

# Masiphephe Network

## Meaningful Involvement of the Private Sector in Women Economic Empowerment and Recuring Gender Based Violence:



A Case Study on the South African  
Breweries' Support of Women Entrepreneurs

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## SYNOPSIS

This case study concerns how the private sector has meaningfully contributed to the reduction of Gender Based Violence (GBV) and Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE). The case study explores how corporates can invest in women sustainably to enable them to contribute to a nation's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The case study highlights strategies that promote women beyond empowering women to just stay in the informal sector to active benefit and involvement as entrepreneurs thereby armouring them to be economically independent and in some cases avoid staying in abusive relationships. The case study explores how South African Breweries, through its Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programme and other initiatives, has empowered women economically over the years. The SAB Foundation looks for innovative products, services, business models and processes that directly address the challenges faced by low-income women, youth, people living with disabilities, or people living in rural areas.

## INTRODUCTION

Women and youth in entrepreneurship are critical levers for economic growth and development, both in South Africa and other African/Developing countries. Research evidence indicates that economic participation by women has wide-reaching impacts on and long-term benefits for local communities as well as overall economic growth. Notably, a digital divide that disadvantages mainly women and youth in rural areas and the informal economy in African countries continues to exist. The National Strategic Plan for addressing gender-based violence (GBV) in South Africa released by President Ramaphosa on 11 March 2020 directed a very specific call to the private sector to participate in addressing this issue. The economic cost of GBV to South Africa has been estimated at between R28.4 and R42.4 billion (KPMG, 2014). Still, there has been little evidence of widespread successful GBV interventions (Abrahams, Mathews, Martin Lombard & Jewkes, 2013).

Economic power intentionally transforms the structural foundation of gender-based violence across all spheres, in ways that reshape economic and social norms and value systems to facilitate women to change their lives. Many of these changes require a

term lens, with short term changes that contribute towards more deeply integrating an understanding of the ways in which the economy and other structural drivers shape the nature and experiences of GBV for different women in South Africa. The private sector can therefore be instrumental in supporting initiatives to reduce GBV while empowering women. Support minimises traumatisation associated with criminal justice processes by providing the economic muscle to access the justice system and leave abusive relationships.

## BACKGROUND

The injustice and stigma sometimes attached to GBV survivors has often caused the pandemic to be viewed as a private matter that the private sector did not wish to get involved in. While there has been a shift on this in recent year, private sector has been urged to intervene as part of their social responsibility and the long-term economic effects of GBV. Private sector therefore has an opportunity to provide preventive action against GBV, but also to harness business opportunities through empowering women survivors of GBV.

The National Strategic Plan on GBV and Femicide (NSPGBVF) Pillar Five on Economic Power highlights important aspects of linking GBV and WEE. These are:

- Accelerated initiatives that address women’s unequal economic and social position, through access to government and private sector procurement, employment, housing, access to land, financial resources and income other generating initiatives;
- Safe workplaces that are free of violence against women and LGBTQIA+ persons, including but not limited to sexual harassment;
- Demonstrated commitment through policy interventions, by the South African state, private sector and other key stakeholders to eliminate the impact of economic drivers of GBV;
- Strengthened child maintenance and related support systems to address the economic vulnerability of women.

The concepts of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and the relationship between organisations and society had evolved and placed an increasing emphasis on organisations’ accountability for not addressing issues that affect society including gender equality (Holmström 2006). Recent theoretical developments in the fields of organisation

studies and strategic communication place great emphasis on human centeredness and on the achievement of the GSOs, as shown by Galpin, Whittington and Bell (2015).

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is the commitment of businesses to act ethically and contribute to the social and environmental well-being of their stakeholders and communities. CSR programs can have a positive social impact by addressing issues such as poverty, health, education, human rights, diversity, and climate change. However, implementing CSR programs is not without challenges, especially in the context of risk management.

There are four major policies affecting CSR in South Africa, although there are additional policies (e.g., the Occupational Health and Safety Act) that specify health, safety, and wellness requirements for corporate employees. The King Reports I (1994), II (2002), III (2009) and IV(2016) set the broad framework, establishing a code of ethical corporate conduct including encouraging investments in broader social and environment welfare. The Company Act of 2008 (amended in 2011) creates a CSR monitoring function through required Social and Ethics Committees. The Johannesburg Stock Exchange (JSE) Social Responsibility Index rewards social responsibility with “best performer” rankings. The Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (B-BBEE) Act of 2003 provides concrete targets across a broad checklist of activities which includes socioeconomic development activities . Collectively, the CSR policies act as a catalyst for companies to act as responsible corporate citizens, invest in their communities, support South Africa’s racial transformation agenda, and care for the health of their employees.

## CASE STUDY DETAILS

The South African Breweries Foundation (SAB Foundation) supports businesses that primarily benefit women and youth, people in rural areas and people with a disability. The Foundation provides a continuous journey of support for entrepreneurs and social innovators, with the aim of creating and building sustainable businesses, that support job creation, help address social issues and build communities. As part of this journey, these individuals and small businesses have access to funding, business skills development, tailored mentorship, and assistance with access to markets and finance. The programmes are designed to help take our entrepreneurs from ideation to growth and beyond.

South African Breweries fosters economically sustainable opportunities that are inclusive and enable entrepreneurs to gain access to opportunities. Through its entrepreneurship

programmes, SAB supports entrepreneurs on their journey and shows commitment to providing a tangible and sustainable future for all South Africans.

Amongst other initiatives, SAB a business that is continuously geared towards a more inclusive and diverse environment for employees, especially women, celebrates International Women's Day annually. The SAB Foundation Trust has committed over R151 million to support 355 enterprises, and 2686 entrepreneurs since 2010. The SAB Foundation has clearly made gender equality a pillar of CSR policy with 70% women entrepreneurs benefitting from its programmes.

## CHALLENGES

**Multiple roles of women** - One of the most significant challenges women entrepreneurs in South Africa encounter is the need to wear multiple hats. Many women find themselves in single-headed households, where there is often a lack of support. Juggling the responsibilities of business ownership and family life can be incredibly demanding and can significantly impact their business operations.

**Building resilience** - While majority of women in small businesses and entrepreneurs are often forced to find innovative solutions to overcome the multitude of serious challenges in the country, the SAB Foundation entrepreneurial programme steers them towards showing resilience and succeeding in building sustainable businesses, and in turn, creating jobs. The Foundation reflects a business survival rate of over 90% over five years and that these entrepreneurs have achieved a combined revenue of half a billion rand from 2015 to March 2023. At least 70% of these businesses are women owned.

**Load shedding and safety** – the obvious impact of loadshedding on women's safety as well as economic empowerment is devastating. Women entrepreneurs and small business owners are having to look to alternative solutions to tackle this challenge in order to keep their businesses afloat. In the case of the entrepreneurs that the SAB Foundation supports, this has meant that many have had to use the grant funding their business receives from the foundation. Many of the SAB Foundation entrepreneurs, including women were able to use their grant funding to source alternative power solutions, such as invertors or solar, and this allowed them to continue operations as normal, generate an income and provide job security for their employees.

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Access to growth funding - Many women entrepreneurs find that access to further funding after an initial start-up grant poses a significant challenge for them. Most business owners pour all of their energy into making their business succeed, only to fall at the final hurdle when they should be scaling and growing their enterprises to the next level.

Mentorship and skills development - Many women entrepreneurs have shared that they often struggle with their cash flow, access to markets, business evaluation processes, costing and pricing, as well as supply chain management. The women entrepreneurs reported that they had no one to go to for advice or to encourage them to succeed, and they felt unmotivated, overwhelmed and lonely. The Foundation will focus on one-on-one mentorship which is necessary for the business owners.

## FINDINGS

SAB Foundation's Executive Director, Bridgit Evans, says that entrepreneurship knows no gender. It is a realm where intellect and ability prevail, transcending the boundaries of gender. The director believes that women entrepreneurs play a pivotal role in driving economic development, job creation, innovation and social change. However, the Foundation has not turned a blind eye to the very real challenges that South African women entrepreneurs face daily.

The Foundation is one of the few private sector entities to offer psychosocial support to women. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the SAB Foundation recognised the profound impact the crisis had on entrepreneurs. To address this, they introduced the RESTORE Programme, designed to provide trauma counselling and support to SAB Foundation entrepreneurs grappling with the aftermath of the pandemic, civil unrest and ongoing economic challenges. The programme included group workshops led by a clinical psychologist, as well as personal virtual counselling sessions provided by SAB Foundation partners. This initiative underscores the foundation's commitment to holistic support for entrepreneurs facing unprecedented challenges.

The SAB Foundation acknowledges the gender disparities that women face in accessing venture capital including cases of GBV in some cases. The male-dominated financial services industry needs serious reform and a re-evaluation of the country's venture capital landscape to not prejudice women entrepreneurs as well as to offer business growth support

based on merit Even though women entrepreneurs receive business skills development training and other forms of support, they often find themselves neglected when it comes to enterprise development support, and struggle to secure sound venture capital. Prioritising women in entrepreneurship can create substantial opportunities, subsequently leading to positive impacts on the economy and society at large, including reduction of GBV.

When women entrepreneurs receive proper investment and support, their businesses naturally flourish as there is the substantial purchasing power held by women. By neglecting to tap into this potential market, businesses miss out on a significant economic opportunity. The economic potential that women entrepreneurs represent need to be seized by businesses. The Foundation has embraced gender equity, fostering inclusivity, and supporting women in entrepreneurship thereby keeping women in productive roles compared to reproductive roles. This focus drives economic growth and positive social change, thus working towards a more equitable future for the country.

It is usually a challenge for many women to move from the informal economy to the formal economy and eventually to becoming business owners due to some challenges in starting a business in the country. South Africa should be the easiest country in Africa to start a business on account of its well-developed infrastructure - not the hardest. South Africa ranks 131st on the ease of starting a business index. It ranks 111th in getting electricity services connected. South Africa should engage in a massive deregulation of the startup ecosystem process for all sectors of the population.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

South Africa is an entrepreneurial leader in sub-Saharan Africa yet still grapples with increasing levels of GBV. The country has made significant progress to overcome structural factors and produce some of the most innovative and successful enterprises on the continent including focusing on women empowerment. The country provides the institutional support necessary for high-growth businesses led by women to emerge and thrive, while government policies work to close historical gaps. With the addition of targeted, coordinated policies to address remaining bottlenecks, there is possibility of reducing GBV whilst achieving greater women led economic growth through entrepreneurship. As with all entrepreneurship ecosystems, some bottlenecks do remain – in South Africa’s case these are large-firm dominance, patriarchy, cultural perceptions of entrepreneurship, and structural inequality. The SAB Foundation, through promoting entrepreneurship is not an economic empowerment programmes to address the symptoms but addresses



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the underlying systemic causes of women's economic disadvantage. Entrepreneurship targeted at women is a meaningful way that the private sector can use to reduce GBV and empower women. The private sector can therefore play its part in social responsibility by:

- Recognising GBV as an issue that affects employees – it is likely that one out of three women in any organisational setting will experience some kind of GBV in their lifetime. It is therefore imperative for private sector organisations to recognise these facts and to acknowledge the likelihood that perpetrators and victims are most probably among their employees.
- Create platforms for employees to engage on GBV issues - Employee wellbeing programmes can raise awareness of GBV issues and provide information on where to go or what to do if it happens.
- Address gender inequality more rigorously - Private sector organisations need to reflect on their communication to all stakeholders, including employees, to ensure that no gender stereotyping or perceptions that influence societal values, norms and attitudes condoning GBV can be communicated in its content.
- Publicly express disapproval of any kind of GBV - This should include any kind of GBV, such as sexual harassment in the workplace as well as in the private lives of individuals. Programmes and partnerships with other stakeholders should be communicated in CSR reports to demonstrate how they serve the best interests of all stakeholders (creating shared value) in finding solutions to address GBV in South Africa.
- Participate in GBV policy development - It is also important for the private sector to engage in dialogue with other stakeholders and to establish multi-sectoral platforms on which to collaborate in finding solutions for GBV intervention. Even though such actions will, admittedly, require resources, the cost of no action for South Africa has been made abundantly clear in the NSP for South Africa.
- Provide the necessary resources to address GBV – The private sector organisations need to dedicate appropriate financial and human resources to design and implement a holistic workplace response to GBV, in particular and that they build understanding and a supportive environment. The business community should create strategic executive committees on gender equality as a way of demonstrating commitment from the very top.
- Support women's economic growth from informal to formal - Legitimise a pathway to formal entrepreneurship in the informal sector. It is important for enterprises to be able to become a part of the formal economy in order to grow the businesses and ensure that firms pay taxes. However, entering the formal economy should

not and cannot be a burden on SMEs. Some people are self employed in the informal sector because they want to avoid registration and taxation. But many people work in the informal sector through necessity, not choice. Today, there are two features of the informal sector that are well recognised. Firstly, much of the informal economy contributes greatly to the formal economy. Secondly, women constitute the majority of precarious, underpaid, informal workers.

- Focus on education - A country that has the demographic structure of South Africa should make education the number-one priority for all of South Africans. This is not a quick fix but it is the only policy that cannot be ignored.
- Addressing gender norms that affect WEE - These are norms related to unpaid care work, control of resources and economic decision-making, GBV, respectability, honour and mobility.

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Our programme encourages inclusive GBV interventions through strategic policy advocacy, community-led collaborative and supportive multi-sectoral partnerships, building awareness and promoting behaviour change; to shift GBV social norms and empower women and girls to be able to achieve their full potential.

**BREAK THE SILENCE, CALL 0800 428 428 (GBV COMMAND CENTRE) TO**

**REPORT AND GET GBV SUPPORT.**

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