

Clover Mama Afrika focuses on empowerment, sustainability

 By [Sindy Peters](#)

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What started off as a humble project 13 years ago has blossomed into Clover's flagship CSI programme. The Clover Mama Afrika project has since appointed 42 mamas who run successful care centres throughout SA, caring for children and the elderly, many of which are abused, orphaned, homeless and vulnerable.



Professor Elain Vlok, founder of Clover Mama Afrika and manager of corporate services

We interviewed Professor Elain Vlok, founder of Clover Mama Afrika and manager of corporate services, to find out what goes into the design of a successful CSI project, how the sustainability of the project is ensured, and what some of its notable successes have been thus far.

What was unique about this year's Clover Mama Afrika Smarties Week?

This year's Smarties week which was held at the Ocean Breeze Hotel in Strand, Cape Town, was amazing. It was all about a "Breeze of Fresh Air", and we thought what better time to acquire and renew skills than at the beginning of the year. We witnessed a stronger bond between the mama's, which was a result of their growth over the years. They were more united and very eager to learn more skills.

We were also so excited to welcome two new Clover Mamas; Yvonne du Preez of Upington and Nondumiso Mpitimpiti of Amalinda Forest. It makes me so proud to have them join our sisterhood and it's great that the project keeps growing, which means we can empower more women and more communities.

I am not only proud of what the Clover Mama Afrika's achieved during this week but also of what our project has achieved over the last year. We won another two prestigious awards namely the PMR Diamond Arrow Award at the beginning of 2016 and the Gender Mainstreaming Award in the latter part of last year, not to mention our tenth PMR Diamond Arrow award in January 2017.



How do you decide what the vital areas for skills development are, and how do you ensure successful participation from the mamas?

Our project focuses on women who contribute greatly to the advancement of their communities and based on a simple concept – empowering community caregivers with viable skills, which they pass on to others, to earn a sustainable income and improve the lives of people living in poverty. We have a dedicated team, alongside sponsors and great partners, who ensure that the mamas are trained in a variety of essential skills. We also are able to help them to pass on those skills and empower their communities. Cooking, baking, bread baking, sewing, quilting, mosaic, hairdressing, welding and food gardening are just some of the training they receive and significantly, they are also presented with the necessary tools, equipment and infrastructure to create an income for their communities on the back of their newly acquired skills.

The mamas that we choose need to be pillars of strength in their communities at the time of their selection.

Our team believes that no relationship can be a success unless there is unconditional support and open communication systems in place. We therefore have a hands-on approach and work closely with each of the mamas to ensure regular monitoring and evaluation. We also ensure the monthly reports from the mamas are implemented correctly.

What goes into the design of a successful CSI project such as Clover Mama Afrika project?

Lots and lots of love and hard work! It's been a combination of our passion and a brilliant CSI model.

Clover Mama Afrika has established a reputation for being one of the country's most innovative, effective and sustainable CSI programmes. The programme demonstrates its innovative roots as a CSI initiative - it does not just provide for those in need, it teaches them to help themselves, to bring tangible benefits to the people it aims to uplift at grassroots level, while framing the overall Clover brand in a positive light.

As mentioned before, the mamas that we choose need to be pillars of strength in their communities at the time of their selection. We take immense care in mama selection - these mamas need to be prepared to be committed.

Great care goes into selecting quality training facilitators as well as equipment. We work with training facilitators such as Bernina RSA for sewing, Siyabonga Africa for bread baking, Chipkins for baking, Pick n Pay Good Food Studios for cooking and baking, Food & Trees for Africa and Reel Gardening for food gardens.

Blue chip corporate partners assist us with financial support and services/products such as Eqstra Holdings, Expeditors International, MiX Telematics, HFR Transport, Unicode Systems, Aranda Textiles and Hosken Consolidated Investment Foundation.

It is an honour that after so many years, I can still feel so excited and so proud to be driving Clover Mama Afrika. It is thanks to this project and the very people I work with, from Clover Exco to project partners, colleagues and of course our Clover Mamas that makes me feel as I do.

How do you ensure the sustainability of the project?

Clover Mama Afrika is all about “Building and nurturing our nation”. We teach the mamas how to fish rather than giving them fish, instead of giving people handouts, the company is investing in projects that empower communities and enhance their ability to become self-sufficient in the long term. That means the project doesn’t stop with the mama we train, but rather continues with her staff and community members.

Each mama is committed to becoming sustainable and manages their self-help projects appropriately and ensures that the members in their care are the true beneficiaries. They are also committed to empowering others. They are in a position to pay the members who work on their self-help projects and/or give them a share of the profits for all items they make and sell. Clover Mama Afrika funds are invested in skills training, workshops, starter kits and equipment and we will renovate and repair premises where needed.

The project has received many independent awards over the years - what do you believe sets it apart from other initiatives?

I would say it’s the model we have, it’s one that requires a lot of work, but it means that our success doesn’t stop at the mama trained/assisted. Over the last year, we also trained an additional 150 individuals through 26 skills training sessions that included sewing, quilting, baking, pottery and an egg laying project. Our Clover Mamas transferred their skills to an additional 865 fellow members. Even our return on investment has increased from 106% to a whopping 124% over the last year.

We are currently monitoring and evaluating a total of 183 self-help projects of which 140 are income generating projects. All of this contributes to the continued success of Clover Mama Afrika but none of this would be possible without the unconditional support from everyone.

Is the project open to collaboration with other companies?

We operate in the spirit of *ubuntu*, therefore we are always open to collaborations with other companies to join us on this road through hope and upliftment to sustainable success. To date every aspect of the Clover Mama Afrika initiative has surpassed all expectations and each success is a testament to the hard work, dedication and enormous pride of all involved. Any donation big or small makes a huge difference to the lives of Clover Mama Afrika members.

All donations received are distributed accordingly to each centre countrywide.

Please highlight for us some of the notable successes of the project thus far.

Our mamas are now in a position to pay the members who work on their self-help projects and/or give them a share of the profits for all items they make and sell. That in itself speaks volumes of the success of the project.

Clover Mama Afrika funds are invested in items that are geared towards sustainability; skills training, workshops, starter kits and equipment. With the view of bettering a person’s chance of success and growth, Clover Mama Afrika will renovate and repair premises where needed.

Clover has achieved great brand value from the Clover Mama Afrika project, helping the project itself to continue to drive the mamas to new heights. The below items demonstrate the success of the project and its solid stance or sustainability, to continue to help those in need.

- The project has achieved R62.4m worth of publicity since 2004. This publicity has in turn introduced leads for additional sponsors/donors and potential new mamas, while it helps contribute to a positive brand image.
- University students countrywide use Clover Mama Afrika as their case study, further spreading a positive word about Clover as a company.
- While it all started off as a 100% social economic development project, we are seeing some of our projects evolving into enterprise development initiatives. We do have two Clover Mama Afrikas that manage bakeries only and one mama managing a sewing centre – these we list as 100% micro enterprise development initiatives.
- 183 self-help projects have been started and 140 income-generating self-help projects have been created
- Over the last 13 years, the lives of over 15,500 children and more than 2,500 elderly has been positively affected in South Africa.
- Clover Mama Afrika has collectively trained 2038 individuals who have in turn transferred their skills to over 9500 fellow community members.
- Collectively 328 members are permanently employed and earning a regular income.
- Over 30 blue chip partners have joined the project which has contributed to its success.

Are there any plans in the near future to further develop the scope of the project?

We are constantly developing the scope of the project, it is our aim to empower more mamas so they can further transfer their skills to their communities.

Clover has and never will turn a blind eye to the plight of people in need, and this is why Clover established the Clover Mama Afrika project in 2004.

ABOUT SINDY PETERS

Sindy Peters (@sindy_hullaba_lou) is a group editor at Bizcommunity.com on the Construction & Engineering, Energy & Mining, and Property portals. She can be reached at sindy@bizcommunity.com

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