

Discrimination in south africa sociology essay



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Affirmative action policies are designed to counter the effects of discrimination. At best, affirmative action is ineffective and at worst distortionary. Moreover, discrimination in South Africa is largely a thing of the past. As such, affirmative action policies in South Africa ought to be abandoned.

Affirmative action policies in South Africa are meant to correct wrongs of the past by promoting equal opportunities for those that were oppressed by the Apartheid system; the Blacks; Africans Indians and Coloureds. The policy focus on policies and strategies needed to redress past racial imbalances in the workplace, education, gender equality

Employment Equity Act (EEA) implemented in 1998 aims at developing a non-discriminatory and socially equitable labour market. Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) was implemented in 2003 and the purpose of the act is to economically empower all black people, including people with disabilities and people living in the rural areas. BEE entails empowering black people through

“... ownership and control of businesses and assets, Human Resource Development and indirect empowerment by means of preferential procurement, enterprise development, profit and contract sharing by black enterprises, local content requirement, etc” Burger and Jafta (2006: 7).

This means other racial groups are still discriminated as it BEE based on race rather than economic standards. It also promotes Black capitalism as it gives Black-middle class advantage, the underprivileged Blacks are made worse off in the process; widening the inequality gap. According to Kovacevic

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(2007: 6) about 60% of empowerment deals went to the companies of only Black businessmen in 2003. In view of that wealthy Blacks are enriched at the cost of those living in poverty. The BEE has been vastly questioned as it does not benefit majority of the Blacks, but just a few elite.

Education equality

Apartheid education system was designed such that blacks were only trained for low-skilled jobs. Affirmative action requires changing of admission preferences such that everyone has the right to basic and tertiary education.

Berverly (1997: 532) found that some South African universities are facing challenges that need ongoing attention and commitment to affirmative action. This is not surprising given that every institution wants to maintain or upgrade its ranking. Majority of blacks complete their matric in public schools where there is poor education system relative to private schools. For higher academic institutions to keep up with international standards, they will be more willing to admit students from private schools than public schools; being white students. Education is the key to employment and better standard of living. Denying one access to better education because of their race or for being poor simply adds more weight to their economic struggles. People with poor education are often unable to secure sufficient resources to ensure a good education for their children. The children are then, in turn, unable to provide their own offspring with an education that will allow social and economic advancement; intergenerational immobility. Racial inequalities in education contribute highly to racial inequalities in employment opportunities and achievements.

Employment and recruitment equality

There was a significant increase in the white-black employment gap between 1995 and 2000. From 1995 to 1997 the probability for blacks of being employed increased substantially for those with matric or tertiary qualification, whereas whites experienced high formal employment irrespective of their academic qualification (Burger and Jafta, 2006: 21). However the transformation changed between 1997 and 2004 when chances of being employed for the whites became determined by education attainment. Employment rates for whites without matric declined while the probability of blacks being employed declined.

Between 1994 and 2001 there was an increase from 2% to 33% of enterprises that observed emigration of skilled labour. White workers have struggled to find jobs in South Africa as a result opted to migrate to other countries because of the redistribution policy. This steered outflow of skilled labour (Kovacevic, 2007). In addition a lot of whites are forced to retire earlier in the public sector, while they encounter difficulties in getting jobs in the private sector (Adam, 1997: 232).

Thompson and Woolard (2002: 9) found a substantial increase of 58.1% growth rate of African managers between 1995 and 2001 whereas percentage of White managers declined by 39% in public service management. The percentage of Coloured managers has remained stagnant while that of Indians has increase by a little but significant rate during the period. Given the race distribution of the country, the change for the whites is not that major.

Gender equality

During the apartheid era women were excluded from most types of formal employment except clerical and secretarial work, black women occupied positions as domestic workers and tea-ladies in office buildings. Women were denied access to education (especially black women) and were economically and politically disadvantaged (Kongolo and Naido, 2004). The government has intended to empower women through gender policy framework. This favours women therefore men are being discriminated, however, Mphai (1989: 6) insists that female discrimination in the country is still persistent as females enjoy fewer employment benefits than their male counterparts.

Mathur-Helm (2005: 63) maintains that affirmative action has only allowed women entry into the formal sector but not into senior positions in corporate jobs. This may be because of negative stereotype belief that women are meant to follow and not to lead. Compared to their male counterparts, women do not show leadership potential or skills that men portray, they are also thought to be less objective, less aggressive, less ambitious, less confident, less capable of contributing to organizational goals and less capable at learning technical and mechanical skills. However, women position in politics has improved compared to the private and public sectors as 30% of parliamentarians are women. Thompson and Woolard (2002: 20) found approximately 53% of non-managerial staff in the public services to be women in 2001 compared to 49.4% in 1995. This transformation is not significant enough as it does not match racial transformation performance. What needs to be done as to empower women while at the same time not discriminating against men, the government should invest more in female

gender based jobs and encourage female participation in postgraduate studies through scholarships.

Wage gap

A number of studies have shown whites to be higher income earners than other race groups. Burger and Jafta (2006: 2) found that the White population group still earns more than any other population group in the country. Whites had wage earnings of almost twice as much as the second highest earning group (Indians), with Coloureds and Blacks earning considerably less, on average. This might be because whites not only meet minimum requirements but they are also more qualified for the positions they occupy; which is hardly the case with other racial groups, or maybe because Blacks are not qualified for the positions they hold; they have been favoured.

Conclusion

Some argue that Affirmative action is another form of apartheid and not only does it reduce employment it also retards economic growth.

Affirmative action policies should be drawn such that no one is favoured since it is not possible to favour someone without discriminating against another. Africans are benefiting more than other ethnics than were also oppressed by apartheid hence discrimination. Adam (1997: 244) suggest that the policy should be revised such that it is based on the criteria of class and concentrate on disadvantaged people rather than criteria of race as the current definition of affirmative policy in South Africa is broadening inequality gap among classes of the same race. Lee (2010) however cautions that there is not much differentiation between race-based and class-based

policies as they are more complements than substitutes. Class considerations can be integrated into selection procedures within the designated race group to reinforce the process of redress.

Adam also adds that the criterion for 'potential' should be taken more seriously as it appears that people that are benefitting from affirmative action are those with political connections. This in turn leads to nepotism as the well-off provide their children with labour market advantages hindering the success of the poor and economically disadvantaged.

According to Kovacevic (2007) the BEE programme has failed to properly address issues of poverty and employment not to mention fostering economic growth. It is therefore best to revise affirmative action policy from race base to socio-economic base rather than abandon it to tackle the problems of poverty and employment as to empower the underprivileged. Conferring preferential status on poor, rural, or inner-city persons would draw attention to differences between rich and poor, urban and rural, or suburban and inner-city, but such measures are upheld due to the benefits to bridging these gaps. It is best for the South African government to deal with the scars of apartheid differently than impose another form of apartheid. Class- or need-based affirmative action is permanent and more costly in terms of public funding, vulnerable to the same problems of disparity in aptitude of beneficiaries, and unviable in high-level occupations, management and ownership (Lee 2010: 31).

Affirmative action also devalues accomplishments of members of the designated group who could have advanced without preferential treatment;

their achievements are questioned whether they have been attained out of hard work or out of “ sympathy”. Affirmative action also stigmatizes beneficiaries as a group, creates dependence on the government, and alienates members of non-designated groups. These issues pose the heaviest challenges to affirmative action formulation and implementation (Lee, 2010). Denying capable candidates opportunities and persistently inhibiting the human development. But the problem is those that were oppressed under apartheid government; Blacks are the ones socio-economically disadvantaged. Given its costs and benefits, the question of whether affirmative action policies should be abandoned in South Africa is inconclusive or debatable as the policy is meant to correct the wrongs of the past. Maybe had there not be any racial discrimination before independence, socio-economic problems would be handled differently. Racial discrimination still persists in the country; it is just not as bad as it was during apartheid. Removing affirmative action might worsen discrimination as the reasons why discrimination occurred in the first place are still there. Should academic and professional institutions find no reason to discriminate thus stop believing that one group that is more productive or smarter than the other; then only then should affirmative action policies be abandoned.