

# Womanhood



Role of Women in the Public Service *Special Edition*

August 2006



## Commemorating the 50th Year of the March by Women to the Union Buildings: *Role of Women in the Public Service*



### Introduction

This year South Africa will commemorate 50 years since the March by women to the Union Buildings. On 09 August 1956, more than 20 000 women of all races, under the leadership of the Federation of South African Women (FEDSAW) and the African National Congress Women's League (ANCWL), held a march to the Union Buildings in Pretoria (now known as Tshwane) to protest the imposition of pass laws against women. Whilst this March specifically demanded the withdrawal of passes to African women and the repeal of laws, it was essentially a march towards a just society. The Apartheid regime subjected women to humiliation and degradation at the hands of pass-seeking policemen. The efforts of these women 50 years ago, contributed significantly to the democratic, non-racial and non-sexist society which was born in 1994.

The plight of women in South Africa has always occupied a central place in the broader struggle for national liberation and democracy in this country. It is therefore fitting that, as we commemorate this 50th year of the March by women to the Union Buildings, we explore and celebrate the march of women in the Public Service under the democratic government.

### Legislative and Policy Context to Ensure Gender Equity

A key characteristic of the Public Service in the Apartheid era was its highly discriminatory nature. The South African Public Service through its historical inheritance reflects an administration that has been influenced by discriminatory employment policies and human resource practices based on race, gender and disability. With this in mind the South African government introduced legislation to transform the Public Service.



*No beacon is too high for a woman denied her rights*



*Leaders of the 1956 March: from left - Rahima Moosa, Lillian Ngoyi, Helen Joseph and Sophia Williams.*

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996, guarantees equal opportunities for all workers in the Public Service. Emanating from the Constitutional guarantee, legislation and policies have been put in place to ensure that equality is achieved in the Public Service. These are reflected in the following table:

*Table 1: Legislation, policies and decisions that regulates gender equity in the Public Service*

Legislation / Policy / Decision	Requirement / Implications
White Paper on Reconstruction and Development of 1994	The goal of this White Paper is to "...speed up the creation of a representative and equitable Public Service and to build an environment that supports and enables those who have been historically disadvantaged by unfair discrimination to fulfill their maximum potential within it so that the Public Service may derive the maximum benefit of their diverse skills and talents to improve service delivery".
White Paper on the Transformation of the Public Service of 1995	The White Paper required that within five years (i.e. November 1999), at least 50% of positions at management level should be occupied by black persons. During the same period at least 30% of new recruits at middle and senior management should have been women. According to this White Paper, within ten years, people with disabilities should have comprised 2% of Public Service personnel.
White Paper on Affirmative Action in the Public Service of 1998	The White Paper states that government will review and re-set the national minimum targets (set by the White Paper on the Transformation of the Public Service) by the end of 2000 and every three years thereafter.
Employment Equity Act of 1998	Section 15 (1) of the Act states that affirmative action measures are measures designed to ensure that suitably qualified people from designated groups have equal employment opportunities and are equitably represented in all occupational categories and levels in the workforce of a designated employer. Furthermore, subsection (2) states that affirmative action measures by a designated employer must include- (a) measures to identify and eliminate employment barriers, including unfair discrimination, which adversely affect people from designated groups; (b) measures designed to further diversity in the workplace based on equal dignity and respect of all people; (c) making reasonable accommodation for people from designated groups in order to ensure that they enjoy equal opportunities and are equitably represented in the workforce of a designated employer; (d) subject to subsection (3), measures to- (i) ensure the equitable representation of suitably qualified people from designated groups in all occupational categories and levels in the workforce; and (ii) retain and develop people from designated groups and to implement appropriate training measures, including measures in terms of an Act of Parliament providing for skills development.
Cabinet Decision on the setting of targets for gender and disability equity	Cabinet originally set a target of 30% representation of women in senior management positions and 2% for people with disabilities in the Public Service by March 2005. These targets have since been reviewed and Cabinet has approved that 50% representation of women in senior management positions must be achieved by 31 March 2009. The 2% target for employment of people with disabilities remains unchanged and must be achieved by 31 March 2010.

## Role of the Public Service Commission in Promoting Gender Equity

The Public Service Commission (PSC) as the custodian of good governance is responsible to promote the Constitutional values and principles contained in section 195, that govern public administration. The ninth principle is that “Public administration must be broadly representative of the South African people, with employment and personnel practices based on ability, objectivity, fairness, and the need to redress the imbalances of the past to achieve broad representation.”

*Table 2: Constitutional principles governing public administration*

**1. Principle One:**

A high standard of professional ethics must be promoted and maintained.

**2. Principle Two:**

Efficient economic and effective use of resources must be promoted.

**3. Principle Three:**

Public administration must be development oriented.

**4. Principle Four:**

Services must be provided impartially, fairly, equitably and without bias.

**5. Principle Five:**

People’s needs must be responded to and the public must be encouraged to participate in policy making.

**6. Principle Six:**

Public administration must be accountable.

**7. Principle Seven:**

Transparency must be fostered by providing the public with timely, accessible and accurate information.

**8. Principle Eight:**

Good human resource management and career development practices, to maximize human potential, must be cultivated.

**9. Principle Nine:**

Public administration must be broadly representative of the South African people, with employment and personnel practices based on ability, objectivity, fairness, and the need to redress the imbalances of the past to achieve broad representation.

In promoting the principle of a broadly representative Public Service, the PSC has conducted studies on the State of Representativeness in the Public Service in 2000, on disability equity in 2002 and on the implementation of Affirmative Action in the Public Service in 2005. In addition, the PSC is in the process of concluding a study on Gender Mainstreaming in the Public Service. In promoting the Constitutional values and principles, the PSC has played a significant role in the monitoring of female representation in the Public Service and can offer an informed opinion on the progress that has been made.

## Assessing Progress in Achieving Gender Equity

Implementing Affirmative Action programmes is fraught with tensions. It is also highly emotive and makes those charged with effecting it vulnerable to charges of bias. Therefore critically, recruitment in the context of this principle requires the capacity for implementing standards objectively in a situation of open competition. Care has to be taken to balance redressing historic imbalances by earmarking certain groups for appointment (race, gender and disability) with the need not to compromise excellence and standards. The legislative, normative and regulatory framework put in place in the first decade of democracy is yielding impressive results. There is now a sufficiently large pool of competent persons from previously disadvantaged groups at all levels in the Public Service. As at 31 May 2006, 591 040 women (56%) and 461 239 men (44%) were employed in the Public Service.

However, statistics continue to show that although the Public Service has made progress in achieving numeric targets for employment equity, women still need to be better represented at leadership levels and that disabled people are still underrepresented. The following table provides an overview of progress made in achieving gender representivity at senior management level:

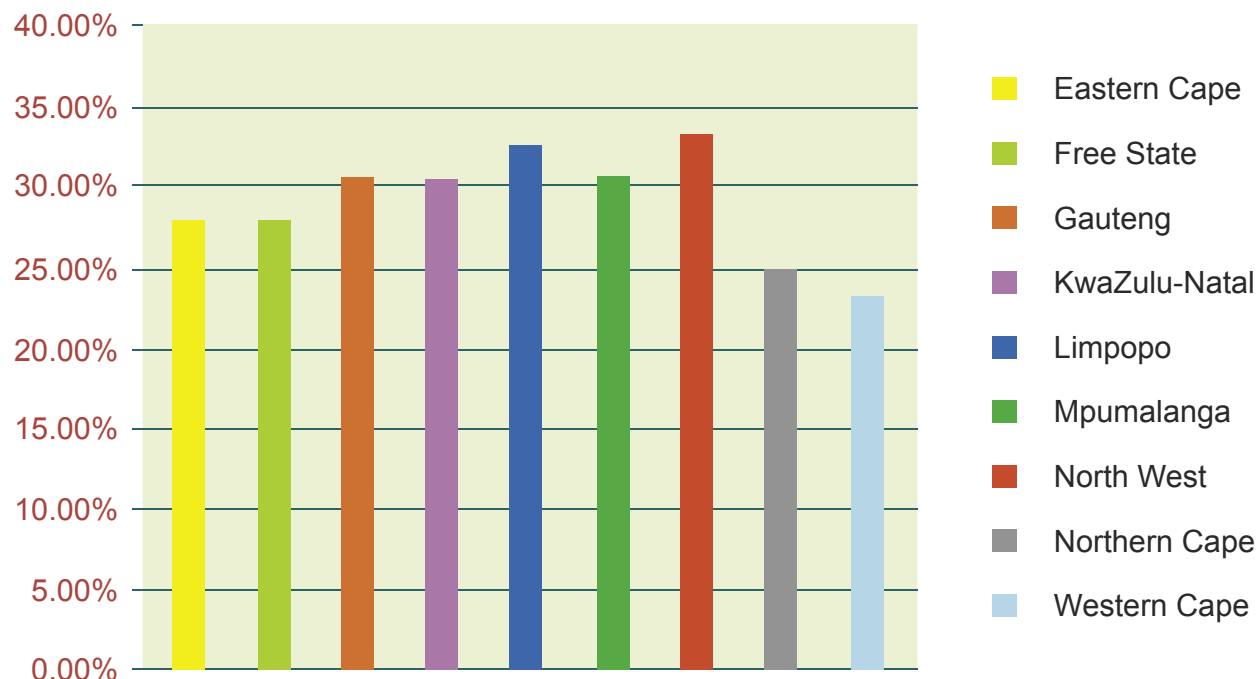
Table 3: Progress in achieving gender representivity at senior management

Year	Percentage Female Managers	Source
1996	10%	CEDAW: First South African Report, 1997:4.1
1998	14%	E-Journal, South Africa: Gender Statistics
1999	18,28%	PSC State of Representativeness Report, 2000
2005	27%	Vulindlela April 2005
2006	30%	Vulindlela May 2006

As reflected in the table above, the PSC has been monitoring and evaluating the attainment of representivity in the Public Service since 1999 and has witnessed a steady increase in the representivity of women. In 2000 it produced a Report on the State of Representativeness<sup>1</sup> in the Public Service which showed progress against targets for national departments and provincial administrations as at 1999. At that stage the target of 50% for race representativeness at the management level was met. Women only comprised 18,28% at the time instead of the target of 30% for women at that level. Furthermore, the target of 2% for persons with disabilities was also not attained with a negligible 0,09% persons with disabilities appointed at the time.

A more comprehensive review of Affirmative Action in the Public Service was completed by the PSC in 2005<sup>2</sup>, which looked closely at the question of empowerment. Data drawn from Vulindlela at the time indicated that at the quantitative level the targets for race at the management level were largely met. For 2005 the targeted level for female representivity at senior management level was 30%. In terms of data sourced from Vulindlela as at April 2005, a rate of 27% has, however, only been achieved. At national department level the overall rate of female representivity at senior management level was 28,6% whilst at provincial level the rate was 26%. **Figure 1** provides a summary of the state of female representation at senior management level in provincial administrations as at May 2006.

Figure 1: Percentage of women at management level in provincial administrations as at May 2006



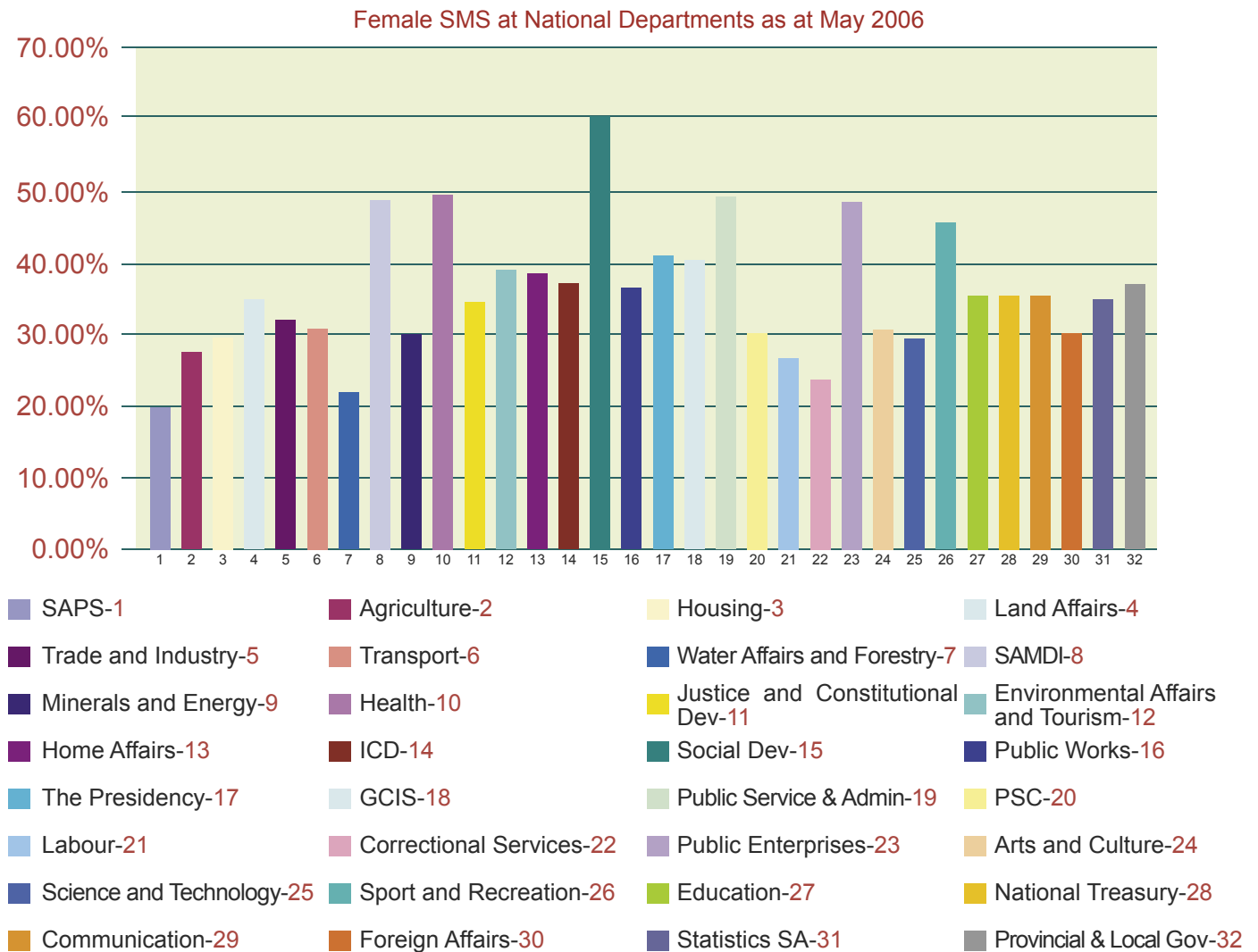
<sup>1</sup>Republic of South Africa. Public Service Commission. The State of Representativeness in the Public Service. Pretoria. July 2000.

<sup>2</sup>Republic of South Africa. Public Service Commission An Audit of Affirmative Action in the Public Service. Pretoria. March 2006.67



As will be noted, provinces such as Limpopo and North West had already exceeded the target of 30% that was set to be achieved by 2005 and are already aspiring towards realization of 50% that has now been set by the MPSA by 31 March 2009. The disparity in the levels of attaining the target between institutions is also visible when considering the status in National Departments at May 2006 as depicted in **Figure 2**.

Figure 2: Percentage of women at management level in National Departments as at May 2006



Democratic era marches to the Union Buildings.



Table 4: Statistical information of women at management level in National Departments as at May 2006

National Departments	Male	Percentage	Female	Percentage
South African Police Service	532	80.50%	129	19.50%
Agriculture	34	74%	12	26.00%
Housing	28	71.80%	11	28.80%
Land Affairs	43	67.20%	21	32.80%
Trade and Industry	89	64.80%	49	35.20%
Transport	47	69.80%	21	30.80%
Water Affairs and Forestry	85	76.60%	26	23.40%
South African Management and Development Institute	11	52.40%	10	47.60%
Minerals and Energy	54	70.20%	23	29.80%
Health	41	50.70%	40	49.30%
Justice and Constitutional Development	123	65.50%	65	34.50%
Environmental Affairs and Tourism	53	61%	34	39%
Home Affairs	43	61.50%	27	38.50%
Independent Complaints Directorate	7	63.70%	4	36.30%
Social Development	21	39.70%	32	60.30%
Public Works	72	65.50%	38	34.50%
The Presidency	33	57.90%	24	42.10%
Government Communication and Information System	17	58.70%	12	41.30%
Public Service and Administration	39	52%	36	48%
Public Service Commission	35	70%	15	30%
Labour	48	72.80%	18	27.20%
Correctional Services	128	75.80%	41	24.20%
Public Enterprises	24	53.40%	21	46.60%
Arts and Culture	27	69.30%	12	30.70%
Science and Technology	42	71.20%	17	28.80%
Sport and Recreation	6	54.60%	5	45.40%
Education	52	64.20%	29	35.80%
National Treasury	107	64.10%	60	35.90%
Communication	43	64.20%	24	35.80%
Foreign Affairs	156	70%	67	30%
Statistics South Africa	73	65.20%	39	34.80%
Provincial and Local Government	17	62.90%	12	37.10%

Most national departments are making great strides in the promotion of women in senior management. However, departments such as Water Affairs and Forestry, Correctional Services and the SA Police Service were lagging behind significantly considering the 50% target that has now been set to be achieved by 31 March 2009.

### Women Heading the Public Service

An important indicator of how women have been mainstreamed in the Public Service is the number of female Heads of Department (HoDs). In the past the HoD level was almost exclusively male dominated. The extent to which women have been absorbed in these positions of power is a clear indicator of government’s confidence in the ability of women to provide strategic leadership. It also suggests that women are capable of asserting themselves in a highly competitive environment where only the most competent and confident individuals succeed. **Table 5** provides a statistical overview of the number of female HoDs as at April 2006.

*Table 5: Statistical information on heads of national and provincial departments*

National Department/ Provincial Administration	Gender		Race			
	Male	Female	Africans	Asians	Coloureds	Whites
National Departments	32	5	27	1	4	5
Free State Province	10	1	8	0	2	1
Western Cape Province	8	4	1	0	7	4
Limpopo Province	8	2	10	0	0	0
Mpumalanga Province	4	5	10	0	0	0
Gauteng Province	11	2	11	1	0	1
KwaZulu-Natal Province	8	7	13	2	0	0
North West Province	8	3	9	1	0	1
Northern Cape Province	9	3	7	0	5	0
Eastern Cape Province	5	4	8	0	0	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>13</b>

In terms of these statistics, the total number of HoDs at national level comprises 37. Of these, five (5) (13,5%) are females. At provincial level there are 102 HoDs. Of these 31 (30,3%) are females. Out of a total of 139 HoDs in the Public Service (national and provincial departments combined), 36 (25,8%) are female. Although progress has therefore been made to mainstream women in the Public Service at this level, there is definitely more that can be done.

### Mainstreaming Women with Disabilities

Women with disabilities were also negatively affected by the discriminatory measures of the past. Studies conducted by the PSC indicate that the Public Service has not been able to meet its own targets in respect of disability equity. In fact there has been a steady decline in the number of disabled persons employed in the Public Service. According to statistics on the state of representativeness in the Public Service as at February 2006, people with disabilities comprised 0,06% of the Public Service. This is a decline from the 0.12% achieved in 2004 and 0,25% achieved in 2002. There is also a shortfall of women when compared with their male counterparts. The figure for males is 0,10% (1072) whereas for females it is 0,06% (638).

#### Democratic era marches to the Union Buildings.



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The challenge for the Public Service is not only to attain the 2% target set by government, but also to ensure that issues of reasonable accommodation and improved work environment are enhanced by making the Public Service an employer of choice for people with disabilities. Whilst pursuing this, the Public Service will have to ensure that females with disabilities are adequately represented.

## Conclusion

The PSC is of the view that the Public Service should move beyond the setting of targets and create a work environment that reflects equality. A change in the traditional roles of men and women in society and in the family is required to achieve full equality between men and women. Even though women have made great strides, there is a need to ensure that the way in which men and women relate to each other is not determined by personal values. In organisations, women managers may be treated unfairly by male counterparts and sometimes by their peers. Some women may feel that their male colleagues do not appreciate or respect them and that double standards may be applied with regard to work volumes and accessibility of support.

As South Africa commemorates the March of women to the Union Buildings in 1956 against the pass laws which were imposed by the apartheid government, it is important to acknowledge and appreciate the strides that women have made in the Public Service as well as recognise the contribution of women to the promotion of equality both in the workplace and on the home front. At the same time it is important to acknowledge that much still needs to be done if a Public Service that reflects gender equality is to be attained.

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50th Anniversary of the Women's March  
**AGE OF HOPE**  
through struggle to freedom



Public Service Commission

Photos: courtesy of GCIS