

SA not using female talent

The role of women in the workplace has changed dramatically over the past two decades with more women participating in the South African - and global - workforce due to increased education opportunities.

"The increased presence of women in the workplace plays a major role in the financial and social empowerment of women and has seen government initiatives and legislation enforce and promote the empowerment of women in this way," said Kay Vittee, the CEO of Quest Staffing Solutions.

However, Vittee noted that the United Nations (UN) 2012 gender report found that although women perform 66% of the world's work, and produce 50% of the food, they earn only 10% of the income and own only 1% of the property in the world.

Vittee said: "During women's month, we supposedly become more aware of women and the role they play in society, but not much focus is given to the fact that they are also natural born leaders in the workplace."

SA women don't earn as much

Vittee refers to the 2010 Census figures, which highlighted that an estimated 51% of women in the country are active contributors to South Africa's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). "This number indicates that the employment rate of women is higher than that of men. However, South African women do not earn as much as men, largely because women are mostly employed in informal sectors and have little influence in decision making."

Furthermore, Vittee said that The South African Board for People Practices (SABPP) Women's Report 2011 mirrors this sentiment and highlights that considering women constitute 50.9% of the South African population, the country is not utilising available talent optimally.

In terms of women taking up senior management positions, Vittee pointed to the Businesswomen's Association (BWA) of South Africa report: 'Women's contribution to the Economy' in 2013, which revealed that although transformation within professional industries has been occurring over the years, not much is being done to develop and fully take advantage of the potential of women as 'captains of industry'.

Powerful drivers of the economy

"The BWA report states that women can be powerful drivers of the economy if female employment and entrepreneurial participation rates were to match that of their male counterparts within the highly paid professional occupations, key decision-making positions, and entrepreneurship and business transactions. To make matters worse, the 2013 Grant

Thornton International Business Report (IBR) on women in business found that only 28% of top decision-making roles in South African businesses are filled by women," said Vittee.

She explained that this percentage has remained static since 2009 and is, ultimately, not good enough.

"This number does not come close to achieving the Bill on Gender Equality and Women Empowerment's target of ensuring a 50/50 representation of women in decision-making structures in both the private and public sectors," exclaimed Vittee.

"In terms of Employment Equity (EE) requirements for gender equality, businesses are expected to abide by specific regulations and meet targets in terms of employing women who are as capable and qualified as male candidates of fulfilling a particular position," she said.

Vittee highlighted that, ideally, organisations should not only enforce policies relating to women empowerment merely to meet the required target, but also implement practical steps.

Vittee said: "The Gender Equality Principles Initiative, which is a public-private collaborative formed by the San Francisco Department on the Status of Women, outlines practical standards that companies can aspire to, measure against and use to assess their progress. These standards relate to elements such as employment and compensation; work-life balance and career development; management and governance; business, supply chain, and marketing practices; and leadership, transparency and accountability.

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