

Heineken South Africa Women's Month entrepreneur - Sibongile Sambo, founder and MD of SRS Aviation

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Sibongile Sambo is a trailblazing entrepreneur in the aviation industry. She is the founder and managing director of SRS Aviation, which is the first 100% black woman-owned aviation company in South Africa.



Sibongile Sambo

This #WomensMonth, Heineken South Africa has partnered with Bizcommunity to showcase the phenomenal work and impact of women entrepreneurs such as Sibongile.

1. Can you please tell us a bit about yourself?

I am a mother of two boys aged 18 and 7, an entrepreneur and a board member of CAMASA (Commercial Aerospace Manufacturing Association of South Africa). I was born in Bushbuckridge in the Ehlanzeni District of Mpumalanga, but I grew up in KwaZulu-Natal.

I continue learning every day, and have a B. Admin in Industrial Psychology and Political Science, the University of Zululand. I have also completed an Honours degree in Industrial Psychology through Unisa, and am now completing my MBA through GIBS Business School.

2. How did you get into aviation?

I've always had a love for airplanes.

Coming from Bushbuckridge, we lived close to Air Force Base in Hoedspruit, so I would always see the aircraft take-off and land. I used to force my mom to book me on a flight home from Durban (where I attended high school) to Nelspruit at least once a year, blackmailing her that I would fail school if she did not as I said.

Post-1994 the government encouraged the youth and entrepreneurs from previously disadvantaged backgrounds to get involved in business activities. I did a lot of research around the industry and business opportunities within aviation sector. I concluded that one could either start a scheduled airline like an SAA or a British Airways. The other option was to own a non-scheduled airline, which involves offering private jet flights on demand.

I opted for the latter and started [SRS Aviation](#) in order to not compete with the SAAs, but complement its offerings with my charter flight business. My mom and aunt invested their pension money into the business and the first contract we won involved flying strategic cargo for government and the rest, as they say, is history.

3. What are some of the challenges women face in the male-dominated aviation industry? How do women overcome these challenges?

The challenges are certainly there when you enter this industry as a woman. There are a few women who hold senior position and in general those who are qualified tend to be overlooked within this male-dominated industry. The salaries for female pilots, for example, are noticeably lower than those of their male counterparts. The industry it would seem is built around men, even the pilots' uniforms caters more to the clothing requirement of men. The industry must transform in the areas of leadership, prioritise pay parity and be attractive to a lot more women entering all areas of the sector including

aviation management, aviation medicine and the technical fields such as aeronautical engineering and aircraft technicians.

4. How are you continuing to run your business and plan ahead in these difficult times?

The industry has been challenged by the pandemic and the resulting lockdown. In April of this year, my company was due to start a factory in Pretoria for the manufacturing of aircraft parts and components, but we put that on hold. We will only investigate the viability of those plans this month (August). My company has also invested in a drone licensed business, so we are getting some work in that sphere. We also now have drones that can spray any open area for the pandemic as well – have begun marketing that facet of our offering.

5. How can readers of this piece support your business?

Through the drone company, we have a training school. Companies that want to empower young people can sponsor them, so that we train them to become drone pilots for which there is a need locally and within our fourth industrial world. In addition, they can also sponsor young people for technical training (non-destructive training) through our training school in Centurion, enabling them to become qualified artisans for instance.

We also still need clients who can hire our planes, jets, and helicopters. We know that due to the pandemic things have changed, but we still anticipate many corporates opting for chartered commercial flights over commercial flights for the travelling needs of key staff.

Facebook: @SRSAviation

Website: <http://www.srsaviation.co.za/>

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About SRS Aviation

SRS Aviation (Pty) Ltd is South Africa's first, and only, fully empowered, black women-owned and operated airborne services business. SRS Aviation offers clients professional and personalised flight options to destinations around the world. Our Air charter services varies from VIP Charter, Tourist Charter, Cargo Charter; Game Count & Capture and Helicopter Services. SRS Aviation provides technical training (artisans and non-destructive training) and assessments.

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