



Asian Arena

with Pooja Kotedia Patel

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School project gave my 'pilot dream' wings

Mahesh Samir Shah, 15, is a breath of fresh air. Her dream is to be a pilot. The CEO and founder of the Wings for Women initiative is currently working on the Global Social Leaders Sustainable Development Goals Competition. This week, we caught up with Mahesh to share her life as the youngest member of Women in Aviation International.

Tell us a little bit about yourself...

I am a bubbly, fun, hardworking, professional (when I need to be) and a very patriotic person. I am pretty amazing, and I bet my friends would agree with me (winks!)

How did you begin your work with Wings for Women?

As a requirement of the IB MYP Curriculum, I had to create a project based on my interests and passion. The one thing I am most passionate about is Aviation. I chose to be the pilot of the plane, not the passenger. I was also inspired by Capt. Irene Koki Mutungi of Kenya Airways who guided me in firming up my project. I am so very thankful to Capt. Koki for all the advice and support in building WFW.

What is it all about?

Wings For Women's project goal is to spread awareness about the pilot career to teenage girls in Kenya, with the help of a website. We hold interactive sessions with girls from Mombasa and Nairobi. We educate them about the basic needs of piloting as a career, the life of a pilot, basic aircrafts and its parts, the requirements to be a pilot and what the world has to offer them. WFW is currently running in Mombasa and workshops have been successfully completed in Nairobi. We aim to develop and open more groups within Kenya.

You are so young to be able to work on something of this scale, what makes you different from other youth and what drives you?

Everyone is unique. I personally feel it is my love, passion and dedication to my project that makes me a bit unique - not different, from everyone else. All this is what drives me to soar the skies.

What inspired you to take up flying?

When I think about it, a lot of things have inspired me to take up flying such as seeing how aircrafts take off and land with such velocity and how pilots around the world are achieving their dreams of travelling without much expense as it is their job to after all. I guess in general, aviation really intrigues me.

How do you manage to balance your school life and Wings for Women?



RAPID FIRE

If not a Pilot, what would you chose to be... Air Traffic Controller
Favorite part of Nairobi City... Anywhere in Westlands
Your biggest pet peeve... When people assume being an Air Force Pilot means dropping bombs on people
Passenger you would love to fly someday... My grandfather
Your greatest supporter... Don't have a specific one, but my family and friends
Who would play you in a Bollywood

film... Kirti Kulhari who played Seerat Kaur in URI
Your strongest attribute... My passion
Your greatest flaw... I get so emotional sometimes
Destination you'd love to fly to... Back home to Mombasa (Moi International Airport)
Go to comfort meal... Khichdi
Words you live by... Flying is the best possible thing for women.



you or keep up with your work?

They can get in touch with me via email (wingsforwomen21@gmail.com) or via Instagram (www.instagram.com/wingsforwomen) where they can also keep up with what I do.

What do you do in order to unwind?

I actually dance without a care in the world. It is the best thing ever. I take my speakers and just blast music in the room, and I stop when my sister complains.

What is your message to young women in Kenya who want to pursue their dreams?

I can tell you that you are beautiful, strong, powerful and amazing. No one can stop you in achieving your dreams. Even if something comes your way, simply just find your way around it. I will always keep singing that "flying is the best thing for women" and that "dreams don't work unless you do."

en?

Let me not lie — It is so stressful. Sometimes I forget to post on my Instagram account or forget to reply to emails all due to my busy school life. So, to manage all this, I make a schedule which helps me organise myself and manage my time well. Since I reduced my posting to twice a week (on Monday and Thursday), I create my content every month by spending a good two hours. To remind myself to post, I have weekly reminders on the respective days which reminds me that I need to post. Since a new session will be starting in two weeks, I will plan ahead of time so I can do both my school work and my project.

For those who wish to get involved in your project, or those young girls who also want to take

up flying careers what tips can you share?

If you want to take part in my initiative, I would be very happy to have you. If you want to take up flying here are a few tips and pieces of advice I have for you. First, do your research. This is very important as your research will help you find a flight school, mentors, cadets, aviation professionals etc. Second, find an inspiration or find a way to drive you and increase your passion. My project is what drives me to push forward and it has already taken me places. Lastly, keep a mindset that you follow. You cannot let anyone bring you down. You have a goal and you need to achieve it. Let us keep breaking the stereotype because #girlsflytoo!

How can one get in touch with