

Crowd-sourced safety platform SOSS steps up in fight against GBV

By  Sindy Peters

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The Covid-19 pandemic and the resultant lockdown have had the unintended consequence of intensifying the spotlight on gender-based violence in South Africa - a 'shadow pandemic' that has long plagued the country. Looking to help curb the number of GBV cases and assist those at risk, co-founder and CEO Thabo Nonkenge and his business partners developed [SOSS](#), a digital crowd-sourced safety platform that connects the user to a volunteer network of nearby responders and protectors.

The network is made up of not only the user's personalised list of emergency contacts, but also sends an SOS call for help to nearby emergency response services and to community members who have signed up to be active allies and protectors. The app also stores data that can be used as evidence once a case has been opened to assist victims and promote more convictions.



Thabo Nonkenge, co-founder and CEO of SOSS

We chatted to Thabo Nonkenge, CEO and co-founder of SOSS, to find out more about what inspired the app's development, how it works, and his long-term vision for the platform.

 ***Tell us a bit about you and what inspired you and your team to launch SOSS.***

Thabo Nonkenge: I grew up in a household run by women; I have four sisters and no brothers and most of my friends are female. This means I have been exposed to gender-based violence (GBV) all my life as the women in my life have and their experiences galvanised me into seeking solutions that can help at a practical level.

“ The straw that broke the camels back for me was when two close friends of mine were raped and nothing was ever done about it. ”

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■ *How does the app work?*

Nonkenge: The app is free to download. Once downloaded, the app requires the user to choose one of two profiles, the ProTactor profile or the Subscriber profile.

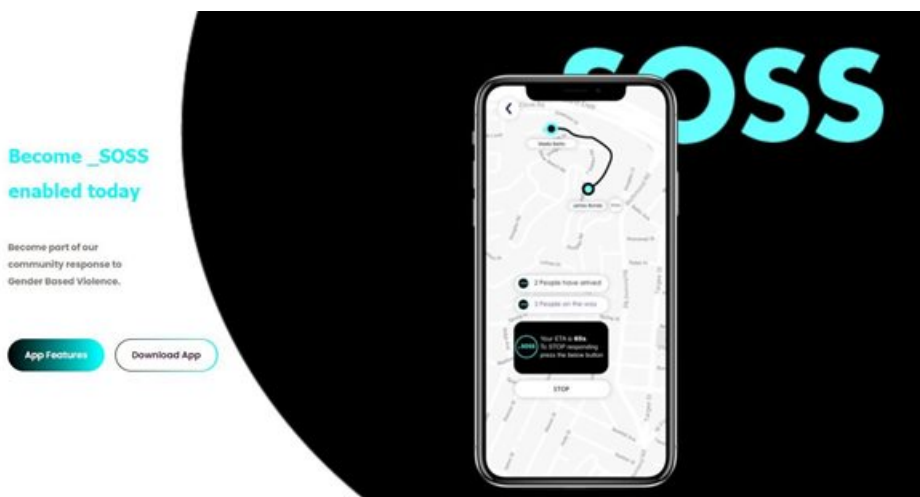
The ProTactor (proactive timeous actor) profile is a non-paying profile, thus only able to receive emergency signals from fellow subscribers of the app while itself is unable to call for help as an unpaid account.

The Subscriber account is the paid account and thus allows people to call for help. When in danger, subscribers can press their onscreen panic button or with their screen locked they can hold down the off button or the volume buttons and help will arrive in less than 90 seconds.

The app allows ProTactors to gather eyewitness accounts in the form of text and later video and encrypts it to prevent tampering, storing it as part of our evidence cache.

■ *What's unique about the platform?*

Nonkenge: It's the world's first crowd-sourced personal safety platform, meaning for the first time everyone with the SOSS app can call for help and receive it both from fellow app users and private security firms at the same time.



■ *Share with us more about SOSS' partnerships with #OneAfrica.org and #notinmyname International and what these entail.*

Nonkenge: Our approach has been to garner support from ordinary people and civil society in order to be used effectively and understood. Not In My Name International, individuals like Dr Crisselda Kananda others have agreed to help us pursue this goal with their national footprint and branch-level activities and we have seen much success from these partnerships.

■ **What are some of the obstacles you've encountered in bringing this idea to life? How did you overcome them?**

Nonkenge: Lack of funding from potential investors, corporate buy-in. This was largely due to lack of understanding of the concept that we have brought to reality.

“ We have since overcome all these by having built the platform and demonstrating its power and practicality. ”



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■ **Since launch, what has the reception been like to the platform?**

Nonkenge: Very positive.

■ **What impact has Covid-19 had on the development of SOSS, if at all?**

Nonkenge: It's had a detrimental impact - we were meant to launch in schools a year ago when the country went into lockdown, but have been lucky and gained traction since the middle of February this year.

■ **What is your long-term vision for SOSS?**

Nonkenge: For SOSS to be an enterprise (business-to-business) and a consumer platform with both being highly supported by the national SAPS and local police departments.

■ **What's next on the cards for SOSS?**

Nonkenge: Total national coverage.

Click [here](#) for more info on SOSS.

ABOUT SINDY PETERS

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