

ANNUAL REPORT 2021



LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AIDS	Acquired Immunodeficiency Virus	NPO	Non-Profit Organisation
ART	Anti-Retroviral Therapy	NIMArt	Nurse Initiated Management Of Antiretroviral Therapy
COVID-19	Corona virus disease, 2019 novel coronavirus	PrEP	Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis
DABLAPmeds	Central Chronic Medication Dispensing And Distribution	PPS	Partial Payment System
CPR	Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation	PPE	Personal Protective Equipment
HTS	Hiv Testing Services	RTCQI	Rapid Testing Continuous Quality Improvement
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus	STIs	Sexually Transmitted Infections
HRIS	Human Resource Information System	SyNCH	Synchronised National Communication In Health
I-ACT	Integrated Access To Care And Treatment	TRE	Trauma Releasing Exercises
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation	TB	Tuberculosis





FROM THE CHAIRPERSON

DR MARIETTE SLABBERT

"When nothing is sure, everything is possible"
Margaret Drabble

The past year was marked by a series of curve balls which severely tested Hlokomela resolve and capability. While COVID-19 continued to expose the harsh cracks in our society and world, the war in Ukraine added economic and social hardship to the mix.

In true Hlokomela fashion, the staff rose to the occasion, adapted approaches and continued to serve the needs of vulnerable people in the Kruger2Canyons Biosphere Region.

Hlokomela led the charge in Mopani District to vaccinate people against COVID-19. When it became clear that some groups were more vulnerable to COVID -19, masked senior citizens were transported to nearby state hospitals for their jabs. At the same time, Hlokomela started fundraising to renovate an empty school building and establish its own vaccination site to cater for farm workers and other vulnerable groups in the area. Through close collaboration and partnership with District Department of Health, specifically the vaccination team from Sekororo Hospital, the centre was operational in no time. Motivated by the effort, local farms, volunteers and Hlokomela community health workers quickly spread the word and 8089 people were vaccinated.

Uncertain times demand creative and sustainable solutions. No longer able to offer all services for free, Hlokomela launched its Partial Payment System in 2021. The Partial Payment System caters for individuals and employers who want to buy quality health services at a subsidised price. With the system, employers can offer their employees access to comprehensive services, short waiting times and a monthly report on how many employees visited the clinic. The money we raise is used to create more services for those who cannot afford to pay for health care.

To improve quality of services, reporting and productivity, Hlokomela embraced technology in 2021. The electronic medical records system improved patient flows and record keeping and helps us to report to our donors and the Department of Health. It also generates invoices for the Partial Payment System. We also took the electronic route on staff, procurement and payroll management. Staff can now check their leave balances in real time.

One thing I am certain about. In the next year the proud Hlokomela team will continue to turn bad things into really good things. No matter what.





FROM THE DIRECTOR

CHRISTINE DU PREEZ

"Twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by the things that you didn't do than by the ones you did do. So throw off the bowlines. Sail away from the safe harbour. Catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore. Dream. Discover." Mark Twain

It is not yet 20 years but 16 years and we are catching the trade winds in our sails!

This is exactly what Hlokomela did in 2021 after the shocking blow of COVID-19 that hit South Africa as well as our Maruleng sub-district. We lost dear friends, family members and colleagues. Once again Hlokomela had to change, because it was no longer business as usual. With the help of the farmers we renovated a vaccination centre and assisted the Department of Health in facilitating the vaccination drive. Through COVID-19 we also saw the need for a web based software system - GoodX - to assist our Hlokomela clinic for easy screening, patient scheduling and clinical notes.

We are very happy to announce that the first phase of the Partial Payment System was successful, allowing us for the first time in 16 years to contribute to our own funding.

I am so grateful to our funders, the community, board members and staff members for the extra mile they walked with Hlokomela in this challenging year.





BOARD OF TRUSTEES



**CHAIRPERSON
DR MARIETTE SLABBERT**



**DEPUTY CHAIR
PROF JOHN GEAR**



**BOARD MEMBER
TEBOGO MAMETJA**



**EXECUTIVE OFFICIAL
CHRISTINE DU PREEZ**



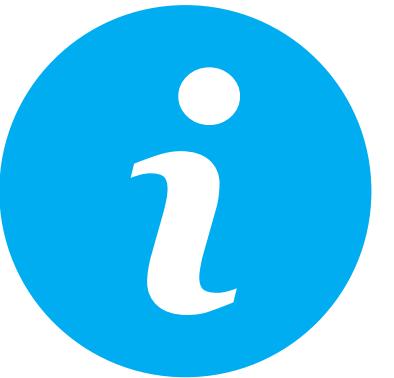
**BOARD MEMBER
LINDIE BOTHA**



**SECRETARY
LOHANZI JANSEN VAN VUREN**

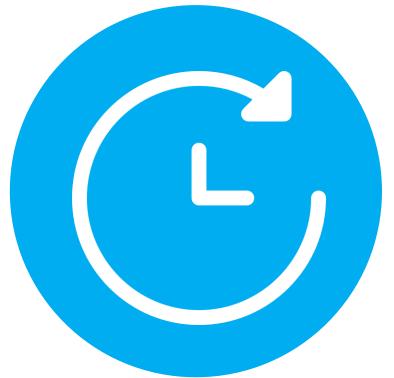


**BOARD MEMBER
DORIS MALEPE**



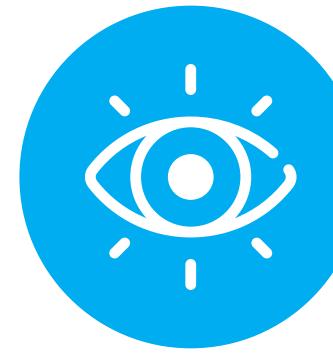
WHO WE WERE

Hlokomela was established in 2005 in response to research that highlighted a critical need for health care among farm workers and other vulnerable populations in the greater Hoedspruit area. Since then, Hlokomela has been a prominent and respected role player in the health and well-being of the local community, serving about 60 000 people annually (direct and indirect beneficiaries).



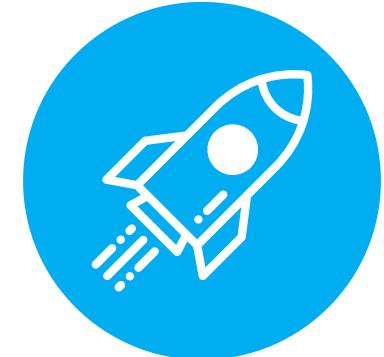
WHO WE BECAME

In 2021, faced with the second year of the COVID-19 pandemic, Hlokomela continued to lead the way after 16 years of caring. Aiming our focus at our farm worker and sex worker beneficiaries, we made sure that no one was left behind when we started rolling out COVID-19 vaccinations in Hoedspruit, Limpopo as well as in other areas of the Mopani District where the organisation implements programmes. From April, we implemented the long awaited partial payment system to help secure the financial viability of the organisation in a time when donor funding is becoming ever harder to secure.



OUR VISION

A culture of caring that empowers all.



OUR MISSION

To provide quality, all-inclusive health care to everyone in the Kruger2Canyons Biosphere Region.

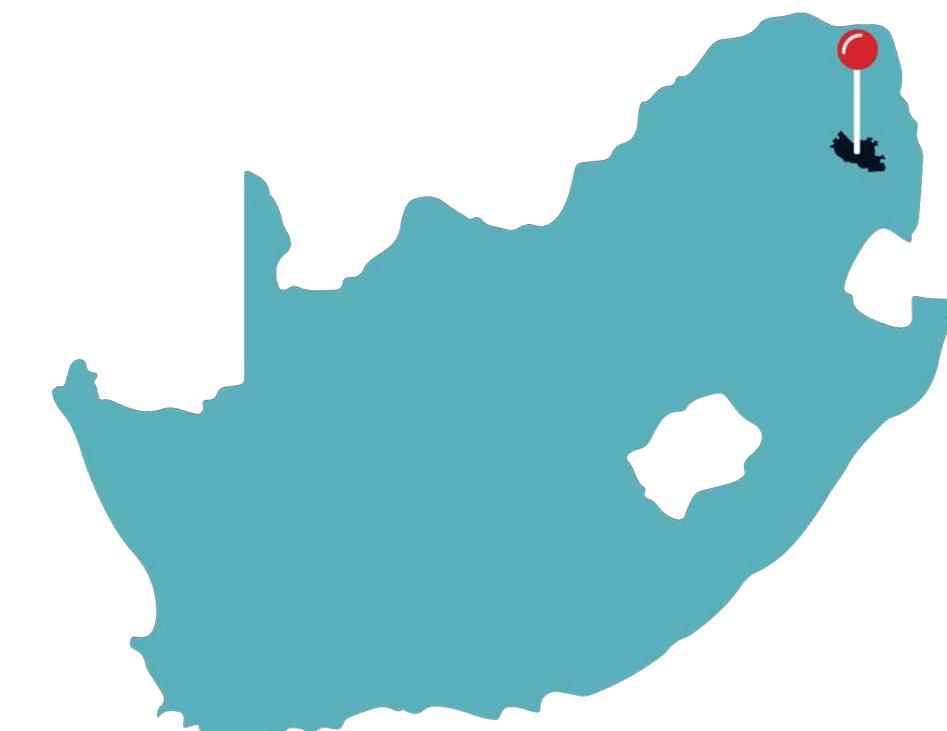


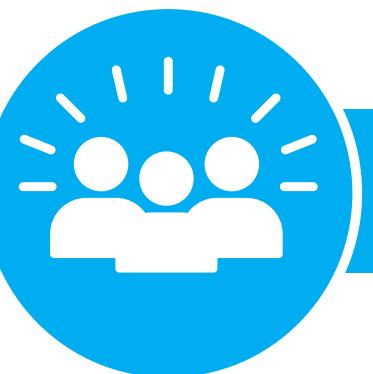


WHERE WE WORK

We do most of our work in the greater Hoedspruit area, the administrative centre of the Maruleng Municipality, which is situated in the Mopani District, Limpopo Province. Hlokomela implements the Sex Worker Programme across the entire Mopani District.

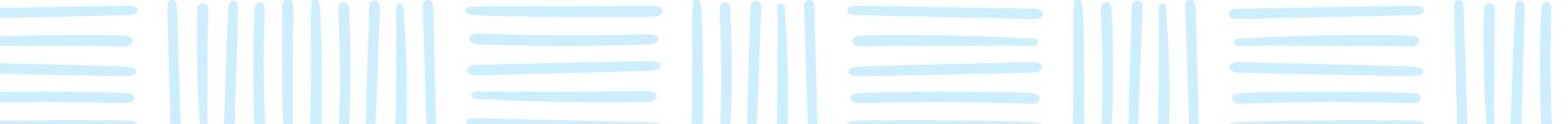
Tourism, government services and farming are key economic activities in these areas although the tourism sector continued to be quiet in 2021 due to the national lockdown. The farming sector offers employment to a large portion of the local population of seasonal and migrant workers.





WHO WE SERVE

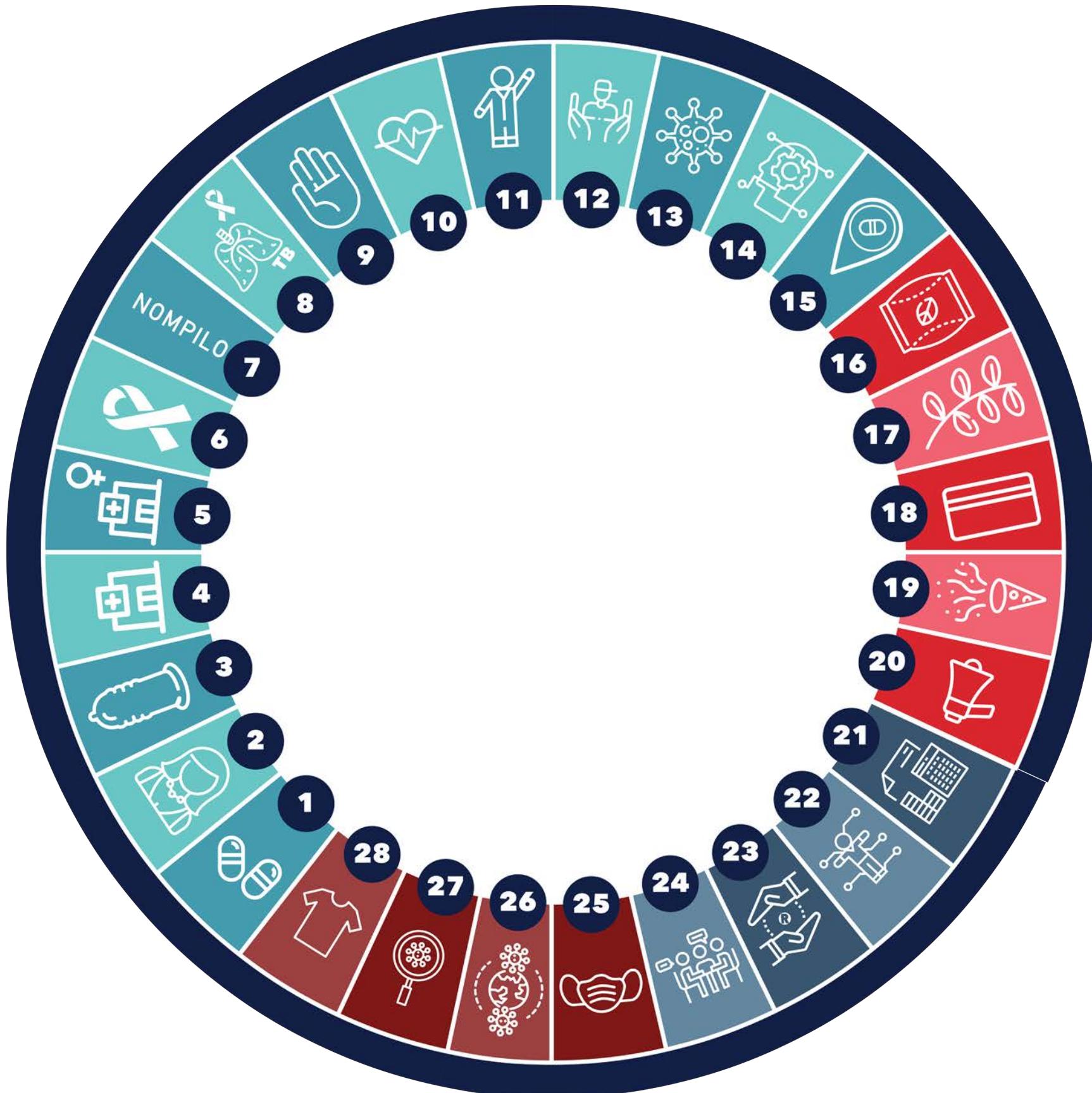
- Farm workers, including seasonal workers, in the Kruger to Canyons Biosphere Region.
- Farm owners and managers in the Kruger to Canyons Biosphere Region.
- Employees of local game lodges notably in the Greater Timbavati.
- Migrants from Mozambique, Zimbabwe and other provinces in South Africa.
- Sex workers in the entire Mopani District of Limpopo Province.
- Our government partners in the Maruleng Municipality, Mopani District, and Limpopo Department of Health.
- Our donors and funders.





WHAT WE DO

The work we do is grouped under four main headings:



1

HEALTH AND SOCIAL PROGRAMMES

1. PRE-EXPOSURE PROPHYLAXIS(PREP)
2. SEX WORKER PROJECT
3. CONDOM DISPENSERS
4. 10 X CLINICS
5. WOMEN'S CLINIC
6. HIV TESTING SERVICES (HTS)
7. NOMPILO PROJECT
8. HAST-HIV/AIDS, SEXUAL TRANSMITTED
9. INFECTIONS & TUBERCULOSIS HEALTH AWARENESS
10. PRIMARY HEALTH CARE
11. ADDRESSING GENDER BASED MIGRANTS PROGRAM
12. COVID-19 AWARENESS, SCREENING, COMMUNITY EDUCATION, TESTING, AND VACCINATION.
13. OFFER TRAUMA DEBRIEFING TO STAFF AND PATIENTS
14. EXTERNAL PICK UP POINT FOR PATIENTS REGISTERED ON DABLAPMEDS

2

SUSTAINABILITY

16. HERB GARDEN
17. SPEKBOOM PROJECT
18. PARTIAL PAYMENT SYSTEM (PPS)
19. FUND RAISING EVENTS
20. MARKETING

3

OPERATIONS

21. FINANCE DEPARTMENT
22. HUMAN RESOURCES
23. GRANTS & DONATIONS
24. BOARD OF TRUSTEES

4

COVID-19 VACCINATIONS

25. COVID-19 READINESS & PROTOCOLS
26. COVID-19 AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS
27. COVID-19 DIAGNOSIS & DETECTION
28. CLOTHES & DIGNITY PACK DISTRIBUTION

1

HEALTH AND SOCIAL PROGRAMMES

Our health and social care programmes offer biomedical, social and structural interventions to reduce the transmission of HIV, TB and STIs. Our services cover the continuum of care, ranging from combination prevention to treatment and retention, as well as sexual and reproductive health. Social programmes include psychosocial support and programmes to reduce gender based violence and human rights violations.

Specific activities:

- Working with farm management to create a healthier work environment, supported by workplace HIV policies and workplace wellness programmes;
- Providing peer education on farms (Nompilos) and in the sex worker programme (peer educators);
- Training and mentoring of caregivers recruited from the community;
- Training, and mentoring male role models to address gender based violence, transactional sex, and poor health-seeking behaviour in men;
- Promoting safer sexual behavioural through an integrated social behaviour change communication programme, using outreach, billboards and pamphlets;
- Sensitising health care workers, the police and the community towards sex workers and migrant populations;
- Offering recreational programmes to increase social participation and improve the quality of life of farm workers and their families;
- Promoting healthy lifestyles, condoms, and primary health care services and referrals at fixed

3

OPERATIONS

Good administration is the backbone of the organisation. The operations department supports the health, social and sustainability projects to run smoothly by ensuring that the administration, maintenance on buildings, procurement and finances are all in order.

4

COVID-19 VACCINATIONS

As COVID-19 vaccinations became available to healthcare workers early on in 2021, we focussed on getting our staff vaccinated as a matter of priority. As the year progressed, we transported the elderly to vaccination sites until we opened a vaccination site at Hlokomela Blyde Clinic. Here we supported the Department of Health by facilitating and managing vaccination outreaches from Sekororo Hospital.

2

SUSTAINABILITY

These projects aim to support Hlokomela to become more sustainable in future:

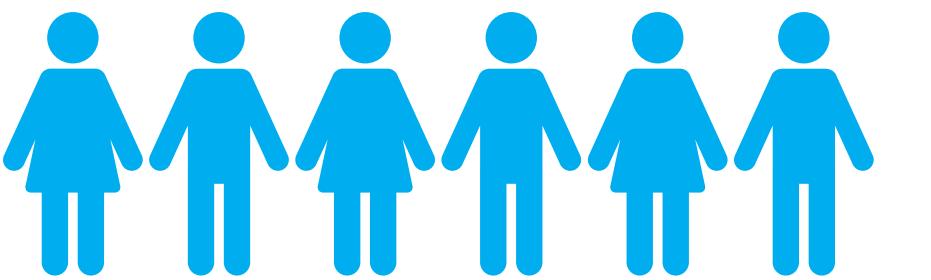
- The Partial Payment System (PPS) has three legs: the Hlokomela Employers' Health Club (HEHC), walk-in clients and Hlokomela Health Cards.
- Growing and selling fresh herbs, herb products, vegetables and dried fruit in the Hoedspruit and Ba-Phalaborwa area.

1

HEALTH AND SOCIAL PROGRAMMES

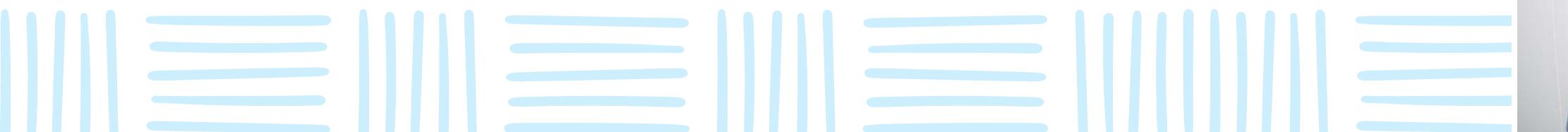
In 2021, Hlokomela continued to develop and implement HIV workplace policies for local farms and businesses. By the end of 2021, we assisted 72 enterprises with improving their employment policies, supported by a peer education programme. We facilitate access to health services, programmes and medical products. Activities include signing a memorandum of co-operation, setting up HIV&AIDS committees, HIV testing services and social communication initiatives to reduce HIV infections.

Hlokomela runs wellness clinics at Richmond Farm, Hlokomela, Bavaria Fruit Estate, Klaserie Private Nature Reserve, Phelwana, Singita Lebombo, Thornybush and the South African Wildlife College. Doctors and professional nurses provide health care services and referrals, information and condoms at these wellness clinics.



16 365

TOTAL NUMBER OF HLOKOMELA CLIENTS



DABLAP Meds

(previously Central Chronic Medication Dispensing and Distribution - CCMDD)

By December 2021, 1004 clients were enrolled on DABLAP Meds



1 004

CLIENTS ENROLLED ON DABLAP



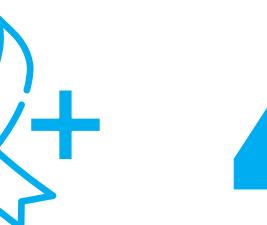
HIV

- 94.8% of clients who visited Hlokomela know their status
- 98.1% of patients who tested HIV positive were initiated on treatment
- 91.3% of patients on ART had a suppressed viral load after 6 months on treatment

*Hlokomela is working towards achieving “90-90-90”, an ambitious treatment target that was set by UNAIDS to help end the AIDS epidemic by 2030.

21 600

PATIENTS TESTED



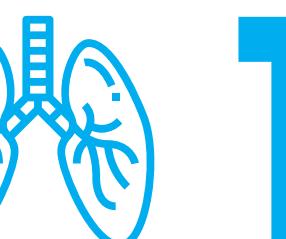
471

PATIENTS HIV POSITIVE



TB

Hlokomela screened 93.8% of 15 365 patients who visited our clinics for TB. Only 5.2% (8) of the 152 sputum samples collected, tested positive for TB and all newly diagnosed TB clients were initiated on treatment with a 100% TB cure rate.



15 365

PATIENTS SCREENED



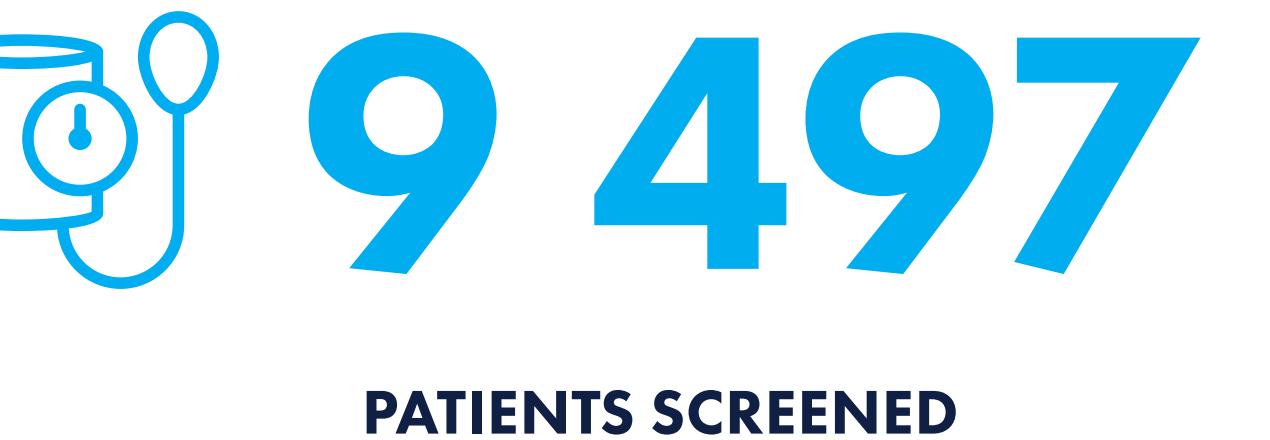
STIs

Out of 11 137 patients (15 years and above) screened for STIs, 1.3% (151) tested positive and were treated for STIs.



Hypertension

Between the ages of 18 and 44, we screened 6 750 clients for hypertension. We also screened 2 747 clients who are 45 years and older. This year, 151 clients were newly diagnosed with hypertension and initiated on treatment, and 1 182 collected treatment.



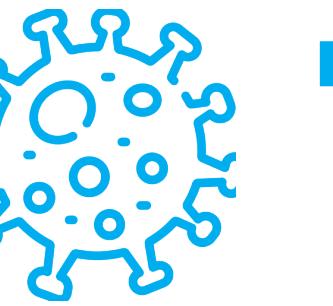
Diabetes

Between the ages of 18 and 44, we screened 7 053 clients for diabetes. We also screened 3 255 clients who are 45 years and older. This year, 47 clients were diagnosed with diabetes and initiated on treatment, and 302 collecting treatment.



COVID-19 testing

Of the 15 365 people screened for COVID-19 this year, we tested 2 555 between January and December 2021 of which 457 were positive.



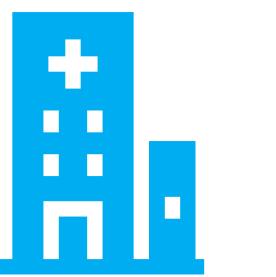
15 365
PATIENTS SCREENED



Outreach on farms

Community Health Workers, also known as Nompilos at Hlokomela, attend to clients on farms. During the year, 82 Nompilos rendered home based care services to 143 clients who are on chronic medication. Interventions ranged from primary health care to distributing health and social educational information.

Many of these clients are on ARV and TB treatment; Nompilos referred 473 individuals to clinics for further health care services

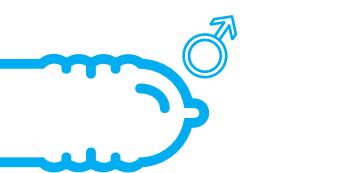


473
INDIVIDUALS REFERRED TO CLINICS



Condom distribution

Hlokomela maintains condom dispensers at 141 locations, mostly high HIV transmission areas such as truck stops, shebeens, taxi ranks, hawker markets, hotels and lodges. During the year, we distributed 1 038 000 male and zero female condoms.



1 038 000
MALE CONDOMS DISTRIBUTED



Sex worker programme

The programme aims to empower sex workers with skills that will enhance their capacity to speak for themselves, to address human rights violations, to access psychosocial support, to make informed choices and to provide opportunities for them to test for HIV. Sex workers also have an opportunity to be screened for COVID-19, non-communicable diseases, sexual reproductive health and mental health issues.

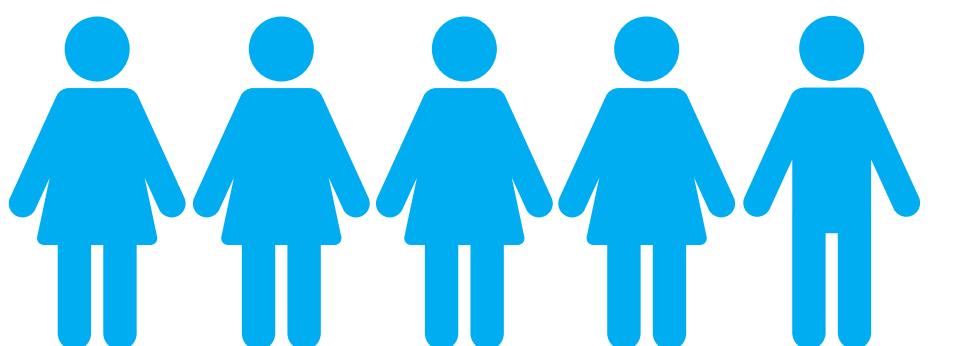
Hlokomela implements the sex worker programme across the entire Mopani District. Each of the five sub-districts have three peer educators and two HTS & linkage officers. Two site coordinators manage the peer educators, two professional nurses and an enrolled nurse manage the linkage to care through the HTS & linkage officers and attend to sex workers in the field. When needed, sex workers are referred to a doctor in the clinic.

This year outreaches to sex workers in the field were greatly improved with the addition of a mobile wellness clinic, allowing clinical staff the option to offer a wider variety of health care services to their clients.

The programme's social worker and social auxiliary worker offer psychosocial support to sex workers while an advocacy officer advocates for their rights by sensitising stakeholders about the programme.

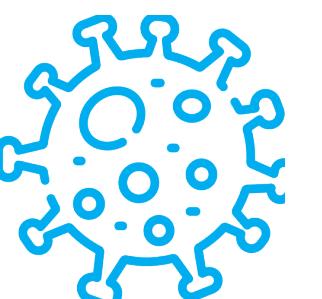
During the year, peer educators reached 2368 sex workers of the targeted 2323 sex workers per quarter, at 90 hotspots in the District.

During the year, 611 sex workers received COVID-19 vaccinations.



2368

SEX WORKERS REACHED

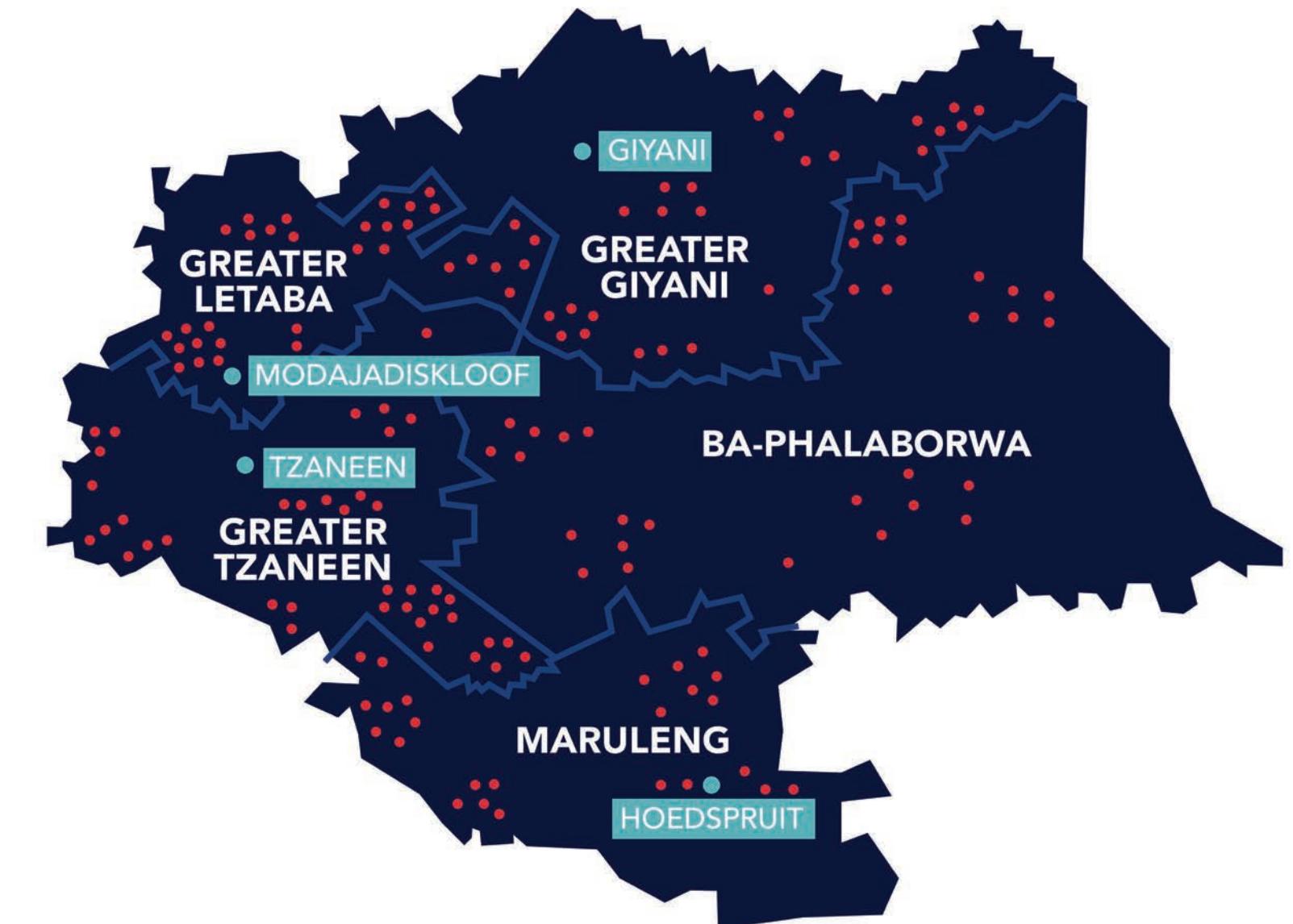


611

SEX WORKERS RECEIVED
COVID-19 VACCINATIONS

Pre-exposure prophylaxis

Hlokomela offers pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) to people at high risk of HIV. During 2021, of the 9473 sex workers reached, 2726 were tested for HIV and 179 of these clients that tested negative for HIV were initiated on PrEP and 222 retained on PrEP. Out of those who were tested, 29 clients tested positive of which 14 were initiated on ART and 11 referred to their home clinics and linked to care.



* SEX WORKER PROJECT RUNS ACROSS THE WHOLE OF THE MOPANI DISTRICT



Hlokomela Women's Clinic

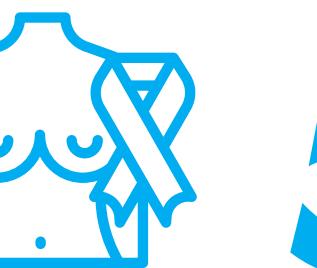
Hlokomela Women's Clinic has reached thousands of women through outreaches, trained and educated, screened and treated many more in the clinic and out in the field.

During the year, 53 clients were screened for breast cancer. Of these, 14 were referred to the hospital for further management; 4 of these women were positively diagnosed and treated for breast cancer. Other scans done at the Women's Clinic include 20 abdominal scans, 93 pelvic scans, 159 pregnancy scans, and 22 4D scans.

During 2021, 261 patients were screened for cervical cancer. The clinic performed 61 visual inspections with acetic acid (VIA) of which 1 was positive for cervical cancer. Ten clients were referred for biopsies.

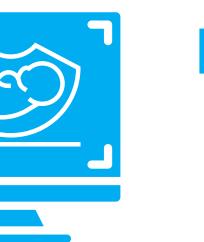
1 248 Clients were assisted with family planning (contraception).

Approximately 1 500 donated bras were handed out to women in need who come to Hlokomela Women's Clinic as clients. In addition, 800 packets of sanitary pads and 300 reusable sanitary pads were handed out to clients and young girls during clinic outreaches. Hlokomela Women's Clinic further supported approximately 60 vulnerable mothers by giving them baby clothes, nappies and baby formula that was donated to the clinic throughout the year.



53

PATIENTS SCREENED



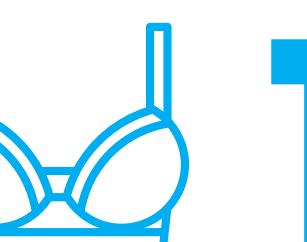
159

PREGNANCY SCANS



93

PELVIC SCANS



1500

DONATED BRAS



2

SUSTAINABILITY PROJECTS



Implementing the partial payment system

In April 2021, after almost two years of intensive research and piloting and months of community consultation, we implemented the Partial Payment System (PPS). The first few months were especially challenging for our clients as well as our employees who all tried to adjust to the new way of working whereby not everything was for free at Hlokomela anymore. This came as a shock to many after 16 years of getting a high quality service for free at Hlokomela. Inevitably, some clients chose to transfer out from Hlokomela, but as the year progressed many new clients came to Hlokomela to access these same services.

The PPS consists of three legs; the Hlokomela Employers' Health Club (HEHC), Hlokomela Health Cards and walk-ins.

The Hlokomela Employers' Health Club (HEHC) offers employers the unique opportunity to access Hlokomela's services at a discounted rate by becoming part of the HEHC through a monthly subscription fee. By means of accurate recordkeeping of their employees who access our services, we are able to offer the employer up to date information on the number of clinic visits per month and generate a monthly invoice to employers in the club. Another benefit of becoming part of this club is that the employee is responsible for 30% of the cost of care, while the employer covers the remaining 70%. By December 2021, about 1000 employers representing 8 employees had signed up to and were benefiting from the Hlokomela Employers' Health Club.

The Hlokomela Health Cards have proven to be more popular than were expected. This option is offered to employers as well as individuals. For a once off fee of R500 per year, an individual receives a unique card with his/her information printed on the reverse side of the card. This card allows the owner free access to most Hlokomela services and discounted



rates to more specialised services for an entire year. Many employers also preferred to take this option for their employees. By December 2021, we had sold 637 Hlokomela Health Cards.

Clients who are not part of the HEHC or have a Hlokomela Health Card, are still welcome at our clinics and are able to access services at walk-in client rates.



637

TOTAL NUMBER HEALTH CARDS SOLD



Hlokomela Herb Garden

This has been an extremely challenging year for the Hlokomela Herb Garden, indeed the second in a row. Due to declining sales, the Herb Garden lost its manager in 2021. The ladies working at the Herb Garden were faced with a tough choice - either step up and fight for their livelihood or give up. Hlokomela staff do not however give up. The Herb Garden team, with the support of Hlokomela management, pulled together and took up their new roles and responsibilities, learning day by day.

Above all expectations, these women managed to keep the Herb Garden books in the black month on month for the entire year.



3

ORGANISATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

Strategic partnerships

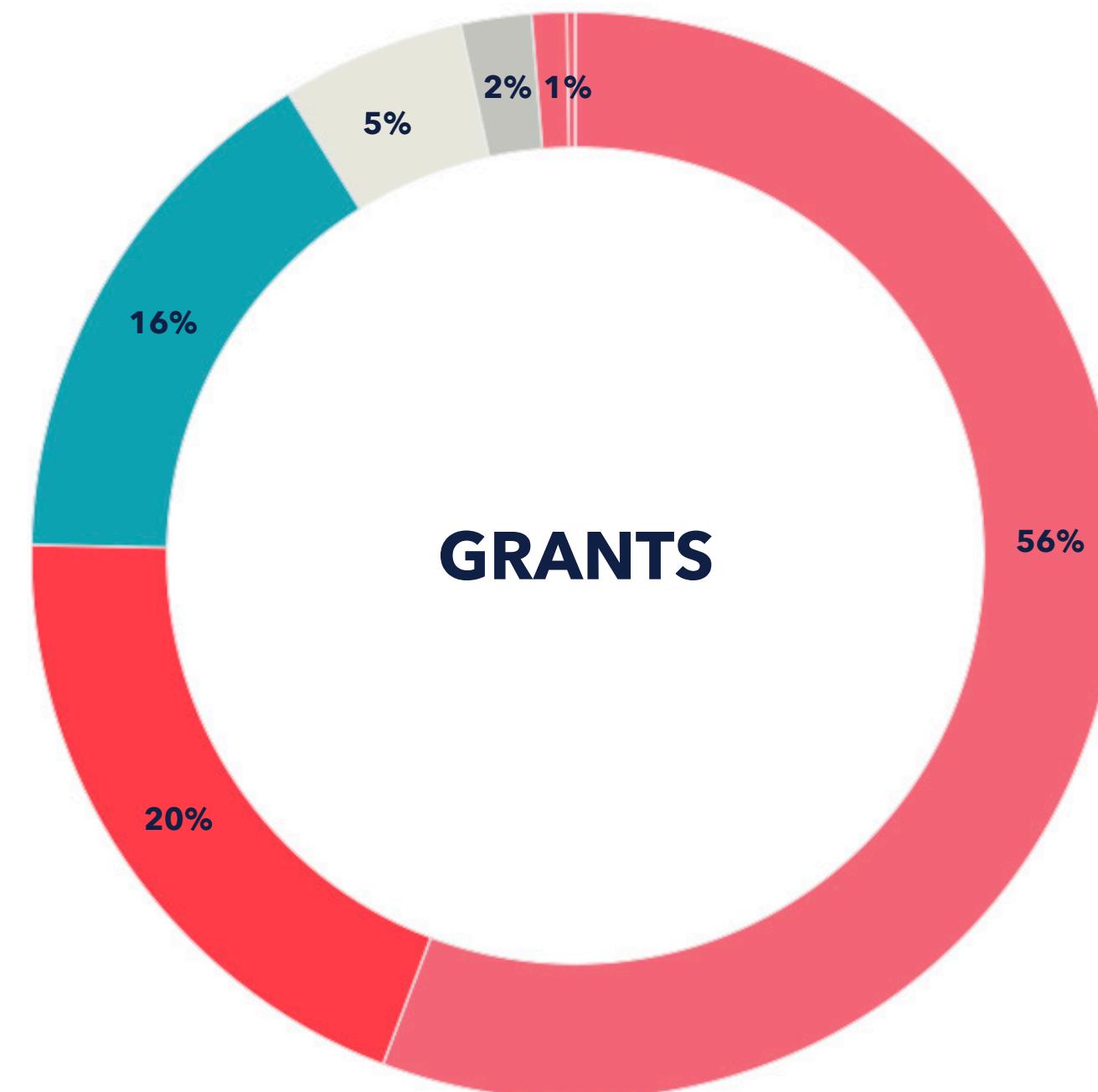
This year Hlokomela partnered with Australian Volunteers International (AVI) for the Sanitary Pads Project as well as the Hlokomela Ambassadors Project. We received support from the DG Murray Trust and Discovery Fund to implement COVID-19 vaccination activities.

Research

No research was conducted at Hlokomela this year.

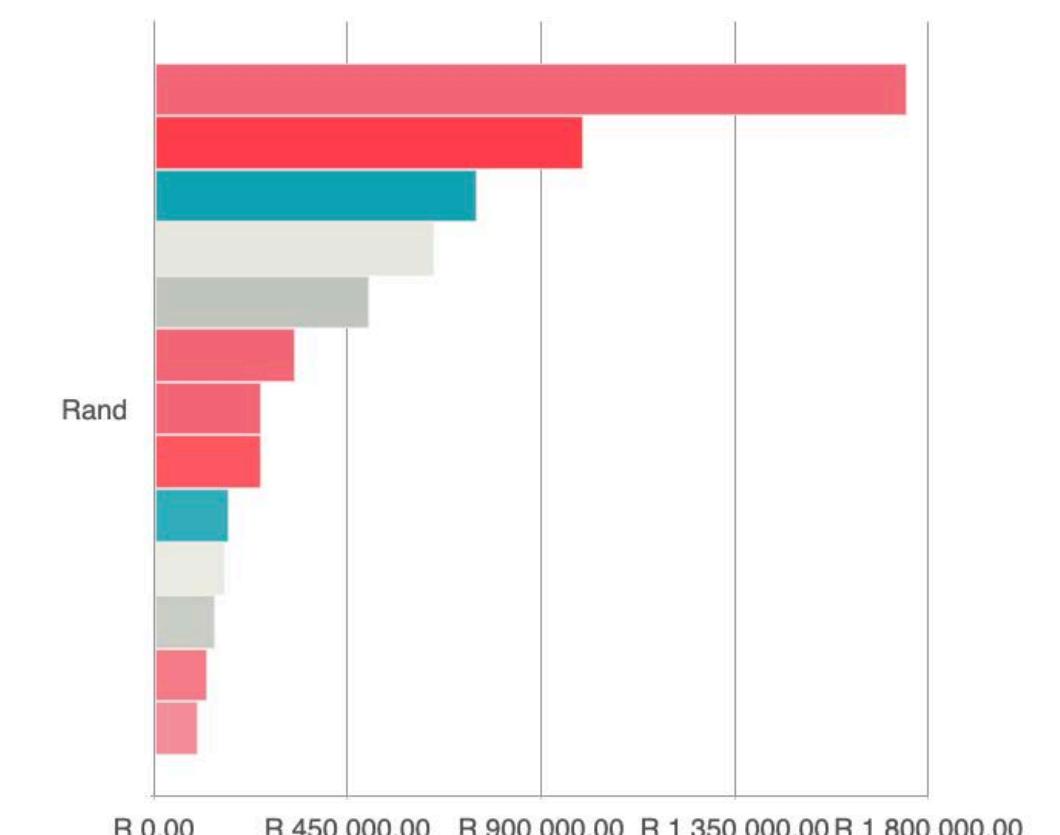
Funding and fundraising

Hlokomela relies mainly on donor funding for its activities. Hlokomela's sustainability activities supplement donor income and government in-kind contributions. Detailed audited financial statements are available upon request.



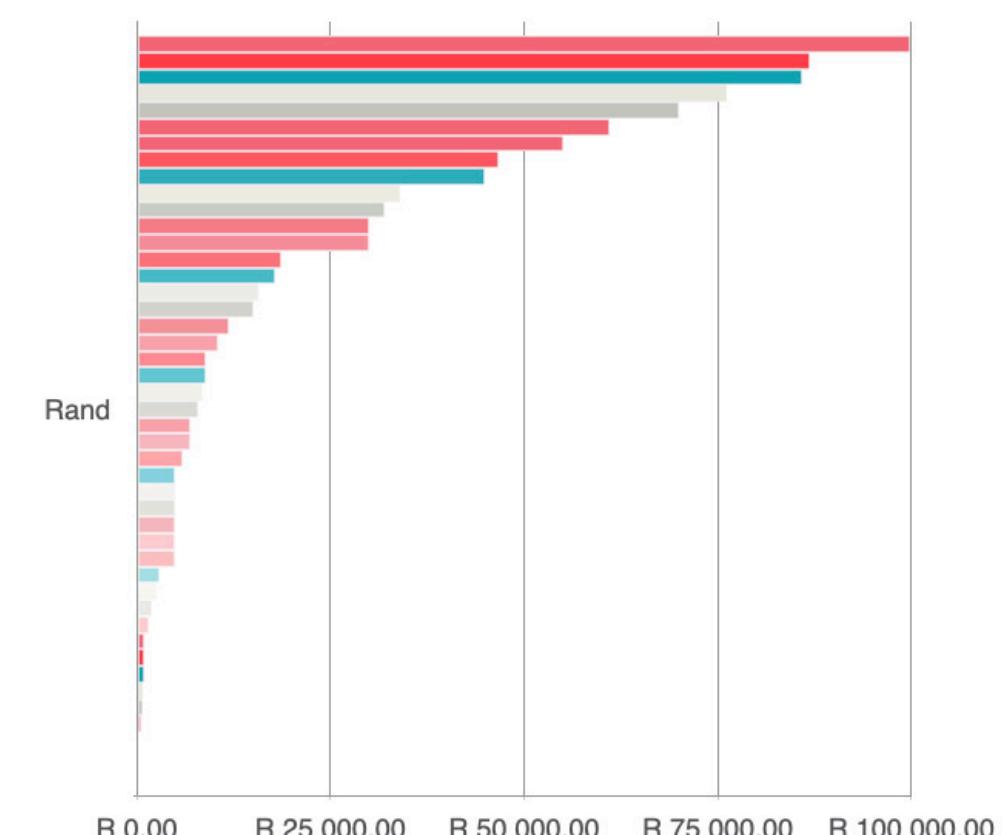
1

LARGE DONATIONS



2

SMALL DONATIONS



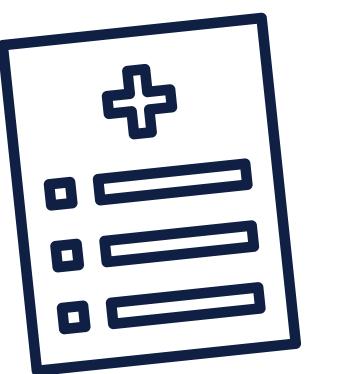
Training and development

This was a big year for Hlokomela in terms of harnessing technology to work smarter and faster.

The clinic trained on and implemented an electronic medical records system which has assisted in streamlining patient flow and invoicing as part of the partial payment system. The system allows for standardised reporting to donors and the Department of Health, with statistics only a click of a button away.

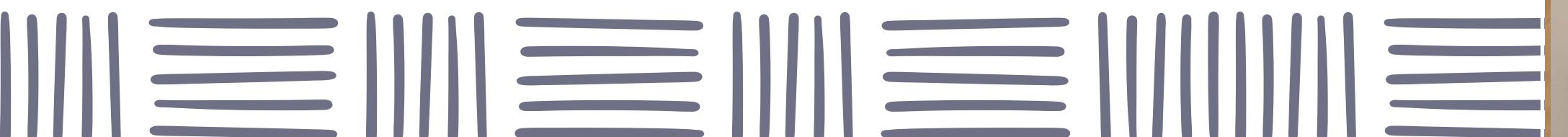
In terms of human resources, the organisation adopted a multi-functional HRIS to track employee attendance and securely save documents online. This has transformed the monthly payroll process and allows managers real-time information on the attendance and leave balances of their team members.

The procurement process has also been simplified by using an online server to which all authorised staff members have access, whether they work from home or from the office.



451

CLIENT RECORDS LOADED TO HRIS



4

COVID-19 VACCINATIONS



Hlokomela's vaccination activities were characterised by weekly outreaches in conjunction with Sekororo Hospital vaccination staff to the Hlokomela Vaccination Centre.

Hlokomela's vaccination activities kicked off in 2021 when we transported the elderly to nearby state hospitals (CN Phatudi, Sekororo) for vaccination when only those older than 60 were eligible for vaccination.

The next logical step was finding a way to secure easily accessible COVID-19 vaccinations for our beneficiaries. We realised we would need to establish a vaccination site that is easily accessible to the vulnerable, and highly mobile, population of local and migrant farmworkers who work and live in the Mopani District. This key population group does not have the means to travel to far flung vaccination sites, nor could they afford to take time off work as many are employed as seasonal workers and every day's earnings can mean the difference between having a meal on the table or going hungry.

Fully realising the need for urgency as the third COVID wave picked up speed, we approached Unifrutti, the farming group that owns the farm where Hlokomela Blyde Clinic is located, for permission to renovate the old, deserted school building near the clinic as a vaccination site. Unifrutti were amazing, getting on board immediately.

Unifrutti started with the renovations and rallied support amongst other farmers to get the building up to standard so that all farmers in the area could benefit from a local vaccination site for their workers.





The weekly outreaches were coordinated by Hlokomela staff, and supported by community volunteers (mostly Rotary Club members) and our Nompilos (Community Health Workers). Sekororo Hospital provides the data capturers, vaccinators and vaccines. Hlokomela staff also assisted with data capturing and registering clients on EVDS.

From May to December 2021, Hlokomela facilitated 8089 COVID-19 vaccinations at the Hlokomela Vaccination Centre but in total we facilitated more than 10 000 through referring clients for vaccination to Department of Health facilities during the early months of the year.



8089

**TOTAL NUMBER COVID-19
VACCINATIONS**



Toughest sex worker fighting fiercely for health and human rights

By Constance Rahlane

Esther Ratlou is not someone to be messed with. When she speaks, she is heard and she will always have the last say. She is intimidating and fearless and sorry for you if you get on the wrong side of her!

This was Esther Ratlou when I met her for the first time in 2017 when I worked as a site coordinator in the Hlokomela Sex Work Programme. Sitting in the front row at a Risk Reduction workshop wearing a skimpy black dress, staring at me with scars as proof of surviving life on the streets. She challenged us every step of the way as she spoke on behalf of her fellow sex workers, sharing the problems and hardships they face on a daily basis.

However, the Esther I see today is a very different person from the one I met 4 years ago. Instead of fighting with other sex workers in the street for territories and clients, she now provides them with health, behaviour and safety information and also fights for their human rights when they are violated. She gives them condoms and makes sure they all know their HIV status.

Esther says this is all thanks to Hlokomela. In just four years she has grown in the programme from beneficiary to the position of peer educator, from peer educator to awards winner and from awards winner to HTS & Linkage Officer early in 2022!

Esther, a 34-year-old mother of three, says she still pinches herself in disbelief. "I still cannot believe it is me who is this position! I have never been so proud of myself and so excited; even when I walk I feel so big," she says.

After Esther dropped out of school in Grade 11, she went to Johannesburg in search of a better life. A friend invited her there with a promise of work; but the work was not the kind she expected; she had to sell sex for a living.

"I was very scared, but I had no choice but to do sex work and I made R2000 that day," she explained. Because she was new, many clients chose her at the price of R100 per session. It was very

overwhelming for her but she persisted because she had no other choice. She stayed in Johannesburg for four years, enduring abuse from clients and also fellow sex workers.

"A client would sleep with me and instead of paying after he would hit me and demand all the money I have worked for that day. My relationship with other sex workers was not good, we always fought for clients" says Esther.

Esther felt that her life was at risk because she would work the whole night and afterwards her last client would come and beat her up and take all her money for the day. She suspected that other sex workers were selling her out.

So Esther came home to Tzaneen in 2010, but she realised quickly that sex work paid much less in Tzaneen, Limpopo than in Johannesburg, so she tried to have a normal relationship.

However, the abuse in her life didn't stop. Instead of showing her love, the father of her second child abused her every day. She left him and went back to the streets of Tzaneen to do sex work.

Just like in Johannesburg, she received a hostile welcome from other sex workers. "We would fight every day for clients and territory and the clients were even worse. We had to hire a pimp to protect us and fight with clients for us; but later he sent criminals to take money from us every day after work".

Life on the streets was not easy for Esther, but it made her strong and brave so much so that she eventually became the boss of the street. Now Esther was the one who welcomed new sex workers, or chased them away. Sex workers reported to her when they had problems. She would fight tooth and nail with clients when they abused her or her fellow sex workers. Even the police knew her name as she would swear at them when they approached them where they sold sex. Esther also chased away people from other NGOs and the Department of Health, throwing stones at them when they tried to approach.



Kim Risiba, a social auxiliary worker at Hlokomela, was too scared to even come close to Esther. "The only way to reach other sex workers was through Esther, if Esther didn't want you there, it was difficult to reach them. She was very bossy, she used to chase us and swear at us when we try to give them condoms".

The turning point in Esther's life came when she attended her first Hlokomela Risk Reduction workshop for sex workers.

"I didn't know anything about my rights, or STIs, (Sexually Transmitted Infections). When we had STIs we didn't know where to go to, and some clients would hit us when they discovered that we had STIs. I didn't know that it was abuse what my ex-boyfriend was doing, I thought it was normal," she says.

Esther even started taking PrEP (Pre-exposure prophylaxis) right away in 2017, since she was still lucky to have been HIV negative.

When Hlokomela advertised positions for peer educators in 2019, Esther applied and got the job. She was excited yet reluctant because she had never done anything else besides sex work.

However, Esther has been one of the most active peer educators in the programme. She was inspired to train for HIV Testing Services by the HTS & Linkage Officer she worked with closely, Bheki Malomola.

Today, Esther is a well-respected person not only at Hlokomela but even in her community. I look at her with strong admiration. I no longer feel intimidated by her but instead I feel proud of my work; for the part I played in changing her life from a street fighting sex worker, to a caring mother and role model for other women.

Breaking the silence and stigma of mental health

By Sonja Botha



On 2 May 2021 I celebrated my fourth year at Hlokomela. It has been a wonderful experience in so many ways. I have acquired new skills, met amazing people and made fantastic memories.

I have also battled with depression and anxiety during the last 4 years, particularly this past year. A series of major events in my life caused my mental health to take a turn for the worst. Being a health care professional, I am often the one comforting, counselling and advising patients on their health, but neglecting my own. At the beginning of April, I started having anxiety attacks. I have had only two panic attacks in the past 3 years, however these episodes became more regular and without prior warning. I battled to cope and suffered severe brain fog and memory loss related to a COVID infection I had in January this year.

Thanks to my wonderful friend and Clinic Manager, Sr Laverne Stebbing, I realised that something had to be done. She arranged for me to consult with one of our volunteer doctors and I was admitted at a psychiatric hospital for two weeks. During my stay there, I was diagnosed with major depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress syndrome (PTSD) as well as sleep apnoea, which in itself is a major cause of depression and fatigue. I was put on the correct medication and received intensive therapy. I attended group sessions and classes on how to manage my mental health struggles.

This time was extremely valuable and insightful for me. I am sharing this information to create awareness on mental health. I have decided to break the silence and stigma around mental health by starting with my own life. This is a very treatable and common illness and more people suffer in silence than we care to acknowledge. This unfortunate fact is unnecessary and I hope that my story and disclosure motivates you to be sensitive to the mental health status of not only yourself but of those around you. Look out for signs of anxiety and depression and be the difference in someone's life. There is nothing to be ashamed of. We all have a responsibility towards each other to break the silence and the stigma.

Please visit <https://www.sadag.org/> for signs and symptoms of anxiety and depression.

I would like to thank Hlokomela for the gracious and kind way they assisted and supported me throughout this journey.

Sonja Botha is the Staff Nurse on duty in Hlokomela Women's Clinic and is passionate about all things related to women's health and wellbeing. She is an integral part of the Hlokomela team and brings a special kind of empathy and understanding to the work we do.



HLOKOMELA HONOURS

- 2007:** Independent study finds farm workers trust confidentiality of services offered.
- 2008:** Maruleng Municipality's Best Non-Profit Organisation in Mopani District.
- 2008:** Christine du Preez is a finalist in The Southern African Trust and Mail & Guardian Drivers of Change Investing in the Future awards.
- 2008:** Poster presentation at the 17th International AIDS Conference in Mexico City.
- 2009:** Hlokomela received an award from Mail & Guardian "Investing in the Future" awards selection committee with the 2009 'Investing in Life' award for its holistic innovative approach to medical and social service delivery for farm workers and their families.
- 2010:** Hlokomela participated in the 2010 International AIDS Conference in Vienna.
- 2010:** Silver Star award from Impumelelo for innovations in government and public sectors.
- 2011:** Board member presentation on the Herb Garden at the Peace Corps South Africa Health Symposium.
- 2012:** Denmark based television crew films an episode of a cooking series by the winner of Master Chef Denmark, using ingredients from Hlokomela Herb Garden.
- 2012:** Poster presentation at the 19th International AIDS Conference in Washington, DC.
- 2013:** The Director of Hlokomela received the award and was the winner of the SA's Most Influential Women in Civil Society Organisations and Related Services.
- 2013:** Poster at the 6th SA Annual AIDS Conference in Durban.
- 2014:** Director accepted as Ashoka Fellow.
- 2014:** Herb Garden manager and general assistant awarded Entrepreneur and Female Farm Worker of the Year respectively by the Limpopo Department of Agriculture
- 2015:** Christine du Preez receives a Recognition Award in the category International Community Workers Recognition at the Women4Africa Awards UK 2015.
- 2016:** Poster presentation on behalf of the Discovery Fund at the 21st International AIDS Conference in Durban.
- 2017:** The Herb Garden entered the Limpopo Province Department of Agriculture Maruleng Municipality 2017 Female Farmer of the Year competition and took second place in Top Entrepreneur Processing at the awards ceremony in August 2017.
- 2018:** The Hlokomela Women's Clinic wins Gold at the Community Chest Impumelelo Social Innovations Awards ceremony in Cape Town, November 2018.
- 2020:** Christine du Preez and the Hlokomela team were awarded the 2020 Women's Day award by the DA Women's Network (DAWN) <https://limpopo.da.org.za/2020/08/dawn-honours-hlokomela-and-its-founder-in-hoedspruit-to-commemorate-womens-month>



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