

Press Release

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Media Contact: Mienke Steytler Tel: 011-482-7221 Ext 2003 Email: mienke@sairr.org.za

Time to consider new models of affirmative action

This week the IRR released an *@Liberty* policy paper on affirmative action. The paper deals with the need for a non-racial form of affirmative action in employment instead of the present race-based system.

The authors, Advocate Mark Oppenheimer and analyst Cecelia Kok, argue that the current race-based policy of affirmative action is an ineffective way of seeking to address past wrongs. They write that race is no longer an accurate proxy for disadvantage, given the number of upwardly mobile 'black' people who have prospered since 1994. Hence, the use of race in deciding who should be given preferential treatment by employers is now likely to result in already wealthy people being given an unnecessary leg-up.

They also argue that the present affirmative action policy may deny the benefits of valuable skills (engineering ones, for instance) to poor people, which may leave them without access to clean water and proper sanitation. This situation serves to entrench rather than diminish disadvantage.

Write Oppenheimer and Kok: "Ironically, the main victims of race-based affirmative action are not the 'whites' who may be excluded from job appointments but the 'black' and marginalised majority."

For these and other reasons, the authors urge that South Africa shift to 'equal opportunity' affirmative action, which would be race-neutral in its approach and more effective in overcoming the lingering consequences of past discrimination.

You can read the full paper [here](#).

Ends.
