

Nedbank - Campaigning against financial abuse

Many barriers to women's financial inclusion are visible - such as lack of identification or distance to a banking agent. Others, including financial abuse, are invisible but equally constraining. Financial abuse is a form of intimate partner violence in which one person controls, restricts, or exploits another's access to financial resources - for example, forcing a partner to hand over their salary, monitoring or blocking their transactions, taking loans in their name without consent, or preventing them from opening or using a bank account. These behaviors limit a person's ability to earn, save, and build economic independence. When financial abuse shapes how individuals earn, save, borrow, and transact, it not only restricts personal financial autonomy but also distorts participation in the broader financial system.

Nedbank, South Africa's fourth largest bank, recognized that financial abuse posed a consumer protection risk: gender-based violence can directly affect customers' financial safety and behavior. Nedbank sees its role as a financial service provider as two-fold: to offer financial products and services to South Africans, and to build awareness, generate knowledge, and reduce financial harm across the broader population. While financial institutions increasingly provide non-financial services such as financial education, addressing financial abuse represents a more complex and sensitive extension of this role. In response, Nedbank adopted an iterative, learning-led approach that combined public awareness, consumer insight, and engagement to better understand how financial abuse manifests and how individuals experience financial control. This included using its platform to elevate financial abuse as a financial risk, gathering data to better understanding consumer vulnerability, and experimenting with ways to communicate this issue credibly. Together, these efforts reflect a shift in how financial institutions can engage with complex social risks - moving beyond service delivery toward a more active role in consumer protection, social norms change, education, and market awareness.

Quick facts

Barriers addressed



Social Norms

Ambivalence or antagonism towards women's financial independence



Consumer Protection

Increased exposure to frauds and scams



Institutional Norms & Practices

Lack of strategic focus on women customers

Segment focus

1 2 3 4

Geography

South Africa

Key stakeholders involved

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Customer Journey Relevance



Sources

- [Nedbank](#)
- [Nedbank survey](#)
- [Nedbank Buy Men](#)
- [Financial Sector Conduct Authority](#)
- [UNCDF 2022](#)
- [CGDEV 2018](#)
- [UN Women](#)

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Key activities

Nedbank's intervention combined public awareness, consumer insight generation, and iterative experimentation rather than a single, fixed solution.

- **Product design**

The bank initially pursued a product-based solution by introducing a “secret savings pocket” within its banking app, allowing users to set aside [money privately](#) - a feature aligned with [well-documented strategies](#) women use to maintain financial autonomy. However, Nedbank discontinued the feature after only a few months after recognizing that, if discovered, it could put users at greater risk from abusive partners. This experience highlighted a critical insight: financial products designed to increase autonomy can also create unintended harm in contexts of financial abuse. In response, the bank shifted its approach from product design to risk awareness, focusing on how financial services can both mitigate and exacerbate harm. The following year, it launched its first financial abuse awareness campaign.

- **Awareness Raising Campaign**

Beginning in 2024, Nedbank used its marketing platforms

during the annual UN Women-led global campaign against gender-based violence called “[16 Days of Activism](#)” to insert financial abuse into public discourse, placing [warning-style messages on advertisements](#) to signal that money can be used to control and harm women.

- **Public-facing Survey on Financial Abuse**

Alongside this, the bank launched an [open, ongoing survey](#) to collect data from both customers and non-customers on experiences of financial control, awareness, and autonomy. Insights from this survey, combined with consultations with survivors, informed the development of consumer “archetypes” to better understand patterns of financial abuse and tailor messaging.

- **TikTok Campaign with Male Champions**

In 2025, Nedbank expanded its 16 Days of Activism campaign through partnerships with local TikTok content creators, leveraging their platforms to spread awareness of financial abuse. NedBank intentionally targeted male content creators to act as male champions on the issue. Across these efforts, Nedbank positioned itself less as a service provider offering a defined solution and more as a facilitator of awareness, data collection, and public engagement around a largely unaddressed financial risk.

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Outcomes/results

Nedbank's campaign and survey are ongoing, but early results demonstrate both the scale of engagement and initial shifts in awareness and help-seeking behavior - critical precursors to addressing financial abuse as a barrier to financial inclusion.

Early signals suggest that increased awareness and recognition of financial abuse may lead women to seek support, with potential implications for safer engagement with financial services. Further research - such as tracking changes in account usage, control over funds, and reported experiences of abuse over time - would help assess whether public awareness campaigns translate into improved financial inclusion outcomes.

Evidence of widespread exposure and engagement:

The TikTok campaign reached a large national audience through creator-led content, generating over 58 million impressions and more than 200,000 user engagements. Content was delivered through trusted, peer-led voices rather than institutional messaging, contributing to high levels of interaction and sustained attention across multiple pieces of content. This level of reach suggests that the topic of financial abuse was introduced at scale into public discourse.

Improved understanding of financial abuse as a financial risk:

Nedbank complemented the 2024 campaign with an open, ongoing survey accessible via QR codes embedded in campaign materials, allowing individuals to voluntarily share their experiences. While responses are self-selected and not representative of the broader population, the survey provides real-time insight into how financial abuse manifests among those engaging with the campaign. Early responses (n=621) suggest that financial abuse exists along a spectrum: 41% reported low risk, 30% early signs of control, 21% escalating abuse, and 9% severe restriction.

Respondents are primarily working-age (77% aged 25–54) and include both clients and non-clients (72% vs. 26%), suggesting relevance beyond the bank's immediate customer base. High opt-in rates for follow-up information (69%) indicate strong engagement and demand for support. While additional demographic data (e.g., income, geography) is limited, these findings offer a starting point for identifying risk segments and informing future measurement and intervention design.

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Key enabling environment factors for the intervention

South Africa's regulatory environment places a strong emphasis on consumer protection and financial sector conduct, creating space for financial institutions to engage with customer well-being beyond product delivery. The [Financial Sector Conduct Authority](#) (FSCA) explicitly mandates fair customer outcomes and responsible treatment of financial consumers, which can extend to addressing risks that affect financial behavior and vulnerability.

Internally, the intervention was enabled by leadership support and a broad institutional mandate that positioned the bank as responsible not only for service delivery, but also for reducing financial harm. This allowed Nedbank to allocate resources toward an iterative, learning-led approach and to engage with financial abuse as a systemic risk rather than a product-level issue.

The fact that the initiative was led by the marketing function - rather than product or risk teams - also created flexibility to test messaging, gather insights, and engage the public without the regulatory and operational constraints associated with financial product design.

Key design elements and principles that led to successful outcomes

- **Leadership support for experimentation**
Nedbank's leadership enabled an iterative, test-and-learn approach, allowing the team to explore sensitive and unconventional interventions, accept missteps, and refine their approach over time.
- **Expanded view of the bank's role**
Nedbank positioned itself not only as a provider of financial products and services, but also as an actor responsible for building awareness and reducing financial harm. Inspired by purpose-driven brands, the bank linked this work to its long-term business interests, recognizing that addressing financial abuse contributes to more stable and engaged customers over time.
- **Long-term orientation toward financial risk**
Rather than seeking immediate product uptake or short-term returns, Nedbank approached financial abuse as a systemic risk requiring sustained engagement, data collection, and gradual behavior change.

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Key design elements and principles that led to successful outcomes (cont.)

- **Digital accessibility and reach**

The intervention relied on a digitally connected population, with both the survey and campaigns delivered through online platforms and QR-enabled access. This enabled broad participation and real-time engagement, which were critical to generating insights and sustaining momentum.

Potential for scale/replicability

The core concept - positioning financial abuse as a financial risk and integrating it into customer-facing communication - is a transferable, replicable model across contexts, even as specific delivery channels may need to be adapted. Institutional commitment is critical, as is a willingness to engage with sensitive social issues.

Several elements are inherently scalable. Digital marketing channels, partnerships with content creators, and integration into existing campaigns enable broad reach at relatively low marginal cost,

particularly in contexts with high smartphone and social media penetration. Markets with low smartphone penetration can translate this concept into radio or other low-tech platforms. Financial service providers with digital platforms are also well positioned to collect consumer insights on financial abuse, allowing them to continuously refine messaging and better understand customer vulnerability.

Challenges encountered during the program

In early 2025, Nedbank launched the "[Buy Men's](#)" campaign to highlight the "pink tax" - the higher prices often charged for products marketed to women, such as personal care and hygiene items. While intended to raise awareness of gender bias in consumer markets, the campaign generated significant public backlash, including challenges to the framing and credibility of the claims. Nedbank ultimately withdrew the campaign due to reputational risk, reflecting the sensitivity and contestation surrounding public discussions of gender inequality.

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Recommendations from the research

- Financial service providers can expand their role beyond product delivery by engaging with the social and behavioral risks that shape financial outcomes, using awareness-building, data collection, and public engagement to address issues such as financial abuse.
- A phased, awareness-first approach may be more appropriate than product-led interventions for sensitive issues, allowing institutions to build understanding of customer experiences and avoid unintended harm before introducing financial solutions.
- Low-cost, continuous feedback mechanisms - such as public-facing surveys and the development of diagnostic customer archetypes - can provide real-time insights into customer vulnerability, enabling institutions to refine messaging, anticipate risks, and improve customer-centric design.
- Product safety reviews should be integrated into design processes to identify and mitigate potential unintended consequences, particularly where interventions may increase risk if discovered or misused.
- Partnerships with trusted organizations and the use of diverse voices, including male champions, can strengthen credibility, extend reach, and support shifts in social norms around financial control and independence.

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