

Navigating the gendered complexities of South Africa's financial landscape

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In a country marked by stark economic disparities, South African women face unique challenges in achieving financial independence and security. The financial landscape, shaped by historical inequalities and ongoing societal barriers, often presents a complex maze for women to navigate. Despite progress, a significant gap in financial inclusion persists, hindering women's ability to save, invest, and build wealth. The intricacies surrounding women's financial empowerment in South Africa is complex, but solutions are within reach. This Women's Month presents an opportunity to look critically at the challenges, but also to highlight remedies and simply to ensure a dynamic dialogue persists as the first means of addressing economic inequality.

Freedom is about more than income



Jill Snijman, head of marketing at 1st for Women

South African women are at a critical nexus of significant progress and persistent inequality, says Jill Snijman, head of marketing at 1st for Women. “Despite legal and educational advancements, systemic barriers continue to impede access to economic opportunity, personal safety, and social mobility. Many are trailblazers, being the first in their families to secure higher education or formal employment, yet they also carry the immense burden of generational expectations and the disproportionate weight of unpaid care work and a persistent wage gap.”

In a brand new report commissioned by 1st for Women to look at the lived realities of South African Women called [Her and Now: Insights into the Women of South Africa 2025 Report](#), financial stress comes up as one of the most significant challenges facing them today, with 75% reporting it as their primary source of stress.

“Financial stability is not merely about income – it represents freedom, choice, and emotional liberation. Our findings show that a striking 88% of women in SA believe financial independence is essential for their happiness, yet over 60% lack the financial support necessary to pursue their personal and professional goals.”

The report also reveals South African women in a paradox: they are more expressive, more ambitious, and more connected than ever. Yet, they're also more fatigued, more vulnerable, and more burdened by

structural inequality. “Amid this tension, a powerful shift is taking place, one that doesn’t look like a revolution but feels like one. It’s quiet, intentional and grounded in softness, not struggle,” says Snijman.

Strikingly apparent in the report is that women are not waiting for systems to change. “They’re adapting by setting boundaries, seeking their own peace, supporting one another, and finding meaning in daily intentional choices. The most important thing for society to do to support this is to recognise that women’s wellbeing cannot be addressed through single interventions. Safety, financial security, emotional support, and personal agency are interconnected needs requiring comprehensive approaches.”

And, adds Snijman, their financial aspirations are centered on agency and fulfillment rather than simple accumulation. “Women seek the ability to make unconstrained choices, support their families, and pursue meaningful experiences. However, a significant guilt complex remains, with 64% feeling guilty about spending money on themselves.”

Understanding deep-rooted vulnerabilities



Lourandi Kriel, CEO at Sweepsouth

Economic inequality is rife in South Africa and it disproportionately affects women.

“The domestic work sector, crucial for many, has seen a 15% reduction in jobs since before the Covid-19 pandemic. A worrying statistic when 87% of domestic workers are the primary breadwinners of their home supporting an average of four dependents with this single salary,” says Lourandi Kriel, CEO of Sweepsouth.

Thousands of domestic workers experience deep-seated financial stress that’s only exacerbated by the cost of living and regular exposure to various other vulnerabilities. “Women’s Month is another opportunity to highlight the challenges these women face because only in understanding the complexities of the lived financial reality of domestic workers can we begin to address it in a systematic and sustainable way,” Kriel adds.

In addition to improving access to ongoing education and training for domestic workers, particularly around financial literacy, what’s needed is the more rigorous enforcement of labour laws for one, states Kriel. “Furthermore, exploring innovative solutions for compliance in private homes, considering diverse work arrangements and vulnerable groups, is also a good starting point.”

Younger women taking the lead



Bradd Bendall, national head of sales at BetterBond

Almost 70% of all homeowners in South Africa are women – either buying property on their own or jointly with men – with more opting to do so alone than ever before. Furthermore, among those women applying for home loans, it is buyers under the age of 40 who are leading the charge, says Bradd Bendall, BetterBond's national head of sales.

“BetterBond's data shows that the percentage of home loan applications submitted by women has climbed from 36% in 2016 to nearly 42% a decade later,” says Bendall. “What's particularly noteworthy is that younger women lead the way when it comes to applying for a bond.” In 2021, most of BetterBond's applications from women, around 57%, were for buyers over the age of 40.

“Four years later, this trend has reversed and we are seeing a larger portion of applications by women for younger buyers. Just over 53% of BetterBond's women applicants are younger than 40, compared with the almost 47% who fall within the older cohort.” We are seeing the inverse with our male applicants, where buyers older than 40 still account for the lion's share of application volumes at just over 54%,” adds Bendall.

“It's evident that women are choosing to prioritise their financial independence from a younger age. Economic empowerment has eclipsed the traditional notion of waiting for a spouse before investing in the home and white picket fence,” notes Bendall. “This is why we are seeing such a marked increase in homeownership by women on their own, or jointly with men, while the ownership of property by men only, as reported by Lightstone, has remained static at 31%.”

With many women no longer waiting for a marriage or a career milestone to purchase property, their activity is particularly strong in entry-level price bands. Lightstone reports that single women far outnumber men as buyers in the under-R250,000 market. This dominance continues through properties priced up to R1m. At recent Women's Day event, Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities Minister, Sindisiwe Chikunga, said women still face [barriers](#) in accessing finance and property.

She added that generally, because of entrenched pay disparities, women tend to earn less and own fewer assets. South Africa ranks 111th globally in terms of salary parity for similar work, according to the [Gender Gap Report 2025](#). However, the report does highlight the efforts being made to level the playing fields in the property market, noting that men and women have 'near-equal' access to land assets.

Sustainable financial systems



Yushanta Rungasammy, director and co-head of the corporate and commercial team at CMS South Africa

“A noticeable and important shift continues to take place in the financial and regulatory space and much of it is being driven by women in leadership, particularly within legal, compliance and advisory roles,” says Yushanta Rungasammy, director and co-head of the Corporate and Commercial team at CMS South Africa. “Female-led firms and advisors are helping redefine what a sustainable financial system looks like. Their approach prioritises not just compliance and ethics, but also long-term impact and inclusive growth qualities that are vital in today’s environment.”

Rungasammy notes that women in legal and compliance fields often bring a deeper sensitivity to issues like ESG, governance, risk management and stakeholder inclusion. “They’re also more likely to push for diverse voices to be heard, particularly those of women and underrepresented groups, which helps foster greater transparency and trust in the system.”

“What inspires me most is the way many of these leaders are giving back by mentoring younger professionals,” she adds. “It’s a powerful cycle that’s laying the groundwork for a stronger, more equitable industry, one that values people as much as profit.”

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