

Vodacom launches Gender-Based Violence Fund

The Covid-19 pandemic and nationwide lockdown has compounded the effects of existing gender inequalities and led to an increase in violations of women's rights, including elevated risks of domestic violence and other forms of GBV. This has been evident with Vodacom's GBV command centre (GBVCC) reporting a spike in gender violence-related calls during the nationwide lockdown.

As part of its ongoing commitment to fight against GBV, the Vodacom Foundation hosted a GBV webinar on 25 August, which aimed to shed light on the impact of GBV and how to overcome it. During the webinar, Vodacom also announced the launch of a R5m Gender-Based Violence Fund to further support survivors of GBV.



The virtual event was facilitated by Lebogang Mashile, poet, author and speaker as well as a panel of dynamic guest speakers including Takalani Netshitenzhe of Vodacom South Africa; Masingita Masunga, inspirational speaker, TV director and philanthropist; Rosie Motene, Pan African queer and feminist and speaks on GBV and LGBTQI in Africa and Cheryl Hlabane, operations manager at Frida Hartley Shelter.

“Conversations have started in Vodafone, and Vodacom on these forms of discrimination, because the only way to stamp out racism, gender and class discrimination is to first acknowledge that there is a problem, that these forms of discrimination exist in societies in which we operate, and that it will not be tolerated in the workplace. Our global and group CEOs are taking the lead. These conversations, force all of us to introspect on the kind of culture we want to create for ourselves and for future generations,” said Netshitenzhe.



Vodacom steps up to fight against GBV

3 Jul 2020



During the course of the webinar, the panel shared their personal experiences of GBV, discussed how society views

survivors of GBV and challenges women face when leaving abusive relationships.

The impact of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) is extensive and includes physical, sexual and mental consequences for women and girls that remain with them for years. “Many people don’t acknowledge the various levels and effects of GBV. People need to understand that abuse affects women in physiological and neurological ways,” says Motene. “We need to also acknowledge the strength it takes for survivors to speak out about their abuser as they often face scrutiny from different areas of our society,” says Motene.

Hlabane said the country needs to improve its structures to support survivors of GBV. “There is a large misconception that victims of GBV are weak. They are asked questions as to why they were abused or why did they not speak out sooner. We need to improve our structures to support survivors of GBV and improve funding towards support systems so that these survivors are not forced to stay in abusive relationships,” says Hlabane.

Vodacom also announced that Masingita Masunga has been appointed as an ambassador to the Vodacom Foundation. As an ambassador, Masingita will champion the values upheld by the Vodacom Foundation and focus on key areas of education and gender empowerment.



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Vodacom’s GBV programmes focuses on prevention, response and victim support. Response is through the Gender Based Violence Command Center which launched in partnership with the Department of Social Development in 2014. Victim support is through digital literacy provided in the shelters for victims and survivors of GBV. The mobile-based app has been developed as part of the prevention strategy.

The App will serve as a risk assessment tool for the App users to determine if they are in an abusive relationship so that they could seek help. Through this mobile-based App, the user will be able to compile and keep a journal of abusive incidents that could serve as evidence during criminal investigation and prosecution. The app is intended to augment prevention and response focus. The app is expected to be launched later this year.

Vodacom appeals to anyone who may need support during this time to contact the GBV Command Centre through the following channels:

- By dialling 0800 428 428 or via USSD on *120*7867#
- A Skype line ‘HelpMeGBV’ for members of the deaf community
- An SMS-based line 31531

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>