

# 6 Gender-Based Violence in South Africa and Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships

*The Vodacom Foundation Experience*

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## INTRODUCTION

Gender-based violence (GBV) comprises one of the grossest human rights violations globally, and spiralled during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is referred to by United Nations Women as 'harmful acts directed at an individual or a group of individuals based on their gender. It is rooted in gender inequality, the abuse of power and harmful norms'.<sup>1</sup> South Africa, a constitutional democracy founded on the values of human rights and human dignity, has some of the world's highest levels of GBV, leading the country's president to declare GBV the second pandemic. Acknowledgement exists that GBV is systematic and addressing it effectively requires a comprehensive approach focused on prevention, response, and victim/survivor support through multi-stakeholder partnerships. Since 1994, the South African government – a signatory to UN frameworks on the protection of women – has put myriad of measures in place to address GBV but to little avail. With each government administration since 1994, GBV is of great concern, and in recent years, it is clear from media reports and the quarterly police statistics that the levels continue unabated. The causes of GBV are multifaceted and include cultural, legal, political, and economic factors,<sup>2</sup> and South Africa's violence

<sup>1</sup> UN Women, 'Frequently asked questions,' [www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/faqs/types-of-violence#:~:text=Gender-based%20violence%20\(GBV\),of%20power%20and%20harmful%20norms](http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/faqs/types-of-violence#:~:text=Gender-based%20violence%20(GBV),of%20power%20and%20harmful%20norms).

<sup>2</sup> Council of Europe, 'Gender Matters: What Causes Gender-Based Violence?', [www.coe.int/en/web/gender-matters/what-causes-gender-based-violence](http://www.coe.int/en/web/gender-matters/what-causes-gender-based-violence).

culture can also be traced to the apartheid era where violence was normalised as a response to resistance.

A rising phenomenon alongside GBV in South Africa is femicide, where women or perceived women are killed on the basis of gender identity.<sup>3</sup> In recent years, following a spate of horrific GBV reports and femicide, civil society organisations (CSOs) heightened their activism and started demanding decisive actions from government. This activism led to government in 2018 recommitting to a social compact with the business and civil-society sectors to step up the fight against GBV and femicide through the National Strategic Plan on Gender-Based Violence and Femicide (NSP). The NSP provides for 'accountability, coordination and leadership; prevention and rebuilding social cohesion; justice, safety and protection; response, care, support and healing; economic power; and research and information management'.<sup>4</sup> Where multi-stakeholder partnerships are forged, each partner must bring their own area of expertise to complement the others. The government, as the policymaker, should develop pragmatic policies and create a conducive environment in

<sup>3</sup> Department of Justice and Constitutional Development, 'What Is Femicide?', [www.justice.gov.za/vg/femicide/docs.html](http://www.justice.gov.za/vg/femicide/docs.html).

<sup>4</sup> In 2019, an Interim Steering Committee (ISC) on GBV and femicide established by President Cyril Ramaphosa following a multi-party stakeholder summit, produced 'an Emergency Response Action Plan (ERAP)' providing for:

- 'Urgent response to victims and survivors of GBV.
- Broadening access to justice for survivors.
- Changing social norms and behaviour through high-level awareness raising and prevention campaigns.
- Strengthening existing architecture and promoting accountability.
- The creation of more economic opportunities for women who are vulnerable to abuse because of poverty.'

The ISC also developed the NSP with the following pillars:

- 'Accountability, Coordination and Leadership.
- Prevention and Rebuilding the Social Cohesion.
- Justice, Safety and Protection.
- Response, Care, Support and Healing.
- Economic Power, and
- Research and Information Management.'

which the other partners can operate; business and especially big business must bring agility and technical resources in the implementation of policies; and civil society must be the ears and eyes that hold both government and business accountable.<sup>5</sup> Vodacom

<sup>5</sup> Below is a summary of some laws on GBV, some of which were amended by the Parliament of the Republic of South Africa in 2021 and 2022 as part of President Ramaphosa's reform package:

- The Domestic Violence Act (Act 116 of 1998), which was amended in 2021, to inter alia, expand on definitions related to domestic violence, reporting of domestic or suspected domestic violence against vulnerable groups, authorisation for arrest without a warrant under certain circumstances, and simplification of the process of application for protection orders.
- The Sexual Offence and Related Matters Act (Act 32 of 2007), which was amended in 2021 as the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act to inter alia amplify the national register for sex offenders; ensure children of a certain age are not held criminally liable for engaging in consensual sex; define sexual offences; and make it a duty to report sexual offences against vulnerable persons.
- The Protection from Harassment Act (Act 17 of 2011), whose main objective is the issuing of protection orders against general and sexual harassment, including the management of firearms involved in harassment.
- The Children's Act (Act 38 of 2005), which was amended in 2022 to further protect children from, amongst other issues, maltreatment, neglect, abuse, or degradation.
- Combating of Trafficking in Persons Act (Act 7 of 2013), which is aimed at combating human trafficking and effecting international agreements or instruments on human trafficking.
- The Criminal and Related Matters Amendment Bill, which was tabled in parliament in 2021 to amend the Magistrates Courts Act, 1944; the Criminal Procedure Act, 1977; the Criminal Law Amendment Act, 1997; and the Superior Courts Act, 2013, to inter alia impose stricter conditions for the granting of bail for criminal offences linked to GBV; allowing for virtual court proceedings; allowing victims of domestic violence to participate in parole proceedings; and regulating sentences for crimes committed against vulnerable people.
- The Prescription in Civil and Criminal Matters (Sexual Offences) Amendment Act (Act 15 of 2020), which amends the Prescription Act of 1969 to list sexual offences for which prescription does not run under certain circumstances and to amend the Criminal Procedure Act of 1977.
- Victim Support Services Bill of 2019 (not yet law), whose objective is to protect the rights of victims of violent crime against victimisation and ensure care, support, response, empowerment, and shelter for the said persons, with responsibilities assigned to relevant government departments and other stakeholders.
- Policy on the Prevention and Management of Learner Pregnancy in Schools General Notice 704 of 2021, issued by the Minister of Basic Education, whose objective is to minimise learner pregnancy through various interventions.

(Proprietary) Limited,<sup>6</sup> known as 'Vodacom South Africa', and its Foundation have been prominent partners in the fight against GBV since the early 2000s, working closely with government institutions and providing funding to CSOs that champion the rights of women and children. The Vodacom Foundation's partnership with both government and CSOs contributes to addressing policy implementation weaknesses including lack of access to reporting tools, toxic societal norms, rising teenage pregnancies, inaccurate reporting, and inadequate victim/survivor support and empowerment – including the government's inadequate support of CSOs at the forefront of the fight against GBV. The next sections examine how the Vodacom Foundation uses its resources to support the government and CSOs to address societal and policy challenges.

### **The Role of the Vodacom Foundation and Its Partners in the Fight against Gender-Based Violence**

Founded in 1999, the Vodacom Foundation – the charitable arm of Vodacom South Africa – established itself as a pioneer of societal change by partnering with the government and CSOs to address challenges in education, health, and gender equality. Driven by the belief that companies are part of the society in which they operate, in 2017 the Vodacom Foundation streamlined its activities and adopted three of Vodacom South Africa's eight Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with an understanding that the goals are interrelated: education, gender equality, and partnerships, with technology as an anchor.<sup>7</sup> Under education, the Foundation has now created an education ecosystem that spans thirteen schools of excellence. The

<sup>6</sup> Vodacom South Africa is a subsidiary of Vodacom Group Limited, known as the Vodacom Group, and both are based in Midrand, South Africa. Vodacom Group is a subsidiary of Vodafone Group PLC, which is based in the United Kingdom. The Vodacom Foundation is the charitable arm of Vodacom South Africa, and the Vodafone Foundation is a UK registered charity (No. 1193984) under Vodafone Group and oversees twenty-seven foundations, which includes the Vodacom Foundation.

<sup>7</sup> The Foundation's revised strategy was approved in 2017 and subsequently in 2021.

ecosystem provides a comprehensive approach to education where the focus is not just on the learners, teachers, and infrastructure, but also on psychosocial support to address societal ills like GBV that hinder learner performance and educational outcomes. Under gender equality, the Foundation runs gender empowerment initiatives that support women and youth development, staff and public volunteering, and the fight against GBV. The latter serves as the flagship project in partnership with the Department of Social Development (DSD) and various CSOs. The GBV programme has now matured into an ecosystem that supports prevention, response, and victim/survivor empowerment, as outlined in what follows.

## RESPONSE

One of the weaknesses in the fight against GBV is inadequate reporting and inaccurate statistics. In order to encourage victims of GBV to report abuse and ensure effective monitoring of the reporting, in 2013 the DSD approached the Vodacom Foundation to assist with setting up the GBV Command Centre. The Centre, which is currently managed by social workers from the DSD, is technology-driven through a short message system, voice, Unstructured Supplementary Service Data (USSD), video-conferencing, geo-location, and a data-capturing dashboard.<sup>8</sup>

The social workers, including a sign language specialist, take calls and provide confidential counselling to the callers. Depending on severity, they refer some cases to the police, community based-social workers, and shelters that house the victims of GBV. Although the Command Centre was created to respond to GBV, it also accepts calls on other societal challenges, some of which have a direct or indirect link to GBV, such as alcohol abuse, poverty, and joblessness.<sup>9</sup>

Inconsistencies in GBV reporting were glaring in 2020 at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic national lockdown, when a number

<sup>8</sup> Republic of South Africa, Department of Social Development and Vodacom Foundation, <https://gbv.org.za/about-us/> and <https://vodacom.com/vodacom-foundation.php>.

<sup>9</sup> See <https://gbv.org.za/about-us/>.

of general calls were conflated with GBV-related calls. A statement by the Minister of Police in the first month of the lockdown indicated that about 87,000 GBV calls were received through the National Joint Operations and Intelligence Structure (NATJOINTS) since the declaration of lockdown, and a few days later the Minister was reported to have said 2,300 cases of GBV were recorded in the first few days of the COVID-19 lockdown.<sup>10</sup> A Member of the Executive Council for Gauteng Social Development reportedly mentioned more than 120,000 such cases were recorded in the first three weeks of the national lockdown.<sup>11</sup> Further reports from non-governmental stakeholders noted tripled GBV cases received by the Command Centre in the first week of the lockdown.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, the number of GBV cases dramatically increased globally during the pandemic, and South Africa was not an exception, especially because GBV has always been a concern there. However, contradicting statistics from different sources published in the media were of great concern. As a partner that supplies communication technology to the GBV Command Centre, the Foundation deemed it necessary to pay special attention to the reported calls through the dashboard. By logging and monitoring all daily calls accepted by the social workers, it found the following trends:

- In 2019, the Command Centre recorded 96,620 calls, of which 1,846 were GBV-related.
- In April 2020, during the first month of the lockdown 23,041 calls were recorded, of which 690 were GBV-related.

<sup>10</sup> Bheki Cele, South Africa Minister of Police, 'Police Received About 87 000 Calls Related to Gender-Based Violence during Lockdown', 3 April 2020, <https://youtu.be/uclZSledrZE>; and 'Cele Welcomes Drop in Crime but Gender Based Violence Cases Still High', 5 April 2020, [www.iol.co.za/news/south-africa/cele-welcomes-drop-in-crime-but-gender-based-violence-cases-still-high-46262416](http://www.iol.co.za/news/south-africa/cele-welcomes-drop-in-crime-but-gender-based-violence-cases-still-high-46262416).

<sup>11</sup> See 'SA Records over 100 000 GBV Cases during Lockdown', 6 September 2021, [www.sanews.gov.za/south-africa/Sa-records-over-100-000-GBV-cases-during-lockdown](http://www.sanews.gov.za/south-africa/Sa-records-over-100-000-GBV-cases-during-lockdown).

<sup>12</sup> See 'GBV Centre Calls Triple during Lockdown, 1st for Women Steps Up to Help', 2 April 2020, [www.iol.co.za/news/south-africa/western-cape/gbv-centre-calls-triple-during-lockdown-1st-for-women-steps-up-to-help-45995727](http://www.iol.co.za/news/south-africa/western-cape/gbv-centre-calls-triple-during-lockdown-1st-for-women-steps-up-to-help-45995727); and 'Shocking Stats on Gender-Based Violence during Lockdown Revealed', 1 September 2022, [www.timeslive.co.za/amp/news/south-africa/2020-09-01-shocking-stats-on-gender-based-violence-during-lockdown-revealed/](http://www.timeslive.co.za/amp/news/south-africa/2020-09-01-shocking-stats-on-gender-based-violence-during-lockdown-revealed/).

- In 2020, 180,909 calls were recorded, of which 6,726 were GBV-related.
- In 2021, 80,156 calls were recorded, of which 5,102 were GBV-related.

Social workers noted an escalation of calls during the hard lockdown levels 5 and 4 in 2020 when people's movement was most restricted; the highest number of calls was recorded in Gauteng Province, followed by Kwazulu-Natal and the Western Cape.<sup>13</sup> Close monitoring of the Command Centre dashboard helps ensure that accurate statistics are released from the Command Centre, so as not to mislead the public. This way, social workers are able to filter the calls to isolate GBV-related calls from general calls. However, the Command Centre is just one of the mechanisms provided by government to report on GBV cases. Some cases are reported directly to the police through the NATJOINTS and other emergency service numbers. However, these platforms are not integrated to give a single view of the cases, thereby contributing to contradictory reports.

Misaligned reporting on GBV is concerning and requires improvement, and this matter is now a priority for the Gender-Based Violence and Femicide Response Fund (GBVFRF) comprising private-sector business leaders and other professionals, which was established in 2019 to assist with fundraising to support programmes on GBV and femicide under the NSP. The GBVFRF has established a dashboard which attempts to provide comprehensive visibility and a monitoring tool of available data from some government platforms on GBV and femicide in South Africa, as the first step towards an integrated national reporting system.<sup>14</sup>

Although the Command Centre receives thousands of calls from desperate callers year on year, and is a vital platform to assist victims of GBV and perpetrators, after eight years there are areas that require attention to improve the quality of service:

<sup>13</sup> Foundation Board Quarterly Reports, 29 October 2020 (unpublished). The dashboard records daily calls from all technologies – voice, SMS, USSD. Video-conferencing calls are minimal and are reported manually.

<sup>14</sup> GBVF statistics dashboards, <https://gbvfresponsefund1.org>.

- The Command Centre has protocols on the turnaround time for answering calls, but the Foundation is aware of occasional service disruptions. Unfortunately, unlike with sales call centres where there is a customer service feedback mechanism, the Command Centre does not have a caller feedback mechanism to rate the service, and this feedback mechanism is required.
- Due to the confidentiality of the cases, Vodacom does not receive reports on referrals to other institutions, number of cases investigated, or those that have been successfully prosecuted. Whilst confidentiality is key, anonymous statistics would go a long way to enable monitoring and evaluation, in order to measure the impact of the Command Centre services, to instil confidence in the criminal justice system, and to encourage reporting.
- The technology requires upgrades to align with the emerging digital transformation developments. For instance, the video-conferencing facility may need upgrades to align with most commonly used platforms since the COVID-19 pandemic to ensure inter-operability for callers. Big data analytics which have now become an integral part of Vodacom South Africa's operations can be introduced to assist with caller experience, and with social workers' performance and decision-making, especially referrals.

#### VICTIM AND SURVIVOR EMPOWERMENT

Anyone can call the GBV Command Centre irrespective of social and economic class; perpetrators also call to seek counselling. However, most GBV victims are from lower social and economic classes who are economically and emotionally dependent on the abuser. This dependency is exacerbated by the high levels of poverty, unemployment, and inequality in South Africa; and women, children and youth are the most vulnerable. For these reasons, the NSP identified economic empowerment as one of its pillars in the fight against GBV and femicide. Although victim and survivor empowerment is pivotal in order to break the cycle of GBV, especially for underprivileged people who have no access to support services, the government's policy and support for victims through shelters is vague. Various reports found that the majority of the



shelters in South Africa are owned by CSOs;<sup>15</sup> although shelters are a great resource for woman empowerment and protecting the rights of minor children, they are not adequately funded by government,<sup>16</sup> and the spend on victim care and support is less than the allocation for prevention and response.<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, shelters provide short- to medium-term stays determined by the circumstances and nationality of the victim (some shelters exclude non-South-Africans) and availability of space, and some offer psychosocial support and skills development.<sup>18</sup>

Conscious of the socio-economic causes of GBV and challenges facing these CSO-owned shelters, the Vodacom Foundation introduced an information and communication technology (ICT)-based victim and survivor empowerment programme in some shelters to provide digital literacy training aiming to break the cycle of abuse. The trainers are graduates from the Foundation's youth academy education programme, who were trained in partnership with Microsoft Corporation and Cisco Systems, Inc., and they preserve the confidentiality of the victims and shelters in this support programme.<sup>19</sup> Since inception in 2018, the Foundation has trained over 1,600 victims and survivors. To further preserve confidentiality, the Foundation has no access to the programme beneficiaries and therefore cannot make follow-up enquiries in order to determine how the programme empowers the beneficiaries after leaving the shelter. This has been flagged as an area of weakness which precludes programme impact measurement.

<sup>15</sup> Watson, J., and Lopes, C. 2017. *Shelter Services to Domestic Violence Victims: Policy Approaches to Strengthening State Responses*, Policy Brief No. 1, September, p. 3&11, [www.saferspaces.org.za/uploads/files/policy\\_brief\\_final\\_02\\_web.pdf](http://www.saferspaces.org.za/uploads/files/policy_brief_final_02_web.pdf).

<sup>16</sup> Commission for Gender Equality, *Report on Consultative Hearings into the State of Shelters in South Africa 2020*, [https://static.pmg.org.za/1/CGE\\_Report\\_on\\_Shelters\\_2019.20.pdf](https://static.pmg.org.za/1/CGE_Report_on_Shelters_2019.20.pdf), p. 6

<sup>17</sup> Vetten, L., and Lopes, C. 2018. *Out of Harm's Way: Women's Shelters in the Eastern and Northern Cape*. Cape Town: Heinrich Böll Stiftung, p. 1, <https://za.boell.org/en/2019/05/30/out-harms-way-womens-shelters-eastern-and-northern-cape>.

<sup>18</sup> Watson and Lopes, *Shelter Services*, p. 5. See note 15.

<sup>19</sup> Vodacom Foundation, 'Gender-Based Violence Program', [www.vodacom.com/vodacom-foundation.php](http://www.vodacom.com/vodacom-foundation.php).

## PREVENTION

Response and victim/survivor empowerment are pivotal to the fight against GBV. However, prevention is key, before pain and deep emotional scars are inflicted. Until the social norms that perpetuate GBV – such as the socialisation of boys and girls as unequal parties – are eradicated, it will be difficult to address GBV. To foster a culture of awareness and gender equality, in 2019 the Vodacom Foundation introduced the prevention pillar to pay attention to the root causes of GBV, in partnership with societal influencers who include gender activists, celebrities, CSOs, and men.<sup>20</sup> The involvement of men culminated in a men-led campaign called ‘Be the Light’, calling upon men to ‘say no’ to GBV, featuring Vodacom men and sportsmen from the football and rugby teams sponsored by Vodacom South Africa (the Kaizer Chiefs Football Club, Orlando Pirates Football Club, and the Blue Bulls (the Bulls in Vodacom Super Rugby)).<sup>21</sup>

The notable issue that partners amplify during dialogues is the intersectionality of gender, race, and social class. To this end, the Foundation also appointed an ambassador, Masingita Masunga – a media personality with cerebral palsy from an underprivileged upbringing – to inspire young people through her personal experiences on the intersection of gender, disability, race, and social class.<sup>22</sup> The partnerships with these ‘influencers’ are key in the fight against GBV and femicide because personal storytelling effectively delivers strong and impactful messaging, and, due to their media presence and societal standing, influencers reach a diverse pool of South Africans and create societal awareness. In essence, influencers play a delivery partner role for the Vodacom Foundation on GBV and femicide. In addition to delivering awareness messaging through influencers, the

<sup>20</sup> Vodacom Foundation, ‘Vodacom’s FaceBook Live Women’s Month Event Puts Emphasis on Finding Lasting Solutions to the Scourge of Gender Violence’, 26 August 2020, [www.vodacom.com/news-article.php?articleID=7541](http://www.vodacom.com/news-article.php?articleID=7541).

<sup>21</sup> Vodacom Foundation, ‘Be the Light against Gender-Based Violence’, 3 July 2020, <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=cc20XjvVx58>.

<sup>22</sup> See note 20.

Vodacom Foundation and Vodacom executives participate in panel discussions with various partners to share learnings and experiences on how to leverage the GBV ecosystem to change the narrative on the societal stereotypes that fuel GBV and femicide.

INTEGRATION OF THE GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE ECOSYSTEM THROUGH PROSECUTION, DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY, AND PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT

The ecosystem described cannot be successful if there is fragmented implementation on GBV, as this would make it difficult for victims to receive immediate and compassionate support. To provide an integrated strategy for prevention, response, and support for rape victims, in 2000 the National Prosecution Authority's Sexual Offences Community Affairs (SOCA), along with government partners and donors, rolled out 'one-stop' victim-friendly facilities called Thuthuzela (Comfort) Care Centres. Located in a public-sector medical health facility, these centres provide comfort to the victims of rape through immediate medical care, counselling, investigation, and prosecution, aimed at reducing secondary victimisation, improving conviction rates, and shortening the turnaround time for the finalisation of cases.<sup>23</sup> The Vodacom Foundation was one of the Thuthuzela Care Centres donors in the early 2000s at the inception of this integrated care model.<sup>24</sup> In spite of the disturbingly high rates of GBV and rape statistics in the country,<sup>25</sup> only sixty-three Thuthuzela

<sup>23</sup> National Prosecution Authority, 'Thuthuzela Care Centres Turning Victims into Survivors', [www.npa.gov.za/sites/default/files/resources/public\\_awareness/TCC\\_brochure\\_august\\_2009.pdf](http://www.npa.gov.za/sites/default/files/resources/public_awareness/TCC_brochure_august_2009.pdf).

<sup>24</sup> *Vodacom Annual Report 2003*, pp. 46–47, [www.vodacom.com/pdf/investor/integrated-report/2003/integrated-annual-report.pdf](http://www.vodacom.com/pdf/investor/integrated-report/2003/integrated-annual-report.pdf).

<sup>25</sup> South African Government, 'Minister Bheki Cele: Quarter Two Crime Statistics 2021/2022', 19 November 2021, [www.gov.za/speeches/speaking-notes-delivered-police-minister-general%2%A0bheki-cele-mp-occasion-release-%2%A0quarter](http://www.gov.za/speeches/speaking-notes-delivered-police-minister-general%2%A0bheki-cele-mp-occasion-release-%2%A0quarter); 'Minister Bheki Cele Releases Crime Statistics for the Third Quarter of 2021–2022', 18 February 2022, <https://youtu.be/G23kQrXJjil>; and South African Police Services, 'Speaking Notes Delivered By Police Minister General Bheki Cele (MP) at the Occasion of the Release of the Quarter Four Crime Statistics 2021/2022 Hosted in Pretoria', 3 June 2022, [www.saps.gov.za/newsroom/msspeechdetail.php?nid=40209](http://www.saps.gov.za/newsroom/msspeechdetail.php?nid=40209).

Care Centres exist in South Africa,<sup>26</sup> and they are underutilised due to lack of awareness and stigma attached to rape.<sup>27</sup> The government's target to increase the number of centres was hampered by the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>28</sup> Since 2022, the Foundation has been working with SOCA and the GBVFRF to revive its support to the Thuthuzela Care model to facilitate the construction of additional centres, starting with two in 2023. Going forward, the Foundation will also equip some centres with ICTs to provide digital literacy to the victims of rape whilst they receive Thuthuzela support. The Foundation's revived support to the Thuthuzela Care Centres is deliberately integrated into its GBV and education ecosystems, and demonstrates Vodacom Foundation's commitment to an integrated approach to GBV.

To deepen integration, in December 2020, the Vodacom Foundation launched the Bright Sky South Africa application (app) in three South African languages, integrating all three pillars of the Foundation's GBV ecosystem. The zero-rated app was first launched in some Vodafone European markets; it has been adapted to define and describe South African societal practices, norms, and stereotypes that fuel GBV for awareness purposes. The app interfaces with the criminal justice system institutions, shelters, and the GBV Command Centre. As a digital tool, it also provides awareness on cybersecurity threats and is available on Apple iOS- and Google Android-based devices.<sup>29</sup> The South African version of the app was

<sup>26</sup> Unpublished communications between the Vodacom Foundation and the GBVFRF in September 2023 on the establishment of the new centres.

<sup>27</sup> *Process Evaluation of NGO Services at Thuthuzela Care Centres*, 2018, p. 11, [www.nacosa.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/GBV-Evaluation-Report-Web.pdf](http://www.nacosa.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/GBV-Evaluation-Report-Web.pdf).

<sup>28</sup> *Department of Justice and Constitutional Development: Annual Report 2020–2021*, p. 97, [https://nationalgovernment.co.za/departments/department\\_annual/375/2021-department-of-justice-and-constitutional-development-\(doj&cd\)-annual-report.pdf](https://nationalgovernment.co.za/departments/department_annual/375/2021-department-of-justice-and-constitutional-development-(doj&cd)-annual-report.pdf).

<sup>29</sup> Vodacom, Sustainability Report for the Year Ended 31 March 2021, p. 46, <https://vodacom-reports.co.za/integrated-reports/ir-2021/documents/sustainability-report-2021.pdf>; and Vodacom Foundation, 'Vodacom Zero-Rates Bright Sky SA Gender-Based Violence Awareness App', 21 January 2021, [www.vodacom.com/news-article.php?articleID=7594](http://www.vodacom.com/news-article.php?articleID=7594).

written with the assistance of a Foundation CSO partner, Women & Men Against Child Abuse, to ensure the script is aligned to societal realities. In April 2021, the Foundation introduced USSD version of the app to cater for users with no smart devices.<sup>30</sup> Some psychosocial support experts who are partners of the Vodacom Foundation have started using this app in schools.

The psychosocial support programme was launched in 2021 by the Vodacom Foundation, working with a professor from the University of Stellenbosch in partnership with the Department of Basic Education (DBE) in the schools of excellence to complement the education ecosystem. Under the slogan 'change the world' the programme provides counselling support to teachers, parents, and learners. Rising cases of social ills such as bullying, teenage pregnancy, on-site general violence, and GBV motivated this programme. The presence of psychosocial experts in the schools creates space for the teachers to focus on pedagogical development while psychosocial experts provide counselling services on societal ills that disrupt learning. These experts engage with the school governing bodies, parents, the DSD, and the police, thereby building a community of support around the school.

So far, 22 psychosocial support experts are working in 17 schools in 6 provinces and the support currently covers approximately 17,000 community members, including teachers, learners, parents, and caregivers.<sup>31</sup> More than 50 per cent of cases attended to by the psychosocial experts in schools are GBV related. With rising teenage pregnancies during the COVID-19 pandemic, this psychosocial support programme is augmented by the Policy on the Prevention and Management of Learner Pregnancy in Schools.

<sup>30</sup> Vodacom Group Social and Ethics Committee Report, 3 November 2021 (unpublished).

<sup>31</sup> Vodacom Foundation, 'Vodacom Joins Forces with Government to Launch a New Ecosystem Using Public Schools to Fight Gender-Based Violence in Society', first reported on 12 August 2021 at inception of the programme, and from unpublished records the programme has now grown to wider reach, [www.vodacom.com/news-article.php?articleID=7670](http://www.vodacom.com/news-article.php?articleID=7670).

Issued by the Minister of Basic Education in 2021, the objective is to minimise learner pregnancy through various interventions and make it mandatory for educators to report pregnancy of girls under 16 where the male partner is above 16.<sup>32</sup>

The integration of the GBV and education ecosystems creates a seamless approach to philanthropy and demonstrates the intersectionality between societal challenges and educational outcomes. Learners drop out of school not only because they lack the intellectual or coping abilities to excel, but also because of emotional, social, and economic challenges. Although the objective of psychosocial support is to address societal ills, from engagements with the psychosocial experts and a school principal, the programme is also contributing to self-esteem rebuilding through job creation for young graduates in social work and psychology who could not find jobs in the mainstream economy. Further, integrating more schools in one village helps to spread the message to the community at large about the impact of the programme, thereby positioning the Vodacom Foundation as a pioneer of sustainable development.

The integration approach outlined on prosecution, technology, and education with psychosocial support demonstrates the power of a multifaceted approach and multi-stakeholder partnerships in tackling GBV. With lessons learnt from this integrated approach, a concerted effort to scale up these services across the country can lead to the reduction of GBV cases in South Africa.

#### GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE SUPPORT FOR VODACOM EMPLOYEES

Inspired by the saying 'charity begins at home', to demonstrate focus on employee well-being in 2019, Vodacom Group Limited (known as Vodacom Group) launched a domestic violence and abuse policy

<sup>32</sup> See [www.gov.za/documents/national-policy-act-policy-prevention-and-management-learner-pregnancy-schools-3-dec-2021](http://www.gov.za/documents/national-policy-act-policy-prevention-and-management-learner-pregnancy-schools-3-dec-2021), p. 28 (Government Gazette, No. 45580, 3 December 2021).

for its employees following a global launch, the first of its kind by Vodafone Group PLC. The policy which provides ten day's leave was introduced after extensive research commissioned by the Vodafone Foundation to understand the scale and impact of GBV on employees and workplace performance. To be effective, the policy is supported by training human resources (HR) personnel, and is linked to the company's total wellness programmes.<sup>33</sup> In 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Vodafone Foundation commissioned further research to determine the implementation progress across the twenty-seven foundation markets. The research found that impressive progress was made in the implementation of the policy since its introduction, with 95 per cent of the markets commending the policy for its significant contribution to support affected employees. Eighty per cent had completed or were on the path to completing training of supervisors and HR. Markets also attest to invoking various interventions such as referral to the internal and external total wellness programmes and providing flexibility to the work conditions of affected employees. Employees found that the policy creates uniformity in addressing domestic violence across the markets, fosters employer–employee trust, promotes intersectionality conversations, creates safe spaces for difficult conversation on domestic violence, and affords a gendered approach to GBV.<sup>34</sup> The first version of the policy focused just on the victim-employee, but in 2022 the policy was updated to address employee-perpetrators of GBV. This policy creates alignment on Vodacom South Africa's focus on communities, customers, and colleagues by giving employees on-site tools to address GBV whilst at the same time allowing them access to the tools of the Vodacom Foundation.

<sup>33</sup> Vodafone Foundation, *Vodafone's Domestic Violence and Abuse Policy Guide: A Briefing for Business*, July 2019, pp. 4–6, [www.vodafone.com/content/dam/vodacom/files/Vodafone\\_Domestic\\_Violence\\_and\\_Abuse\\_Policy\\_Guide.pdf](http://www.vodafone.com/content/dam/vodacom/files/Vodafone_Domestic_Violence_and_Abuse_Policy_Guide.pdf).

<sup>34</sup> Pillinger, J. 2020. *Executive Summary: Learnings from Vodafone's Global Policy on Domestic Violence and Abuse*, Vodafone Foundation, November, pp. 4–8, [www.vodafone.com/sites/default/files/2020-11/learnings-from-vodafones-global-policy-on-domestic-violence-and-abuse.pdf](http://www.vodafone.com/sites/default/files/2020-11/learnings-from-vodafones-global-policy-on-domestic-violence-and-abuse.pdf).

## The Transformation of CSOs to Strengthen Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships: A Vodafone and Vodacom Case Study

CSOs are an integral part of the fight against GBV because they operate within communities and are accessible. As such, the Vodacom Foundation has been working with CSOs since the early 2000s. However, the effectiveness of CSOs is hampered by lack of human and financial resources. A majority of CSOs, especially the small ones, depend mainly on donor funding and big corporations such as Vodacom South Africa. Corporates collaborate with CSOs as delivery partners because they bring community-based expertise due to their direct involvement with victims, survivors, and perpetrators. However, funding is drying out as more companies scale up their own programmes to embed integrated environmental, social, and governance (ESG) strategies within their businesses. In 2020, the Vodafone Foundation, Vodacom Foundation, and Safaricom PLC commissioned research to investigate the challenges faced by local African CSOs in accessing global donor aid.<sup>35</sup> The findings and recommendations from this report will enhance the Vodacom Foundation's multi-stakeholder partnerships to fight GBV.

The report highlights multiple barriers preventing African CSOs from operating at the same scale and capacity as international CSOs based locally, including funding and donor languages, trust and perceptions, governance and leadership challenges, the regulatory and policy environment, adaptability and agility of CSOs to fluid contexts (such as COVID-19), power relations especially related to the localisation, and domestication of international organisations in Africa.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Vodacom Group Limited owns approximately a 35 per cent stake and Vodafone Group PLC approximately a 5 per cent stake in Safaricom PLC.

<sup>36</sup> Vodafone Foundation, *Achieving Greater Equality in Global Philanthropy*, September 2020, [www.raceandphilanthropy.com](http://www.raceandphilanthropy.com); and Vodacom Foundation, 'New Report Urges International Investment in African Philanthropy for Sustainable Social Impact', 13 September 2021, [www.vodacom.com/news-article.php?articleID=7692](http://www.vodacom.com/news-article.php?articleID=7692), p. 6.



Findings and recommendations approved by the Vodafone Foundation include acknowledging that the relationship between Western donors and African CSOs is still premised on colonial mind-sets and this power dynamic overwhelms local CSOs. Vodafone Foundation further agreed that the digitising and capacity-building of CSOs is pivotal, the private sector and government need to play a much more meaningful role to support CSOs, CSOs must invest in succession planning, and they must build relationships with local funders instead of just relying on international donor funding. Lastly, the Vodafone Foundation agreed that Western donors must acknowledge that local CSOs are best placed to address local societal challenges.

These findings and recommendations resonate with the work already started by the Vodacom Foundation to transform the relationships with its partner CSOs through capacity-building. The Vodacom Foundation currently funds ten CSOs, the majority of which depend solely on corporate donor funding to champion the rights of vulnerable women and abused, abandoned, and orphaned children. Only three of these CSOs also receive government funding.

However, the Foundation's support to these CSOs was tested when in 2016, the South African government introduced revised Codes of Good Practice on Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (B-BBEE), in order to address the imbalances created by apartheid, requiring companies in the ICT sector to inter alia, use ICTs to support philanthropy in order to receive maximum points in the B-BBEE score card.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>37</sup> The codes published in Government Gazette 40407, of 7 November 2016, aim to further deepen the implementation of the Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (B-BBEE) Act 53 of 2003, as amended by inter alia stimulating growth and promoting transformation of the ICT sector and access to ICTs. To contribute to these objectives, measured entities in the ICT sector must contribute 1.5 per cent of net profit after tax to support socio-economic development (SED), and the spend for such initiatives must be ICT-based in order for the entity to realise maximum points from the B-BBEE score card. This ICT requirement meant that Foundation and company SED activities which are not ICT-based would not be recognised for purposes of B-BBEE measurement. The B-BBEE Act was enacted in order to redress the imbalances resulting from the apartheid system, which excluded mainly black people, black women,

Unfortunately, none of the Foundation-supported CSOs had at the time deployed ICTs as a tool for development, instead the Foundation only provided them with an annual financial grant, which meant that under the new B-BBEE legislative arrangement, the Foundation would forfeit points to the score card as there was no ICT benefit to CSOs. A debate ensued in the company on the possibility of removing these CSOs from the Foundation beneficiary list. After several iterations, the Foundation decided to support these CSOs not for statutory compliance purposes, but as part of its commitment to connect for good and in support of the company's purpose to connect for a better future, by fostering digital literacy and gender equality.

Although the Vodacom Foundation continues funding these CSOs on an annual basis to deliver on their programmes, it has limited funding to support projects from other charitable institutions because it runs massive and costly infrastructure-related projects in support of government programmes in education and GBV. Consequently, the Foundation had to devise creative ways of providing sustainable support to these CSOs beyond just funding. In order to empower these CSOs to attract more funding from the government and to adopt digital transformation to improve their offerings to the vulnerable, a journey ensued to digitise the operations of these CSOs with costs borne by the Foundation. Most CSOs were eager to adopt digital transformation to improve their administration processes and to support their beneficiaries. The Foundation deployed twenty-four ICT graduates from its youth academy to eight CSOs that were open to additional support, and computer laboratories to

and black people with disability from participating in the economy. The measured entities are assessed against a score card to achieve the law's objectives with weightings assigned to the pillars of the score card thus: ownership (25); management control (23); board representation (8); top management representation (5); employment equity (10); skills development (20); enterprise and supplier development as follows – (procurement (25); supplier development (10); enterprise development (15)); and lastly, SED (12). Vodacom South Africa needs a minimum of B-BBEE level 4 in order to qualify for spectrum and some big government contracts (according to Global System for Mobile Communications Association spectrum refers to 'radio frequencies allocated to the mobile industry and other sectors for communication over airwaves').

three of these CSOs to provide digital literacy to the staff and some of their beneficiaries. The survey conducted by the Foundation in 2021 found that this deployment of ICT coordinators and computer laboratories multi-dimensionally transformed the way the CSOs operated. Two of the CSOs expanded their geographical footprint to another province as a result of the financial support from the Foundation. The partnership also contributes to job creation because these CSOs collectively employ a total of 267 people. Digital transformation provides ease of daily administration, empowers beneficiaries and staff with self-confidence in using ICTs, and puts the CSOs in good stead to apply for government funding.<sup>38</sup> The Foundation and Vodacom staff survey found that the partnership with these CSOs teaches the Vodacom staff compassion, boosts staff morale through volunteering at these CSOs, creates a mutually beneficial partnership, inspires development of ICT solutions to solve societal challenges, and enhances company brand and reputation.<sup>39</sup>

The Foundation continues to ensure that these partner CSOs comply with Vodacom South Africa's internal policies derived from national laws on CSO registration, anti-corruption, terrorism, money-laundering, and ensuring that there is no duplication of funding with other Vodacom South Africa programmes. However, this annual vetting process can be cumbersome and overwhelming for CSOs and may serve as a deterrent to funding renewal. So, the ICT coordinators will also assist with interpretation and completion of the required application forms.

The review of the relationship with these CSOs changed power dynamics between the Vodacom Foundation and the CSOs to a symbiotic relationship based on mutual respect. Today, the Foundation refers to and treats its CSOs as delivery partners, acknowledging that they have a community reach and field understanding on GBV that the Foundation lacks. Going forward, the Foundation will report on

<sup>38</sup> *Vodacom Foundation Report* (unpublished), September 2021. The report was tabled in the Vodacom Foundation Board Meeting of 3 September 2021.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

the work of these CSOs in its annual activities because the grants and capacity-building provided benefit not just to the CSO but also vulnerable communities which are the main focus of the Vodacom Foundation's work. From engagements with CSO managers, there is immense gratitude towards the transformative partnership between Vodacom Foundation and the CSO in the daily management of administrative functions and the benefits to children who would otherwise only have access to ICT at university level due to high levels of inequality in the country.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

There is growing realisation by government, civil society, and big business of the need to work together to tackle GBV. However, GBV is a complex national crisis, which requires a capable state to manage with clear polices, multi-stakeholder partnerships, and a robust criminal justice system. The South African government is showing a positive trajectory in its commitment to addressing GBV in some areas like prosecutions,<sup>40</sup> DNA management,<sup>41</sup> and providing police stations with trained GBV officers.<sup>42</sup> However, there is still a concern that many cases remain unreported due to societal stigma or lack of confidence in the criminal justice system, and some cases are not prosecuted due to botched investigations.

In December 2021, ahead of the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence, and shortly after the release of crime statistics, President Ramaphosa gave high-level progress remarks on the response to the GBV crisis since the launch of the NSP, including updates on legislative reform, capacity-building in police stations, and psychosocial services. He admitted that despite the government's best efforts, the shameful picture on GBV in South Africa

<sup>40</sup> *Department of Justice and Constitutional Development: Annual Report 2020–2021*, p. 97, see note 28.

<sup>41</sup> See 'Cabinet Pleased with Clearing of DNA Testing Backlog', 2 March 2023, [www.sanews.gov.za/south-africa/cabinet-pleased-clearing-dna-testing-backlog](http://www.sanews.gov.za/south-africa/cabinet-pleased-clearing-dna-testing-backlog).

<sup>42</sup> South African Police Services, 'Speaking Notes'; see note 25.

continues unabated, thereby diminishing efforts to create a GBV-free society.<sup>43</sup>

Much has been said about the current state of South African prisons, which are not conducive for the rehabilitation of offenders due to overcrowding, gang activity, and sexual assault. Prevention and economic empowerment are key. However, where offenders are put behind bars, correction and rehabilitation require much more attention – in the first instance by accelerating the pace of addressing of overcrowding, stopping repeat offenders, and smoothly reintegrating ex-offenders into society.<sup>44</sup>

In its 2019–2020 annual report, the Department of Justice and Constitutional Development reported a 75.2 per cent conviction rate for sexual offences brought for prosecution, representing 4,098 convictions.<sup>45</sup> In 2020–2021, the number of convictions increased to 75.8 per cent, with 2,539 convictions, and this number increased to 3,402 in the 2021/22 year but is recorded in the annual report as a 74.2 per cent rate.<sup>46</sup> Although the conviction rates seem to be improving and this is commendable, there is criticism as the trend's focus is on cases brought for prosecution rather than all reported cases.<sup>47</sup> Consequently, reports on prosecution must give a full picture of successfully prosecuted cases against all reported cases to draw attention to the number of withdrawn and unattended cases (cases that were never brought to trial).

<sup>43</sup> The President, Republic of South Africa, 'From the Desk of the President', 22 November 2022, <https://mailchi.mp/presidency.gov.za/from-the-desk-of-the-president-monday-22-november-2021>.

<sup>44</sup> Cameron, E. 2021, 'Harsh Prison Terms Won't Solve the Crisis of Gender-Based Violence,' *News 24*, 9 August, [www.news24.com/news24/analysis/edwin-cameron-harsh-prison-terms-wont-solve-the-crisis-of-gender-based-violence-20210809](http://www.news24.com/news24/analysis/edwin-cameron-harsh-prison-terms-wont-solve-the-crisis-of-gender-based-violence-20210809).

<sup>45</sup> *Department of Justice and Constitutional Development Annual Report 2019/2020*, pp. 107–108, [www.justice.gov.za/reportfiles/anr2019-20.pdf](http://www.justice.gov.za/reportfiles/anr2019-20.pdf).

<sup>46</sup> *Department of Justice and Constitutional Development: Annual Report 2020/2021*, see note 28; *Department of Justice and Constitutional Development: Annual Report 2021/2022*, p. 97, [www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis\\_document/202210/justice-constitutional-development-annualreport.pdf](http://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis_document/202210/justice-constitutional-development-annualreport.pdf).

<sup>47</sup> South African Broadcasting Corporation featuring Advocate Bronwyn Pithey, 'NPA's 75% Conviction Rate for Sexual Offences Questioned' 10 September 2020, <https://youtube.com/watch?v=oWR5d2QFYIg&feature=share>.

To improve accuracy in reporting of GBV cases, the role of all relevant organs of the state and other stakeholders needs to be augmented by technology, including big data analytics and a dedicated unit to collate and analyse the data before disseminating. CSOs in the GBV space should be digitalised, with costs for indigent CSOs largely carried by their private-sector partners and the remainder by government.

With the dire need for support, it is unclear why the Victims Support Services Bill, which was tabled in parliament in 2020, was not processed and passed together with the package of laws that were tabled in 2021, as part of the legislative reform package. This bill and the policy on shelters must be given priority to address the role of government in victim support, especially in shelters.

Government still has difficulties driving a coordinated and consistent approach to GBV. A disconnect exists between the work of line-function departments and private-sector initiatives, with some stakeholders questioning whether private initiatives such as the newly established GBVFRF are meant to replace the existing state or private-sector initiatives. Poor reporting on GBV and poor programme planning contribute to inadequate funding, thereby giving rise to requests for the private sector to fund some of the GBV programmes or initiatives, which is unsustainable. There needs to be clearly defined roles on what each partner brings to the partnership to avoid ambiguity, duplication, and competition.

Measurable targets underpinned by a performance-based remuneration model should be set for public servants dealing with GBV, with organisational performance assessed strictly against these targets. A monitoring and evaluation framework is also required to measure the impact of multi-stakeholder partnership programmes.

The Vodacom Foundation's contributions, while not insignificant, are broadly a drop in the ocean. Technology is not a *panacea* for societal ills, but efforts can be scaled up if there is clear delineation of roles between government, the private sector, and civil society.

More companies should actively join the fight against GBV beyond simply providing grants; they must offer sustainable solutions

that contribute to the GBV ecosystem and the NSP. However, existing multi-stakeholder partnerships are hampered by a nagging suspicion from some government partners that the private sector is just revenue-driven and not genuine in its support to the developmental agenda. On the other hand, a view exists in some private-sector circles that government spends most time formulating policies and making statements on GBV but fails on implementation, as is evident from the crime statistics every quarter.

Lastly, this GBV crisis can only be resolved through multi-stakeholder partnership, guided by mutual trust, tight policies, clear role definition, and the willingness of all parties to effect change. However, partnerships should not usurp or replace government's constitutional and international obligations to promote gender equality, prevent GBV, and protect victims.