

Beyond Women's Month (Part 2)

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

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This is a continuation of a Women's Day discussion published last week. Click below if you have missed part 1:



Beyond Women's Month (Part 1)

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Outlining the problem in a little more detail

The issue with Women's Day Teas and Luncheons is that the audience of these conversations are the people who are affected by the current structure. Being at home this year, and taking a break from these events, brought about the opportunity to introspect on how we can take the conversation around the empowerment of women out of the echo chamber, and bring it into the rooms where the people who traditionally hold power can listen and engage.

The issue with the current structuring of Women's Day/Month is that it is aimed at tackling the cosmetic problems and symptoms that inequality brings about. Instead of hosting events where a few exceptional women hold the stage, there's the opportunity to engage meaningfully with South African women about what would make their lives better.



Photo by [Dennis Magati](#) from [Pexels](#).

Recently, Newzroom Afrika 405, launched their Women's Day campaign - a call to the President to change the coat of arms and add a woman figure to this national symbol. While we understand the thought behind the gesture, it's campaigns like these that show how brands often miss the mark and engage issues facing women on a shallow and superficial level. As a brand that is led by women, and that is making moves in the media industry, we would love to see Newzroom Afrika announce other efforts over and above the call to change the coat of arms. A mentorship programme for young women in media, and consciously inviting female experts to speak on their platform is an example of how they can empower women in a tangible way. Change is only going to come when each corporate and government department intentionally takes steps to change how they bring women to the table.



Brands who craft Women's Day campaigns centred in consumerism, or tout empty slogans without meaningfully engaging the issues their consumers are facing is definitely a symptom of the problem. The real problem? Not giving capable women the platform to speak and lead us into the future. Qualified women leaders are not lacking in South Africa. Brands that do not have enough intentional female representation, and brands that don't pay men and women equally, need to step back from hosting Women's Day teas and luncheons, as these are artificial efforts aimed at distracting women from asking for true equality in the workplace. If there is no true intention to transform from the inside out, then brands need to start sitting Women's Day out. We promise we won't notice if you don't post a pink square for Women's Day.

We have lost count of the number of "discounts" and "spoil the women in your life" emailers received from multiple brands in the lead up to Women's Day. Are these brands able to substantiate their claims of supporting women? Are these brands and organisations comfortable to share their leadership team structures with us? We believe it's high time for brands to be held accountable for the commercialisation and minimisation of such an important day.

What is the opportunity?

The great news is that every problem comes with an opportunity to find a solution. So, what can brands do to edify women beyond Women's month? Brands can hire more women, not just one woman to tick the female quota at the top, but more women across the board. This will lead to a more responsible approach to messages targeted at women as they will have multiple employees that have the female lived experience. We will start seeing messages that define women in South Africa beyond "resilient". "Brand Women" is a brand that is multifaceted. It exists beyond the confines of women being strong. We need to start seeing women positioned as much more. Brands need to represent women as leaders, athletes, entrepreneurs etc.

Momentum is a great example of a brand that is doing this. Once again this year, they have launched their "Womentum" campaign for Women's Month. What we enjoy about this campaign, is that Momentum as a brand has long stood to empower women in sport - through their sponsorship of the Protea Women's Cricket team over the years and also in partnering with the Gsport Trust. So, when this brand changes their "M" to a "W" it isn't just a symbol for the month - it speaks to a long term commitment to engaging meaningfully with the role of women in sport. When we dug a little deeper, it was great to see that their group chief marketing officer is Nontokozo Madonsela - a black woman. On double-clicking a little more, we saw that their board is made up of a fair split of men and women from different walks of life. We love to see it.





The big advantage that diversity has is that it brings a number of different voices, and lived experiences to the table. When done right, diversity is a competitive advantage because it allows brands to connect meaningfully with consumers from across the spectrum.

Furthermore, brands need to act more responsibly in how they market their products to girl children. Instead of always portraying girl children in pink, looking cute and fragile - represent them as children running around with dirt on their faces just like you portray boys. It is our responsibility as brand custodians, to undo all the passive marketing targeted towards girls and women, as these kinds of messages have long-term psychological effects on how women view themselves and how they move around the world – including our workspaces. When we bring more voices to the table, we open up that conversation so there isn't one worldview crafting our messages.

Society also needs to stop prioritising racial equality over gender equality. Can women's issues get the same energy, please?



What is Women's Day without equality?

Michael Hathorn, Ginkgo Agency 8 Aug 2019



Why are we still here?

It's been 64 years since that revolutionary march to the Union Buildings led by Lillian Ngoyi, Helen Joseph, Rahima Moosa and Sophia Williams-De Bruyn. Why do we still need to justify the significance of giving women a seat at the table?

Unfortunately, we're still having this conversation because it's not being had in the spaces where it matters. The racial and gender inclusion conversation is a very uncomfortable one to have, however it is a very necessary conversation that stands to benefit **everyone**. And to the detriment of many corporates, this conversation hasn't been happening because their bottom line is valued over inclusion. Leaders need to realise that there is great power that lies in leaning into this discomfort, as well as the positive impact that bringing women into decision-making rooms has on both their bottom line and company culture.

How can you be an ally?

Create space for uncomfortable conversations within your brands and organisations. It's so easy to build a relationship with someone who has a similar background, but the magic really happens when people from different backgrounds genuinely collaborate.

It's not just about giving women, and people who are different, a seat at the table. It's about ensuring that once they're in the room, they are empowered to speak up from that seat and that they are heard when they do. When the women of 1956 started this, it was about so much more than teas and luncheons. Let's remember that, and honour them in how we commemorate women in South Africa.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Solani Hayisi is the group account director at Wunderman Thompson and **Babalwa Nyembezi** is head of digital at Net#work BBDO.

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