



AVE: R 22487.47

Entrepreneurs are smashing the gender myth with success

THE myth that women start businesses only because they have to is just that: a myth. Research shows that South African women are almost as entrepreneurial as men — and are becoming more so.

The survey by the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor shows that in 2001, men were twice as entrepreneurial as women. But by last year, men were only 1.2 times more entrepreneurial than women.

Jacqui Kew, senior lecturer in the Department of Accounting

at UCT and co-author of the GEM report in SA, said there was a direct correlation between women's increasing involvement in entrepreneurial activities in SA and the growing influence that women have in politics, business and community development.

Liz Zambonini, director of enterprise development initiative The Hope Factory, said a lack of

skills was one of the major challenges facing the growth of women entrepreneurs in SA.

“The basic school education is simply not sufficient to shape people into thinking like entrepreneurs. Not only does it not

encourage an aspirational train of thought, but many school-leavers come away without a sense of even the most basic

essential skills,” she said.

Entrepreneurs also “need a level of business acumen, some financial wherewithal, and they need to have certain sales skills and be able to market their product”.

Kew said: “Our communities need to realise that unless young girls are given access to education, and are allowed to follow dreams and aspirations that go beyond just family, we're

denying them the right to significantly contribute to South Africa's economic activity.”

Self-confidence and determination were yet more obstacles to women. Having the confidence as a start-up operation to interact with people, network for contacts, and get potential investors and customers to believe in your product or service was critical for success.

Laiiqah Sasman, who established Lasaka Construction, a small business in Cape Town that removes rubble, delivers building materials to site and does renovations, said gender stereotypes remained her greatest problem.

“Men automatically question the capability of women players in the construction industry, making it difficult to break into

the market. It's been challenging, but when I look at how far my business has come, I see how much I've accomplished.”

Access to markets was another challenge to women entrepreneurs in South Africa. Bridging the gap from neighbourhood networks to wider, more aspirant markets was hard, so various organisations, including The Hope Factory, offer ac-

cess-to-market programmes specifically for entrepreneurs.

Then there's the problem of getting money to start the business.

Zambonini said: “Capital-investment opportunities are difficult to secure. Often requirements for bank loans can be too onerous for start-ups to manage, and sometimes grassroots entrepreneurs simply need a few thousand rand to get their business going. A small investment in a start-up business makes a huge difference to its bottom line.”