

A photograph of a man and a young girl walking in a rural, possibly informal settlement, environment. The man, on the left, is wearing a bright yellow long-sleeved sweater, white pleated trousers, and a dark belt. He is looking down and to the right. The young girl, on the right, is wearing a maroon sweater with a yellow V-neck, grey shorts, and blue pants. She is looking down at something in her hands. The background shows simple buildings with corrugated metal roofs and a dirt path. A green vertical bar is on the left side of the image.

“Some people think I am wrong even to talk about AIDS. For me it has become my life’s work.”



By 2005 one million children were orphaned in South Africa because of HIV/AIDS. A joint initiative between Unilever South Africa, the Durban Children's Society and Boksburg Child and Family Welfare Society offers an alternative to institutional care. Called *Thokomala* (which means 'warmth' and 'caring' in Zulu), five houses have been bought, each providing a home for up to six orphans, some of them HIV positive.

Headed by trained foster mothers, the homes are located in the children's own communities, where they are able to stay until they are adults. A further 180 orphans are looked after through community fostering, forming a cluster around these homes. Picture shows Harold Bokaba (back, centre) visiting one of the five *Thokomala* homes in South Africa.

Sub-Saharan Africa has 10% of the world's population but over 60% of the world's HIV/AIDS

For Harold Bokaba, a Unilever South Africa employee since 1977, trying to stem the spread of HIV/AIDS has become an all-consuming part of his life. Harold used to run the customer help desk for delivery drivers at the distribution centre for Unilever's Boksburg plant in the suburbs of Johannesburg. As the HIV/AIDS crisis began to worsen at the beginning of the 1990s, he started an HIV/AIDS support group with others at the plant and became a volunteer in his spare time.

"That is when I decided to change from being an active trade unionist to a crying and caring person for people

infected by the epidemic," Harold recalls. Recognising that truck drivers picking up prostitutes at the roadside is one of the key ways the HIV virus is transmitted from community to community, he started handing out condoms to the truck drivers who passed through the distribution centre.

HIV infection is endemic in sub-Saharan Africa

Harold is only too aware of the devastation HIV/AIDS can cause. As with so many people in South Africa, this deadly disease has claimed

a member of his own family, and he wanted to do something to try to help his fellow South Africans.

HIV infection is endemic in sub-Saharan Africa. Although it is home to just 10% of the world's population, the region accounts for over 60% of the 39 million adults and children UNAIDS estimates are living with HIV/AIDS worldwide. In the region just over half the 25 million people with HIV are women and it is estimated that in 2004 the disease caused 2.3 million deaths and 3.1 million new infections. HIV prevalence is highest in southern Africa, where at least 10% of the population is infected.

Unilever has operated in South Africa for over a century and its products, such as *Sunlight* soap, *Omo* detergent, *Knorr* foods and *Lipton* tea, are among the region's most popular brands. The company employs around 50,000 people at 30 sites in 11 sub-Saharan countries, including tea estates in Kenya and Tanzania and factories in Nigeria, Ghana and South Africa. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the companies in each country developed HIV/AIDS prevention programmes in response to local needs, ranging from awareness initiatives to voluntary counselling, testing and, where appropriate, treatment and care.



Harold Bokaba with a group of home-based care givers in the Vosloorus township near Unilever's Boksburg plant.

Unilever is committed to developing effective health education programmes and securing access to appropriate treatment for all employees at all stages of the disease, although it does not operate a one-size-fits-all approach. "Countries differ greatly in the quality and availability of public healthcare, the level of prevalence, and cultural attitudes towards the disease," explains Dr Murray Coombs, Occupational Health Adviser for Unilever's Africa Regional Group. "This requires us to take a localised approach."

While the emphasis has been on education and prevention, Unilever helps employees with HIV/AIDS to combat the infection through nutritional supplements that boost their immune systems, treatment for opportunistic infections and, when needed, anti-retroviral therapy administered, if at all possible, through public health provision. "The workforce in many African countries is both mobile and transient, so it is usually best for patients that anti-retroviral treatment comes from a stable source where they can continue their treatment when they move jobs," says Dr Coombs.

Unilever companies in Africa operate HIV/AIDS prevention programmes in the wider community, including training of peer health counsellors, educational talks and materials, promotional events and giving out free condoms. In Kenya and

Tanzania, where Unilever has its own hospitals for workers on its tea estates, the company is working towards ensuring that treatment at these hospitals is integrated into the local public healthcare infrastructure. This will improve the quality, access and continuity of treatment for employees and local communities alike.

While Unilever's local community involvement programmes have been, and continue to be, highly effective, it was recognised that much greater impact could be achieved by leveraging the company's position as a prominent business in the region.

Julian Stanning, an HIV/AIDS Programme Adviser to Unilever's Africa Regional Group, explains: "Businesses can be so much more effective working together, both as a group working with governments and to scale up activities in the wider community. On a local basis, large companies often don't have much contact with each other, so we have put a lot of emphasis on helping to build national business coalitions and on facilitating contact between coalitions in different countries. Unilever companies are active members of national HIV/AIDS business coalitions in nine countries in sub-Saharan Africa and have played a leading role in the establishment of several of these."

The South African Business Coalition on HIV/AIDS (SABCOHA), formed in 1997, is starting to play an influential role in South Africa, where nearly five million people are HIV positive or have AIDS and where 1,500 new infections occur every day. In August 2004 the coalition launched a toolkit to help small and medium-sized businesses to create their own HIV/AIDS programmes. Largely modelled on Unilever's own management guide and funded by the UK's Department for International Development (DFID), the toolkit is designed to help managers cut through the plethora of HIV/AIDS materials available and save costs in implementing their own programmes.



Gail Klintworth (right), National Manager, Unilever South Africa, presenting Reuel Khoza, Chairman of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) Business Group, with the SABCOHA toolkit. Developed in partnership with Unilever, the toolkit aims to help small and medium-sized businesses to create their own HIV/AIDS programmes.

While sub-Saharan Africa is where Unilever's HIV/AIDS efforts are most visible, external HIV/AIDS programmes are also being implemented in other countries where Unilever has operations. In Brazil, for example, Unilever is working with the country's national business council to combat HIV/AIDS, *Conselho Empresarial Nacional de Combate a AIDS*, and the Brazilian Ministry of Health to stem the rising toll of HIV/AIDS among young people.

With the HIV/AIDS epidemic growing rapidly in Eastern Europe and Asia, Dr Bernard Luten, Unilever's Head of Occupational Health for Europe, is working with Unilever businesses in these regions to develop their HIV/AIDS programmes. Dr Luten believes much of the experience gained in

South Africa and Brazil, for example, can be applied elsewhere and that there is no time to lose: "In South Africa it took five years for HIV/AIDS to go from 0.5% to 1% and then seven years to go from 1% to 10%.

"One of the lessons we learned in Africa is not to try to force fit a solution that has been developed somewhere else. By all means learn from others, but it's important that companies in other regions create their own policies and programmes in order to develop a sense of local ownership and a fit-for-purpose programme. It's also important not to do your own thing in isolation. If one company in a country takes a lead without taking others along, it can be quite detrimental. That's why we are involved with other companies in forming local business coalitions."

For Harold Bokaba, what was an interest has now become a calling. Harold no longer works in the customer care centre and he no longer confines his efforts to handing out condoms to truck drivers. He has become a full time HIV/AIDS worker for Unilever. His work now takes him to schools to talk about the dangers of unprotected sex, to community centres, churches, offices and factories. It also involves him talking to what he calls the "forgotten societies," in places such as prisons, where rape and sodomy are widespread and the virus is easily transmitted.

"Every day I wake up thinking what more can I do?"

Harold now realises this is his life's work. "It's not a job, it's more like a vocation for me," he says. "I feel I have an obligation to help people at the grass roots and every day I wake up thinking what more can I do to help these people?"



A Unilever employee handing out condoms on one of Brazil's bustling beaches. As part of its community health education programme, hundreds of employees from Unilever's factories in Brazil volunteer each summer to hand out HIV/AIDS prevention kits to tourists along the beaches of Brazil's north-east coast.

This initiative, which has distributed 185,000 condoms since 1995, is part of Unilever Brazil's award-winning national HIV/AIDS education programme, in partnership with national business council *Conselho Empresarial Nacional de Combate a AIDS* and the Brazilian Ministry of Health.

Unilever believes that one of the best and most sustainable ways it can help to address global social and environmental concerns is through the very business of doing business in a socially aware and responsible manner.

This is one in a series of occasional articles called *Global Challenges – Local Actions* that looks at how Unilever companies are tackling global social and environmental concerns by working in partnership with local, national and international agencies, governments, business organisations and NGOs.

Unilever works with a wide range of partners in Africa and Brazil on HIV/AIDS prevention and promotion, including local governments, international aid agencies, business coalitions, and medical and welfare organisations.

If you would like to know more about Unilever Brazil and its approach to corporate responsibility, please visit www.unilever.com.br/. For more details about Unilever South Africa or about the Thokomala childcare initiative please visit www.unilever.co.za.

If you would like to know more about the SABCOHA toolkit, see www.sabcoha.co.za. Unilever HIV/AIDS programmes are also available as models on both the Global Business Coalition on HIV/AIDS website www.businessfightsaids.org and the World Economic Forum Global Health Initiative website www.weforum.org.

For more about Unilever's position on HIV/AIDS and about Unilever's social and environmental activities, please visit www.unilever.com/ourvalues/environmentandsociety. There you will find copies of our latest environmental and social reports and copies of previous articles in this series. Subjects of other articles include:

Global Challenges – Local Actions

- Micronutrient deficiency in Africa
- River pollution in Indonesia
- Climate change/refrigeration in Europe
- Rural micro-entrepreneurs in India
- Sustainable fishing off Africa
- Tackling diarrhoeal disease in Asia through hygiene education
- Diversity and Unilever
- Saving water in Latin America

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