Ntombifuthi Cibane started her construction company by learning on the job.

**Moving on up**

**In the beginning**

Cibane’s earliest memories are of her widowed mother waking her seven children at 4am and sending them out to plough her lands and get water from the river before they went to school.

“We didn’t have a room as we knew it was either that or starvation,” says Cibane. The family relied on the beans, maize and potatoes they grew to sell and for sustenance.

Cibane matriculated from Zwelethini High School in Umbuzo, Durban, and obtained her BSc from the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Her lofty break came the day her construction firm from another province presented her at a meeting before the “know nothing about the project”, she says, as an angry Chinese fitter employee had bungled the basics so she had to plain to look like a fool.

**Getting started**

This all came to an end in 2007, Cibane registered her company. Two years later, she began to tender for projects and won one for water reticulation in 2010, “which I’d never done before”. She had no previous experience to be confident to enter on a tender.

Cibane found an excellent plumber and learnt on the job by watching him work while he trained local labourers who had little. They fitted the project ahead of schedule. With her newfound confidence, she tendered for another similar project near Inanda.

In 2012, she expanded her services and was supplying labour to the department of transport for road maintenance, such as clearing verges and cleaning storm water pipes.

The Zululand District Municipality called on Cibane to carry out emergency repairs at Ethembeni Hospital and the gutsy young woman was on her way.

**Overcoming obstacles**

To Cibane’s amazement, her bank granted her the loan. “I couldn’t believe it what just happened,” says Cibane. “I gained the loan and the trust of my workers, which is paramount.”

**Next step**

Since 2010, “I have never been without a job,” says Cibane proudly. She made a point of always being on site so that she understood the language, the terminology and the work. “The technicians had very little experience with the site, so I had to employ locals and train them—and they want their wages, or they become suspicious.”

**Hurdles**

“I needed a revolving credit facility to pay my labourers’ wages, but they couldn’t get a bank. In some cases, I had to employ locals and train them—and they want their wages or they become suspicious.”

**Dreams and goals**

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