

# THE OTHER HALF: TOWARDS BETTER UTILIZATION OF WOMEN'S POTENTIAL IN SOUTH AFRICA\*



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*Die noodsaaklike ekonomiese groei in Suid-Afrika vereis dat alle beskikbare bestuurspotensiaal ontwikkel en benut word. Hierdie artikel gee 'n oorsig van statistieke wat betref indiensneming in Suid-Afrika, veral in soverre dit vroue en bestuurslui aangaan. Die aantal vroue in bestuursposte het tussen 1969 en 1977 verdriedubbel — wat 'n aanduiding van die behoefte is, aangesien die getalle van mans, en Asiërs, kleurlinge en swartes in bestuursposte ook gestyg het. Die waarskynlikheid van verhoogde militêre aktiwiteit in Suid-Afrika verhoog ook verder die vraag na en die benutting van vroue sowel in militêre diens as in die privaatsektor.*

## INTRODUCTION

In view of the need for economic growth in South Africa in order to provide work for the country's growing population it is essential that all available human resources be developed in order to meet the future managerial needs of the country. Apart from the growing number of educated blacks, coloureds and Asians, a major underutilized resource is represented by "the other half" of the population, women, who have an educational background similar to that of men of their population group, but are usually either stuck in "typical women's jobs", or are at home managing the household.

The general economic principle of the benefits of better utilization of all human resources regardless of race or sex was well explained by Nobel prizewinning economist Paul A Samuelson. (1) "There is no fixed size to the social pie . . . . Instead, the total of the national output is produced by the cooperation of the factors of production, . . . (including) human endowments as modified by training and education." As a country gains new manpower, for example by increased female participation, "the same land and compliment of capital assets can produce a larger social pie."

## HUMAN RESOURCES NEEDS OF SOUTH AFRICA

### Past and present: Managerial resources

Traditionally and up to the present, South Africa has largely drawn its managers, both in the private and the public sectors, from the white male population. It has virtually become a cliché that "four million whites are carrying 20 million non-whites".

If one looks more closely at the "four million whites", it becomes clear that not even all of them are capable of, or involved in, much of the "carrying". Only about half-a-million of the whites are males with Standard 10 or higher educational qualifications. According to the 1970 census, 462 091 white males and 394 739 white females had Standard 10 or higher qualifications. (2) Considering that the current white population is estimated at between 4 250 000 and 4 500 000, the corresponding figures would now probably be about 550 000 males and about 470 000 females.

Regarding the occupational category "Managerial, administrative and executive", the figures (3, p 6); (4) in Table 1 show a marked growth in the proportion of white females to white males between 1969 and 1977. The real numbers of males continued to increase steadily in spite of the percentage gain of women. The number of women in this category, however, trebled in only eight years. (The percentages do not add up to 100% because white males or females are shown as a percentage of the total number of whites, blacks, coloureds and Asians in this category.) Employment of whites in this category appears in Table 1.

Table 1  
Employment of white males and females in managerial category

Year	Males	Percentage of total	Females	Percentage of total
1969	72 891	90.65%	5 277	6.56%
1975	114 461	86.5%	10 389	7.82%
1977	122 853	85.77%	15 535	10.85%

\* Second in a series of three articles on the utilization of the managerial potential of women.

Table 2

South Africa: Numbers of different races and sexes in four employment categories, 1969 and 1975

Occupations	Whites				Blacks				Coloureds/Asians			
	1969		1975		1969		1975		1969		1975	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
1. Professional	113 399	54 799	161 855	81 481	24 037	33 613	48 139	70 003	14 700	13 059	22 318	21 073
2. Managerial	72 891	5 277	114 461	10 389	567	20	3 731	75	1 574	79	3 839	375
3. Clerical	130 737	192 587	136 468	273 201	35 330	1 680	67 975	6 599	30 781	7 935	51 825	27 767
4. Sales	53 217	54 711	69 311	72 648	21 274	3 728	25 884	8 930	13 558	5 125	22 661	17 027

Source: 4.

Table 3

South Africa: Percentages of different races and sexes in four employment categories, 1969 and 1975

Occupations	Whites				Blacks				Coloureds/Asians			
	1969		1975		1969		1975		1969		1975	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
1. Professional	44,71	21,61	39,98	20,13	9,48	13,25	11,89	17,29	5,80	5,15	5,51	5,20
2. Managerial	90,65	6,56	86,15	7,82	0,71	0,02	2,81	0,06	1,96	0,10	2,89	0,28
3. Clerical	32,76	48,26	24,20	48,45	8,85	0,42	12,06	1,17	7,71	1,99	9,19	4,92
4. Sales	35,10	36,09	32,02	33,56	14,03	2,46	11,96	4,13	8,94	3,38	10,47	7,87

Source: 4.

Over the same period there was also a considerable growth in the percentages of black, coloured and Asian males and females in this category, although numbers of incumbents were still low, as can be seen in Tables 2 and 3.

Tables 2 and 3 give the 1969 and 1975 employment figures and percentages of males and females of the different races in Category 2, Managerial, executive and administrative, as well as those in the three other categories which could be connected with, and could possibly feed into managerial positions: Categories 1. Professional, semi-professional and technical; (2. Managerial;); 3. Clerical; and 4. Sales and related work.

It must be borne in mind that most of the women represented by these statistics would tend to be at the bottom end of the "managerial" category, that is "administrative" rather than "executive" since, as statistics given later will indicate, very few women in South Africa actually hold senior or top management positions, although they have started to move upwards. This leaves the task of managing the affairs, services and economy of South Africa largely in the hands of the small white male population.

Considering that many of the white men at matriculation or higher level are involved in occupations other than management, for example education, government service, research and the various professions, it is understandable that South African business is starting to run low on available managerial potential as far as white men are concerned. Virtually every recent study relating to the future "manpower", or rather human resources, needs of South Africa, has proposed that more use will have to be made of educated blacks, coloureds and Asians, and also of white women.

#### Employment rates of women

The numbers of South African white women who are economically active have increased steadily since the early 1950s, with a remarkable increase in the proportion of married women in the workforce.

The labour force participation rate of married women increased from 11,3% of the total of white married women in 1951, to 19,4% in 1960, and then to 27,9% in 1970. (5) Participation rates of divorced women went from 67,9% in 1960 to 71,3% in 1970; while 20,4% and 23,5% of all widows worked in 1960 and 1970 respectively. (6, 7)

The female labour force participation rate increased from 29,2% of all white women in 1960, to 35,5% in 1970. (8)

The number of white women employed as a proportion of the total labour force is also increasing. According to the Department of Labour, the total number of white women in all occupations excepting artisans and apprentices, increased from 353 555 in 1969 to 485 703 in 1975, that is from 35% of the total of all whites employed in these occupations in 1969, to 39% in 1975 (4). In 1970 34,6% of all employed whites were women. (3, p 32)

These trends agree with world-wide trends and with trends in the United States, where the labour force participation rates for married women, husband present, rose from 30,5% in 1960, to 43% in 1974. (9) Participation rates for never-married and divorced women have always been higher than those for married women, and one source quotes the rates for divorced women of all ages as having risen to 74% in 1974. (10) According to the US Department of Labour, 65% of all divorced and separated women,

and 24% of all widows were in the workforce in 1975. (11)

The proportion of the female population of working age who were in the labour market rose from 33,9% in 1950 to 44,7% in 1973, (12, pp 85–87) and was 46,3% in 1975. (11, p 2) These women represented 40% of the total United States labour force in 1975, that is two out of five workers were women. (11, p 1)

In the United States, the group contributing most to the *increase* of women in the labour force, has been married women with children, (13) particularly between the ages of 25 to 44 years, (14) and this trend is expected to continue. This again compares closely with trends shown in a breakdown of South African female labour force participation rates according to age, including a projection of rates in 1981. Table 4 shows that the largest increase between 1960 and 1970 was in the 40–44 age group, and this pattern is expected to continue. In all age groups between 25 and 49 rapid increases have occurred, and are expected to be even larger in the near future — with a slightly lower increase rate in the 30–34 age group, probably caused by mothers who still have young children at home.

This trend indicates that women, particularly mature and married women, are likely to continue to participate in the South African labour force at an increasing rate.

Table 4

Female Labour force participation rates according to age, with projection of rates for South Africa, 1981

Age	Base period		Target year
	1960	1970	1981
15–19	33.08	33.23	33.39
20–24	50.49	58.11	66.49
25–29	31.03	39.60	49.03
30–34	28.29	35.58	43.60
35–39	28.66	37.19	46.57
40–44	28.52	39.35	51.26
45–49	28.75	37.74	47.63
50–54	26.41	33.50	41.30
55–59	25.20	28.19	31.48
60–64	14.82	18.70	22.97
65–69	7.89	11.02	14.46
70–74	4.74	5.50	6.34
Average	29.18	35.52	42.16

Source: 8.

#### Future needs: The role of white women and of other races

The Office of the Economic Advisor to the Prime Minister, in its 1976–1981 Economic Development Programme, (15) stated that a minimum Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth of 5% would be required in this period in order to ward off an increase in the unemployment rate. Based on an estimated

2,2% annual growth of the GDP per worker, this would require a 2,7% annual increase in the economically active population, total for all races. This was broken down into the following growth percentages: 2,4 for whites; 3,2 for coloureds; 3,0 for Asians; and 2,7 for blacks.

If, as many people fear and as will be discussed in more detail later in this paper, military activity particularly in the border areas should increase in the next few years, an increasing proportion of the projected 2,4% of the growth in white employment would probably have to be represented by women. Thousands of young men have already been withdrawn from the regular labour market to do military service, now for an extended period of 24 months.

In a manpower planning study published in 1975 with projections of labour force supply and demand in 1980, a serious shortage of manpower with a high educational level was forecast, this shortage being particularly marked in the case of white women at virtually every educational level. (16, pp 79–81) Based on the assumption that 1960–71 trends would continue, a shortfall of 59 577 white women was forecast, compared with a shortage of 21 127 white men in 1980. Vermaak gave the following background to this situation: The fairly general shortage of male workers in the late 1960s and early 1970s had led to a sharp increase in the percentage of women in the labour force. The percentages of female professional, semi-professional and clerical workers had increased, while the percentages of female sales, service and production workers and artisans had decreased. The greatest demand for white women occurred in the Services and Financing sector (58,9%), the Commercial sector (21,8%) and the Manufacturing sector (11,1%), most of these positions requiring at least Standard 8 or a higher educational level. (16, p 28) The lower level jobs, those in which the percentage of white women had decreased, had largely been taken over by black, coloured and Asian workers. Vermaak compared projected labour demand and supply in South Africa in 1980, according to population group and sex, and also according to educational level. Relevant to the topic of this paper is his projected shortfall of 60 000 white women, 41 500 of these with an education of Standard 10 or higher. (16, pp 77 & 80)

Vermaak suggested a number of possibilities to counter the projected shortage of human resources: (16, p 90)

- \* Restructuring of the labour force to allow greater use of blacks, coloureds and Asians, thereby increasing the supply of whites for other posts
- \* Greater use of white women
- \* Increased immigration
- \* A lower rate of economic growth.

Regarding the first proposal, the restructuring of the labour force and greater use of other racial groups is already occurring since both government and industry

are desegregating jobs previously held by whites at an increasing pace. The government has also announced the abolition of virtually all legislation on "job reservation", which should further speed up the desegregation process.

Concerning Vermaak's third and fourth suggestions, the basic assumptions for this forecast included an average annual growth rate of 6,4% in the GDP, and an annual immigration gain of 20 000 in the white population. (16, p 4) Due to the extended recession in 1976-77, the GDP growth was lower than expected, and for a follow-up of this study recently completed, a GDP growth of 5% was assumed. (17) The effect of the lower economic growth rate will to some extent decrease the demand for labour. At the same time the immigration gain assumption of the previous study had to be changed, and in the new study forecasts were done on the basis of zero immigration gain, 10 000 and 20 000 immigration gain, because there has been a severe drop in immigration figures due to political uncertainty and unrest in 1976-77. Mention has even been made of the possibility of emigration if the political situation should deteriorate. These factors would probably cause a considerable decrease in the currently projected supply of white labour, particularly in the higher levels, and it is likely that some of these gaps will have to be filled by white women not currently in the labour market, as well as by men and women from the other population groups.

#### INCREASED EMPLOYMENT OF WHITE WOMEN

Vermaak's second suggestion for meeting the country's future human resources needs was to increase the use of white women, particularly on the higher educational levels. This is also the main concern of this paper. Vermaak mentioned several problems which would require attention if the participation rate of women were to be increased from the 36% at the time of his 1975 study, to the 43% which would be required if the shortage of 60 000 white females projected for 1980 were to be filled entirely from the white female population. (16, p 91) The problems said to be keeping women out of the labour force include:

- \* the present taxation system
- \* the lack of part-time jobs
- \* family responsibilities.

These problems have been discussed in two other papers by the author, (18; 19) along with other problems which affect both working women in South Africa, and women who wish to enter employment.

A feature in the *Financial Mail* (20) on the future of South Africa also refers to the severe deficits faced by South Africa, in both skilled and managerial workers. "Nobody disputes that by 1980 there will be at least 300 000 vacancies\* in the professional, technical, managerial and administrative categories." Urgent attention to education of people of all races is suggested as a longer-term solution, but the more

immediate source suggested to fill this critical gap is "the economically *inactive* university trained reservoir among white women", who could be drafted into the economy.

#### White women: Possible employment competition for other races

One concern which is frequently mentioned in regard to the increasing participation of white women in employment is that one of the main priorities in South Africa is, and should remain, the creation of more jobs for the black, coloured and Asian groups. It is then said that white women, whose husbands are employed, should not take jobs which could have been filled by non-white family heads, particularly at a time when unemployment problems exist. In 1977/78 after three years of a cyclical down-phase, which had become the deepest recession since the early 1930s, some 35 000 coloureds, Asians and whites (over 1% of the relevant labour force) were registered as unemployed. At the same time estimates for black unemployment varied between 600 000 and nearly 2 000 000.

If the projected population growth in the different population groups is considered, this problem appears even larger. A leading demographer, Sadie, estimated with the 1970 census as a base that the country's population in 1975 totalled 25,25 million, of whom 70% were blacks, 17% whites, 10% coloureds and 3% Asians. (21) The projected population for 1980 is 29,05 million, comprising 71% blacks, 16% whites, 10% coloureds and 3% Asians, while for the 50,29 million population forecast for the year 2000, the corresponding percentages are 74%, 14%, 10% and 2%.

A significant implication of this change in the population composition is (21) "that the pool for drawing on entrepreneurial initiative and managerial responsibility will decline in relative size if it continues to be confined to the white and, in growing but limited numbers, the Asian population groups. In 1970 the combined pool was 20,3% of the total population: by the year 2000 it is projected to be 16,1%: and by 2020 it will have dwindled to 13%. It follows that either GDP per head will rise at a slower rate than would otherwise have been possible or else the participation of blacks and coloureds in positions of responsibility will need to be encouraged."

As the above indicates the future need for entrepreneurial and managerial potential will be so great if the economy is to be kept going in the interests of all, that the better utilization of the talents of white women in this field need not threaten the future employment of people of other racial groups, but could contribute towards creating more job opportunities by providing a stable source of middle management potential.

If the Vermaak study of manpower supply and demand is scrutinised more closely and educational level is taken into consideration, (16, pp 77-89) it also

\* This figure is considerably higher than Vermaak's projections.

becomes clear that increased employment of white women need not be in conflict with that of most blacks, coloureds and Asians, due to the difference in educational level. The major shortage of white women (for 1980) has been identified on the educational level Standard 8 and upwards. Shortages of Asian men and women, and of coloured and black women, are projected on these levels. The only two groups where surpluses are forecast on these levels are coloured and black men, mainly with a Standard 8, 9 or 10 educational level. Their underemployment is a large problem, which lies outside the scope of this study; but since it is regarded as unlikely that white women will come forward to the degree needed to fill the projected 1980 shortfall of 60 000, many black or coloured men might move into some of these positions, providing they are geographically where the jobs are — more so now since virtually all job reservation legislation has fallen away.

From the news media and from personal interviews with executives in several organizations it appears that the same pattern is developing in South Africa as has occurred in the United States, namely that the "minority groups" of women and blacks are moving into and upwards in companies at about the same time and pace, increasingly filling jobs which were previously the domain of white men. However slow this pace is, there is a growing consciousness that the abilities of both groups must be developed. In fact, many South African companies have specific plans and programmes to promote the development and acceptance of blacks in new positions, while very few have such programmes for women.

The fact that shortages are also forecast in the case of black, coloured and Asian women on the higher educational levels, (16, pp 83, 86, 89) could be related to experience in the United States that educated black women tend to be more career oriented and therefore generally in greater demand than black men, or in some cases white women. (22) The reasons given for this in the United States include the facts that black women are more frequently heads of families than white women and therefore have to take full career responsibility; and that socio-economically black women grow up with the idea of working for the larger part of their lives, and therefore have less prejudices in themselves and in others to overcome concerning their entering employment. One in eight of all families in the United States are female-headed, while one in three of all black families in the United States have female heads. Other factors in the career success of black women in the United States which do, however, not apply in South Africa, are the higher educational level of American black women, and the fact that under Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action programmes enforced by United States law, black women are "double counted" for quota purposes, that is both as a woman and as a black, in companies' minority group promotion programmes.

This also casts an interesting light on a paragraph in Van der Merwe's book on the South African business environment: (23) "There is a small but rapidly growing professional, entrepreneurial and managerial coloured group. More than 25 000 coloureds occupy professional and technical positions, and a few also hold administrative posts. Unlike other population groups nearly 60% of these jobs are occupied by women, almost double the percentage in respect of white women."

In a lecture in 1962 on the human resources of South Africa, (24) Biesheuvel called for a new approach to employment policy in order to fully utilize all available human resources.

Although he was referring mainly to the utilization of non-white labour, several of the statements could well also apply to the increased utilization of women. He quoted Brown and Harbison on newly industrializing countries: (25) "There are many factors which bear upon a country's potential for industrial development ... availability of natural resources, the ability to attract and to accumulate capital, the creation of a stable government and the availability of labour ... . Yet in many respects the really critical factor is that of attracting, accumulating and developing the high-level human resources which modern industrialization unconditionally demands ... . Managerial resources are probably the principal element determining the productivity of labour, assuming that capital and natural resources are constant."

#### **Military considerations and the utilization of women**

A recent statement by Maj-Gen Neil Webster (26) neatly summarises the situation discussed so far: "People are available and have the brainpower to fill top and middle management positions. Only 15% of our population is suitable for this, and more than half of these are women. Now is the time to start training women to fill these positions — if by 1985 we have not done so we shall be in serious trouble as far as management is concerned. We need to make better use of women both in civilian and military life."

This also leads us to consider a very important factor which has to be added to the manpower considerations mentioned above. Military activity increases the demand for working women in two ways:

- \* directly, due to the employment of women in the defence force at an increasing rate, frequently in jobs previously held by men.
- \* indirectly by drawing women into positions in the public and private sectors, filling the places of men withdrawn from the regular labour force to do military service.

#### **Women in the Defence Force**

From interviews with a senior officer involved in manpower planning the following was established: (27)

The South African Defence Force is looking very positively at the increased employment of women, particularly white women, due to the shortage of white men, and also in order to enable women to defend themselves physically. A large number of job categories have been identified where the sex of the incumbent is not of vital importance, and as far as possible these are being filled by women, in order to free men for positions for which women are less suitable for practical and physical reasons. Table 3.5 indicates the present and potential use of women in the Defence Force:

Table 3.5  
Utilization of women in the SA Defence Force

Section	Women employed in Nov. 1977	Number of positions suitable for women
Army	418	1 600
Air Force	181	1 300
Medical Corps	458	902
Navy	174	460
Staff Divisions	281	600
Total	1 512	4 862

Source: 27

Besides this shortfall of over 3 000 women — which is expected to take a number of years of active recruitment to fill — large numbers of women could also be used well in the commando system and in civil defence. There is growing interest among young girls in military training, and in the seven years since the Civil Defence College for women was started, applications increased from 236 in 1971 to 580 in 1977. The approach of this institution has now been broadened, the name changed to the SA Army Women College and the intake increased considerably. For 1978 and 1979, however, applications dropped somewhat to 540 and 480 respectively.

Although compulsory national service for women is not considered at this stage, the Defence Force has a very positive approach to the recruitment, development and promotion of women on a voluntary basis. From February 1973 to July 1977, women as a percentage of the total Defence Force increased from 0,6% to 5,9%. By October 1978 this proportion had further increased to 7,01%. Two women hold the rank of brigadier, there are five colonels wearing skirts, and 581 women holding other ranks. Besides a total of 1638 women in uniform, Defence has 7 675 posts for civilian women, 4 579 of which were filled in November 1978.

The situation in the United States offers an interesting comparison. Although the US military forces were racially integrated in the 1940s (probably largely due to the demands of the Second World War), integration on sex lines has only taken place in the past few years. (22) The participation rate of women in the US forces increased from 1% to 5% in the 1970s.

### Effect of military activity on civilian employment of women

Throughout history women have frequently played an important role in times of military activity, sometimes participating actively as in the tales of Herodotus and the Amazons of Dahomey, (28, p 93) or in the Second World War and currently in Israel. But their more important role has been that of "home support", stepping in to fill the gaps left by men in active service. This repeated economic activity of women outside their traditional home role has made an important contribution towards the development and acceptance of the economic role of the women in peace time as well, although there has always been a withdrawal of women from the labour force after each war.

"Experiences during wartime also led women to reassess themselves. Sexuality, political power, and economic capabilities all become salient issues when women are expected to forgo a sex life and, at the same time, assume political and economic responsibilities that have been the usual province of men. At such times, women are needed as a labour force — pulled into the factory and office during wartime, and pushed out when men can replace them; although the movement of married women into the labour force appears to be a long-term gradual trend that is only magnified by war. By these labour force activities, women learn they are capable of doing 'man's work', while employers recognize a source of labour far cheaper than men." (12, p 44) There are usually many handicaps and problems in creating policies and facilities to enable a woman to combine her career and household responsibilities, but (referring to the United States) "this was not so during the war when women were needed. All kinds of innovations were offered and accepted with minimal fuss ... When the nation needed Rosie the Riveter, working women became the new paradigm, utilization of child-care centres a patriotic duty. After the war, nobody ever heard of such a thing." (29, pp 56, 117)

After the First World War both the proportion of women university graduates in the United States, and of working married women increased. (12, p 45) But soon the Great Depression followed and thousands of women, having the vote but not political or economic equality, "were left unemployed, only to find that government relief and public works projects almost always gave jobs to men". The same happened in Germany when Hitler again imposed the Napoleonic ideal of "Küche, Kirche, Kinder" on the German women who had been emancipated by the war. (28,p 147) With millions of men out of work, and family life upset while women provided cheap labour, there was a strong movement "back to the home". (29, p 375) An example is the national Man's Legion which was established in the United States, seeking to make it unlawful for a woman to hold any job a man might hold. But when the Second World War came along women were again needed. "It knocked our program

on its ear, you might say", the general secretary of this legion said explaining their lack of success. (29, p 13)

It appears that in the same way women are now needed, and may be needed increasingly, in the South African economy.

## CONCLUSION

Up to the present, the South African economy has been managed mainly by white males, but if the economy is to expand at the same pace as the rapidly-growing population, new sources of managerial talent will have to be found. Educated white women could make an important contribution in this field, along with educated people of other population groups. White women are already moving into the labour market, and into higher-level jobs, at an increasing pace. This trend is expected to continue due to a shortage of about 60 000 white women in the labour force forecast for 1980. If military activity in South Africa should escalate, this could further increase the demand for, and the economic activity of South African women.

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