



# The Sunrise Campaign *Entrepreneurship and Ending Violence* South Africa November 2024

**Susan Swart** took the microphone with confidence at the SADC Gender Protocol@Work Summit and declared: "I overcame, so can you!" Her emotional anguish of living with an abusive husband finally surfaced after her husband decided she was not good enough anymore and left her and her two kids to fend for themselves. She thought long and hard about the business ventures she could pursue. She registered a catering business and started with a donated chips making machine. Ten years ago, Susan attended the Gender Links (GL) entrepreneurship training programme for survivors of gender violence and said that since then she has never looked back. As she put it: "GL taught me how to fly. I was encouraged to encourage others and was empowered to empower myself. I want to tell everyone that they can overcome, just like I have. My business is still growing and I know it will keep growing. Gender links has provided me with the platform and the freedom to be the best that I can." Within minutes the whole marquee, with over 400 regional delegates, rose to its feet, applauding the will and drive of a woman who has refused to succumb to the violence and discrimination that continue to render women second class citizens thirty years after the advent of democracy in South Africa.



Susan Swart, GBV Survivor - Cape Aghulas Municipality - Gender Protocol Summit.  
Photo: Gender Links



Over the last ten years, the *Sunrise Campaign, End Violence, Empower Women*, has gained momentum across the Southern African Development Community (SADC), reaching over 3000 women in ten countries, 600 of these in South Africa. The programme has contributed to the growing evidence on the nexus between economic empowerment and sustainable solutions to Gender Based Violence (GBV). Underscoring the policy level significance of this project, in 2020, South Africa adopted a National Strategic Plan on Gender-Based Violence and Femicide (NSP GBVF) with a stand-alone pillar on Economic Power.

Read our [Economic Justice Policy Brief](#).

The case study demonstrates GL's **expertise** in the field of gender violence (linking research, policy, advocacy and practise) as well as **effectiveness** in connecting the dots between GBV and economic empowerment.

## Who is Gender Links

Formed in 2001, Gender Links (GL) is a Southern African NGO committed to an equal and just society for women and girls in all their diversity. With its headquarters in Johannesburg, South Africa, and offices in five other SADC countries, GL champions gender equality and justice through research, advocacy, linking and learning, movement and institution building in Southern Africa and beyond.

## Why the Sunrise Campaign

South Africa has been identified as one of the most dangerous places in the world to be female (New Frame, 2020). GL has conducted baseline research on violence against women (VAW). Showing that over three quarters (77%) of women in Limpopo; 51% of women in Gauteng; 45% of women in the Western Cape and 36% of women in Kwa Zulu Natal report experiencing some form of violence (emotional, economic, physical or sexual) at least once in their lifetime both within and outside their intimate relationships. A higher proportion of men in Gauteng (78%) and KwaZulu Natal (41%) than women admitted to perpetrating violence against women in their lifetime.

Across the SADC region, [Gender Based Violence \(GBV\) baseline studies](#) conducted by Gender Links and corroborated by Demographic Health Surveys show that at least one in three women experience physical, sexual, economic, verbal or psychological abuse during their lifetime. The VAW Baseline studies include questions on gender attitudes that show that while 88% of men and 82% of women think that people should be treated

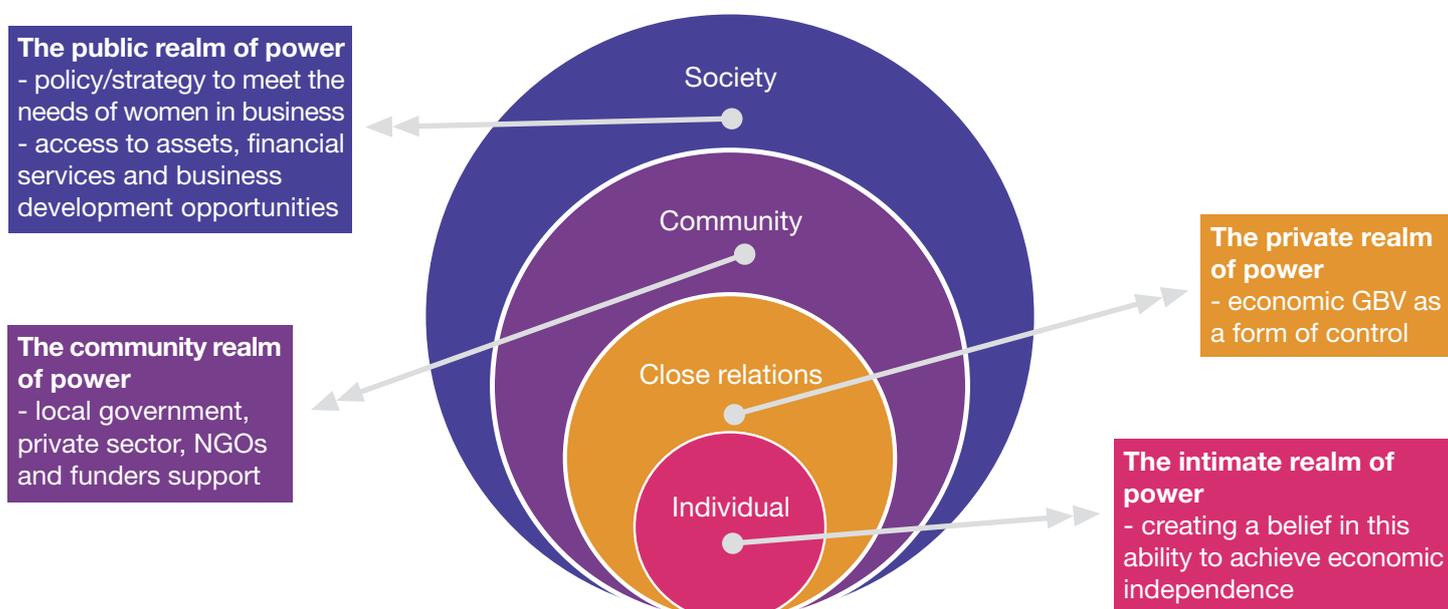
the same whether they are male or female, 86% of men and 58% of women think a woman should obey her husband. The studies show that the most likely forms of violence are also those least likely to be reported to the police - economic, psychological and verbal abuse.

Over the last twenty years, GL has gathered over 2000 [Stories](#) or first-hand accounts of women's experiences of violence. An analysis of the stories showed that the main reason women stay in abusive relationships is to ensure that their children have a place to stay, attend school and have food. The dual vulnerabilities of economic dependence and gender based violence deter women from leaving abusive relationships.

## What the Sunrise Campaign involves

In 2013, Gender Links piloted a programme entitled [Empower Women, End Violence](#) to test the hypothesis that increasing women's agency, confidence and economic power would result in less violence for women in abusive relationships and more control over their lives. Rebranded the [Sunrise Campaign](#) in 2016 because of the "new beginning" that this model offered to survivors of GBV, the programme focusses on an integrated approach of Life Skills and Entrepreneurship training including confidence building; decision making, business management, use of IT, networking and addressing the underlying structural inequalities between men and men.

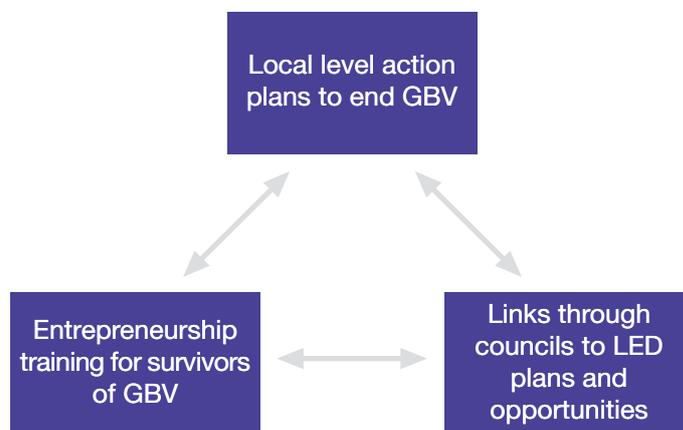
The approach derives from GL's [Theory of Change](#), which is based on the ecological model.



At the **individual level**, the project links survivors of GBV to Local Economic Development opportunities life and information technology skills training that enhances the agency and reduces GBV for survivors. At the **household level**, the programme involves at least three family members, including (where appropriate) former perpetrators as part of a parallel rehabilitation programme.

At the **community level**, the programme forms part of GL's work on gender responsive governance at the local level through the [Centres of Excellence for Gender in Local Government \(COEs\)](#). Councils commit resources, and run campaigns to end gender violence, and empower women economically, as part of a long term, systemic approach to changing the attitudes that fuel GBV. A unique feature of the programme is that it is anchored by councils that have undergone a ten-stage process to become COEs. The councils include support for survivors of gender violence as part of their GBV and Local

Economic Development (LED) action plans. GL provides an entrepreneurship training course tailored for survivors of GBV that combines life skills designed to enhance confidence and agency with basic business skills. While GBV debilitates and destroys self-worth, business builds confidence, negotiation skills, innovation, and resilience. The two forms of training thus complement each other.



<b>Goal</b>	Survivors of gender violence reclaim their agency and experience a marked reduction in GBV through enhanced economic opportunities and outcomes linked to the economic development plans of local authorities.	
<b>Outcomes</b>	GBV survivors with increased agency and economic independence.	Economic power is incorporated into local economic development action plans.
<b>Interventions</b>	Capacity building for GBV survivors on life, enterprise and information technology skills.	Local councils anchor the Sunrise campaign as part of local economic development initiatives.
	Formation of Women in Local Economic Development (WLED) Networks using appropriate technologies.	Review local GBV action plans of host COEs and integrate economic power as a key pillar of the strategy.
<b>Problem statement</b>	High levels of GBV in South Africa disproportionately affect every aspect of women and girls' lives compromising their ability to exercise their rights as citizens; research and anecdotal evidence show that a high proportion of women remain in abusive relationships because of a lack of economic independence.	

## How the Sunrise Campaign has evolved

The model has evolved over three phases to incorporate new learning and become a robust model with a total reach of 13 540: including 3010 GBV survivors trained as entrepreneurs; an average of three family members per household (including where appropriate former perpetrators); Gender Focal Persons; members of GBV and Local Economic Development (LED) committees, the programme has demonstrated the link between economic power and reducing GBV.

"I am really grateful that I attended the first meeting with Gender Links, otherwise I would not have made some of the decisions that I have made. I would not have known about the small grants from the Department of Agriculture and I would have been afraid to think about the future."

*\*Ntombi from Witzenberg*



Funding Leadership Opportunities for Women (FLOW) in the Netherlands supported the first phase from 2013 to 2015 in Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Madagascar, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe. The United Nations Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women funded the project in South Africa, Madagascar and Eswatini from January 2020 to December 2022. Important innovations included

a focus on young women, and the inclusion of men. The project gained momentum in Zimbabwe in 2023 with funding from the Swedish Development Agency (Sida) for Local Economic Development in 12 councils, with the Sunrise Campaign a central pillar. In South Africa, the Irene M. Staehelin (IMS) Foundation based in Switzerland is supporting the project in ten municipalities spread across four provinces.

## The current programme in South Africa

Province	Council	No of women
Gauteng	Emfuleni	20
Gauteng	Midvaal	21
Limpopo	Greater Tzaneen	21
Limpopo	Maruleng	20
Limpopo	Phokwane	20
Northern Cape	Magareng	20
Northern Cape	Platfontein	19
Northern Cape	Sol Plaatjie	20
Western Cape	George	17
Western Cape	Knysna	23
<b>Grand Total</b>		<b>201</b>

The current 201 participants in South Africa come from Magareng, Phokwane, Sol Plaatjie and Platfontein in the Northern Cape; Greater Tzaneen and Maruleng in the Northern Cape; Emfuleni and Midvaal in the Northern Cape as well as George and Knysna in the Northern Cape.

The six municipalities in Gauteng and Limpopo formed part of the COE programme. The Northern Cape is new to the programme. In year three GL will work with the councils and women entrepreneurs to implement campaigns popularising the link between economic power and GBV prevention and reduction. The campaign will be accompanied by localised information, education and communications materials and a video that documents the results of the programme. The video illustrating results will be shared with the local councils in the District, the Provincial and National Government to lobby for the inclusion of economic power as a key strategy for GBV prevention and reduction.

In November 2024, the entrepreneurs received R20,000 each from IMS to invest in their business. Local mentors are being identified and trained to support women entrepreneurs. The mentors will record all interactions through a virtual system. The mentorship will continue for the three-year duration of the programme.

## Changing lives, changing communities

As the project is ongoing, evidence of impact comes from the earlier phases, as well as anecdotal evidence from the more recent phases.



In the pilot phase (2013 to 2015), 1350 survivors of GBV trained as entrepreneurs. 91% completed a business plan and 79% followed through on the plan. 533 survivors of GBV in nine Southern African countries were mentored in the follow-up phase in 2016. Average income increased by \$35 per month after the first phase to \$328 per month in the follow-up phase. 85% (post training) and 97% (follow up) of participants said they now experience less or much less GBV (Gender Links, 2019). Overall, the relationship control index increased by four percentage points to 66%. In 2016 the campaign won the Mail and Guardian "Investing in the Future Award".

Some important outcomes are demonstrated in the personal accounts of participants through "I" stories and interviews and some are summarised in the following stories.

One of the key aims was to achieve increases in **income for the participants**: "I have learned that one has to budget first before spending money. My spending behaviour has improved and I avoid buying things that are unnecessary. I am currently selling my goods on a cash basis or my customers must at least give me a deposit before I release goods. Before these workshops I was selling sweets and cigarettes but currently I am selling beauty products, ladies hand bags and also loan people money. We were taught to save proceeds from the business and to refrain from using the money we have made." *\*Eva from Phalaborwa<sup>1</sup>*

Prior to the project some of the women were already running small businesses and there has been testimony that they have **improved the way they run their businesses or started a business with more potential**: "I found the training very helpful and interesting. The most useful thing about the training was that I was taught how to save money from a business. This was a major lesson for me and I can see the improvement. Before I attended

the training, I had a small business selling cool drinks and airtime at my house. In June 2015, I started to venture into a new business of renting out rooms. I am hoping to finish the building of all the rooms by June 2016. So far I have built two rooms with bathrooms to rent out. It was at the Gender links workshop where I got the information and the encouragement to build these rooms. I am managing to do this project all by myself".

*\*Maria Mathebula from Phalaborwa*



The group of women in Phalaborwa during the first training workshop. Photo: Susan Mogari



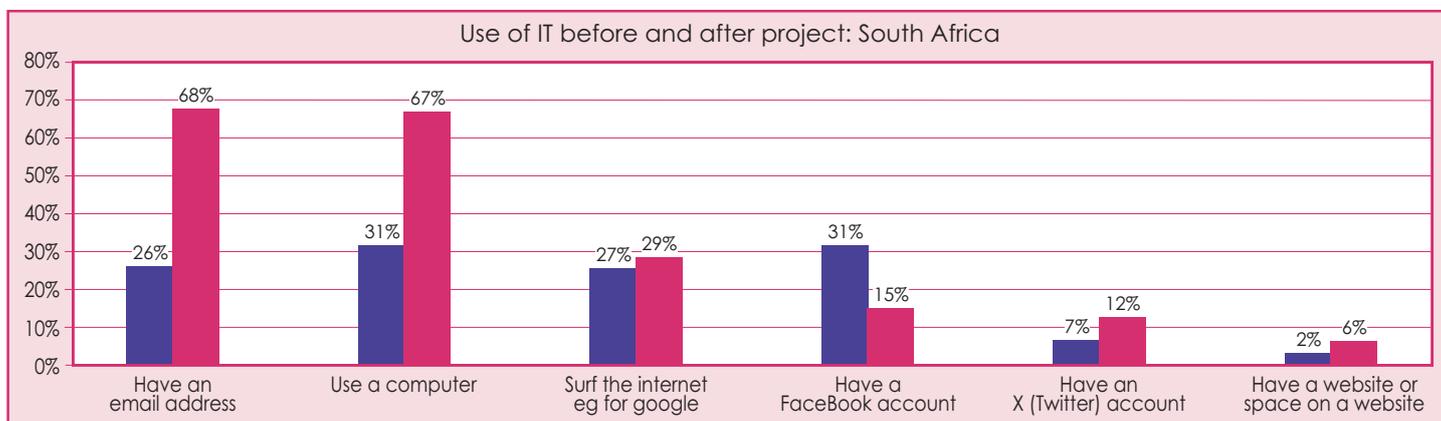
"I am a survivor of GBV. At the beginning of my marriage, I thought everything was ok. We were more than husband and wife, we shared everything and shared everything like friends do. I was

not aware that my now ex is having an affair. I found out that he had a child with one of his mistresses. One morning, when I woke up and made my bed, I found a knife under my pillow. Our marriage became a battlefield and sour. I went to court for a protection order, fearing for myself and my kids' lives. He filed for divorce after two years of separation.

In 2023, I attended the GL GBV survivors' workshop by Alpha Centre. My marriage had made me worthless, valueless but with her lessons. After the workshop I realised I can still make it in life. Through Entrepreneurship, we learned about business management, financial management, business plan development. I had business and I realised I was not running it properly. I learned a lot about business like cash flow, business plan development, customer service, etc. On 9 October 2024, I noticed an amount of R20000 in my bank account from GL. I nearly fainted. I called one of my family friends, I needed someone around because I felt like I was losing myself, and I could die with happiness. I bought enough stock, a business phone and a laptop. Now I am not afraid anymore. I am well equipped, and my business is operating. The ongoing mentorship is amazing. In years to come, I want to see myself doing business all over Africa and around the world."

*Mantoa Paulina Mokoena, Meyerton Midvaal in South Africa*

A \* denotes a pseudonym as the participant does not want to be identified.



In the first phase, the programme brought about a change in **IT skills**. As illustrated in the graph, 67% of the women now use a computer compared to 31% at the start of the project. 68% have access to email (compared to 26% at the start). 29% surf the internet (compared to 27% at the start). 12% of the women indicated that they now have an X (Twitter) handle as opposed to 7% at the inception of the project. There was a small increase in website usage from 2% to 6% at the end of the programme. The use of a FaceBook account however, dropped from 31% to 15%.



Participants in Midvaal Municipality learning to use computers during the training. Photo: Susan Mogari

One of the main aims of the project was to **increase survivor's personal agency** and many have indicated positive changes in their relationships as a result: "Since doing the Gender Links training I can now sit down with my husband, talk about any issue and he does not get angry like he used to. The family is happy that I persevered through difficulties and they have learned from my new way of dealing with problems; to talk to people and not bottle problems inside. I am managing to raise my children with my small

business and also I am proud of the person I have become. My training has also given me the confidence to help others. I created a support group where women share their problems and give each other advice of how to work through their problems." \*Vuyela Khomo from Blouberg

"I am a 37 year old mother of a 12 year old son; raised by a single mother; married off traditionally at the age of 16 to a man 22 years my senior. I suffered physically, mentally, spiritually, emotionally, and financially. I could not even choose what TV programmes to watch. He ordered me to take off a summer dress because he said it was too short to be worn by a married woman.



I suffered from low self-confidence; I felt worthless. When I told my mom about what was happening, she would tell me a woman must keep her household problems to herself. I died alone, in silence as my husband carried out so many extra marital affairs. In March 2024 I joined the Sunrise Campaign. The sun started shining again. I felt like a new creature. When I received the R20 000 from GL I nearly fainted because I never had that amount of money in my entire life. I bought a deep freezer and stuff to start my braai business. I am a new person." *Issie Marena, Platfontein, Northern Cape, Kimberly*

#### For more information contact:

Naledi Masipa: [SAmanager@genderlinks.org.za](mailto:SAmanager@genderlinks.org.za)

Visit: <https://www.genderlinks.org.za/what-we-do/end-violence-empower-women>

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