

TREND ANALYSIS ON GENDER DISPARITIES IN NAMIBIA'S MINING SECTOR: EVIDENCE FROM THE AFFIRMATIVE ACTION REPORTS OF 2011-2015

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ABSTRACT

Gender inequality has become a global concern as it involves the denial of opportunities and equal rights based on ones' gender. Namibia is no exception to this global phenomenon. The country's labour force is characterised by inequalities based on gender, despite the various government interventions to address such disparities. Like many governments across the globe, the Namibian government through its Employment Equity Commission enacted the Affirmative Action (employment) Act No. 29 of 1998 to ensure that all Namibians enjoy equal employment opportunities and benefits. This paper examines the trends on Affirmative Action (employment) Act in the mining sector - one of the gendered sectors. It utilises data from Affirmative Action Act annual reports of 2011/2, 2012/3, 2013/4, and 2014/5 provided by the Employment Equity Commission. The paper concluded that the country's mining sector is still dominated by prejudice, stereotypes, and discriminatory practices based on gender orientation. As a result, the participation of women in this sector is still minimal. The paper makes recommendations on innovative practices adopted by other countries in the retention and attraction of women into the gendered sector

Keywords: affirmative action, gender disparities, women, mining sector, employment

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Gender inequality is culturally embedded and can be traced back before colonialism in Namibia. This was when the country's economy was purely agrarian, and pastoral based on a collective control of resources. During pre-colonial Namibia, agricultural production was subsistence-based, and there was a gender-based division of labour, whereby hunting and cattle herding were the preserve of men, and child rearing, preparation of food and cultivation of crops were women's responsibilities. Ethnic groups had different livelihoods; the Namas, Damaras and Hereros were pastoralists, the Ovambos and Kavangos were agro-pastoralists, and the San were hunters and gatherers (Jauch, Edwards & Muchena, 2011).

Akawa (2014) points out that African women had control over their livelihood until the missionaries and colonialists disrupted the equality between African men and women. Although the inequalities had existed before, they intensified with the arrival of the missionaries and the inception of colonialism. Missionaries and colonialism collaborated with the local elites by subordinating women for their own benefit. According to Akawa (2014), the creation of customary laws took course and became effective. Through these laws, patriarchy moved forward unopposed and subsequently created inequalities between men and women.

Clear divisions of labour were noticed during this period whereby the role of women was as a primary source of labour through fertility (Jauch et al, 2011). And due to society's mutual ownership of significant productive assets, it ensured a fair distribution of wealth within the community. Furthermore, Jauch et al (2011) posit that key necessities such as land and livestock were possessions of community groups and there was advocacy for collective belongings that forbade individuals the right to claim ownership of such resources. Although land was a collective possession, the system favoured men who were given access to land ownership. Adult males were the beneficiaries of land from the chiefs and they had control over key productive assets (Jauch et al, 2011).

As a result, land control continues to be skewed and highly concentrated in the hands of men. Although women play an important role in food production, in most cases, they were denied land ownership or control over land (SOFA, 2011). In minimal instances where women could acquire land, most of the time they had to gain access to the land through their relationship with a male family member, and lost their rights over the land if the relationship ended. Women also faced deprivation in other areas such as

restriction in decision-making powers in homes and public spheres. These became cultural norms and eventually got entrenched in modern legal and structural frameworks. Jauch et al (2011, p 182) notes that this has shaped what they termed “the trajectory of gender inequalities that persist up until today,” thus, resulting in a society characterised by current and historic unequal power relations between women and men, whereby women are systematically disadvantaged and oppressed.

According to Lindsey (2011), the pre-modern society whereby hunters and gatherers were dominant did not experience big differences between the two genders. This was so because there were no subjects of exploitation. Contrarily, in modern capitalist societies, there are private property rights and these are transmitted as patriarchal norms in society. A clear manifestation of gender inequalities erupted when men began to control the labour of women, social surpluses produced by female labour, women’s sexuality and also their fertility. The prevalent inequalities erupted due to the following factors: Women were not paid for their house work; their work began to be seen as unnecessary and; men portrayed themselves as bread winners (Lindsey, 2011). Consequently, the patriarchal system was entrenched in society ascribing men’s rule over women.

Fuelling the existing gender inequalities was the introduction of foreign rule during colonialism, especially through the migrant labour system. In the colonial era, women’s traditional subordination was retained and entrenched through new forms of oppression. The migrant labour system, in particular, had detrimental effects on women as it forced them to take over multiple responsibilities that were traditionally performed by men. In addition, they had to cope with the burdens of child rearing, attending to subsistence crops and livestock as well as managing the extended household (Jauch et al 2011).

Furthermore, male migration for labour purposes increased women’s dependency on male remittances and promoted patriarchal authority over women. According to Macionis (2010), borrowing from Engels, capitalism increased male dominance, and created more male power. He explained this claim in three states: Firstly, capitalism ascribed power to men through their high incomes and private property ownership; secondly, women became the consumer part of society because they were not producers but relied on the men for survival; thirdly, is the division of labour which restricts men to the factories and women to the home space. Women are not paid working in the home but men are paid for working in the factory.

All the three claims put more importance on men's job by rewarding them and ignored the women's reproductive and productive role in society.

In a similar vein, Likuwa and Shiweda (2017) asserted that male migration during the contract labour system affected the Ovambo communities. There were no male labourers for the household agricultural activities and women were left alone to deal with family activities which included the care of domestic animals and subsistence farming. These divisions had several implications on the sustainability of the household's livelihood particularly in terms of food security. The impact was less in Kavango compared to the Owambo because the latter's homesteads for married couples were usually built within the boundaries of the parents' homesteads where family members were usually responsible for the welfare of others. During the absence of a husband there were usually other adult males left within those homesteads to help with agriculture work and other household activities.

Since it is widely acknowledged that the existing gender inequality is the aftermath of gender division of labour since pre-colonial times and retained during post-colonial era, which consequently accorded an inferior status to women, the Namibian government like many other governments across the globe institutionalised various laws and policies designed to redress inequalities in terms of gender. The enactment of such laws and the designing of such policies can be attributed to liberal feminism within the political structures. Theoretically, liberal feminism claims that gender differences are not based on biology, and therefore women and men are not all that different. If women and men are not different, then they should not be treated differently under the law. Women should have the same rights as men and the same educational and work opportunities (Lorber n.d.). Thus, this study examines the gender disparities that are intense in the Namibian mining sector which continues to be gendered despite legal instruments designed to mainstream gender.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Challenging Organisational Gender Inequality: A Global Concern

The degree and causes of gender inequality vary across the globe. National and international measures are employed to curb the high degree of gender inequality. According to Kamrany (2012), from an economic perspective, gender discrimination also largely impedes accelerated

economic growth in many countries as it prevents women from reaching their maximum productive potential. Although women constitute 40% of the global work force, there are still many who are unpaid family workers in the informal sector. Those who do formal work are generally paid much less than their male counterparts, despite being equally capable and skilled (Kamrany, 2012). Furthermore, their status and promotion is limited to middle or lower ranks, and they are laid off pre-retirement age more frequently than men. They also have limited educational opportunities, and they typically run smaller farms and less profitable enterprises.

Gender inequality erupted from the household level to community level, and then eventually landed in the workplace and later manifested itself as an impediment to a gendered balance work environment. As a result, it became a catalyst for the unfair treatment of male and female employees in organisations (Acker, 2012). This saw the birth of reactionary stances, especially from the feminist scholars, focusing on gender inequality in organisations. Hence, gender in the workplaces gained ascendancy in the late 1960s and early 1970s as feminist scholars criticised the conventional organisation as inadequate because it ignored the importance of gender in working life (Acker, 2012). Since then scholars' continued research on gender processes in organisations, created new concepts including "gendered and gendering", and greatly increased the awareness on how gender inequalities are produced and reproduced (Acker, 2012, p. 214)

Messner (2009) defined a gendered institution as an institution constructed by gender relations and whereby its structures and values (rules, formal organisation, sex composition etc.) reflect the conception of masculinity and femininity. Furthermore, Messner (2009) defines gendering institutions as institutions that help construct the current gender order, which include creating masculine and feminine identities. The notion of theorising gender became more challenging because of intersectionality — the idea that gendered processes do not stand alone, but intersect with and are shaped by race and class processes, as well as other forms of inequalities and exclusion that are deeply embedded in different societies (Acker, 2012).

Namibia's Interventions to Address Gender Inequalities

The country's population is growing at a steady pace making it easier for the government to effectively implement its policies. According to the Namibian Statistics Agency [NSA] (2012) report on the national census, the country's population stands at 2,113,077 from 1,830,330 reported by the 2001 national census conducted by the National Planning Commission [NPC]

(2002). Of the 2,113,077, 1,091,165 are women. According to NSA (2015), the labour force survey report indicated that of the 990 998 people into the labour force, 502 639 are women, thus accounting for 51 percent. The figures of female entrants in the labour market look promising, but there are numerous structural factors that affect women's working conditions.

One major constraint faced by women is the artificial barrier known as the 'glass ceiling' which is defined by Grout and Sonderegger (2007) as the invisible barriers based on attitudinal or organisational bias that prevent qualified individuals from advancing upward in their organisations into management positions. These barriers reflect discrimination; a deep line of demarcation between those who prosper and those who are left behind (Mishra, 2014).

There are numerous sectors within the country's workforce that are dominated by males, even though there are capable and qualified women who are equally capable of holding their own in such sectors - construction, fishing and mining industries. These sectors are gendered, and the process of gendering is still on course. Most of the gendered sectors in the Namibian workforce today, are those that had been instituted during the contract labour system such as mine work, farm work, construction work and fishing. Employment opportunities for women had been minimal, particularly in the gendered sectors.

According to Jauch, Edwards and Cupido (2009), in cases where women employment was available especially to black women, it came in the form of jobs as domestic workers, as well as menial employment as cleaners in companies where they faced long working hours, extremely low wages, and complete absence of benefits and job security. Furthermore, Jauch et al (2009) argued that the phenomenon of the existing gender inequality which was inherited from pre-colonial Namibia was fuelled by the fact that shortly after independence, the country inherited laws that undermined women's active involvement in the economic realm. Such laws further drove women's underrepresentation in various decision-making organs. As a result, gender disparities had widened making it difficult for women to rise. Hence many were trapped in the vicious circle of poverty due to a dearth of socio-economic advancement policies specifically targeted at women at that time.

Namibia ratified the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1992 that advocates for member states to act swiftly against the discriminatory practices based on gender (Ruppel, 2008). Thus, during the mid-1990s, the government intervened by addressing gender inequalities that were created

during the pre-colonial era and which were retained during the colonial and post-colonial eras (Republic of Namibia, 1995). The retained inequalities included the lowering of women's status created during the contract labour system era which was deliberately aimed at recruiting men and ensuring the total absence of women in various formal employments (Republic of Namibia, 1995). The system further inherently denied the significance of women's productive and reproductive roles. Gender gaps in all sectors of society were widespread particularly in decision-making in various community settings. Women also lost significant political ground during the colonial era and education opportunities were minimal for women; all these factors contributed to women's oppression.

Subsequently, in 1997, the government adopted the National Gender Policy, which marked an important step towards the attainment of gender equality in the country. The policy provided a framework to guide the implementation of programmes aimed at meeting the expectations of the Namibian people, especially women, to attain fundamental freedom and to be equal to their male counterparts with regard to participation in all developmental initiatives and nation-building efforts (Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare, 2010).

Among other government interventions, was the introduction of the Employment Equity Commission and formulations of policies and guidelines to guide the country in gender-related matters. The Employment Equity Commission became the custodian of the Affirmative Action Act of 1998 under the then Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare (Employment Equity Commission, 2002). This legislation fostered fair employment practices with regard to recruitment, selection, appointment, promotion, and equitable remuneration of previously disadvantaged persons. More specifically, previously disadvantaged persons such as women and persons with disabilities were referred to as the designated group. Such interventions allowed women to enter the work force at various positions and in industries that have been male domains, but not at management level.

Like the National Gender Policy, the Affirmative Action Act's agenda is to close the gaps that were created by past socio-economic, political, and cultural inequalities that existed in pre and post-colonial Namibia and clearly supports inclusion of competent women in critical positions of employment (Employment Equity Commission, 2002). However, Holzer and Neumark (1996) argue that Affirmative Action policies have always been controversial, largely because of the allegation that they cause employers (and universities) to prefer less-qualified minorities or females over more qualified males. The

Employers' Guidelines to the Affirmative Action Act no. 29 of 1998 states that, "for the purpose of the Act, a suitably qualified person is defined as a person who has the abilities, formal qualifications or relevant experience for a position of employment" (EEC, p. 9). Thus, the Act made no provision for any loophole that will lead to the hiring of incompetent employees.

The government also introduced the Labour Act of 2007 which aims at regulating the conditions of employment of all employees in Namibia without discrimination on grounds of sex, race, colour, ethnic origin, religion, creed or social or economic status thus, ensuring equality of opportunities and terms of employment, maternity leave and job security for women (Republic of Namibia, 2007).

However, Jauch et al (2009) note that despite the government interventions to address gender disparities, gender inequalities persist. The most common inequalities are the wage gaps between men and women and the sex segregation of jobs, occupations, and skewed hierarchal positions. Echoing similar sentiments, Mufune (2013) points out that results from the Namibia Household Income and Expenditure Survey (NHIES) 2009/10 indicated that more Namibian women were increasingly entering into the labour force because of the post-independence policies. However, women still lag behind in many areas of labour force participation. It was further noted by Mufune (2013) that women also face constraints in accessing the basic resources needed to participate fully in productive earning opportunities, thereby increasing their probability of falling into a vicious circle of poverty and eventually finding it difficult to get off this trap.

Given this background, this paper focuses on assessing whether government interventions, specifically the Affirmative Action Act, had achieved its intended purpose of addressing gender disparities in one of the country's gendered sectors, the mining sector, over a period of four years from 2011/12, 2012/2013, 2013/2014 to 2014/2015. It also aimed at providing the basic size and structure of the mining sector while focussing on both genders' employment participation and career progression in order to explore disparities based on gender orientation.

Methods and Materials

The analysis is based on secondary data collected from the annual reports of the EEC on Affirmative Action (employment) Act, 29 of 1998 for the years 2011/12, 2012/13, 2013/14 and 2014/15. The study utilised data for the stated period because the report for 2016/17 was not available at the time of conducting this study. The commission gathers annual workforce profile

statistics from the employers' Affirmative Action reports of persons from designated groups, which aim to achieve equity and eliminate barriers in the workplaces so that no person is denied employment opportunities for reasons unrelated to ability. Although data on different sectors of economy are readily available, this study focused on the mining industry, which is one of the gendered sectors and is historically deemed as a masculine preserve. Statistics provided by the EEC reports on the mining industry appear general because no descriptions were provided on specific types of mining activities. Thus, the study analysis also focuses on mining in general which nonetheless encompasses different mining activities. Within the mining industry, the emphasis was on examining how the workforce profile has been changing over the time period identified by the study. The figures of four different annual reports on Affirmative Action in the mining sector were captured using Microsoft excel. A descriptive analysis was carried out to give an overview of the employment status over a period of four years. Moreover, a trend analysis was done using line graphs, to examine how employment patterns as regards gender within different areas of the mining industry has been changing over a four-year period.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Workforce Profile

According to the Namibia Labour Force surveys conducted during the period 2012 to 2014, the number of employees in the mining sector increased between 2012 and 2013 but remained constant during the period 2013 and 2014. However, the proportion of increase remains low (less than 5%) compared to other sectors. There are significant differences in the proportion of male and female employees in the mining sector. Figure 1 shows the trend of employees in the mining sector during the three year period.

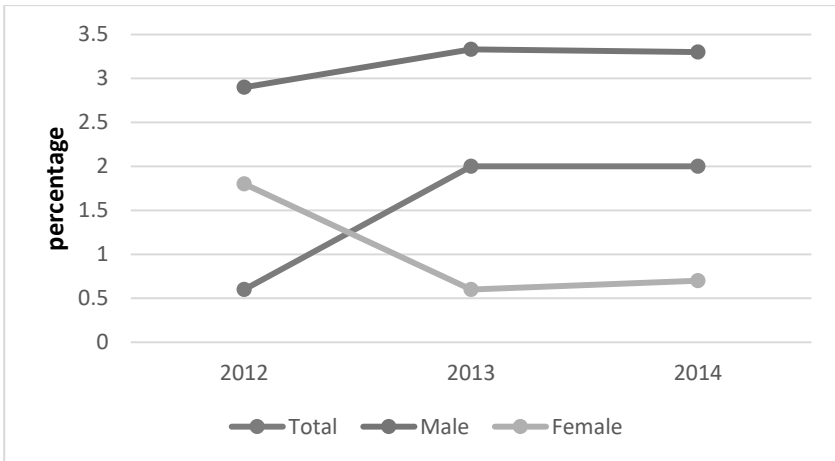


Figure 1: Trend analysis of employees in the mining sector

The Namibia Labour Force surveys also reported that in 2012, about 46 percent of the employees in the mining sector earned on average between N\$8 000 and N\$9 999 monthly. In 2013, female employees in the mining sector on average earned N\$ 9 202 while male employees earned on average N\$11 124. Furthermore, in 2014 the average monthly wages of female employees remained unchanged while that of male employees dramatically doubled from N\$11 124 to N\$24 424. The latest annual report on Affirmative Action (employment) Act indicated that the entire Namibian mining workforce comprised of 8913 employees, of which 7356 are men who constitute 82.5%, and only 1557 are women who merely translated to 17.4 % of the mining workforce.

The gender composition in Namibia’s mining sector is depicted in Table 1. This clearly illustrates a wider gender gap within the country’s mining sector which can be attributed to various factors such as dominant culture, family roles, nature of the job, hard labour and gender stereotypes among others. Generally and not specifically to the above table, many of the problems women face when pursuing mining careers are those which arise due to women’s traditional roles as the primary caregiver. It can be very difficult for females to achieve a good work/life balance because of the industry’s constraints in terms of flexibility, remote site work and juggling child care with often unsociable hours and expectations of overtime.

Table 1
Gender Composition in Namibia's Mining Sector

Job Category	Men	Women	Grand Total	% Women in industry
Executive Directors	34	2	36	6%
Senior Management	158	37	195	19%
Middle Management	358	124	482	26%
Specialised/ skilled/ senior/ supervisory	1193	334	1527	22%
Skilled	1776	423	2199	19%
Semi-Skilled	2328	384	2712	14%
Unskilled	1033	185	1218	15%
Total Permanent	6880	1489	8369	18%
Casual/Temporary and seasonal	476	68	544	13%
Total	7356	1557	8913	17%
<i>Employment Equity Commission</i>				

Source:

(2015)

Figures 2 to 5 present the males and females' participation in the mining sector in various positions during the 2011-2014 periods. The figures clearly depict a notable margin in gender variations. The results show a high proportion of males in the executive directors' cadre accounting for 91% while women account for only 9%. Although men dominated in the mining workforce in all positions of employment during the period 2011 to 2014, there is evidence that the number of women improved from the unskilled positions to more skilled and professional positions. These positive developments can be linked to the initiated policies and programmes put forward by the government and mining companies aimed at ensuring women's participation in more advanced roles.

In recent years, there has been a proliferation of career awareness campaigns from the mining companies encouraging female learners to pursue math and science subjects in schools and eventually enrol in technical fields. To date, females make up 40% of the students in mining and geology courses in Namibian universities but only 10% of those currently working in the mining sector (Mining Journal 2016). The government is encouraging public and private institutions to address the issue of gender inequality particularly in senior positions. By 2014, the percentage of women in middle management positions reached 30% and those occupying senior management positions slightly exceeded 20%.

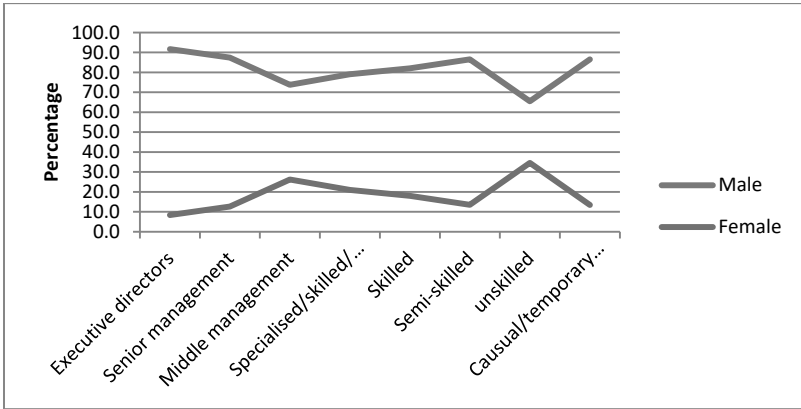


Figure 2: 2011 male and female employees in the mining sector

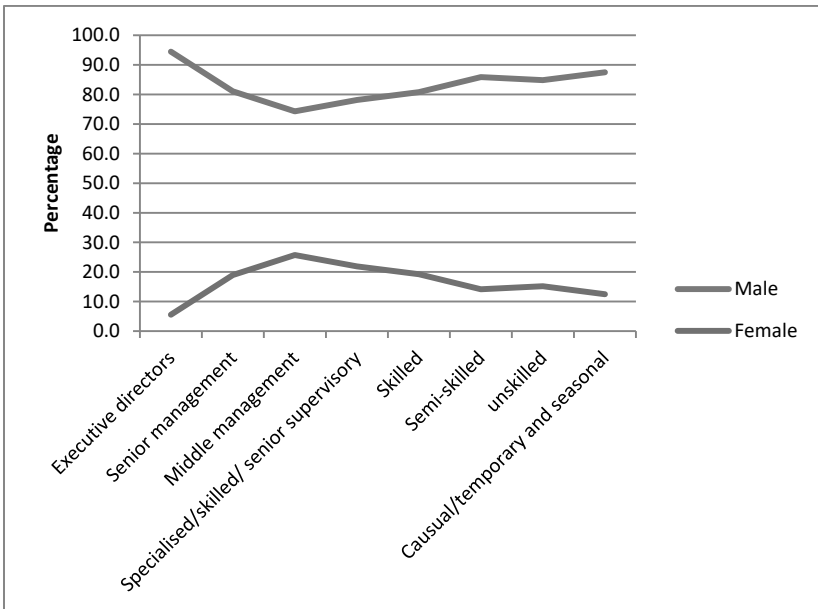


Figure 3: 2012 male and female employees in the mining sector

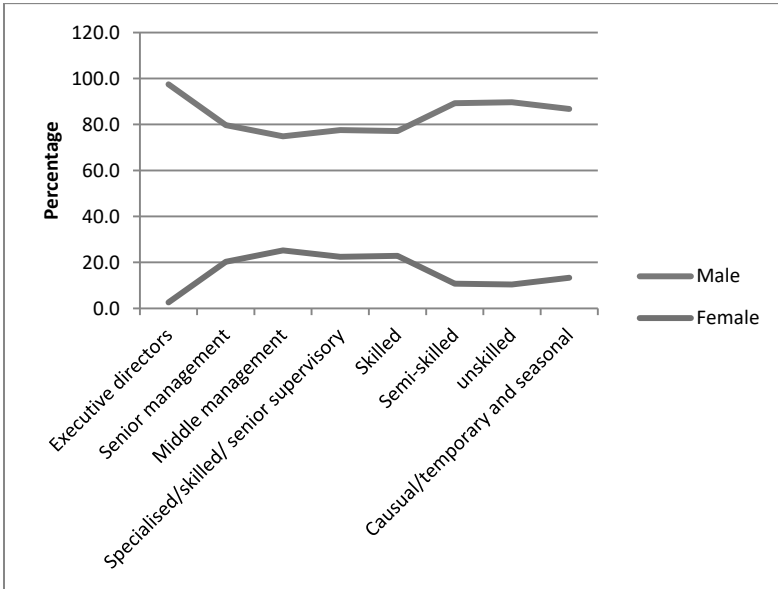


Figure 4: 2013 male and female employees in the mining sector

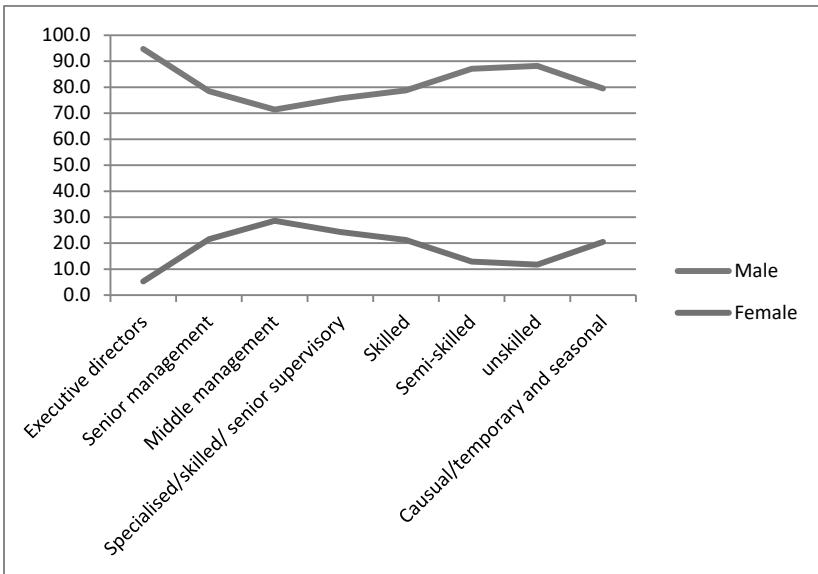


Figure 5: 2014 male and female employees in the mining sector

Although the different annual reports on the country's labour force surveys indicate that there is a significant increase of female entrants into the labour market, this is not proportionally distributed across all the sectors. NSA (2015) reported 990 998 people in the entire country's workforce, of which

502 639 were women accounting for 51%. Despite the high proportion of women in employment, women still face multiple constrictions such as accessing equal employment opportunities in various sectors and getting promotion that is proportional and at the same rate with their male counterparts.

The concept of glass ceiling is also present in the Namibian mining industry as few women find it challenging to reach the top of the hierarchical ladder. The mining sector traditionally has been a gendered space and was deemed a male domain. However, several policies have been formulated to reverse the phenomena through legal means, such as the adoption of the Affirmative Action Act that was introduced first in the West and later in many countries across the globe.

However, the historical backgrounds prior to the introduction and aims of the Affirmative Action vary in different countries. In some Western countries, the composition of workforces resembled an Irish coffee of which the top is constituted by whites and the bottom by blacks, thus the need to change the status quo was imperative. In the United States, the main goal of this order was to achieve equal opportunity in employment and to ensure that applicants for jobs would be judged without consideration of their race, colour, creed, religion or national origin (Krstić, 2003). Other countries, like India, have adopted affirmative action to deal with the disadvantaged segments of their populations (Chandola, n.d.). In Namibia, this legislation intends to foster fair employment practices to the previously racially disadvantaged people, women and persons with disabilities, referred to as the designated group in the Act (EEC, 2002).

Male dominance in the mining sector has been across the entire spectrum from the lowest to the highest positions. In recent years, there has been an improvement in the number of women occupying management positions; however, their participation in executive positions in the mining sector is lagging. Njiru (2013) observes that women's entrance in some sectors could be attributed to the government's commendable strides in ensuring the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women in recruitment. Women have also started participating and pursuing training in fields that have been male-dominated in the past such as engineering and geology.

This paper analysed trends on gender disparities in the Namibian mining sector for a period of four years. Although the period might seem to be short in presenting a clear picture of what transpired over the years, the results depict that much still needs to be done to advance women

participation in the mining sector. The underrepresentation of women is still high which stems from the legacy of colonial and traditional attitudes with denied women the education and career opportunities available to men as well as shaped societal perceptions about the role of women.

Though female participation has improved across all industrial sectors, companies are still focusing on more innovative attraction and retention strategies to foster this latent growth and support young women working in the sector. In Australia, for example, only 18% of jobs in the mining industry are occupied by women (Wynn, 2001). In general, the characteristics of employment in mining such as long shifts, hard labour, and the working environment have discouraged women from exploring roles in the industry. However, in some countries such as Namibia, mining companies are currently encouraging women's participation in the sector by offering flexible work packages, onsite child care, better pay rates, comfortable working conditions, extended maternity leave, breastfeeding facilities as well as on-site housing for couples.

The inequality patterns in the mining sector are particularly pronounced for women. The obstacles holding back gender equality include unequal access across the range of productive resources, including land, financial resources, information about markets, and appropriate technologies and taboos regarding women's participation in underground work. However, there exists great opportunities to bridge this gap by including the participation of women in the corporate world through enabling legislation, policies, and environments.

Worth noting is that the overall mining sector in Namibia makes a significant contribution to the country's economy, accounting for about 9.3% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (Mweemba, 2014). The generated revenue contributes significantly to the national projects that are crucial for nation building and accelerating the realisation of the objectives of the national and global plans and policies namely; the National Gender Policy of 2010-2020, Vision 2030, National Development Plan 5, and sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Hence, denying women full participation in the mining sector translates into women's exclusion from the national cake. This impacts on women's livelihood because the dependence on men for cash remittance is entrenched while others fall into the vicious circle of poverty due to limited income.

The United Nations is advocating for women to be represented across all categories of employment in the extractive industry, especially in decision making positions. The goal is to have women firmly located as

proactive agents within the legitimate mainstream mining sector for sustainable benefits for individuals, communities, and countries (UN Women Policy Brief, 2014).

According to the Ethical Corporation (2013) referencing the UK's Mining for Talent Report for 2013, company profit margins are higher for mining companies when women are on the board of directors.

Another study by a non-profit research group, Catalyst Census of Women Board Directors (2003), found that female board representation in business indicated higher returns on sales, equity, and invested capital. There is an opportunity to shift women from the livelihood and survival levels to true empowerment thus enabling women to build assets, create wealth, and move into business leadership. For example, in 2002 the South African Mining Charter introduced quotas urging mining companies to employ 10% female staffs. The Namibian mining sector is beginning to employ drastic measures to ensure that companies adhere to the stipulations set out in the legal framework advocating for gender parity in all sectors of the economy. The Mining Journal (2018) quotes the former Minister of Mines and Energy, Hon. Obeth Kandjoze as saying that "unless companies applying for mining licences employ more women in management positions, they will find it hard to get licences" (p 38).

Globally, the mining industry has the lowest proportion of women on its boards compared to other industries; with women occupying only 5% of the board positions of the top 500 globally listed mining companies (Temkin, n.d.). However, mining companies listed on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange have the best level of female board representation in the mining world, with 24% of South African women sitting on the boards of the top 100 globally listed mining companies and 21% of South African women sitting on the boards of the top 500 global mining companies (Temkin, n.d.). This example of good practice can be replicated among other governments and private sector companies and organizations by globally introducing legislation and policies that encourage gender diversity (Temkin, n.d.).

Overall, the study underpinned the mining sector's inability to absorb women in high numbers as the main constraint in addressing the existing gender inequalities. The prevalence is even higher in lower level and entry level positions even when women are fully able to execute such duties effectively and efficiently like their male counterparts once granted the opportunity. This intersects with one of the core objectives of the Affirmative Action Act, which intends to achieve equity and eliminate barriers in the workplaces so that no person is denied employment opportunities for

reasons unrelated to ability (EEC, 2002). However, for the small number of women that have succeeded in penetrating into mining sectors, they are still confronting challenges, one of which is climbing up the ladder in the highly-skewed hierarchy. According to the results, women find it difficult to get promotions that would put them in positions to be influential in advocating for fellow women's interests and privileges.

While the Namibian Public Service Commission is conscious of the need to address the gender balance in the private and public sector, there is no official quota or targets for the employment of women and this needs to be in place to ensure that each organisation has indeed acted towards achieving gender equality as envisaged in the Affirmative Action Act (Usiku, 2011). Furthermore, for the Affirmative Action Act to make a mark in addressing one of its core objectives, which is to reduce gender gaps especially in the gendered sectors, it requires a systematic and structural adjustment that will eliminate the conservative belief that advances masculine interests and continuity in the gendering of sectors that have been traditionally deemed as male domains. Moreover, although the Affirmative Action policy has clear directives, the implementation requires proactive measures across the spectrum by setting quotas, targets, and possible implications that may arise when organisations fail to uphold its tenets. This will aid in ensuring that women's full participation and ability to equally compete with their male counterparts regardless of gender orientation is realized.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The struggle for gender equality in Namibia is far from being over. From independence, various legal reforms were put in place in pursuit of gender equality in terms of economic and social justice for all. Discriminative cultural practices, patriarchal ideologies, and historical imbalances have been the primary focus under the new legal reforms. This translates to deliberate policy formulations aimed at ensuring equal treatment of all people in terms of gender, race, ethnicity, and disability. However, significant challenges remain particularly gender equity in employment opportunities which are evident in the country's mining sector where more men are employed and hold key positions compared to women. Such gender inequalities have a tremendous effect on women's livelihoods because women's underrepresentation in key positions provide no scope for women issues to be addressed by the top level management where policies are made and implemented.

The guiding principle meant to address this skewed state is the Affirmative Action Act. In relation to the Act, there is urgent need for reports' scrutiny to ensure that the Act achieves its envisioned outcomes. As different years' reports continuously indicate, huge gender actions need to be taken in addressing loopholes that undermine the effectiveness of the policy and its objectives. The study recommends an increased networking of females associated with the mining sector and enforcement of gender equality within national mining companies.

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