

'Fight for it, work hard, and make it happen!'

 By [Sindy Peters](#)

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This August we're celebrating women from all walks of life who have an innate passion and commitment to make a positive difference in the world through their work. No listicle of incredible South African women would be complete without Professor Elain Vlok, manager of corporate services at Clover SA and founder of the Clover Mama Afrika project.



Professor Elain Vlok, manager of corporate services at Clover SA and founder of the Clover Mama Afrika project

Vlok has been the driving force behind the grassroots initiative for 15 years now, empowering the mamas it supports with the skills they need to in turn help support their own communities. Under Vlok's inspirational leadership, the Clover Mama Afrika project has produced some impressive results.

We caught up with Prof Vlok to find out more about some of the project's achievements thus far, what keeps her motivated, and what advice she has for others looking to make a positive impact in SA.

Could you tell us a bit more about yourself, your background, and what led you to your current role at Clover.

Professor Elain Vlok: It takes a passionate and committed person to reach a goal successfully and then to maintain its success. Fifteen years ago I embarked on a project that has changed the lives of thousands of individuals and continues to do so. I'm the driving force behind Clover Mama Afrika – Ukwakha Isizwe, meaning building and nurturing our nation, and this project has become Clover SA's greatest success story and flagship corporate social investment initiative.

When I was growing up, I was surrounded with a family that thrived on always wanting to learn, hence my academic background and wide knowledge of everything from sewing to baking. I learned from an early age that knowledge is power and nothing stopped me from always learning new things... whether it was through words in a book or learning using your hands. It also became easy for me to embark into unknown territory and to make things happen, such as the Clover Mama Afrika project. When I first started with Clover Mama Afrika, nothing prepared me for the challenges that would change my life too. I am blessed to be working with formidable women who want to change their standard of living as well as improve the lives of the members they care for.



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Professor Elain Vlok 7 Jan 2019



■ ***As head of the Clover Mama Afrika project for 15 years now - what keeps you motivated?***

I work hard to inspire and motivate these mamas to realise and achieve their goals. The tangible results of the Clover Mama Afrika project are testament to their passion and commitment. If you believe it, you can do it!

■ ***Share with us some of the project's greatest achievements.***

Clover Mama Afrika was established in 2004 in order to assist underprivileged people. The goal was to give South Africans

from disadvantaged communities back their pride and livelihoods. Mamas are identified within communities and then trained to have various skills in order for them to share these skills within their communities.

We are proud to say that between the 26 operating Clover Mama Afrikas, they collectively have 183 self-help projects of which 143 are income-generating self-help projects thanks to the support of Clover Mama Afrika.

Through the project 12,800 children and more than 1,200 elderly have been positively affected in South Africa. The project has collectively trained 2,172 individuals who have transferred their skills to over 11,400 fellow community members and collectively more than 300 members are permanently employed and are earning a regular income.

Through the help of Clover Mama Afrika, the mamas have built up their confidence and have been able to expand their operations or start new ventures they otherwise wouldn't have been able to without the support and training from Clover Mama Afrika.

- Sewing - 23 centres
- Quilting - 14 centres
- Cooking and baking - 23 centres
- Siyabonga bread baking - 23 centres
- Food gardens - 17 centres
- Beadwork - nine centres
- Crocheting / Knitting - 14 centres
- Flower arranging - 11 centres
- Pottery - one centre
- Hairdressing - four centres
- Egg laying / poultry project - five centres

Added value skills:

- Art - 20 centres
- Welding - five centres
- Mosaic - 10 centres
- New Earth Pottery project - five centres

We believe that no relationship can be a success unless there is a great support system and open communication. We also ensure regular monitoring and evaluation is done with the mamas and also check if the monthly reports are implemented correctly. By doing an annual roadshow it allows us to visit the mamas to establish their progress and identify the needs in their respective projects.



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Sindy Peters 16 Feb 2017



📊 Are there plans to develop the programme further?

We are continuously upskilling our mamas all over the country, enabling them to grow their own businesses and ensuring they are providing their community with quality skills. We visit the mamas and their centres during the course of every year to check what is needed and how we can continue to assist them.

📊 What advice would you give to other women who have a CSI vision they'd like to get off the ground.

Never undersell yourself and never think you can't do it! Our country and its communities need these CSI projects to continue to uplift and upskill people. Do the research, do the homework, do the hard work and build something amazing.

■ ***Is there a female figure that has had a positive influence on your life?***

My mother.

■ ***What is your message for Women's Month?***

There are inspiring female leaders all over the world who are advancing women's rights and innovating within their respective fields. In addition, gender does not determine leadership potential. So, no matter what anyone ever tells you, fight for it, work hard, and make it happen!

ABOUT SINDY PETERS

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