

## EXPLORING THE SYNERGY BETWEEN GOVERNMENT AND BUSINESS ENTITIES IN THE FIGHT AGAINST SUBSTANCE ABUSE IN EAST LONDON. A 2018-2021 STUDY

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### *ABSTRACT*

*South Africa's public sector is resource deficient and that justifies the need for the government and business entities to fight synergistically against substance abuse. This study adopted a qualitative approach to explore the working synergy between government and business entities in the fight against substance abuse. The research population for this study was comprised of participants from business entities and government and non-government organisations based in East London in the Eastern Cape province. One-on-one interviews and focus group discussions were conducted to gather information from the purposively selected participants. The findings identified intermittent contributions from business entities that could be utilised in the fight against substance abuse, as well as a weak policy nexus with national policies, weak campaign synergy between government and business entities, and poor mobilisation of business entities by the government. This study encourages South African business entities to include addressing substance abuse in their corporate social investment activities. Resource mobilisation is one of the important roles in social work practice and social workers need to coordinate and facilitate the synergy between government and business entities in the fight against substance abuse.*

**Keywords:** corporate social investment, business entities, government, policy, substance abuse, sustainable development goals (SDGs)

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## INTRODUCTION

The sustainable development goals (SDGs) explicitly call upon business entities to apply their creativity to solve sustainable development challenges (Van der Waal & Thijssens, 2020). Well-organised synergy has been proved to optimise productivity and effectiveness in addressing social ills, and in countries such as South Africa that are facing a substance abuse epidemic, an intensive working synergy between governments and the business sector against substance abuse is important to achieve developmental ideals as outlined the SDGs. In the light of this, the broader study from which this paper has been drawn sought to investigate the contribution of business entities to the fight against substance abuse in the city of East London in South Africa. This is because substance abuse has been recognised by SDG No. 3 as a health challenge that warrants serious attention. Substance abuse impedes health programmes and achievements, and because it is important for the country to achieve the SDGs and since the South African public sector is resource deficient, there is a need for synergy between government and business entities in the fight against substance abuse. Several business entities have joined the government in campaigning against substance abuse through corporate social investment (CSI) policies (Bala, 2021). This paper provides the background for the study, describes the methodology that was applied, the discusses findings that were generated.

## BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Substance abuse continues to ravage the world; even the developed world, which has access to extensive fundraising mechanisms, is overwhelmed by this scourge (Bala & Kang'ethe, 2021a). Africa, particularly South Africa, has experienced an uncontrollable increase in substance abuse with several potent homemade drugs that are destroying the lives of young people (Bala & Kang'ethe, 2021b). A frightening increase in substance abuse among female adolescents in South Africa has exacerbated the problem (Mohasoa, 2010). The most disturbing and fatal health issues related to the phenomenon have affected the developing world, with South Africa being one of the most seriously affected (Mokwena & Makuwerere, 2021). The economic consequences associated with substance abuse have been extensively documented by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC, 2015).

Consequently, a large number of policies have been designed and implemented to address substance abuse, with international drug control conventions serving as the reference for local policies (UNODC, 2015). South Africa has revised the *National Drug Master Plan* (NDMP) – a significant and detailed policy document – four times to introduce relevant measures to address and prevent the problem. The 1999-2004 (NDMP1), 2006-2011 (NDMP2) and 2013-2017 (NDMP3) advanced a series of recommendations that are now implemented in the current 2019-2024 (NDMP4) (Department of Social Development, 2020). The latest NDMP emphasises seven strategic goals: 1) to reduce the demand for drugs in communities; implement reduction and related measures; 2) an effective law enforcement response to drug-related crime; 3) address money laundering and promote judicial cooperation; 4) increase the availability of and access to controlled substances exclusively for medical and scientific purposes, while preventing their diversion for illegal use; 5) identify and control new psychoactive substances; 6) promote governance, leadership and accountability for a coordinated and effective multi-

sectoral response; 7) strengthen data collection, monitoring, evaluation and research evidence to achieve the goals and stimulate robust and sustainable economic growth aimed at reducing poverty, unemployment and inequalities ((Department of Social Development, 2020).

Additional pieces of legislation such as the Drugs and Drug Trafficking Act of 1992 (RSA, 1992), the Prevention of and Treatment for Substance Abuse Act 70 of 2008 (RSA, 2008) and the National Liquor Regulations of 2004 (RSA, 2004) were enacted to address the problem along with the NDMPs (Mokwena & Huma, 2014). However, illegal drug manufacturing and trafficking in South Africa have rocketed to uncontrollable levels and South Africa has more illegal and/or unlicensed taverns that serve liquor than licensed taverns (BusinessTech, 2017). Within every 10 metres in townships and rural areas, one is likely to come across an illegal tavern that sells liquor (Bala, 2017). These taverns do not adhere to the legal guidelines set by the government, as they sell alcohol to children below the age of 18 and are open 24 hours a day. This problem is increasing beyond policy control (Bala & Kang'ethe, 2020).

The foregoing evidence implies that all societal stakeholders need to respond to this phenomenon and appreciate the efforts made by the government. It is thus pertinent that other stakeholders, such as the private sector, supplement the government's efforts in the battle against substance abuse because the private sector may be in a position to access comparative advantages such as effective fundraising mechanisms and strong campaign programmes (Bala, 2021). Dreyer (2012) posits that there is a feeble synergy between the South African public welfare system and the private sector in the fight against substance abuse. Shelly and Howell (2018) hold the view that even the National Drug Master Plan ignores the fact that business entities are necessary stakeholders in the fight against substance abuse. Therefore, the social work sector, as the stakeholder at the forefront of the fight against substance abuse, must mobilise and support the synergy between the government and private businesses. Accordingly, this study aimed to investigate the synergy between the government and business entities in the battle against substance abuse in South Africa to attain the following objectives, namely to gauge (1) the magnitude of support that selected business entities inject into the campaign against substance abuse, and (2) the policy nexus between government and business entities in the fight against substance abuse.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The study adopted a qualitative approach that included the use of direct quotes from the participants to reveal their perceptions and views on the synergy between government and business entities in the fight against substance abuse in East London (Silva, 2017). A case study design was employed to make direct observations and collect data from a limited sample to generate information in a natural setting (Lichtman, 2013). A case study design refers to the data-collection strategy applied to a relevant small geographical area or a predetermined number of people as subjects of a study (Williman, 2017). The current study's case was drawn from the city of East London and was descriptive and explorative. The qualitative data were collected through in-depth interviews with representatives of business entities, government departments and non-governmental organisations. These participants also took part in focus group discussions during which they discussed the synergy between government and business entities in the fight against substance abuse. The in-depth interviews and focus group discussions were guided by prepared interview guides with open-ended questions.

## **SAMPLING PROCEDURE AND TECHNIQUES**

The study adopted a purposive sampling technique to select organisations and participants that were thought to have rich information about the synergy between government and business entities in the fight against substance abuse (Brannen, 2016). In line with the objectives, the researchers selected participants from government and non-governmental institutions who might have collaborated with business entities in the struggle against substance abuse in East London. A few business entities were also selected to gather their perspectives about collaborating with the government in addressing substance abuse. Key informants were purposively selected from within the abovementioned organisations.

## DATA ANALYSIS

The study adopted qualitative data-analysis techniques, specifically thematic analysis, which is a process of identifying, analysing and reporting patterns and themes derived from the data. Nyumba, Wilson, Derrick and Mukherjee (2018) posit that thematic analysis seeks to unearth the salient themes in a text at different levels, while thematic networks aim to facilitate the structuring and depicting of these themes. The researchers formed themes and sub-themes through the application of codes and, in the process, unnecessary data were eliminated to produce relevant patterns. The themes and sub-themes that emerged from the data were validated by capturing the participants' sentiments and phrases verbatim. The thematic analysis was strengthened by listening to the audiotapes of the interviews and transcribing them to sieve for appropriate data. The themes were arranged to correspond to the study's research objectives and questions. The thematic analysis process was completed manually.

## ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Because of the involvement of human participants in this study, the researchers had to be vigilant in protecting their human rights and dignity during the research process. Leavy (2017) asserts that ethical principles guide the behaviour, expectations and conduct when interacting with experimental subjects. The participants in this study were therefore provided with a written consent form to sign before volunteering to take part in the research. The informed consent forms highlight the participants' rights and protection. Firstly, the researchers formally requested permission from business entities, governmental organisations and NGO managers to include them in the study. Then the information about the research was provided to available and willing participants through verbal communications and a written letter. To ensure the participants' privacy, anonymity and confidentiality, the researchers ensured that the participants could not be identified in the report or from the information they shared. The researchers ensured that the meeting venue was private and they assigned code names to the participants so that only the researchers knew who was connected to which code name. The data-collection tools and the relevant research questions were submitted to the University of Fort Hare Research Ethics Committee for an ethical clearance certificate. There were no conflicts of interests in this study and its quality was assured. The researchers wrote letters to obtain permission from the leaders and managers of the relevant communities, business entities, NGOs and government institutions.

## FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Table 1 presents the demographic profile of the key informants from the various government and non-governmental organisations in East London that took part. Of the total of sixteen (16) participants, ten (10) participated in the in-depth interviews and six (6) participated in the focus group discussions. The participants described in this table were code-named KIP (Key Informant Participant) and numbered from KIP1 to KIP16.

**TABLE 1**  
**DEMOGRAPHIC DETAILS OF THE PARTICIPANTS FROM GOVERNMENT AND NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS**

Government and NGOs	Code Names	Age	Gender	Race	Marital Status	Education level	Position
Department of Social Development	KIP1	49	M	Black	Married	Tertiary	Social worker
Buffalo City Municipality	KIP2	55	M	Black	Married	Tertiary	Community liaison officer
Department of Education	KIP3	48	F	Black	Single	Tertiary	Senior education specialist
Department of Health	KIP4	51	F	Black	Married	Tertiary	Senior nurse
Secondary school	KIP5	59	M	Black	Married	Tertiary	School principal
Secondary school	KIP6	58	M	Black	Married	Tertiary	School principal
Rehabilitation centre	KIP7	42	F	White	Single	Tertiary	Counselling psychologist
Rehabilitation centre	KIP8	43	F	White	Married	Tertiary	Social worker
SANCA	KIP9	50	M	Black	Married	Tertiary	Social worker
NICRO	KIP10	48	M	Black	Married	Tertiary	Social worker
Department of Social Development	KIP11	42	F	Black	Married	Tertiary	Social worker
Buffalo City Municipality	KIP12	54	M	Black	Married	Tertiary	Ward councillor
Department of Education	KIP13	48	M	Black	Single	Tertiary	Senior education specialist
Buffalo City Municipality	KIP14	50	M	Black	Married	Tertiary	Community liaison officer
Buffalo City Municipality	KIP15	53	M	Black	Married	Secondary	Ward councillor
South African Police Services	KIP16	52	M	Black	Married	Tertiary	Sergeant

Table 2 presents the demographic information of the participants from various business entities. The researchers employed codes instead of names to maintain the participants' anonymity and protect their rights and privacy. So Business Entity Participant 1 was identified as BEP1 and numbers were assigned sequentially to all the participants up to BEP10.

**TABLE 2**  
**DEMOGRAPHIC DETAILS OF THE PARTICIPANTS FROM BUSINESS ENTITIES**

Characteristics	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Code names	BEP1	BEP2	BEP3	BEP4	BEP5	BEP6	BEP7	BEP8	BEP9	BEP10
Age	50	48	57	36	40	40	45	53	47	51
Gender	M	F	M	M	F	M	F	M	M	F
Race	Black	Black	Black	Black	Black	Black	Black	Black	Black	Coloured
Marital status	Married	Single	Married	Single	Single	Single	Single	Married	Married	Single
Education Status	Tertiary	Tertiary	Tertiary	Secondary	Secondary	Secondary	Secondary	Tertiary	Secondary	Tertiary
Occupational Rank	Communication officer	Social worker	Assistant manager	General worker	Supervisor	Security officer	Cleaner	Communication officer	General worker	EAP practitioner

## THEMATIC FINDINGS

Table 3 presents the thematic findings.

**TABLE 3**  
**THEMATIC FINDINGS**

Intermittent contributions of business entities in the fight against substance abuse.
Weak policy nexus with national policies.
Weak campaign synergy between government and business entities.
Poor mobilisation of business entities by government.

## Intermittent contributions of business entities in the fight against substance abuse

The findings established that irregular contributions are made by business entities to assist in the fight against substance abuse. The discussions with the participants revealed that business entities sometimes participate in the International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking activities and several confirmed that the contributions are made inconsistently. The verbatim quotes from the participants presented below support this finding.

*Occasionally, business entities participate in the campaigns against substance abuse in surrounding communities. (BEP4 - general worker, 36 years of age)*

*In some of the events, particularly during the international day against drug abuse, we contribute. (BEP10 - EAP practitioner, 52 years of age)*

*Certain business entities in East London have now and then contributed financially to the campaigns we have conducted against substance abuse. (BEP2 - social worker, 48 years of age)*

These comments confirm that business entities are willing to participate in the fight against substance abuse. Ironically, even the tobacco industry has implemented corporate social responsibility (CSR) programmes (irregularly) against tobacco abuse, particularly in developing parts of the world (Dănescu & Popa, 2020). Hungary has set an example for other countries in that numerous Hungarian business entities are involved in the country's fight against substance abuse (Radacsi & Hardi, 2014). In addition, the literature highlights that a limited number of large companies, for example, Santam, have made significant contributions to campaigns against substance abuse in South Africa (Cover Magazine, 2015).

## Weak policy nexus with national policies

The findings indicated a weak nexus between business entities' substance abuse policies and national policies and those applied in other bodies. The participants revealed that the substance abuse policies that are applied in business entities are not properly aligned with national policies such as the NDMPs (Bala, 2021; Makuyana, 2017). The participants asserted that some sections of the business substance abuse policy run counter to the national policies. This mirrors poor policy implementation among the business entities as well as poor government monitoring of how business entities assist in the campaign against substance abuse among their workforces. Excerpts from the participants' comments on the substance abuse policies in their workplaces are presented below.

*As independent and private organisations, business entities formulate their own policies against substance abuse. They do not feel obliged to follow national policies. (BEP5 - supervisor, 40 years of age)*

*Most objectives of business entities' policies are not in line with national policies, but certain parts are. (BSP3 - assistant manager, 57 years of age)*

*I believe the business entities' policies sometimes oppose national policies because they are more inclined to suspending and dismissing their employee when found abusing substances in the workplace. I do not think national labour policies agree with dismissal of the employees rather than assisting them. (BSP1 - communication officer, 50 years of age)*

*Business entities' policies are bound and naturally made to protect and promote productivity, unlike public policy which is not overly driven by money making. (BSP8 - communication officer, 53 years of age)*

The scenario described in the above quotes indicates that the policy objectives of most business entities are not in line with national policies, thus making them ineffective in addressing the scourge of substance abuse. It is also apparent that the role of government programmes in monitoring the effectiveness of business entities in the fight against substance abuse is weak (Smook, Ubbink, Ryke & Strydom, 2017).

## ***Weak campaign synergy between government and business entities***

The findings supported by the sentiments expressed by the majority of the participants revealed a weak campaign synergy between government and business entities against substance abuse. The participants held the view that there was a poor complementary relationship between the government and business entities against substance abuse. The verbatim statements presented below support this finding.

*We do not have a proper or formal collaboration with government in addressing substance abuse. (BEP3 - assistant manager, 57 years of age)*

*The complementary relationship between government and business entities against substance abuse is not strong. (KIP12 - social worker, 54 years of age)*

These sentiments indicate a glaring gap in the collaboration between the government and the business entities in the fight against substance abuse. Perhaps this connotes poor policy operationalisation with regard to the way that business entities need to contribute to the fight against substance abuse, as well as poor monitoring of the business entities' efforts to fight against substance abuse (Radacsi & Hardi, 2014). The Political Declaration adopted at the Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly in June 1998 advocates for the active participation of business entities in promoting a drug-free society (Ghodse, 2017).

## ***Poor mobilisation of business entities by government***

The participants revealed that the government has not been successful in mobilising business entities to assist in the fight against substance abuse. The participants indicated that the government has made only weak attempts to recruit the business community to address the increased use of drugs in communities. The excerpts presented below corroborate this finding.

*There is no proper plan in place that seeks to facilitate or mobilised participation of business entities in the fight against drugs. (KIP16 – SAPS sergeant, 52 years of age)*

*South African government need to strengthen its methods of mobilisation for business community as part of the fight against substance abuse. (KIP13 - senior education specialist, 48 years of age)*

*The local government institutions have not strongly invited business entities to assist in the campaign against drug abuse in East London. (BSP3 - assistant manager, 57 years of age)*

The sentiments presented in the above paragraphs indicate that inadequate methods have been employed by the South African government to mobilise resources against substance abuse. It is believed that even the United States of America and various European countries' governments have adopted narrow approaches to mobilise business entities to take part in the fight against substance abuse (Radacsi & Hardi, 2014).

## **DISCUSSION**

The demographic profile regarding age indicated that the majority of the participants from the relevant business entities ranged from 36 to 51 years of age, while the key informants ranged from 42 to 59 years of age. Notably, the majority of the participants belonged to the middle-age group of society, which is typically the experienced and productive segment of society. This information is also validated by Mroczeck and Little (2014), who indicated that middle-age usually ranges between 36 and 55 years of age. Madhavan, Schatz, Gómes-Olivé and Collinson (2017) corroborate this by contending that people between the ages of 34 and 55 years are the middle-age group who are both socially and economically productive.

The results revealed gender disparity among the business entities and key informants, with men outnumbering women. Despite the democratic dispensation in South Africa that brought hope of eliminating inequalities, women continue to experience inequity in the labour market (Espi, Francis &

Valodia, 2019). This implies that South African legislation has failed to eliminate gender disparities in the workplace (Sinden, 2017). This is a form of historical discrimination that has favoured men at the expense of women in the workplace. Espi *et al.* (2019) also indicate that South Africa still has a long way to go in winning the battle against gender inequality.

This study established that most of the participants were either single or divorced. This reflects the South African demographic profile indicating that the majority of the citizens are single. This freedom (from marriage commitments) may have an effect on the culture of substance abuse, particularly with regard to the consumption of alcohol (Bala, 2017). The number of single adults has escalated significantly in South Africa among people in the age range of 18-34 years and within the middle-age group (Statistics South Africa, 2018).

The findings indicated that the participants who had attained tertiary education outnumbered those with secondary education. This reflects that most of the key informants were rich in knowledge and understood the dynamics associated with substance abuse. They could be trusted to perform a modest analysis of the substance abuse problem.

The demographic data pertinent to occupational rank established that the participants occupied diverse positions with different knowledge packages and that substance abuse cuts across various levels of professions. The prevention and treatment of substance abuse require a diversity of professional experts (Setlalentoa, Ryke & Strydom, 2015). Addressing the challenges associated with substance abuse requires the application of a multidisciplinary approach whereby a variety of skilled professionals collaborate with and complement one another (Scholten, 2017).

The findings established that only irregular contributions are made by business entities to assist in the fight against substance abuse. There is a dearth of literature on the investment of the business community to assist in the war against substance abuse. However, some commentators recognise the intermittent contributions made by various business entities; for example, Nedbank SA has observed the increasing bullying and sexual violence within schools, which are attributed to drug and alcohol use, motivating the company to partner with Girls and Boys Town and Agisanang Domestic Abuse Prevention and Training (ADAPT) to implement substance abuse and school safety programmes. Currently, the programme conducts advocacy campaigns within schools and facilitates individual counselling. In 2018 the programme recruited 120 learners aged from 12 to 20 years from three high schools in Alexandra Township to constitute a peer education group (Nedbank Group, 2018). The Nedbank ADAPT programme operates in community streets through subsidising community development projects aimed at reducing substance abuse (Nedbank Group, 2017). Other business entities such as Santam have, intermittently, assisted in the fight against violence and substance abuse among children in South African communities (Santam, 2017). Alcohol-producing industries have been slow in accepting corporate social responsibility against harmful drinking (Mialon & McCambridge, 2018).

The findings indicated a weak nexus between business substance abuse policies and national policies or those applied in other bodies. Evidence abounds that certain elements of business policy documents contradict the national policies on substance abuse (Smook, Ubbink, Ryke & Strydom, 2014). While there is evidence that numerous business entities have adopted guidelines for a workplace substance-abuse policy, these have disregarded treatment programmes for their employees (Smook *et al.*, 2017), as advocated by the Labour Relations Act No. 66 of 1995 (South Africa, 1995). Furthermore, national policies encourage businesses to conduct educational campaigns to address substance abuse, but the majority of business entities do not comply with the guidelines laid down by the government (Mogorosi, 2009).

The findings, supported by sentiments expressed by the majority of the participants, revealed a weak campaign synergy between government and business entities against substance abuse. This resonates with Radacsi and Hardi's (2014) findings that the level of collaboration between government and business entities against substance abuse is low, although the "Declaration on the Guiding Principles of Drug Demand Reduction" proposed the need for collaboration. Internationally, there is a need for

collaboration and the mobilisation of corporate social responsibility against substance abuse (Llopis, 2017). South Africa has long mobilised for partnership between government and business entities to improve economic development, but substance abuse does not appear to be high on the agenda (Kula & Fryatt, 2014). The Global Compact Network South Africa (2019) warns that the South African government needs to challenge the private sector performance on Sustainable Development Goal Number 3, which includes substance abuse as a health problem. Haywood, Funke, Audouin, Musvoto and Nahman (2018) hold the same view that the South African government and business entities are still at the initial stages of forging a complementary campaign against health issues, as prescribed by SDG 3, which emphasises the importance of business entities supporting efforts to combat health challenges. The seemingly uncontrollable increase of substance abuse and the ramifications of this imply that all societal stakeholders need to collaborate against this scourge. Moreover, because of their position and comparative advantage in fundraising, the role of business entities has been in the spotlight.

The participants revealed that the government has not adequately mobilised business entities to assist in the fight against substance abuse. Despite overwhelming evidence of public-private partnership in the fight against substance abuse, limited success has been recorded. On the same note, current policy does not ensure synergy between the government and the business community in the fight against substance abuse. This is because of the failure of international and local drug policies to mobilise business entities to participate in discouraging substance abuse in communities (Department of Social Development, 2020). It could also indicate that the government is failing to mobilise assistance from business entities. In relation to this objective, this study also found that the government had not made sufficient efforts towards mobilising a working synergy with business entities. This signifies the need for the government to launch proactive and viable techniques aimed at recruiting business entities to assist in the fight against substance abuse.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

This study was informed by multifaceted perspectives from social work to economics (corporate social investment). The global agenda for social work and social development emphasises that social workers should be on the frontline in improving the health of individuals, groups and communities. With regard to this, the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders Fifth Edition (DSM-5) recognises substance abuse as a severe health problem that requires as much attention as any other disease (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). On the same note, the South African government is not winning the war against substance abuse both inside and outside the workplace. This study supports mobilising the assistance of business entities, with social workers as brokers, that are deemed appropriate partners because of their financial capacity. The study encourages South African business entities to include substance abuse in their corporate social investment activities.

Substance abuse poses a threat to the public and private sectors and thus requires a strong complementary partnership. Social work and social development practice need to introduce innovative holistic approaches to fight substance abuse, which poses a significant threat to the business community's productivity. Therefore, business entities and their occupational social workers need to strengthen their substance abuse policies.

## CONCLUSION

This article explored the synergy between government and business entities in the fight against substance abuse. It was found to be important for the government to adopt proactive methods to mobilise the business community to assist in the battle against substance abuse. It is argued that business entities are willing to participate, but the government institutions that are responsible for substance abuse interventions have not yet approached them for their assistance. Lastly, substance abuse policies need to highlight the possible role of business entities in addressing the problem.

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