

Improving Safe Access to Public Transport for Women in Cape Town, South Africa.

Project location	Cape Town, South Africa
Project start date	October 2024
Project duration	14 months

Introduction:

With funding from the Canadian Fund for Local Initiatives, Transaid, in partnership with the South African National Taxi Council (SANTACO) Women’s Desk, Cape Crisis and Sonke Gender Justice, implemented a project to improve safer access to minibus taxis for women living in low-income communities on the periphery of Cape Town. This project responded to the findings of a three-country study which Transaid implemented between 2019-2022 in collaboration with Durham University which identified concerns around personal safety as a key challenge faced by women users of public transport in Western Cape Province.

Minibus taxis are the most commonly used mode of public transport for people living in low-income communities, providing access to education and employment opportunities. However, access to this transport is limited for women, who communicate real concerns around personal safety and security (Porter, 2023). Women are vulnerable to physical and sexual assault, particularly when travelling alone. There are frequent reports in the media of women being robbed, harassed, and raped while using minibus taxis. Between 2017 and 2022, the minibus taxi industry saw an increase in violence with 1,653 deaths recorded with Western Cape Province cited as being one of the most affected.

In response, Transaid and SANTACO Women’s Desk designed a project to improve access by providing clear reporting mechanisms and promoting greater accountability on the part of transport providers.

Methodology:

This project demonstrates a scalable solution to addressing the concerns linked to personal safety and security communicated by women users of minibus taxis in low income areas with a focus on two key activities.

- I. Engaging with minibus taxi associations to design and support the adoption of a Safe Minibus Taxi Charter

promoting greater accountability on the part of transport providers concerning the safety of their passengers.

- II. Building the capacity of a cohort of *Champions* from the largely male workforce, to act as focal persons and provide support to women travellers by conducting widespread and extensive sensitisation on issues relating to sexual and gender-based violence (S+GBV).

A proportion of the minibus taxi fleets from participating associations were asked to display stickers inside their taxis, each showing a QR code via which, commuters were able to access the Safe Minibus Taxi Charter, additional materials and telephone hotlines for the purpose of reporting incidents of S+GBV.

In addition, the drivers and sliding door operators working in these vehicles, as well as rank coordinators, were encouraged to attend a series of sensitisation activities to improve their awareness on issues relating to S+GBV and to build their capacity to perform the role of *Champions* of this initiative.

Sonke Gender Justice, a specialist non-governmental organisation, designed and packaged sensitisation materials tailored to the minibus taxi industry. A first phase of sensitisation was conducted targeting as many drivers and sliding door operators as possible to improve their understanding of S+GBV giving the project team the chance to identify possible *Champions* amongst the workforce. A second phase, involving enhanced training and mentorship, targeted these *Champions* each of which agreed to perform the role of S+GBV focal persons for the reporting of incidents and signposting to relevant specialist agencies for victims, where required.

Pre- and post-sensitisation surveys were conducted to monitor knowledge retention on the part of participants. *Champions* were also encouraged to perform the role of peer educators cascading the information to the wider workforce.

Results:

A total of nine minibus taxi associations agreed to adopt the Safe Minibus Taxi Charter comprising a total of 491

taxis each of which now carry a hard copy of the charter and display stickers and QR codes in both English and Afrikaans.

Widespread sensitisation was delivered to 124 minibus taxi drivers, sliding door operators and rank coordinators each of which showed an increased understanding of issues relating to sexual and gender-based violence as a result of the sensitisation as well as an increased confidence in talking about S+GBV to their peers during interactive group sessions.

Ninety-eight per cent of participants said that they learned something new about S+GBV and femicide, while 94% of participants felt confident enough to speak to other taxi drivers and sliding door operators about this subject. **Eighty-six per cent said they believed that they could play a role in ending S+GBV in the minibus taxi industry.**

Of the 124 participants, 33 participants were selected for enhanced training to become part of a cohort of project *Champions* of which 23 successfully completed the training.

During the closing stages of this project, a survey targeting commuters, both women and men, was conducted to gather feedback on this initiative as well as a profile of users of this mode of transport to inform the future rollout of this initiative.

A questionnaire was completed by 1,162 randomly selected commuters (58% of which were women) using the minibus taxis operated by the nine participating associations. Fifty-two per cent of travellers surveyed were between the ages of 18 and 35 and 40% of the total number of participants were in formal employment with female students being the second largest user category.

Fifty-six percent of travellers were using this mode of transport to travel to paid employment highlighting the importance of minibus taxis in improving access to work for communities in low income areas on the periphery of the city. Seventy-six percent rely on minibus taxis at least twice weekly with 32% of people using taxis every day of the week. Women were more reliant on minibus taxis (229) for everyday travel than men (148).

A greater proportion of women (52%) communicated having concerns about using taxis than men (46%) with concerns including in order of importance, road safety, cleanliness, personal safety and customer service. Of the women who had previously reported incidents (239), drivers, sliding door operators and rank coordinators were

the most common recipients of reports from women commuters justifying this project's focus on including all of the above as part of the cohort of project *Champions*.

Seventy-seven per cent of women commuters had noticed the Safe Minibus Taxi Charter stickers and overall, **95% supported having a charter in place**, 92% of women responding that they would encourage other women to make use of the charter.

Conclusion:

While competing work schedules limited the participation of drivers and sliding door operators in the S+GBV sensitisation, there was support for these sessions by the majority of the male workforce and interest from a far wider group of minibus taxi associations in participating in future initiatives of this kind.

It is also important to note that both women and men commuters were overwhelmingly in support of there being a charter, with survey participants stating that this initiative should be rolled out to all minibus taxis with a view to influencing positive attitudinal change to combat incidents of sexual and gender-based violence against women.

With communicated support from SANTACO's national headquarters and the Western Cape Provincial Government, this approach represents a scalable model which Transaid hopes will be supported in future.

Tools Utilised:

Safe Minibus Taxi Charter, pre- and post-sensitisation survey, minibus taxi commuter survey.

About Transaid:

Transaid is an international development charity that seeks to transform lives through safe, available, and sustainable transport. Founded by Save the Children, The Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport (CILT), and its Patron, HRH The Princess Royal, the international development organisation shares 25 years' worth of expertise in over 30 countries with partners and governments.

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