

# Beyond Women's Month (Part 1)

By [Solani Hlayisi](#) & [Babalwa Nyembezi](#)

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As a country, we love to celebrate the "resilience" of South African women. In our conversations, and in the spaces we occupy consulting on brands, it's always been so important to us to highlight that while South African women are commendable for surviving in the world's rape capital, it's not something to be celebrated. On a day that is centred around celebrating women, in all their power, how do we move beyond merely putting the spotlight on their resilience?



Image source: [Chelsi Peter](#) on [Pexels](#).

It was interesting to see this year, a shift in the conversation amongst some women online. There were a number of posts on social media being shared by women who no longer want to be called “Imbokodo” which comes from the saying “you strike a woman, you strike a rock”. Women, black women in particular, no longer want to be celebrated for enduring hardship. So, in kicking off this conversation, we asked ourselves, how can brands craft messaging that meaningfully engages the role of women in moving society forward?

For the purposes of this article, we thought it best to highlight how Women’s Day first came about, as the integrity of this day has eroded with each passing year. On 9 August 1956, 20,000 South African women staged a march to the Union Buildings in protest of the proposed amendments to the Urban Areas Act of 1950, which limited the movement of Black Women and in turn, limited the type of opportunities and quality of life that these women could pursue.

Fast forward 64 years later, the issues that women face on the home and work front still prove insurmountable – not because of our incapability, but because those in power have failed to address the issues that affect South African women. To top it off, many brands have commercialised this important day and use it to sell their products to women.

The foundation to liberate women in South Africa was formed in 1956, however, there is still much work to be done collaboratively amongst men, women, the government, and corporates, if we want to see true freedom in our lifetime.

## What do the stats say?

This article was inspired by an informal poll that Solani did on Instagram. She asked women how they would like to be commemorated beyond National Women’s Day and Women’s Month. To no surprise, many of the responses centred around wanting to get equal pay for equal work; getting seats they rightfully deserve at the corporate table; the eradication of mansplaining; and the desire to receive full pay when on maternity leave.

In 2020, South African women are by law, entitled to four months of maternity leave, however, employers are not obliged to pay them a salary during that time. It's reported that only 2 out of every 10 women receive their full pay when on maternity leave. Women are getting financially punished for their biology! We are NOT making this up. Although, we really wish we were.

South Africa also has the world's highest salary inequality. Despite the Employment Equity act 55 of 1998 warning against this, South African women that are employed on a full-time basis earn 22.7% less than their male counterparts. We are afraid to even delve into what is happening in the informal employment space.

Source: Global Wage Report 2018/19

To bring it closer to home, research done by Mzamo Masito (chief marketing officer - Google Africa) and Bogosi Motshegwa (strategy director and founder at Thinkerneur), highlights that out of the 63 CEOs and Creative Leads in big advertising agencies, only 10 are women.



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Jessica Tennant 26 Jan 2018



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Leigh Andrews 9 May 2018



The lack of female representation at the top of the ladder is not a problem that is unique to the advertising industry. There seems to be a growing trend across the board, of only bringing women into leadership roles when companies need saving. Remember the appointment of Nhlamulo Dlomu as CEO of KPMG and how she was used as the scapegoat for the Gupta corruption scandal? Is it not time to hire women to lead-based on true representation and their exceptional skill set? If women can be brought in to clean the mess of men, surely they can be considered as the first option to hire.



### KPMG chief exec takes up global role

4 Oct 2018



Numerous studies show that women-led companies and brands tend to perform better than those led by men. Even in a global pandemic, reports indicate that women-led countries are navigating the coronavirus better than countries that are led by men.

Our favourite brand case study is the notable turnaround that The Foschini Group (TFG) is experiencing under the brand leadership of Pride Maunatlala as their head of marketing. Foschini has come back from a slow death to a brand that understands the progression of women and how fashion and beauty can be used as a tool for women to confidently tackle life's challenges.

The work that the brand teams at TFG do, is evidently led and championed by women, for women. They don't just talk supporting women, they put their money where their mouth is. The launch of the Foschini Fourways Mall concept store was proof that the brand really is about "All Woman" as this came with big collaborations with local female-owned fashion and beauty brands.



### Foschini reveals new All Woman concept store

6 Sep 2019



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Despite the stats and case studies proving that women consistently lead businesses into the future, we're still setting aside a single month for women, and hosting empowerment sessions that are in reality an echo chamber. We use the month to celebrate the first, the only, and the different, amongst women, as opposed to doing a stock take of the overall progression of women.

We need to devise tangible short-term and long-term goals aimed at truly empowering women, and ensuring that the Oprah Winfreys, Shonda Rhimes, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcukas, Judy Dlamini, and Pride Maunatlalas of the world move from being the exception to being the rule in our society.

What are the people in power (read men), doing to redress the overt gender inequality in their organizations and businesses? To be continued...

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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