

# Prof Elain Vlok on Clover's self-sustaining CSI model

 By [Jessica Taylor](#)

10 Feb 2016

The annual Clover Mama Afrika Smarties Week, Clover's flagship CSI programme, took place in Johannesburg last week, from Sunday, 31 January to Friday, 5 February, including an awards evening for rewarding the mamas' previous years' work and commitment to their respective communities. These remarkable women collectively care for over 15,500 children and 2,500 elderly people, many of whom are abused, orphaned, homeless and vulnerable.



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

The project itself has won many accolades since inception 12 years ago and has, to date, appointed 41 mamas throughout South Africa.

Every year, they travel from different provinces across the country and unite to partake in a week of hands-on workshops to become 'way better' in their voluntary community service. "These formidable women work hard throughout the year and this event gives us an opportunity to unite the mamas together and to work hand in hand. Once having learned these essential skills, they pass on their knowledge and teach others in their communities to empower themselves and uplift their communities," explains Professor Elain Vlok, manager of Clover's corporate services and founder of [Clover Mama Afrika](#).

Vlok believes that the project's ongoing success is built on a generosity of spirit that is at the same time the very essence of ubuntu...

## **Why this initiative?**

Clover has always been involved with community projects but wanted to make a more positive impact and took a decision in 2003 to involve itself actively in the lives of the poor. The result was Clover Mama Afrika, a sustainable long-term social development programme.

Clover has never turned a blind eye to the plight of people in need, and this is why it established the Clover Mama Afrika project in 2004. The goal was to give South Africans from disadvantaged communities back their pride and livelihoods. The concept of Clover Mama Afrika is simple: empower community care-givers with viable skills, which they, in turn, pass on to others in order to become sustainable. All of this is done whilst caring for society's most vulnerable members, like orphaned and abused children, those infected or affected by HIV/AIDS and senior citizens.

The Clover Mama Afrika initiative has set out to restore some of the best aspects of African tradition into modern life, such as caring for one another, passing on skills and protecting the young, the weak, the aged, as well as HIV/AIDS victims. Today, the Clover Mama Afrika project places a strong emphasis on assisting women in disadvantaged communities to learn to help themselves so that they may regain their pride, establish self-sustaining livelihoods and become valuable members of their communities and to society at large.

### **■ How does it work?**

At the heart of the programme are the carefully chosen 'mamas' who already act as pillars of strength in their communities at the time of their selection. Hand-picked by Clover and its area managers, mamas are incredibly special ladies who already make a difference to the people around them and want to empower others to become self-sustaining too.

The programme sees that they are trained in a variety of essential skills that can then be passed on to other community members. Cooking, baking, bread baking, sewing, quilting, mosaic, hairdressing, welding and food gardening is 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 Clover Mama Afrika team monitors and evaluates Clover Mama Afrika's positive impact by doing regular on-site visits and one-on-one meetings with the mamas. We make sure that regular evaluation forms/progress reports are sent and completed by the mamas. We provide a 24/7 hands-on approach, which helps us in identifying strength and weaknesses, and problem areas are handled and remedied as quickly as possible.

### **■ Who supports the project and how so?**

Hugely important to the success of Clover Mama Afrika is the open-hearted attitude of the programme's corporate partners and sponsors who assist to make it meaningful for so many needy people across South Africa.

As a respected JSE-listed company with a century-long history of serving farmers and the public through a wide range of world class 'way better' dairy and beverage products, Clover is committed to maintaining Clover Mama Afrika's status as a corporate social investment programme that makes a real difference. In line with its commitment to the programme, Clover also ensures that Clover Mama Afrika meets the highest levels of transparency and corporate governance.

With that said, Clover is of the firm belief that the best way for Clover Mama Afrika to have the greatest possible impact is through partnership and collaboration with other organisations and individuals that want to embed sustainability into the fabric of South African society. Besides, the wide-ranging needs of South African communities requires committed teamwork from as many people as possible who have the means to make things happen for those who don't.

### **■ Is Smarties Week only held in one city each year? Are all the mamas able to attend and, if so, are their transport and accommodation costs covered?**

Each year the annual Smarties Week takes place in a different city. Unfortunately, not all the mamas are able to attend due to their responsibilities in their community, but most of the mamas attend Smarties week as it is beneficial to them. Clover covers their accommodation and travel costs.

■ ***Is it an invite-only event, exclusively held for the mamas?***

Yes this is only for the mamas. It gives the mamas an opportunity to unite and work hand in hand together. It is Clover Mama Afrikas major training session to make sure that the mamas are on track and to guide them for the future.

■ ***How does one become a mama?***

The mamas are carefully chosen by Clover and its area managers and need to be pillars of strength in their communities at the time of their selection. The mamas who are chosen are incredibly special ladies who already make a difference to the people around them and want to empower others to become self-sustaining too.

■ ***Who were the top achievers at the awards ceremony held on Thursday evening?***

- Mama Sipwe Solomons of Hazyview, Mpumalanga as the Performer Extraordinaire;
- Mama Florence Nyakiso was awarded of Botshabelo, Free State as Business Woman of the Year award
- Mama Mirriam Toni of Mbekweni, Western Cape as Top Achiever of the Year as well as recognised as the mama with the Ultimate Cleanliness and Hygiene;
- Mama Mirriam Makamu of Tembisa, Gauteng was awarded Most Improved.

■ ***What are some of the ways they're making a difference in their communities, and how has the initiative enabled them to further their impact?***

Each mama has trained many people in her community who, in turn, transferred their skills to fellow community members. These remarkable women collectively care for over 15,500 children and 2500 elderly people, many of whom are abused, orphaned, homeless and vulnerable.

- Clover Mama Afrika has trained 1934 individuals who, in turn, transferred their skills to more than 8500 fellow community members.
- Collectively 358 members are permanently employed and are earning a regular income.
- Over 30 blue chip partners have joined the project, which has contributed to its success.

Clover Mama Afrika ensures that regular training is provided to meet the growing demands from the Clover Mama Afrika self-help projects. Additional equipment is also provided to make their tasks a little easier. Regular training includes progressive, advanced and specialised training.

■ ***How does the project in turn benefit Clover, and why would you recommend this model?***

Numerous research studies have shown that people want to do business with and buy the products and services of organisations that they feel are not just doing good because they have to, but because they want to. Add to the fact that 70% of CEOs say that corporate social initiatives are vital to profitability – it then makes sense that Clover's flagship CSI, Clover Mama Afrika is the success story it is today and will be for many years to come.

Clover Mama Afrika has also observed an improved employee morale amongst Clover employees who witness what CMA does via the InCLOVER newsletter and those Clover staff involved with mamas in their areas are motivated and inspired by these women and what Clover does to help them.

This is a great CSI project that helps struggling people with the right tools and skills to make a difference in their communities and their country. Each Clover Mama is trained in numerous skills to assist her to benefit personally from it, for her to sustain her community projects and to assist with upskilling immediate community members.

Each mama is committed to becoming sustainable and manages her self-help projects appropriately and ensures that the members in her 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 it will renovate and repair premises where needed.

The project continues to support the informal economy through the Clover Mama Afrika self-help projects and has shown a significant job and income generation potential and it helps to meet the need of poor consumers by providing accessible and low-priced goods and services.

### 📌 **Concluding remarks.**

The passion, commitment and constant communication with me and my small but dedicated team and contact with the respective Clover Mama Afrika's help to make this project the success story it is.

## ABOUT JESSICA TAYLOR

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