



President Cyril Ramaphosa was booed and jeered in 2019 when he told men he wanted them to take responsibility for the rape and deaths of women in South Africa. He launched the GBVF Response Fund in 2021 to tackle the scourge. Picture: Supplied

Don't look the other way

● Recent progress by high-impact GBVF Response Fund grant partners, in the first four months of implementing their programmes and interventions, showcases how much South Africa can achieve when we work together towards a common cause. More than 17,000 survivors of gender-based violence received support from community-based organisations (CBOs) during rollout earlier this year. This is a powerful leap in the right direction to combat gender-based violence and femicide (GBVF) – the country's first pandemic.

The evil of GBVF predates Covid-19 significantly and remains unchecked and virulent. In real terms, the progress made remains a drop in the ocean when you consider the extent of the crisis.

For our part, as the fund, while our approach of adopting a multipronged, collective and unified fight is making a tangible difference – and serves as a powerful case study for what can happen when energy is directed in the right areas – there is still an urgent need to accelerate action and scale up efforts. But this is not something we can do alone. Now is the time for more South Africans, businesses, civil society and government role players to step up so our progress is not slowed by lack of support, will and funding.

There is little doubt that we have a monumental task ahead. UN Women reports that one in three women have been abused in their lifetime. In times of crises, the numbers rise, as seen during the pandemic and other recent humanitarian crises, conflicts and climate disasters. Its new report, based on data from 13 countries since the pandemic, shows that two in three women reported that they or a woman they know experienced some form of violence. Only one in 10 said survivors would go to the police for help.

The National Strategic Plan (NSP) on GBVF is the government's comprehensive strategy for tackling all forms of violence and abuse against women and children. Since its launch in 2020, several interventions have been implemented – the GBVF

GBVF is SA's de facto 'first pandemic' – we all have an urgent moral obligation to accelerate action, writes **Judy Dlamini**

Response Fund being one. Our fund, launched by President Cyril Ramaphosa in February 2021, hit the ground running to stem this tide of dehumanisation and destruction.

To counter statistics about how these crimes are underreported, we managed to see 1,575 protection orders applied for through the fund's CBO partners by the end of May, with 1,492 being granted. In total, 4,773 GBVF cases were reported – a 94.7% success rate, and well ahead of the targets set for the 2022 calendar year. As many as 29 of the CBOs we support operate in GBVF hotspots, and they managed to reach 20,641 people.

But this is only the start. We need to collectively ramp this up as we fight for equal rights and equal opportunity for all genders. This includes asking the hard questions, such as what are men doing to ensure women in their organisations have equal pay and chances of promotion. Let's give women a chance to lead, and call it out when we don't see it. Don't look the other way, as you then become an accomplice – each of us has a duty to do something. Women do not abuse themselves – so men, we need your voice and activism against the scourge.

According to the UN, only 48 countries – less than a quarter of the 206 analysed in a recent study – treated violence against women and girls-related services as an integral part of their national and local Covid-19

response plans, with few adequately funding these measures.

Funding in South Africa remains a key challenge as we look to extend the life and mandate of our fund while the government finalises the setting up of the council that will be the implementing agent of the NSP for GBVF. Access to funds will enable the fund to support more CBOs and intermediary organisations (with their own networks of CBOs) to do more for more people in need. This support needs to come from all parts and sectors of our society and needs to happen fast to ensure momentum is not lost.

At the fund, we are deeply grateful to our president who listened to the urgent call of the National Shutdown Movement, among other activist groups. With the envisioned GBVF council not yet running, our fund is filling the void, and its life and mandate is being extended. But everyone needs to play an active part. It is time for all of us to step up to do more – whether it is funding, raising awareness, changing behaviours or helping survivors.

I am proud of what our fund has achieved in a short time. Our innovative partnership model is peerless, and is setting the standard on how the fight can be won against GBVF in South Africa, across the rest of Africa and further afield. Our multipronged, collaborative, targeted and verified approach works.

With your support, we can do much more to scale this up to the right level – to end this scourge in our lifetimes. I urge you to join us today as we roll out the antidote to end South Africa's first pandemic – GBVF.

* Dlamini is chair of the Gender-Based Violence and Femicide (GBVF) Response Fund. The fund is a private sector-led initiative aimed at supporting the implementation of the new National Strategic Plan on GBVF, by raising financial and non-financial resources, and allocating them to organisations working to tackle GBVF and ensure support and access to justice for victims. The fund pursues powerful public-private partnerships to address GBVF