



Multi-skilled Dlamini dreams of a society free of toxic masculinity

Dr Judy Dlamini is bringing her vast experience in leadership, integrity, accountability and tenacity to the fight against gender-based violence and femicide (GBVF).

Dlamini (63), a medical and academic doctor who wears many hats as a businesswoman, author and Chancellor of the University of Witwatersrand, is the chairperson of the Gender-Based Violence Response Fund (GBVF).

The fund was launched by President Cyril Ramaphosa in February 2021, to support

the implementation of the national strategic plan to end GBVF. Various private companies pledged donations that amounted to over R128 million to the fund and its establishment was supported by the International Women's Forum of South Africa.

At the helm of the fund, Dlamini is entrusted to ensure accountability of the funds and to deliver on its mandates. She works with five board members from various sectors who volunteer their skills and expertise.

Dlamini believes that she was chosen to lead based on her long track record in leadership and her passion for eradicating toxic masculinity and patrilocal norms. With November and December featuring the 16 Days of Activism against GBV campaign (25 November to 10 December), Dlamini says that until the scourge is eradicated, it will be a 365-day campaign.

"In life, you will always find someone who is willing and able. I have led before; I also have a clear understanding of what it is to live in a country where you do not feel safe. So I would like to believe that motivated my appointment," she says.

Dlamini has served in different sectors of the economy, most notably as the founder and executive chairperson of the Mbekani Group, which has been in business for more than 25 years. She strongly advocates for gender equity.

As a result, she founded the Female Academic Leaders Fellowship to develop a pipeline of black female leaders in academia. She is also a director of the South African Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SME) Fund, a partnership between the government,

development finance institutions and the private sector to grow an inclusive economy through supporting SMEs.

In her 2019 book, titled *Equal but Different*, which is based on her doctoral thesis, Dlamini explores the intersection of race, gender and social class in the career progression of women. The book features stories from women across the globe who share their stories of how gender equality helped them to progress.

Fund improves lives

This understanding of how inequality affects women stands her in good stead as chairperson of the GBVF Response Fund. Dlamini is optimistic that the fund will make a meaningful impact across social classes where GBVF is prevalent.

To achieve a positive outcome, she refers to the six pillars that are part of the National Strategic Plan on GBVF. Those include accountability, coordination and leadership, prevention and rebuilding social cohesion, justice, safety and protection.

She says her responsibility is to ensure the representation of all key role players in the fight against GBVF, which she refers to as another pandemic.

She believes that given the calibre of her team members, she will be able to safeguard the fund and continue to deliver its mandate. In praising her team, she says: "In leadership, you must have the right people in place to execute the plan."

Dlamini is pleased with the fund's progress, but notes that the 'scourge is deep and has been entrenched for decades.' "We need to galvanise support from all sectors," she says.

The fund has already disbursed R36 million, supporting 108 community-based organisations that focus on GBV across the country. Dlamini explains that organisations were called to submit their proposals and preference was given to those that address the range of challenges faced by victims and survivors. She says they were impressed by the outcomes achieved by some of the organisations.

Dlamini says they have appointed Tshikululu Social Investment, an experienced fund management company, to ensure the fund makes a real difference to South Africans affected by GBVF. Intermediaries have also been employed to support four informal organisations that could not handle large finances, but had the will to assist victims.

She says the fund works with academics who assist with scientific facts and analyse

all statistics provided by the South African Police Service (SAPS), because she is keen to understand the reality on the ground. "We have to be sure of the statistics. Academics assist

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"There are closed places where incidents are not reported, but they are happening. Working with academics has helped us to unpack that. We have also hosted *izimbizo* with non-governmental organisations to get a better understanding of the situation," she says.

More support needed

While Dlamini is upbeat about the fund's impact, she cites several challenges and calls for cooperation between government and the private

sector.

She says the fund has engaged with Ministers on issues such as the backlog in DNA analysis, which hampers investigations and court cases. Her proposal is for the SAPS to work with universities that have experts in DNA analysis to resolve some of the cases.

She challenges the private sector and philanthropists to increase their efforts in the fight against GBVF, as they did with COVID-19.

The majority of stock exchange-listed companies put little effort into ending GBVF, says Dlamini. She points out that insufficient funds have been raised and pleads with companies to continue to donate. While several companies have made pledges, the fund is unable to budget for its programmes until the money is deposited into its account. "Some companies are pledging with cash in kind, while some are not immediate donations. It is difficult to budget based on that," she says.

Dlamini acknowledges the bad reputation of fraud and corruption associated with public organisations meant to help vulnerable people. She draws on her integrity and governance skills to assure the country that all the monies will be accounted for. She says they have set up a risk and audit committee and there is a long chain of



accountability.

"I understand the lack of trust in public organisations; as a board, we are fully aware of that. I am accountable for everything I do and the people I lead. Also, I believe in integrity, I always tell young leaders to make it a norm to do well, even when they are under no supervision. I try to be inclusive and give other people an opportunity to raise their points, even when the final decision lies with me. I take advice from the majority, even if our views differ, and take full accountability for it," she says.

Dlamini believes in kindness and respect, which she emphasises must be restored in society. She says if people are kind and respectful to each other, GBVF would be non-existent.

As the chairperson of the GBVF Response Fund, she hopes to see justice being served for women; children; sex workers and the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning society. Her wish is for patriarchal norms and toxic masculinity not to have a place in South Africa.