

# Changing female demographics in aviation

 By [Evan-Lee Courie](#)

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When Nandi Mbele was a young little girl in Grade 9, she attended her first air show at the Waterkloof Airforce Base in Pretoria. She was so fascinated by the aerobatic display that her first thought was, 'what's stopping me from doing that?'. Since then, she's always wanted to pilot a Boeing aircraft.



Nandi Mbele, pilot at Mango Airlines

Mbele has been a pilot since 2009 and joined Mango Airlines six years ago.

When asked why she wanted to become a pilot, Mbele says, "I didn't want a boring job for the rest of my life. I'm someone who gets bored very quickly, so I needed something that was able to stimulate all of my senses. I need to be kept on my toes. Even if you have been flying for years, this profession allows you to perfect your craft on a daily basis, and you get to learn new things".

This [Women's Month](#), Mbele shares her story of how she is pioneering her way through the skies of South Africa.

## Being First Officer

### **Could you describe a typical day in your job?**

I arrive at work and sign on for my duty. As a first officer, I have to check the serviceability of the aircraft, check the destination, the route and the weather to see if or how it will affect the operations on the day. I then check that the paperwork is correct in relation to different routing and legal aspects. I make sure all of this is done before the captain arrives so I can give him or her a rundown of the important points, with regards to operations on the day.

In the aircraft, I'm second in command, and with that, my duty is to assist the captain in having a safe flight.

■ **What did you want to be when you grew up?**

I honestly wanted to be a lawyer and specialise in criminal law, but that changed after I attended my first airshow.

■ **How did you get into the aviation space?**

I attended my first airshow in Grade 9. It was at Waterkloof Airforce Base. I was so fascinated by the aerobatic displays. My first thought was "what's stopping me from doing that"?

■ **What was the best advice anyone ever gave you?**

My basketball coach used to tell us to never stop playing/fighting to win a game until the final whistle. I've taken this piece of advice into every aspect of my life and I continue to remind myself to never stop working hard for what I want to achieve.

■ **What advice do you have for the future generation of women wanting to get into the aviation space?**

“ Always believe in yourself. Stay true to yourself and stay focused - it may not be easy, but it will definitely be worth it. ”

■ **Who or what is your biggest motivation?**

My mother has to be my biggest motivation. I've been granted the privilege of being a daughter to a very strong, wise, kind-hearted and funny woman. She has set a great example of what I should aspire to become as a woman.

■ **Are South African women getting enough of a chance to spread their wings in the aviation industry?**

I do think the industry has come a long way when it comes to females within the industry. I still believe more can be done. I'd personally love to see more "all female cockpits".

■ **As a female pilot, what's the least and most exciting aspect of your workday?**

The most exciting part is being in control of that Boeing 737-800, hearing the engines roar and seeing spectacular views from up in the sky. The least exciting part is if the aircraft has a technical problem, and that causes a major delay.



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■ **Could you list a few, if any, specific challenges females face in this industry?**

Unfortunately, some people still believe females are not capable of flying aircrafts, or that any female working onboard should be cabin crew, so inappropriate comments are made.

■ **What is your advice for overcoming these challenges?**

By addressing the individual, and hopefully, they understand the comment they made is inappropriate, and I remind them that the training I went through is the same training males pilots went through. We can only try to change the world one person at a time.

■ **What trends do you predict in the aviation industry in the coming years?**

With more and more people travelling, I predict that the rate of South African scheduled flights will become 24 hours, like many of the international airlines.

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