



Joan with female members of the Traffic Police service carrying out roadside checks in Uganda

Joan Aitken: International Women's Day

Transaid Board Chair and former Traffic Commissioner for Scotland

In 2003, I was appointed as the first ever female Traffic Commissioner for Scotland and only the second for Great Britain. This meant that women were heading the regulation of the bus, coach and road haulage industries in Scotland and part of England. The industries were predominantly male owned and operated. For me, it was a great career development, being another first in industries essential to the economic and social wellbeing of a country. Nothing connects without transport and logistics, and as a woman I saw the industries differently.

As a young apprentice solicitor I had seen the impact that the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 had made in keeping all of us safe; and throughout my life I also saw the benefits of seat belts, of vehicle safety design developments, of drink driving laws, of the evidence that speed kills, and that mobile phone use kills. I was committed to those safety measures and for business, workers and communities to benefit.

I was also committed to using my personal and professional experience to highlight when women were not being given a fair chance - by the absence of toilet and parking facilities, by shifts that did not recognise menstruation, by vulnerabilities when buses did not show, by pornographic images in workplaces, and so on.

I got to know Transaid through industry events, sitting next to Transaid's CEOs at dinners and donating cash at such dinners. When my leisure hobby of cycling became known, I was chivvied into signing up for Transaid's 2017 South Africa Challenge - 300 miles to Cape Agulhas where the oceans meet. For me, that was an intense challenge; I was so nervous and so out of my comfort zone- I was 64 years old and not a sportswoman.

That Transaid cycle challenge changed my life.

Not only did I raise money for Transaid (people gave generously for they recognised this was a hard act for me, and no one ever expected a Traffic Commissioner to do it) but I gained a network of new friends and contacts, and the recognition that I had skills and insight into the importance of transport and road safety, which placed me to help Transaid further.

Then came two more cycle challenges - Zambia and Malawi. I am also very proud that the biennial Scottish Transaid Dinners came out of discussions between prominent Scottish Transaid supporters, and that baton is now carried by Lynsey Craik of Grangemouth, one of the next generation of women in road haulage in Scotland.

Role models are important in life and I have been lucky to have watched or known some very impressive women. I learned by watching and also of heeding generous advice - and being constructively comforted when things haven't gone so well. I began my professional life as an apprentice for three years and that generational commitment to training and bringing on others is a value I hold close.

More women are entering the transport and logistics industries but there remains a distance to travel, especially in driver recruitment. Toilet and hygiene facilities, personal safety, quality training, respect, modern shift patterns - absence of such are the very obvious barriers to why women are not going in to such jobs. More and more of us are being heard when we make these points - points that apply worldwide!



Joan on Cycle South Africa