

Becky Shiimbi: Breaking the odds in the taxi industry



The expression “Namibian taxi drivers” brings about aggravating thoughts of men speeding from suburb to suburb, waving their arms at you after having rudely cut into traffic, not to mention making numerous illegal stops of which the most notorious is picking up or dropping off a client on the green robot - until it turns red.

From the open-air parking lot at Unam to the busy streets of Katutura, it is hard to imagine a woman embarking in a field so heavily dominated by men - least of all in the capital city that brews with fierce competition. For starters, most male taxi drivers have already formed tight circles within circles to hold a monopoly where possible.

Rebeka “Becky” Shiimi, decided to enter this world and not see her gender as a drawback, but rather as an inspiration to push her to succeed in this male-dominated world. *Sister Namibia* interviewed Becky and asked her how it feels to be a part of this virile career path.

Becky first became involved in the taxi industry when she acquired a taxi for additional income. The man who drove the taxi for her, saw her as a young woman and therefore did as he pleased, giving her sleepless nights. Her car was going to ruins and she was losing money. She asked herself what the root causes could be that led to the taxi industry being rife with corruption and a lack of regulation. She discovered a lack of mutual respect between taxi drivers, taxi owners and the general public. Becky started toying with the idea of empowering taxi drivers by giving them dignity so that they would start performing better as drivers.

On 1 August 2013 Becky founded Melila Transportation and a year later she has 15 taxis in her fleet. “We manage the taxi, we manage the driver, and we also manage their income. In order for that to work they need to trust us”, says Becky. As a mother of two, the establishment of the company proved, at times, to be time consuming but with the aid of her assistant they managed to make Melila Transportation Consultancy CC the success it is today. To find their drivers, they work with the Ministry of Labour and listen to the radio where drivers advertise themselves. After a background check and police clearance, Becky interviews the potential drivers to see whether they are reliable and a good match for the company. Employed drivers receive a salary cheque with which they can open accounts, pay

social security, and a monthly contribution by the taxi owner to assist them to cover accident costs or traffic tickets. Melila is currently working on getting their drivers medical aid. Debriefing meetings are held on a monthly basis to give drivers the opportunity to share difficulties they encounter, which the Melila team then try to find practical solutions to.

While she initially found that men in the industry did not fully respect her, her continued professionalism and care have seen things change significantly. Her drivers have become the dignified men she had dreamed of, and are busy raising the bar in the taxi industry. Men – from the drivers to the City Police and other entities she has been working with treat her not just as a woman, but as a person to be respected.

Here are some comments from Facebook on how people feel about female taxi drivers today:

- Delphina Muleke: “I think they (women) are also human and deserve a chance to pursue any employment opportunity that comes up. I just don’t think it’s safe for them to drive at night as they might be in danger, but otherwise, I salute them for being so brave!”

- Hedwig Ndokosho: “Well, if I were to take a taxi at night I would trust a male taxi driver, mostly because there are so few female taxi drivers I would be suspicious of a woman behind the wheel. I don’t think male drivers are better than women drivers or vice-versa. That is a stereotype. But there are female kidnappers out there and they are chosen particularly because you would never suspect a woman of hurting you.”

- Rukee Kaukuunga: “Hardly see them. I think I have only seen two so far. I think it’s not safe for a woman to be a taxi driver. As a woman, I wouldn’t do it. Windhoek is already dangerous as it is. Imagine driving people the whole day. Random people. Unless you can defend yourself.”



By Paleni Amulungu