

When her husband died, she found a solution for her family's survival – in the male-dominated steel business, writes

## **Bhekisisa Mncube**

**W**HEN Zandile Mabaso started Mazat Aluminium and Steel (MAS) she was newly widowed with children to support. There was no time for a business plan or market research. That would come much later.

“I went in head-first, like a fool rushing in where angels fear to tread,” admits the 37-year-old former housewife.

After the death of her husband a few years ago, and with three daughters to support, Mabaso felt she had to take decisive action. The gamble paid off: the business is now firmly established and geared for expansion.

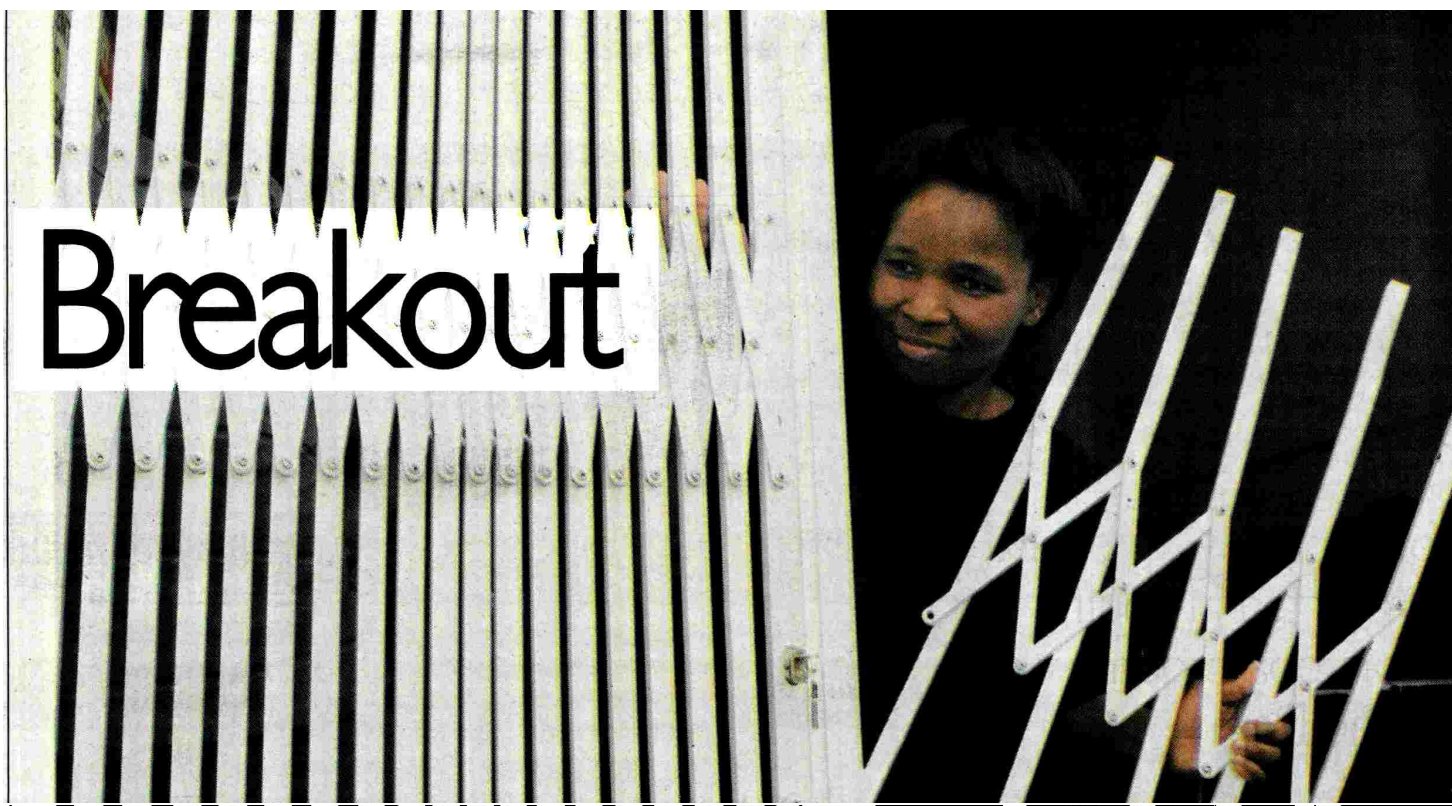
Recalling those dark early days, she says, “Time stood still. I was devastated. I did not know where to start rebuilding my life. I had last worked many years ago. My husband was the breadwinner.”

After a period of mourning, she decided to venture into business.

“My idea was to use my late husband's provident fund to build a B&B.” It was while shopping for signage for the B&B that she came up with the idea for the business she would eventually set up.

“I stumbled on an aluminium frame. I held it in my hand. It was beautiful. I decided then and there to go into the aluminium and steel business.”

Durban University of Technology business incubator Invo Tech provided her with an initial home for the business and the training she needed to get her



# Breakout

Zandile Mabaso at the workshop where the gates and burglar bars are manufactured.

Picture: BONGANI MBATHA

idea off the ground. It helped with registration and the business plan, and offered mentoring and marketing.

“Invo Tech boosted my confidence and gave me the opportunity to network with a range of entrepreneurs.”

Mazat Aluminium and Steel finally opened last July. Mabaso's start-up capital was R200 000 from her late husband's estate.

She set up a small factory near eManzimtoti and equipped it with state-of-the-art tools, including crimping and slotting machines. She now employs five permanent staff, two of whom are women.

Mazat Aluminium and Steel manufactures aluminium windows, shop fronts, expandable gates, motorised driveway gates and folding doors. Other products include aluminium washing lines

and awnings, stainless steel gates, patios and fencing.

Mabaso's product range includes the poster frames that got her into the business.

She has more than 60 clients, 15 of whom are regulars. This financial year her annual turnover will touch R400 000.

Total monthly overheads are about R15 000.

“I now produce 40 gates a month for various clients,” she says.

Now keen to expand, she says, “I have done market research and found that Ladysmith and Mthatha in the Eastern Cape are ideal for this type of business.”

For her plan to work, she needs a capital injection of R300 000 to buy industrial machinery that can make more products faster. “I've already approached the big four

banks and all have declined my application even though I have a successful business model and an investment of R350 000 to use as a collateral.”

Nevertheless, she remains determined to expand the business within a year and is obtaining a South African Bureau of Standards (SABS) stamp of approval for her products.

In talks with the Small Enterprise Development Agency (Seda) on her expansion plans, she is also considering approaching the Motsepe Foundation for funding.

Her success is largely due to her determination – and an impressive CV that includes numerous business training courses she has attended in the past few years. Her qualifications include a National Diploma in

Human Resources Management (Border Technikon), Advanced Computer (Durban University of Technology), Taxation and Value-Added Tax – VAT (KIB Accounting), and Business Administration & Secretariat (Hi-Tech Computer College). She is also a member of the South African Board for Personnel Practice.

But success in a male-dominated industry has come at a cost. Mabaso is yet to draw a salary from her business. “I've sacrificed my savings, my friends, my sleep and time with my family to make this business work. Failure is not an option,” she says.

Deven Reddy, Innovation Incubator Manager at Invo Tech, says, “Zandile is a real gem and we at Invo Tech are very proud of her achievements.”