



INVESTIGATING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE AFFIRMATIVE ACT AS A TOOL FOR EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES OF A SELECTED GOVERNMENT MINISTRY IN NAMIBIA FROM 2016 TO 2021

Wilhelmina Shaalukeni¹, Dr Helena Hakweenda²
Stadio

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ABSTRACT

Motivation for the study: It has been observed that when affirmative action issues are not addressed then they impact service delivery. Secondly, there appears to be fewer studies in the area of affirmative action, particularly in the Namibian Government, especially in relation to affirmative action, particularly in the Directorate of General Services (DGS) head office in the Khomas region.

Research approach: The study adopted a qualitative research approach with a case study research design. The data were collected through interviews and thematically analysed.

Main results: Affirmative action is defined as measures premeditated in disregarding unlawful discrimination among employees. In investigating how the implementation of the Affirmative Action Policy is in performing, it was found out that the Affirmative Action Policy is only operational to a very limited extent. On assessing factors that hinder effective implementation of affirmative action, the study results show that lack of a monitoring policy, lack of training, lack of leadership interest, public perceptions and workplace discrimination contribute to the lack of the full realisation of affirmative practices in the DGS. In establishing measures that were put in place to implement and/or promote the Affirmative Action policy in DGS it was found that there were no attempts towards implementing affirmative action remedies. The study recommends mentoring and coaching programmes, initiating supervisory or monitoring boards, and conducting training and development programmes on affirmative action as essential strategies to promote ethical affirmative action practices.

KEYWORDS: Affirmative action, effectiveness, employment opportunities, discrimination.

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The survival of humankind is closely linked to the employment opportunities available in the public or private sectors. This may explain why internal labour law, through various bodies, provides employment equity to avoid discrimination at work and present equal employment opportunities for everyone (Sesele, Marais & van Rooyen, 2021). However, employment inequality is exacerbated by past experiences, including colonisation, which transcended into the post-colonial era for most countries.

Similar to global practices, Namibia passed the Affirmative Action (Employment) Act, 1998 (Act 29 of 1998) to prohibit employers from discriminating against individuals due to religion, race, colour or sex during employment exercises. These exercises are done when recruiting, terminating services, negotiating compensation and making decisions on forms of employment (Republic of Namibia, 1998). This is also consistent with Article 8 of the Namibian Constitution, which prohibits any unfair practices based on race, religion, gender and other factors. Notably, black men had limited equal employment opportunities before Namibia's independence in comparison to their white counterparts (Nyambe, .2020).

Equally, there were limited opportunities for women to occupy positions at the management level (Nyambe, 2020). Despite notable strides for equal job opportunities and fair workplace practices in present Namibia, the office of the Prime Minister's annual report (2019/2020) reveals there are still notable imbalances between men



and women (Republic of Namibia, 2020). Furthermore, the Ministry of Sport, Youth and National Service (MSYNS) annual report 2020/2021 indicates that women's representation falls short, compared to men's counterparts in strategic positions, despite women constituting the majority of the workforce (MSYNS, 2020). In particular, there is an observable trend of men dominating promotional positions within the DGS compared to women and this practice seems to continue, despite women presenting similar capabilities to those of men. The preceding sentiment confirms the findings from others (Mwetulundila and Indongo, 2018). The study noted that despite efforts made by various organisations, it is undeniable that discriminatory labour practices still exist regarding the equal opportunities of women compared to their male counterparts. This situation equally applies in the directorate of general services' head office according to the integrated 2017 - 2020 ministerial report (MYSNS, 2020).

Therefore, this study aims to investigate the implementation of Affirmative Action in promoting equal job opportunities in the MSYNS, particularly in the Directorate of General Services [DGS]. Hence, the study was conducted to address the following specific objectives.

- ❖ To investigate the implementation of the Affirmative Action policy in promoting equal job opportunities in the DGS.
- ❖ To determine the factors that hinder effective implementation of the Affirmative Action policy in general services.
- ❖ To ascertain current measures of implementing the Affirmative Action policy in the DGS.
- ❖ To establish measures to implement the Affirmative Action policy of the DGS effectively.

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The preliminary literature related to the study's research topic is presented in this section.

2.1 Definitions of concepts

Affirmation Action Defined

Melson-Silimon, (2021) defines affirmative action as a short-term intercession of special consideration to remedy discrimination and ensure fair competition and equality during recruitment and in the workplace. On the other hand, affirmative action, as per Section 17 of the Affirmative Action Act of 1998 of Namibia, alludes that programmes should be initiated to ensure all Namibians experience equal employment opportunities, progression in the workplace as well equitably representation in the private and public institutions (the Republic of Namibia, 1998:18).

Equality

A set of procedures aimed at providing fair and equal employment opportunities and fair workplace practices (Gomes, Silva & Brito, 2021).

2.2 The implementation of affirmative action

To understand the implementation of the affirmative action policy, it is essential to look at the affirmative action policy internationally and continentally before comparing it with the local context. This may position Namibia as a country to learn from best practices or the failure of other countries while in pursuit of effective policy implementation as indicated below:

Global perspectives

In the early 1960s, the United States of America recognised the Affirmative Action policy to combat racial discrimination during the recruitment process and gender disparity (Koea, Rahiri & Ronald, 2021). Such recognition ensures that public institutions, for instance, police organisations, hospitals and universities, are representative in nature and include previously disadvantaged people (Garner, Harvey & Johnson, 2020). To a larger extent, the implementation reduced discrimination in the employment fraternity, contributing significantly to equality in recruitment and workplace practices.

Another country is multi-ethnic Malaysia where the Malaysian government implemented the Affirmative Action policy by initiating programmes to promote equal rights, not only in the employment settings but in all institutions for all citizens, despite the country being multi-ethnic (Warikoo & Utaukwa, 2020). Programmes such as yearly trainings, reporting on the institutional structure and the justifications of those in positions of power are among the strategies proven to have worked well in implementing affirmative action (Biazotto, 2022). Consequently, helping in promoting equal job opportunities.



Continental perspectives

In South Africa, the need for implementing affirmative action as a result of the apartheid era was crucial since the 1926 Job Preservation Act protected South African Whites' jobs and interests compared to the indigenous African, Indian and mixed-race workers (Carrim, 2022). However, during apartheid, there was a lack of policy to protect black people, women and people living with disabilities from unfair labour practices, for instance, salary imbalances and opportunities in the place of employment (Naidoo, 2018). Therefore, the government promulgated the Employment Equity Act, No. 55 of 1998. Since the policy's inception, previously disadvantaged groups have had the opportunity to be recruited and move into the public and private institutions in South Africa (Naidoo, 2018). Generally, the adoption of affirmative action policies in Africa has seen a commendable increase in the number of previously unemployed and disadvantaged. Especially women in the political arena, whose representation in the workforce has risen over 30% in some Eastern and Southern Africa, including countries in West and Central Africa (Okedele, 2021).

Namibian perspectives

In Namibia, Sisamu's study (2015) on the implementation of the Affirmative Action policy revealed that some public institutions have, to a great extent, tried to implement the policy, which has assisted those who were previously disadvantaged in occupying strategic managerial positions. However, some institutions have not fully implemented the Affirmative Action policy, and this is despite its importance in providing equal employment opportunities.

Comparative analysis of the affirmative action

On the contrary, the implementation of affirmative action has been received with mixed feelings around the globe, mainly because it is perceived, as the majority feels it restricts competent employees from moving into higher positions (Gururaj, Somers, Fry, Watson, Cicero, Morosini & Zamora, 2021). Sadly, the preceding situation resulted in some employees being demoralised because they felt that there was no career progression due to preference given to previously disadvantaged groups. It is possible that the implementation of affirmative action policies is more realised in European countries than in Africa, where income inequality among employees in the same organisations persists. Nonetheless, the awareness campaigns used by some countries in advocating for the importance of fairness during recruitment at the workplace and post-workplace era seem to be shared by those countries successfully implementing affirmative action policies.

2.3 Hindrance to effectively implementing the policy

Leadership within a particular organisation determines the implementation of affirmative action. This implies that when top leaders in an organisation are unwilling to adhere to the Affirmative Action policy, its implementation may be challenged (Okedele, 2021). According to Amano-Patino, Aramburu and Contractor (2021), the lack of implementation oversight for most organisations revealed that, to a reasonable extent, it has led to failure in implementing the Affirmative Action policy not only in Namibia but across the globe. It appears that oversight functions may have compelled those in charge of administration in various institutions to ensure the provision of the Affirmative Action policy is adhered to.

Another fundamental factor is the lack of training on implementing affirmative action programmes (April & Govender, 2022). The authors further note that when employees are not sensitised often on the policy of Affirmative Action, even those in leadership may tend to overlook its importance in the work setting. Therefore, it can be stated here that the authors' sentiment may fit well, especially with the researcher's experience, attesting to the fact that most trainings offered in many public institutions is related to the specific performance gaps, not the policy implementations. With this in mind, it might be appropriate to concur with April and Govender (2022) that a lack of training on affirmative action policy and implementation guidelines may reasonably account for the failure to implement the policy effectively.

In a nutshell, the preliminary literature related to the current study was explored. From the literature review, it can be observed that the principle of affirmative action is closely associated with the need to bring about societal equality through the preferential treatment of previously disadvantaged people, which is linked to historical imbalances. Several scholars undertook studies on affirmative action, however, it appears there is still a paucity of scholarly work in the study, mainly targeted at the effectiveness of affirmative action. This realisation is despite the negative impacts associated with the lack of implementation of affirmative action as a tool for job opportunities. On this ground, the study may, together with other scholarly work, contribute to implementing the policy not only in the area of study but countrywide at various institutions.



3. METHODOLOGY

The researchers adopted a qualitative approach, which allows for exploring the problem under investigation. In addition, the approach permitted the use of interviews to collect data from participants with more experience in affirmative action as an employment opportunity policy (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2016). This approach correlates with the case study design given that the approach was more concerned with specific individuals with experience on the issue under investigation.

In this study, interpretivism, specifically adopting ontology, was the study paradigm used. The choice was based on the study's need to inquire about the Affirmative Action policy's implementation. Therefore, ontological questions on the reality existing in the DGS about the affirmative practices applied were used. These questions were the reason for the interpretative recommendations provided by the study to provide an in-depth understanding of how affirmative action practices may be realised.

3.1 Population

The population of DGS in the Ministry of Sport, Youth and National Service (MSYNS) has four divisions namely; human resources, finance, transport and procurement, which totals to 53 employees. These were the primary population since they are all likely to experience the effects of the lack of the Affirmative Action implementation policy. To this end, the criteria included male and female employees deployed at the Khomas national headquarters, those in leadership positions and subordinates.

3.2 Sample size

For this study, initially, 10 participants were anticipated (7 in leadership positions and 3 subordinates) to participate. On the contrary, only 9 were interviewed, 6 in leadership positions and 3 as subordinates from the population. The researcher's decision to include more of those in leadership was informed by the fact that implementing the Affirmative Action policy is the responsibility of leaders.

To this end, it was assumed that those in leadership might be well vested with information as to provide in-depth evidence on the issue that the researchers investigated. Furthermore, the criteria included those with at least three or more years of work experience in DGS with sound knowledge of affirmative action practices.

Even though the study used few participants, data saturation guided the study. The possibility of going beyond what was initially anticipated in the study's proposal in terms of sample size was high. However, with data saturation, there was no need for the researchers to continue collecting data while the participants kept on giving similar responses (Morse, 2015). This could be seen in the data presentation section, where the participants' answers merged to a reasonable degree to illustrate the exhaustion of data in terms of new ideas and thoughts.

3.3 Research Instruments

A face-to-face semi-structured interview was employed in this study because it promoted interviewer-interviewee interaction. Data were recorded, transcribed and presented under the findings section. Apart from being an example of the qualitative data collection method, the interview was crucial for probing questions that were explored in-depth to clear misunderstandings (Akşan & Baki, 2017).

3.4 Trustworthiness of data collected

The study used only participants with three and more years of experience because they are presumed to be knowledgeable on affirmative policy practices to ensure reliability and validity. To this end, the study's findings could be trusted upon.

3.5 Data Analysis

Making sense of data collected through interpretation refers to data analysis (Nowell *et al.*, 2017). In qualitative data, content and thematic analysis methods are primarily used. Hence, the study adopted thematic analysis to analyse the primary data. In this way, themes that emerged were categorised as per their similarities or differences in relation to participants' opinions (Nowell *et al.*, 2017). Therefore, the transcribed data were presented by assigning codes to it, which was further discussed extensively while identifying trends and issues. The guidelines suggested by Fouché *et al.* (2021) in analysing data directed the researchers. In this case, data was prepared, the coding unit analysis was arranged, categories were developed, and a coding scheme was employed. In addition, the coding scheme was tested; meanwhile, codes were re-assigned, which were further interpreted before reporting the findings.



3.6 Ethical Guidelines

Confidentiality was assured to all the respondents, including avoiding identifying any person and relating the findings to an individual (*see data presentation section*). The interviews of recorded data were stored safely and will be destroyed after the study. Research ethics was upheld in the study with the researcher's moral duty and obligations by ensuring participants were unharmed. Further, the researchers respected participants and ensured justice, privacy, anonymity, confidentiality, and fair treatment. Lastly, the research was approved by Stadio Higher Education to have been within the acceptable confinement of the ethical standards.

4. FINDINGS

In this section of the article, the study's findings were presented and analysed to give an account of participants' views on the Affirmative Action policy's implementation in providing equal employment opportunities in the DGS. As mentioned earlier, thematic analysis was used in this study. The section is threefold. Firstly, it contains data on the participants' characteristics. Secondly, the study objectives and questions are presented and categorised into common study themes. Lastly, the discussion section which combines the participants' personal characteristics and the research objective findings are outlined.

PARTICIPANTS' PROFILE CHARACTERISTICS

Under this subheading, the questions about the participant's demographic information to establish their characteristics ought to be answered. This was necessary since the study's trustworthiness may be linked to the elements of the participants of the study. Table 1 constitutes demographic information of the participants.

Table 1: Participants personal profile

Sex	Occurrence	Position	Occurrence	Experience	Occurrence	Qualifications	Occurrence
Females	4	Leaders	6	3-6	1	PhD	00
Males	5	Juniors	3	7-10	1	Masters'	4
				11-14	2	Honours	3
				15 and more	5	Diploma	2
Affirmative Action Training							
		Occurrence					
Yes		2					
No		7					

In the first place, the study established the gender of the participants. Regarding gender, Table 1 shows that 4 (44%) of those that participated and formed part of individual interviews were females and 5 (56%) were males. On the other hand, from Table 1 above, it can be further noted that 6 (67%) of the participants are those in leadership positions while 3 (33%) are subordinates.

As presented in Table 1, work experience was another consideration in the present study. Notably, those between 3-6 and 7-10 years of working experience were represented by a single participant, accounting for 11% of each category. The table above illustrates that the participants between 11-14 constituted 22% (2) of the study's total participants. Meanwhile, 5 (56%) participants were in the category of 15 and more years, which appeared to account for a more significant portion of the participants.

Furthermore, the study also looked at the professional qualifications of the participants, as seen in Table 1. Firstly, none of the participants was a PhD holder; however, 4 (44.44%) of the total 9 participants are holders of Master's degrees. Therefore, these participants in this category were the majority in terms of number. Equally notable from the table, those with Honours degree were 3(33.33%), constituting the second highest category of the participants in the present study. Surprisingly, the lowest qualification [Diploma] in the categories accounted for the lowest representation of only 2 people (22.22%).

Establishing the number of participants who attended affirmative action training was part of the question under personal characteristics, as Table 1 shows. In this regard, only 2 (22%) of the total 9 participants indicated to have undergone affirmative action training. On the contrary, 7 (78%) of the participants confirmed not to have undertaken any training related to affirmative action.

**QUESTIONS IN RELATION TO RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

This section presents the data obtained from the empirical research findings. The codes were initiated to protect participants' identities. As explained earlier, themes are used to group responses based on similarities or differences.

On the coding, **S1, S2, S3, and S4** refers to the first, second, third and fourth participants who were sampled for this study as those in supervisory positions. Moreover, **J1, J2, J3, J4 and J5** refers to those who participated in the study as subordinates. The numeric item after each alphabet stands for the number of the particular participant interviewed. For instance, S1 meant the responses from the first person interviewed.

Table 2: Themes and sub-themes from interviews sessions

THEME AND SUB-THEMES	FREQUENCIES
Affirmative action DEFINITION	9
Positive discrimination	7
Favouring certain individuals	9
HOW EFFECTIVE IS THE AFFIRMATIVE ACT POLICY	9
Smaller extent	8
Larger extent	2
FACTORS THAT HINDER THE EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION OF AFFIRMATIVE ACTION POLICY	9
Lack of monitoring policy	4
Lack of training	8
Lack of leadership interest	6
Public perception	4
Workplace Discrimination	9
4. MEASURES FOR AFFIRMATIVE ACTION POLICY IN DGS	9
No measures	9
ADDRESSING CHALLENGES LINKED TO AFFIRMATIVE ACTION IMPLEMENTATION POLICY IN DGS.	9
Mentorship/coaching programs	4
Supervisory/Monitoring Board	4
Training and development	9

THEME 1: AFFIRMATION ACTION DEFINITION

To ascertain the participants' understanding of the studied topic, the researcher needed to include a question about what affirmative action entails. Therefore, the following were answers grouped as per participants' views.

Sub-theme 1: Positive discrimination

J1, J2, J3, S1, S2, S3, S5, and S6 associated affirmative action with agreed measures premeditated in disregarding unlawful discrimination among employees and providing solutions to address discrimination against previously and most vulnerable members of the society within the workplace [Interview with Individual participants, August 2022].

“For me, I may regard affirmation action as eliminating discriminatory practices that so many have occupied working place. Especially discrimination against women, the disabled or previously disadvantaged communities” (J1).

In my understanding, affirmative action deals with strategies that are put either by the central government or a particular institution to ensure that opportunities are provided to individuals or community members that were previously denied opportunities and provide them necessary support that gives them confidence in whatever they do (**S6**).

Sub-theme 2: Favouring specific individuals

J3 and S3 associated the definition to mean favouring specific individuals to bring about somewhat and justice workplace opportunities [Interview with individual participants, August 2022].



“I will refer to it as positive discrimination since most individuals considered first are denied opportunities in society for various reasons, including their sexual orientation, ethnicity and social status” (J3).

The above sentiment is also shared, S3 measures put in place to favour the previously disadvantaged individuals in society, especially in relation to work, employment and education.

THEME 2: HOW EFFECTIVE IS AFFIRMATIVE ACTION POLICY?

The objective of this theme was to determine how effective the Affirmative Action policy is in the study area. This determined the study's conclusion and, through determination, the recommendations were made in pursuit of accelerating the implementation of the Affirmative Action policy.

Sub-theme: Smaller extent

Most participants [J1, J2, J3, S1, S2, S4, S5, and S6] believe that affirmative action is only effective to a small extent in DGS. [Interview with individual participants, August 2022].

J1 clarified further:

It might be remiss of duty to indicate that affirmative action is effective in the DGS. However, there are some instances where you see clearly that women and disabled people in our organisation are still neglected in terms of higher positions. We can attest to the recent three promotions that took place last month, and this month in the top positions, no woman was considered despite also possessing the same qualifications to that men. To make matters worse, no interviews were conducted to determine the best candidates. I think it is time for internal promotions to consider written tests and interviews; this will ensure that the best candidates are selected not only as preferred by those in top positions. Of course, I can still acknowledge that others would argue that they do not qualify for the jobs, but If affirmative action is all about measures in place to promote the involvement of women in the top decision-making processes in the organisation and you still have those that are unqualified for the positions how will one justify the effectiveness of the measures in place to provide growth for women and those who are vulnerable?

Adding to the above sentiment, S4 claims that the “Affirmative Action policy is more likely to be successful only if the opportunities for growth of previously disadvantaged and the vulnerable are enhanced to give account for growth”.

Currently, you[sic] have a situation where in the [DGS] women are more than men; however, count the number of men [sic], when using the affirmative action angle, it can be concluded that its effectiveness is still a far-fetched reality. Even though some women are considered, this still does not represent to a considerable extent the purpose for which the policy was enacted (S5).

S6 Explained Further:

As a woman, it is just fair to acknowledge that the affirmative action policy has not fully been felt since we [sic] still have our fellow women that still do not trust in their capability, and the minority group in our department still lack confidence on what they can offer the organisation at large. When you analyse this, it is because the working environment is not still conducive enough to promote women and their capabilities through various training. I have more than 10 years in this leadership position, but I never attended training or any course on affirmative action. In this current practice in the organisation, how do you expect the full impact of the policy?

Sub-theme 2: Larger extent

According to S3, the affirmative action policy is effective in DGS (Interview with individual participants, August 2022).

S3, to this end, the participant illustrated further:

I hear [sic] several people complaining about the affirmative action policy and its impact on the department and the entire ministry. [However]... if you compare the years immediately after independence of our[sic] country and where we are now, you[sic] will see there is a big difference in terms of integrating previously disadvantaged group[s] in the positions and other opportunities. I[sic] remember when I [sic] started working here, there were no women that were occupying top leadership positions, but now if you are to analyse from the top in the ministry, including within our department, there are now women in leadership positions, including those from minority groups even though they are few. [Based on this] I will say that affirmative action policy is more effective in our department and the ministry at large (S3).



THEME 3: FACTORS THAT HINDER THE EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION OF AFFIRMATIVE ACTION POLICY

It was thought from the beginning that there was a need to ascertain factors that affect the effective implementation of the affirmative action policy in the DGS. This is based on the researcher's awareness that to successfully address the challenges of affirmative action implementation, there is an undeniable need to establish the challenges first. With these themes, the challenges linked to ineffective implementation of affirmative action are presented and grouped into themes as indicated below.

Sub-theme 1: Lack of monitoring policy

Four of the participants cited a lack of monitoring policy as the reason for failure to fully realise the potential of affirmative action policy [J2, S3, S4 and S5] (Interview with individual participants, August 2022).

“As argued, you can have a well-crafted policy in the name of affirmative action policy, but without strategies in terms of how it will be monitored, its full realisation cannot be accounted for. The need to have a monitoring policy cannot be overemphasised if we are to be proud Namibians on how well we have integrated this policy in various government ministries” (S3).

S4 noted that:

Apart from the affirmative action policy itself that provides guidance, consistency, clarity and accountability, it is worth noting to ensure that there are measures put in place to monitor the implementation. These measures could be standalone policies or strategies. Therefore, the absence of such a policy can be cited as one of the reasons hindering the effective implementation of affirmative action in the DGS.

Sub-Theme 2: Lack of training

Excluding J2, all participants J1, J3, S1, S2, S3, S4, S5, and S6 pinpointed that lack of training in the department is a plausible reason that affects successful affirmative action implementation (Interview with individual participants, August 2022).

“Most of us[sic] are yet to attend training regarding affirmative action policy, and this perhaps contributes to the failure of all employees to be interested in the policy since little is known about it” [J1].

“What is so surprising is that you have this policy that needs to be implemented, but people are not sensitised about it; how do you expect them to understand the affirmative action practices fully? I acknowledge that there are several trainings that we have undergone. However, none of these trainings were related to affirmative action. What surprises me[sic] is that even as a leader, the only time I found out about affirmative action is when I read a particular article as part of my[sic] school work” [S1].

S4 clarified further:

With so many workshops for us leaders on leadership, management, supervision and control, finance and administration, I[sic] cannot remember attending a workshop on affirmative action. This entails that the lack of training to incorporate affirmative action practices may contribute to why the realisation of successful affirmative practices is still a far-fetched reality.

Similar [S6] provide an extended explanation in this regard:

One of the challenges is the failure to provide necessary training to employees. I attended this kind of workshop in Otjiwarongo organised by the Office of the Prime Minister in 2016. However, there were no junior member[s]... in that workshop. [The implication]...of excluding junior member[s] is that these are the future leaders of tomorrow, and they will be expected to adhere to the affirmative action policy while they have less awareness of it. Therefore, as part of grooming the subordinates, it is paramount that their training incorporates, even to a small extent, the future role of affirmative practices in the DGS.

Sub-theme 3: Lack of leadership interest

J1, J2, J3, S1, S2, and S5 indicated that the interest of some of those that are in leadership positions in complying with affirmative action policy is a severe challenge in terms of successful implementation (Interview with individual participants, August 2022).



As noted by **J3**, “I have a strong belief that those in leadership or supervisory positions have a duty to support and promote the affirmative action policy through their conduct. *“When there is [a] lack of interest in leaders to comply and implement the affirmative action policy, this will cascade to their juniors who will be future leaders.*”

S1 narrated:

Given that leaders influence desired behaviours in subordinates that benefit the organisation, their conduct determines how well the policy within the DGS can be implemented. Therefore, our leaders[genuine] interest is essential for realising the policy. Without the interest of those entrusted with leadership or supervisory positions, even reporting can be manipulated to fit their agenda; perhaps it is so vital to ensure that before appointing a person in a leadership position, one should first be tested in his or her interest capabilities in implementing the institutional policy. With this, the DGS may ensure that, to a considerable extent, those in leadership positions understand and have a genuine interest in contributing to implementing the affirmative action policy.

Sub-theme 4: Public perception

J2, S1, S3, and S4 refer to public perception as contributing factors to the failure to implement the affirmative action policy in DGS. (Interview with individual participants, August 2022).

In the DGS, just like in most public service institutions, there is a firm belief that women, for instance, are less capable than men. Such a trend stems from societal responsibilities that distinguish the role of men from those of women and transcend into the workplace environment. It is said that these stereotypes of the inability of other groups of society to occupy top positions had been well acknowledged in the workplace, consequently affecting how well the affirmative action policy is implemented [**J2**].

For **S1**, believe that:

I was shocked at some point when we had a meeting to discuss some appointments at the leadership level that some could pinpoint that it is not appropriate for some women to be on top of men in terms of leadership, given that the more senior leader was a woman. I remember vividly one attendee mentioning that other women cannot lead women; let us appoint a man. These kinds of beliefs are counterproductive and do not promote affirmative action practices in the organisation. It is[unfortunate] that they still occupy space in the DGS.

By nature, men are superior to women; the bible further confirms this; therefore, expecting women to rule over men is unrealistic. Naturally, particular ethnicities in Namibia are more than others in terms of numbers; therefore, there is a strong public perception that these individuals should be provided more opportunities than other minorities. This has been manifested in most government institutions where higher posts should be occupied to a more degree by such ethnicity. The masses cement and support the public perception, leading to a failure to consider the previously disadvantaged individuals in Namibian society. This is a plausible reason for a failed affirmative action implementation (**S3**).

Sub-theme 5: Workplace Discrimination

All participants pinpointed discrimination at the workplace as well as denying others opportunities for growth to account for the unimplemented affirmative action practices in DGS [**J1, J2, J3, S1, S2, S3, S4, S5 and S6**] (Interview with individual participants, August 2022). The responses are further detailed below:

“There are times, when skills and knowledge possessed by employees, are not considered due to discrimination based on friendship, ethnicity, skin colour, affiliation and region where an individual comes from” [**J1**].

“In some instances, recognition in study opportunities may be determined on how close with the people in charge. [Naturally], this hinders the growth of most disadvantaged individuals in the DGS” [**J3**].

S2 amplified the answers by noting that:

Perhaps it is just right to recognise that no matter what, people in the organisation will always have preferences; this preference informs the choice they make at the workplace. I have noted with grave concern that some supervisors prefer to associate with their tribes at the workplace than other tribes. In the process, we have seen those close to them awarded scholarship opportunities with accelerated growth. Such a trend is not comprehended well by other employees whom some opt to resign. You can see from my point that when affirmative action practices are not considered, ineffective implementation of affirmative action may contribute to an organisation’s poor performance through strained human resources and persistent conflict.



THEME 4: MEASURES FOR AFFIRMATIVE ACTION POLICY IN DGS

Sub-theme 1: No measures

All participants, **J1, J2, J3, S1, S2, S3, S4, S5** and **S6**, believe that there are no measures put in place to support the affirmative action policy in DGS (Interview with individual participants, August 2022).

J1, J2, J3, S1, S2, S4 and **S6**; since we are not told about it, I am not sure if we have such measures in place, to be honest.

As noted by **J1**, *“there are no current measures as far as I am concerned regarding the implementation of affirmative action not only in the DGS but in the entire ministry since there are no strategies that I am aware of aimed at addressing this ambiguity”*.

Despite acknowledging the absence of affirmative action policy in the DGS, **S6** note:

The only measure available is through the affirmative action policy that compels all organisations to accommodate, for instance, people with disabilities in their decisions on employment and promotion within the organisation. Furthermore, the provision that institutions should avail all sorts of opportunities to the previously disadvantaged person in all streams. Nonetheless, let me[sic] acknowledge that the policy itself only stipulates these measures; however, it was supposed to be to the ministries to ensure that strategies are in place to adhere to these measures. Furthermore, the same policy compels the institutions to have a career growth blueprint through training to capacitate mostly affected individuals by previous practices and contemporary practices.

THEME 5: ADDRESSING CHALLENGES LINKED TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE AFFIRMATIVE ACTION POLICY.

Sub-theme 1: Mentorship/coaching programs

Mentoring and coaching programmes were pinpointed by **J2, S2, S3** and **S4** (Interview with the individual participants, August 2022).

J2, *“To realise the full potential of the affirmative action policy in our department, it is essential to ensure that subordinates are mentored and coached on the importance of affirmative action. This will ensure that they will embrace and implement the concepts when assuming the highest position”*.

According to **S3**, *“when there is a lack of coaching and mentoring on the affirmative action aspect, it is unwise to expect continuity even if the affirmative practices were currently in full swing in the department. However, when you[sic] mentor young people, you[sic] present the opportunity for the acceptance of affirmative practices going into the future”*.

“I think it is time we need to embrace affirmative action and start mentoring each other so that we understand the concept well and its purpose is not only in the department’s general service but in the whole ministry” (**S4**).

Sub-theme 2: Supervisory/Monitoring Board

J1, J2, S2, and **S5** believe that they should be a regulatory entity to oversee the implementation of the affirmative action policy in the DGS (Interview with the individual participants, August 2022).

J1 emphasise:

It should be mentioned that affirmative action policy itself omits an essential component of compelling the institutions to oversee the oversight for successful implementation of the affirmative action policy. Therefore, for consistent implementation, [supervisory/advisory committee] are supposed to be initiated. Such initiatives allow for accountability, influencing human conduct to be within the confines of the policy since there are monitoring mechanisms in place.

Also, **S2** elaborated that *“without a supervisory body through entities, this could be an independent body on the policy’s employment, and the initiated policy may not yield the desired results. I can argue that this is the reason why the effectiveness of the affirmative action policy in our department is yet to be felt”*.

“When no one cares, the roles and duties of supervisors or leaders to ensure adherence to affirmative practices become less prioritised [consequently] affecting its realisation” (**S5**).



Sub-theme 3: Training and development

All participants **J1, J2, J3, S1, S2, S3, S4, S5** and **S6** recommended that they should be training programmes on affirmative action often to sensitise all employees on its importance and purpose in the DGS (Interview with the individual participants, August 2022).

“There should be constant specialised training within the department to promote the appreciation of the policy” (J2).

S3 explained further, *“I recommend that training and awareness should be initiated at the grassroots level so that we [sic] have a situation that not only allows those in supervisory positions alone to attend this kind of training”.*

S4 note that *“the best way could be crafting of an affirmative action flyer and being posted on the notice boards within the organisation. This will remind us from time to time that each of us has to promote adherence to the policy”.*

Some of us only hear it in other organisations; in our department, you hardly hear it being articulated; this may indicate its irrelevance in our setting. To avoid this, we could initiate training to enhance employees’ knowledge of affirmative action practices not only for supervisors, but also for the junior employees of the DGS and the entire ministry. With the retention policy within the organisation, the areas of growth can be identified in terms of career path, new skills or knowledge. Such undertakings may address performance gaps [and] consequently serve as motivating factors to job satisfaction, which is a prerequisite for high retention in several organisations” [S5].

4. DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

Regarding gender, Table 1 shows that 4 (44%) of those that participated and formed part of the individual interviews were females, while 5 (56%) were males. Even though there is a slight difference between participants in terms of gender representation, their gender was represented. Such representation may imply that the bias that might have been associated with gender while answering questions may have to a considerable extent, been removed in this study.

Regarding the positions of those who participated in the study, six (6) were in leadership positions, while three were junior employees in the DGS. For the reason that the study was aiming at establishing the effectiveness of the Affirmative Action policy, there was an indisputable need to include more people with general knowledge of policy matters. Therefore, the preceding ratio was considered essential, given that those in leadership positions constituted most of the participants.

In relation to work experience, the study established that all participants had worked in DGS for more than three years. This was one of the crucial discoveries in terms of the study’s personal profile, especially considering that the longer an individual works in an organisation, the more experience and knowledge they gain, contributing significantly to the study’s purpose. This is also according to the set years in terms of who is supposed to be part of the study from the proposal phase. The justification of how well participants were equipped for the present study may be seen in the detailed explanation in the data presentation section. To a considerable degree, their responses correlated, benefiting the study.

Apart from not having doctorates, all participants had qualifications ranging from Master’s degrees to diplomas. This result was not surprising, given that the entry requirement of any post within the DGS, requires an individual to have a diploma. The difference in professional qualifications could result from the number of years in the organisations. The more extended one stays in an organisation, the more he or she becomes interested in advancing his/her career by studying further. The possession of qualifications may have been vital in the study since it is now established in the 21st century that when interviewing educated people, the margin for error is slim compared to the illiterate in terms of providing information that may be of great help to the study.

On ascertaining whether the participants attended affirmative action training, it was surprising to note that from the total of nine participants that were interviewed, only one participant indicated to have attended training on affirmative action. This has bearing implications, particularly when considering the role of training and workshops in aligning the conduct of employees to policy.



In determining how participants understood affirmative action, the study found that affirmative action was associated with measures premeditated in disregarding unlawful discrimination against employees. Notably, the discrimination targeted those previously discriminated against, for instance, women and minority groups of the society. This definition may be explained in part by the need for the government of the Republic of Namibia to eliminate discrimination not against women only but the disabled and minority groups in the workplace but also during recruitment, access to educational opportunities and other platforms. With this understanding, it cannot be disputed that certain groups of people previously were not considered superior in the world of work and the affairs of the country. Such disparity transcended the post-independence era. As such the Affirmative Action policy was enacted to remedy such gaps. This definition coincides with that observed in Melson-Silimon (2021), in which affirmative action is a short-term intercession of special consideration to remedy discrimination and ensure fairness.

In determining how effective the Affirmative Action policy is in the study area, it was found in the study that the Affirmative Action policy is only effective to a very limited degree. Mainly because of the fact that there are major instances where women and disabled people in the study area were found to still be neglected in terms of occupying higher positions. The possible explanation for this result may be because when considering the human resources in the department, the majority are women in comparison to men. However, most of those who occupy higher positions and are in leadership or supervisory positions are men. With this observation, the findings of the study are in affirmation that the Affirmative Policy's impact is minimal in the department.

On the contrary, the study found a contradictive result in which it was also the knowledge that affirmative action has a remarkable impact, particularly when comparing earlier post-independence years where women's representation in top government structures was far-fetched. Further, disabled individuals and people from disadvantaged groups were not provided with opportunities in prominent organisations and other opportunities. This also resonates with the study by Shumba (2018) in which it was noted that opportunities in terms of leadership positions for the disabled and previously disadvantaged still exist in several public institutions in Namibia.

This contradicting result may be due to the fact that the interpretation of effectiveness was seen different by participants. This may imply that to some, the progression made from independence to date is seen as effective since the justification of the effectiveness was based on the comparable statistics. While to the majority, the interpretation of effective was based on the limited timeframe that 32 years after independence, women and previously disadvantaged people were supposed to be fully integrated into the mainstream within the DGS. Taken together, the conclusion that can be made in this regard is that the Affirmative Action policy is not effectively given that it is a short-term plan, and it was hoped by many that by now, the disparities surrounding discrimination before and during the earlier years of independence were supposed to be addressed already.

On assessing factors that hinder effective implementation of affirmative action, the study results show that lack of monitoring contributes to a limited realisation of affirmative action practices in the DGS. It is noted in the study that when the policy is put in place without the monitoring and evaluation strategies in place, its longevity may not be realised. From this result, it can be seen that continuity through monitoring mechanisms is essential in this regard.

One possible explanation for this result is that monitored policies are subjected to reviews and recommendations. When a particular action is monitored, recommendations may be provided to address the successful implementation or remedy the setbacks. However, if there are no monitoring mechanisms, challenges that affect the implementation of the Affirmative Action policy may be known, thereby presenting impossible attainment of full integration of the policy purpose in the department.

Another challenge identified in the study is the lack of training. This is further confirmed in the demographic information when it comes clear that employees are not exposed to training on affirmative action practices. When one looks at the importance of training in influencing desired behaviour, there is no doubt that appropriate measures and decisions regarding affirmative action may only be taken if all employees, including those in leadership positions, understand the purpose of the Affirmative Action policy and its role it seeks to achieve in the department. On the contrary, lack of knowledge necessitated by lack of training may be a stumbling block to fully realising the Affirmative Action policy. It was also noted in the study and confirmed by Govender (2022)



that a lack of training on affirmative action policy and implementation guidelines may reasonably account for the failure to implement the policy effectively.

Apart from a lack of monitoring policy and training, the study still found that a lack of leadership interest in realising affirmative action affects its successful implementation. This finding is based on the fact that when there is a lack of interest in leaders to comply and implement the affirmative policy then this will cascade to the junior staff members who will be future leaders. An alternative explanation of the findings could be that the leader's role in the implementation of affirmative action policy varies from person to person.

Leaders and managers are responsible for ensuring the adherence to affirmative practices since they make critical departmental decisions in terms of recruitment, appointment and employee career growth. When these three variables, among others, are analysed, it may be worth noting in this study that, to a larger extent, leaders or supervisors are entrusted with the responsibility to ensure the implementation of affirmative action practices. However, when they lack interest, it is correct to state that the policy on affirmative action may not achieve the purpose, it was recognised for. In regards to the lack of monitoring policy in relation to affirmative action implementation, it seems lack of clarity with regards to policy could not be confirmed in the literature used in the study. This finding correlates with that observed in Okedele (2021), in which it was argued that leadership within a particular organisation determines the implementation of affirmative action. As already stated, when top leaders in an organisation are unwilling to adhere to the Affirmative Action policy, its implementation may be challenging.

Public perception also was found in the study to influence the extent to which the Affirmative Action policy may be implemented. Perhaps this may be a fascinating finding because the effort to remedy the subjugation of ethnic and cultural minorities and women is affected by societal norms, perceptions and values. This finding represents the current reality in Namibia, where the majority of men and some women are not comfortable with the previously disadvantaged people occupying prominent roles in various organisations. This mindset may partly explain why perhaps, gender representation in most organisations, not only in the DGS is still unachieved in Namibia.

Lastly, workplace discrimination also emerged in the study as contributing to the ineffective implementation of the Affirmative Action policy. In this case, discrimination is based on non-friendship, ethnicity, colour, affiliation and region where an individual comes from. The discriminated individual is denied the opportunities to study, advance their career, promotion and training/course preferences and as a result this preference informs the choice they make at work. This finding may be supported by the recent minority employee in the DGS who successfully pursued discrimination claims against the ministry over promotions and won the case. With this in mind, there can be no doubt that discrimination affects the efficiency and effective operation of the entire ministry. Furthermore, the study findings are in congruent with that of Naidoo (2018), in which it was noted that women and people living with disabilities are unfairly discriminated against including salary imbalances and opportunities in the place of employment.

The study also sought to establish measures that were put in place to implement or promote affirmative action policy in DGS. Nevertheless, surprisingly, all participants indicated that there were no measures they could remember initiated towards implementing affirmative action. This meant that the department and the ministry failed to comply with the government affirmative action that compels the ministries, agencies and private institutions to adopt strategies designed to curb the affirmative disparities inherited from the previous regime. This result could explain why the Affirmative Action policy is not fully implemented or is ineffective in the DGS. This is contrary to a Malaysia example, where annual trainings on affirmative action are conducted, and institutions are compelled to report on the progress made to central government.

In determining strategies that may work to promote affirmative action practices, the study found that mentoring and coaching programmes are initiated for promoting affirmative action in the DGS. As mentioned already, it is essential to ensure that subordinates are mentored and coached on the importance of affirmative action. This will ensure that they will embrace and implement the concepts when assuming a higher position.

When critically analysing these results, it is more apparent that the focus of mentoring and coaching is more on subordinates that are yet to assume leadership roles or those that are still new in their supervisory roles. This is important for the future since it cannot be denied that the current crop of leaders was, at some point,



subordinates. So perhaps they are unable to embrace the concepts of affirmative action due to their background. This, to the researchers, is so crucial since it focuses not only on those in positions of authority but also on those yet to influence the organisation through decision making.

An equally important study finding is that of initiating the supervisory/monitoring board as the panacea to affirmative implementation challenges. It is established in the study that such an initiative allows for accountability, influencing human conduct to be within the confines of the policy since there are monitoring mechanisms in place. This is an important finding, and especially if we consider that when human beings not supervised then the possibility of straying or circumventing the required affirmative practices is high. Within this premise, at least to certain extent, it could be agreed that a supervisory and monitoring board is crucial in realising affirmative action practice. This finding was not established in the literature consulted for this study.

The study still found training and development was a must as all participants recommended that they should be training programmes on affirmative action often to sensitise all employees on its importance and purpose in the DGS. It is important to note here again that through training, knowledge of affirmative action could be enhanced. The above finding also coincides with Biazotto (2022), who argued that establishing training programmes (that may include on and off-the-job training), workshops and awareness meetings may ensure that everyone in the organisation contributes to the goal of the organisation. The author further elaborated that programmes such as yearly trainings, the reporting on the institutional structure and the decisions taken by those in positions of power are among the strategies proven to work well in implementing affirmative action (Biazotto, 2022).

5. LIMITATIONS

The first limitation was in relation to the research approach. Since the study adopted a qualitative study, only a few participants took part in the study. Furthermore, other directorates and departments were excluded from taking part in the study. However, this limitation was addressed to a reasonable extent by involving participants with three and more years of experience in the study area. This was important, especially considering that those that dominated the study were those in leadership positions with the responsibility to ensure affirmative action is implemented.

The second limitation was in relation to the sampling method. As already stated, the study employed purposive sampling, where a researcher used her judgment to recommend suitable participants for the study. Therefore, others were excluded, including those with a negative relationship with the researchers; this may have a bearing impact on the study since those left out could have contributed to the attainment of the study objectives.

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The primary objective of the present study was to investigate the implementation of the Affirmative Act as a tool for equal employment opportunities. The study results show that the problem exists. The study further concludes that no measures are put in place to promote effective affirmative implementations, hence the reason why the Affirmative Action policy is ineffective. There is also confirmation that the study results, in some cases, merged with those from literature. By adopting the following recommendations, affirmative action practices may yield meaningful impacts.

The study recommends the following based on the study findings:

- It is recommended that mentoring and coaching programmes be introduced to the DGS and to the entire ministry regarding affirmative practices to promote acceptable equity practices for all employees.
- The study also recommends the initiation of a supervisory/monitoring board on implementing affirmative action to promote adherence.
- Further, training should continue and include affirmative action and thus expose members to issues related to affirmative action implementation.

Recommendations for future research are also presented:

- A quantitative study could be undertaken to analyse the implementation of the Affirmative Action in the whole ministry.
- A qualitative comparative study on implementing affirmative action in three selected government ministries in Namibia.



On international implications, the study findings contribute to knowledge in the field of affirmative action, precisely the feminist field. Simultaneously, the results provide global leaders insights on affirmative action practices and shows challenges within Namibia as part of the international community.

The international implications, illustrated in the preceding paragraph, may apply locally. This implies that local leaders within the DGS and nationally may learn the challenges and adopt measures as recommended to promote the effective implementation of affirmative action in their respective organisations. In terms of further managerial implications, the study may present local findings and compel managers to initiate strategies to ensure that affirmative action practices are promoted as per national policy. Failure to do that, such conduct may be used to measure the effectiveness of the manager/leaders in particular positions.

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