

WOMEN'S REPRESENTATIVENESS IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN PUBLIC SERVICE

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the extent to which women were represented within senior management services (SMS) in the South African public service during 1999 to 2009. Statistics from quantitative research were used to determine whether women benefited from the equality and equity provided by the government. The results suggest that it will take considerable time for women to reach equality with men as top executives, since the government's target of 50% women's representation at SMS by 31 March 2009 was not achieved, although women comprise 52.76% of the working population of South Africa. The South African public service achieved 34.87% women's representation at SMS, which was a slowdown in women's advancement at a rate of 1.11% per year from 2005 to 2009. Women's representation would not only bring about substantive equality and equity in the South African public service, but would also permit women equal access to the government's decision-making processes. It is suggested that women be given more advancement opportunities, which would allow them to achieve representation and self-actualisation.

INTRODUCTION

It will take hundreds of years for women to reach equality with men as senior managers (Eccles 1996:92). Women have been marginalised and treated with contempt internationally, and these issues have received global attention (Davidson & Cooper 1992:3). South African society has traditionally favoured white men. Blacks and women were subordinate, had less power, fewer opportunities and less access to resources than white men (Erasmus, Swanepoel, Schenk, Van der Westhuizen & Wessels 2005:171–173).

In 1996, South Africa publicly declared its stance against discrimination against women by ratifying the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and signing treaties such as the United Nations Millennium Declaration and its Development Goals (MDGs) in 2000 and the Commonwealth Plan of Action on Gender Equality 2005–2015 (Republic of South Africa 2008c:17). These commitments showed South Africa's dedication to enhancing women's equality by determining gender equity targets, which directly

affected women's representation in senior management services (SMS) positions in the South African public service (Republic of South Africa 1995b:23). One of the vital criteria used to measure progress with regard to the transformation process is representativeness (Wessels 2008:29), which not only tests whether public institutions have achieved gender equality and equity, but measures its state of transformation (Republic of South Africa 1995:23).

Section 9 of the *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996* (hereunder referred to as the 1996 Constitution) guarantees the equality of women in the South African public service (Republic of South Africa 1996:7). This is underscored by the *Employment Equity Act of 1998* that promotes women's representation by including them as a designated group (Republic of South Africa 1998b:51). The *Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act 4 of 2000* (Republic of South Africa 2000) guarantees women's representation through legislative and other measures.

Quantitative research was used to examine the extent to which women were represented within SMS in the South African public service between 1999 and 2009. The article presents a theoretical approach to equality, and then to inequality. Thereafter women's representation in the public service is contextualised. The article reports on gender equity statistics received from the Department of Public Service and Administration (DPSA). The statistics were used to answer the research questions below:

- To what extent have women benefited from “the full and equal enjoyment of all rights and freedoms” in the public service (Republic of South Africa 1996:7)?
- Do women of different race groups experience equal opportunities in the South African public service?
- What impediments prohibit women's advancement in the public service?

EQUALITY

The 1996 Constitution guarantees everyone the fundamental right of equality. This includes the equality of all persons and groups in society in the social, political and economic spheres. The 1996 Constitution also recognises that measures to ensure freedom from discrimination are necessary to remedy the pervasive inequalities which define South African society (Republic of South Africa 1997c:9). Equity is the fair sharing or receiving of what one deserves (Pauw 2003:23). Section 9 of the 1996 Constitution sets out the equality of South Africans as a right. Firstly, this section reveals that every South African “is equal before the law and has the right to equal protection and benefit of the law” (s 9(1)). Secondly, it explains the practical implications of this concept as “the full and equal enjoyment of all rights and freedoms” (s 9(2)). Section 9(3) prohibits direct and indirect unfair discrimination on the basis of, among other things, race, gender, sex, pregnancy, colour and culture. These provisions of the 1996 Constitution thus imply

that neither the government nor any other person can prohibit women from being promoted to SMS in the public service.

The *Employment Equity Act* of 1998 seeks to further the aspirations of the 1996 Constitution in promoting equality by including women as a designated group (Republic of South Africa 1998b:51), because white women were disadvantaged on the grounds of gender (Erasmus *et al.* 2005:171–172), while black women were disadvantaged on the grounds of race and gender (Mello 2000:32). According to the *Employment Equity Act* of 1998, equity in the workplace can be achieved through 1) “promoting equal opportunity and fair treatment in employment through the elimination of unfair discrimination”; and 2) “implementing affirmative action measures to redress the disadvantages in employment experienced by designated groups in order to ensure their equitable representation in all occupational categories and levels in the workforce” (Republic of South Africa 1998b:ch 1). Gender is conceived as an activity and a social dynamic rather than a role; therefore gender equity is about exploring how gender figures in social interaction: silencing, marginalising and excluding women from positions of influence (Pesonen, Tienari & Vanhala 2009:4). From the discussion it is apparent that the effective implementation of gender equity depends on three key elements: the elimination of unfair discrimination in human resource (HR) policies and practices; the efficient implementation of affirmative action to achieve equitable representation of women at all SMS levels, which takes place by empowering women (Republic of South Africa 1998a:203); and accelerating their advancement (Kahn 2010:69).

The *Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act* 4 of 2000 (Republic of South Africa 2000:ch 1) defines equity as “the full and equal enjoyment of rights and freedoms” which includes *de jure* and *de facto*. *De jure* is the promotion of equality through legislation, while *de facto* is the promotion of equality through other measures. These provisions are designed to protect or advance disadvantaged people (Republic of South Africa 2000:ch 1). It is therefore necessary for the outcomes of equality to be apparent at SMS levels in the public service (Republic of South Africa 1995:10.6).

The *White Paper on Transformation in the Public Service* of 1995 states government’s desire to bring about equality in the public service by stating that 30% of SMS posts should have been occupied by women by 1999 (Republic of South Africa 1995:10.6). The South African Cabinet increased the representation of women to 50% at all SMS by 31 March 2009 (Republic of South Africa 2008c:12, 16). Achieving these targets would allow the public service to utilise the competencies of women optimally, and in that way enhance both women’s representation at SMS levels and the public service’s performance. The *White Paper on Affirmative Action in the Public Service* of 1998 stipulates that affirmative action plans would allow the public service to achieve the prescribed gender equity targets (Republic of South Africa 1998a). It is underscored by the *White Paper on Human Resource Management in the Public Service* of 1997 (Republic of South Africa 1997a:3.2.3),

which states that public managers should use improved HRM practices combined with affirmative action to redress social imbalances within a relatively short period of time. Although the period is not overtly stated, it can be inferred from government’s gender equity targets (from 1994–1999 and 2000–2005), which is five years. It means that women should have occupied 50% SMS positions by 31 March 2009.

The South African government is striving to set an example by appointing more women in government. For example, Ms Lindiwe Nonceba Sisulu has been Minister of Defence (a senior cabinet position) of the Republic of South Africa since 11 May 2009 and was also Minister of Housing from 2004–2005, as well as Minister of Intelligence from 2001–2004. Ms Tina Joemat-Pettersson has been Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries of the Republic of South Africa since 11 May 2009. Women representation during the presidency of President Mbeki was as follows: in Parliament 32.65%, in Cabinet 42.5% and in local government 37% women (Republic of South Africa 2008d:4). During the presidency of President Zuma the situation is as follows: in Parliament 37.5% women, in Cabinet 42% and in local government 40% (Mbola 2009). Although there is an increase in women’s representation in parliament and local government, the South African government has not achieved its gender equity targets.

From the literature it is clear that the legislative framework provides for women’s representation in SMS positions in the public service. However, it is imperative to determine the extent to which women experience equality in the South African public service.

INEQUALITY

Statistics South Africa’s mid-year population estimates report of 2008 (Republic of South Africa 2008a:3) shows that 52% of South Africa’s adult population consists of women and they make up 52.76% of the working population, but constitute only 14.7% of executive managers; only 7.1% of them are directors and presidents of institutions (Mathur-Helm 2005:59).

Research conducted by Eccles (1996:93) found that households headed by women are economically poorer than their male-headed equivalents, partly because of women’s inequality and lack of access to the government’s resources. Levenberg (2009:30) concurs with that finding, stating that women are excluded from the benefits of black economic empowerment (BEE) in the South African mining industry, which is the world’s largest producer of gold and platinum. This is a contradiction in terms of government’s purpose to provide social equality to women (50% women at SMS by 31 March 2009 (Republic of South Africa 2008c:12, 16)), since it denies them economic equality (10% women in the mining industry by 2009 (Levenberg 2009:30)). For women to enjoy substantive equality (Republic of South Africa 1997d) they need political, social and economic equality, which would allow them to enjoy the full and equal rights and freedoms (Republic of South Africa 1996:7).

According to Eccles (1996:91) there are several key ways in which the unequal treatment meted out to women contributes to distorted development. Among the most noticeable of these inequalities is a lack of recognition of women's contribution to production, and an excessive workload without commensurate reward in comparison with men (Callister 2005:16–19). The predominance of males at management level has resulted in a culture in which male behaviour patterns are perceived to be the norm (Pesonen *et al.* 2009:3), and in which women often find it difficult to be accepted as equals by their male counterparts (Republic of South Africa 1998b:24). It is also easier for men to combine their professional and social lives and create the impression that they are dedicated to their work than it is for women, who also have to satisfy the demands of rearing children and household responsibilities (Bureau of Gender Equality 2004:16). According to Singh, Terjesen and Vinnicombe (2008:53–55) women in senior management positions do not easily gain access to corporate boardrooms, where an elite group of male directors maintain their power. Women face manifold organisational barriers that deny them access to top management positions, which include less support for career-making than their male counterparts enjoy, and being excluded from important networks that are crucial to their careers (Pesonen *et al.* 2009:3). It is therefore necessary to determine women's representation in the South African public service.

CONTEXTUALISING WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION IN THE PUBLIC SERVICE

The statistics reflecting the representation of women per race group in the public service took into account the population size as mentioned in Statistics South Africa's mid-year population estimates report of 2008 (Republic of South Africa 2008a:3). Figure 1 depicts gender equity statistics at SMS per race in the public service from 1999 to 2009, and Figure 2 illustrates gender equity statistics at SMS per management level (GD –director) and race for 1999, 2005 and 2009, which coincide with government's target dates. Figures 1 and 2 are adapted from the race and gender statistics received from the DPSA. These figures portray race and gender statistics of SMS levels from 1999 to 2009. The DPSA could only provide a breakdown per management category from 2004 onwards.

Figure 1 reveals that the public service has not achieved the 1999 target of 30% women in SMS (Republic of South Africa 1995:10.6; Republic of South Africa 1998b:23); it did achieve a figure of 17%. Figure 1 shows that the public service achieved 29% representativeness in 2005 and met the 30% target only in March 2006 (Republic of South Africa 2008c:11–12), which was seven years late. Figure 1 also shows that the public service achieved only 34.87% representativeness of women in SMS by 31 March 2009 (Republic of South Africa 2009). The trend shows an increase of 10.64% in the first five years (1999–2004), which is a rate of 2.85% per year; and 5.55% in the second five years (March 2005–31 March 2009),

this reveals a slowdown in the rate of women's progress. It seems highly improbable that the public service will achieve the target of 50% representation of women at SMS during the next decade.

Figure 1: Gender equity for SMS per race in the Public Service

Race	Gender	Gender equity at SMS per race in the Public Service										
Year		1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
African	Men	96	136	149	179	186	203	2 585	2 838	3 190	3 566	3 574
	Women	24	41	46	57	75	86	1 295	1 457	1 765	2 028	2 108
	Total	120	177	195	236	261	289	3 880	4 295	4 955	5 594	5 682
	% Women	20.00%	23.16%	23.59%	24.15%	28.74%	29.76%	33.38%	33.92%	35.62%	36.25%	37.10%
Asian	Men	17	17	21	29	31	28	385	417	457	496	464
	Women	5	5	5	6	7	8	153	184	219	259	222
	Total	22	22	26	35	38	36	538	601	676	755	686
	% Women	22.73%	22.73%	19.23%	17.14%	18.42%	22.22%	28.44%	30.62%	32.40%	34.30%	32.36%
Coloured	Men	15	28	28	33	36	44	392	422	467	486	458
	Women	4	8	8	8	11	14	141	170	198	233	226
	Total	19	36	36	41	47	58	533	592	665	719	684
	% Women	21.05%	22.22%	22.22%	19.51%	23.40%	24.14%	26.45%	28.72%	29.77%	32.41%	33.04%
White	Men	86	104	70	84	94	98	1 568	1 637	1 709	1 750	1 400
	Women	8	13	11	19	24	28	456	573	681	771	600
	Total	94	117	81	103	118	126	2 024	2 210	2 390	2 521	20 00
	% Women	8.51%	11.11%	13.58%	18.45%	20.34%	22.22%	22.53%	25.93%	28.49%	30.58%	30.00%
Grand Total	255	352	338	415	464	509	6 975	7 698	8 686	9 589	9 052	
Total women	41	67	70	90	117	136	2 045	2 384	2 863	3 291	3 156	
% Women	16.08%	19.03%	20.71%	21.69%	25.22%	26.72%	29.32%	30.97%	32.96%	34.32%	34.87%	

Source: Adapted from race and gender statistics October 2009, Republic of South Africa 2009

The Public Service Commission (PSC) Report of 2008 (Republic of South Africa 2008d:87, 89) suggests that it took the DPSA a long time to achieve the target of 30% women's representation, and that it may take even longer to achieve the target of 50% representation at SMS. The report does not mention the rate at which women's progress is being slowed down. Research conducted by Metz and Thar-enou (1999:204) shows that in Australia the rate of progress of women in senior management positions has also slowed down. Mathur-Helm (2005:59) concurs, stating that women in South Africa comprise of 7.1% of institutions' directors and presidents, compared to 8.4% in Australia. This trend implies that the corporate advancement of South African women will continue to be restricted. It is under-scored by the action taken by the South African National Defence Force (SANDF), which adjusted its 50% representation of women at SMS to 40% women at com-mand (decision-making) bodies, which prohibits women's advancement to the general cadre (brigadier general and higher) (Department of Defence 2009:D1-7). The results reveal the impossibility of achieving 50% representation of women at SMS in the South African public service.

Figure 1 also shows that public institutions had not achieved government's gender equity goals of 30% and 50% representation respectively by 1999 and 2009, which means that women did not enjoy the full and equal enjoyment of all rights and freedoms in the South African public service. One of the reasons for this non-achievement may be the reluctance of directors general (DGs), heads of department (HoDs) and senior managers to comply with the performance manage-ment and development system (PMDS). They may not conclude their performance agreements (PAs), or do so late (Republic of South Africa 2008d:64-65). For exam-ple, during the 2007/2008 financial year, only 16% of national and 13% of pro-vincial HoDs entered into and filed their PAs with the Public Service Commission (PSC). Non-compliance by HoDs means that it is probable that those reporting to them may be non-compliant as well (Republic of South Africa 2008d:65). Another reason for it might be that the public service is still seen as operating within over-centralised, hierarchical and rule-bound systems inherited from the previous politi-cal dispensation, which makes it difficult to hold individuals accountable (Repub-lic of South Africa 1997a:12). DGs hold the key in changing this attitude; but since they are not held accountable the status quo will most probably be maintained (Republic of South Africa 2008d:65-66).

Figure 2: Gender equity at SMS per management level and race for 1999, 2005 and 2009 in the Public Service

Race	Gender	Director General			Deputy Director General			Chief Director			Director			Total		
		1999	2005	2009	1999	2005	2009	1999	2005	2009	1999	2005	2009	1999	2005	2009
African	Men		54	68		130	197		502	752		1 688	2557	96	2 374	3 574
	Women		18	27		59	118		251	424		869	1539	24	1 197	2 108
	Total	0	72	95	0	189	315	0	753	1 176	0	2557	4096	120	3 571	5 682
	% women	0%	25.00%	28.42%	0%	31.22%	37.46%	0%	33.33%	36.05%	0%	33.99%	37.57%	20.00%	33.52%	37.10%
Asian	Men		5	3		22	30		80	107		256	324	17	363	464
	Women		0	0		10	12		14	49		118	161	5	142	222
	Total	0	5	3	0	32	42	0	94	156	0	374	485	22	505	686
	% women	0%	0.00%	0.00%	0%	31.25%	28.57%	0%	14.89%	31.41%	0%	31.55%	33.20%	22.73%	28.12%	32.36%
Coloured	Men		9	7		22	28		73	100		244	324	15	348	458
	Women		3	6		7	12		27	47		94	160	4	131	226
	Total	0	12	13	0	29	40	0	100	147	0	338	484	19	479	684
	% women	0%	25.00%	46.15%	0%	24.14%	30.00%	0%	27.00%	31.97%	0%	27.81%	33.06%	21.05%	27.35%	33.04%
White	Men		12	12		45	56		299	320		1 053	1012	86	1 409	1 400
	Women		3	1		17	18		73	114		342	467	8	435	600
	Total	0	15	13	0	62	74	0	372	434	0	1 395	1479	94	1844	2000
	%women	0%	20.00%	7.69%	0%	27.42%	24.32%	0%	19.62%	26.27%	0%	24.52%	31.58%	8.51%	23.59%	30.00%
Grand Total	0	104	124	0	312	471	0	1 319	1 913	0	4 664	6 544	255	6 399	9052	
Total women	0	24	34	0	93	160	0	365	634	0	1 423	2 327	41	1 905	3 156	
%women	0%	23.08%	27.42%	0%	29.81%	33.97%	0%	27.67%	33.14%	0%	30.51%	35.56%	16.08%	29.77%	34.87%	
Black women	0	21	33	0	76	142	0	292	520	0	1 081	1 860	33	1 470	2 556	
Asian and Coloured	0	3	6	0	17	24	0	41	96	0	212	321	9	273	448	
% Black women	0%	14.29%	18.18%	0%	22.37%	16.90%	0%	14.04%	18.46%	0%	19.61%	17.26%	27.27%	18.57%	17.53%	

Source: Adapted from race and gender statistics October 2009, Republic of South Africa 2009

Figure 2 reveals that none of the race groups achieved government's 1999, 2005 and 2009 gender equity targets of 30% and 50% women respectively at SMS. The statistics show a gradual increase in women's representation per race group. It reveals that women of different race groups do not experience equal opportunities in the South African public service. Figure 1 shows that African women have advanced faster than women of other race groups. This creates discrimination among women and gives prominence to the 'queen bee' approach of those who have broken through the glass ceiling (Mathur-Helm 2005:63–64). These women may be considered to be tokens by their male counterparts (Peterson & Philpot 2007:177) and thus they may be interested only in their own personal achievement and progress instead of in promoting the course of women, particularly juniors.

During the previous political dispensation, white women in the public service had an advantage over black women because they had indirect access to economic, social and political power, which gave them the opportunity of corporate advancement, although to a lesser extent than white men (Erasmus *et al.* 2005:171–173). Rothenberg (2001:591) concurs, claiming that white women's built-in privilege of "whiteness" and history of sharing power with white men allowed them to advance corporately faster than black women. Rothenberg (2001:590) states that white women define women in terms of their own experience, which means that black women become the "other", the outsiders whose experiences and traditions are too alien to comprehend (Rothenberg 2001:591). The pendulum of advancing one race group above another has swung from white to black women, while the minority groups lag behind.

Figure 2 shows that affirmative action has benefited black African women [2 108 (82.47%) of 2 556], more than Asian and coloured women [448 (17.53%) of 2 556] combined. This is underscored by the PSC Report of 2008 (Republic of South Africa 2008d:86), which reveals that black Africans at national level have increased from 74% in 2004 to 80% in 2007, and that at provincial level over the same period they have increased from 64% to 71%. Consequently, the development of women in general is being neglected and seen as subordinate to the development of black African and white women (Mathur-Helm 2005:61). An antidote to this challenge may be to determine racial gender percentages which mirror South Africa's demographics (Kahn 2009), and would compel the public service management's commitment to implement policies without showing favour to any race group (Republic of South Africa 1998a:25–26, 60).

The statistics for 2009 reveal that men occupy the overwhelming majority of management positions, with marginal female representation at DG-director levels. This demonstrates men's dominance in showing favour to certain women by allowing them access through the glass ceiling, while prohibiting others. Figure 2 portrays challenges for successive planning because superiors give preference to their own race and gender, which not only perpetuates a skewed public service hierarchy, but also prohibits citizens from being served by competent employees, or

by employees they can better relate to because they are from their own race and gender (Van Dijk 2008:393). Figure 2 illustrates that women are under-represented and their appointment to SMS positions is restricted. It reveals that the most women in the public service are allowed access to director and CD positions, but very few of these women are allowed to reach DG and DDG positions, thus proving the existence of a glass ceiling for women in the South African public service (Republic of South Africa 2009). Zafarullah (2000:201–202) contends that public institutions that are struggling to develop their internal apparatus (for the improvement of society) are being forced to withhold democracy and equal opportunities from the very groups they should be advancing: the weak and the vulnerable. Figure 2 confirms that though equality legislation has been implemented in South Africa, inequality in career advancement and job segregation still remains. Thus employment equity and affirmative action policies alone cannot remove persistent barriers to women's advancement (Mathur-Helm 2005:59, 62).

Figure 2 shows that the managerial hierarchy in the public service is consistent with research conducted by Mathur-Helm (2005:63–64), which shows the dominance of mainstream cultures. The figure shows African men at the top, then African women, followed by white men, white women, Asian men and coloured men, Asian women and coloured women (Republic of South Africa 2009). Studies conducted by Pesonen *et al.* (2009), Mathur-Helm (2005) and Singh *et al.* (2008) cite social and individual barriers as being responsible for women's employment and advancement in SMS, especially in the private sector. Figure 2 reveals that when top management selection is made, men knowingly or unwittingly appoint those men who resemble themselves (Pesonen *et al.* 2009:4), which has been the practice since the 1940s (Erasmus *et al.* 2005:171). Mello and Phago (2007:148) concur, stating that historical patriarchy is one of the causes that prevents opportunities accorded women in the workplace, and which in turn prohibits women's advancement in the South African public service. This is underscored by Pesonen *et al.* (2009:17), who claim that women can be more efficient and effective provided men change their attitude towards having more women in influential positions. Thus, women are still regarded as secondary to men in the South African public service.

Figure 2 shows that equality allows for a more structured and proactive way of managing imbalances in the workplace. Women can use equality as a tool for challenging the status quo, which might avoid reproducing and reinforcing inequalities. Equality is a means for challenging gender mainstreaming, which should take cognisance of the differences not only between the conditions, situations and needs of men and women (Bureau of Gender Equality 2004:4-5), but also their racial differences (Nelen & Hondeghem 2000:9).

Public institutions operate in an increasingly competitive environment when it comes to acquiring talent in a range of scarce-skills categories. SMS have been identified as critical in the delivery of public services (Republic of South Africa 2003);

however, the vacancy rates of 2006 showed that 35% of SMS posts were vacant (Kock & Burke 2008:214). Women's representation is a means of supplementing the skills shortage in the South African public service and allows for greater gender sensitisation in the workplace and more responsive delivery to women's plights (Republic of South Africa 1998a:29). Women's representation would provide the public service not only with competent employees, but also with employees who have experienced the worst forms of discrimination (Erasmus *et al.* 2005:171–173). Women can empathise with those communities who have experienced the worst form of discrimination because they understand their plight and culture and speak their language. Women would ensure that social justice prevails, particularly for those communities who lack political, economic and social resources. Women's representation would enhance the institution's effectiveness and productivity, which in turn translates into better service delivery for all communities (Republic of South Africa 1998c); this would improve the quality of life of all South Africans (Republic of South Africa 1996).

CONCLUSION

The article has examined the representation of women within SMS of the South Africa public service. The analysis revealed that women comprise 52.76% of the South African working population, while men comprise 59%. Although the government's legislation seems to favour women, its target of 50% representation of women at SMS by 31 March 2009 was not achieved. The legislative success depends on the public service's management philosophies and practices; these treat women differently as a result of social constructs, norms and stereotypes determined by corporate culture.

The results suggest that it will take hundreds of years before women gain equality with men as senior managers. Therefore, women experience continued underrepresentation at SMS. The achievement 34.87% on 31 March 2009 reveals a slowdown in the rate of women's advancement (1.11% per year from 2005–31 March 2009, compared to a rate of 2.85% per year for the period 1999–2004). This trend makes the achievement of 50% representation of women at SMS in public service in the next decade unattainable. The results are in line with research conducted by Metz and Kulik (2008) and Eccles (1996).

It is suggested that the South African public service should take a similar approach to that of the SANDF in adjusting the 50% to 40% representation of women at all SMS, which is realistic and achievable within the South African context. Directors General and HoDs are currently not accountable for achieving government's gender equity targets. Making them accountable may discourage DGs and HoDs from promoting their own agendas and thus undermining the gender equity legislation. It would allow women of all race groups to be fairly and equally treated.

Women's representation at SMS would not only bring about substantive equality and equity in the public service; it would also permit women equal access to the government's decision-making processes. Women should therefore be given more advancement opportunities, which would not only allow them to occupy SMS positions in the South African public service, but also to achieve self-actualisation.

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