# Damsel in Distress – Entry #274

My entrepreneurial journey with Damsel in Distress began with a simple but uncomfortable question: what happens when someone is in danger and cannot safely reach a phone? In South Africa, where gender-based violence remains a severe social problem, that question carries real weight. Many safety solutions still assume that a person has the time, freedom and privacy to unlock a phone, open an application and ask for help. I began thinking about whether access to assistance could instead be built into something already worn on the body.

That thinking became Damsel in Distress, initially imagined as a discreet safety ring. The idea was simple: a wearable product that could allow a user to trigger an emergency response without drawing unnecessary attention. As I researched the problem more deeply, however, I realised that the ring alone was not enough. A wearable can only be as useful as the communication system and response network behind it. The concept therefore evolved from a single product into a broader safety ecosystem consisting of wearable devices, a child-focused necklace, and the Purple Grid, a proposed network of strategically placed communication nodes intended to expand emergency coverage.

Building the concept has required more than creativity. It has forced me to make decisions about technology, affordability, infrastructure, customers and implementation. One of the biggest challenges has been balancing ambition with feasibility. It is easy to imagine a national safety network; it is much harder to decide where to begin, how much the first products should cost, what technology can realistically fit into a small wearable, and how the system can function when a smartphone is unavailable. These questions pushed me to research wireless communication, embedded systems, product design, manufacturing, market structure and business modelling far beyond what I originally understood.

The market strategy also changed as the business matured. Instead of trying to serve the entire country immediately, I began focusing on a practical entry point: university communities. Two universities in the Eastern Cape provide an initial reachable student population of roughly 43,000 people. Universities offer a concentrated environment in which the technology, customer response and partnership model can be tested before broader expansion. This taught me an important entrepreneurial lesson: a large vision becomes credible when it is supported by a small, realistic starting point.

Competitions and external criticism have also shaped the project. Not every pitch has succeeded, and that has been useful. Losing competitions forced me to question assumptions rather than defend them simply because they were mine. I learned to separate the mission of the business from the exact form of the first solution. I also learned that strong entrepreneurship is not only about presenting an inspiring idea; it requires evidence, clear numbers, technical honesty, customer understanding and the willingness to refine a model when weaknesses become visible. Some of the most valuable progress in Damsel in Distress came from questions that were difficult to answer at first.

The social impact I hope to create remains at the centre of the project. Damsel in Distress was born from the need to improve personal safety, particularly for women and children, but the broader system is intended to serve anyone who may face danger. The long-term vision is not simply to sell jewellery. It is to build a network in which discreet wearable access to help, community participation and better safety data can work together. If successful, the system could contribute to safer campuses and communities while also creating information that helps identify coverage gaps and places where intervention is most needed.

Most importantly, building Damsel in Distress has changed how I understand entrepreneurship. I used to think entrepreneurship began with having a good idea. I now understand that the idea is only the beginning. Entrepreneurship is the discipline of repeatedly asking whether the problem is real, whether the solution is useful,

whether customers will pay, whether the technology can work, and whether the model can survive beyond enthusiasm. It requires resilience, curiosity and the humility to change direction without abandoning the purpose behind the work.

Damsel in Distress is still developing, and many technical and commercial milestones remain ahead. Yet that unfinished journey is precisely what has shaped me most. I have learned to move from imagination to research, from research to structure, and from structure toward execution. Whether the final system looks exactly as it does today or continues to evolve, the project has already taught me the kind of entrepreneur I want to become: one who starts with a real problem, questions assumptions, builds deliberately and keeps refining until the solution is worthy of the people it is meant to serve.