

ABSTRACT

25 years into democracy, Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (B-BBEE) policy meets outrage and discontent in the political and public discourse which suggests that more Small-Micro and Medium Enterprises (SMMEs) need to be empowered, especially black owned Exempted Micro Enterprises (EMEs). This situation is even more dire for sectors that are refusing to transform such as the ICT Sector. Meanwhile the state made it a point that Black owned EMEs become automatic potential beneficiaries of B-BBEE's economic opportunities. Within these EMEs black women, youth and the vulnerable peoples' businesses seem to lag, calling for government to put emphasis on empowering them.

This research investigates the role of B-BBEE policy in advancing EMEs as an objective of its policy, focusing on those that operate in the Information and Communications Technology ICT sector. The main aim of B-BBEE policy is to reduce unemployment and inequality that was perpetuated by the previous apartheid government.

Through interviews done, the study captures experiences and perceptions of black women owned EMEs in the (ICT) sector. Other interviews were done with key informants from the Department of Trade, Industry and Competition (DTIC) and the B-BBEE Commission. The ICT sector is used as a case study to explore and understand EMEs' experiences of B-BBEE policies.

The paper makes use of three themes that are vital to explore the role of B-BBEE policy in advancing EMEs as an objective of its policy as envisaged at the creation of the policy. These themes are i) affirmative action, ii) empowerment and transformation and iii) business regulations and policies. These themes assist us to understand the theory behind the failure of the policy from both policy makers and beneficiaries. The paper will show that the policy does not advance EMEs, it rather reproduces inequality.

Key Words: SMME, EME, Affirmative Action, Empowerment, ICT, B-BBEE