in responsible business practices.

Key lessons learnt

Though gender inequality is global, an understanding of how issues such as race and class relate to South African business practice is necessary in order to develop appropriate company interventions around gender equality.

Awareness-raising would be beneficial to business in South Africa to demonstrate how gender equality initiatives could impact positively on their core activities while assisting in the enhancement of wider socio-economic conditions and poverty elimination. A committed business leadership willing to encourage an analysis of workplace practices in relation to both core business and social investment activities would do much to promote the business case for action in this area.

Encouraging interventions that go beyond capacity-building, equal opportunities and diversity approaches to gender equality would probably require working with partners from other sectors.

Affirmative action and encouraging opportunities for skilled black African women at executive level were the main focus of gender equality work within companies researched. Any assessment of the possibility of improvements for poor black African women requires the involvement of and partnership with

other stakeholders, especially trade unions, to which the majority of formally employed unskilled women workers belong.

Businesses in South Africa largely developed programmes for their workforce and the wider community without reference to other companies. Appropriate methods of transferring skills, knowledge and good practice around gender equality and other issues among companies should be encouraged. Potential areas for engaging in this process include cross-sector dialogue between businesses, government agencies, unions and bodies representing women's interests, positioning gender equality as a key part of broader diversity work across business sectors, sharing local and international case studies and organising regular networking and discussion forums.

Suggestions have been made for possible future gender equality research programmes including initiatives with specific sectors, women executives, company supply chains and unions as well as working on leadership and diversity issues. Work in these areas could be conducted across companies with the engagement of appropriate stakeholders. It would need to be sensitively managed by agents with a clear understanding of the South African context.

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Background

The majority of the active black African female population continues to be confined in survivalist, micro and small-scale enterprises in the informal sector.

Investing in gender equality, in terms of ensuring equal access by both women and men to opportunities, resources and rewards, makes good business sense. As competition in the global marketplace increases, key competitive advantage rests with maximising the potential of a company's workforce. This necessitates addressing the needs of all workers, both male and female. By promoting opportunities for women, employers improve their ability to secure quality personnel from a wider range of job applicants as well as using the different assets that both men and women bring to the workplace to foster innovation and creativity. The potential for improvements in productivity, motivation and efficiency are likely to increase with the correlated benefits for business of greater profits, market advantage and positive brand image. More fundamentally, if business is to be sustainable in the long term, gender inequality needs to be taken more seriously. Women make up more than 50% of the South African population, and are key consumers, customers and clients as well as employees, spouses or partners of employees and providers of necessary services in homes and communities for which they are often unpaid.¹ If businesses are to contribute towards eradicating poverty, if they are to survive and be sustainable, and if their activities are to contribute towards a healthier and less unequal society, they cannot ignore existing inequalities between women and men.

During 1999, The International Business Leaders Forum (IBLF) sought to develop a workable action plan with the business sector to improve women's working conditions in South Africa's large and medium companies, particularly for poor black African female employees, while facilitating more productive links between business and female consumers. Both facets of the programme were expected to impact

upon wider organisational practices as well as provide an example of collective action to other sectors of the economy. In parallel, the Resource Centre for the Social Dimensions of Business Practice (RCSDBP) identified gender equality as a key issue in understanding how business activity can positively impact poverty elimination with business benefits. As a result, the two organisations agreed that a pilot programme would be established to achieve the following outputs:

- a context and situational analysis of gender equality practices in selected South African companies
- examples of good practice and case studies for dissemination as learning tools
- research on methods of transferring knowledge and skills between businesses
- potential for replication, scale-up and lessons learnt.

Research on gender equality practices within the South African private sector is sparse, and companies appear to tackle it in isolation. This study is intended as a modest contribution to investigation in this area by seeking to identify and share the views of business leaders and managers in relation to gender equality.²

1. More than one-third of all households in South Africa, and 66% of South African rural households, are headed by women; by excluding them, business is in fact curtailing its potential to grow and be profitable.

2. Interviews were not carried out with employees or unions.



Gender equality and the private sector in South Africa

Gender equality initiatives can positively impact on the core activities of business while assisting in the enhancement of wider socio-economic conditions and poverty elimination.

South African women make up two-fifths of the paid workforce, account for almost 70% of all service-sector employees and more than half of all clerical positions. They are under-represented in positions that are perceived to be male-oriented (for example, fewer than 1% of engineers are women), and over-represented in industry sectors that are service-oriented and characterised by low wages and poor working conditions. The South African labour market remains skewed, and occupational segregation, power imbalance and pay discrepancies prevail. When these figures are examined in relation to race, they clearly suggest the need for increasing women's access to both formal and informal resources.

Following the long struggle against apartheid,³ and in recognition of the key role played by women in this, the South African legislative environment has theoretically emerged as one of the most enabling in the world for women. As well as espousing international gender instruments,⁴ national legislation has been passed to promote gender, as well as racial equality.⁵ Labour

legislation safeguarding women's rights includes the Labour Relations Act 1995, the Basic Conditions of Employment Act 1997, the Employment Equity Act 1998 and the Skills Development Act 1999. The Employment Equity Act was passed to ensure that there was no discrimination in the workplace and that employers promoted and reported on the employment equity of designated groups (black people, women and people with disabilities) to the Department of Labour as a legal compliance. Although application of the law is problematic, and a coherent policy on gender equality implementation practices is lacking, this is an important instrument for providing a legal framework for dealing with workplace discrimination.

Despite efforts deployed towards the economic empowerment of women, the majority of the active black African female population continues to be confined in survivalist, micro and small-scale enterprises in the informal sector.⁶ There are some indications that women are increasingly seeking self-employment in the formal private sector. South African women, especially African rural women, are becoming entrepreneurs in order to enhance their economic status. However, the challenge for the majority of women who find themselves in the small business and informal sectors is formidable. Government tenders and procurement policies inadvertently place female-owned – especially black female-owned – business in a less competitive position. In addition, access to markets, finance, training and organisation, poverty-related facilities for childcare, transport infrastructure, safe and reliable storage, training in non-traditional skills and a safe working environment are needed.⁷

These challenges are reinforced by women's poor literacy levels,⁸ which mean lack of access to formal employment and employment in the lower strata of companies. In addition, research⁹ has shown that companies exhibit latent and overt gender and

racial discriminatory practices, with black women earning less, facing poor recruitment and promotion prospects and, in some cases, unable to find work in sectors regarded as the preserve of whites.

In February 2000 a report was published by the Commission on Gender Equality (CGE) entitled *Gender and the Private Sector (GAPS)*, citing the gender equality trends and practices of South Africa's top 100 companies. The report suggested that although legislation would serve to start the process of ensuring that companies comply with human rights and equity principles, large private-sector companies have largely marginalised gender equality practices. It highlighted the need for a comprehensive action plan to create a culture of gender equality in the private sector that would educate and instil awareness among women relating to their basic rights as well as informing business leaders that gender equality practices are synonymous with enhanced productivity and competitiveness.

3. See, for example, Qunta, C (1987) or Africa National Congress (ANC) web page with details of the role of women in the struggle against apartheid.

4. Commitment by government to the Beijing Platform for Action, Ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), Adoption of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Declaration on Gender and Development.

5. The adoption of a Charter for Effective Equality, The Growth, Economic and Redistribution Strategy (GEAR) & Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) prioritise job creation initiatives and specifically mention the emancipation of women and the enhancement of the small, medium and micro enterprise sector (SMME).

6. Almost 80% of people engaged in the informal sector are African, 60% of whom are African women (Lund et.al, 2000).

7. Lund et.al, 2000

8. Three-quarters of those who are illiterate in South Africa are women. In some rural areas, illiteracy runs as high as 50%, CGE.

9. GAPS (1999), Breakwater Monitor.



Methodology and terminology

This study involved:



Definition

* “Gender equality, equality between men and women, entails the concept that all human beings, both men and women, are free to develop their personal abilities and make choices without the limitations set by stereotypes, rigid gender roles and prejudices. Gender equality means that the different behaviour, aspirations and needs of women and men are considered, valued and favoured equally. It does not mean that women and men have to become the same, but that their rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female. Gender equity means fairness of treatment for women and men, according to their respective needs. This may include equal treatment or treatment that is different but which is considered equivalent in terms of rights, benefits, obligations and opportunities.”

ABC of Women Worker’s Rights and Gender Equality, ILO, 2000

Acronyms

ANC	African National Congress
CGE	Commission on Gender Equality
IBLF	International Business Leaders Forum
ILO	International Labour Office
NBI	National Business Initiative
RCSDBP	Resource Centre for the Social Dimensions of Business Practice
SBP	Small Business Project
UNIFEM	United Nations Development Fund for Women
COSATU	Congress of South African Trade Unions



Case studies

The informal sector is a larger source of employment for women than for men.

Two-thirds of the world's 876 million illiterates are women.

More women than men lack the basic literacy and computer skills needed to enter "new media" professions.

ILO, Gender! A Partnership of Equals, International Labour Review, Vol 138, No.3, 1999

1 CASE STUDY A South African outbound Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) company

This company has a strong market presence with listings in international markets. It has a good reputation for its world-class processes and systems and work in the community. The company began equity initiatives in 1971 in order to increase the number of black people in salaried ranks. In 1985, the company's first equity programme aimed to ensure half of all staff would be black. By 1992, 46% of the staff were black but evaluation indicated that their spread in higher grades and line functions was unsatisfactory and that qualitative aspects of the programme had been poor. A second equity strategy aimed to examine demographic representation and to eliminate workplace discrimination. By 1997, black people made up 54% of salaried staff and 16% of all executives. Broader general management practices had been introduced to address issues around people relationships, independent black distributors were encouraged through affirmative procurement, and implementation of minimum threshold for equity in the incentive scheme was developed for all executives. However, feedback from surveys indicated that considerable progress had yet to be made in the area of social integration; and that women, as well as black people, needed to be taken account of in the company's equity programmes.

With the changes in government and the introduction of employment equity legislation, a third equity strategy was launched to encompass Strategic Alignment, Headcount, People Management, Human Dignity and Commercial Equity. The strategy is based on:

- **Leadership commitment:** the Managing Director and Board drive the process and evaluate equity implementation on a regular basis to identify "weak" areas.
- **Holistic approach:** equity takes account of all dimensions of the company's operations and does not just focus on a headcount.
- **Integrated approach:** equity plans must be integrated into line functions and communicated to all employees through mechanisms such as in-house magazines.
- **Incentives:** incentives are provided to managers when equity headcount targets are attained even though there is recognition that the existing skills pools of women and black people may differ from particular skills being sought.
- **Regular reviews:** monitoring through in-house surveys of equity targets, grievance and sexual harassment incidents is critical for tracking progress.
- **Redefinition of merit:** merit includes the ability to manage and operate within a diverse team and markets that will deliver growth.
- **Strategic resourcing:** unique processes to attract and retain talented people, especially black people and females, need to be developed.
- **Process rather than an event:** equity must be a strategy that is implemented by the organisation over a long period of time.

2 CASE STUDY Information Communication Technology (ICT) sector

This company is a highly profitable, fast-growing telecommunications service provider with an international shareholder base. It has relatively few full-time employees, and it tends to employ skilled individuals. It is recognised for being proactive in providing community services and sponsorship. The employment equity strategy encompasses a strong gender focus and is seen as a business imperative. Final accountability for gender equality and employment equity reside with the Managing Director, with the human resources department acting as an enabler to line management in this area. An incentive scheme is in place, and line managers are compensated when equity targets are reached. The company has recognised that some equity targets may not be reached because the pool of previously disadvantaged candidates within certain areas of technical competence is limited. It has also carried out an audit to identify internal company barriers that restricted growth in the individual development of these employees. It examined, in relation to women, issues pertaining to decision-making autonomy, remuneration, company culture and whether the environment encourages the advancement of women.

The company has also developed a sexual harassment policy and a code of ethics policy as well as a Women's Forum, where women meet and discuss issues that affect them. It was suggested that there could be similar forums between organisations. Monthly reporting to the human resources function has been instituted to track whether interventions are yielding desired outcomes and shifts in representativeness and attitudes. Those interviewed felt that a gender equality programme should:

- not instil a feeling of entitlement among any employee
- involve awareness building for both men and women so that gender equality is not perceived as just being about women requiring special interventions
- identify careers where women are under-represented and which are aligned to future labour planning needs. Suggest activities to close the gap, and link these to female learners acquainting themselves with technical careers at school level, thereby breaking the traditional mindset
- examine issues with all staff such as single parenting, career management, confidence-building, health issues (rape, HIV/AIDS), financial planning and independence and image and beauty
- be streamlined with concrete interventions that focus on specific areas layer of the organisation or industry sector
- have measurable short-term deliverables
- consider equal pay for equal work and communicate the meaning of this to women (and men)
- examine racial inequality issues
- train for fast-tracking
- be well publicised and communicated to employees of participating companies.

3 CASE STUDY Retail banking sector

This retail bank has gained a positive reputation in the marketplace for its leadership as a corporate citizen. It has recently restructured, and assigned many staff to new positions, taking gender equality into account. This has caused some instability and affected morale. Because of its geographical spread, the company has found it a challenge to create opportunities for employees in non-metropolitan areas. To accommodate women and single parents it has invested in distance-learning programmes. Promotion and advancement of women has increased and women are proportionally represented in the workforce. However, the number of women applying for senior positions from the regional offices is not as high as the company would like, and men still dominate the higher echelons.

The company believes that one of the main barriers impeding the advancement of women is that they are more restricted than men in terms of family responsibilities. They also recognise that gender equality at work is dependent on a specific environment: e.g., outlet, head office, department or unit. The company has conducted diversity workshops to address communication issues and to explore different cultures. It feels that a broad private-sector gender equality programme should:

- give companies the opportunity to learn from others in terms of good practice
- afford a new and fresh approach to gender equality within business
- provide diversity tools
- assess underlying dynamics within corporate organisations
- be cascading and decentralised with the involvement of account executives for different units
- incorporate the unions in some way
- benchmark and monitor effectively.



4 CASE STUDY Financial institution

This company is a large employer and is well known throughout South Africa. Responsibility for employment equity resides with the human resources department but is part of a wider transformation programme that includes the corporate affairs unit which communicates equity plans to the group and to external stakeholders. Black women are under-represented in management and technical positions. The company believes that gender equality programmes should consider:

- cultural diversity, diversity management and gender equality
- childcare issues, especially for single parents
- improved company communication on human resources and employment equity issues
- training focused on empowerment, leadership and assertiveness skills for women
- strategies for mentorship
- valid and reliable evaluation systems which are both qualitative and quantitative
- an understanding of how gender and race issues intersect
- discussion of issues such as socialisation barriers, equal pay for work of equal value, why different scales of remuneration exist, and women's attitudes to non-technical positions
- a forum for women within the organisation to address women's issues in the workplace.

5 CASE STUDY A large parastatal

This company has undergone massive restructuring and has been mandated to seek solutions to many inherited challenges. The board comprises directors from diverse racial, gender and professional groupings; and divisional boards drive corporate strategy at lower levels. The company has a good reputation for training and development activities, and is regarded as a leader in the field of corporate social investment. It is also known for having a cadre of highly skilled and competent black females in the workforce.

The successful implementation of the company's employment equity plans is based on an analysis of current work practices and procedures, the identification of areas of under-representation among designated groups, and agreement between management and staff on implementation processes and areas of accountability. The company has identified eight high-level interventions required to attain equity goals; integral to these is a target-setting process set against national demographics.

Gender equality is regarded as a moral obligation and something the company must both initiate and succeed in. At the end of 2000, women constituted approximately 13% of all employees. There is a strong focus on advancing women into senior management positions, which has involved special training and research into latent barriers that affect the advancement of women. To counteract these, regional equity committees have been established to ratify and endorse equity goals at district level. In some company subsidiaries, projects have been established to encourage women to pursue technical jobs with the objective of fast-tracking female candidates who show potential. Mentors are provided from the human resources unit. These projects aim to recruit women both from within and outside the company to reach set targets spanning a period of time. Meanwhile, the company continues to monitor basic conditions of employment and invests significant resources in the training and development of unskilled and lower-level female workers. Monitoring of sexual harassment is carried out at all levels of the organisation. The company's gender equality focus is promoted through a communications strategy involving regular launches, internal awards and employee magazines.



Key research findings

Gender equality interventions in South Africa have been developed around three main approaches: capacity-building women through skills and mentoring opportunities; promotion of equal opportunity programmes which seek to encourage women to enter male-dominated areas; and through the management of diversity which emphasises the business case for having a mixed workforce. Although these approaches are of value, they are unlikely to have a significant impact on gender inequality without a deeper analysis of workplace practices and the issues that inform them.⁹ This would require:

- a change in corporate culture and hence workplace practice
- an understanding that engaging with marginalised groups, such as poor black African women, is actually beneficial to a company
- the building of effective partnerships with appropriate stakeholders.

Both the situational appraisal and the networking session revealed that companies and attendees often had conflicting views on the meaning of gender equality: about what programmes in this area would mean or entail; who the target audience should be, particularly in terms of race and rank; whether companies should have an external and/or internal focus; and what the exact link between gender equality and business was.¹⁰

Gender equality was largely seen as an affirmative action issue which must be addressed because of legislative requisites. Though some companies were committed to mainstreaming gender equality and accelerating employment equity, few had been able to adequately integrate an approach that addressed race and gender inequalities simultaneously.

Awareness-raising was needed on how gender equality initiatives can impact positively on core business activities while improving wider socio-economic conditions and contributing towards poverty elimination.

Unless gender equality within the private sector is examined in relation to race and class as well as issues such as rural/urban background, culture, language, HIV/AIDS and health, and marital status and age, a clear understanding of the requirements of different groups of women is impossible.

The issue of race impinged on any discussion of gender issues, especially where black female managers were interviewed. It was also clear that class divisions among black women were important. As the research progressed it became apparent that unless gender equality within the private sector was examined in relation to race and class as well as issues such as rural/urban background, culture, language, HIV/AIDS and health, marital status and age, a clear understanding of the requirements of different groups of women was impossible. By unpacking these factors carefully, the possibility of ascertaining which gender equality interventions would be most appropriate at different levels within a company and how these could be developed would be more feasible.

Only the parastatal companies espoused an organisation-wide gender equality policy in a forthright manner. They were also the only companies where there were more and better-quality positions for black women and where black women were strongly represented at executive and senior management level. Leadership, organisational culture and traditional mindset were demonstrated as integral to the success or failure of any equity programme.

Most companies spoke more about black female access to management than wider interventions to improve the working conditions of semi-skilled women when questioned about their gender equality work. These companies asserted that

promoting black women into positions of decision-making was a critical point of departure from traditional practices of equity, which often resulted in marginalising the issue of executive development for women. However, more than 10% of the companies interviewed headhunted from black professional associations for skilled black African staff rather than developing structured succession planning and organisational training for these positions.

In order to examine more clearly the positions and opportunities for poor black African women in the workforce, a wider research approach is deemed necessary. The involvement of other stakeholders, such as union representatives, is key to this.¹¹ As there was ambivalence by business leaders towards the idea of involving unions in gender equality initiatives, the development of constructive business/labour partnerships would require considerable effort and changes in attitude.

9. See Hardy (2001), CG Gender Lens (1998) & Ely & Meyerson (2000).

10. Until recently the term 'women' often implicitly equalled 'white women' and 'black people' equalled 'black men', hence the increasing equity emphasis on 'black women' in particular.

11. As well as CGE, organisations such as the Parliamentary Women's Group, the Office of the Status of Women and academic units such as the African Gender Institute, Gender Equity Unit (University of the Western Cape) and Women's Net were suggested.

Examples of good practice

TYPE OF INTERVENTION	EXAMPLES FROM COMPANIES	GENERAL COMMENTS
<p>Capacity-building women</p> <p>Seeks to ensure that more women as individuals are competent to compete in the workplace and/or to assume positions of leadership.</p> <p>Assumes that ‘women’ and ‘men’ have different experiences; aims to minimise these differences to enable ‘women’ to compete as equals and thus improve representation.</p> <p>Specifically targets women employees; and offers training, skills and mentoring opportunities. In communities the same is true – especially given the Nigerian environment.</p> <p>Sometimes includes approaches that aim to encourage ‘feminine values’ in the workplace.</p>	<p>Monitoring the basic conditions of employment for women.</p> <p>Training and development of unskilled and lower-level female workers.</p> <p>Offering training programmes for women in the community to set up small businesses.</p> <p>Accommodation of women single parent employees through distance learning programmes.</p> <p>HIV/AIDS counselling for women.</p> <p>Fast-track management programmes aimed at increasing the number of women in managerial and professional positions.</p> <p>Seminars and forums for women employees to meet and discuss issues that affect them in the workplace.</p>	<p>Tends to focus primarily on issues of representativeness.</p> <p>‘Women’ can appear as ‘the problem’: ie. as a group that needs ‘assistance’.</p> <p>Little change in the ‘general’ areas of work that don’t have specific targets.</p> <p>Change largely seen as responsibility of individual, and the focus is on women taking this responsibility. Men don’t have any responsibility to change.</p> <p>May help with small increase of women in leadership positions, but does not address fundamental structures.</p> <p>Men may see this approach as giving ‘women’ unfair advantages.</p> <p>Can reinforce stereotypes: eg: ‘feminine’ behaviour can only be found in women.</p>
<p>Equal opportunity programmes</p> <p>Seek to provide equal opportunities for women by addressing structures that block women’s access and advancement.</p> <p>Favour legal and policy-based interventions that aim to reduce organisational constraints/barriers on women’s ability to achieve.</p> <p>Initiatives encourage women to enter male-dominated areas and create an enabling environment for women.</p>	<p>Research to identify barriers that restrict women and black people through policy audits, reviews, external consultancies and staff surveys.</p> <p>Recognition of need for balance between the career and work aspirations of women and their family responsibilities.</p> <p>Making shared-risk credit and loans available to entrepreneurial women in the community.</p> <p>Sexual harassment policies. One business had incorporated this into its code of ethics policy for the company as a whole, and another had instituted a special monitoring system of sexual harassment at all levels of the organisation.</p>	<p>Tend to focus on affirmative action: often difficult to work with both race and gender.</p> <p>Concentration on top structures and decision-making levels of business.</p> <p>Tends to favour few women at management level who are able to climb ‘career ladder’.</p> <p>Questions about whether men face career/work difficulties, and the relationship to the domestic role of women and wider discrimination have not been addressed, either by business or by society as a whole.</p>

Examples of good practice (continued)

TYPE OF INTERVENTION	EXAMPLES FROM COMPANIES	GENERAL COMMENTS
<p>Diversity management</p> <p>Emphasises the business case for having a mixed workforce.</p> <p>Attempts to address multiple inequalities simultaneously and integrate issues of 'gender inequality' among these.</p> <p>Aims to increase tolerance, valuing behind-the-scenes 'work' that often goes on over and above regular job descriptions.</p>	<p>Mainstreaming gender equality by integrating it into line management functions.</p> <p>Setting targets with a gender focus by looking at national demographics and examining minutes of board meetings, tender proposals, business plans and line reports.</p> <p>In-house magazines focussing on equity and diversity and incorporating a gender focus. One company used employee magazines to emphasise its gender equality commitment.</p> <p>One company, through its focus on the black African market, reviewed the extent to which adverts perpetuate negative stereotypes and amended its advertising in order to be more sensitive to women and black African culture.</p> <p>Formulation of procurement policies that targeted female-owned businesses and people with disabilities.</p>	<p>Tends to prioritise issues of 'race' and culture as opposed to gender.</p> <p>Can reinforce stereotypes with emphasis on respect for 'feminine' values.</p> <p>Concentrates on developing tolerance for differences and does not always use this to reshape the ways in which work gets done.</p> <p>Primarily quantitative in nature though there is evidence that some companies are beginning to look at the issue more qualitatively.</p>
<p>Institutional change</p> <p>Focuses on underlying/hidden systemic factors in the organisation that lead to inequity.</p> <p>Examines deeply held assumptions about the way business is conducted and links with wider society.</p> <p>Looks at how organisations are gendered and where male-centred norms are in-built in work practices and structures.</p> <p>Participative management practices are developed, and issues of gender equity are considered alongside those of organisational effectiveness.</p>	<p>A number of companies, particularly the parastatals, believed that there was a moral obligation to continuously indicate their commitment to women's emancipation and to create synergy between aspects of growth, profitability and shareholder value with gender equality principles. They had begun to look more fundamentally at gender equality in relation to this and to 'race'.</p> <p>Some companies had worked to analyse their internal and external linkages and social investment work. One company felt that working proactively with women in the community was vital to developing the country's economy and was assisting poor rural women to obtain credit and act as a link to other development resources.</p> <p>Shell Nigeria's Women's Programme (profiled at networking session) provided a good social investment showcase of how a company has reviewed its licence to operate and developed a participatory approach to working with more than 100 communities. Promoted income-generating and welfare projects aimed at improving the economic well-being of women and their families, building community confidence and women's capacity to own, manage and sustain economic development.</p>	<p>Involves a long-term process of directed organisational change and learning.</p> <p>Demands great leadership and workforce commitment.</p> <p>In order to truly reflect institutional change businesses must work to redress inequalities in their core business activities, social investment work and through engagement in policy dialogue.</p>



Transferring knowledge and skills

Private-sector initiatives promoting opportunities and improvements for women in the workforce need to go beyond the capacity-building, equal opportunities and diversity approaches. They need to address – with other key partners – the multitude of complex and challenging factors that underpin the sphere of gender equality in the South African private sector in order to develop appropriate interventions.

The vast majority of managers and those attending the networking session were unaware of what other companies were doing in the area of gender equality. The interviews and networking session assisted in awareness raising, and suggestions were made for further exchange and activity in this area.

1 ‘Gender inequality’ cannot be tackled in an isolated fashion
Focusing on diversity The fact that business leaders would not commit to a programme that had “gender” as its title or main focus area, was identified as inhibiting potential transfer of knowledge and skills between companies. Participants felt that a gender equality programme should perhaps take on a broader diversity stance and include all business sectors.

2 Responsibility
Leadership commitment and profile It was agreed that one of the best methods for sharing knowledge and skills was through proactive company directorship. Participants felt that gender equality should be positioned as a Managing Director and shareholder issue as opposed to one that was led by Human Resources; and that leadership commitment, and an acknowledgment of the importance of targeting men as well as women, from those seen to be strategic and high-level within an organisation would go a long way to promoting gender equality awareness and action on this issue among companies.

3 Knowledge-building and sharing
Cross-sector dialogue Issues relating to gender equality and women’s workplace rights could be transmitted through productive dialogue involving business leaders with other key stakeholders such as government bodies; Department of Labour, CGE, international agencies; ILO, UNIFEM, trade unions, black empowerment groups and appropriate women’s organisations. This was perceived as a

way of capacity-building for work on gender issues generally, developing networks with a focus on gender equality, sharing information and good practice constructively, influencing government legislation, and complementing equity work, promoting a more positive workplace environment and increasing opportunities for women. This would also then make necessary links with broader social changes required.

Conducting seminars/workshops
Business coalitions and organisations, such as the National Business Initiative (NBI), the South African Institute of Directors and the University of Natal’s Leadership Centre, expressed an interest in hosting seminars on the issue of gender in the workplace. This was with the attendance of a wider audience of business representatives in order to assist cross-learning between organisations and the transfer of knowledge between companies in this area. It was felt that such organisations, which are widely respected by the private sector in South Africa, would be able to:

- attract participation at leadership level to examine and discuss the issue of gender equality in the private sector,
- raise awareness for both men and women and challenging business about gender equality and its relationship with core business activities.

International case study profiling
International case studies that demonstrated good practice from outside South Africa were perceived as being helpful in drawing attention and allowing transfer of knowledge and skills more widely. Speakers could be invited to make presentations at seminars or specific events, and company representatives could be drawn into international networks that exist around gender in the workplace.

Sharing case studies It was felt that a useful tool for sharing information in

this area would be some form of manual, written report or newsletter on good gender practices with case studies from a variety of companies that could be disseminated within South Africa. The annual South Africa Corporate Social Responsibility Handbook was considered to be one such avenue for this. The suggestion that an “external” agency with an “objective” stance could assist in networking and drawing together case studies was examined. Though acknowledged as a good idea by some, there was marked hostility by others to “outsiders coming to tell South Africans how to do things”. Emphasis was placed upon the fact that South Africans should work on solutions to these problems themselves. Any donor/funding agency working in this area would have to have a clear understanding of the South African context and the respect of all stakeholders before being accepted in this regard.

Benchmarking and impact measurement

These were seen as important in creating a culture of awareness around the issue of gender equality. By developing tools together, companies would be able to identify both internal and external challenges and share information on what works best. Nearly all interviewees raised the issue of monitoring, with emphasis on the fact that a valid and reliable monitoring and evaluation system or tool would be needed for a gender equality programme that would encompass a qualitative and quantitative stance.

4 Capacity-building for women

Developing capacity-building/mentoring programmes for women

The issue of skills was seen as integral to any proposed programme. It was felt that there was a need for mentoring programmes that developed opportunities for:

- non-traditional/non-stereotyped career options for girls and women
- well-qualified black women to gain access and entry to projects and experience
- women to take up strategic and leadership positions.

Mentoring was seen as important in assisting in both technical and conceptual knowledge, learning from a broad base of experience and gaining supportive contacts. Several methods were suggested for mentoring across companies. These included:

- black African women who had reached high levels in business assisting in skills development and access to opportunities for black women
- the involvement of male mentors to encourage their female counterparts
- an electronic support system linked with international organisations familiar with mentoring issues for women
- informal mentoring networks
- groups of male and female mentors working with schools in underprivileged areas to encourage poorer African students of both sexes to enter business and non-stereotyped fields.

Organising networking forums One company had established a Women’s Forum where women meet and discuss various issues. They suggested that there could be similar forums between organisations to share views and suggestions for change.

Self-employment, and part-time and home-based work, have expanded opportunities for women’s participation in the labour force but are generally characterised by lack of security, lack of benefits and low income.



Conclusion & recommendations

Women continue to occupy the lower and middle ranks of organisations, have unequal access to training and promotion, encounter difficulty entering male-dominated professions, and are paid less than men for equal work.

ILO, Gender! A Partnership of Equals, International Labour Review, Vol 138, No.3, 1999

There was consensus, both during the interviews and at the networking session, that business leaders in South Africa should be addressing gender equality more fully. However, it was equally clear that private-sector initiatives promoting opportunities and improvements for women in the workforce, specifically for poor black African women, need to go beyond the capacity-building, equal opportunities and diversity approaches outlined in this document. They need to address, with other key partners, the multitude of complex and challenging factors that underpin the sphere of gender equality in the South African private sector in order to develop appropriate interventions. In addition, business leaders need to be convinced that gender equality is beneficial to their companies.

It is suggested that business should seek to work on gender equality programmes in the key areas of **core business activity, social investment and engagement in policy dialogue** by:

- cross-sector partnership-building – engaging in productive dialogue and developing collaborative partnerships between organisations and individuals from different sectors, e.g. companies, business organisations, government agencies, unions, women’s groups, academic institutions and black empowerment organisations
- awareness-raising and capacity-building – mobilising and equipping individuals in business and stakeholder organisations to plan and deliver successful gender equality programmes by examining the deeper relationships between gender, poverty and business
- effective communication & information-sharing – exchanging & disseminating information about gender equality initiatives and examples of good practise both between and across sectors.

Possible areas for further research and the development of initiatives are as follows:

Sector-specific programmes

Rather than focus on the “bigger picture” which is, to a certain extent, being dealt with through employment equity legislation and black empowerment initiatives, more streamlined programmes and interventions that focus on a limited number of areas could be developed. Such initiatives could concentrate upon a particular area, layer of an organisation or specific industry sector. The programmes should have measurable short-term deliverables. One could, for example, consider working with parastatals or the banking/financial sector. This would largely omit other large organisations that monopolise markets and employ considerable numbers of employees, but these factors would need to be considered against issues regarding sustainability, reach and the multiplier factor.

Women’s executive programme

Many companies indicated that black women’s access to management was their main challenge. This was echoed by others attending the networking session who felt that women’s opportunities at unskilled level were largely being addressed by legislation such as the Basic Conditions of Employment Act and the Skills Development Act. These acts should ensure that most companies have espoused policies that will provide an enabling environment for non-management female staff. Their feeling was that apartheid had structurally marginalised black women for economic participation and that affirmative action did not really prioritise the recruitment and advancement of black women. Their interest was in a separate programme that specifically encouraged this. The disadvantages of a programme that focuses on a relatively small echelon of the corporate structure need to be carefully considered. Focusing on an

executive programme implies that the barriers to female advancement within the corporate world relate primarily to training/skills and women not possessing the “right attributes”, such as ambition, to advance. More fundamentally, it would not address the latent issues of power and leadership mindset or of deeper work practice issues.

Working with the community and supply chains

Based on the Shell Nigeria experience as well as trends apparent in the South African economy it is clear that the net absorption rate of employment within the private sector is limited and that business has a vested interest in ensuring that it builds close and mutually beneficial relations with neighbouring communities. At the same time, South African legislation will ensure in principle that women employed in the formal sector are beneficiaries of training – Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET), basic conditions of employment, etc. The vast majority of women, however, are not employed by the formal sector. The development of specific programmes, such as those of Shell Nigeria, to empower women and to encourage companies to utilise the services of female-owned small businesses would address this issue. One way ahead would be to encourage a programme working with company supply chains and procurement policies. This would involve careful analyses of companies’ production processes/chains, and it would be necessary to look at inherent market biases with respect to formal and informal rules in the way things get done rather than concentrate solely on the numbers of women developing new businesses.

Business and labour initiatives

The vast majority of female workers within the corporate sector are unskilled, low-ranked female employees most of whom are unionised. Despite efforts over a number of years, South African unions remain dominated by male shop stewards and are not known to consider gender equality a priority, so such a programme would not be easy. However, a sensitive programme between carefully selected business and labour

representatives, perhaps with the involvement of the South African branch of the ILO, could be framed to develop union capacity to work on gender issues and to address the concerns of low-ranked female employees in the private sector in more innovative ways .

Programmes could build on the advances already being made in this area through legislation such as the Skills Development Act and the Basic Conditions of Employment Act; investment in Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) for illiterate and functionally literate employees; and place greater emphasis on the training and capacity-building of lower-level workers by examining some of the following areas, all of which would also impact upon male workers:

- further ABET expansion
- ensuring that women are empowered about their rights
- assisting companies to implement policies that relate to basic conditions of work and issues of concern raised by women.

Leadership and diversity programme

Opinions and perceptions elicited through the networking session indicated that companies are reticent about gender equality, affirmative action and employment equity; and there is therefore a need to focus to a great extent on managerial thinking and the mindset of business leadership. It was also clear that gender is part of a larger diversity paradigm that includes race, and that women do not constitute a homogenous entity. Many companies do not appreciate the role that diversity can play in terms of productivity or know how to integrate it into an organisation’s business plan: they see these as mutually conflicting. A programme that addresses the issue of diversity in a non-threatening way with leaders from all key sectors while working with business to capitalise on a desire for positive international repute, the advertising trends of companies and the move to benchmark organisational development practices at an internal level, could be part of a strategic approach in this area.

These options have been put forward as a platform for further exploration

Despite calls for gender equality, women are significantly under-represented in governments, political parties and at the United Nations.

against feasibility constraints. Each poses different strengths and limitations. A key consideration for the success of any of the interventions would be to obtain the participation of organisations and individuals who have both the necessary skills and a positive reputation among South African businesses. More importantly, any programme must have tangible outcomes.

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The International Business Leaders Forum

Established in 1990 on the initiative of HRH The Prince of Wales, the International Business Leaders Forum (IBLF) is an educational charity supported by approximately 60 major global companies from Europe, the Americas, Asia, Africa and the Middle East. Although headquartered in the UK, the primary focus of the IBLF work is in transition and developing countries, where it works with corporate members and a range of partners to encourage continuous improvement in responsible business practices in all aspects of companies' operations; act as a facilitator for partnership – bringing together leaders in business, civil society and the public sector to stimulate collective action on a range of social, economic and environmental issues; and help create an enabling environment that provides the necessary conditions for responsible business practices and cross-sector partnerships to flourish. The IBLF is committed to engaging business as a partner in development where the intended outcome of responsible business practice is to deliver value to society at large as well as to shareholders, which helps to achieve socially, economically and environmentally sustainable development.

The Resource Centre for the Social Dimensions of Business Practice

The Resource Centre for the Social Dimensions of Business Practice (RC) has been established to promote responsible business practices in developing countries with three core areas of work:

- creating evidence: an innovative programme that builds effective business solutions and establishes the business case
- sharing knowledge: an interactive service that facilitates access to good practice and solutions
- building capacity: an implementation mechanism including the tools that enable the adoption of sustainable practices.

The Resource Centre for the Social Dimensions of Business Practice was set up at the instigation of, and with funding from, the UK Government's Department for International Development as one aspect of meeting its commitment to halving global poverty by the year 2015. Established in 1999, nine UK-based organisations formed a consortium that has a wide range of leading-edge experience in the social dimensions of business practice as well as operational activities and networks through the world. The Resource Centre is based in the London office of, and managed by, The Prince of Wales International Business Leaders Forum which has been active for the past 12 years in promoting socially responsible business practice world-wide with a focus on transition and emerging economies.

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African Gender Institute University of Cape Town works to contribute to the vision of Africa as a continent liberated from the legacies of colonial and patriarchal domination. This site also contains a comprehensive link to various women's organisations throughout South Africa. www.uct.ac.za/org/agi

The African National Congress (South Africa) site has documents concerning women in the liberation struggle, and documents such as the South African Women's Charter for Effective Equality. <http://www.anc.org.za>

Centre for Diversity and Business: site that examines the "new business landscape" of people and values and supports business strategies and resources for diversity programmes. <http://www.diversityandbusiness.com/>

Commission on Gender Equality (South Africa) seeks to promote gender equality and to advise and make recommendations to Parliament or any other legislature with regard to any laws or proposed legislation that affects gender equality and the status of women. <http://www.cge.org.za>

Department for International Development (DFID) is the UK's Government department responsible for promoting development and the reduction of poverty. <http://www.dfid.gov.uk>

Department of Labour (South Africa): full information on South African policy and legislation in the area of labour law. <http://www.labour.gov.za>

Gender At Work is a South-North knowledge-building network promoting exchange around institutional change for gender equality. <http://www.genderatwork.org/>

International Business Leaders Forum is an international educational charity promoting responsible business practices internationally that benefit business and society. <http://www.iblf.org>

International Labour Organisation gives information on equal employment legislation, collective agreements, case law, customary law, labour courts, workers' and employers' organisations, national guidelines, government programmes & publications on gender equality in the workplace. <http://www.ilo.org/>

National Business Initiative (South Africa) was formed as a not-for-profit, business-based, public-interest organisation. Its focus is on the contribution of the business community to socio-economic delivery, employment creation and the delivery of basic services within local government structures. <http://www.nbi.org.za>

Resource Centre for the Social Dimensions of Business Practice: primary targets are business and business organisations operating in the developing world. However, given that the social impact of business is not only a concern of society, the Resource Centre works with selected organisations and institutions that influence and impact business behaviour. <http://www.rc-sdbp.org>

Small Business Project (South Africa) is an independent, private sector, specialist support and research unit engaged in small business development. It is a registered not-for-profit company funded by donor agencies, such as the Department for International Development (UK), the Ford Foundation (USA), and a growing number of South African corporate partners. <http://www.sbp.org.za>

UNIFEM promotes women's empowerment and gender equality. It works to ensure the participation of women in all levels of development planning and practice, acting as a catalyst within the UN system. <http://www.undp.org/unifem>

Upstart Business Strategies (South Africa) is an independent economic development research and consultancy firm specialising in small business development research, programme design, project management, programme evaluation and local economic development. <http://www.ubsmart.co.za>

Women In Development Southern Africa Awareness (WIDSAA) Programme: WIDSAA provides information access, working closely with the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and national partners. The programme aims to be a catalyst and service to the region's governments, NGOs and agencies, media and the public in the formulation of policy affecting women. <http://www.sardc.net/widsaa/>

Women's Net (South Africa) is a networking support programme designed to enable South African women to use the Internet to find the people, issues, resources and tools needed for women's social action. <http://www.womensnet.org.za/>