

WOMEN IN SA MUST SHAPE THEIR OWN SOCIAL ORDER

SOUTH Africa today boasts one of the world's most progressive constitutions, and yet the country's women are still marginalised politically, economically and socially.

Gender-based violence is rife, with some reports indicating a woman is raped every 17 seconds in South Africa.

Indeed, many of our social ills affect women disproportionately.

Young women between the ages of 15 and 24 years are four times more likely to be infected with HIV than their male counterparts. Women are 30% poorer than men.

According to a Careers24 salary survey, men in the corporate sector earn 65% more than their female counterparts.

These statistics attest to the subservient role South African women continue to

**BONGIWE
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occupy in society.

Why have the fortunes of women not changed since 1956, when thousands of women marched on the Union Buildings to protest against the "pass laws" which restricted their movement outside the reserve areas?

Who is responsible for the change?

While several theories can be put forward to explain the status quo, I believe we need to re-examine the role that we play as women in our families and communities in reshaping our future.

The men who rape us are

our fathers, our uncles, neighbours and even our sons. These relations may seem quite diverse, but they have one thing in common: most were raised and nurtured by a woman in their formative years.

Statistics South Africa reveals that 40% of households in South Africa are headed by females.

While I see how the absence of male role models can be used to explain our predicament, it is also a fact that women (whether or not they head the household) tend to be the primary caregivers.

These formative years play an important role in shaping the behaviour and perceptions of children.

Given this advantage, how much are we doing to leverage this influence and lay a foundation for a non-sexist South Africa that effectively uses its women?

Do we still need to march on the Union buildings in 2014? Is there anything we can do differently today, as women raising young girls and boys, to shift the social norms that continue to disadvantage and endanger women?

Soul City Institute (SCI) has over the last 20 years tackled various issues

relating to the emancipation of women, including gender-based violence.

Through social behaviour change communication, SCI has sought to generate discourse about gender roles and challenge the socio-cultural attitudes and perceptions that perpetuate the discrimination, marginalisation and abuse of women.

Although today civil soci-

ety celebrates gains made through collective advocacy work which has seen the enactment of laws that protect women from abuse, much still needs to be done at community, family and individual level to shift entrenched gender perceptions.

This year SCI launched the "Rise Young Women's clubs". The programme seeks to promote social cohesion and build the

resilience and agency of young women to effectively deal with challenges they confront in their lives.

This programme is in response to the realisation that South Africa needs a movement of young women who expect and demand to be respected by their partners, and who can likewise raise respectful young

boys and girls who will continue to affirm the importance of women beyond one day in the calendar.

So as we commemorate 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-based Violence, I challenge all women to think about the influence that they have in shaping and negotiating a new social order for women in South Africa.

I urge all of us to think what impact it has on our daughters' sense of worth and our sons' point of reference when they see us stay in and tolerate abusive relationships.

What will tomorrow look like if we don't demand that our status, as women, be honoured and affirmed.

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