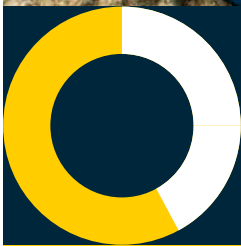




**I WANTED TO  
CHALLENGE  
THE IDEA  
THAT WOMEN  
DON'T CLIMB  
ELECTRICITY  
POLES**



**ZAMASWAZI MBALI KWELA | STUDENT**



**Currently Studying:**  
Electrical Engineering  
N5



**Location:**  
KwaZulu-Natal,  
Clermont



**Age:**  
21 years



**Academic Institution:**  
Elangeni College  
KwaDabeka Campus



## BREAKING THE NORM

When we were in matric at my high school, given the jobs crisis, we were encouraged to research jobs in South Africa and look at which jobs would be open to women. My research led me to a choice between two options, law and engineering. I ruled out law for a couple of reasons, including that attorneys don't earn as much as engineers!

Although the prospect of good pay was one push towards engineering, the main reason I chose it was I wanted to break the norm and try something that many women fear. I was particularly drawn to electrical engineering because I wanted to challenge the idea that women don't climb electricity poles or ladders.

I had the right subjects at high school (mathematics, physical sciences and life sciences) and so I decided to push myself and give it a try. To be honest, it has been long and tough as the course is not an easy one, but I have soldiered on. I like to challenge myself. Receiving certificates for each term that I've passed is a key highlight and motivates me to keep going.



## PUSHING ME TO THE NEXT LEVEL

I am the first in my family to focus on the sciences. Most people in my circle, including my siblings, are teachers and my mother did administration. Even though my mother is not an engineer, she is my main role model. I look up to her as she challenges herself a lot and pushes me to the next level. My family is also very supportive, they motivate me to keep studying, telling me that education is the key to my future and will help me to go far in life.

If I look to the field of engineering, my role model would be one of my lecturers in industrial electronics. He is not one of those lecturers that leave you to do it on your own as he is always willing to lend a helping hand and uses teaching styles that challenges us to think carefully and uses additional materials and not just the college textbooks.

He challenges us to do better and puts in the extra effort, finding a way to assist us. All our lecturers go the extra mile especially to help us through the challenges

of COVID-19. We haven't been spending much time in school, so they have created specific groups to help us interact and ask questions. They push us to keep going and motivate us.

I have applied for learnerships at three companies since 2021, I have not been successful so far, however I am hopeful and when I get workplace exposure I will apply for a National diploma after gathering 18 months work experience.

## YOU NEED TO FOCUS ON YOUR STUDIES, OTHERWISE YOU WILL FAIL

The move from high school to studying at college has been a life changing experience and has been a big wake up call. When I first started the course, I thought it was going to be a walk in the park, but I quickly lost that confidence as it is a complex course with some very difficult subjects. I realised that at college, if you want to do as you please, you can. No one will tell you that you need to attend classes, no one will tell you that you need to study.

I realised that I only have myself to rely on and I was going to need to focus and push myself to complete the course, otherwise I would fail. I had to take some time out and ask myself what I really want in life, to know what my goals are and how to achieve them.

There have been highs and lows, but I have now got my confidence back because I can see how far I have come with my studies. I have worked hard under pressure and persevered despite the difficult subject matter. It also helps that I have one more term to complete and am almost at the finish line.

### IT IS WONDERFUL TO SEE WOMEN COMING TO STUDY

Engineering is a male dominated industry but a significant change I have noticed is that there are more female engineering students. It is wonderful to see women coming to study and pushing themselves to the next level. As women, we have not encountered problems at the college. They have welcomed us, and when registering for the course there has been no bad behaviour or biased statements implying that we shouldn't study. They will take you as long as you have the right subjects that qualify you for the course.

The male students are my "bros", and we all help each other in class. We have our own study group with two girls and two guys. We all share information and when someone has more knowledge in a subject, they help the others. No one thinks they are better than anybody else and it has been a great experience.

### I HAVE SHOWN THAT WOMEN CAN DO IT

I am a woman, and I am studying electrical engineering and it has been a beautiful thing to receive support from my community and my family. They really believe in me, and I have gained quite a lot of respect.

Electrical engineering is deemed to be a difficult course and not a lot of people in my community are doing it. There is also the stigma around engineering being a male dominated industry. I think that seeing me progress in my studies and watching how I have committed and pushed myself to the core has led to my community believing that it is possible to succeed in this field. I have shown them that it can be done. I can see they have become more open to the idea because they have even started to push their children into the field.

People, and especially women, are often scared of engineering as it is seen as a challenging course. I think it is important to go into high schools, especially girls' schools to educate them about engineering and attract them into the field. I am optimistic that as women, there will be opportunities out there for us, it's just a matter of trying.



**I AM OPTIMISTIC THAT AS WOMEN, THERE WILL BE OPPORTUNITIES OUT THERE FOR US, IT'S JUST A MATTER OF TRYING.**

