

MANUFACTURE OF AFFORDABLE LEATHER BALLS IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

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Context

All over the world children and young people love playing games and taking part in organised sport. That this is good for their physical and psychological health as well as their social well-being, nobody would question. But in sub-Saharan Africa these basic rights are denied the great majority because the imported balls and other sports equipment are completely unsuited to local conditions and are prohibitively expensive.

Project / Partners

The Alive & Kicking model is designed with dual aims:

1. Local Manufacture of Footballs/Revival of the African Leather Industry

Alive & Kicking is developing an infrastructure for making affordable, durable and repairable leather balls to supplement the imported non-repairable synthetic balls which are too expensive for the vast majority of Africans. Costing just under £4 to make, Alive & Kicking balls have the competitive edge in meeting consumer needs – durability and affordability. Initially production will focus on standard footballs, but we will soon manufacture balls suitable for younger children, and for other sports.

Agreement has been reached with Bata International Shoe Company to make available split leather in bulk for cutting into ball panels. These panels are then dispatched via Alive & Kicking headquarters in Nairobi to local stitching centres – in rural or disadvantaged areas – which assemble the final product. Each centre employs twenty workers, providing skills and employment to people who need it most. The establishment by Alive & Kicking of a framework for local manufacture of balls is thus a catalyst for grass roots economic development. In turn, the increased availability of affordable balls means that sport becomes more accessible to disadvantaged youth as their schools and sports clubs become better equipped.

2. Preventive Health Programmes

The AIDS epidemic in Africa has reached devastating proportions and the vulnerability of young people in particular to HIV infection is widely documented.

All Alive & Kicking balls carry HIV warnings. Further, it is the aim of Alive & Kicking to use any profit from the sale of balls to fund a sport-based preventive health programme. Health materials specifically targeting adolescents – including hard-hitting poster campaigns featuring sporting heroes – will focus on HIV/AIDS and other diseases of poverty such as malaria, and will be provided in conjunction with the sale of Alive & Kicking balls to any school or youth organisation.

Alive & Kicking also wishes to take advantage of the unique position held by sports coaches as a natural focal point for the discussion of health issues with youngsters, and will implement training programmes to this effect.

Partners

The Football Association, UK Sport, Bata International Shoe Company, BBC World Service, Department for International Development (DfID). In Nairobi the project enjoys the support of the Kenyan Ministry of Gender, Sports, Culture and Social Services and the National AIDS Control Council. Locally-based development agencies such as UNICEF and OXFAM are equally supportive. In the UK, the Minister for Sports, Richard Caborn, has given Alive & Kicking his personal backing, and the FA and UK Sport are strong supporters of our efforts.

Results

Five months into the project and three stitching centres in Nairobi, two in deprived areas, are already producing 600 balls per week made of reinforced leather, which – if punctured – can easily be mended. By the end of the first year of production Alive & Kicking will have made close to 50,000 balls.

The standard ball has been approved by the FA and by Sven-Göran Eriksson, the England manager, and was inspected by Jerome Champagne and by Dr. Joseph Mifsud of UEFA when they visited Nairobi. Major companies and development agencies are already buying the balls in bulk.

Confirmed large orders include:

<i>Corporate Entities</i>	<i>No</i>
General Motors	500
Safaricom Foundation	850
Nairobi Bottlers (Coca Cola)	1,000
East African Safari Rally	1,200
DHL	550
<u>Youth/Health Agencies</u>	
MYSA	250
Red Cross	360
UNICEF	3,000

The Alive & Kicking project has also attracted media attention. Even before we had started production Reuters commissioned a short film that went out to seventeen African countries.

Discussion/Implications

Alive & Kicking was set up in response to a year-long feasibility study on the acute shortage of affordable balls and sports equipment in East Africa. It is thus our goal to develop counterpart operations in other African countries, which face the same challenges as those we are addressing in Kenya. We have already received requests to establish stitching cooperatives in Malawi, Zimbabwe, Zambia, South Sudan and South Africa.

South Africa is of particular significance in the expansion of our project as the host of the World Cup in 2010, representing a continent whose population is largely deprived of opportunities to play ball games and which is in dire need of assistance in the battle against AIDS. This will be a unique opportunity to highlight our project and emphasize the importance of equitable access to affordable and suitable sports equipment, such as footballs, if we are to ensure that vast populations are not excluded from the power of sport.

Alive & Kicking is a working example of how the inherent links between sport, international development, health and education can be exploited to radically improve the lives of, potentially, millions of people.

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