

FirstRand's CSI That Works addresses gender-based violence

The third in the series of CSI That Works corporate-interest breakfasts hosted by the FirstRand Foundation, on the topic of gender-based violence, took place on 25 February 2014 in Sandton, Johannesburg.



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The event was hosted by Sizwe Nxasana, chairman of FirstRand Foundation. Three key industry speakers: Lisa Vetten, Bafana Khumalo and Dr Lesley Ann Foster discussed a variety of high impact programmes and strategies focused on interventions to end gender-based violence (GBV) in South Africa with the end goal of empowering the women of the country, as well as aiding industry by supplying information around funding initiatives and programmes. Gender-based violence (GBV) is a human rights violation and a form of discrimination against another person, on the basis of gender. The rate of sexual violence in this country is one the highest in the world with a shocking 33% of men reporting raping a woman during their lifetime - clearly an inconvenient truth that can no longer go ignored by society and big business alike.

Mostly perpetrated by men

Most acts of GBV are perpetrated by men on women and girls. For this reason, GBV is mostly viewed as violence against women.

According to the World Health Organisation, globally, at least one in five women has experienced violence in their lives. Violence against women is the major cause of death and disability for the 15-44 age group; one in three teenage girls has suffered sexual abuse by a boyfriend, and one in four has experienced violence in a relationship. A study in Gauteng revealed that friends, acquaintances and neighbours accounted for 43.4% of those who rape adolescents. However, rapists in South Africa often go unpunished because rape is one of the most under-reported crimes and has one of the lowest conviction rates. More than 90% of rapists and nearly two thirds of men who kill their intimate partners go unpunished in the country.

In making a contribution towards addressing GBV in South Africa, the FirstRand Foundation commissioned the research: Reframing Interventions to End Gender-Based Violence in South Africa: Lessons learnt from corporate social investment (CSI)-funded programmes. The research was conducted as part of the FirstRand Foundation communications strategy to document and share learnings under the theme: CSI that Works. The research results and lessons learnt aim to positively influence CSI spending in South Africa. Vetten, a research associate at the Wits Institute for Social and Economic Research (WiSER) will set the scene and contextualise GBV in South Africa. Khumalo, co-founder and executive director of the Sonke Justice Network, then speaks about the role of men and boys in ending gender-based violence. Dr Foster is the founder and director of Masimanyane Women's Support Centre. Her talk will detail her organisation's support services to victims and survivors of gender-based violence.

Few programmes focus on primary prevention

One of the challenges in addressing GBV is that it is generally framed as a women's issue, leaving out men (the primary perpetrators). Furthermore, most of the programmes in GBV focus on secondary and tertiary prevention, providing services and activities designed to prevent abuse and victimisation of survivors of GBV. There are still very few programmes focused on primary prevention to ensure that GBV does not occur in the first place.

The predominance of GBV in South Africa reflects the high level of inequality between women and men in society. Although predominantly occurring in the home and between individuals and families, GBV is no longer a private matter but a national social pathology. Research indicates that violence against women is largely being driven by a patriarchal society that perpetuates sexism and male dominance through social practices that maintain inequality between men and women. Domestic violence has also become normalised in most communities, making it 'acceptable' for men to use violence against women as a means of resolving conflict in the home. Unfortunately, the criminal justice system has failed to effectively provide support to victims and survivors of GBV.

Various stakeholders working to address GBV in the country are beginning to advocate for collaborative partnerships and review their approaches to programming. Men and boys are slowly being included in GBV initiatives, to transform them from being perpetrators to being part of the solution. Working with men and boys has been found to be effective in addressing GBV as such programmes begin to challenge cultural norms and definitions of masculinity.

Making funding decisions

Issues that corporates should consider in making funding decisions within the GBV sector include the following:

- Design GBV programmes informed by research-based evidence;
- Support programmes that focus on parenting and building family relationships;
- GBV programmes should not solely focus on the victims but also on the families;
- Support action-oriented multi-sectoral professional learning communities on GBV in order to enhance understanding;
- Promote and support gender-based programmes focused on collaborative partnerships to promote effective and efficient use of resources to bring about systemic change;
- Support prevention and early intervention programmes to eliminate GBV;
- Promote programmes that focus on boys and men in order to address the underlying causes of GBV;
- Target perpetrators of GBV to be part of the solution through rehabilitation and reintegration in communities;
- Support workplace GBV programmes to complement community interventions and minimise productivity losses;
- Commit to long-term support in order to bring about systemic change given the complexity of GBV; and
- Insist on monitoring and evaluation of programmes to ensure accountability and high impact CSI.

Gender-based violence against women has been called "the most pervasive yet least recognised human rights abuse in the world." The results of such violations have far reaching effects on personal lives, on communities, and on labour relations in the corporate sphere. Unwanted pregnancies, unsafe abortions, injury and trauma stemming from the abuse incidents, sexually transmitted diseases including HIV are all consequences of gender-based violence, which perpetuate the cycles of abuse and poverty. In the CSI That Works series, FirstRand Foundation examines some of the prevalent issues that South

Africa, as an economy and society, must face in order to fully achieve the human rights status to which it aspires.

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