

Is B-BBEE being properly leveraged for women empowerment?

There are 14 points available on the B-BBEE scorecard for companies that empower their female employees but a recent report released by the Commission for Employment Equity shows that while women make up 45% of the workforce, the promotion of women into senior management positions continues to be frustratingly slow.



Source: Getty Images

So, what else should we be doing to ensure that gender diversity and gender equality in the workplace are not foreign ideals that are unattainable?

“Through the Employment Equity Act, South African businesses are already under massive pressure to transform their workplaces. So, more legislation is not an answer to address the advancement of women – and more specifically African women – in the workplace,” says Sean Sharp, the executive head of sales at EduPower Skills Academy.

“A carrot rather than a stick approach is the best way to encourage companies to drive empowerment and the ideal vehicle to implement this is B-BBEE. But we need to shift the goalposts to make this work,” Sharp explains.

Under the Codes of Good Practice, there are a number of areas across the priority elements that currently award companies for meeting women-specific targets. These include four points under Ownership, six points under Management Control and another four points under Enterprise and Supplier Development.

“The bulk of the points available are only unlocked when Black Women achieve top-level positions. But if this is the desired outcome, over the past 10 years the results show that B-BBEE is failing to deliver this empowerment objective,” Sharps adds.

This comment is based on the findings released in the recent Commission for Employment Equity Report 2020/21. This shows that over a 10-year period, Coloured and Indian women representation at top-level management may have increased but the representation of African Women fell by 2.7%.

Top Management	2010/11 Report [19.1%]	2020/21 Report [24.9%]
White Women	65.4%	64.7%
African Women	18.5%	15.8%
Coloured Women	4.8%	5.7%
Indian Women	7.5%	10.6%

“While there are more Black women in senior positions overall, the fact that the number of African women in senior management positions has decreased is very concerning. This could allude to the fact that companies are simply not doing enough to develop the talent they have, and this is where there is a massive opportunity for B-BBEE to play a more strategic role in the advancement of women,” says Sharp.

Skills development

Sharp believes that in addition to incentivising the development of women in senior roles, B-BBEE should also be focussing on the development of women throughout the organisation. The sweet spot for this is the 25 points available under Skills Development. He says that by restructuring this priority element to include African Women-specific targets, B-BBEE could ensure that they receive the training they need to secure sustainable employment opportunities or to advance within their organisations.

“The balance between simplicity and effectiveness lies in adjusting the B-BBEE Skills Development scorecard to give businesses, especially listed and generic corporates, points for measurably prioritising and incentivising training for unemployed or employed African Women,” Sharp explains.

By identifying and training promising African Women, organisations would not only be enhancing their productivity at junior levels, it would also establish a strong and progressive succession plan for these women. And with the bonus of additional points on the B-BBEE scorecard, this could offer businesses a win-win that would add to their bottom line.

Sharp concludes by emphasising that B-BBEE isn’t a one-year race but rather a long-term strategy to deliver transformation and sustainable economic growth for all South Africans. “Small changes now could build up to deliver impressive results five years down the line. By fine-tuning Skills Development to include specific African Women targets, B-BBEE could be successful in achieving the advancement of women in the workplace that has proved to be so elusive for so long.”