

## **GENDER EQUALITY FOR ACHIEVING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL ONE (NO POVERTY) IN SOUTH AFRICAN MUNICIPALITIES**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Sustainable Development Goal One demands the reduction of poverty, hence holds significance in the South African context where a high unemployment rate still prevails, hampering socio-economic development of the country as a whole. In addition, poverty is linked to gender inequality with female counterparts occupying fewer jobs in the South African labour market than men. This situation is even more dire at grassroots levels, where a lack of education and civic awareness, inadequate gender-based poverty alleviation policies, and inappropriate gender-based participation in pro-poor growth strategies, contribute towards the weakening of women's empowerment. This article hypothesises that gender equality in poverty reduction strategies could have a positive impact in the realisation of Sustainable Development Goal One. In order to explore the gender equality measures in poverty reduction initiatives, the article utilizes a qualitative research approach with an exploratory design. This involved distributing a survey questionnaire to residents of Emfuleni Local Municipality as part of the Mainstreaming Gender Equality (MGE) approach to promote equal opportunities in poverty reduction programmes at grassroots level in South Africa. The responses showed that community members are changing their perspectives on gender equality, the role of gender in achieving Development Goal One, and the significance of gender-based contributions towards social-economic development. The article recommends that future research should focus on gender-disaggregated needs, gender-sensitive roles, gender-based demographic data, and gender-mainstreaming, as policy options for socio-economic development at local government level in South Africa.

**Keywords:** gender, gender equality, poverty, pro-poor strategies, sustainable development goals

JEL Classification: Z00

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

Gender equality is fundamental to achieving economic growth and poverty reduction in Africa (African Development Bank, 2014). In order to meet the demands of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) One, most of the countries in Africa have become signatories to international and regional settlements. Despite this commitment the gender disparity in Africa is acute “where women are far less likely to be employed than their male counterparts” (United Nations Millennium Development Goal Report, 2013) resulting in households living in poverty with disadvantaged standards of essential resources. A similar gender-bias approach is prevalent throughout South African society where “joblessness among African women ... is as high as 70 to 80 percent in some parts of the country” (Antonopoulos, 2008), and is even more dire at grassroots level where lack of education and civic awareness, inadequate gender-based poverty alleviation policies and inappropriate gender-based participation in pro-poor growth strategies contribute towards the dampening of women’s empowerment. To investigate the gender equality measures in poverty reduction initiatives, a study was conducted in a selected South African municipality. Utilizing a qualitative research design, the general interview approach was used “to ensure that the same general areas of information were collected from each interviewee” (Andrade, 2014: 16). The article applies the Mainstreaming Gender Equality (MGE) approach that aims to bring equal opportunities in poverty reduction programmes at grassroots level in South Africa.

## **II. CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Gender is defined by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO, 2004: 1) as “the relations between men and women, both perceptual and material”, and it stresses that gender is “not determined biologically, as a result of sexual characteristics of either women or men, but is constructed socially”. Thus, it is more correctly a “central organizing principle of societies, and often governs the processes of production and reproduction, consumption and distribution”. Gender, therefore, is not associated with the biological side of being male or female. Instead it is more of a socially constructed phenomenon, related closely to the roles, tasks and responsibilities which society attributes to men and women in

the community of which they are part, and in society at large. Gender equality can be conceptualized as a problem of achieving ‘sameness’ (this is linked to the notion of equal opportunity), or of affirming difference from the male norm (positive actions fit with this approach, although they are not limited to it), or of transforming all established norms and standards of what is or should be female and male (gender mainstreaming is seen as a suitable strategy suitable to achieve this) (Verloo, 2007: 23). Gender equality is about capabilities, capacities and abilities for men and women to perform tasks, deal with responsibilities and play differential roles. It also encompasses ambitions, interests and desires and accommodates both men and women who deserve better opportunities at social, economic, political, personal, and professional fronts.

SDG One is linked to poverty reduction. According to Encyclopaedia Britannica (under ‘Poverties’, 2016), poverty is “the state of one who lacks a usual or socially acceptable amount of money or material possessions”. Regardless of the particular definition one favours, “authorities and laypersons alike commonly assume that the effects of poverty are harmful to both individuals and society”. SDG One requires governments to establish pro-poor strategies and poverty reduction measures in a country-specific context. In the case of South Africa, the “proportion of the population living in poverty increased to 55,5% (30,4 million) in 2015. The number of persons living in extreme poverty (i.e. persons living below the 2015 Food Poverty Line of R441 per person per month) in South Africa increased by 2,8 million, from 11 million in 2011 to 13,8 million in 2015” (Statistics South Africa, 2017a: 1). The level of poverty in South African municipalities is growing, as confirmed by the Institute of Race Relations (IRR) (Business Tech, 2016: 1), in its assessment of the deprivation index of 44 municipal and 8 metropolitan districts. The table below provides details on the top 15 poorest municipalities in the country.

The information shows that a large percentage of people living in these areas earn between R1 and R1,600 per month and suffer extreme levels of poverty. Statistics South Africa (2017a: 1) further confirms that “the most vulnerable to poverty in our society are... females...[.]” This is underscored in statistics released by News24 (04 July 2013), that at least 32.4% of the population in 2013 were living under the food poverty line, which was set at R305 per individual per month. Furthermore, most were women. The statistician General Pali Lehohla emphasises that “women experience far higher unemployment [and] they experience a far lower participation rate [in the economy]” (News24, 2013). Nor has this untenable situation changed drastically as yet. The report for the year 2017, entitled

*Quarterly Labour Force Survey, Quarter 1*, released by Statistics South Africa (2017b: 5) highlights that “Black African women are more vulnerable in the labour market, with larger employment shares in low-skilled occupations”. It bears repeating that this is more challenging at the grassroots level, where Black African rural women also experience “lack of access to resources and basic services compounded by their unequal rights” (Oxfam International, 2014: 2).

**Table 1: Top 15 poorest municipalities in South Africa**

#	Municipality	Town/City	Province	% earning less than R1,600 pm
1	Alfred Nzo	Mount Ayliff	EC	90.2%
2	Amathole	East London	EC	89.5%
3	UMzinyathi	Dundee	KZN	89.2%
4	OR Tambo	Mthatha	EC	88.7%
5	uMkhanyakude	Mkuze	KZN	88.6%
6	Zululand	Ulundi	KZN	87.7%
7	Chris Hani	Queenstown	EC	86.3%
8	Sisonke	Ixopo	KZN	85.9%
9	Dr Ruth Segomotsi Mompati	Vryburg	NW	85.3%
10	Joe Gqabi	Barkly East	EC	85.1%
11	Vhembe	Tohoyandou	LP	84.8%
12	Greater Sekhukhune	Groblersdal	LP	84.1%
13	Mopani	Giyani	LP	83.5%
14	uThukela	Ladysmith	KZN	83.4%
15	Thabo Mofutsanyana	Phuthaditjhaba	FS	81.2%

Source: Business Tech, 2016: 3.

Note: The provincial codes used in the table are EC: Eastern Cape; KZN: KwaZulu Natal; NW: North-West; LP: Limpopo; FS: Free State.

Furthermore, the Women and Poverty Discussion Document (Oxfam International, 2014: 2) highlights that at micro-level, “women are not only poor in society as a whole but also in their own families”. The same source defines why the nature and level of poverty is experienced differently and more intensely than that of men. Women’s lack of access to land and control over land means that they have less access to credit and technical assistance, both of which are essential for sustainable socio-economic development. At the macro-level, this is seen as

gender-based discrimination in the South African labour market; it impacts upon how men and women experience poverty. They experience it very differently, having “different poverty reduction priorities”. They are also “affected differently by development interventions” (Human Sciences Research Council, 2010: vi). Temba Masilela and his team conducted a research project on gender and poverty reduction (Human Sciences Research Council, 2010: vi), and recommend that gender mainstreaming and the design and implementation of poverty eradication policies from a gender perspective are key to addressing these diverse needs. Box 1 below shows the link between gender equality, poverty reduction strategies and sustainable development (Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2014a: 114-115).

### **Box 1: Link between gender equality, poverty reduction strategies and sustainable development**

***Pro-poor economic growth pace and quality:*** Economic growth is crucial in reducing poverty. A competitive market economy favours secure access for poor women and men to resources such as land, finance and human capabilities. Social policies foster cohesion, mobility, protection, redistribution and gender equality.

***Empowerment, rights and pro-poor governance:*** Empowerment is about enhancing the capacity of poor women and men. Political devolution and increased participation by poor women and men in local or regional government will promote empowerment and pro-poor outcomes.

***Basic social services for human development:*** Sustained pro-poor economic growth raises the income and consumption of poor women and men. Poverty reduction is a critical development issue in Africa. High-level political recognition of the importance of this issue is necessary for any successful human development and poverty reduction strategy.

***Human security to reduce vulnerability and manage shocks:*** Poor women and men see insecurity as both a major dimension and a principal cause of poverty. The risks facing the poor are substantial and call for social protection programmes.

***Mainstreaming gender and enhancing gender equality:*** Gender inequality is both a major cause of poverty and a major impediment to sustainable development. Reducing gender inequality means improving women’s access to employment to earn an income. Poverty strategies must address the differences between women and men in their access to resources and opportunities. Effective anti-poverty strategies must consider existing gender relations, recognize gender exclusion and give greater insight into the effectiveness of “gender budgets”.

***Mainstreaming environmental sustainability using sustainable livelihood approaches:*** The international development goals, which include income poverty reduction, social development, environmental sustainability and regeneration, are closely linked to the political principle of sustainable development.

**Source:** Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2001: 43-49.

To achieve gender equality in poverty reduction strategies for sustainable development as shown in Box 1, this research utilises the Mainstreaming Gender Equality approach. The rationale is that this “calls for a concern for gender inequalities and differences to be brought to the analysis of all situations and the formulation of all programmatic interventions”. It may also mean identifying opportunities to “narrow gender gaps ... and focusing on different institutions or levels” (Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency [SIDA], 2002: 5). Furthermore, as Bieri and Sancar (2009: 24) suggest, “the powerful paradigms of efficiency and efficacy need to be framed from a perspective which integrates gender equality mainstreaming and poverty reduction”.

### **III. Gender Equality and SDG One in South African Municipalities**

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996) provides for a three-tiered system of governance, namely national, provincial and local government spheres that are decentralized in approach. The local government sphere is categorized into metropolitan municipalities (category A); district municipalities (category C), and local municipalities (category B). There are now (since 2016) 257 municipalities countrywide. Their functions, responsibilities and administrative responsibilities are regulated in terms of the White Paper on Local Government (1998), the Municipal Structures Act, No. 117 of 1998, and the Municipal Systems Act, No. 32 of 2000. The municipalities, in general, are not implementing gender equality measures in the political context (that is, decision-making structures and political portfolios) and policy context (integrated development planning, local economic development). This statement is validated in the research conducted by Govender and Vyas-Doorgapersad (2013: 6) which shows that municipalities pose “immense and particular challenges for advancing gender”. Further, there is little doubt that “gender inequality prolongs the adversity of poverty” (refer Jones, Holmes & Espey, 2008), “perpetuates poverty” (read Overseas Development Institute, 2008) and that “rigid gender roles and division of labour lead to economic inefficiencies, limiting growth and poverty reduction efforts” (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), 2010: 1) thereby impacting negatively on the realization of SDG One.

### **The status quo in Emfuleni Local Municipality**

Sedibeng District Municipality (SDM), falls under Gauteng Province and is a category C municipality comprising the three local municipalities of Emfuleni, Lesedi and Midvaal. The inclusion of gender in poverty reduction is not constructive at the grassroots level, as stipulated in the municipal Integrated Development Plan of the Emfuleni Local Municipality (ELM, 2014) which highlights that “although municipalities in Gauteng have made strides in their attempt to integrate gender issues in their planning, serious challenges remain”. In 2014, in order to investigate the correlation between gender and poverty, a pilot study was conducted at Sedibeng District Municipality. The findings were published and are acknowledged in the references. They indicate that there is a “lack of an Employment Equity Plan (EEP)” and this “inhibits the municipality’s ability to address gender equality”. To remedy the situation, the municipality was advised to “develop the EEP in order to fill critical vacancies in the municipality and address institutional transformation and women empowerment to build the municipality into a sound institution premised on excellence” (Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2014b: 331).

This present article extends the scope of the previous study by analysing eighty (80) more responses from the community members of the Emfuleni Local Municipality. The aim is to widen the scope of responses, thereby bringing more objectivity into the research process and reducing bias. In the next, upcoming project, the plan is to approach another eighty (80) community members in each of the Lesedi and Midvaal local municipalities, also aiming to develop a comparative research linking gender to poverty reduction strategies within Sedibeng District Municipality as a whole. This research will be conducted in other municipalities in future, thus developing a comparative data-base, contributing knowledge to the field of public management and local governance.

The participants made their responses on the questionnaire.<sup>1</sup> This approach was considered appropriate because “it provides insight into participants’ experiences and attitudes, making the data gathered more meaningful” (Hoepfl, 2007:1). The responses (n= 80) were categorized and themes were generated for content analysis (a significant tool of a qualitative study), as follows:

#### **Gender-based economic status**

The challenge was to identify the stereotypical mentality of society. In the Emfuleni municipal area, women earn less than their male counterparts and this

was apparent in their responses (69%). In addition, there is still evidence of male-domination in decision-making processes and 42% of the women aver that they are not allowed to take financial decisions within the home. The responses confirm the findings that appear in a report entitled *Women and Gender Relations in the South African Labour Market: A 20 Year Review* (Orr & van Meelis, 2014: 33), highlighting that “there is a gender division of labour in paid employment and in unpaid household work”. Indeed, it seems that much of the work that women do, whether in the home or in formal employment, “tends to be invisible and assumed to be ‘natural’ rather than requiring particular skills, and therefore of little value” and that work in “the household and the service sector ...[is] not viewed as productive”. However, in response to the questionnaire in Emfuleni Municipality a very positive paradigm shift was observed, with the majority of respondents (57%) expressing their progressive thinking towards women-based financial progression in the economy and decision-making processes. This emerging mentality may lead towards holistic gender-based economic transformation, impacting positively on sustainable development in the country.

### **Gender-based employment opportunities**

Gender discrimination is still part of the societal mind-set. As reflected in the responses recorded, 21% of the community members who participated in the Emfuleni study do not support the suggestion that the municipality should introduce gender-based opportunities into its municipal employment structures. This confirms the mentality of patriarchal culture observed in a report released by Statistics South Africa in 2016. The report highlights that “a third of officials holding municipal management posts in 2015 were women (3 612 of 11 014 posts)”. A clear gender disparity exists if this figure is disaggregated by rank. In all provinces of South Africa, very few of these women held directorship posts compared to those working in lower management positions. “Nationally, only 26% of directors (413 of 1 567 posts) were women, compared with 34% of lower management (3 199 of 9 447 posts)” (Statistics SA, 2016: 1).

However, again, the Emfuleni findings indicate a positive shift in thought-patterns with 79% of recorded responses supporting the implementation of gender equality measures, calling for municipalities to explore interventions that promote gender-based employment opportunities. A change of mindset is already apparent within the municipality where the strategic decisions are taken, emphasizing that “women’s and men’s equal opportunities on career development will be

supported”. Furthermore there is an undertaking that impartiality will be observed in staff training. The appointment of women in management posts is also to be promoted persistently; and “obstacles to women’s placement in male-dominated jobs and vice-versa will be eliminated” (Emfuleni Local Municipality, 2012).

### **Gender-based socio-economic development**

The responses indicate that 71% of community members are aware of pro-poor strategies in their municipal area. Policy awareness, civic education and a positive mind-shift are evident. Respondents confirmed their support for proposing that Emfuleni Municipality must:

- promote gender-based research for socio-economic development (85%);
- promote gender equality for socio-economic development in the municipality (85%); and
- promote gender equality in pro-poor strategies for poverty reduction in the municipality (81%)

This progressive thinking was generated as long ago as 1998 by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in a document entitled *Gender Equality: A Key for Poverty Alleviation and Sustainable Development*. It highlights that “women and men experience and fight poverty in different ways. Women are increasingly at the frontline in the fight against poverty, at household and community level. Increasing women’s participation in defining development priorities and strategies alongside men both empowers women and brings new perspectives, resources and dynamics to reduce poverty and empower the poor” (OECD, 1998: 6).

Most of the community members who completed the questionnaire emphasize the need to promote gender-based initiatives in social and economic development to combat poverty in their municipal area. The responses also indicate positive perceptions of and support for gender-based poverty-reduction strategies. The espousal of gender-based disaggregated data and alignment of gender equality with sustainable development are also apparent. This mind-shift may, in time, lead to the incorporation of gender-sensitivity in poverty reduction interventions that currently have gender-biased policy implications in the labour market.

Based on the findings, this article proposes the following policy imperatives:

- Municipalities are taking responsibility and accountability for implementing an Employment Equity Plan. This plan needs to be updated annually.
- An assessment of gender equality should be conducted once every three years.
- Recognition of gender-based work needs to be incorporated in the municipal performance and development management framework.
- Gender-based participation must be encouraged in municipalities' integrated development planning (IDP), and there must be gender participation in local economic development (LED) meetings on economic development.
- More women-based entrepreneurial projects need to be identified.
- Gender-responsive budgeting should be incorporated in municipal integrated development plans
- Gender-based financial demographic information needs to be compiled which identifies the various levels of poverty, income and economically-driven needs of both men and women at grassroots level.

In addition, with regard to their development objectives, municipalities must prioritise poverty alleviation measures with special consideration of marginalized and disadvantaged groups. They should promote gender mainstreaming; and incorporate the Earth Charter<sup>2</sup> (2016: 2) which emphasises that poverty must be eradicated “as an ethical, social and environmental imperative”, Furthermore municipalities must and “affirm and promote gender equality and equity as prerequisites to sustainable development”. These policy suggestions are also aimed to fulfil the Mainstreaming Gender Equality approach which aims to use new political instruments to “assess institutional framework conditions and the effectiveness of political measures” and employs a number of instruments and monitoring techniques, “including gender analysis, gender impact assessment, gender indicators, gender audits, and gender training” which are applicable in a country-specific context (Rodenberg, 2004: 9-10). It is emphasised in the Women’s Economic Empowerment Series (OECD, 2010: 1) that countries which “narrow the differences between women and men in economic opportunities, have increased the pace of economic development and reduced poverty”. In other words, gender equality is both a “cause and a consequence of economic growth”

and a sound gender equality policy is a significant component of strategies for economic development and poverty reduction.

#### **IV. CONCLUSION**

Although it is clear that municipalities need to review and reassess their strategic objectives, and that further research is necessary in the near future, this article deduces that the findings of the above investigation indicate that community members are changing their perspectives on gender equality, the role of gender in achieving SDG One, and the significance of gender-based imperatives in social-economic development. In South African municipalities there is a dire need to appoint staff with the required skills to fulfil the job specifications and descriptions, they must be individuals who are well able to implement the delegated tasks. However, there are currently vacant positions in municipalities due to a lack of gender-based strategies; gender-oriented succession plans; gendered policies on performance management; market-related remuneration packages and institutional/political challenges. There is a need for additional research to address these issues and make suggestions for improvement. SDG One should be viewed as an economic and social development strategy to eradicate poverty. The article recommends that future research must focus closely on gender-disaggregated needs, gender-sensitive roles, gender-based demographic data, and gender-mainstreaming in policy options for socio-economic development.

#### **Notes**

<sup>1</sup>The questionnaire utilized in this study is the same as the one used in the researcher's previous study conducted in Sedibeng District Municipality. The identical questionnaire will be used for further research in the Lasedi and Midvaal Local Municipalities to provide information for a comparative analysis which will investigate socio-economic variables in all three municipalities at a macro level.

<sup>2</sup>The Earth Charter is a universal expression of ethical principles to foster sustainable development (University for Peace 2016).

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