



02

Kathy Namundjebo

Joiner/Carpenter

Meet Katrina Namundjebo, a qualified Joiner and Carpenter, and owner of Windhoek-based Kathy's Joinery and Renovations. Hailing from Swakopmund in Erongo, this oldest of six siblings and graduate of the Windhoek Vocational Training Centre has defied the odds in an otherwise male dominated world. She is proof that women can excel in technical trades and that common perception that technical trades are for men only, is just that – perception. And not fact. This is her story.

Technically Inclined

Katrina Namundjebo, or Kathy as she is affectionately known, has always been more technically, than academically inclined. Growing up in Swakopmund, Namundjebo admired the German architecture and the integration of

wooden features and flooring into designs. “I never really excelled at theoretical schoolwork, probably because I wasn't really interested in it, but because I've always had the ability to design and make things with my hands. Its in my DNA, I am better at taking something apart and fixing it, as opposed to reading about fixing it”, she explains.

It wasn't easy convincing those close to her that she wanted to enroll to qualify as a Joiner and Cabinetmaker. “They thought it strange. It's no place for a woman. But, I've always been headstrong and they had no other option but to make peace with my decision. Their minds were put at ease when I got an opportunity to go to Germany and learn more about Joinery and Cabinetmaking”, she notes.



Today, Kathy's Joinery and Renovations is a growing enterprise, specialising in a range of products and services, including designing and manufacturing household and office furniture such as kitchen units, cupboards, counters, cabinets, beds and baby cots. Although its Joinery and Cabinetmaking work remains the company's core business, Namundjebo is steadily venturing into the broader construction market through general renovation work, including plumbing, welding, tiling, painting and airconditioner installation work.

Difficult Beginnings

It has not always been smooth sailing for this determined woman. "Yes, it took me five years to complete the standard three-year training course to qualify as a Joiner and Cabinetmaker. I

was paying for my own studies and dropped out three times, because I simply didn't have the money to pay for my training. But, I never stopped dreaming and I guess, that is what kept me going and encouraged me to complete my training", the single-minded Namundjebo recalls.

Upon graduation, Namundjebo found employment and worked on a number of projects for German and Chinese construction companies. "It was tough being the only lady in a group of male carpenters. Life was so tough that at one point, my Chinese foreman had to take me in to stay at his house, because I didn't have accommodation", she narrates.

Her big break came when she learned from a radio presenter that the Ministry of Trade was having an open day for small and medium entrepreneurs at a local hotel. "I

already had a rough business plan and brochures of the machines I needed for my own workshop. Still dressed in our overalls, my friend and I rushed there and I was able to engage the then Minister, Dr. Hage Geingob, who is today the Head of State and showed him pictures of work and installations I had done and told him about my needs", she says. "The Minister found it hard to believe that there were qualified women carpenters around. However, he referred me to officials in the Ministry who considered my proposal and made a commitment to fund the acquisition of workshop tools and machinery", she reminisces.

Namundjebo then made work of finding a suitable place from which she could run her business and found a vacant workshop at the Katutura Industrial Stalls near the Old Compound.

Today, her reputation as a female entrepreneur and a trailblazer in leveraging technical career options amongst young women, precedes her. Namundjebo received the 'Best New Entrepreneur' Award at the 2011 Made in Namibia Exposition and has participated at various trade fairs across Southern Africa. She was also inducted in the Namibian Business Hall of Fame as a Laureate in 2014, and is a regular motivational speaker at the National Youth Service's Career Guidance and Orientation Programme for new intakes.

On the wall of her Katutura workshop is a picture with former Zambian president, Rupiah Banda, when she won an award at the Lusaka Agricultural Show. "President Banda was very impressed. He called up local TV crews to film our stand so that it could encourage other women to start thinking differently about

technical careers”, she notes. “In Zimbabwe, on the other hand, it is quite common to find women joiners and carpenters. However, in Angola, it was not the case at all. The locals brought their children to our stand and all they wanted to know was where I studied, so that they could also send their daughters to enroll there”, Namundjebo narrates.

Booming Business

Today, Kathy’s Joinery and Renovations is growing from strength to strength.

Key clients include the Ministry of Defense, the National Housing Enterprise and the University of Namibia.

“As an entrepreneur, your biggest business asset is your reputation. If your work and service offering is not of quality, you will not succeed, period. Excellence is what brings in and keeps clients. Yes, business is good, but my work is to ensure that each and every project in which Kathy’s Joinery & Renovations is involved in, is successful and that my clients are happy”, Namundjebo explains.

Although Namundjebo is making her mark locally, she also harbours dreams of opening her own training institution. “I want to do my part to grow the local skills base and make training accessible for those that are disabled and illiterate. You can’t talk about access without

opportunity”, she states

She also plans to set up shop in Angola. “Despite the economic downturn in that country, Angola’s construction sector offers a lot of potential and presents many opportunities for carpenters and joiners. “Tools and machinery are very expensive, but it is a dream that I am actively pursuing” she states.

Planning for Success

As a mother of a six-year-old daughter, Namundjebo admits that it sometimes becomes challenging to juggle motherhood with the demands of an entrepreneurial life. “I love my daughter with all my heart and I need to make sure that she gets all the love and attention she deserves. It’s not easy with such a demanding job and the constant pressure to grow and sustain my business. It’s a tight balancing act, but good planning helps to strike that balance”, she adds.

Kathy’s Joinery & Renovations

Namundjebo also takes in trainees from technical and vocational institutions for job attachments. “Factoring in and integrating the practical training expectations of trainees on job attachment into our day-to-day operations is very important. These trainees are not

there to sweep floors, but to learn and to be exposed to industry practice”, Namundjebo says. She also laments the fact that too many local employers pay mere lip service to attachment. “Attachment is a critical component of the training curriculum. Only through meaningful attachment opportunities will we be able to grow the industry and support training institutions in delivering the skilled and competent artisans so desperately needed for our economic growth and prosperity”, she concludes.

She continues to defy the odds. Her story teaches us that success is to be measured, not so much by the position that one has reached in life, as by the obstacles which one has to overcome in that journey. Her inspiring and infectious passion for her work has driven her to overcome all the barriers in her way. She is living proof that our dreams can come true, if we have the courage to pursue them.

She is living her passion.

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