WOMEN IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION: INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

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ABSTRACT

The working environment of women in the public service, educational and training opportunities for women in public administration, problems women encounter in the working environment as public managers and views on what the future holds for women public managers are explored. Although the article is to be seen as introductory in nature an attempt is made to touch on the most important aspects. One of the most important problems women officials are facing in the working environment is discrimination. It is suggested that only if women public managers are represented in corresponding numbers with their male colleagues women will be able to make an impact on issues regarding decision-making.

1.1 Introduction

Women labour has been and will always be part of economic life. Over the years the nature and scope of women labour has undergone substantial change due to amongst others, economic, demographic and social developments as well as changes in the perceptions of communities and societies. Economic and social realities such as the scarcity of labour, more specifically the scarcity of managers, induced employers (traditionally male dominated) to break away from previously held social perceptions regarding women in the workplace. These realities lead to the view that the role of women in management positions has been, and still is, regarded as being a necessity.

With regard to the South African labour force, there shortage of trained managers and unless appropriate steps are taken to eliminate or at least to decrease this shortage the situation will worsen. It is, therefore, important that employers should utilise the available human resources in the managerial fields. This article represents some introductory remarks on women labour in public administration. Specific attention will be paid to the following selected aspects:

- the working environment of women in the public service;
- educational and training opportunities for women in public administration;

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Open Rubric

- problems women encounter in the working environment as public managers; and
- views on what the future holds for women public managers.

1.2 Working Environment

Employees in public administration are exposed to a wide range of activities in order to effect optimal rendering of services to society. These activities include *inter alia* managerial, administrative and functional work (Botes, Brynard, Fourie & Roux, 1992:195-197). On the one hand management as such entails the functions of planning, decision-making, leading and checking (Andrews, 1990:162; Fox, Schwella & Wissink, 1991:4). On the other hand administration includes the functions of policy-making and -execution, organising, financing, personnel provision and -utilisation, determining and application of work procedures and methods and control (Hanekom & Thornhill, 1986:10). Functional work in turn refers to the professional and specialised activities in which officials are qualified for example nursing and teaching (Cloete, 1991:238-241). It is the responsibility of public managers (by implication also women public managers) to act as instruments for the efficient and effective execution of the administrative functions as well as the functional work (Andrews, 1990:10). This means that the functions of management should be applied to administration and the functional work. The task of the public manager is to actively put into operation the administrative functions and the functional work.

A salient point that needs to be made with regard to the involvement of public (men and women) officials in management, administration and functional work, is that the position occupied by a public manager in the hierarchy is a direct determinant. The higher the position of the official the greater the proportion of involvement in management and administration and the lesser the involvement in functional work (Hanekom, Rowland & Bain, 1990:14-15). In addition it should be mentioned that the field of management in the public service comprises of three levels, namely the junior management level (assistant director and all other supervisors below assistant director), the middle management level (director and deputy director) and the senior management level (director-general, deputy-director-general and chief director) (Cloete, 1991:206). The scope of management responsibilities differs from management level to management level, hence, it is difficult to determine exactly the amount of time spent by a woman public manager (or for that matter any other manager) in managerial activities. According to Kroon (1986:13) senior managers are the most of the time involved with the leading and

planning functions whereas all the managers spent more or less the same amount of time regarding the checking function.

Women comprise approximately 41% of the total work force in the South African public service ("public service" for the purposes of this article refers to the officials in the central, provincial and local governmental sector) (South Africa (Republic), Central Statistical Service, Population Census, 1991: unnumbered). Since women represent 41% of the work force in the public service it hypothetically follows that a relatively large proportion of the management positions should also be occupied by women officials. This, however, is not the case since current statistics show that at present only 0,04% of the management positions[1] in the public service are held by women. It is clearly indicative that women are proportionally underrepresented in the management cadre. Although the availability of information with respect to women officials holding management positions throughout the public service was a problem it was possible to obtain some figures from the Orange Free State Provincial Administration. On the fixed establishment of the Orange Free State Provincial Administration 10 117 (43%) male workers and 13 280 (57%) women workers hold various positions (Enslin, 1993:5). The aforementioned figures indicate that working women are in the majority but when the management statistics are taken into consideration the situation changes. Table 1 is an exposition of the representation of women managers (from junior management level to senior management level) in the Orange Free State Provincial Administration.

Table 1: Representation of women on the different management levels in the Orange Free State Provincial Administration

Management level	Men	Women	Total	Percentage of women managers
Junior managers (assistant director and all other supervisors below assistant director)	88	23	111	21 %
Middle managers (director and deputy director)	135	5	140	4 %
Senior managers (director-general, deputy-director-general and chief director	0	0	0	0 %

Source: (Enslin, 1993:5).

[1] Due to the confidentiality of the information it was not possible to obtain an exact percentage of the whole public service.

In the Orange Free State Provincial Administration women managers reach a ceiling when they enter the junior management level. Only a few women (4%) were successful to break through the ceiling of the junior management level. This percentage could differ substantially (even more negatively) if an exact calculation of the occupational figures of management positions in other parts of the public service (namely that of the central, and local governmental sector and other provincial administrations) is made.

The reason for the presence of a relatively high percentage (41%) of women in the public service could be attributed to the fact that the role of women in society has changed over the past decades. The increase of women in the labour force is a result of the following factors:

- The need for a second income to maintain the family's standard of living.
- The influence of pressure groups (liberation movements) for women.
- The high rate of divorce which give rise to single parent families and force women to work as the only breadwinners (Beeld, 27 April 1993:3).

Although women are presently represented in public management positions in professions such as ministerial portfolios, correctional services and foreign affairs it is interesting to note that women labour in general is mainly utilised in occupations such as nursing, education and traditional occupations like secretaries, typists and clerks (the so-called "soft jobs") (Van der Walt, 1987:1). This tendency implies that the managerial skills and knowledge of women are largely absent in certain occupations in the public service, especially in the sphere of *inter alia* engineering, mining, metallurgy and the physical sciences (Terblanche in Hirschowitz & Cilliers, 1987:7). The absence of women public managers in the latter occupations could have a detrimental effect on the rendering of services since it contributes to the existing shortage of trained managers. The question that immediately arises is whether women, in comparison to their male colleagues, receive the necessary education and training in aspects of public administration (more specifically in management and administration) and what the content of these education syllabuses and training courses entails.

1.3 Education and Training

In broad outline there are two categories for preparing personnel who intend to follow a career in public administration, namely pre-entry education and in-service training. Pre-entry education is usually presented by educational institutions such as universities

and technikons, whereas in-service training is done by the training sections of the different public service institutions under the guardianship of the Institute for Training of the central personnel agency of the public service (the Commission for Administration) (Andrews, 1988:148). In the ensuing paragraphs pre-entry education and in-service training, with reference to Public Administration, will be outlined.

1.3.1 Pre-entry education

The syllabus with regard to undergraduate courses in Public Administration at the University of South Africa is divided into the following topics, namely an overview of the public sector institutions, Public Administration as an academic discipline, public administration and the environment, theory of organising, personnel administration and -management, public financial management, policy analysis, theory of science, administrative justice, quasi-autonomous public institutions, selected specialised directions in public administration such as administration and modernisation, international public administration and management in public administration (Unisa, Syllabuses of Public Administration I to III, 1993: unnumbered). The aforementioned education provides the student with theoretical knowledge (usually before employment), and is aimed at making students receptive on the one hand, and on the other hand prepare them for in-service training (Andrews, 1988:134).

Statistics for the 1993 academic year concerning the representation of women students in Public Administration at the University of Pretoria[2] and the University of South Africa are summarised in tables 2 to 4 respectively.

Table 2: Profile of the 1993 postgraduate students in Public Administration at the University of Pretoria

Course of Study students	Men	Women	Total	Percentage of women
Honours	9	12	21	57 %
Masters	28	8	36	22 %
Doctorate	12	3	15	20 %

Source: (University of Pretoria, Enrollments of students per Department, 1993:1).

2 Statistics relating to the profile of the 1993 undergraduate students in Public Administration at the University of Pretoria could not be obtained at the time of writing this article.

Table 3: Profile of the 1993 undergraduate students in Public Administration at the University of South Africa

Course of Study students	Men	Women	Total	Percentage of women
Public Administration I	913	1 964	2 877	68 %
Public Administration II	377	154	531	29 %
Public Administration III	97	36	133	27 %

Source: (Unisa, PBL100-A, 1993:1; Unisa, PBL200-D, 1993:1; Unisa, PBL300-G, 1993:1; Unisa, Studentestatistiek, 1993:475-476).

Table 4: Profile of the 1993 postgraduate students in Public Administration at the University of South Africa

Course of Study students	Men	Women	Total	Percentage of women
Honours	43	9	52	17 %
Masters	16	1	17	6 %
Doctorate	8	1	9	11 %

Source: (Unisa, ACSLGO-A, 1993:1; Unisa, AFAPSO-J, 1993:1; Unisa, AIPAOO-5, 1993:1; Unisa, APUPAD-X, 1993:1; Unisa, GSPBOO-8, 1993:1; Unisa, MIRSAO-W, 1993:1; Unisa, Studentestatistiek, 1993:481-482; Unisa, THAGPO-N, 1993:1; Unisa, TPPAOO-A, 1993:1; Unisa, MA (Publieke Administrasie), 1993:1; Unisa, M. Admin. en D. Admin. (Publieke Administrasie), 1993:1; Unisa, D. Litt. Et. Phil. (Publieke Administrasie), 1993:1).

The above statistics indicate that only in the case of the Honours course in Public Administration (57%) at the University of Pretoria and the first year course in Public Administration (68%) at the University of South Africa women make up the majority of the students. The fact that 68% of the students in the first year course in Public Administration at the University of South Africa are women can be related to the prerequisite that Public Administration is one of the options for students who intend to follow the B.A. Cur. degree in Nursing Administration (Unisa, Calendar, 1993:196-197).

The statistics were only taken from two South African universities as this article is only introductory in nature. Further research needs to be undertaken with respect to the situation at other South African universities and technikons.

One of the reasons of the lack of proper representation of women as public managers and also as students in Public Administration could be of the confusion that has developed in course of time about the meaning of the term administration. This confusion is illustrated by the common perception that administration relates to clerical work whereas in reality it relates to functions such as policy-making and -execution, organising, financing, personnel provision and utilisation, determining and application of work procedures and methods and control (Hanekom *et al.* 1990:14-15). The result of the confusion has lead to a negative connotation to the term administration (Adlem & Du Pisani, 1982:87). It is possible that the confusion and the negative connotation about administration have lead to the fact that women are not interested in studying Public Administration. To overcome this lack of interest it is important that measures be instituted to ensure, that women who are interested in following a career in the public service, study the academic discipline Public Administration. One of the measures is to develop a suitable Public Administration course for men and women working in the public service which takes cognisance of gender issues, use of sexist language and developing attitude change. Another measure is to actively promote research on women in Public Administration to show that there is interest in this regard. Furthermore, it is necessary that opportunities in the form of bursaries specifically be made available to women who intend to study Public Administration.

1.3.2 In-service training

Specialised managerial skills, within the context of public administration, are required to be put effectively into practise the necessary functional activities and administrative work. To obtain these managerial skills public managers are exposed to a wide range of subjects. Presently the contents of in-service training programmes in the public service focus *inter alia* on courses for junior managers, middle managers and senior managers and also courses in public management. The course in public management is specifically aimed at those officials who are normally deputy directors and who are about to be promoted to directors (the so-called "managers") (South Africa (Republic), Commission for Administration, Prospectus of Courses and Seminars, 1991:7-13).

In support of the aforementioned management courses officials are also trained, with the aid of courses and seminars, in the following management related aspects:

- negotiation skills;
- stress control;
- spoken English;
- written English;
- labour relations;
- meeting procedures;
- strategic management;
- statistical methods;
- team building;
- speech-making; and
- television appearances (South Africa (Republic), Commission for Administration, Prospectus of Courses and Seminars, 1991:15-44).

The above training programmes are specifically aimed at the extension of knowledge for the specific purpose of filling a post in the public service and to effectively perform the work involved in the particular post. Furthermore the aforementioned training usually takes place after employment and is of a practical nature, this means that the training is aimed at the practical application of knowledge (Andrews, 1988:134). In the 1991 financial year 3 088 junior managers attended the course for junior managers, 735 middle managers took part in the course for middle managers, 117 senior managers participated in the course for senior managers and 242 were on the course in public management (South Africa (Republic), Annual report of the Commission for Administration 1991:22-23).

From the above figures, it is apparent that public officials are trained in relatively large numbers. It is also clear that public officials inclusive of women have a wide range of training opportunities (which deal with contemporary management issues) at their disposal. In view of the fact that only 0,04% of women in the public service are represented in management positions and that women are not significantly representative in the student profile of Public Administration at selected universities, it can be deduced that insufficient women are trained in managerial aspects (and for that matter administrative aspects as well) for the running of public affairs.[3] It would appear that insufficient training in management is one of the problems which women are facing in the field of public administration. It should be stressed that women are confronted with other problems in the work situation as well which should be dealt with in the next paragraphs.

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3 Due to the confidentiality it was not possible to obtain an exact figure of the percentage of women trained in management and management related issues.

1.4 Problems

Many of the problems women are experiencing in the work situation have their origin in the existence of entrenched prejudices towards them. In Western societies, Greek, Roman and Judeo-Christian doctrines had a major influence in forming a unique set of prejudices in this regard. An example is the notion of the inferior role of women in society. Women were primarily viewed as homemakers who had to bear and raise children. As a result educational opportunities were not pursued by women to the extent that was actually demanded by the labour market. Not even the First and Second World Wars, in which women were drawn into the labour force and formed the major proportion thereof, changed attitudes towards them. Although there was a change in attitudes and perceptions in the last two decades the prejudices towards women still prevail to a large extent. The reasons for this can be ascribed to the traditional structure of families which are patriarchal in nature - the man has the position of authority. This tendency manifests itself in social and economic life (Cronje, 1982:10-11; Smit, 1978:39-41).

Apart from the aforementioned traditional problems women are experiencing in practice other problems arose such as those pertaining to the dual role working women are faced with in society. Working women simultaneously have responsibilities at home and at work which cause different role conflicts. Women are also increasingly confronted with situations which lead to stress and results in mental illnesses like depression and neurosis and other psychosomatic problems like high blood pressure and ulcers (Cronje, 1982:70-71).

Viewed superficially the problems women are facing in the working environment, mostly point to discrimination. In order to counteract discrimination in the work place, efforts have been made in public administration to develop a representative bureaucratic system to ensure that the composition of the labourforce is a true representation of the composition of the society. Some of the efforts to develop a representative bureaucracy are affirmative action and equal employment opportunities. The aim of affirmative action is to actively implement programmes of employment for people who have been discriminated against, whilst equal employment opportunities is a more passive way of establishing equal opportunities in the field of public administration (Moore, 1987:257-258).

In the South African public service affirmative action and equal employment opportunities have as yet not been fully applied. However, a closer investigation of the personnel policy in the public service regarding employment and promotion reveals that the main criteria centres around the principle of merit and efficiency which on the surface dispels

the notion of discrimination (South Africa (Republic), Annual report of the Commission for Administration 1989:3). Notwithstanding the absence of any discriminatory measures in the personnel policy of the South African public service, no steps are taken to actively combat discrimination. Although an affirmative action programme was instituted in 1992 by the Commission for Administration it was not specifically directed at women issues (Beeld, 17 February 1994:3). Therefore, it is suggested that a definitive policy be determined to combat perceived and actual discrimination. In the following paragraphs attention will be paid to some views on what the future holds for women in the public service. The focus will be on the attempts intended to improve the position of women in the public service.

1.5 Views on the Future

In view of the rapidly changing South African society it would be difficult to predict what the future holds for women in public administration. Certain changes are inevitable and will certainly include the growth and importance of women in the total labour market of which the public service forms part. Evidence hereof include, *inter alia*, the following:

- Within the context of the proposed **Charter of Fundamental Rights**, the Government has recently signed a number of important international conventions regarding women. One of these conventions include the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women.

- As a result of the signing of the abovementioned Convention the Government has also put forward a **Draft Bill on the Abolition of Discrimination against Women**. Proposals that would affect women in public administration directly are the amendment of the provisions in the **Correctional Services Act**, 1959 (Act 8 of 1959), the **Coloured Education Act**, 1963 (Act 47 of 1963) and the General Regulations for the South African Defence Force. The aim of the aforementioned proposals are to ensure that women may not automatically be dismissed when getting married or becoming pregnant. The Draft Bill also makes provision for the amendment of the **Education and Training Act**, 1979 (Act 90 of 1979) introducing a general retirement age of 65 for all teachers, irrespective of gender.

- The Government has also announced a **Draft Bill on the Promotion of Equal Opportunities** to prohibit discrimination on the basis of gender, marital status and pregnancy and to promote equality and equal opportunities between men and women. The essence of the aforementioned Draft Bill is the prohibition of

discrimination, provision for equal pay for equal work, the prohibition of sexual harassment, the appointment of an Equal Opportunities Commission whose task it is to submit proposals to the relevant Minister for elimination of discriminatory practises against women and the appointment of an assistant ombudsman who will be specifically tasked with matters where the State discriminates against a person on the basis of gender, marital status or pregnancy.

- The Government has also made proposals on a Charter of Fundamental Rights which makes provision for women's rights in a future constitution. These rights, amongst other things, refer to aspects such as the entitlement of women to equal rights with men and a specific stipulation that no law shall, in any matter relating to women, discriminate, distinguish or restrict on the basis of gender.

A consequential development that has an influence on the future of women in public administration is the implementation of a Subcouncil regarding the Status of Women in the Transitional Executive Council (the institution whose responsibility it is to level the playing field amongst political parties before the election of April 1994). During the interim phase towards a new constitutional dispensation the Subcouncil regarding the Status of Women will specifically look after the interests of women on national, provincial and local level. The most important task of the Subcouncil is to make itself aware on behalf of the Transitional Executive Council of matters regarding the status of women in society. More detailed functions of the Subcouncil are as follows:

- Liaise with relevant institutions about matters relating to women.
- Initiate research with regard to the status of women in society.
- Ensure that all women take part in elections and are allowed to become elected for public office.
- Make sure that women participate in the formulation of policy of any public service institution.
- Make certain that no discrimination takes place in the recruitment and selection of women in any public service institution.
- Prevent intimidation and sexual harassment against women.

- Make proposals to the Subcouncil of Finance in the Transitional Executive Council and relevant governmental institutions for the 1994/95 budget with respect to the allocation of money for the promotion of the status of women in society.

- Develop mechanisms and programmes to help women participate in public service institutions (Beeld, 29 July 1993:4; Beeld, 30 July 1993:7).

Furthermore women themselves are in the forefront to improve their conditions. Within the public service, statistics indicate that 40% of the membership of the Public Service Association consists of women. This fact is mentioned to emphasise the growth of women representation which inevitably also implies that women will make themselves heard to a far greater extent in the public service in future (Personal interview, Du Plessis, A. April 1993). In a broader context, not necessarily in the public service, women are also active in preparing themselves for a better future. Political parties have institutions in their ranks who specifically deal with issues regarding the position of women in society; universities have also introduced courses for women managers and established institutes to do research on women matters. Furthermore there are institutions such as the Bureau for Women in South Africa, the Women's National Coalition and the National Women's Alliance who are also engaged in preparing a better future for women in South Africa (Gouws, 1992:6-7; University of Pretoria, Executive Programmes, 1993:21-22).

From the preceding paragraphs it is obvious that different actions are being taken to level the playing field for women in the working environment. If the Draft Bills are accepted by Parliament and the Subcouncil regarding the Status of Women is fully implemented, working women would be in a better position than in the past, especially regarding the elimination of discrimination against them. The planned removal of discriminatory practises also place specific responsibilities on the shoulders of women workers in the public service. Seeing that so much attention is presently paid to the position of women in society, it is important that women seize the opportunities given to them. This means that women officials should act against discriminatory practises and make use of the institutional structures and measures when they are implemented.

Notwithstanding the formal legislative guidelines of the proposed Draft Bill and the implementation of a Subcouncil regarding the Status of Women, positive steps could also be taken in the public service to ensure that discrimination does not take place. Especially with regard to certain components of the functional activities of public personnel administration additional administrative instructions could be issued for public

service managers to adhere to and ensure that discrimination does not take place in practise. Some of these administrative instructions may include the following:

- Selection procedures should be directly related to job performance. In this regard it is important that public service managers avoid aspects such as physical restrictions (for example weight and height) and entrance requirements (such as special training and education) that cause an adverse effect on candidates because they are women. Selection Committees should also consist of women having representation on them.

- Performance appraisal should be based on a formal job analysis and should be as objective as possible. Written instructions, training in the principles of appraisal techniques and representation of women on merit committees are essential for the avoidance of discrimination.

- Prohibition of differentials between men and women on compensation and other fringe benefits. In the South African Public Service differentials between men and women still exist with reference to certain fringe benefits. For example, working women (married) still cannot qualify for a housing subsidy and have to contribute 6% of their monthly income to the State Pension Fund whereas male members contribute 8% (Andrews, 1988:334; Enslin, 1993:5; Moore, 1987:268-270).

Although the abovementioned efforts by the Government and other institutions indicate that numerous actions are taken to prevent employment discrimination the fact remains that women are not sufficiently represented in management positions in the public service. Because of this underrepresentation it is doubtful whether discrimination will be completely done away with. The true test of progress is the actual employment of women in the public service (especially in the upper echelons), in other words how representative of women managers will national, provincial and municipal authorities be in the future? Only if women are represented in corresponding numbers with men in the different management levels will they be able to make an impact regarding decision-making on issues that is of importance to them.

1.6 Conclusion

The objective of this article has been to offer some introductory remarks on women labour in public administration. Firstly, the working environment of women officials in the public service was placed under scrutiny. As officials in the public service performing

their duties within the context of public administration they are subjected to certain institutional activities inherent to public institutions such as managerial, administrative and functional work. The proportional involvement of women officials in these activities is determined by the position hold in the hierarchy of the particular public service institution where they are employed.

The discussion also showed that women in the public service are not proportionally represented in management positions although the total work force consists of 41% women. One of the reasons for the presence of a relatively high percentage of women in the public service is because of the need for a second income for the family to uphold the standard of living. It also appears that women in the public service are mainly employed in occupations such as nursing and education. Therefore, the managerial and administrative skills of women officials are largely absent in other occupations which could have a bearing on the rendering of public services.

Secondly, an overview was given of the education and training opportunities women officials can make use of. Two broad categories were identified, namely pre-entry education which is to a large extent the responsibility of universities and technikons, and in-service training which is done by the different public service institutions under the guardianship of the Office of the Commission for Administration.

With regard to the fact that women are not sufficiently represented in management positions in the public service, and also as a result of a limited number of women students that are enrolled in Public Administration at two selected South African universities, it is evident that insufficient women are trained in managerial and administrative aspects within the context of the public service. In this regard more aggressive measures should be implemented to make training in Public Administration available for women in the public service.

Attention was paid thirdly to problems women face in society, and as a result thereof, how these problems point to discrimination in the workplace. Special efforts have been implemented to counteract discrimination in the workplace. These efforts are referred to as a representative bureaucracy and resulted in changes such as affirmative action and equal employment opportunities. Affirmative action and equal employment opportunities are only in their infancy in the South African public service. Nevertheless it must be pointed out that the personnel policy of the South African public service centres around merit and efficiency which on close examination rejects the notion of discrimination.

Fourthly, some views on the future of women in the public service were taken into consideration. As a resuit of the efforts of the Government to sign a Convention on Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women, the announcement of a Draft Bill on the Promotion of Equal Opportunities, the Government's proposals on a Charter of Fundamental Rights, and the implementation of the Subcouncil regarding the Status of Women, women will in future be in a better position regarding the combatting of discriminatory practises against them. The planned implementation of structures and measures to prevent discrimination against women also place a responsibility on the shoulders of women officials to utilise the opportunities provided to them. Besides the formal legislative guidelines additional administrative instructions could also be issued to ensure the effective counteracting of discrimination in practise. The ultimate test of non-discrimination lies in the proportional representation of women on the different management levels so that women could be heard on issues that is of importance to them.

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