



Kenya: Alive & Kicking

Every child has a right to live and play games, and sport is an effective way to reach out to young people to deliver health education. That's the strong message behind the health-based consortium reinstating the commercial production of hand-stitched leather balls in Kenya, with business expansion linked to promoting HIV/AIDS awareness among the country's youth.

In April 2005, the Business Linkages Challenge Fund (BLCF) matched a private and not-for-profit sector investment of £140,000 to launch the venture. The investment was used to produce cheap, tough, repairable footballs, netballs and volleyballs designed and made in Africa using African skills and African leather. Moreover, each and every ball carries a message about HIV/AIDS and malaria. Led by British charity Alive & Kicking UK, the project partners include Bata Shoe Company, National AIDS Control Council and UNICEF.

The venture's primary target group included 20,000 primary and 2,000 secondary schools in Kenya, plus orphanages, youth organisations, sports clubs and refugee camps.

A factory in Nairobi produces the split leather which is coloured and waterproofed with a layer of PVC that is resin bonded onto the leather. The leather is then delivered to nine stitching centres across the country where 12 pentagonal and 20 hexagonal panels are cut, using hardened steel dyes and a hydraulic press. The panels are screenprinted with the health and education messages plus advice on ball composition and inflation before being stitched together with waxed thread. The stitchers normally work in pairs at workstations equipped with hand tools, finger protection, clamps and mallets for inflating the inserted latex bladder. To ensure the bladder valve is working, the inflated balls are stored for 24 hours before being cleaned, deflated, weighed and wrapped in cellophane.



Following the BLCF grant, production increased rapidly as reconditioned machinery was purchased and there were more funds to buy extra raw materials and pay stitchers. To date, 69 jobs have been created with 54 as stitchers; maximum output is about 2,500 balls a month; a volleyball has been developed, tested and gone into production; training is underway; and there is a greater focus on marketing to close the gap between production and sales. Also, UEFA, together with CAF, have ordered 81,000 Alive & Kicking footballs over two years for donation to schools, youth and sports organisations, orphanages, street children, slum projects and refugee camps.

The project's Alive & Kicking Kenya Road Show ran for five weeks in late 2005, covering 3,000 kilometres with support from commercial businesses and extensive television, radio and newspaper coverage. HIV awareness was



created using theatre and theme games staged during football and volleyball tournaments for schools in 15 locations.



The balls, sold at a small profit to schools so the project becomes self-financing, are distributed with a series of free, hard-hitting posters presenting essential information and prevention advice endorsed by national sporting idols. They are used as a focal point in the HIV and malaria awareness campaigns conducted by development agencies,

NGOs, CBOs and corporates.

The success of the project in Kenya is provoking interest from similar programmes in other African nations such as the 2012 South Africa World Cup organising committee. Meanwhile, other organisations such as the National AIDS and National Malaria Control Councils, WHO and major development agencies are taking a fresh look at how sport can be leveraged to reach young people in rural areas.