



## Preamble

# Corporate social responsibility: a personal reflection on Clover Mama Afrika

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Although corporate social responsibility (CSR) or corporate social investment (CSI), the term preferred by most South African businesses, has been studied from the 1950s, up to date no universally accepted definition has been formulated. However, the basic concepts put forward in the definition of the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD) (2000) are generally accepted as forming the core of CSR.

This definition explains that CSR is the continuing commitment by business to behave ethically and contribute to economic development while improving the quality of life of the workforce and their families, as well as of the local community and society at large.

The South African government's definition of CSR as proposed in the *Draft Codes of Good Practice on Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment* (2005) is closely related to the WBCSD's definition. It states that social investment (as it is referred to in the document) is "an enterprise's contributions to society and community that are extraneous to its regular business activities" (Department of Trade and Industry, 2005). This definition furthermore emphasises *development* as the outcome of CSR and that *local communities* should be the main beneficiaries of these programmes.

From these definitions one can conclude that CSR should:

- improve the quality of life of a company's workforce, their families, local communities and society at large;
- contribute to development; and
- be extraneous to regular business activities.

Although these principles might sound desirable and like “the right thing to do”, many companies used and abused CSR in the past as a tool only to enhance corporate reputation. This led to a number of critics arguing that CSR is nothing but greenwash since its primary objective is to project a favourable image of the company in order to placate critics, whilst continuing with its normal business activities. Even though this is in some instances a valid argument, greenwashing is not in the spirit of CSR. It is accepted that CSR activities can and should also benefit the company. Its primary objective should, however, always be to improve the quality of life of different stakeholders of the company in a way which is contributing to development of society at large through activities extraneous to the company's regular business activities. The contribution from Prof. Elain Vlok is a prime example of how CSR activities can really make a difference; not only in the lives of the beneficiaries of CSR activities, but also in the communities in which these activities are undertaken and in the end contributing to sustainability in society at large.

At this stage a critical reader may start to wonder why a case study of a CSR project is included in a special edition of *KOERS* which focuses on communication. The answer is palpable: no CSR activity, no matter how well-planned and -constructed, can be successful without effective communication in every stage thereof. Effective communication with the beneficiaries of CSR activities is crucial to the success of these activities, as highlighted by Vlok. Furthermore, effective communication between the company and all its stakeholders, including clients, consumers, employees, shareholders, government, the media and local communities is vital to the successful fulfilment of the objectives set for the CSR activities. Only when all relevant stakeholders are informed and content with a company's CSR activities can these activities be truly successful and beneficiary not only to the company, but primarily to the community and in the end to society as a whole.

## **Clover and Mama Africa**

Clover is one of the largest Branded Consumer Goods companies in the country and an organisation with a proud track record of more

than a century. This record includes a long history of commitment to community upliftment, actively involving itself in the lives of the poorest of the poor.

The Clover Mama Afrika – *Ukwakha Isizwe* (“Building and nurturing our nation”) project was launched in October 2004 and is a national social upliftment project which seeks to assist and support communities at grassroots level in an enabling and empowering manner so they can help themselves and those around them. Clover’s flagship corporate social investment (CSI) philosophy is underpinned by the principle of sustainability; 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: “We teach the Mamas how to fish rather than giving them fish”.

The project’s main involvement is with women who take care of abused, abandoned, orphaned and vulnerable children, as well as the elderly. The Clover Mamas collectively care for more than 8 000 children and 1 100 elderly. The fact that Clover is empowering these women, instead of just giving handouts, ensures that these Mamas are able to better nurture the children and elderly people in their care.

Clover Mama Afrika is an award-winning social responsibility investment and has also successfully acquired the financial support of the company’s BEE partner, Hosken Consolidated Investment, as well as the support of many other corporate organisations. Consequently Clover has been accredited with a 100% BEE scorecard.

Prof. Vlok heads the Corporate Communications Department on behalf of Clover and is the custodian of the organisation’s social responsibility initiative, Clover Mama Afrika. The following is a personal account and reflections of Vlok’s experiences with Mama Afrika.

### **Clover Mama Afrika: a personal reflection**

Through my position as Manager of Corporate Services at Clover I have been given the responsibility of finding and driving a corporate social responsibility project that would change the lives of thousands of South Africans. By means of Clover Mama Afrika I have met our country’s matriarchs; they reflect humility, kindness, strength, commitment and responsibility and are respected by their peers. These Mamas hold the keys to the secrets of yesteryear. They tell the stories of the past and are the one’s who are called upon in times of need. Not only are they aware of the needs of their communities, but

they actively address those needs in whatever way possible. In their townships they unassumingly take charge of protecting, nurturing and educating their young and take care of the abandoned senior citizens.

The task of selecting Clover Mamas was an incredible journey that started in October 2004 with the assistance of Clover branch managers. We identified these matriarchs, because they had the resources and qualities a woman needs to become a true Clover Mama Afrika. The principle guidelines for the selection process state that:

- they should have already created a nurturing and protective environment for the people they care for;
- they should have an existing dwelling that accommodates their work;
- their work receives the respect and endorsement of the community;
- they are positively committed to job creation; and
- they are willing to receive training and are committed to pass on their new-found skills to recreate new jobs.

Meeting these Mamas and working with them has given me personal gratitude of how many good people this world has and all they need is a helping hand to achieve their ultimate vision and mission. With the support of Clover we empowered them with skills such as sewing, cooking, baking and starting food gardens. Clover hereby enhanced their ability to become self-sufficient in the long term. We have given them added-value workshops such as basic administration and finance management, first aid, a wash your hands campaign, as well as art training.

With each skills training and development workshop the Mamas also receive start-up equipment. The overall support and funding of this project has led to alleviating poverty by helping them helping themselves and those around them.

My responsibility to manage and drive this project has become rewarding in many ways. It is with pride that I represent Clover through an initiative that truly delivers its byline “All we need is love” and “Clover cares”.

The gratitude shown by the Mamas are the most heartwarming of all. It is better written in Psalm 105:1-2 “Thank the Lord for all the

glorious things He does; proclaim them to the nations. Sing his praises and tell everyone about his miracles.” The Mamas had a calling from a higher power to put their own plight of poverty aside and attend to those in greater need. Their calling was not ignored and their faith brought them to us so that we can recognise their good work and help them achieve their successes in an empowering manner.

Some of the many messages of gratitude from the Mamas include the following:

Together with Clover Mama Afrika we change and better the lives of many ... we are all blessed. (Mama Rosie Mashale of Khayelitsha.)

Clover Mama Afrika has shown us that our hands are like gold ... with them we can make anything happen. (Mama Linah Maluleke of Soweto.)

Thank you for the bridge of hope that has made us realise that all can be achieved. (Mama Esther Nkosi of Mpumalanga.)

Clover Mama Afrika has brought new hope and light to Ebenezer. We give thanks with joyful hearts. (Mama Shirley Merime of Ennerdale.)

- **Open communication is key to our success**

No relationship can be a success unless there are unconditional support and open communication systems in place. The hands-on approach and close working relations I have with each of the Mamas ensure the regular monitoring and evaluation of each self-help project which is implemented. Through this evaluation process, I am able to identify the strengths and weaknesses, as well as challenges, on an individual basis. These close relationships have also provided me with an in-depth knowledge of cultural differences. We all have our own way of dealing with situations and I have learnt to be compassionate towards different situations. The value of this project is also about understanding and learning from one another. We cry together, we sing together and we laugh together – I share their sadness when one of their members passes away.

- **Goodwill attracts valuable partners**

Over the years Clover Mama Afrika has acquired an established reputation and through this the company has attracted valuable partners. I have met people who possess the same passion to contribute positively towards a better future for all. Blue chip partners

such as Hosken Consolidated Investments Foundation, Bernina SA and Plascon among others have enabled us to provide more than we can offer on our own.

To date every aspect of the Clover Mama Afrika initiative has surpassed all expectations and each success is truly a testament to hard work, dedication and an enormous price payed by those involved. As Vincent Lombardi aptly stated: "Individual commitment to a group effort – that is what makes a team work, a company work, a society work, a civilisation work."