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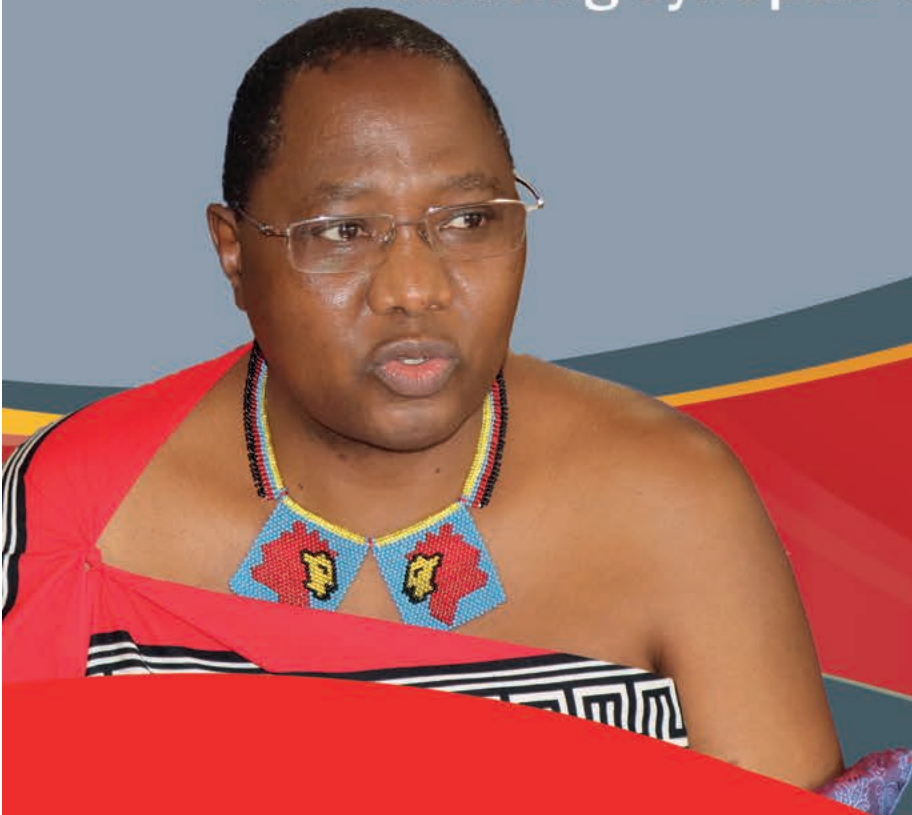
The Nation

We Journal 'Round to Round

December/Ingongoni 2020

World AIDS Day 2020

A tantalising synopsis of national action



The Last Mile Era

Eswatini Ending AIDS in Solidarity
by 2022: A shared responsibility

Sibumbene!! Ngimi nawe sincoba iAIDS nga 2022



NATIONAL EMERGENCY RESPONSE COUNCIL ON HIV/AIDS



**i HIV
yindzaba
yetfu
sonkhe!**

**NERCHA Council, Management and Staff
congratulate Their Majesties for leading Eswatini
to become the first African country to surpass
the UN 2030 target of 95–95–95 in the response
against HIV/AIDS.**

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Statement from His Excellency the Right Honourable Prime Minister
Ambrose Mandvulo Dlamini

THE LAST MILE: TOWARDS ENDING AIDS BY 2022



*His Excellency the Right
Honourable Prime Minister
Ambrose Mandvulo Dlamini*

Each year on December 1 we commemorate World AIDS Day. On this day, as should be the case throughout the year, as eSwatini we join the world to show support for people living with, and affected by HIV.

We pause to remember those who lost their lives to AIDS-related illnesses.

We also come together to celebrate the hopes and resilience of the nation, in the response against HIV and AIDS, and the progress we have made over the last 34 years in tackling this pandemic.

Our theme is: **“Eswatini Ending AIDS in Solidarity by 2022: A shared responsibility”**. In siSwati we say **“Sibumbene!! Ngimi nawe sincoba iAIDS nga 2022”**.

The emphasis being unity, solidarity and a shared responsibility.

These values are crucial success factors, more especially since, in 2020 and beyond, we are faced with the COVID-19 crisis.

It’s my privilege to pay tribute to His Majesty King Mswati III and Her Majesty the Indlovukazi for their sterling leadership and foresight in the response against HIV and AIDS, and for their steadfast commitment to eradicating this pandemic.

It is through the compassion, guidance and great leadership of Their

Majesties that the Kingdom of Eswatini continues to make remarkable progress against HIV and AIDS.

Today, the eyes of the world are once again on the Kingdom of Eswatini as we celebrate the remarkable achievement of being the first African nation to surpass the UN 2030 target of 95–95–95.

This means that in the country, 95% of people living with HIV have been diagnosed; 95% of those diagnosed are on treatment; and 95% of those on treatment are virally suppressed.

The cherry on top is that working together as the nation, we reached this goal 10 years ahead of the global target.

But even with all this progress, we cannot rest on our successes, nor be discouraged by setbacks.

His Majesty has commanded us to ensure we achieve 100–100–100, sooner.

We fully agree with Her Excellency Winnie Byanyima, Executive Director of UNAIDS, that the COVID-19 pandemic must not be an excuse to divert investment from HIV.

We should ensure that the hard-earned gains of the AIDS response are not undermined or sacrificed to the response against COVID-19.

Indeed, the right to health means that no one disease should be prioritised at the expense of the other.

The Kingdom of Eswatini has made its commitment to End AIDS as a public health threat by the year 2022. We must keep this promise.

Indeed, even at the time of COVID-19, **‘HIV still matters’**

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COVID-19,
‘HIV still matters’”

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Eswatini ramps up efforts to End AIDS by 2022

Statement from Minister of Health,
Hon. Lizzie Nkosi

As we commemorate World AIDS Day 2020, we recommit ourselves to addressing the HIV and AIDS crisis in the Kingdom of Eswatini, through our strong multisectoral response action of education, prevention and treatment; focusing on the key populations that are at greatest risk.

In doing so, we are cognisant of the fact that HIV and AIDS is not an issue to be tackled by government alone; and that no amount of money or resources can end this pandemic in isolation. All of us must do our part in the response against HIV and AIDS.

His Majesty King Mswati III has made a rallying call to the nation to pull out all the stops to ensure that the Kingdom of Eswatini fulfils its commitment to End AIDS as a public health threat by the year 2022.

This target was initiated in 2015 as a pledge towards a First World Eswatini and is in line with the global HIV and AIDS targets for 2030

The theme for World AIDS Day 2020 is “**Global Solidarity, Shared Responsibility**” as a country we have adopted it to suit our local context in HIV response and it is “**Eswatini Ending AIDS in Solidarity by 2022: A shared responsibility.**”

As in siSwati we say “**Sibumbene!! Ngimi nawe sincoba iAIDS nga 2022**” We have made remarkable pro-



Minister of Health Lizzie Nkosi and NERCHA National Executive Director Khanya Mabuza lighting candles in remembrance of those who lost their lives to AIDS-related illnesses.

gress against HIV and AIDS and have become the first African nation to surpass the UN 2030 target of 95–95–95.

However, with all this progress we have made, we cannot rest, and we are still on a journey. We have a job to do. There are still population groups that have not reached the 95 – 95 – 95 targets. These are adolescent girls and young women, key populations and men, to mention a few.

As emaSwati, let us commit to overcoming the challenges and barriers we still face “Sibumbene!! Ngimi nawe sincoba iAIDS nga2022.” As His Majesty’s Government is committed to ending AIDS by 2022, we must keep this promise.

There are a number of things we need to do together, faster and in a

more focused way, to beat AIDS.

- Protect rights of women and girls, gender equality and fight gender-based violence. We need to bring power, equality and agency to all young women and girls.
- Put the science and technology to work to save lives. The world has spent billions of dollars developing the fastest tests, the best treatment and new prevention technologies, such as pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) and HIV self-testing. Now let us put them to work, in every community, in every region.
- Sustain resources and investment in HIV and AIDS. We applaud the commitment of His majesty’s Government for committing to procure drugs and provide service providers from domestic public resources for HIV.





**The Council, Management and Staff of the
Municipal Council of Mbabane congratulate
His Majesty King Mswati III for leading Eswatini
to become the first African country to surpass
the UN 2030 target of 95–95–95 in the fight
against HIV/AIDS.**

**'Eswatini Ending AIDS in Solidarity by 2022: A shared responsibility' –
World AIDS Day 2020**

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MunicipalCouncilOfMbabane



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'RESPONSIVE QUALITY SERVICE ON TIME'



GOING THE LAST M



NERCHA Council during a pre-World AIDS Commemoration 2020 event with NERCHA staff

We are tantalisingly close to Ending AIDS by 2022; but...

For the last 34 years we all have been working hard towards that watershed moment where we report that the number of new HIV infections are far below the number of deaths from all causes for people living with HIV (PLHIV).

To date, there has been a decline in new HIV infections and at present, the Kingdom of Eswatini stands at 66% between 2010 and 2019. AIDS related deaths have also declined by 49%.

The pandemic is generalised, meaning it affects all populations, although certain groups such as sex workers, adolescent girls, young women and men who have sex with men are more affected than others. HIV disproportionately affects people in vulnerable populations that are often highly marginalised and stigmatised.

Thus, most new HIV infections and deaths are seen in places where certain higher-risk groups remain un-

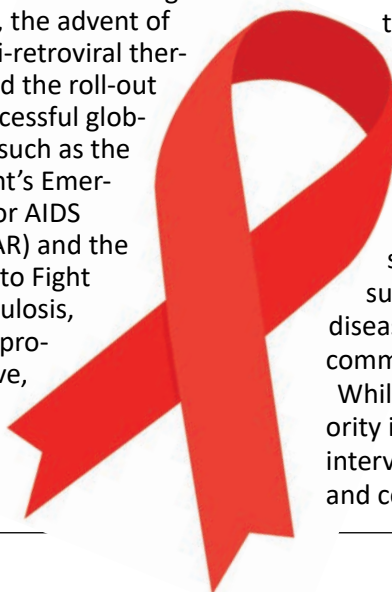
*Ending AIDS as a public health threat in Eswatini by 2022 is achievable if we all work in solidarity and keep our efforts strong. Each and every one of us has the responsibility to put his or her shoulder to the wheel in the national multi- sectoral response to HIV, says **Khanya Mabuza**, the National Executive Director of the National Emergency Response Council on HIV and AIDS*

aware, under-served or neglected.

Fortunately, the advent of effective anti-retroviral therapy (ART) and the roll-out of highly successful global programs such as the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) and the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria provided reprieve, hope, and success in battling the disease.

The Kingdom of Eswatini believes that Ending AIDS in 2022 is unlikely to happen without Integrated health system that provides HIV prevention, diagnosis, and treatment as well as care with other essential health services. and support to other co-morbidities such as TB, non-communicable diseases and mental health at the community level.

While prevention focuses on priority interventions, there are other interventions including HIV testing and counselling; blood safety and



MILE AND BEYOND



Eswatini Ending AIDS in Solidarity by 2022: A shared responsibility

universal precautions; post exposure prophylaxis (PrEP)), integration of prevention programmes for key populations at risk, treatment of sexually transmitted infections (STI) and HIV and AIDS workplace programmes.

In addition to ramping up treatment, the Kingdom of Eswatini has seen an increase in men opting to be circumcised, a welcome move that has been proven to lower the risk of HIV infection.

We can now confidently say that we are reducing the number of new infections rapidly, and are providing high quality HIV services to people living with HIV and Aids.

Studies showed that as a country, our HIV infection rates were exacerbated by individuals having multiple concurrent partners.

As the national multi- sectoral

response to HIV, we embarked on a number of campaigns to drive awareness and share information around the dangers of having multiple concurrent partners and the risk of HIV infection.

We took a rigid standpoint and through implementation of these initiatives, the Kingdom has seen new infections being reduced by 44% since 2014, against a target of 50%.

The kingdom of Eswatini has made the remarkable achievement of being the first African nation to surpass the UN 2030 target of 95–95–95.

That means more than 95 percent of emaSwati know their HIV Status. 95% who have tested and found to be positive are on treatment. And 95% of those who are on treatment are virally suppressed.

We have set our sights on the next

target – 100-100-100 and this will require concerted efforts to diagnose, treat, and support more key and vulnerable populations.

Under the astute leadership of His Majesty King Mswati III, the country has made large domestic investments in the national multi- sectoral response to HIV in Eswatini; with public funds supporting 40 percent of the total cost and Government paying for virtually all antiretroviral drugs, since 2010.

That being the case, we cannot afford as a country to let our guard down.

Despite the remarkable progress made in HIV prevention and treatment, these hard-won gains are in danger of being reversed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

As UNAIDS says, we should remain steadfast in our HIV prevention efforts and ensure that people can continue to access the services they need to stay HIV-free, discrimination-free and violence-free and to be able to enjoy their sexual and reproductive health and rights.

In spite of all the gains, HIV and AIDS will continue to be high on the national agenda.

This is because some sub- populations have not benefited from the strides made in prevention and treatment, with more than 2,500 new HIV infections occurring each year among young people aged 15-24, and with 15% of people living with HIV (PLHIV) not having tested and enrolled in care, the majority of



Envisioning an AIDS-free generation where all children and their families are protected from HIV infection

whom being men and children under the age 14 years. Furthermore, other disease co-morbidities have emerged that pose a threat to the lives of those living with HIV.

NERCHA, working in close partnership with our colleagues within the national multi- sectoral response to HIV is leaving no stone unturned to engage communities and work with them to hunt down and destroy HIV.

We are taking a pro-active stance of taking our services to the people in the various Tinkhundla centres and households.

Government is applauded for its comprehensive programme of funding and providing state-of-the-art ARV treatment to PLHIV, free of charge, and through the public health system.

It is an indictment to all of us that women remain disproportionately affected by Eswatini's HIV pandemic: of the 210,000 people living with HIV in 2018 (190,000 adults), 120,000 were women. Within the entire population, 35.1% of all women are living with HIV, compared to 19.3% of men.

Moreover, young women are particularly affected, with 15.9% living with HIV in 2018 compared to 3.1% of their male counterparts. In 2018, 23,000 young people (ages 15-24) were living with HIV in the country.

This age group is more likely than

others to have low testing, treatment and viral suppression rates.

Early sexual debut and the high level of intergenerational sex between older men and young women helps to drive HIV transmission among this age group.

In our country, about 11,000 children (0-14 years) were living with HIV in 2018, of whom 76% were on antiretroviral treatment.

New infections among children and AIDS-related deaths have reduced greatly to fewer than 1,000 each year.

However, the HIV pandemic continues to have a significant effect on children in other ways. Around 45,000 0 to 17-year-olds have been orphaned due to AIDS-related illnesses.

As the national multi- sectoral response to HIV team, our main goal is to address the structural factors, including poverty, lack of education, substance abuse and violence, that place adolescent girls, young women, and other people at risk of acquiring HIV.

We will also focus on the following:

- **Social and behaviour change (SBC):** This as a cross-cutting programme to deliver risk reduction education and generate demand for the uptake of HIV services.

- **Prevention of mother to child transmission of HIV, syphilis and hepatitis:** We will continue to embrace the double elimination of mother to child transmission of HIV and syphilis, and extend the scope to include hepatitis B.
- **Children in treatment and care:** Working with UNICEF, the country is scaling up point-of-care diagnostics by which infants can now be tested and started off on treatment the same day. We are also working to locate, link and retain those children who did not receive early testing or continued treatment and care.
- **Prevention and treatment of sexually-transmitted infections (STIs):** This programme will continue to be strengthened to contribute to the reduction of HIV infections through education, screening and treatment of STIs.
- **Condom promotion and distribution:** We will ensure that condoms and lubricants are available at the right places for different populations. Strategic focus will be to promote consistent and correct condom use.
- **Economic empowerment:** We will continue to address structural vulnerability to HIV infection caused by poverty and unemployment, among adolescents and young people.
- **Voluntary medical male circumcision (VMMC):** We will scale up VMMC to target younger men by institutionalising VMMC in public health facilities and scaling up early infant male circumcision as a long-term sustainability strategy.



HIV testing and healthcare services have been intensified

As a 100-metre race athlete would know, this being the last mile we have to draw from our deep reserves to reach the finish line, and beyond.

We must engage the last gear and work in solidarity to End AIDS by 2022 through sheer hard work.

On behalf of the national multi-sectoral response to HIV, as NERCHA we call on everyone, from our community leaders, MPs, His Majesty's Government wishes to thank our partners within the UN system, development bilateral and multilateral partners, and all multisectoral stakeholders to continue to support us as we embark on the last mile of Ending AIDS by 2022. Additional information: urc-chs.com and the World Wide Web



NERCHA, Limkokwing in social media blitz to End AIDS by 2022

In the quest to ensure young people have proper knowledge on HIV prevention, NERCHA has partnered with Limkokwing University of Creative Technology to leverage on social media and digital technology to spread the word about HIV prevention among young people.

The partnership will use new technologies to reach critical populations to provide HIV information on mobile devices and smartphones to address issues of stigma and misconceptions about HIV, and deal with feelings of isolation that could lead to risky behaviours among the youth and adolescents.

NERCHA information centre must be listed in search results when social media users seek HIV services near them.

NERCHA National Executive Director

Khanya Mabuza says young people are at the centre of the HIV and AIDS pandemic as they are both the hardest hit by the condition and yet they are also key to overcoming it.

Previous traditional strategies have proven to disregard young people, Mabuza says.

"Our goal is to ensure that the percentage of people who are aware of country vision to End AIDS by 2022 is increased to 80% in 2020 and 90% in 2023.

Further to that, ensure that the percentage of young people who cite social media as the source of HIV information is increased to 70% in 2020 and 85% in 2023," Mabuza says.

"Critical to achieving this milestone is ensuring that young people are given proper knowledge on how to protect themselves from HIV.

Which is why this new partnership

between ourselves as NERCHA and the Limkokwing University of Creative Technology seeks to bridge the information gap between traditional forms of communication and new technologies, by using new technologies that support efficient and effective service delivery."

Mabuza says social media is key to reaching the hardest hit sectors of society, especially vulnerable young people who are falling prey to HIV, with the necessary skills and information to avoid infection.

"Young people have unquestionably demonstrated that they are capable of making responsible choices to protect themselves when provided with support and they can further educate and motivate themselves to make the right choices.

NERCHA is committed to raise the financial and human resources necessary for the response against HIV and AIDS and this is an effort that must centre on working with young people to provide them with knowledge about HIV and how to avoid infection," he says.

Mabuza adds that they need to determine the type of online health information accessed by the youth, in order to supplement face to face HIV prevention services.

“Social media is key to reaching the hardest hit sectors of society, especially vulnerable young people who are falling prey to HIV



UN Resident Coordinator Ms Nathalie Ndongo-Seh

With solidarity emaSwati can End AIDS by 2022

Every year, on 1 December, the world commemorates World AIDS Day. People around the world unite to show support for people living with and affected by HIV and to remember those who lost their lives to AIDS.

In 2020, the world's attention has been focused on the COVID-19 pandemic, on health, and how pandemics affect lives and livelihoods. COVID-19 is showing once again how health is interlinked with other critical issues, such as reducing inequality, human rights, gender equality, social protection, and economic growth hence the theme "Global solidarity, a shared responsibility".

The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed the entrenched inequalities existing in our societies.

This health crisis, like many others, is hitting the poorest and the most vulnerable the hardest.

We have seen how the COVID-19 crisis has exacerbated the challenges faced by people living with HIV, by

women and girls, and by key populations, in accessing life-saving health care, and how the crisis has widened the social and economic inequalities that increase the vulnerability of marginalized groups to HIV.

However, this crisis has also been a wake-up call, an opportunity to do things differently—better, and together. In many respects, the defeat of AIDS as a public health threat depends on how the world responds to COVID-19.

The leadership and engagement of communities, which is instrumental in the success of the AIDS response, has also been key in responding to COVID-19.

We have seen countless examples of how community activism and solidarity have, once again, been paramount in providing people affected

by HIV with information, services, social protection, and hope.

However, such solidarity cannot be the sole responsibility of communities.

Governments, donors, faith leaders, civil society, and every one of us needs to contribute to making the world a healthier place.

Global solidarity, and a shared responsibility require us to view global health responses, including the AIDS response, in a new way. It requires, the national leaders and all of us to come together to ensure that:

Health is fully financed. Governments must come together and find new ways to ensure that health care is fully funded.

No one country can do it alone, domestic and international funding for health must be increased.



Governments, donors, faith leaders, civil society, and every one of us needs to contribute to making the world a healthier place.



UNAIDS Country Director Eswatini Ms Rose Craigue honouring NERCHA National Executive Director Khanya Mabuza

- Health systems are strengthened. Investments in the AIDS response in the past few decades have helped to strengthen health systems and have been supporting the COVID-19 response. But more needs to be done to further strengthen health systems and protect health-care workers.
- Access is ensured. Life-saving medicines,

vaccines, and diagnostics must be considered as public goods. There must be global solidarity and a shared responsibility to ensure that no individual, community, or country is left behind in accessing life-saving health commodities.

- Human rights are respected. A human rights approach applied everywhere will produce sustainable results for health. The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the fault lines in society and how key populations have been left behind in many

parts of the world.

- The rights of women and girls, and gender equality, are at the center. The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly affected women's livelihoods, which have been disproportionately affected by lockdown measures, and lockdowns have increased violence against women in household settings. Women must be included in decision-making processes that affect their lives. The world cannot afford rollbacks in decades of hard-won gains in gender equality.

Now is the moment for bold leadership for equal societies, the right to health for all, and a robust and equitable global recovery.

When everyone is involved and sharing responsibility, positive change happens, investments lead to results, and equality, respect, and dignity is seen. With solidarity, emaSwati can end the AIDS pandemic by 2022.

Based on our historic success thus far, we know that we can achieve the last mile of ending AIDS as a public health threat in Eswatini by 2022.

So far, the country has achieved what other countries have dreamt of achieving the 95-95-95 goals, I am therefore confident that we can achieve the last mile – together! Sibumbene!! Ngimi nawe sincoba iAIDS nga2022

Token of Appreciation to the Director of NERCHA on the occasion of UN75 celebration in 2020

On behalf of the United Nations Development System in Eswatini, UNAIDS would like to recognize in appreciation, Mr. Khanya Mabuza, the Executive Director of NERCHA. Mr. Mabuza, your belief in the vision of Agenda 2030 has been inspirational, under your leadership, NERCHA has played a pivotal role in the achievement of 96-98-97, ten years in advance of the global target. NERCHA's role in leading and coordinating the national multi- sectoral response to HIV in Eswatini has played a substantial role in this historic achievement, though Eswatini has the highest prevalence of HIV in the world, because of this momentous achievement, we are now a shining example for Africa and the rest of the world. It is with great appreciation and pleasure that I, therefore, present to you this token of appreciation from the United Nations. Thank you, Mr. Mabuza.



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ESWATINI TEARING DOWN THE WALLS OF HIV, AIDS

Eswatini's track record in the response against HIV is an invaluable asset to the global efforts of ending AIDS. Rose Craigue, the new UNAIDS Country Director in Eswatini gives a message of support and solidarity.

Every year, on 1 December, the world commemorates World AIDS Day. People around the world unite to show support for people living with and affected by HIV and to remember those who lost their lives to AIDS.

In 2020, the world's attention has been focused on the COVID-19 pandemic on health and how pandemics affect lives and livelihoods.

COVID-19 is showing once again how health is interlinked with other critical issues, such as reducing inequality, human rights, gender equality, social protection and economic growth.

Like all epidemics, it is widening the inequalities that already existed. With this in mind, this year the theme of World AIDS Day is "Global solidarity, shared responsibility".

The Kingdom of Eswatini has modelled the country theme to be in line with the aspirations of the nation and progress in the multi-sectoral response to HIV; being '**Eswatini Ending AIDS in Solidarity by 2022: A shared responsibility.**' The translation to siSwati is: '**Sibumbene!! Ngimi nawe sincoba iAIDS nga 2022.**'

The theme resonates with a nation in unity, working towards ending AIDS; whilst acknowledging the struggles and resilience of those alive today because of the huge progress the country has made against the pandemic.

As we commemorate World AIDS Day 2020, we at UNAIDS, UN System and the international community, do so with a heightened sense of gratitude to His Majesty King Mswati III, His Majesty's Government and the people of Eswatini on the remarka-

ble achievement of the Kingdom of Eswatini in becoming the first country in Africa to meet and exceed the UN's 2030 targets on HIV and AIDS.

Eswatini, the first country to achieve the '95-95-95' global HIV target.

This remarkable feat means that more than 96% of emaSwati know their HIV Status; 98% of those who have tested and found to be positive are on life sustaining treatment; and 97% of those who are on treatment are virally suppressed.

As experts say, this means, an entire generation of children are likely to be born HIV free because of wide treatment coverage.

This shows how great progress is made when governments commit to investing in the health of their people.

Eswatini's multisectoral response continues to make significant inroads in fighting stigma, discrimination and the psychological trauma associated with the pandemic.

This success can

be attributed to investments in HIV prevention and treatment interventions targeting the hardest-to-reach and most vulnerable populations.

This includes girls and young women – who across East and southern Africa continue to be disproportionately affected by HIV.

In Eswatini, 63% of people living with HIV are women.

Importantly, His Majesty's Government's approach of increased access to effective antiretroviral therapy and its earlier use has had the result of saving many lives.

At UNAIDS, we are encouraged by pronouncements by His Excellency the Right Honourable Prime Minister Ambrose Mandvulo Dlamini that despite progress made, the nation will not let its guard down, but HIV and AIDS will continue to be high on the national agenda. We also laud His Excellency's assurances that the COVID-19 pandemic would not be used as justification to divert investment from HIV.

As UNAIDS Executive Director Winnie Byanyima point-



Ms. Rose Craigue, the Country Director for UNAIDS in Eswatini



Gender equality and the health, rights and wellbeing of girls and women are crucial in global response against HIV and AIDS

ed out in her World AIDS Day 2020 message our goal of ending the AIDS epidemic was already off track before COVID-19.

We must put people first to get the AIDS response back on track. We must end the social injustices that put people at risk of contracting HIV.

And we must fight for the right to health.

There is no excuse for governments to not invest fully for universal access to health.

Barriers such as up-front user fees that lock people out of health must come down.

As we move together in solidarity

and shared responsibility in quest of ending AIDS, there are a number of important prerequisites that we should continue to shine the spotlight on.

These include accelerated efforts to promote and protect the rights of women and girls and to advance gender equality.

Women and girls should be empowered and interventions put in place to ensure they are fully involved in, and exercise their right to make decisions about their health and their bodies.

There is evidence that keeping adolescent girls in school reduces their

vulnerability to HIV infection.

We must strengthen investments in education, health and economic programmes that focus on girls and young women to help reduce their vulnerability to the pandemic.

Working together we must bring power and equality to all young women and girls.

Moreover, we should never falter in our commitment towards social justices and human rights in the response to HIV because violations in these areas have been found to be among the drivers of HIV.

It is everyone's right to access health and their information should be treated with respect and dignity.

We should leverage on science, technology and innovation, including advances in treatment such as pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP), especially the new PrEP injectable for women.

As the World AIDS Day 2020 theme suggests, solidarity and shared responsibility remain key to ending AIDS by 2022.

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There is no excuse for governments to not invest fully for universal access to health.



Communities making a Difference: Thuthuka Davies members are leading the way in gardening

Thuthuka Davies changing lives, securing futures

All members of Thuthuka Davies came up with an undetectable status of viral load after regular tests. This is due to peer support and diligent adherence to antiretroviral therapy. This not only preserves the health of members living with HIV, but also prevents sexual transmission of the virus to an HIV-negative partner.

Musa Ndlangamandla reports

It is often said that family is not just the people one is born of the same parents with. Nor is family just the descendants of a common ancestor bound by a shared bloodline.

Family, conventional wisdom tells us, is the people who are pillars of support, especially during difficult times.

Family is more about building and maintaining a network of people that one can trust and fall back on in times of difficulty.

Thuthuka Davies HIV Support Group of Zombodze area, in Shiselweni is as

much the embodiment of family as it is a vehicle facilitating local responses to HIV and AIDS, in rural communities Eswatini.

The support group is a wellspring of vital information, solidarity and psychological support for people living with HIV (PLHIV) and their families.

The National Emergency Response Council for HIV and AIDS (NERCHA) recently approved a E30, 000 grant to Thuthuka Davies for an income

generating project, which saw the latter purchase form mattresses to rent out for use in community events such as weddings, religious functions and funerals.

This is over and above the technical assistance and capacity-building interventions NERCHA coordinates and facilitates.

Thuthuka Davies HIV Support Group was formed in 2004 by PLHIV, mostly adults over 40 years of age, who

“In the local responses to HIV and AIDS, Thuthuka Davies stands out for unity and servant leadership.”

with medical help and HIV support groups, found the strength to build resilience and even help others. These are courageous women, and a handful of men, who do not allow their HIV status to define them.

The eldest member is 90 years old, but has the strength and resilience to match a 30-year-old.

In the local responses to HIV and AIDS, Thuthuka Davies stands out for unity and servant leadership.

Two local families, the Mntshali and Kunene households, returned 1,7 hectares of their fields to indlunkhulu (the local traditional authority) for use by the support group in its small-scale gardening projects.

With the help of the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA), the humanitarian arm of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, the support group was able to instal pipes and vital water infrastructure in the gardens, fencing and seeds and agricultural inputs for the project.

“At Thuthuka Davies, we share ideas on how to deal with the challenges that PLHIV face and how to confront them and move on with a productive life.

It is important for people to see that others diagnosed with HIV manage their HIV status and live well,” says Themba Khumalo, the chairman.

“Over the years we have become a strong family, sharing experiences, defeating stigma and discrimination,



Thuthuka Davies Support group Chairman Themba Khumalo and the deputy Nonhlanhla Magagula

improving self-esteem and coping skills among members, whilst supporting adherence to anti-retroviral therapy adherence and improved retention in HIV care.”

He is echoed by Nonhlanhla Magagula, the deputy chairperson, who says as a result of peer-support within the group, the target of having all members of Thuthuka Davies attaining viral load undetectable status

has been achieved, following tests conducted on 17 August 2020.

“This not only preserves the health of members, but also prevents sexual transmission of the virus to an HIV-negative partner.

This splendid achievement does not mean that we should let our guard down. It is essential that we continue to adhere to the anti-retroviral therapy protocols as required to maintain the undetectable viral load,” Magagula says.

She adds that whilst the COVID-19 pandemic has had a telling effect on all sectors, Thuthuka Davies’s resilience and strong foundations enabled the organisation to continue to function with little disruption.

“They were able to sell their produce from the gardens and hand-craft concerns and shore up productivity,” Magagula says.

The support group also assists members with savings for the ‘rainy day’ as they have a stokvel in which they put away money for groceries, healthcare expenses and farm inputs.

“This is our way of contributing to income generation and wealth creation, for our members and their families.

Our goal is to rapidly grow from a community-based business into the big league.”



Mandla Mntshali whose family availed part of the 1.7ha fields for use by Thuthuka Davies.

Litsemba: A remarkable journey that began with a small step

Nkhungwini is an isolated rural community in the heart of dusty and Shiselweni region. Here in

Nkhungwini, past the history-laden Franson Christian High School in equally forgotten Mhlosheni, the ruins of a post office, leftovers of a grocery store, and skeletons of administrative buildings abandoned by the British colonial government; are a stark reminder of what once was an oasis of commerce, industry and education.

With HIV and AIDS knowing no boundaries, Nkhungwini is not exempt from the challenges associated with the pandemic, regardless of the fact that it remains isolated from the economic heart beat of Eswatini. So does the impact of the COVID-19 crisis.

But there are some people fighting to change that.

A group of middle-aged residents, having been diagnosed with HIV, decided that the condition would not

dictate terms on their lives.

Having resolved to remain productive members of the community, they formed Litsemba HIV Support Group, in 2011.

Litsemba, comprising some 30 members, focuses on tackling stigma and ending discriminatory practices, whilst promoting prevention, treatment and care.

“In order to instil confidence and cater for the welfare of our members and community, Litsemba has a number of income-generating activities, to alleviate poverty through incremental increases in household finances.

Our goal is to help members develop a business that will provide for their children, and general household needs,” says Lindiwe Motsa, chairperson of Litsemba.

Among the income generating projects for the organisation is a tent and chairs rent-out business started with a E30, 000 grant from NERCHA.

Before receiving this grant, they were also involved in manufacturing cleaning products and their flagship cayenne pepper production.

The chairperson added that Litsemba continues to deliver demand-driven interventions, such as:

- growing vegetables to eat and to sell for income generation;
- raising awareness of HIV and AIDS;
- reducing the stigma and promoting acceptance of HIV-positive individuals;
- offering informal counselling services;
- helping community members access medicine and medical care; and
- caring for the welfare of orphaned and vulnerable children so that they will be independent in the future.

Litsemba also receives assistance from ADRA and World Vision.

“Our dream is to build a commercial maize mills in our community.

We want to produce a variety of value-added products from maize such as millie-meal, samp, millie-rice and animal feed.

We want to create many skilled and unskilled jobs.

We appeal to donors to assist with resources to build the structure and also purchase the industrial maize mill,” Motsa says.

“Litsemba, comprising some 30 members, focuses on tackling stigma and ending discriminatory practices, whilst promoting prevention, treatment and care.”



Shared responsibility: Litsemba Support Group members

People Living with HIV key to HIV, AIDS response



Sharon Neves, regional coordinator of NERCHA in Shiselweni

Sharon Neves, regional coordinator of NERCHA, says people living with HIV (PLHIV) are at the heart of the struggle against HIV pandemic and its consequences, hence are key for a strong, effective multisectoral response.

She says PLHIV carry the heaviest burden in terms of loss of bread winners to AIDS-related illnesses, caring for orphans and vulnerable children, depletion of household income, savings and resources in caring for ailing loved ones, and lack of proper nutrition to support anti-retro-viral treatment.

Against that backdrop, NERCHA has rolled out a grant programme for support groups of PLHIV to improve their livelihoods and that of the communities where they operate.

The support groups access a grant of E30,000 to engage in innovative income-generating projects to sustain and strengthen their work.

The projects are community-led and community-owned.

NERCHA offers technical assistance and capacity-building activities, giving space to the support groups to come up with, and fully run their projects.

To date NERCHA has been disbursed a staggering E840, 000 to 28 support groups across the country.

"The objective is to ensure that they fully participate in all the stages, from problem identification, analysis, prioritisation and finding relevant solutions to these unique challenges.

This, as opposed to a top-bottom approach where the people most affected by the pandemic are often

Appeal to Donors and list of items needed

- Litsemba needs resources for a structure and to purchase an industrial maize mill
- Thuthuka Davies needs resources for a drip irrigation system for its gardens
- Both Litsemba and Thuthuka Davies needs assistance with reliable markets for their garden produce
- Both Litsemba and Thuthuka Davies need support with constant training and capacity building for business management
- Litsemba needs another tent, one that sits over 500 people
- Litsemba needs more chairs to add to the 40 that they already have
- Thuthuka Davies need more sponges

excluded in the design and implementation of the response," Neves observes.

"These support groups have for many years, on an ongoing basis, been the game-changer as they allow PLHIV to speak out and discuss their needs and concerns in a safe environment, offer a range of useful services and provide a strong collective platform from which PLHIV can assert their rights.

In these safe platforms people are able to share stories and break down barriers deterring communities from engaging in HIV prevention, care and treatment."

Neves adds that through the support groups, women are also given the opportunity to deal with the growing feminisation of the HIV and AIDS pandemic, which places disproportionate burdens on them and contributes to their impoverishment.

"Women are joining hands to address and act collectively upon issues and challenges specific to them and their children."

“People are able to share stories and break down barriers deterring communities from engaging in HIV prevention, care and treatment.”



NAMBoard insists that food security and agriculture are crucial in the fight against HIV and AIDS.

FOOD SECURITY, AGRICULTURE VITAL WEAPONS AGAINST HIV, AIDS, COVID-19

*The colliding pandemics of HIV and AIDS and COVID-19 bring into sharp focus the importance of agriculture, and agrobusiness in Eswatini's fight against HIV and AIDS. Food security and nutrition are critical prerequisites in the country's efforts to deal with the impact of these pandemics, **Siphephiso Dlamini**, Chief Executive Officer of the National Agricultural Marketing Board (NAMBoard) explains why.*

In 2020, the people of Eswatini have the Sword of Damocles hanging over their heads, thanks to the colliding pandemics of HIV and COVID-19. The devastating impact of HIV and AIDS in the era of COVID-19, is not unique to the Kingdom of Eswatini, but is felt the world over.

This dual crisis, like many others, is hitting the poorest and the most vulnerable in our society the hardest.

According to UNAIDS, the COVID-19 crisis has exacerbated the challenges faced by people living with HIV, women and girls and key populations, including in accessing life-saving health care, and that the crisis has widened the social economic

inequalities that increase the vulnerability of marginalised groups to HIV.

The colliding pandemics of HIV and COVID-19 threaten the gains that the Kingdom of Eswatini continues to make in efforts to mitigate the onslaught of HIV and AIDS through improved access to HIV testing services and the provision of free antiretroviral treatment to people who need it.

On this World AIDS Day 2020, we are celebrating a major milestone achieved by the Kingdom of Eswatini which has become the first African country to surpass the UN 2030 target of 95–95–95.

Reaching this milestone is a testament to the leadership of His Majesty King Mswati III whose legacy

continues to be a rallying call on all emaSwati that HIV and AIDS 'yindzaba yetfu sonkhe' – all hands-on deck in the response against HIV and AIDS.

As NAMBoard we congratulate His Majesty King Mswati III, Her Majesty the Indlovukazi, His Majesty's Government, and emaSwati on their commitment and the progress made in the national AIDS response.

We also pay tribute to Their Majesties for their leadership in the COVID-19 response and interventions, which continue to save lives.

Despite these milestones, we cannot afford to let our guard down as a nation, simple because there is yet no cure for HIV; and a vaccine for COVID-19 is not yet within our



NAMBoard uses technology and research to scale up the agriculture value chain

reach. So, this dual-pandemic poses the greatest danger to the nation's progress as its impact threatens to reverse the strides that the country continues to make.

At NAMBoard we believe that one of the most critical areas that the country has to make substantial investment in, is strengthening food security and nutrition.

Lack of food security and poor nutritional status have been found to undermine the fight against HIV and AIDS and other health challenges.

They also undermine adherence and response to antiretroviral therapy. HIV infection itself undermines food security and nutrition by reducing work capacity and jeopardising household livelihoods.

Although HIV and AIDS and the COVID-19 crisis are recognised primarily as health issues, these pandemics have multiple social and economic dimensions and implications as they affect people in their most productive years of life.

A health approach alone is not sufficient to prevent their spread or mitigate impact on both individuals and society.

At NAMBoard, we strongly believe that the agriculture and agrobusiness sector remains key to food security as it contributes to poverty alleviation by reducing food prices, creating employment, improving farm income and increasing wages.

Buoyed by the active role of Minister of Agriculture Hon. Jabulani Mabuza, Principal Secretary Bongani Masuku and the entire ministry team in efforts to lift Eswatini farmers out of poverty and ensure nationwide

“

It is time for Eswatini to fully feed itself by decisively taking advantage of its agriculture value chain.

food security; NAMBoard has on an ongoing basis, been implementing proven technology and new research to scale up the agriculture value chain in the country.

Despite the threat posed by HIV and AIDS and the COVID-19 crisis, at NAMBoard we are saying; we will push hard to ensure food security in the country, whilst ensuring that reliance of imports is reduced significantly.

It is time for Eswatini to fully feed itself by decisively taking advantage of its agriculture value chain. Agriculture should now be taken as a business, not just as a means for basic survival.

We will continue to support the

Hon. Minister Mabuza as he pursues policies and programmes that allow the country to become a net food exporting state, while using agricultural technologies to add value to processed foods and export commodities.

A robust and diverse food supply is an essential part of the health and nutrition response to HIV and AIDS and COVID-19.

It is encouraging to note that Eswatini's multisectoral approach to the response against HIV and AIDS makes nutrition an integral part of the national response to the pandemic by identifying nutrition interventions for immediate integration

into HIV and AIDS programming.

There is no gainsaying that the colliding pandemics of HIV and AIDS and COVID-19 pose a serious threat to the food security of thousands of people living with HIV and their families, both in terms of their capacity to produce and to purchase their food.

A sustainable climate-smart agriculture and agrobusiness sector goes a long way in ensuring inclusive economic growth, improved livelihoods, sustained animal health and welfare, and addressing environmental issues.

Most importantly it is crucial towards maintaining good health and preventing malnutrition in all its forms.



Agriculture should now be taken as a business

Crucial milestones in Eswatini's gallant HIV, AIDS response

World AIDS Day 2020 comes amid the onslaught of the COVID-19 crisis, requiring countries to approach global health and economic responses, including the AIDS response, in a new way. Despite these formidable twin challenges, the Kingdom of Eswatini has reached remarkable milestones, says Royal Eswatini Sugar (RES) Corporation Managing Director Nick Jackson



RES Corporation MD Nick Jackson

In the global response against HIV and AIDS the Kingdom of Eswatini stands out as a mirror to the world on how a nation can successfully responds to the colliding pandemics of HIV and COVID-19.

Eswatini is the first African country to surpass the UN 2030 target of 95–95–95. A remarkable achievement reached 10 years ahead of target.

The Kingdom of Eswatini's COVID-19 response and interventions to save lives have also been hailed among the top five countries in Africa in a recent update by the World Health Organisation (WHO).

These milestones bear testimony to the fact that working together in solidarity and shared responsibility no mountain is too high for the people of Eswatini.

These milestones make World AIDS Day 2020, extra special for many of us as it fuels our steadfast hope for a world without AIDS.

However, it is worrying that despite the gains on the HIV and AIDS front, there is a disturbing trend of new

infections, especially among young girls. We need to work together to turn the situation around.

World AIDS Day is a time for us to show our support for people living with HIV and remember all those who have lost their lives to AIDS-related illnesses, and all those impacted by HIV and AIDS.

Royal Eswatini Sugar (RES) Corporation recommit itself to fully support and play its part in strengthening the country's multipronged approach to prevent the spread of HIV, and protect those vulnerable to new infection.

His Majesty's Government supported by emaSwati, a multisectoral contingent of stakeholders in Eswatini and abroad, continues to work hard in response to the HIV and AIDS crisis and the onslaught of the COVID-19 crisis.

It is also thanks to the steadfast dedication, selfless sacrifice and hard work, and solidarity of the United Nations system, the European Union and many other development partners, civil society and philanthropic organisations and individuals that

the country was able to reach these milestones.

At Royal Eswatini Sugar (RES) Corporation we draw continued inspiration from His Majesty King Mswati III for his leadership role, imagination and dedication to saving lives, which resulted in the great progress being realised by the country in the response against HIV and AIDS and the COVID-19 crisis.

RES Corporation also pays tribute to His Majesty's Government under the stewardship of Prime Minister Ambrose Mandvulo Dlamini and his cabinet colleagues for putting in place robust policies centred around saving lives and protecting the economy.

The victories recorded in the response against HIV and AIDS resulted from Government's strong focus on key interventions in testing and treatment, coupled with strong community prevention programming.

From the onset of the coronavirus pandemic in March 2020 His Majesty's Government took bold action to minimise the impact of COVID-19.

The Kingdom of Eswatini began introducing disease prevention measures and continued strengthening them in the weeks that followed.

The country also continues to take steps to cushion the economic blow.

Whilst tremendous progress has been made in preventing and treating HIV and AIDS, and in containing the spread of COVID-19 we need to remain alert and not let our guard down.

RES Corporation urges all of us to use this World AIDS Day 2020- and beyond - to promote awareness for HIV prevention and testing, while also ending the stigma and discrimination.

Our HIV, AIDS programme helping thousands of emaSwati



Sifiso Nyembe. Group Public Affairs Manager RES Corporation and colleagues addressing HIV and AIDS issues

Royal Eswatini Sugar (RES) Corporation's health and wellness programme and services continue to benefit employees, their families and the wider communities within the sugar belt.

The company's priority, Managing Director Nick Jackson says, is the health, wellness and safety of employees and the communities and the continued safe operations of our business functioning, particularly under the COVID-19 induced "new normal".

HIV and AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria constitute the main health challenges faced by employees and communities.

RES Corporation, which owns well equipped clinics, also plays a pivotal role in encouraging private sector cooperation on HIV and AIDS awareness and management in the Kingdom of Eswatini.

"Health and Wellness forms an important part of our human, intellectual and social and relationship capitals. Our commitment to our people and our communities is evident in the thorough care and meticulous attention to the medical issues and challenges facing them, as well as our concern for their wellbeing in the workplace," Jackson says.

RES Corporation has in place a

forward-looking HIV and AIDS policy whose objective is to minimise the impact of the pandemic on the organisation and its employees. Employees are actively encouraged to know their status. Confidentiality, respect and the protection of the rights of employees' medical information are the holy grail of the policy.

Key elements of the policy include preventing new infections; provision of voluntary counselling and testing; provision of appropriate care and treatment for people living with HIV; and protection against discrimination and victimisation.

"Our multi-pronged integrated approach seeks to ensure value creation for internal and external stakeholders, to create a professional and conducive environment for everyone to reach their full potential

for self-development and career advancement. The overall aim of this ongoing initiative is not only to improve health consciousness among employees, but to improve productivity."

Following are some of the initiatives of RES Corporation to encourage employees to lead a healthy, safe and active lifestyle:

- A cadre of wellness champions trained to assist their peers in each department.
- Simama 20-20 strategic initiative to improve health consciousness, reduce unit costs of and productivity and enhance productivity. The company's Biggest Loser competition and free gym access have gone a long way to enabling this.
- Campaigns throughout the year to boost the uptake of free medical services which include breast and prostate cancer screening for employees.
- Routine medical examinations. 97% of employees across the company was achieved and 100% for seasonal employees.
- The Sukuma Challenge walk (this year's event was cancelled due to COVID-19)
- Psychological care outreach to departments; SODV trainings and Health and Wellness dinner to boost morale and sense of belonging for employees.



Health, wellness and safety of employees and the communities are a priority at RES Corporation

Mbabane City bringing health and social services closer to people

Creating a strong, safe and sustainable health and care system that is fit for the future has long been a goal for the Municipal Council of Mbabane. The end-game is to achieve the greatest and fastest improvement to the health, wealth and wellbeing of the 100, 000 residents of the Capital City. For many years Council's strategy has been to build resilience in people and communities, while providing safe, consistent and affordable health and social care. Musa Ndlangamandla reports.

The Municipal Council of Mbabane (MCM) uses the primary health care approach which emphasises prevention of disease and accidents, early intervention and the promotion of good quality health for residents; with a complementary capacity for curative, rehabilitative and palliative care.

This is opposed to curative health care which is re-active in nature, thus not sustainable or desirable in the face of the increasing burden of ill-health in the communities.

MCM CEO Gideon Mhlongo says the Council provides 360-degree health care delivery solutions which include the HIV and AIDS counselling, testing, treatment and support, provision of nutrition, health education, psychological wellness, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services, and shelter.

"This developmental approach, sees communities being partners and not just receivers of primary healthcare services, and they extend to basic child and maternity care, family planning and school health services.

These strategic interventions by Council's health and social services department are meant to improve service delivery, especially to more vulnerable groups and the indigent,"



Mbabane City Mayor, His Worship Sikhumbuzo Dube interacting with residents during an intensive COVID-19 awareness campaign around the City.

Mhlongo says.

Being the sphere of government closest to the communities, Council plays a coordinating and facilitating role in the partnership involving the Ministry of Health and other government ministries, Local Community Committees (LLCs), Municipal Health and Social Team, and the NGO community, organisations of key populations and other service providers to bring prevention and care programmes to the residents of

Mbabane.

Fikile Mathunjwa, AMICAALL and Social Services Manager echoed the CEO's words, saying in the 2019/2020 financial year, Council provided health care services to 954 people through outreach initiatives, promotions, and walk in or facility-based services.

Mathunjwa adds that during the financial year 184 children (under 5 years old) were immunised.

"The Council has 10 Social Cen-



tres which provide a range of direct services to orphaned and vulnerable children (OVC), whether living with HIV, orphaned by the condition or affected by HIV and AIDS in the greater Mbabane area.

Food support and health care services were provided to 1200 OVC in the social centres.

Through these social centres, children are able to access nutritious food, health services and assistance with diligent adherence for those who are enrolled for anti-retroviral treatment," Mathunjwa says.

"The children get two meals per day and per year and it costs Council about E200,000 to provide for the children."

Moreover, in collaboration with AMICAALL NCO through Insika Yakusasa Project, which is supported by PACT, 163 high school children were assisted with school fees, whilst 116 from primary schools were assisted with school uniform and 15 assisted with birth certificates.

In the same project 420 vulnerable families were assisted in forming savings groups.

Moreover, a database of the indigent within the municipality was developed with about 700 individuals meeting the criteria for assistance.

Meanwhile, Council also built a E80, 000 house of an indigent grandmother from Mncitsini as part of Council social corporate responsibility.

Mathunjwa explains that a unique characteristic of Mbabane City's healthcare and social services delivery system is that it is all activities are coordinated by a multistakeholder Municipal Health Team.

There is also a Service Directory which is updated regularly.

"With the CEO being the overall head, the Municipal Health Team comprises service providers working in the different spheres of healthcare and social services and is responsible for quality control and ensuring that there is no duplication, inefficiencies and turf battles among the organisations and their interventions," Mathunjwa says. Having a functional MHT and an updated service directory ensures that the municipality is adequately covered with health care

services that are affordable to all social levels of the Mbabane Community

Mathunjwa, says through Council's multisectoral, energetic and effective education campaign much has been achieved in influencing social behaviour change regarding HIV prevention and care and increase the knowledge base on Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR).

Special focus is on learners, and young women between 15 and 25 years old who have been found to be most vulnerable, partly because of intergenerational sexual relations and unequal relationships or are exposed to sexual violence.

There are also interventions targeting the gap between school leavers and young professionals who have just started working.

Some of the programmes include:

- HIV and AIDS awareness campaigns which involve distribution of condoms and ensuring easy access to same in all public spaces and buildings.
- Developing teen clubs, hosting school debates, spelling BEEs, poetry writing and health talks by role models and influencers from key population groups in schools.
- Campaigns against alcohol and substance abuse and its link to HIV and GBV
- Strengthen integration of GBV interventions in all HIV services, including integrating GBV in HIV risk reduction counselling, and HTS (update and implement Gender equity policy)
- Working with LCC and ensuring the membership has a gender equity champion and youth representative
- Formation of HIV support groups.

"Throughout the City, the Municipal Health Team is hard at work assisting families with coping mechanisms aimed at ensuring they respond adequately to GBV and protect others, especially in

light of the stresses that come with the COVID-19 restrictions," Mathunjwa says.

Council took a decision to strengthen primary health care and community-based health volunteer programmes to improve access to health care in the City of Mbabane.

The volunteers not paid a steady stipend or given any sustained incentives or standing allowances.

They operate under the most trying, demanding and heartrending conditions.

It is desirable that these hardworking patriots be properly incentivised, appreciated and paid for their services.

**Municipal Council
of Mbabane
CEO Gideon
Mhlongo**





Your Fresh Produce Partner



WASH
HANDS



DON'T
SHAKE



USE
DISINFECTANT



The Board of Directors, Management and Staff of the National Agricultural Marketing Board congratulate His Majesty King Mswati III for leading Eswatini to become the first African country to surpass the UN 2030 target of 95-95-95 in the fight against HIV/AIDS.

Eswatini Ending AIDS in Solidarity by 2022: A shared responsibility – WORLD AIDS DAY 2020

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HIV prevention and response for children and adolescents

HIV is one of the key pressing challenges affecting adolescents in the Kingdom of Eswatini.

There have been substantial investments in the HIV programme by both the Government and development partners over the last decade.

These investments have had a 44 percent reduction in new infections, but this progress has not been seen among the adolescent and young people population.

The issue of adolescents and HIV has previously not been a key focus on the national development agenda but is continuing to gain importance.

Adolescents' access to transformative behaviour change interventions, HIV testing, treatment and care therefore remains an ongoing challenge.

Eswatini has the highest HIV prevalence globally with a prevalence rate of 27 percent among the 15-59-year-old.

Although there have been declining incidence over the last 5 years in all age cohorts, the rate of new infections remains at 1.4 percent in the population aged 18 to 49 years, but with even higher levels among female young people aged 15- 24 years (1.9 percent) with young women 15-24 years 5 times more likely to be infected with HIV than their male counterparts.

"Young women are particularly affected, with 15.9% living with HIV in 2018 compared to 3.1% of their male counterparts. Early sexual debut and the high level of intergenerational sex between older men and young women helps to drive HIV transmission among this age group.

A comprehensive sex education/life skills education programme is being rolled out at secondary level, but as 70 percent of 13 to 15-year-olds (secondary-age pupils) are still at primary school, this is not meeting the needs of the target audience.

As a result of the above, an estimated 10,754 adolescents are living with HIV, out of whom, only 37 percent are on antiretroviral treatment (ART).

Solution

How is UNICEF Eswatini supporting HIV prevention and response for children and adolescents?

To meet the changing demands of the labour market and social dynamics, a holistic response is required for working with and for adolescents and young people to create healthier, safer, and wealthier lives.

UNICEF works with partners to improve adolescent HIV prevention and improve equitable prevention of and response to violence. Using innovative technology, UNICEF also works with adolescents and young people and their communities to improve knowledge on HIV and AIDS and the impact of violence, focusing on empowering adolescent girls and young women and promoting their participation, and adolescent boys and young men as agents of change. UNICEF supports the school-to-employment transition, including provision of vocational training are further keeping many adolescents and young people from achieving a better future and empowered livelihoods.



Sourced from UNICEF

A LIFE OF SELFLESS SERVICE

*When the list of Eswatini's passionate nation builders is finally compiled, the name **Khanyakwezwe Linda Mabuza** will be among them, for his selfless and immeasurable contribution to the country's torturous yet gallant response against HIV and AIDS. **Musa Ndlangamandla** tells us why.*

Mabuza has been National Executive Director (NED) of the National Emergency Response Council on HIV and AIDS (NERCHA) for 8 years, having joined the organisation close to two decades ago, and has learnt the value of servant leadership, sacrifice, excellence and kindness in the service of others.

Mabuza took up the baton from Dr Derek von Wissel, who was a cabinet minister and was later appointed to the helm of NERCHA, when it was established.

In the course of duty, he has had first hand experience of the evolution of HIV and AIDS and the dynamic nature of the country, and international community's response.

From the late 1980s when HIV and AIDS was viewed as a death sentence, and a blanket of fear and ignorance engulfed the nations of the world.

Mabuza was in the trenches fighting stigma, discrimination and hatred.

Back then, many leaders refused to even acknowledge the existence of HIV and AIDS, let alone the devastating impact it had on families and communities around the world. Mabuza spread a message of hope and resilience.

It can be said without fear of contradiction that Mabuza's input and specific, deliberate actions count for

so much in the Kingdom of Eswatini's remarkable achievement of becoming the first African state to meet UN's 2030 targets on HIV and AIDS.

Being the consummate team player, and reluctant hero that Mabuza is, he always insists that the response to HIV and AIDS, cannot, and should never be pigeonholed into the efforts of any single individual, but the entire community.

Since his appointment, as National Executive Director of NERCHA, Mabuza has worked tirelessly to improve partnerships internationally regionally and nationally for the HIV response.

Under his leadership, domestic resources for HIV have been maintained despite on-going economic hardships faced by the country.

Through his leadership, NERCHA developed its first NERCHA Corporate Strategy 2014-2018 and more recently, he facilitated the country's National Strategic Framework on HIV and AIDS 2018-2023 and the Eswatini HIV Investment Case, which prioritises five key programmes to end AIDS and achieve His Majesty King Mswati III's Vision for eliminating AIDS by 2022.

He is passionate



National Executive Director (NED) of the National Emergency Response Council on HIV and AIDS (NERCHA)



Prime Minister Ambrose Mandvulo Dlamini with NERCHA leadership

about improving the response targeting young girls who are most vulnerable to HIV infection in the country.

He provided leadership for the first ever Prevention Indaba which was a highly successful national forum to discuss HIV and its impact on young people.

The forum was attended by Mr Michel Sidibe the Executive Director of UNAIDS and the Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Eswatini.

Mabuza has more than 20 years' experience in the health sector, having worked in the Civil Society Sector and the United Nations in various capacities before joining NERCHA which is the National AIDS Coordinating Authority under the Prime Minister's Office.

Mabuza is a Public Health Specialist on International Health and Health Management and has been involved in development of Community Health Systems, Private Sector response, Youth and male involvement and currently involved with the test and treat program, PreP for key affected populations and Cash Transfer Studies in the Kingdom of Eswatini.

Mabuza holds a Master's degree in Public Health, B. A. Health Science Management, Diploma in General Nursing and Midwifery, Diploma in HIV and AIDS management, Certificate in Accounting, Certificate in Human Resource Management and a Certificate in HIV research.

He is fluent in English and a number of African languages. He is married and a loving father of two boys.



NERCHA employees during the Buganu festival



World AIDS Day shines spotlight on fight against HIV and AIDS

WORLD AIDS DAY

1 December 2020

RES Corporation recommits itself to fully support and play its part in strengthening the country's multipronged approach to prevent the spread of HIV, and protect those vulnerable to new infection.

HEALTH & WELLNESS IS OUR NUMBER 1 PRIORITY

We actively participate in health, wellness and safety activities to keep a healthy workforce, a healthy community and continued safe operations of our business, particularly under the COVID-19 induced **"new normal"**

The cooperation from all employees and the diligent action from our medical teams have been instrumental in achieving the positive results in the fight against COVID-19.

"If we keep fighting together, we will vanquish all challenges."

RES Managing Director Nick Jackson

