

Affirmative Action and Economic Empowerment are Still Essential

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A RECENT STUDY titled 'Taking Stock after 25 years of Affirmative Action in Namibia', conducted by the Economic Policy Research Association (Epra), concludes that affirmative action and economic empowerment policies are no longer necessary in Namibia.

However, the study has several flaws and biases, as it ignores Namibia's historical and socio-economic realities.

Namibia's unique context requires a critical examination of how historically gained economic power operates in a (post) colonial socio-economic setting where the white minority still holds economic power.

Research has shown that economic inequalities in society are reproduced in the workplace, shaping employment inequity patterns.

Therefore, despite their limitations, affirmative action and economic empowerment policies are still essential to address these issues.

PERVASIVE PROBLEMS

The Epra study draws a flawed conclusion by stating that white males make up 2,1% of Namibia's workforce, leading them to argue that employment equity has been achieved.

However, this overlooks the significant underrepresentation of black people in senior management positions in the private sector, which controls the largest share of the economy.

Despite a majority of black employees, senior levels continue to be dominated by white individuals, as reported by the Employment Equity Commission (EEC) every year.

Our research indicates that racial discrimination is still pervasive in the private sector, with white-dominated senior management teams holding decision-making



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power and shaping organisational culture.

Black employees are paid less, denied access to top management roles, and receive less organisational support.

It is thus disingenuous and shortsighted to suggest policies aimed at promoting the inclusion of marginalised groups in the workforce are no longer necessary.

It is essential to also note that so-called 'employment equity' and 'economic empowerment' policies implemented by the government have been co-opted by private sector organisations.

For instance, full compliance with employment equity policies can be circumvented through false reporting and the appointment of senior black managers who hold little power on strategic issues.

DATA HAS LIMITATIONS

Furthermore, using quantitative data alone to support the Epra study's conclusions is problematic.

While surveys and quantitative data can provide useful insights, they are often limited in their ability to accurately capture the complexities and nuances of employment inequity patterns.

Simple data points are inherently unable to reflect and measure the experiences of victims of workplace marginalisation and oppression.

The Epra study is incomplete

and unfit for addressing affirmative action and economic empowerment policies in Namibia.

Research, as a process of producing knowledge, can be an essential tool for social change and transformation.

However, research can also be done in bad faith, whereby data is misinterpreted and perpetuates existing power structures.

Such research often focuses on the experiences and perspectives of the dominant group while neglecting the voices and experiences of the marginalised.

This not only reinforces existing social and economic hierarchies but silences the voices of those who have been historically excluded.

This is particularly true in a country like Namibia, where the legacy of colonialism and ongoing economic inequality still shapes social and economic structures.

CHALLENGES

Researchers have an obligation to consider the context in which their research is conducted, and to acknowledge potential limitations and biases.

It is essential that we challenge these types of studies and push for more nuanced and inclusive research that takes into account the complex realities of marginalised groups.

The Epra study's conclusions on the relevance of affirmative action and economic empowerment policies in Namibia should be viewed with scepticism.

Only through rigorous, nuanced, and inclusive research that challenges the status quo can we truly advance social change and transformation towards a more just and equitable society.

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