



Yolandi with her minibus taxis

Yolandi Gordon's story

Secretary and member of the SANTACO Women's Desk, Northern Region

Yolandi Gordon has known the South African minibus taxi industry since she was six years old. Her father was a minibus taxi operator and supported his family with this income. When Yolandi's father fell ill, he transferred his operating licence into Yolanda's name, and she became a member of the South African National Taxi Association (SANTACO) Women's Desk. Her father worked until he died in 2017, and Yolandi took over the business.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Yolandi was elected Secretary of the SANTACO Women's Desk. However, when she had a baby in January 2020, she resigned: "I'm not going to put myself at risk. I have a small child. But the following year, the Association called me back to assist with admin, and I eventually returned to my position as secretary."

SANTACO carried out surveys amongst the drivers and found that there was a huge demand for new operating licences. The government decided to provide new licences, and Yolandi was lucky to receive one. She made

an agreement with her mother to use her father's minibus taxi, bringing her fleet to two vehicles.

"After COVID, I realised that this is something that I needed to do, and that's when I slowly started getting interested in the industry. When the opportunity to get a new permit arose, I took it head-on."

Yolandi points out that public perception of the minibus taxi industry in South Africa discourages women from entering the sector. Between 2017 and 2022, 1,653 deaths were linked to turf wars.



"I do understand why women are scared to enter this industry because it can be a cruel industry. We need to try and change the mentality of our people and how they see the industry. People see us as gangsters and crooks. We need to show or prove to other women that this isn't the case."

One way to change the perception of the industry is to improve safety for women using minibus taxis as public transport. SANTACO has pledged a zero-tolerance approach to gender-based violence (GBV), which is a step in the right direction for Yolandi. "You're showing people that whatever happens, there's support out here for you. People might not know where to go if they're badly treated. They need to be made aware."

"We want SANTACO to support us as women in the industry, so that we can empower and assist other women."

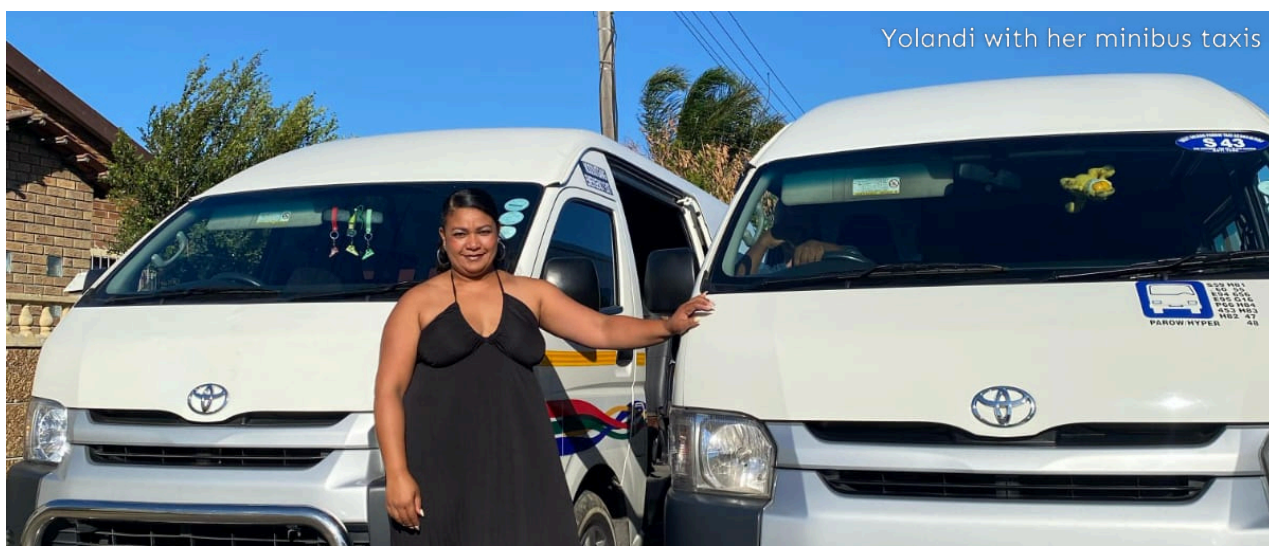
Yolandi also emphasises the importance of a female-focused support network: "It's important to me for women to listen to where I'm coming from and how I feel, so I can be understood. I have a few women inside and outside of SANTACO who lend me an ear. I like to assist wherever I can. One lady who has been part of the industry for many years told me that she had a problem in the past. She was told by a man to approach the SANTACO Women's Desk. In those days, it was inactive, and she didn't know what it was or where it was. Now that the SANTACO Women's Desk is running again, I told her that she can be a part of the project and provide assistance."

Even for passengers, Yolandi looks out for women's safety. After a female passenger had left her keys in a minibus, Yolandi personally drove her to the garage to collect them. For Yolandi, it's actions like these that change people's perception of the industry: "She (the passenger) was so impressed and grateful for the assistance. She never thought that people in the minibus taxi industry would ever help."

"What does International Women's Day mean to me? It's to praise our women- we've been through and are still going through so much. We need to celebrate surviving- surviving through the economy, and through everything that's expected of us. We're not expected to just stay at home, raise the kids, clean, cook, whatever - we are part of the economy."

Funded by The Canada Fund for Local Initiatives (CFLI), Transaid's latest project in South Africa follows on from a three-country study carried out in 2022 with Durham University to investigate the challenges faced by young women and girls as users of public transport, and aims to sensitise drivers and passengers on gender-based violence and harassment.

Visit www.transaid.org to learn more.



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