

Role of Women in Nation Building in South Africa

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CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Introduction

The negotiated transition and 1994 democratic elections in South Africa promised significant gains for gender equality as women acquired one-third of the seats in the national parliament, secured constitutional protection and led to the beginning of legislative reform. This transformation at the national level continues to characterize South Africa as one of the most lauded states in terms of women's access to public positions of power and the protection of social rights. The new constitution earned the recognition of being one of the broadest and having most inclusive anti-discriminatory clauses internationally. These victories were an extension of the decades of women's activism in the struggle to end apartheid and assure gender rights in the creation of a new nation. In this process, a record number of women moved directly from the anti-apartheid struggle, political exile, labour movements or political imprisonment to positions of power within both parliament and the civil service. These macro level changes coupled with the experiences of activism shared by those entering public positions of power, placed enormous hope on the women who took national office. This was characterized by the overarching climate of optimism central to the 1994 transition; the end of the apartheid struggle created new opportunities for women to rebuild South Africa by centralizing gender rights in order to improve the quality of life and status for all women in the country.

In this work, the spaces where women are actively reconstituting society by engendering democracy in ways those are central to assuring the long-term transformation of South Africa have been explored. The entire gamut of their activities and contributions has been captured under three broad categories: Politics, Economic and Social.

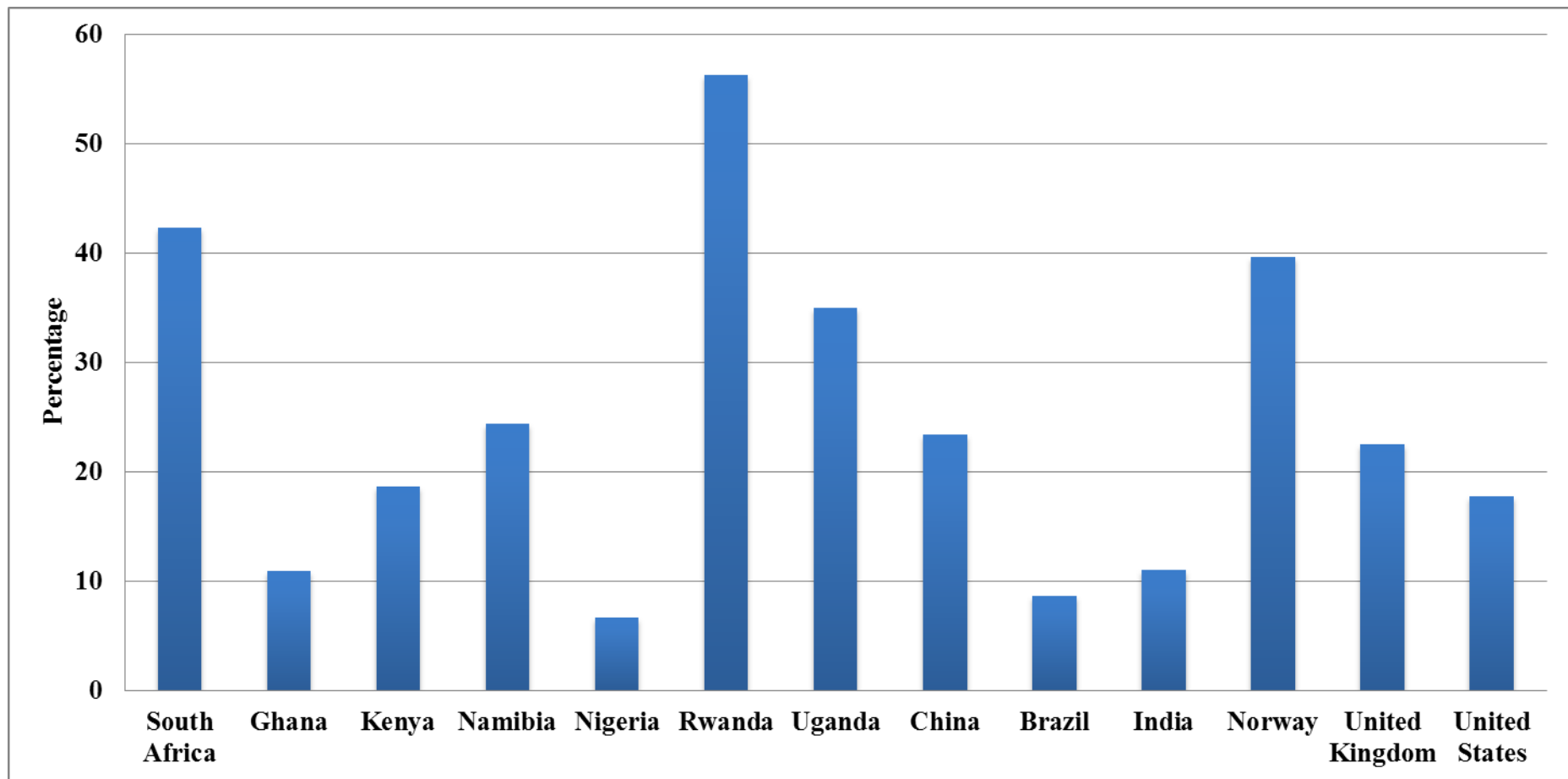


Figure 5-1 Percentage of seats held by women in National Parliament in South Africa, other African nations, emerging economies and developed countries (2013)

Source: Inter-parliamentary Union, 2013

Political contribution

Figure 5-1 contextualizes the percentage of seats held by women in National Assembly of South Africa in relation to other African and emerging economies and developed nations. It clearly shows the position of South Africa where it leads the above-mentioned nations barring Rwanda with an impressive women's participation of 45 percent.

The representation of women in political life and leadership positions and the promotion of gender equity is an integral part of developing and sustaining democracy. The representation and participation of women in the parliamentary arena plays an important role in developing and maintaining a political agenda that is illuminated by consideration of gender issues. Parliament supports the inclusion and equality of women as an important part of nation building. It recognizes that without the active participation of women and the incorporation of women's perspectives at all levels of decision-making, the goals of equality, development and peace cannot be achieved. It is critical that women should be mobilized to enter the sphere of Parliament in order to help explode the myth of the incapacity of women to be decision-makers. Women should not only enter Parliament, they should also be agents of change of the institution, and society.

Since the end of apartheid, South African women have continued to redefine leadership, feminism and power on their own terms and in their own cultural contexts. After the first democratic elections in 1994, female parliamentarians have played an active role in mobilizing women's rights and through their lobbying have ensured the passage of several key pieces of legislation aimed at protecting women's rights, such as the Choice on Termination of Pregnancy Act (Act No 92 of 1996), the Domestic Violence Act (Act No 116 of 1998), the Maintenance Act (Act No 99 of 1998), the Recognition of Customary Marriages Act (Act No 120 of 1998) and the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters Act) Amendment Act (Act No 32 of 2007), to cite but a few examples. Female members of Parliament have also been known to play a role in monitoring the appropriation of government resources from a gender perspective (**Women in Parliament, 2009:14-15**).

On paper South Africa has one of the world's most impressive legal arsenals for protecting women's rights. But the gap between principle and practice is often wide.

In some areas, particularly in politics, it does well. Women played a big part in the liberation struggle and the ANC has promoted their cause. Women hold 45 percent of parliamentary seats, the third-highest proportion in the world and 41 percent of cabinet posts, including many of those often assigned to men: defence, agriculture, foreign affairs, mining, science and technology, and home affairs. Gill Marcus is the first female governor of the central bank. The Democratic Alliance, the country's main opposition party, is headed by Helen Zille and for 15 out of 19 years (1994 onwards) of Independent South Africa, a woman has been the speaker of the National Assembly of South Africa. Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, Deputy President of South Africa from 2005 to 2008 was the first woman to hold the position and at that point the highest-ranking woman in the history of South Africa. On 10 July 2013, Mlambo-Ngcuka was appointed as Executive Director of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women (**Economist, 2010**).

Still, changing the nature of social relations and ameliorating the underpinning causes of gender inequality continue to constitute the most daunting challenges to assuring protective rights central to South Africa's new democracy. As a result, even though women are in powerful positions in the public sphere, the struggle continues in the movement to alleviate gender inequalities in prevailing systems that have not yet transformed in accordance with the public commitment to the gender rights. In families, households, communities and social institutions, women continue to face extreme marginalization, which is very much evident by the severe forms of gender-based violence throughout South Africa.

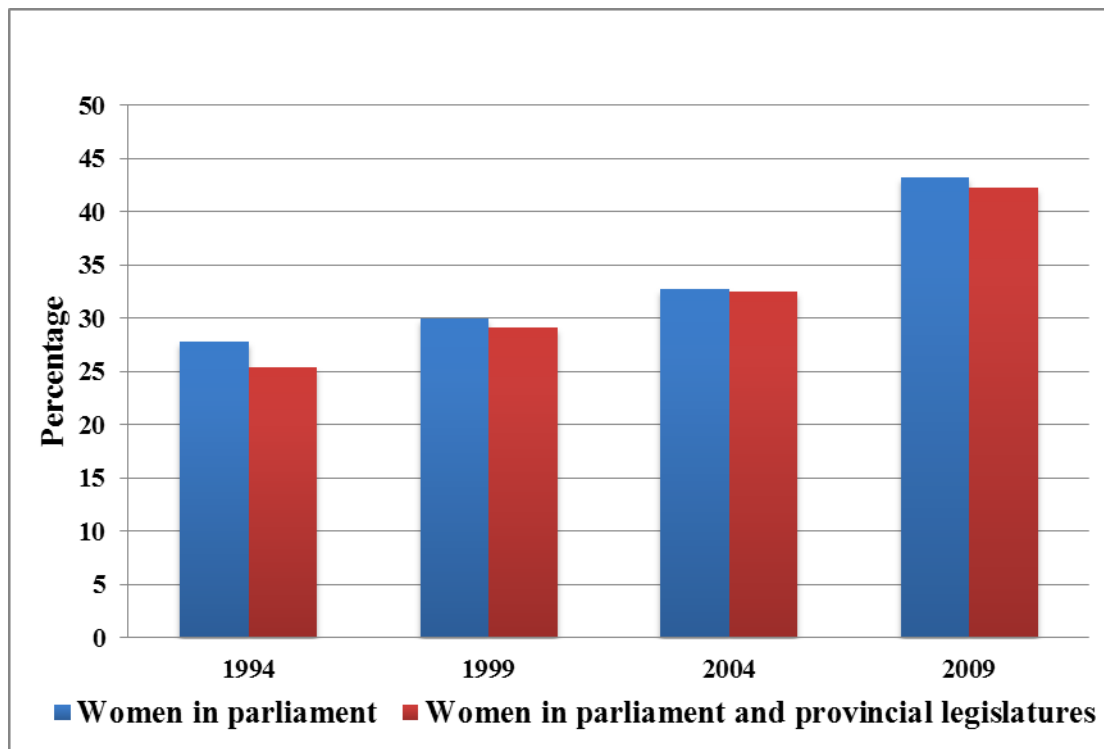


Figure 5-2 Percentage of women in South African parliament and provincial legislature

Source: Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa (EISA, 2010)

Figure 5-2 depicts the proportion of women in the National Assembly of South Africa from 1994 to 2009 and also the proportion of women combined together in the national and the provincial legislatures. In both the cases, the percentage of women has continuously risen with an impressive growth of more than 22 percent in 15 years, which has been unprecedented.

At grassroots level, local government is considered the sphere of government closest to the people. Local politics has impacted directly on the lives of women as they carry disproportionate responsibility for social reproduction and the goods and services provided by local government have a direct bearing on their lives thus making their input into municipal decision-making and policy critical. Local government is obligated to ensure the full participation of women in various municipal structures from ward committees to the mayoral committee. This imperative requires the municipality to confront attitudes of patriarchy in both the public and private spheres – an exercise fraught with political risk.

Women's participation in local government is likely to lead to more efficient and effective delivery of services, which will have a positive impact on the democratic system as a whole. Women's understanding of the needs of households can be translated into knowledge for local planners and delivery agencies, leading to a virtuous circle of gender-sensitive policies and increased and better-valued participation of women and in general improved local governance.

Table 5-1 Gender and local government in South Africa

Year	% women ward	% women PR	% women overall
1995	11%	28%	19%
2000	17%	38%	29%
2006	37%	42%	40%
2011	33%	43%	38%

Source: Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa

Table 5-1 summarizes gender and local government election results over the four municipal elections since 1995. It shows steady progress in the first three elections with women's representation increasing from 19 percent in 1995 to 29 percent in 2000; up further to 40 percent after the ANC adopted a 50/50 quota in 2006. Of particular significance in 2006 was the increase in the representation of women in ward seats (where women traditionally do not do as well as in Proportional Representation or PR seats) from 17 percent in 2000 to 37 percent in 2006 but there is a decline in women's representation in ward seats from 37 percent in 2000 to 33 percent in 2011 and corresponding overall decline of women's representation by two percentage points.

Despite the significant presence of women in the legislatures at all levels, it has not resulted in effective women centric policy initiatives. Entry in the parliament does not translate into upward mobility within the political hierarchy. A strong reason for it has been the patriarchal attitude entrenched in South African society. Even though on paper South Africa can boast of political empowerment of women but the reality is way different. Women have faced resistance from their male counterparts in the form of marginalization in the party and have also seen exclusion from informal political spaces. Thus despite being represented at decision-making levels, women are not so involved in taking decisions hence it remains a male bastion. But at the same time, the

number of women members has increased because of the highly celebrated gender quota in the ANC, subtly pressurizing other parties to follow it too.

Experience across the world has shown that the inclusion of female parliamentarians brings about positive changes in politics, because although all Members of Parliament are responsible for promoting gender equality, the increased representation of women can create a platform for women's issues to be placed on the political agenda. Women in Parliament represent the vast and diverse electorate of women in South Africa and as representatives of this electorate; they are in the position to be agents for change through their oversight and legislative roles but their position needs to be strengthened.

Recent statistics and debates in South Africa highlight that the country's transformative vision has not stretched as far as the judiciary and legal sector. Since this is the very sector tasked with protecting, interpreting and enforcing the rights enshrined in the Bill of Rights so as to bring about social justice and the transformation of society-at-large, the facts are cause for worry.

Despite the South African Constitution's commitment to establishing a society based on non-sexism and the prohibition against discrimination on the grounds of gender and sex, the South African judiciary has failed to adequately represent South Africa's female population. According to former Constitutional Court justice Kate O'Regan, "while there had been racial transformation, the gendered demographics of the bench are the same in 2013 as they were in 1994, with nine male judges and two female judges. As apex courts and ultimate guardian of the constitutional rights and the project of transformation through law, this state of affairs is surely inexcusable."

Only 9 of the 473 senior counsels, from whose ranks candidate judges are selected, were black women, while throughout the whole of South Africa, there are only 20 white women practicing as senior counsel. The Democratic Government and Rights Unit pointed out that as of October 2012, women made up only 28 percent of all judicial officers nationwide. There are only two out of eleven judges in the Constitutional Court of South Africa. In the Supreme Court of Appeal, only seven out of twenty three judges are women (**SAC-IWJ, 2012**).

When it comes to the fourth pillar of democracy; media, several studies indicate that women remain under-represented in newsrooms across the country as the majority of newsrooms remain white and male. Almost all newsrooms have male editors, except for the Mail & Guardian, which appointed Ferial Haffajee as South Africa's first female editor of a major newspaper in April 2004.

Nearly 38 percent of reporters in South Africa were female and 62 percent male whereas globally 37 percent of reporters were female and 63 percent were male **(GMMP, 2010:3-8)**. While this is a hopeful result, the inequality between male and female reporters remains a reality. When assessing media, South African women have not yet achieved equal access and representation as compared to men. Women are under-represented as reporters, news sources, and audience members. Yet, in comparison with other countries, South Africa has about as many female reporters as the average reported in the Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP) and more female sources than the global average. Gender and media activists in South Africa are working tirelessly to bring about quantitative and qualitative changes in the media industry. The media have a responsibility in this new democracy to transform themselves into diverse institutions that provide audience members with alternative viewpoints, including those of women. Yet, the most important change that could significantly close the gender gap in media attention is an improvement in the literacy, education, and employment of women.

Women in South Africa have been the champions of gender reform. They have played and continue to play, a central role in our democracy and the trajectory of our country's future. For a better and more worthy presence of women in the country, it becomes essential to change the attitudes and mindsets of those who would obstruct such access.

The 20th century economic and political developments presented South African women with both new obstacles and new opportunities to wield influence. The most important determinant of a country's competitiveness is its human talent – the skills, education and productivity of its workforce and thus countries and companies will thrive if women are educated and engaged as fundamental pillars of the economy and diverse leadership is most likely to find innovative solutions to tackle the current economic challenges and to build equitable and sustainable growth.

Women make up 52 percent of the population in South Africa yet only 43.9 percent of working South Africans are women. Even more telling is that they constitute only 21.4 percent of all Executive Managers and as low as 17.1 percent of all Directors in the country as shown in Figure 3-5. Only 4.4 percent of Chief Executive Officers in Corporate South Africa are women. There has been a marginal increase from 1.9 percent in 2004 to 3.9 percent in 2008 and the most recent published figures of 4.4 percent in 2011 (BWA, 2012:1-2).

Figure 5-3 shows the statistical profile of women in top jobs in South Africa thus indicating their disproportionately small presence, which is incommensurate with their population. More than a decade after the passage of the Employment Equity Act, which requires companies with over 50 people to hire and promote women (as well as blacks and the disabled) in proportion to their representation in the population as a whole which is 52 percent, white men still dominate senior management and company boards in both the public and private sectors.

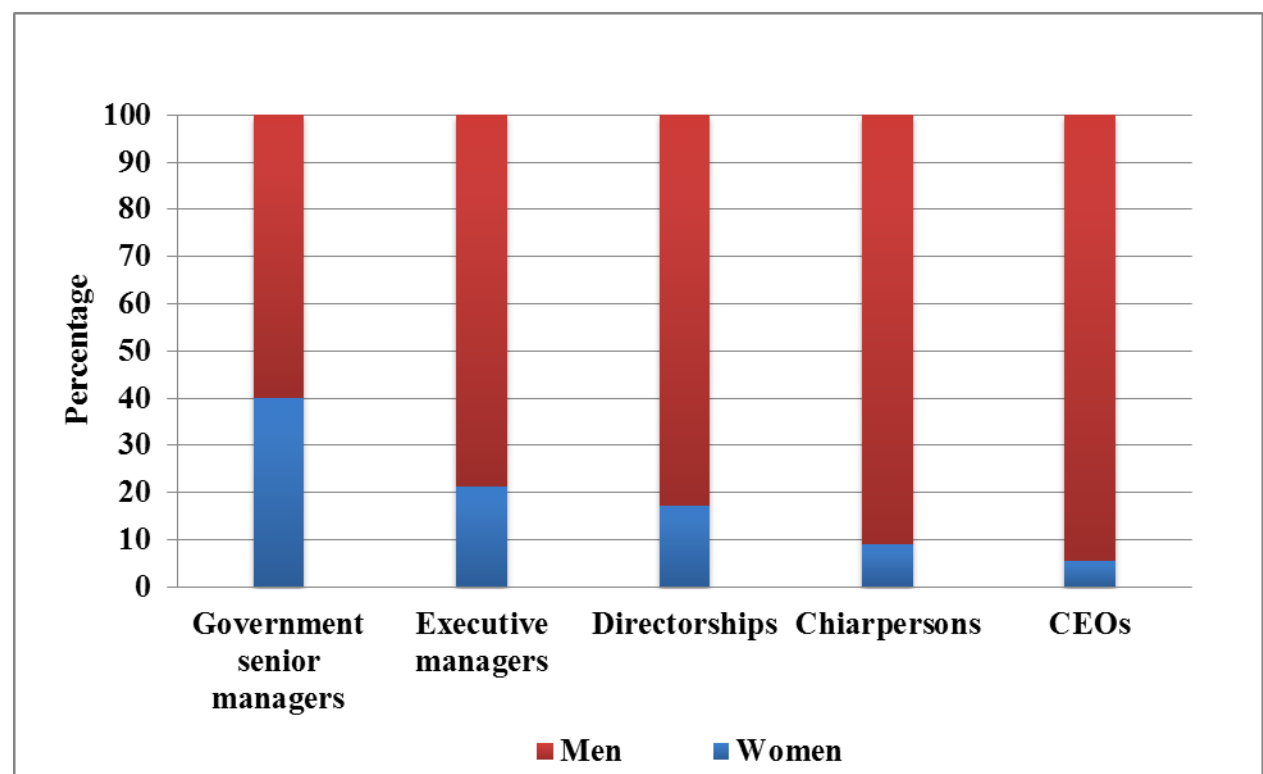


Figure 5-3 Women representation in top workforce in South Africa

Source: Business Women's Association (BWA) of South African Women in Leadership Census 2012

Figure 5-4 shows the racial decomposition of women in top and senior management positions and professional jobs. Not only the overall female workforce in each of the categories is small fraction of male workforce, black women fare even worse compared to their white counterparts. To take the example of top management, there are 4.5 time more men than women and white women are 77 percent more in number than black women. This makes black women a minority within a minority.

On the other hand, given that female students exceed fifty percent of the enrolment figure at tertiary institutions in South Africa, few qualify in mathematics and science areas; they pursue qualifications with softer skills like Law and Human Resources. Although this indicates the number of qualified women becoming available for the workforce, gender disparity in South Africa continues into the labour market. Women are ill-represented in highly skilled and the better-remunerated employment categories (SE, 2012).

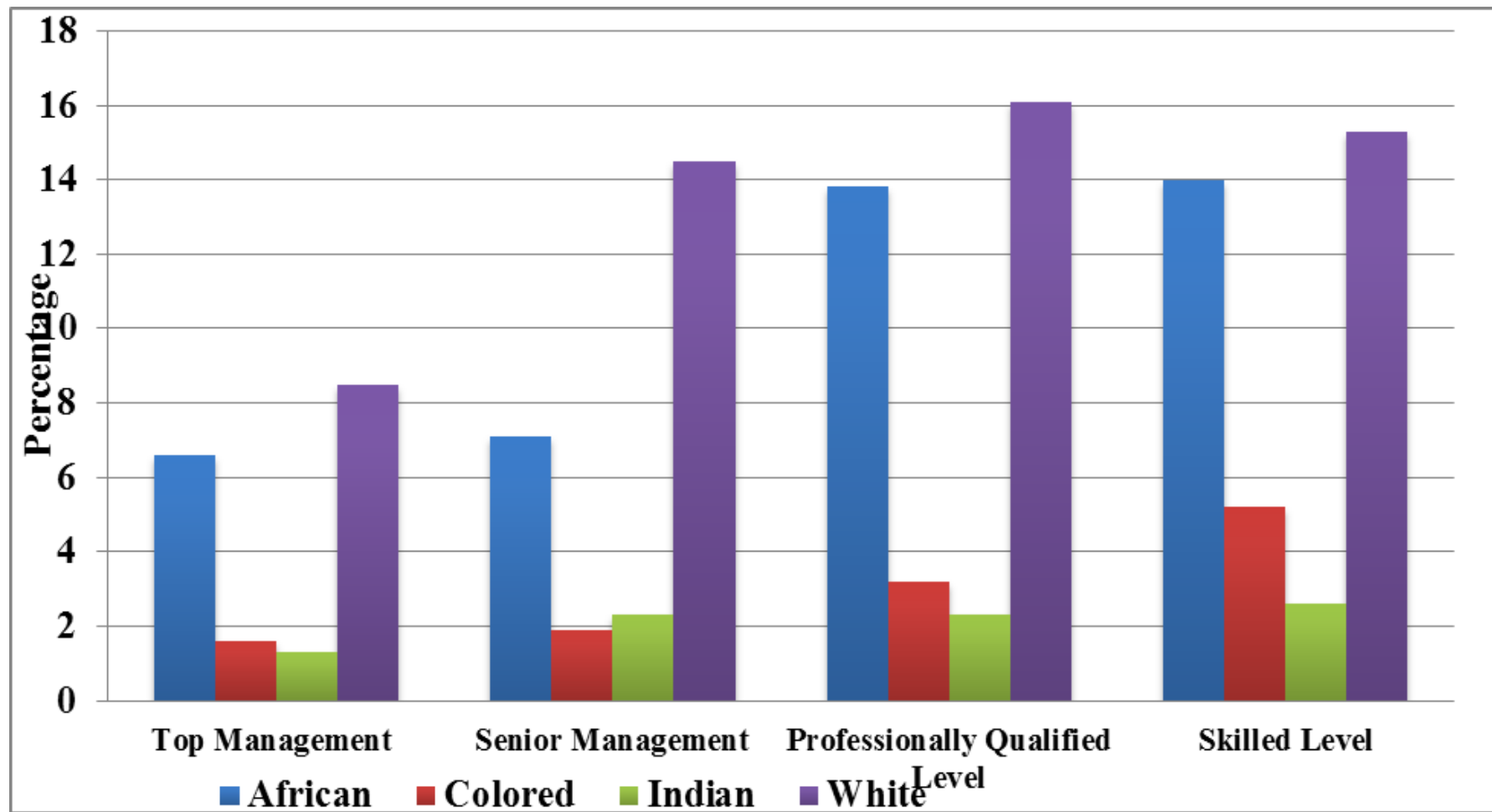


Figure 5-4 Racial composition of female workforce in top/senior management and professional jobs in South Africa

Source: 12th Commission for Employment Equity Report

In South Africa the perception that the role of women primarily relates to home making, still holds strong within most South African ethnic groups. As women progress in career, internal incongruence escalates when these discrepancies are not addressed and solved.

Furthermore, female corporate career progress is still weighted against the stereotyped corporate mind-set of Human Resources managers. Women are often discriminated against, hence the often poor progress or performance in the workplace particularly in higher echelons (SE, 2012).

Figure 5-5 indicates the occupational segregation by gender in the year 2010 in South Africa. It shows that barring certain professions like technical and associate professionals, clerks, service and shop sale workers, domestic workers; women have been lagging behind men by a significant number even though they are enough qualified; thus proving the presence of glass ceiling.

Although women make up nearly half the labour force, most are in lower-wage sectors, particularly domestic service. Paid domestic work institutionalizes the deeply embedded historical processes that relegated black women's labour to relations to servitude within the private household of South African society. At structural level, paid household labour continues to comprise the largest sector of work for black women in South Africa. It is often characterized as the last bastion of apartheid and it places formidably socio-economic barriers in the daily lives of women employed in the sector. So women on average still get less than two-thirds of a man's pay packet. Working women are often concentrated in the lower paying jobs earning lower than men even when they hold the same credentials and work experience.

Among managers, women with a median earnings of R 9,000 earned 75 percent as much as men managers with a median monthly earnings of R 12,000. The biggest gap between women and men is among skilled agriculture employees; however this should be interpreted with caution because of the small numbers involved. The gap between the two groups narrows among technicians, clerks and elementary workers where women earn 88 percent as much as their male counterparts. Women earn the same as men only as domestic workers (SSA, 2010:21).

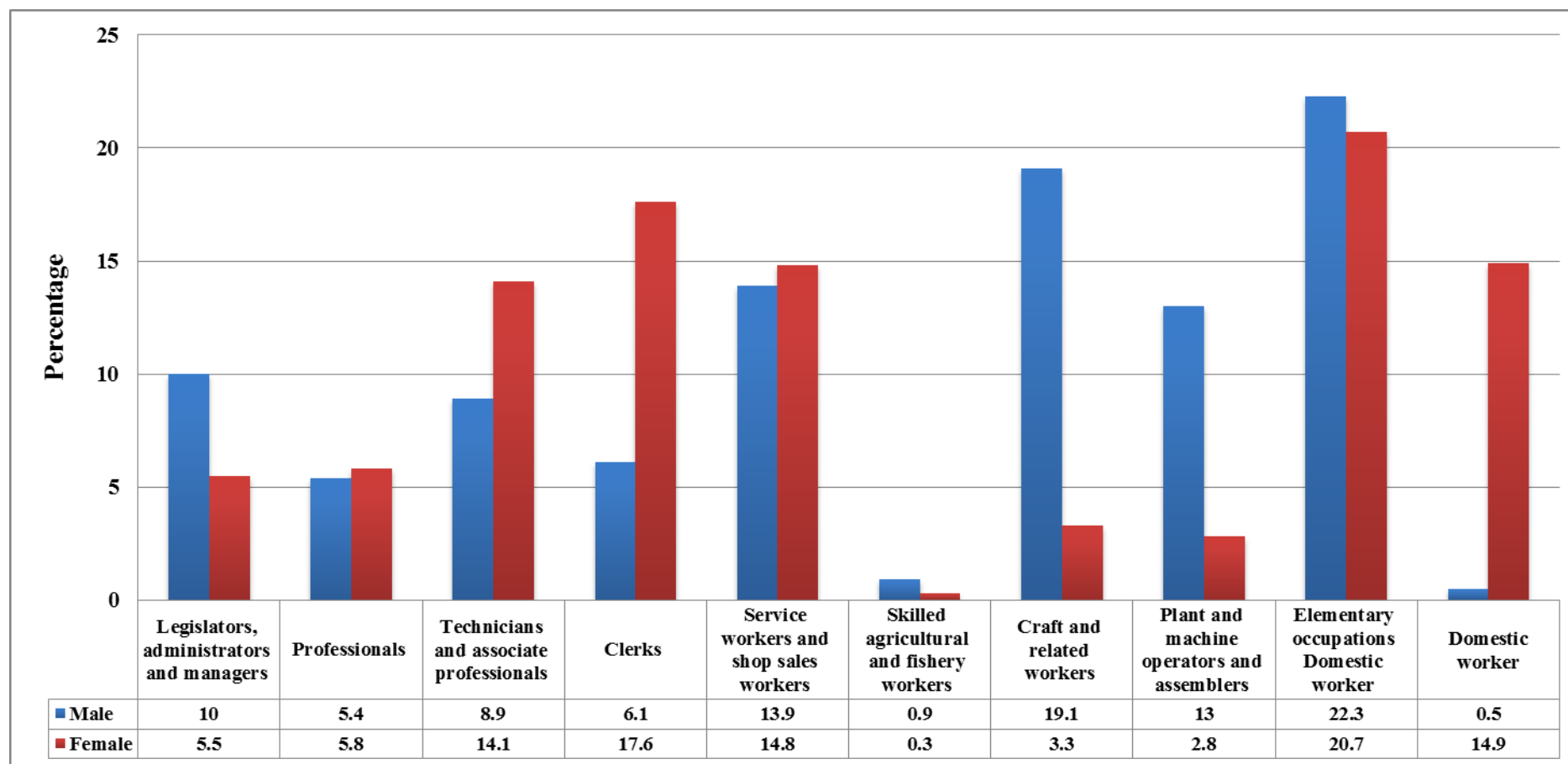


Figure 5-5 Occupational segregation in South Africa by gender in 2010

Source: Quarterly Labour Force Survey, 2010

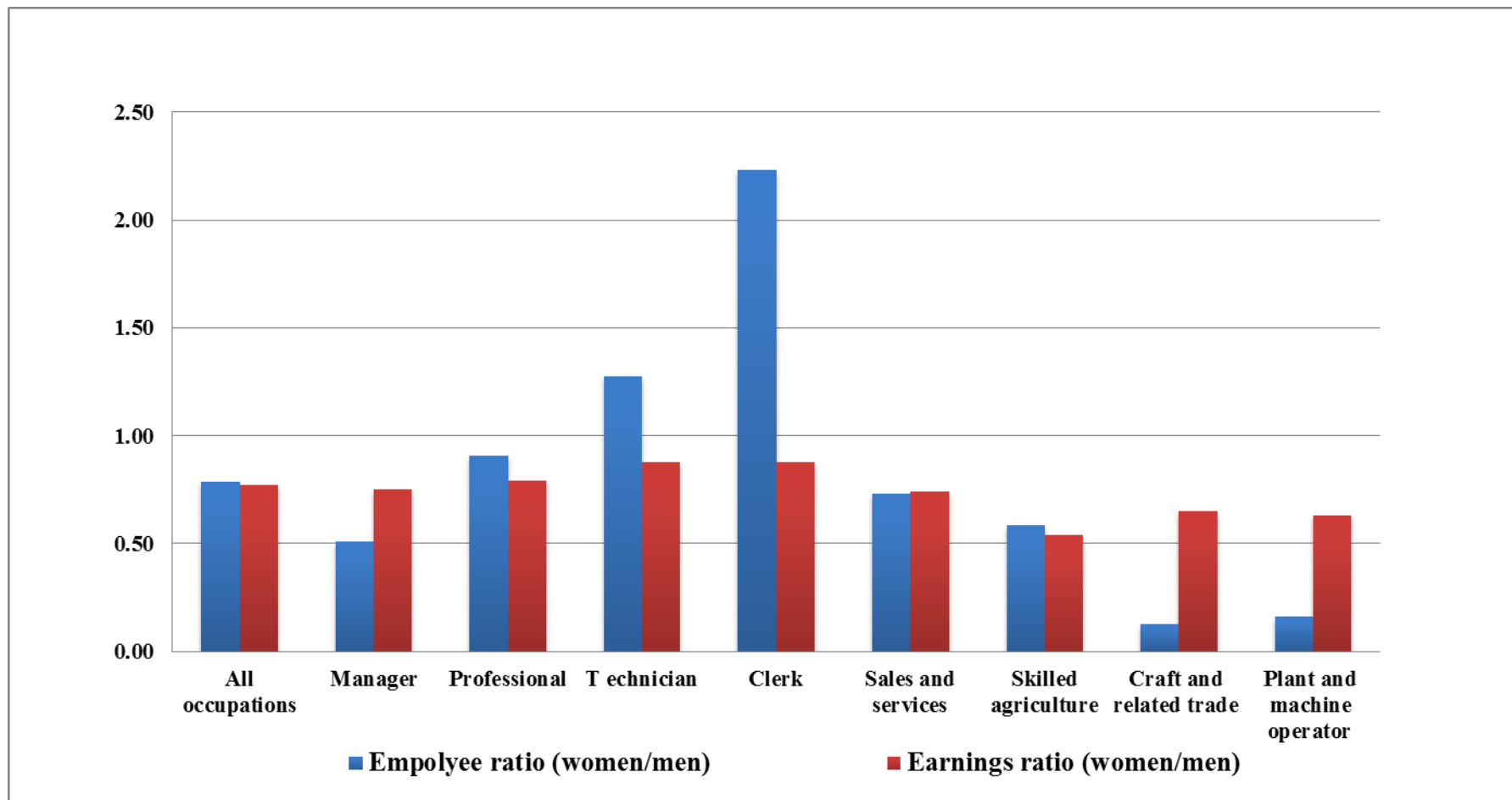


Figure 5-6 Employee ratio and median monthly earnings by gender

Source: Median Monthly Earnings 2010

Figure 5-6 shows that even in professions where women are ahead of men by number; still men are ahead of women in the wages for those professions. Lack of a direct or substantial income for women makes them even more vulnerable to violence and discrimination. The unemployment rate of women in South Africa has been bordering on 30 percent in last several years. Women to men ratio of median earning is as low as 0.75. In case of black women, this ratio is below 0.7. The earnings gap between women and men is evident in all occupations except domestic work. Overall, women had median monthly earnings of R 2,340 is about 77 percent of the R 3,033 median earnings of their male counterparts (**CEE, 2012: 12**).

Although women have fared poorly in professional jobs due to boardroom stereotypes and social prejudices, they have been active in the so-called traditional areas: the informal sector. Informality in employment has always been a challenge for statistical measurement. In developing countries, informal employment comprises nearly one half to three-quarters of non-agricultural employment. Specifically, 72 percent of non-agricultural employment in sub-Saharan Africa is in form of informal employment. Informal employment is generally a larger source of employment for women than for men in the developing world. In sub-Saharan Africa, 84 percent of women non-agricultural workers are informally employed compared to 63 percent of male non-agricultural workers (**Livelihoods, 2000:8**).

In the case of South Africa, the effort to better measure the informal economy was part of a larger effort to develop the post-apartheid national statistical system. Research suggests that the size of South African informal economy could be between 7 to 10 percent of its GDP (**Livelihoods, 2000:9**).

Informal employment is comprised of both self-employment in informal enterprises (i.e., small and/or unregistered) and wage employment in informal jobs (i.e., without secure contracts, worker benefits, or social protection). Self-employment represents nearly one-third of total non-agriculture employment worldwide. Informal wage employment is also significant in the developing world: comprising 30 to 40 percent of informal employment

(outside of agriculture). Informal wage employment is comprised of employees of informal enterprises as well as various types of informal wage workers who work for formal enterprises, households, or who have no fixed employer. These include casual day laborers, domestic workers, industrial out workers (notably home workers), undeclared workers, and part- time or temporary workers without secure contracts, worker benefits, or social protection.

Home-based workers and street vendors are two of the largest sub-groups of the informal workforce: with home- based workers the more numerous but street vendors the more visible of the two. In year 2000, there were about half a million street traders in South Africa. More than 70 percent of all street traders in the country sell food in which more than 70 percent of the traders are women (**Livelihoods, 2000:10**).

Women in rural South Africa are largely confined to agricultural production for domestic consumption and other labour intensive tasks essential for household survival such as fetching water. The economic and social contributions of women in the region have been culturally and statistically undervalued and remain undervalued in public policy formulation. Particularly undervalued have been their multiple roles as food processors, carriers of water, collectors of firewood, processors and preparers of food, carers for young children, the sick and the elderly and in many rural areas; major family contributors of income as well. Although these intangible contributions are difficult to assign a monetary value; one cannot overlook the importance of the endeavor towards society and therefore nation-building.

According to data compiled by International Labor Organization in 2011, 36.8 percent South African women as against 29.5 percent men are in informal employment. It is interesting to note that nearly 20 percent women as against 10.9 percent men are outside in informal sector although in informal employment (**ILO, 2011:15**).

There is compelling evidence that women can be powerful drivers of economic growth in a tangible and quantifiable way. For example, some conservative estimates indicate that if female employment rates were to match male rates in the United States, it would boost

overall GDP by 5 percent. In Japan, such initiatives could increase GDP by 9 percent. In developing economies such as South Africa, the effect can be even more pronounced. The United Arab Emirates for example would see a boost of 12 percent in GDP, and the Egyptian economy would grow by 34 percent. With annual growth rate of 3 percent, South Africa cannot afford to ignore its female human capital. In addition to contributing to economy as an employee, women as entrepreneurs create jobs and wealth (**Booz, 2013**).

According to the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) report, the entrepreneurial activity for South African men is 7.1 compared to 4.9 for women. The risk of failure is perhaps greater for women entrepreneurs, not only because they have to deal with problems associated with operating in a traditionally male-dominated environment but also due to their lack of education and training in this specific field. Although men and women find it difficult to start up an enterprise, limited access to financial resources, lack of support for women entrepreneurs specifically, negative prevailing socio-cultural attitudes, gender discrimination or bias and personal difficulties seem to be specific barriers that women entrepreneurs are grappling with. In South Africa, women entrepreneurs as a result are primarily engaged in smaller businesses. According to GEM 2012 report, women in South Africa own 72 percent of micro-enterprises and approximately 40 percent of small enterprises (**GEM, 2012:2**).

According to the First National Bank (the oldest and one of South Africa's 'big four' banks) 2011 White Paper on Female Entrepreneurship, 38 percent of all established business enterprises are owned by women. Table 5-2 describes that the total entrepreneurial activity among women has increased by 6 percent from year 2009 to 2010.

Table 5-2 Female Entrepreneurial Activity in South Africa

Women's Involvement, Attitudes and Perceptions regarding Entrepreneurial Activity	2009	2010
Total Entrepreneurial Activity (TEA)	40%	46%
Nascent Entrepreneur; Entrepreneurs who are actively trying to start a business but have not yet done so	39%	43%
New firm owner/manager	42%	46%
Established firm owner/manager	38%	47%
Have knowledge, skills and experience to start a business	30%	42%
Aware of good business opportunities	29%	40.10%

Source: GEM Report, 2010

Although men in South Africa are 1.5 to 1.6 times more likely to be involved in early stage entrepreneurial ventures as compared to women, this is mainly due to the various challenges facing women, with regard to starting a business enterprise.

Apart from their contributions in formal and informal sectors, women contribute to the green economy and environment in profound ways. Working for Water (WfW) is such a program of the South African Department of Water and Environmental Affairs has cleared more than one million hectares of invasive alien plants providing jobs and training to approximately 30,000 people per annum, of which 52 percent are women. South Africa is a water scarce country and these plants pose a direct threat to both biological diversity and water security. Invasive alien species are causing billions of Rands of damage to South Africa's economy every year. These species can divert enormous amounts of water from more productive uses and invasive aquatic plants, such as the water hyacinth, effect agriculture, fisheries, transport, recreation and water supply. It is estimated that these plants cover about 10 percent of the country and the problem is growing at an exponential rate (WfW, 2010).

A requirement of the WfW project is that 60 percent of workers must be women, 2

percent disabled and 38 percent youth. Women may be re-employed but men are restricted to a five-year cycle. Wages depend on the type of work, such as slashing plants, applying herbicides or acting as a section leader and men and women are paid equally. It also focuses on small-scale initiatives to develop entrepreneurial skills and to create alternative jobs for women in ecologically sensitive sectors. For example, there is an attempt to add value to the biomass that is being cleared, such as for the production of charcoal and affordable eco-coffins made from black wattle. Some participants are trained in budgeting and business management to help them start their own activities. A small number of women also leave the program for permanent employment in forestry.

Women are the traditional custodians of natural resources in the rural areas and they are also the people who suffer the most from degradation of water and other natural resources. Empowering women through access to information on how to manage their environment promotes access to safe and sustainable resources. South African women are the driving force behind the green economy – adapting sustainable practices, minimizing environmental damage and uplifting local communities. Among the multitude, two women who are making a green impact deserve a mention here, although there are hundreds of ladies out there working tirelessly for the greater good.

Mavis Mogasie Mathabatha was crowned South Africa's 2010 Female Entrepreneur of the Year by the Department of Agriculture. She maintains a forest of *Moringa oleifera* trees, known for their leaves, which possess excellent nutritional properties. Furthermore, Mavis is the founder of Sedikong sa Lerato, an all-women organization dedicated to reducing malnutrition, poverty and hunger in the area. The leaves can be eaten fresh or in powder form and have drastically improved the health of the children supported by the project. Her organization manufactures Moringa leaf powder, the sales of which support her child-care initiatives and community projects.

Camilla Howard, a keen adventurer, recently completed a 3000 km “Trek for Trash” journey across South Africa's coastlines. The aim of the lengthy trek was to raise awareness regarding litter pollution, and also collect trash that they encountered

throughout their walk. There were also community events organized, where locals could go and join them in their coastal clean-up initiatives. The trek, which began in October 2012, also involved visits to schools and local municipalities, and ended in April 2013. Camilla and her trek partner, Michael Baretta, collected a whopping 7 tons of rubbish. They continue to organize various clean-up events around the country (**Sustainable, 2013**).

All Women Recycling (AWR) is another organization dedicated to empowering women and up-cycling waste products to reduce environmental pollution. The business, based in Cape Town, creates eco-friendly gift boxes made from 2 liter plastic cool drink bottles. Around 60 percent of the boxes produced are sold internationally, whilst locally, products are sold at over 30 retail outlets and at markets. Unemployed women are taught how to make the gift boxes, and also learn valuable business skills (**AWR, 2013**).

Social contribution

Before assessing the social contribution of women in South Africa, one must understand their social condition and physical well-being. Women's social participation and contribution is the direct result of their condition and status in the society, and their social status in turn determines their social contribution. It is in the home, particularly in black ones, the centuries old patriarchal attitudes have changed least. There men continue to rule the roost, sometimes imposing their authority with drug- or alcohol-fuelled brutality. In its latest world report, Human Rights Watch, a New York-based lobby, describes the level of physical and sexual violence against South African women as "shockingly high".

South Africa has a generalized HIV epidemic driven largely by sexual transmission, which disproportionately affects women. The underlying causes which contribute to this infection include the lack of economic power to access treatment or take sexual decisions including use of condoms and not having a say to change oppressive myths and cultural practices. In South Africa, more than 30 percent antenatal women suffer from HIV/AIDS. In 20-24 years age group, every 4 out of 5 women is HIV infected. In 25-29 years age

group, this ratio is 2 out of 3 (**Violence, 2013:10-12**).

South Africa also has the unenviable title of the rape capital of the world where domestic violence and intimate partner violence (IPV) dominate the crime against women. Violence against women has been one of the most prominent features of post-apartheid South Africa. While estimates of the extent of violence vary, the issue has dominated national public debates and galvanized community-based activism and NGO intervention often led by women themselves (**Violence, 2013:10-12**).

Nearly 4 women are killed every day in domestic/intimate partner violence and more than 50 percent of all female homicides are contributed to IPV. More than half of all the cases before South African courts are of rape. Apartheid legacy of violence against women and deeply rooted patriarchal attitudes combined with superstitious beliefs among the common public have led to continued ill treatment of women in South African society (**Violence, 2013:10-12**).

Although South Africa has one of the most progressive constitutions in the world and exemplary anti-discriminatory laws, this has not been enough to overrun the apparent culturally mainstream practice of violence against women. A high percentage of women in local and national politics, assemblies and cabinets have also not helped much. Viewing women as essentially ‘dirty’ and ‘evil’, warped notions of female sexuality and homophobic attitudes have sustained the inhumane practices such as ‘jack rolling’ and ‘virginity testing’. Rape is often committed in disguise of a cultural tradition where the Constitution itself becomes a mute witness as it tries to strike a balance between the rights to “freedom and security of the person” and protecting “cultural, religious and linguistic communities.” The former include the right to “bodily integrity,” such as the right “to make decisions concerning reproduction,” while the latter guarantee the right “to enjoy one’s culture and religion” and “to form, join, and maintain cultural, religious, and linguistic associations and other organs of civil society.” Political, religious and community leaders appeal to these latter rights in debates about abortion, traditional circumcision rites, virginity testing and medical treatment for persons living with

HIV/AIDS.

Women's lot is made worse further by the problem of illiteracy and lack of vocational training. More than 12 percent women and 20 percent black women above the age of 20 have no formal education.

As shown in Figure 5-7 below, women have the lowest standard of formal education, with more than 20 percent of women still lacking any formal schooling.

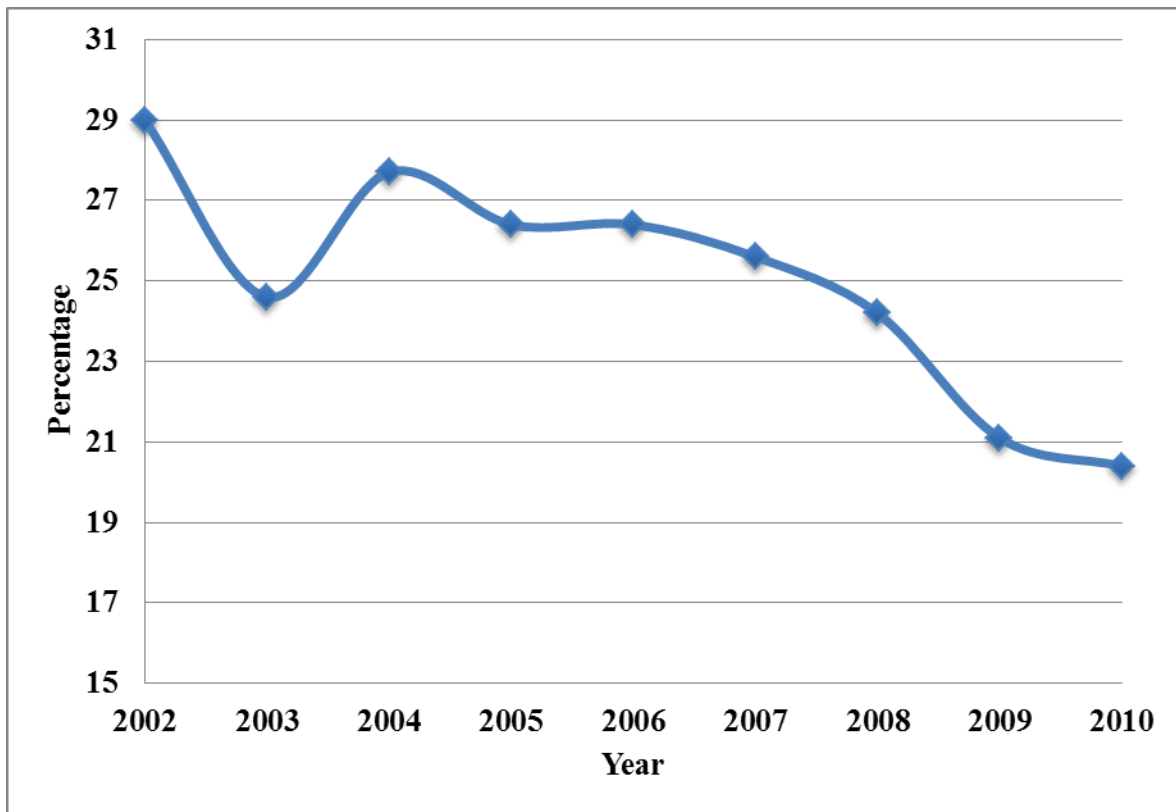


Figure 5-7 Percentage of female illiteracy (women aged 20 years and above with no formal education or highest level of education less than Grade 7)

Source: General Household Survey 2002–2010

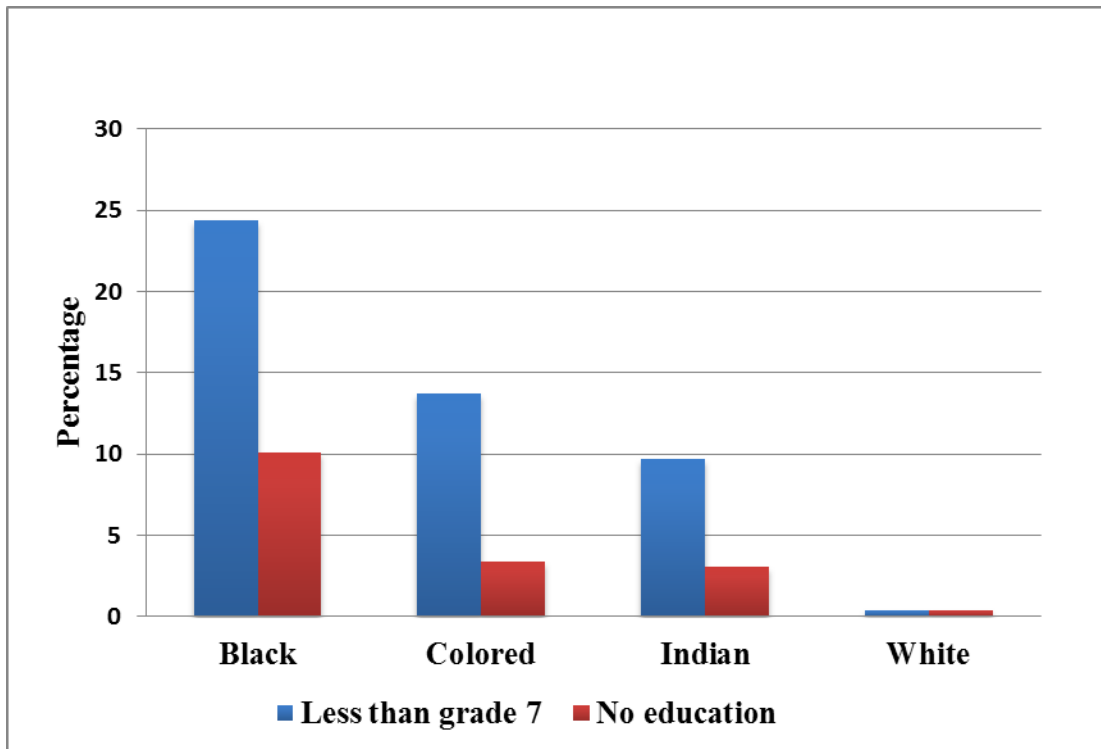


Figure 5-8 Racial decomposition of illiteracy among South African women aged 20

Source: General Household Survey 2010

Figure 5-8 shows the racial decomposition of illiteracy of women in South Africa. It clearly indicates that black women are lagging behind women of all other races in the country. With white women having the least percentage of illiteracy, it is the black women who have the highest rate of illiteracy and schooling less than grade 7. This factor is the leading cause of black women living in abject poverty and not progressing well in their careers thus being dependent on men and thus being exploited.

As per the Income and Expenditure Survey (IES 2010/11), 23.3 percent households in South Africa are headed by women while the income ratio of female-to-male headed households is less than half with nearly 4 percent decline in last 5 years as shown in Table 5-3. (IES, 2010-11:1-2)

Table 5-3 Income ratio of female to male headed households for South Africa

Female to male household income ratio	
Year	Ratio
2010/11	0.47
2005/06	0.49
% change	3.96

Source: IES, 2010-11

In terms of the time spent on unpaid care work, the largest gender gap was seen in household maintenance activity where women spent 3 hours 15 minutes, 2.2 times what their male counterparts spent (1 hour 28 minutes) (**A Survey of Time Use**). On average married women who did this activity spent more than 4 hours doing household work, while married men spent only just over one hour. Unemployed women who did this activity spent 4 hours 25 minutes doing household duties, which is almost twice what unemployed men spent. According to statistics South Africa 2013, 41.9 percent children live in a household where only mother is present (**SSA, 2010:15**).

Despite tough struggle with life and with society, women have been relentlessly working towards contributing to their family and society in their respective ways. A majority of health workers in South Africa are women who work as unpaid or full time workers in the country even though there is lot of ambiguity around their status and employment benefits.

Even through NGOs women have carved a niche for themselves by empowering young women from disadvantaged backgrounds and by developing strategies for their educational and personal development. A few of them are in fact headed by women themselves. Some of them seek to eliminate poverty and to enhance women's participation in local governance.

Some others are committed to creating an environment in which people living with and/or affected by HIV/AIDS are free from stigma and discrimination. This commitment

is translated into the promotion of gender equality and equity, respect for human rights, mobilization of resources for prompt access to AIDS care, support and treatment in order to restore dignity and improve the quality of life of infected persons. These groups provide an enabling environment for persons to affirm and accept their status; the opportunity to share pain, joys, and fears with other women in an environment which is safe, without stigma and discrimination is crucial for women to move forward with grace and dignity and to continue to live positively.

Others provide referral services and shelter to women experiencing domestic violence. Their uniqueness as an organization is in providing both services to survivors and engaging in advocacy using a feminist and intersectional analysis. Their work is rooted in the belief that change can only be said to be effective when women's lives are directly improved through our interventions. They also believe that there is no single route to change, and thus constantly seek new and creative approaches in programming to achieve the change they seek.

At community level, the proliferation of women's NGOs has contributed to the advancement of women in education and society. Most of them are concentrated in the urban areas and only a few reach rural women, who are the main victims of male domination. Despite this, these NGOs are doing commendable work.

The government of South Africa places particular importance on subsistence agriculture in its efforts to fight food insecurity and poverty. One of the objectives of the Integrated Food Security Strategy (IFSS) initiative (**DoA, 2002**) is to improve household food production, trade and distribution. Increased subsistence production has the potential to improve the food security of poor households in both rural and urban areas by increasing food supply, and by reducing dependence on purchasing food in a context of high food price inflation.

The majority of the subsistence producers were found to be in the rural areas and about 300,000 from urban areas (formal and informal). Women account for 58 percent of these subsistence farmers. Additionally, food gardens are popular among African women's

groups in South Africa. The main aim of food gardens according to the respondents was to improve nutrition and create livelihoods for the urban poor. In such subtle but effective ways women are contributing their bit towards the society and the country (**DoA, 2002**).

In the latest Mo Ibrahim Index on African governance, South Africa is ranked 4th out of 53 African countries for its record on women's rights (**Mo Ibrahim, 2012**). In the World Economic Forum's "gender gap index" it comes an impressive sixth out of 134 countries in the world. In the United Nations Development Programme's "gender empowerment measure" it also does well, being placed 26th out of 182 countries. But in the United Nations "gender-related development index" it is ranked a poor 129th, again out of 182. Such a wide discrepancy is not simply because the various bodies measure different things but also because the picture of women in South Africa is so mixed.

Concluding Remarks and Recommendations

Given a patriarchal culture in South Africa, is the present involvement of women in the society, the best possible for the nation? This calls for an equal opportunity and anti-harassment policies that would effectively reduce discrimination against women's interest in the social, economic, leadership and political development in South Africa. The economic dependency trap, educational disadvantages, and other obstacles to empowerment such as the birth of a child and lack of day care facilities are major hindrances to women's emancipation and progress.

The empowerment of women in South Africa through education, technical skills, enhanced self-worth and economic independence will lead towards equality and a more inclusive society and way of life. Training in personal and family hygiene, knowledge about healthy food production and preparation will help to alleviate the living standards of women. Policies that could promote women's freedom and choice in sexual and reproductive matters including the right to have safe sex will help to empower South African women to be the custodian of their bodies and health.

The role of women in the family contributes to a large extent to their health status. Women in the rural areas have numerous roles and responsibilities- as mothers bearing

and rearing children, as wives, as members of an extended family, as housekeepers, as food producers and often also as income generators and earners. The ability to meet the demands of all these roles as well as the ability to cope with conflicts that may arise when their multiple roles are not compatible with each other depend on the women's access to financial resources, skills and help from other members of the family or community. Even during pregnancy or after delivery, they must fulfill all these tasks, sometimes with little or no support from other family members.

There is also a need to address poverty, which is closely linked with poor health, basic education and lack of social services in the region. While some provincial governments have made great strides forward in the provision of health facilities, there is still need to recognize that women's health needs differ from those of men and in this regard very few states, if any, have made overall holistic achievements to address the needs of women. Women are not only recipients of health services, the majority of them are health service providers and largely responsible for the health of their families yet they lack the power in decision-making which impact on the health and quality of their lives and those of their families.

Women are almost exclusively responsible for domestic tasks including food processing- both a domestic and productive task- cooking, cleaning, child-care and collecting water and firewood. The combination of these tasks along with agricultural work forces women to work longer hours than men.

Opportunities for women to diversify their economic roles in South Africa beyond semi-subsistence food production, casual employment and small-scale marketing have not been readily available. Low levels of educational attainment and patterns of high fertility have provided the background to limited female involvement in formal sector job markets. This is despite the fact that, large numbers of households have been and remain de facto women headed. Prejudice against women continues to exist in public and private sectors in South Africa. A glass ceiling that limits women from enjoying true equal opportunities and a working environment free from sexual harassment is very evident in

the nation at all levels.

In South Africa, about half of those active in the informal economy are women. As elsewhere, they are concentrated in micro-scale, often one –person operations, while their male counterparts tend to dominate the more lucrative sub-sectors like transport.

Women's social position and their role *vis-a-vis* that of men, especially in the rural areas, makes them potential cornerstones of sustainable environmental programmes and projects. However, they need skills development in such areas as agricultural sciences, particularly soil survey, land evaluation and assessment of soil degradation and desertification.

Getting more women in strategic positions of decision-making and providing leadership training at all levels for women will go a long way in ensuring the involvement of women in issues relating to the environment and its management. Simply entry in the parliament does not translate to the upward mobility within the political hierarchy.

Improving the role and influence of women in environmental policy-making, management and practice will only remain a good talk show unless the subject is fully established in the national environmental management and development thought process. To get this goal accepted and systems geared effectively to its attainment are the real challenges.

Poverty prevents women from accessing even simple technologies. The lack of technology serves to perpetuate their poverty. The marginalization of women is compounded when they are overlooked in the allocation of agricultural resources and services to rural households.

Providing women with appropriate environmental training and information as well as employment opportunities can reinforce their role as key players in the application of sustainable development values and techniques. This would lead to a more equitable and sustainable development of the planet as well as a healthier environment.

Of all the strategies that might be developed to empower women, education at the home, school and community level could be the most effective. Since economic power is one of the major causes of male domination and violence against women is a demonstration of this, there is need for women to have access to education, especially higher education which enables them to obtain high paying jobs. Career counseling is therefore crucial at all levels of education.

Professional women also need to be sensitized and mobilized to participate in politics and rise to the challenges of taking on decision-making positions. Women need to be trained generally in leadership and lobbying skills, to enable them to compete effectively with male colleagues.

Opportunities for advancement remain slim for women in the media profession. They seldom become editors of newspapers, mainstream or alternative but remain foot-soldiers. The media is a powerful weapon. If democratically used, the media and other new forms of communication can expand and increase the opportunities for women and other marginalized groups in societies.

Science and technology, as fundamental components of development are transforming patterns of production, contributing to the creation of jobs and new ways of working and promoting the establishment of a knowledge-based society. Given the large number of women in the workforce, South Africa must devise mechanisms for engaging women with science and technology in order to enhance their productivity and thus increase the quality of national production. Women should be actively involved in the definition, design, development, implementation and gender-impact evaluation of policies related to the economic and social changes referred to above.

Despite the extremely adverse social conditions which borders on hostility, women's contribution to South African society and nation is enormous. Women discharge a variety of social roles as leaders, social workers, bread-winners, mothers (41.9 percent children live in households where only the mother is present) and 23.3 percent of all households are headed by women. The lot of ordinary South African women is still hard.

But it is getting distinctly better. And a growing number of them are doing very well and contributing their bit towards the society.

Women's contribution towards nation building must be evaluated in the context of difficult circumstances they live in. One often wonders, what they could have achieved in a free, fair and safe society. As South African economy falters at a growth rate of mere 3 percent, the country can ignore half of its workforce at its own peril. To stay competitive in the new millennium, South Africa needs to make women empowerment its highest priority.

In the 21st century, development should not only focus on power plants, good roads, health care, technology, dams and defence, rather governments need to put people and families first. They can do this by investing in women, young girls, welfare and education, women's needs, in creating women's opportunities and in promoting women's rights. It is therefore paramount for NGOs, the public and private sectors to ensure that women are their top priority in achieving sustainable development in South Africa.

South Africa has done well to empower its women politically (having a rank 7 out of 135 nations in Global Gender Gap Index 2012 in political empowerment) but performs poorly in the comity of nations in case of economic participation having a rank of 69, in educational attainment having a rank of 87 and in health and survival with a lowly rank of 103. With huge gender gaps in literacy, employment, health (especially HIV) and social status, they are highly disadvantaged. Given their resilience in the past, all they need is level playing field. South Africa needs to recognize the contribution of its women and in turn needs to create better opportunities, provide safe working conditions and change age old patriarchal mindsets so that women are respected as individuals too.

1. One can identify four broad sets of initiatives to enhance women empowerment and their participation in all walks of life:
2. Legislation to address visible barriers
3. Cultural transformation to address invisible barriers

4. Role models and leadership
5. Actions for future women and public sector leaders

Recommendations

1. Emphasis on achievement of equality for women as active citizens, decision makers and beneficiaries in the political, economic, social and cultural spheres of life. Women most in need of social upliftment must be given priority.
2. Development and implementation of mechanisms through which South Africa can meet its constitutional, sub-regional, regional and international commitments towards gender equality, human rights and social justice.
3. Transformation of existing institutional values, norms and cultures which hinder gender equality.
4. Enactment of laws that take into account the needs and aspirations of women.
5. Development of strategic objectives for implementing such laws and policies.
6. Adoption of effective management information systems to ensure that those who implement policy receive adequate, appropriate and relevant training and development.
7. Development of clear performance indicators in line with priority areas to ensure effective monitoring and evaluation of progress.
8. Allocation of resources for the benefit of women in rural and urban areas and mechanisms ensuring that these resources reach them.
9. Current thinking sees economic growth as an important component in improving the quality of life for all. But growth in GDP per capita income is usually an unreliable indication of change in the lives of poor people, especially women. For change to be felt by women there has to be a twin strategy that involves economic growth with effective strategies for meeting the basic needs of the people.
10. The increased presence of women in the legislatures, the executive branches and other structures of government has made it possible for women politicians and civil servants to promote women's interests through new legislation as well as

through an increasingly strong lobby to transform male-dominated institutional norms, values and cultures. Despite such improvements, there is still a long way to go before institutional power is shared equally between women and men in the government and corporate sectors. The persistence of a predominantly male culture in most organizations makes it difficult for those women who have penetrated the "glass ceiling" to ensure that their voices are effectively heard.

11. Co-ordination of the planning and implementation of programs and projects to address issues that face women so that their practical and strategic gender needs are met.
12. Actively source both financial and non-financial resources from partners (both internal and external) to support the programs of action that are focused on the development of women and gender equality.
13. Build the capacity of women and women's organizations to actively participate in and influence the administrative and political decision-making processes within communities and local government.
14. Develop the ability and skillfulness of women and men to access services, information, resources, and opportunities and so ensure the fulfillment of their civic rights and responsibilities
15. Develop platforms that will increase the dialogue and profile of gender issues so that practical solutions and best practices will emerge to guide the planning and implementation of plans and programs.
16. Conduct research and social impact assessments to ensure that statistics, strategies and policies remain relevant and updated.
17. Further, it is suggested that the macro/high level strategic planning, coordination, monitoring and reporting functions be institutionalized at the highest levels of power and authority of the organizational structure. Another component for consideration will be the integration of the gender program as a structural entity with other human rights programs.
18. Create an enabling environment for the delivery of local government services to meet the specific gender needs of women and men as well as promote gender

- equality.
19. Provide a training program, raise awareness and build capacity internal and external to the organization aimed at the empowerment of women and promotion of Gender equality.
 20. Conduct gender research that will inform service delivery.

Embarking on women's empowerment for the attainment of gender equality is crucial to the national project of the transformation of society and its institutions in South Africa. South Africa has adopted gender mainstreaming as a strategy to achieve gender equality in government. This makes it obligatory for all the government structures and institutions to take steps to implement this strategy.

Gender based policies and women in senior policy making positions should serve as role models for changing cultural stereotypes. With concrete resolution of the constraints militating against women's participation in development, the nation will move faster in empowering women thereby building a nation that is not only prosperous but also all inclusive – a role model nation for the other African and developing nations.

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