

# Cultivating an equal opportunity society

[Society](#)



The equity act was implemented after apartheid in South Africa and America in order to force businesses to hire disadvantaged groups in order to amend the imbalance apartheid created in the economy. The equity act is very much needed in a country where racism led to a minority group being developed. In my opinion the equity act has a very important role in reinstating a sense of believe in a better future. There is no point in telling a minority group they are free to do anything but then not force the majority group to allow this. The majority group could go on refusing to hire minority groups, still harbouring a racist view. You cannot expect people to instantly change their long standing views of discrimination and overnight start hiring different races and genders.

It is a slow process and education, trust and forgiveness are not easily acquired. Here the equity act aims to force people to accept the change and move forward letting go of discrimination. Now in South Africa believe the equity act has allowed our country to move away from formal apartheid and into a time where the focus on race and gender has become bigger than ever. Today when you apply for an education, bursary or job your race and gender is a major deciding factor for the recruiter or employer.

By law in South Africa if you have a business that employs more than 50 people you have to comply with the regulations and rules set out in Employment Equity act, this is also known as Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) and should you not achieve the desired level of BEE status your business can be fined. The higher your BEE status the more likely you are to win government contracts ensuring higher paid jobs for your

business. Because of the need for a BEE status, employers' criteria for hiring staff have shifted from capabilities and merit to race and gender.

An employer will much rather hire a staff member that will ensure the business a hire BEE status than hire a staff member that will not increase his status or even worse lead to him to being fined. Even though the latter staff member may be more qualified than the first staff member the employer will gain more funs with a less capable employee than with a highly skilled employee of the wrong race or gender. Because the employer is now forced to hire less skilled workers his more skilled workers have to work harder to make up for the employees who cannot perform the duties.

This leads to feeling of hatred and discrimination among employees. Companies may also struggle to find people of a certain group that is qualified to perform a task and so leave the company under staffed and not capable of providing a service or product. This situation leads to not only a drop in quality of services and products but these businesses also receive more work as winning a contract is purely based on what race and gender works for you. Companies have moved from wanting to provide top quality services and products to wanting the correct race and gender to work for them.

Your standard of work is no longer important, just what you look like. How is that a move forward from focusing on skin colour? Disadvantage groups now have more opportunities available to them now but your race, gender, familytradition and religion greatly influence your worldview and interests. For this reason many economic sectors lack the people required to meet BEE status. I interviewed a director of a security company in my home town and

he had this to say about the equity act. Mr Smith runs a private security company in Cape Town and employs 150 security guards.

He only has a level 2 BEE status. Mr Smith explained to me that due to the nature of the tasks required in his company, male employees are more attracted to the job. In order to comply with the employment equity act he has to hire a certain percentage of people from previously disadvantaged groups. Unfortunately these people lack the funds required to be educated as security guards. Mr Smith has to pay for these people to be educated costing his company a large amount every year and he can also only afford to educate a certain amount of people of the required race, leaving his company understaffed.

For example say he has to employ 20 Indians but can only afford to educate 10 Indians. He is not allowed to hire 10 staff members from another group and thus leaving his company understaffed by 10 people. He also has problems finding females to hire as security is not viewed as a job suited for females. For this reason his BEE status is very low and he has almost no chance in acquiring large government contracts needed to grow his business not even mentioning being under staffed. If he doesn't comply with BEE he will be fined and in order to comply with BEE he has to pay to educate the proper race.

It is a vicious cycle and is created from an act looking at empowering our country. In this situation all the act is doing is decreasing job opportunities as implementing this act becomes too costly for small businesses. Trough BEE many disadvantaged groups have been receiving job positions they are not qualified for. Under skilled people are being made directors of companies

purely to increase BEE status and thus increase contracts for the company. These directors often still harbour a feeling of oppression and revenge.

Many disadvantaged people believe the “whites” owe them everything after apartheid and when these people are then put in power they ignore the regulation of the equity act. They want revenge for their suffering and will only favour their race or gender. Due to the lack of monitoring the implementation of the equity act, many companies are never fined for not complying with the act. There are companies playing by the rules and suffering and there are companies ignoring the rules, favouring their “own” in the job market and bribing their way to the top.

We are now seeing companies with a majority of one race being born creating more hatred among groups. This goes for previously disadvantaged groups and advantaged groups. When your race and gender becomes a criterion for employment victimization will always be a factor. Before the equity act you were hired based on merit, sure disadvantaged groups didn't even stand a chance as their access to education was restricted but being hired based on your label is fuelling blame and discrimination now more than ever.

Not only is the act exaggerating the very problem it seeks to solve it is now giving people a valid criteria and reason for discrimination. People will always seek to blame and point out differences among themselves, this act just allows the differences among people to be taken more seriously. I have heard many times people say, “he was only hired because they need more black people,” or “She only won because she is a woman and they need to have a female win so they can keep their government sponsorship. It is a

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really sad situation to be in when you no longer have to do your best to achieve success but can achieve success by purely applying to a company or university that is short on filling their BEE criteria. Not only is this a bad thing for skilled people who are losing jobs based on race but it is detrimental to skilled people being hired in suitable positions all while there, they are being frowned upon. I can definitely see the equity act as necessary in our country. It is vital for educating the majority about the minority and vice versa. It is important for empowering and providing confidence in oppressed groups.

It can eliminate the stereotypes of a white man's job or a black ladies' job. Society can grow so much from being pushed to integrate our relationships with other groups and us as a country can rectify our differences but unfortunately this act has illuminated our differences and used it as its very criteria for success. We are moving backwards and our standard of service and quality of products are dropping. Businesses are suffering and the people who do strive for excellence are stepping back in order to favour an attitude of "the world owes me everything".

The people are not ready for such an act. Our focus on difference and our "revenge" attitudes are overshadowing our goal of working as one. I don't expect people to forget about apartheid, its effects will still be felt for many years, but I do believe if we can realise that we all do have a chance at an equal opportunity for success, we can create an economy fuelled by one goal, a brighter future for all. Unfortunately right now we are slipping into reverse creating a world worse than before.