

# Adapt where possible, says Clover Mama Afrika Trust's Prof Elain Vlok

 By [Sindy Peters](#)

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*As part of our #LockdownLessons series, Bizcommunity is reaching out to South Africa's top industry players to share their experience of the current Covid-19 crisis, how their organisations are navigating these unusual times, where the challenges and opportunities lie, and their industry outlook for the near future.*

We chatted to Professor Elain Vlok, Clover manager of the Clover Mama Afrika Trust, to get her take.

■ **What was your initial response to the crisis/lockdown and has your experience of it been different to what you expected?**

**Professor Elain Vlok:** At first the news was a bit daunting, however our mamas and our team are accustomed to facing challenges and so we adapted fairly quickly.

The Clover Mama Afrika team has been working from home, and we hope to return to the office during May or June due to the lowering of lockdown levels to level four. We are lucky that our work is mobile and thanks to technology, we are available 24/7.

■ **Comment on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on your organisation or economy as a whole.**

**Prof Vlok:** Clover, as a business, is an essential service, but the mamas have felt the change. They are used to being out on the ground, helping, operating and working. It has, therefore, been difficult for them. However, in true Clover Mama Afrika spirit, they've been supporting their communities by sewing masks, thanks to their sewing courses, delivering food parcels, and providing educational activities to children in their care, among others.



Professor Elain Vlok, Clover manager of the Clover Mama Afrika Trust

## Examples:

- Mama Phumla of Dibashe Special Centre in Mdantsane forms part of the ECD Forum and has a permit to help deliver food parcels to 26 families in the Potsdam location during this time.
- Mama Nondumiso Mpitimpiti of Step Ahead Centre in Amalinda Forest is able to provide her community with fresh eggs, thanks to the egg-laying project Clover Mama Afrika helped her set up earlier this year.
- Mama Engelina Molete of Lejwe La Thuso Foundation in Dobsonville has been cleaning up and preparing her food plot.
- Mama Phomolo Raisa of Botshabelo is very active in educating her members regarding hygiene and has distributed sewn masks to each one, as well as been using this time to train members baking skills under strict hygiene conditions and supplying the members with much-needed fresh bread and buns.
- Mama Rina Malan of Pretoria has been working hard with the teenagers of her centre to sew masks and has just received an order from Clover to produce over 3,000 masks.
- Mama Daphne Oliphant of Roodewal continues to bake for her community and is keeping the children busy with craft work.
- Mama Selestien Moses of Ashbury has initiated a challenge to produce 1 million masks for her community and

surrounds.



Professor Elain Vlok with Clover Mama Afrikas (Image supplied)

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#### ▣ **How is your organisation responding to the crisis?**

**Prof Vlok:** We are available to our mamas countrywide telephonically and via email and obviously have had to put all skills training on hold until further notice. We are assisting the sewing mamas with fabric and accessories for them to meet the demands of mask sewing for their communities. Our top sewing mamas have received an order to provide Clover with corporate masks.



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#### ▣ **Comment on the challenges and opportunities.**

**Prof Vlok:** The challenge for us is not being able to see our mamas. Relationships are built on face-to-face meetings, but we have learned from our experience that we make the most of our face-to-face time together, and build on that remotely when not in the same province as all our mamas. Similarly, some of our mamas cannot operate, meaning a lack of income from projects like catering. It is economically a very difficult time for everyone.

A lot of our mamas have adapted and tried to turn the difficulties into opportunities – such as mask sewing. They've also used their existing skills to help others (food parcel delivery). The opportunity here is looking beyond what we cannot do, and looking at what we can do during lockdown.

#### ▣ **How has the lockdown affected your staff? / What temporary HR policies have you put in place regarding remote working, health & safety, etc.?**

**Prof Vlok:** We are already used to dealing with our mamas remotely, because they are based all around the country. Therefore, we maintained our regular contact via email, WhatsApp and phone calls. We have encouraged them to stay indoors per lockdown rules.

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■ ***How are you navigating 'physical distancing' while keeping your team close-knit and aligned?***

**Prof Vlok:** As mentioned, we are a close team and work remotely already. It is difficult for our mamas and we wish we could visit them, but we remain in regular contact and promote social distancing. We have shared various posters and advice on social distancing with all our mamas to use at home and at their centres, should they be permitted to be open. Regarding the team in the office, we have regular Skype meetings and we ensure that no task on hand is delayed. It is basically work as usual, just not in the same office.

■ ***How have you had to change the way you operate?***

**Prof Vlok:** What we have done is talk to our mamas about their challenges during lockdown. We are always available to our mamas, whether it be for advice or for the evaluation of additional project support.



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■ ***Any trends you've seen emerge as a result of the crisis?***

**Prof Vlok:** Many of our mamas are sewing masks for their communities, now that masks are recommended by government, and we are pleased so many of our mamas have benefitted from our sewing classes and can still earn something while helping their communities.

■ ***Your key message to those in the sector?***

**Prof Vlok:** Keep positive, stay indoors where possible, stick to the levels imposed by government and adapt where possible.



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■ ***What do you predict the next six months will be like?***

**Prof Vlok:** The next six months are not going to be easy; we will need to be in touch with our mamas and offer whatever support we can and it's going to be a working relationship with challenges that we might not foresee. However, we are up for the challenge and stay positive. Our mamas have always been positive in the face of adversity and this will be another hurdle that will put us through our paces, but I believe we will recover.

We also look forward to rescheduling our skills training sessions and do our national road show before the end of the 2020. If there is one thing I am certain about, it is that our Clover Mama Afrikas will recover and will be doing better after the lockdown. I don't see the period after lockdown as problematic but as exciting and challenging, and we will make it work.

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