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## **THOUGHT LEADERSHIP**

**Breaking the Chains:  
How South Africa's Private Sector is Mobilising to End  
Gender-Based Violence and Femicide (GBVF)**



**We Dare To Pledge**

Gender-Based Violence and Femicide (GBVF) in South Africa is more than a crisis—it's a vicious chain that binds individuals, families, and communities to a cycle of pain, fear, and economic hardship. For years, the silence around this pervasive issue has created invisible but powerful links, preventing meaningful change. Yet today, the silence is breaking, and a new movement is emerging, bringing together South Africa's private sector and spearheaded by the [National Business Initiative \(NBI\)](#).

This journey is one of collective courage, breaking each link in the chain of GBVF with the hope of building a South Africa where safety and dignity are everyone's birthright. But how do we turn the willingness to act into sustainable, transformative change? And can the private sector lead the charge in shattering these long-standing chains?

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### Why Silence Can't Be an Option: The Hidden Costs of Inaction

Silence around GBVF doesn't just maintain the status quo—it strengthens the chains that hold society back. The impacts of GBVF are evident in lost productivity, escalating healthcare costs, and fractured communities. Studies estimate that GBVF costs South Africa billions annually, straining resources that could otherwise be invested in growth and development. But beyond the financial burden, the hidden costs are even more profound. The trauma endured by survivors and the long-term consequences on families impact the nation's collective well-being.

The NBI, in collaboration with [Nottingham Trent University \(NTU\)](#) and [Gordon Institute of Business Science \(GIBS\)](#) hosted a critical discussion where [GIZ GmbH - Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit \(GIZ\)](#), brought to light sextortion and the gendered nature of corruption. This form of exploitation—a crime where individuals, often women, are coerced into sexual favours in exchange for essential resources or opportunities—is a silent yet destructive form of GBVF.

As businesses come to terms with these costs, many are realising that taking action against GBVF is not only a moral imperative but a business one. Silence has a price, and inaction only tightens the chains. Today, a growing number of companies understand that they have both the power and the responsibility to help dismantle these barriers.

## A Roadmap for the Future: Tools for Transformation

Through the establishment and launch of a centralised learning and information portal, called the WeDare (Women's Equality: Digital Access and the Right to Expression) Repository, we aim to co-ordinate awareness-raising learning, sharing and maintaining a finger on the pulse of developments.

The Repository serves as a centralised resource where companies access best practices and strategies to combat GBVF collaboratively. This tool embodies the principle that knowledge shared is knowledge multiplied, allowing companies to build on one another's efforts.



NBI has also developed and will roll out the [Transformation Blueprint](#) and Maturity Curve, a tool that enables companies to assess their progress in gender equity and inclusion. This roadmap is a guide for businesses to understand where they are and where they need to go, ensuring that change is measured, impactful, and continually advancing.



In partnership with [Genesis Analytics](#) and the [Wits University Southern Centre for Inequality Studies \(SCIS\)](#), we developed an online platform enabling businesses to calculate and visualise their Gender Pay Gap. By calculating their pay disparity, companies are displaying commitment to narrowing the gender pay gap. Through these initiatives, the private sector has the resources to not only dismantle the barriers of GBVF but to keep them from reforming. However, the journey is far from over, and the question remains: Will companies rise to the challenge, using these tools to drive sustained, long-term transformation?

# SHATTERING THE CHAINS: GENDER BASED VIOLENCE AND FEMICIDE (GBVF)



The private sector's journey to becoming a proactive force against Gender Based Violence and Femicide (GBVF) has not been linear. Each milestone in the fight against GBVF represents a link broken—a step closer to a South Africa where everyone can live free from fear:



Each milestone represents a vital step in eradicating the hold of GBVF, yet questions remain: Are these actions enough to tackle such a deeply rooted issue? Or is there more the private sector must do to drive systemic change?

## Mobilising a United Front

The NBI has been instrumental in creating a collaborative, strategic response to GBVF within the private sector. Through the Social Transformation Unit, we have guided businesses in implementing policies that not only support survivors but also foster accountability and proactive prevention. This work is about more than surface-level policy updates—it's about reshaping corporate culture to prioritise safety, respect, and support.

Through multistakeholder roundtables, we provided a platform for open discussion, where companies can share both successes and setbacks. These dialogues are essential in building an ecosystem of knowledge sharing and accountability, ensuring that no one organisation bears the weight of this task alone.

Examples of corporate commitment include [Anglo American](#), which overhauled its policies to align with GBVF objectives, as well as [Hollard](#)'s collaboration with the 1000 Women's Trust,

and **Woolworths'** internal 'Shift the Needle' initiative with Womaniko, both of which were part of the WE-DARE initiatives of NTU and GIBS. Yet, even as these initiatives unfold, we must ask: How can we create a framework that allows for collective learning and rapid adaptation? And how do we ensure these efforts are making an impact on the ground, where they matter most?

The Cultural Shift: Practical Steps to Transform Workplaces into Safe Spaces Policies are critical, but they're only one part of the equation. Breaking the chains of GBVF requires a deep-rooted cultural shift, embedding zero tolerance toward violence and exploitation into the fabric of each organisation. The NBI emphasises that this shift must go beyond policies to become part of a company's daily practices, values, and interactions. **Here are some practical strategies that companies can implement to foster this cultural transformation:**

- **Clear, Transparent Reporting Channels** Companies should create secure, anonymous, and accessible reporting channels for GBVF-related incidents. This can be achieved through dedicated hotlines, secure digital platforms, or partnerships with third-party providers to ensure that employees feel safe and supported when coming forward. Regular audits can ensure these channels remain effective and confidential.
- **Workplace Training and Awareness Campaigns:** Ongoing training sessions that address GBVF, consent, and bystander intervention equip employees to recognise and prevent harmful behaviors. Companies like Woolworths are incorporating programs such as 'Shift-the-Needle,' where employees at all levels participate in workshops and discussions that challenge biases and normalise conversations around respect and safety.
- **Establishing a Code of Conduct and Consequence Management:** A comprehensive Code of Conduct should outline unacceptable behaviours, including GBVF-related misconduct, and the consequences for violations. NBI advocates for transparency in applying this code, ensuring consistent, fair responses to reported incidents. Leaders can exemplify adherence to these standards, reinforcing accountability at every level.
- **Support Networks and Survivor Assistance Programme:** Companies can provide support networks and resources for survivors, such as counselling services, legal assistance, and medical support. Partnering with organisations that specialize in GBVF support, such as the 1000 Women's Trust, can enable businesses to offer resources that are professional, effective, and compassionate.
- **C-suite and Leadership Involvement in Advocacy:** When executives actively champion safe, inclusive workplace cultures, the message resonates throughout the organisation. Leaders can share personal commitments to these values, host open discussions on GBVF, and reinforce the importance of safety, inclusion, and respect. Culture change is perhaps the hardest chain to break, requiring time, commitment, and uncomfortable conversations. But as more companies commit to these steps, a ripple effect emerges—creating workplaces that are truly safe and inclusive.

**A Call to Action:** Building a Legacy of Freedom: Eradicating GBVF will not happen overnight, nor will it be the result of a single organisation's efforts. It requires a national commitment, where the private sector stands as a pillar of support, resilience, and progress. The NBI's vision is clear: a

South Africa where GBVF is no longer tolerated, where silence is not an option, and where every business is a champion for change. The journey to a GBVF-free future is one of resilience, courage, and solidarity.

For South Africa's private sector, this is a defining moment—a chance to create a legacy that reflects our highest values and aspirations. The only question that remains is: Are you willing to shatter the silence and lead the way to a new era of dignity, safety, and freedom for all?



**For more information on the We Dare Pledge and the We Dare Repository, please contact:**

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*The National Business Initiative (NBI) is an independent and voluntary coalition of South African and multinational businesses launched in 1995 by the then President, Nelson Mandela.*

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