

# Leveraging corporate resources in the fight against GBV

By [Kusile Munzi-Hairwadzi](#)

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When former first lady of the United States Michelle Obama remarked that: "Any man who uses his strength to oppress women is a coward, and he is holding back the progress of his family and his country," she could easily have been referring to the horrific incidents of femicide and gender-based violence in South Africa.



Kusile Munzi-Hairwadzi, general manager: MTN SA Foundation

It is disheartening that South Africa is a country where the rate of femicide is five times higher than the global average, according to the UN's World Health Organisation (WHO). WHO estimates that 12.1 in every 100,000 women are victims of femicide in the country every year.

## Gender-based violence a national crisis

In September this year, we saw the South African government declaring gender-based violence a national crisis, and with the 16 Days of Activism for No Violence against Women and Children campaign underway, the news cycle continues to shine a spotlight on more recent horrific acts that have been perpetrated.

It is also hardly surprising that hundreds of thousands of women (and men) have taken to social media and the streets in recent months to express their outrage and highlight the growing risk that the most vulnerable members of our society face each day. While we have seen South Africa rallying behind this issue, it is important that the momentum be sustained - and everyone has a role to play.

But what can corporate South Africa do to contribute meaningfully to creating a society where women are empowered and feel safe, and where the survivors can receive much-needed support? Business in South Africa cannot only be about generating revenue. It also needs to play an active role to ensure that it

becomes a driver of positive change.

## Role of women in the advancement of society

We believe that every organisation should harness its resources and competencies to contribute in the fight against this scourge. At MTN we have a keen awareness of the important role that women play in the advancement of society. It is for this reason that we continuously explore innovative avenues to support and enable women, particularly those who lack the means to empower themselves.

An example of this is MTN's support of Amazwi Abesifazane – Voices of Women Museum (VoWM), a Durban-based non-profit organisation that assists women, in many instances women from rural communities. These women have been given the opportunity to showcase and monetise their craft, by documenting their stories of triumph and loss, elation and sorrow through embroidery.

## Art as a vehicle of resistance

Historically, South Africans have used art as a vehicle of resistance against institutionalised segregation. This has since

evolved to become an instrument that is used to raise awareness about the challenges of important issues like climate change, gender-based violence and the range of socio-economic challenges facing the country.

Though art has a universal appeal, the majority of the population, unfortunately, still lacks access to this. To bring the arts closer to South Africans, MTN has leveraged the power of connectivity and technology to create a realistic 3D virtual tour of the [Voices of Women Museum's Dreams, Wishes, Expectations\\_RECYCLED art installation](#).

Set at the Castle of Good Hope, the curator of the installation, Coral Bijoux, uses 'space' as a device to conjure up themes such as 'access' and 'use' which come accompanied by the power dynamics associated with them. The 3D virtual exhibition features many embroidered personal narratives by women of South Africa. The stories in their pieces – some tragic, others hopeful - remind us of the desire for change and a safe and respectful life.

We believe that not only will this assist in heightening awareness about these important stories, but that this, in some small way, will contribute towards the fight against gender-based violence.

## **Facilitating justice for women**

In addition to supporting women in the arts, we have also put our resources behind Tshwaranang Legal Advocacy Centre to assist the organisation in funding its mandate of facilitating access to justice for women who have experienced, or are at risk of experiencing, gender-based violence.

We also support White Door Centre of Hope (WDCH), an organisation that provides sanctuary to survivors of gender-based violence. To that end, we have refurbished four of their facilities and provided them with ICT infrastructure, furniture and clothing in the Eastern Cape and Mpumalanga.

To get behind this year's 16 Days of Activism campaign, we have once again partnered with the Department of Social Development and ZTE to contribute a multimedia centre to Khanyiselani Development Trust, a registered non-profit in KwaZulu-Natal. This organisation provides for the development and implementation of sustainable holistic and integrated strategies focused on the impact of HIV and Aids – often an unfortunate result of gender-based violence.

## **Moral obligation to contribute**

In addition, MTN is working with Coral Bijoux again to host an embroidery workshop at the Saartjie Baartman Centre for Women and Children in Athlone, Cape Town. This centre was the focus of MTN and ZTE's partnership during last year's 16 Days campaign, which saw the two companies joining forces to establish a 20-seater multimedia centre there. MTN pledged to provide free internet connectivity to power the centre for two years and provided ICT training to the facilitators.

We believe that, through interventions like this, we are helping to provide a much-needed lifeline to the members of society who are at the receiving end of this unwarranted violation of their dignity.

As a responsible corporate citizen, it is our moral obligation to contribute, in whatever way we can, to the significant issues impacting on the people of our country. In words and deeds, we can create a South Africa where women feel safe to walk the streets without fear of being violated, and where our homes become safe havens.

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

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