



transaid



Sherly Cleophas

## Sherly Cleophas' story

### 'You don't need to be shut out by the world': Sherly Cleophas on women in the minibus taxi industry

Sherly Cleophas wakes at 3:30am every day. She is already preparing her children for school and setting out to start her day before most of her community is stirring.

Sherly is a minibus taxi driver and owner in Cape Town, South Africa. She is responsible for customer complaints and regulates the Belville Taxi Rank. Sherly is also an ambassador for the South African National Taxi Council (SANTACO) Women's Desk in the Northern Region, working closely with Transaid to tackle harassment and sexual and gender-based violence (S+GBV) in minibus taxis, in particular at her taxi rank in Belville.

Sherly's day follows a precise rhythm. She collects her regular commuters, many of whom specifically request her, and ensures they arrive at connecting transport on time. She then rotates between routes and the rank throughout the morning.

"They actually wanted to become my regulars," she says. "Because they trust me and they feel safe whenever I drive them."

Safety, for Sherly, is not simply about vehicle roadworthiness, though she insists on compliance, valid licensing and proper loading capacity. It is also about creating an environment where passengers feel at ease.

"When they get in the van, I make them feel comfortable. They can trust me."

Her commuters know her number. They greet her with hugs. If she is absent, they ask after her. Over nearly two decades, she has become more than a driver; she is a steady presence in people's daily lives. For Sherly, that presence carries responsibility: "I need to make sure that my passengers get to work safely."

For seventeen years, Sherly has been a well-respected member of the minibus taxi industry. However, this wasn't the path she initially imagined. "I was originally introduced to the taxi industry by my husband," she explains. "I didn't like taxis at all."

Today, the industry that once intimidated her is the space where she has built authority, respect and lasting community trust. Nevertheless, the South African minibus taxi industry remains heavily male-dominated. When Sherly first began, confidence did not come easily. "In the beginning, I didn't feel that confident," she recalls. "I didn't know the drivers. I didn't know the route."



**"You will always feel that some of the guys got that attitude, 'why should I listen to a woman? I'm a man'."**

Women taxi drivers and passengers alike face challenges in minibuses. As a Women's Desk ambassador, Sherly handles complaints, many of them from women experiencing harassment or unsafe behaviour in taxis.

"The complaints that I normally get from women are about drivers that are harassing them, guards using foul language, pulling them out of the vehicle, or driving too fast when they ask them to slow down."

When Sherly receives complaints, she collects detailed information, files formal disciplinary reports, and escalates cases for hearing where necessary. Records are kept. Repeat offenders can face serious consequences, including being barred from working within associations.

"Most people didn't know where to go to complain," she explains. "Now they know."

Through training delivered with Transaid and Sonke Gender Justice, in partnership with SANTACO Women's Desk and funded by the Canada Fund for Local Initiatives, Sherly has completed five GBV-focused courses. These trainings have strengthened her ability to support complainants, conduct disciplinary processes properly, and raise awareness among drivers and rank operators.



**"I am aware of how to address these things and to make the complainant feel at ease to speak out."**

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Transaid has also supported the implementation of practical initiatives, including the development of a Safe Taxi Charter and informative stickers inside vehicles, clearly displaying reporting information.

"This initiative gave us amazing results," she says. "The complaints are less, and the harassment is also totally less."



Sherly at the Belville Taxi Rank

Sherly also emphasises that meaningful change requires male allies: “We need more male drivers to support us as women. They must not feel that they’re above us or we’re above them. We’re in the same industry and we’re supposed to support each other.” To this end, Transaid’s Safer Minibus Taxis project appoints male champions in the industry to educate their male colleagues on harassment and sexual and gender-based violence.

Sherly’s message to women is direct and unapologetic:



**“I want to encourage women to be more powerful. You don’t need to be shut out by the world. Tell them who you really are, what you want, and what you want to become.”**

For International Women’s Day 2026, Sherly’s story reflects this year’s call for Rights. Justice. Action. For ALL Women and Girls. In an industry where social norms and harassment have long undermined women’s safety and authority, Sherly is taking action by confronting misconduct, upholding standards, and encouraging other women to step forward. With training and partnership support, she is not only strengthening her own leadership but helping to advance justice and safer working conditions across the sector. When women like Sherly are supported, they do more than drive routes; they drive systemic change.



Sherly and her friend at Belville Taxi Rank