

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

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8 March 2021

INSIDE:

- > EMPOWERMENT PRACTICES
- > SOCIETAL CHALLENGES
- > GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE



AN EQUAL FUTURE

Upholding women's rights, potential, preparedness and response in decision-making during challenging times

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General Manager (Northern Cape,
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Lumka Majola



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CHOOSING TO CHALLENGE THE GENDER STATUS QUO

In this issue of *International Women's Day* celebrated on 8 March, we reflect on women's rights to make decisions in all areas of life, including the right to challenge stereotypes and patriarchy and the right to demand that business doesn't regress gender balance progress in times of global crisis. We also share why education remains a key empowering tool. In closing, we talk about the challenges around our current approach to addressing gender-based violence with the CEO of the Soul City Institute, Phinah Kodisang. ■

CONTENTS

- 5 Corporate Gender Intelligence Report**
How does the UN Women's Women Empowerment Principles campaign tie into corporate gender intelligence?
- 6 Generation Equality**
We talk to SA women leaders about the progress and contributions of women leaders in ensuring that we achieve an equal future for all, especially through times of crisis.
- 9 Activism**
Raising the voices and needs of women and the girl-child across social, economic and political spheres.
- 10 Gender Balance Progress**
How have businesses responded to the counter-regressive nature of our current global crisis?
- 11 Education**
Why education remains a pivotal tool for changing the future of women.
- 12 Gender-Based Violence**
The CEO of the Soul City Institute weighs in on the challenges we all face in combatting gender-based violence.



5

12



INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

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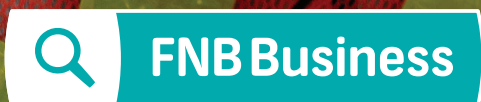
ON THE COVER:

Top row from left:
Rachel Masuku, Tantaswa Fubu,
Sally Hutton, Colleen Larsen
Bottom from left:
Stacey Brewer, Koketso Moeti,
Phina Kodisang, Lettie Mashau,
Lynette Ntuli



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WOMEN

JOURNEY TO THE BOADROOM



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Colleen Larsen

PARTNERING TO ESTABLISH GENDER PARITY BEST PRACTICES

Colleen Larsen, president of the 30% Club Southern Africa, explains why she is working with local companies to ensure that the United Nations (UN) Women's Empowerment Principles become a reality and support gender mainstreaming. By Thando Pato

UN Women says that “empowering women to participate fully in economic life across all sectors is essential to build stronger economies, achieve internationally agreed goals for development and sustainability, and improve the quality of life for women and communities. The private sector is a key partner in efforts to advance gender equality and empower women”.

This is why over the last decade UN Women has been working with companies across the globe to adopt and implement the UN Women Empowerment Principles (WEPs). The seven WEPs offer guidance to organisations on how they can enact and promote gender equality and women's empowerment practices.

These principles range from establishing high-level corporate leadership for gender equality to promoting education, training and professional development for women in all spheres of work.

POLICIES AND PRACTICES THAT EMPOWER

A key focus for UN Women is principle five, which encourages the implementation of enterprise development, supply chain and marketing strategies and practices that empower women. In South Africa, this principle links directly to the bold announcement, by President Cyril Ramaphosa last year on National Women's Day, that government's goal is for state-owned enterprises to source at least 40 per cent of goods and services from women-owned businesses. While his declaration affects the public sector, it was a step in the right direction and an example to the private sector of how to endorse gender mainstreaming.

FAST FACT
UN Women has a global presence in over 80 countries.

Source: UN Women

AS CUSTODIANS OF THE 30% CLUB SOUTHERN AFRICA, BUSINESS ENGAGE IS WELL PLACED TO RECOGNISE THE SYNERGIES BETWEEN WEPs AND THE 30% CLUB'S ASPIRATIONS.

BUSINESS ENGAGE AND WEPs

In 2020, UN Women South African region contracted Business Engage to look into the WEPs programme with a view to:

- audit the existing WEPs signatories
- extend the base of the WEPs signatories
- develop a localised indicator system
- establish a local Community of Practice.

Currently, signing up for WEPs is a simple process that involves a CEO's signature. However, many of the organisations for one reason or another have only been paying lip service to the principles once they signed off on them. The problem has also been exacerbated by changes in personnel, which often leads to a lack of continuity in practices or no understanding by new stakeholders of what is required of them.

It was not surprising that Business Engage was chosen by UN Women to undertake this important task. After all, as custodians of the 30% Club Southern Africa, Business Engage is well placed to recognise the synergies between WEPs and the 30% Club's aspirations. For many of the organisations involved with WEPs, merging their input within the 30% Club made a lot of sense.

FORMING A COMMUNITY AROUND BEST PRACTICE

The result is that several organisations have come together to form a Community of Practice with regards to WEPs. The reasoning behind the community is to unify the work being done by the various organisations in the gender mainstreaming realm. The corporations within the community will, over the coming years, build up a repository of information that will be deposited in a cloud-based library for all to access. Over and above this, the community allows all involved to share their best practices. This is important so that businesses don't waste time and resources developing what others have already mastered.

The Community of Practice is unique to South Africa. While this means that there are no existing models to share notes with, it does allow us to start on a blank slate. There are no limitations to what the community can create. With many people currently feeling quite isolated, this community may well be the catalyst for other types of communities in the future. ■

IN DECISION

Women have undoubtedly made progress in their bid for equality in their public and personal lives. But how do we ensure full participation in decision-making? By Nia Magoulianiti-McGregor

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted an uncomfortable truth: women continue to contend with the bulk of housework and childcare, and are more expendable in the workplace in times of economic crisis.

Acknowledged by the UN Women in its Generation Equality Campaign, calls are growing for women's rights to make decisions in areas that include equal pay, equal sharing of unpaid work, an end to violence against women and girls, and the need for appropriate healthcare services.

South African women, too, are confronting these issues.

STILL NOT PART OF THE PROCESS

Despite progress, “we have a way to go”, says Lynette Ntuli, CEO of Innate Investment Solutions. “Women are still not central to decisions – even those that affect us directly. There is hesitation in allowing more women to take up positions of leadership. Societal structures still tend to be patriarchal,” she says. “Bias is difficult to topple.”

Ntuli says society is still fractured. “We need to have painful conversations that don't focus on isolated issues. We need to acknowledge structural and systemic hindrances



and why it is they continue to exist.

“Men also need to figure out their politics.” Are they helping in dismantling mindsets that hinder women's progress or do they find it easier to just go with the flow?

She says that throughout the pandemic, it is “women in the significant majority” who have ended up unemployed

in a country where there is a disproportionately high number of women-headed households. “Women are still responsible for the main labour of childcare and gender-based violence is competing as the second pandemic.”

How do we move the needle? “Through organising and collaborating with each other – we cannot remain isolated in our particular pods of activity. Ensure your C-Suite takes equality seriously,” advises Ntuli.

WOMEN ARE RELATIONSHIP-BUILDERS

CEO of SPARK Schools Stacey Brewer agrees that the “disproportionate burdens on women” have become more noticeable during the pandemic. Yet, she says, while it's hard to find local female entrepreneurs who have built a billion rand company, countries headed by women have been highly successful in dealing with the pandemic.

“Male decisions are largely ego-driven and political. Women focus on a ‘safety first’ approach, taking decisive steps for the greater good.

“Women bring this same level of care and empathy to the workplace. Women are relationship-builders, this drives productivity and solutions.”

The Boy's Club is still alive, says Brewer. “Not all men are embracing diversity, especially when it comes to raising capital. Still, women are not guiltless. The Queen Bee syndrome, where some women leaders don't encourage others, still exists. I am super-deliberate in encouraging diversity of thought.”

She's heartened by a new generation of women graduates. “They've increased in confidence. Change is inevitable.”

POLICIES HELP

While the CEO of Motheo Construction, Lettie Mashau, believes that business leaders must ensure women are represented at board level, the government has a role to play too. “Empowerment policies need to be monitored.”

Mashau says that within Motheo the majority of board members are women. “During the early stages of lockdown last year, as much as we were impacted financially, we decided to provide food parcels to the needy. We continued paying our employees and being supportive, rather than prioritising shareholders.



“Women leaders take a kinder, more inclusive approach. We are a voice for the voiceless. We need to be looking at special skills programmes focusing on women, identifying skills and giving back this way. We must continuously engage and dialogue around this issue.”

Mashau, herself mentored by her predecessor the late Dr Thandi Ndlovu, says the company has a strong mentorship culture. “Women need to identify potential and follow through by giving women the opportunity to grow. For my part, I want to take the legacy forward.

“Perhaps we can't change the whole world or even the whole country, but we can make a difference in our own spaces.” ■

“MALE DECISIONS ARE LARGELY EGO-DRIVEN AND POLITICAL. WOMEN FOCUS ON A ‘SAFETY FIRST’ APPROACH, TAKING DECISIVE STEPS FOR THE GREATER GOOD.”— STACEY BREWER



Driving Equity and Inclusion

FOR WOMEN LEADERS IN A POST-COVID-19 WORLD

At Duke Corporate Education (Duke CE), we believe leadership is a force multiplier for positive change. While political leadership remains crucial, responsibility for transforming society lies mostly with organizations. All leaders - in government, business, or nonprofits - must play a fundamental role in shaping our future.

“Being a feminist means believing that every woman should be able to use her voice and pursue her potential, and that women and men should all work together to take down the barriers and end the biases that still hold women back.”

Melinda Gates, Duke University alumna, author of *The Moment of Lift: How Empowering Women Changes the World*



Sharmila Chetty is the President of Duke Corporate Education Global Markets, USA, UK, Europe, Africa and Asia.

The call to action to help women in our organizations is more important than ever, as they have been deeply and negatively impacted by the pandemic. Years of progress toward gender equality are at risk as we lose women, and especially senior women, from the workforce. Projections from the International Labour Organization suggest the equivalent of 140 million full-time jobs may be lost due to COVID-19; and women's employment is 19 per cent more at risk than men. And, around the world, black women and working mothers are suffering disproportionately.

What we do now, how we engage, and how radically we think, will determine what happens next. To retain women at work now, companies need to build inclusive and equitable cultures. We know from the research that diversity is good for business and financial results, and we have seen that diverse teams are more innovative. The case for establishing a truly diverse workforce, at all levels, is even more compelling in this time of enormous challenge. To realize racial and gender diversity, organizations must adopt a learning orientation and ultimately shift their cultures. This will take commitment and movement by all leaders, turning our focus to achieving sustainable outcomes by:

- Accelerating development through learning experiences that create a culture of lifelong learning.
- Fostering allyship by helping women to develop a network of male champions and allies and build a broad community of sponsors.
- Developing networking skills and mindsets, applying learning approaches to strategic networks, and activating networks for progress.
- Building a sense of belonging, where all ideas and contributions are recognized.
- Understanding the unique talents women bring to your organization.
- Developing psychological safety to enable all employees to feel safe when speaking up.
- Building collective awareness of the importance of having women in senior leadership roles, advocating for women leaders, and building a robust pipeline of diverse leaders.

This pandemic has taught us all an invaluable lesson that the only way we will succeed is by cultivating resilience and being intentional in our actions. Organizations need to rethink their cultures and reset their norms so they can strengthen their proposition for women by building a workplace where they can realize their full potential - Sharmila Chetty President Global Markets Duke CE and Architect of The Davos of Human Capital.

March 2021 - “Women in Leadership” a global webinar in celebration of International Womens Day.

July 2021 - “The Davos of Human Capital” a global webinar for those in the Leadership, Learning and Development space.

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CHOOSE TO CHALLENGE

Collectively, women can overcome some of the societal challenges they face, writes Denise Mhlanga

Feminist and activist G D Anderson once said: “Feminism isn’t about making women stronger. Women are already strong, it’s about changing the way the world perceives that strength.”

Changing this perception requires women’s voices to be elevated at all levels, acknowledging that we live in a changing world, says Phumi Mtetwa, JASS Southern Africa regional co-director.

Mtetwa is an activist whose work focuses on economic, gender and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or intersex (LGBTI) equality and justice issues.

She explains that feminism is a vision for society and not for women. At JASS, supporting feminist women means meeting women at their level, understanding their priorities and helping them to raise their voices.

“I lift women because it is the right thing to do. The challenge is to continue to build and transform support structures while operating sustainably. Women are

agile, we’ve learnt to be together while we are apart, thanks to technology.”

Mtetwa says worldwide, women face challenges including capitalism, patriarchy, white supremacy, widening inequality and gender-based violence (GBV).

“Women have alternative solutions. However, they continue to

fight to be heard. This is where a collective of voices becomes an effective tool for overcoming some of these challenges,” says Mtetwa.

The COVID-19 pandemic has added to the challenges facing women. In April 2020, the United Nations revealed an increase in GBV incidents globally with spikes in cases of abuse in East Asia, Europe, South America and Africa as a result of lockdown.

“Violence is the overarching reality for women. Many have survived physical, emotional, financial and sexual violence, with some having died at the hands of this violence,” says Kwezilomso Mbandazayo, Oxfam SA Women’s Rights and Gender Justice programme manager.

This is compounded by the structural violence of poverty, inequality, racism, and living under a global order that thrives on the oppression and dispossession of the many to the benefit, extreme wealth, and safety of the few, explains Mbandazayo.

DAILY INJUSTICES

Koketso Moeti, founder and executive director of amandla.mobi, an online activist platform, explains that inequalities such as access to public space, safety and bodily autonomy have preceded the current crisis.

“Some of these existing inequalities have worsened as a result of the pandemic, creating new ones in the process. High living costs and job losses have hit women the hardest, thus progress has been halted,” she points out.

Amandla.mobi leads campaigns that build real power for black people with a particular

focus on low-income black women who face challenges of injustice daily in different ways.

“We connect people so that our voices have maximum impact and power to hold political and corporate interests to account, and advance solutions that build a more just and people-powered Mzansi.

“Overcoming these challenges requires political will, prioritisation and massive value shifts in society,” Moeti says.

While this will not happen overnight, as a start – and laying the foundation for ongoing work – households could be helped through a basic income grant.

Financial compensations are paid out late, the distribution is poorly handled, and some women are excluded from receiving the social relief distress grant if they are already receiving other forms of social grant.

This situation forces women to bear the brunt of the economic fallout caused by the crisis, Moeti explains. It excludes them as people needing support and prevents them from living with dignity in their own right irrespective of their caregiver status.

When women and society at large stand up against injustice, create alternative solutions and fight for their rightful place, a tangible reality becomes a possibility, says Mbandazayo.

“As part of a global feminist resistance movement, I have a voice, and so does everyone. The way I raise my voice is made possible by those who came before me, women I work with – together we can achieve so much more,” she adds. ■

“WOMEN HAVE ALTERNATIVE SOLUTIONS. HOWEVER, THEY CONTINUE TO FIGHT TO BE HEARD. THIS IS WHERE A COLLECTIVE OF VOICES BECOMES AN EFFECTIVE TOOL FOR OVERCOMING SOME OF THESE CHALLENGES.” — PHUMI MTETWA

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Koketso
Moeti

WORKPLACE EQUALITY IN THE NEW NORMAL: PRIORITY OR PASSE?

Corporate priorities have changed during the pandemic. Issues that once seemed urgent – including gender equality – have fallen away as companies struggle to survive. Has COVID-19 put the brakes on female advancement for good? By Lisa Witepski

Organisations were far from immune from the panic that characterised 2020. Thrust into a period of inactivity during lockdown, many companies went into crisis management mode. “As we fought to address the challenges that were arising, it was natural for many organisations to allow other, more long-standing imperatives to fall to the bottom of the pile,” comments Sally Hutton, managing partner at Webber Wentzel. Such imperatives, of course, include gender empowerment.

And yet, the need for initiatives that further advancement remains. That’s why Hutton’s colleague, director of human resources Rachel Masuku, maintains that it is necessary to adopt a deliberate and intentional approach to ensure gender equality: “This will ensure that the issue does not fall off the radar,” she says.

Tantaswa Fubu, group executive for human capital and transformation at Barloworld, agrees that the existence of formal policies is important. This helped Barloworld

uphold its focus on female advancement, which was introduced in 2017.

“We committed to 40 per cent women from the supervisor group up to group exco level. By March 2020, that figure stood at 41 per cent. The organisation is now planning to increase this to 50 per cent within the next three years.”

Barloworld also worked to close the gender pay gap. This is vital, Fubu

says, because women should not feel that they are token placements or afterthoughts. Any organisation truly committed to real female empowerment should take decisive steps to prove that women are as highly valued as their male counterparts. Linked to this, any measures implemented to support female employees must speak to their real needs, not those the organisation imagines or guesses.

One of the tools that Webber Wentzel has found helpful is the creation of forums and communities where human resources representatives from like-minded organisations can discuss their challenges or triumphs in this area. This has the added benefit of ensuring that female advancement remains top of mind within the community.

“Softer” measures like this can be augmented by equipping employees with skills and tools to manage the new reality they face in the pandemic’s wake. This is especially important for women who have found their daily load increasing with the addition of housework and homeschooling. It may be stressful, but Masuku points out that there is a silver lining: for many years, men who have been sheltered from the juggle of their partners’ lives are now aware of the challenges they face. Webber Wentzel has worked to assist in this area through transitional coaching, which Hutton says is tailored to help people adapt to a COVID-19 lifestyle.



Tantaswa Fubu

That said, there is no substitute for a deliberate and intentional approach to the issue, preferably driven by a dedicated department. Hutton notes that Webber Wentzel’s journey has been boosted by initiatives such as the company’s adoption of the UN Women’s Empowerment Principles (WEPs).

Hutton advises that it helps for the company’s commitment to gender empowerment goals and its formal strategy to be

made visible by, for example, hosting regular workshops. “This sets a rhythm so that the issue becomes entrenched in the company’s agenda.” Buy-in from the top levels of the organisation is also vital. In Webber Wentzel’s case, the Gender Strategy Working Group is a sub-committee of the board. What’s more, all initiatives and progress are mapped and measured, so that the company can assess whether real progress is being made. “When you have a structure in place, it is easier to take accountability,” she points out.

“The pandemic has opened our eyes to the need for flexibility. We have an opportunity to open the job universe – and we should take full advantage,” Hutton concludes. ■



Rachel Masuku



Sally Hutton

“IT IS NECESSARY TO ADOPT A DELIBERATE AND INTENTIONAL APPROACH TO ENSURE GENDER EQUALITY. THIS WILL ENSURE THAT THE ISSUE DOES NOT FALL OFF THE RADAR.” – RACHEL MASUKU

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Graça Machel

DRIVING POTENTIAL TO CHANGE

Knowledge is wealth and education is key to ensuring that women are lifted out of poverty, writes Puseletso Mompei

The UN Women’s theme for International Women’s Day, celebrated on 8 March, is: “Women in leadership: Achieving an equal future in a COVID-19 world”. This theme, aligned with the priority theme of the 65th session of the Commission on the Status of Women and the UN Women’s flagship Generation Equality campaign, highlights how women leaders and organisations have demonstrated their skills, knowledge and networks to effectively lead in COVID-19 response and recovery efforts.

The Generation Equality campaign is resolute in its belief that “women stand at the front lines of the COVID-19 crisis as healthcare workers, caregivers, innovators, community organisers and as some of the most exemplary and effective national leaders in combatting the pandemic”. The campaign has highlighted both the centrality of women’s contributions and the disproportionate burdens that women carry.

The African Report on Child Wellbeing 2020: How friendly are African governments towards girls?, released by advocacy group African Child Policy Forum (ACPF), chaired by Graça Machel, carries similar sentiments. In her foreword, Machel says: “Girls and women have always been and will continue being the

bedrock of African society, then, now and in the future. But their contribution has remained considerably undervalued. For us to create a just and inclusive society, to prosper and ensure sustainable development, we must invest in our girls. All we need is to scale up our commitments and invest heavily in our girls at every stage of their life cycle. This will enhance their potential to transform and drive the socioeconomic development and transformation of our continent.”

One of the key tools to enhance women’s potential and drive them out of poverty, according to the ACPF report, is education.

THE CONUNDRUM

Nicole Christopulo, strategic project lead for FNB Women in Business, agrees, but adds that the biggest challenge women still face today is accessing the funding needed to further their studies. Women are often the primary or sole income-earners and as such, also must support their extended families. They can only do this if they receive fair remuneration and opportunities that align with a higher education similar to those who have had the privilege of such

WOMEN ARE OFTEN THE PRIMARY OR SOLE INCOME-EARNERS AND AS SUCH, ALSO MUST SUPPORT THEIR EXTENDED FAMILIES. THEY CAN ONLY DO THIS IF THEY RECEIVE FAIR REMUNERATION AND OPPORTUNITIES THAT ALIGN WITH A HIGHER EDUCATION SIMILAR TO THOSE WHO HAVE HAD THE PRIVILEGE OF SUCH AN EDUCATION.

an education. A key intervention that has proven to be a powerful tool in helping women realise their potential and have the same opportunities to close the gender income gap, says Christopulo, is an executive education programme.

“But these types of programmes are expensive and not all demonstrate an immediate return on investment for the funding institution,” says Christopulo. She adds that the fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic has greatly affected all avenues along the funding continuum.

One of the solutions for funding your further education programme, Christopulo says, is a student loan. “A student loan is purposely set up to lessen the impact on your pocket by postponing the repayment on the capital amount to once studies have been completed.” For women who are studying and have other responsibilities, this break from additional monthly expenses provides a breather. ■

WHY AN EXECUTIVE EDUCATION?

UCT GSB Executive Education director Kumeshnee West: “The focus on our executive education programmes is management and leadership. Besides the new knowledge gained, a key factor you exit the programme with is a new set of networks and that is vital for any manager or leader’s future. The other key outcome is peer learning. We are also training leaders who can navigate a volatile, uncertain and complex world.”

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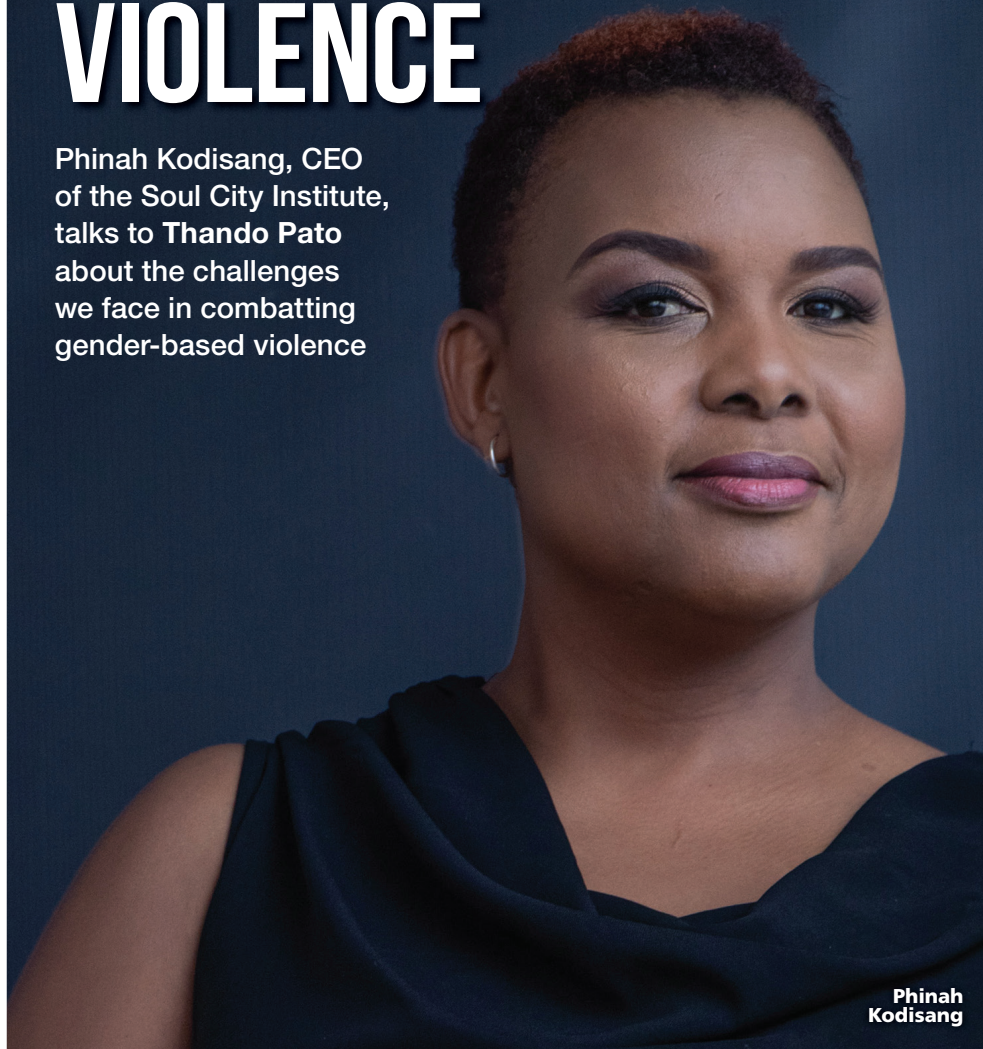
Milpark Education: “Milpark’s executive education training is designed to help build business acumen and instincts while developing individual growth and business leadership skills. Our executive learning experience is aimed at professionals, from entry-level management through to executive level, and involves activities that create an experimental learning environment and challenge students to develop new approaches to situations.”



Nicole Christopulo

TACKLING GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Phinah Kodisang, CEO of the Soul City Institute, talks to Thando Pato about the challenges we face in combatting gender-based violence



Phinah Kodisang

Violence against women and girls is one of the most prevalent human rights violations in the world. According to the United Nations Population Fund, one in three women will experience sexual assault or physical violence against them in their lifetime. In South Africa, gender-based violence (GBV) is also a basic human rights violation, says Phinah Kodisang, CEO of the Soul City Institute.

“Protecting the integrity of your body is enshrined in the Constitution, so when someone inflicts pain on you by forcing themselves on you they are violating you. For most women, it doesn’t end with just bodily harm, GBV ends in death (femicide), taking

away their right to life, which is also a human right violation.”

The United Nations (UN) Women claims that the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated GBV, with domestic violence escalating around the globe amid national lockdowns and quarantines. UN Women says: “Women and girls are also disproportionately affected by the pandemic’s socioeconomic impact, increasing the risk of violence.”

THE POLITICS OF GBV IN SOUTH AFRICA

Kodisang says the South African government’s modus operandi in dealing with pressing problems is to set up yet another commission to investigate the issue. “GBV is not new, it’s

been part of our society and the news cycle for a long time and the government has been aware of it. But we are unable to deal with it because the political will to be decisive is only half there. There are some efforts, but they are not concrete enough for decisions and rulings to be followed through.”

WHAT IS WRONG WITH OUR CURRENT APPROACH?

She says that there are many challenges in tackling the scourge of GBV. A large part of the problem is the societal attitude of “innocent until proven guilty”. “What we should be doing is that if a man is accused of GBV, we must see him as guilty until he proves his innocence. I believe that change in attitude will produce better results for women. We need more people to be on the side of the victim. As it stands, the onus is on the victim to prove that they were assaulted, which is hard if there are no witnesses or physical examination evidence.”

One of the biggest challenges facing lawmakers, government, civil society and women when it comes to tackling GBV, says Kodisang, is that: “We are a very patriarchal society and we are dealing with intergenerational trauma and ways of coping that are passed down through culture and religion. Some cultures entrench patriarchy, which continues the cycle of toxicity and violence. That is how ingrained patriarchal thinking is.

“WE ARE A VERY PATRIARCHAL SOCIETY AND WE ARE DEALING WITH INTERGENERATIONAL TRAUMA AND WAYS OF COPING THAT ARE PASSED DOWN THROUGH CULTURE AND RELIGION.”— PHINAH KODISANG

“We also need to acknowledge that we are a nation in pain and that we have not dealt with the trauma of our history. The pain of the past is still present, and it goes beyond race relations. It is about how people were dehumanised and the ripple effect of that in the rest of our society. Until we acknowledge that, we will never heal. Dealing effectively with GBV is a mammoth task because it is so intersectional and it affects all facets of life.”

BACK TO BASICS

Kodisang says that to start tackling GBV, perpetrators need to be treated consistently and sentencing needs to be uniform. “People’s lives need to be respected and hard crimes such as murder and rape need to carry maximum sentences. The current perception because of the inconsistency in sentencing is that GBV is not taken seriously in South Africa. We make more noise about racism as a human rights violation than we do about GBV.” ■

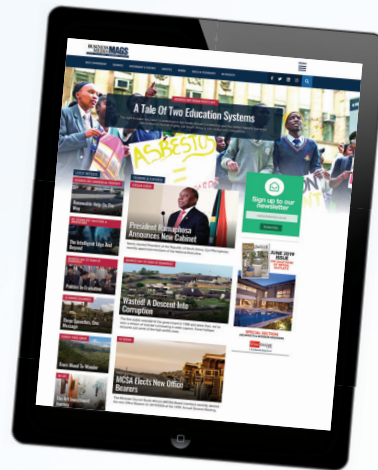
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