



transaid

CASE STUDY:

Sherly Cleophas

Minibus driver & line controller - Cape Town

Sherly at the Bellville taxi rank

Sherly Cleophas works at the Bellville taxi rank, which is one of the busiest taxi ranks in Bellville, Cape Town. More than 1,400 drivers operate out of this rank and Sherly is just one of five women working there.

The minibus taxi industry in South Africa is lucrative, and a major source of employment. With rail services in decline, minibus taxis provide a vital transport service for millions of people every day. However, they can also be the scene of violence, with regular reports of shootings between rival gangs and attacks on women.

Sherly has been a minibus driver for thirteen years. A typical day for Sherly involves starting work at 4:30 in the morning. In the winter, it is dark and a rush to get out of the house, especially with two young children at home.

Every day is a busy day for Sherly. As well as driving, she also manages two lines at the rank and this comes with additional responsibilities. Each rank has between six and eight drivers at any one time as the passengers embark.

Women in Africa face substantial discrimination in the transport sector, both as users of transport and as transport sector employees. This affects their wider access to work, education and training in every sector. Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, additional pressures on women's mobility have further exacerbated these constraints. Relevant skills acquisition, at an early age, is essential if women are to break through such barriers.

Transaid and the University of Durham have investigated youth engagement and skills acquisition within Africa's transport sector, under the Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF). The aim of the project is to address the specific challenges of Africa's highly gendered transport environment, with a view to encouraging Africa's young women into the labour force, transitioning them to meaningful employment and promoting a greater gender balance.

It is Sherly's job to keep the drivers in order as they load and unload their vehicles and to ensure that they follow the rules of the rank, which is certainly not a straightforward task.

"Sometimes there are accusations that I have to deal with. Accusations get raised against the drivers. Mostly these are customer complaints. Formal complaints are taken to the Executive. Drivers come for a hearing - the driver will come along with the owner of the minibus. Sometimes drivers will be suspended, for example if there is a stabbing or a fight in front of customers. It depends how serious the accusation is."

Sherly Cleophas

Sherly explained that sometimes it can be the passengers that cause the problems.

"They bring their issues from home into the minibus and I will ask passengers to think on this when they get into my taxi - sometimes it works."

"I have learned how to deal with the men at the rank when they give me problems. Sometimes I raise my voice and other times I will walk away."



Early on in her role, Sherly found the job to be very stressful, however she has subsequently learned to adapt. She has enjoyed most of the work since starting the job, particularly liking the physical aspect that comes with driving and working on the rank. In the future, Sherly may choose to purchase her own taxi, but for now she is focused on driving and controlling the lines.

Sherly is in the minority as a woman working as a driver at the Bellville rank, and highlighted how difficult this can often be.

"In my culture, men are seen as superior to women and will not allow women to dictate to them. So at work, here on the rank, they think this is not your territory."

Sherly Cleophas

With a decade of experience under her belt, and now controlling two lines in one of the busiest taxi ranks in Cape Town, Sherly is challenging social norms and has clearly earned the respect of the rank, her fellow drivers and SANTACO (South African National Taxi Council).

After a long and challenging day at the rank, one may think that Sherly would be keen to rush home as soon as possible however, Sherly said otherwise.

"If I am not here it is total chaos, so I usually leave well after six o'clock."

Sherly Cleophas