

Drivers of Change

Powerful alliance in the fight against Aids

Winner — Drivers of Change Business Award: **Apparel Lesotho Alliance to Fight Aids (Alafa)**

Mitzi du Plessis

"I was so happy when my baby Thato went for the HIV test and was negative! She is a beautiful, healthy girl. I do not have enough words to thank Alafa."

"I came to the clinic at my job because I wanted to know my status. I was suffering. I was so thin and was worried about that. I was 39kg ... now I am 75kg. So I am proud of Alafa because it made me what I am."

Testimonials such as these are plentiful in Lesotho, where the Apparel Lesotho Alliance to Fight Aids (Alafa) has implemented a groundbreaking campaign to provide HIV and Aids support for workers in the country's burgeoning apparel industry, enabling them to remain gainfully employed while at the same time managing their health.

To be truly understood, the impact of Alafa needs to be seen against the background of prevailing socio-economic conditions in Lesotho and the importance of the apparel industry for job creation in the Lesotho economy.

Lesotho is a small, land-locked country, surrounded by South Africa, with a population of just under two million. It is one of the poorest countries in the world and is ranked as a least-developed country. Its economy is based on

subsistence agriculture, livestock, remittances from migrant workers employed in South Africa, a developing mining industry and the textile and apparel sector.

For a number of years the textile and apparel sector has received technical support from regional development agency ComMark Trust in partnership with the Lesotho National Development Corporation. In 2005 ComMark received funding from the United Kingdom's department for international development (DFID) to design a strategy to address HIV/Aids in the industry. Alafa was born in that process.

The apparel sector is the largest private sector employer in the country and by mitigating the effects of HIV/Aids on the livelihood of employees and the industry as a whole, Alafa helps to ensure job security.

The industry-wide programme, which was launched in Maseru in May 2006, covers 75% of the 46 000-strong textile and apparel workforce in Lesotho with its education and prevention programme and 50% of workers have access to medical monitoring and treatment with antiretrovirals. Surveys within the apparel sector show that 43% of employees are HIV positive.

The programme directly benefits women-headed households, targeting two main drivers of the HIV



The textile and apparel industry in Lesotho employs 46 000 people

epidemic — poverty and gender inequity. Most apparel industry employees are young women and it is this gender and age group which is most at risk for HIV/Aids.

The programme also supplies prevention of mother-to-child-transmission services and will include spouses and dependants in 2009.

Alafa is considered to be a leader and innovator in the private sector workplace response to HIV and Aids. There is ample evidence

that the programme contributes to Lesotho's growing reputation as a socially conscious and ethical source of clothing, a factor that is becoming an increasingly important requirement in global markets.

The programme counts prominent international celebrities such as U2 front-man Bono among its champions and campaigners.

Lesotho's apparel industry produces mainly for the US market for some of the world's most prestig-

ious brands such as Gap and Levi's. The importance of the industry for poverty alleviation in Lesotho goes beyond the sector. Workers in the industry earn R560-million a year and this income circulates through the local economy, stimulating a variety of small businesses selling goods and services.

Alafa's strength lies in its ability to draw upon the strengths of various contributors to benefit the industry and its workers.

As its name implies, Alafa is an alliance. The project is hosted by the Lesotho Textile Exporters' Association, with government, service providers, industrialists, labour, brands and retailers, funders, donors and multinational organisations working together to fight the HIV and Aids pandemic.

The programme has built strategic partnerships with the three relevant government ministries (trade and industry, health and labour), the National Aids Commission and trade unions.

The programme is funded mainly by the contribution of a number of brands (EDUN, WalMart, Gap and Levi Strauss), bilateral donors (the UK department for international development and Irish Aid) and multilateral donors (the European Commission), which have already committed significant funds to rolling out the programme.

The worth of an achievement is not in the value of the accolades it receives,

but in its inspiring others to exceed it.

The Southern Africa Trust congratulates the following 2008 Drivers of Change:

In the **civil society** category, the Lusaka based Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection scooped the award for its simply powerful basic needs basket survey. The basic needs basket compares essential food and other essential costs of a regular family of four against the income of an average household. It's having a visible impact on Zambia's poverty reduction efforts.

The Apparel Lesotho Alliance to Fight AIDS (ALAFA) which is a coalition of apparel manufacturers, retailers, workers, international clothing brands, international organizations, and the Lesotho government won the award in the **business category** for its innovative sector wide public-private-community partnership that is showing how possible it is to protect key productive economic sectors in poor countries from the ravages of HIV and AIDS.

In the **individual category**, the visionary Richard Mkandawire won the award for his outstanding leadership in convincing African leaders and the international community that Africa can muster the ability and political will to overcome hunger and poverty through a green revolution for food security.

A **special joint award** was given to the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development of Mauritius and the Mauritius Council for Social Service (MACOSS) for driving a major change in how regional priorities to overcome poverty are set in our region.

May you inspire many others to exceed the remarkable difference you are making. The Southern Africa Trust thanks all the individuals and organisations that submitted nominations.

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DRIVERS OF CHANGE



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