

Founder of The Barefoot Facilitator, Rehana Moosajee is currently on the Board of ITDP. Her assignments include wellbeing economies, food systems, eco-mobility, place-making and staying connected to nature in rapidly urbanizing contexts. Prior to founding Barefoot, she served on the Mayoral Committee in the City of Johannesburg from 2006–2013.

Despite being the political Head of Transport for the City of Johannesburg between 2006 and 2013, Rehana Moosajee has never considered herself a feminist transport practitioner. But as a woman, having stepped into the space and becoming increasingly involved in shaping policies and implementation, she has helped to shape the beginnings of a more just transport system that caters to the needs of everyone.

“I would have never imagined myself wearing a feminist transport hat. But I think it is about a human approach, one that is very much people-centric. The people who have been invisible in the planning and conceptualization of transport systems, their lives, their needs, their requirements, have not really been front and center in the way transport systems have been planned.”

From her time living and working in Johannesburg, Rehana emphasizes that the biggest issue for women around transport is personal safety. When every trip begins with wondering if they will experience verbal or physical harassment or abuse, if they will actually return from their journey, is a very real lived experience for women in South Africa. Rehana has worked passionately to be part of shifting that experience, using the historical evolution of public transport in Johannesburg as a reference.

“It became apparent to me the extent to which transport was a site of struggle – the 1957 Alexandra Bus Boycotts, the violent clashes between the African National Congress (ANC) and Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) in 1990 which unfolded on the trains – the trauma that is inherent in the South African transport system is palpable and felt by everyone. Women in particular, because of the patriarchal nature of the industry, feel incredibly vulnerable in a transport system that doesn’t even see their humanity, let alone vulnerability.

To help address this, Rehana feels blessed to have been part of the committee for transport as a part of the legacy of the 2010 World Cup. The Rea Vaya project is the realization of this: A project unapologetically driven by the redistribution of space to benefit the vast majority, the possibility of having well-lit places where they could wait for public transport, and a public transport system that gave people a semblance of dignity.

“Rea Vaya was intended to showcase the possibility for what a human-centric, dignified, environmentally-friendly transport system could look like.”

Though these movements were a step in the right direction, Rehana was challenged after an encounter during which she, along with three colleagues (two international), were held at gunpoint in Johannesburg. This was upon return

Rehana Moosajee

FOUNDER OF THE
BAREFOOT FACILITATOR

SOUTH AFRICA





from Mobilise in Dar-Es-Salaam following an intense discussion about women's safety and mobility. The experience highlighted for Rehana that women's safety is not just about infrastructure. It is about acknowledging and improving the interlinkages between all aspects of a woman's daily life: placemaking, the economy, transport, sustainable food systems, even one's personal space – they are all interwoven.

"I think the work I do now is about connecting and creating quiet spaces for people to think through their work from much deeper perspectives."

Rehana is grateful for her naiveté when younger, regarding it as the means with which she was able to make it through to the other side of her work. Still, she wishes she could have built a better balance and been more present for her family, which paid the price for her role in the public sector. Community is so important in this regard: "You don't have to do everything alone. There are like-minded, like-hearted people that you can connect with to carry you through. There is no such thing as an individual superhero. We are very much part of collectives and those you surround yourself with, enable you to navigate some of the most difficult parts of life."

Looking ahead to the next generation of transport advocates, activists, and professionals, Rehana emphasizes how focus needs to shift away from only the transport components of the transport system and start threading together the economics, the space, the planet.

"Issues of gender-based violence, environment, economy, are as much transport issues as they are of those disciplines. Widen your lens, widen the horizon of the work you do and what it really means. It is not about moving a person from point A to point B. It is much deeper than that."