



Mobilising men all over the country to join in and Support each other: A brother for life

By Kristin Palitza

Abstract

Brothers for Life is a National Campaign targeting men over the age of 30. The initiative has been initiated by Johns Hopkins Health and Education in South Africa (JHHESA), Sonke Gender Justice (Sonke), South African National Aids Council (SANAC) and other key stakeholders. It is aimed at addressing the risks associated with having multiple and concurrent partnerships, men's limited involvement in fatherhood, lack of knowledge of HIV status by many, low levels of testing and disclosure, and insufficient health seeking behaviours in general.

Focusing on the positive

South African women and girls face some of the highest levels of violence in the world. 1 in every 4 South African men admits to have raped a woman. That's bad news – but the good news is that 3 out of 4 South African men have not been violent.

Undeniably, it is men who commit the majority of acts of domestic and sexual violence. But many men and boys are strongly opposed to this violence and feel it has no place in a democratic South Africa.

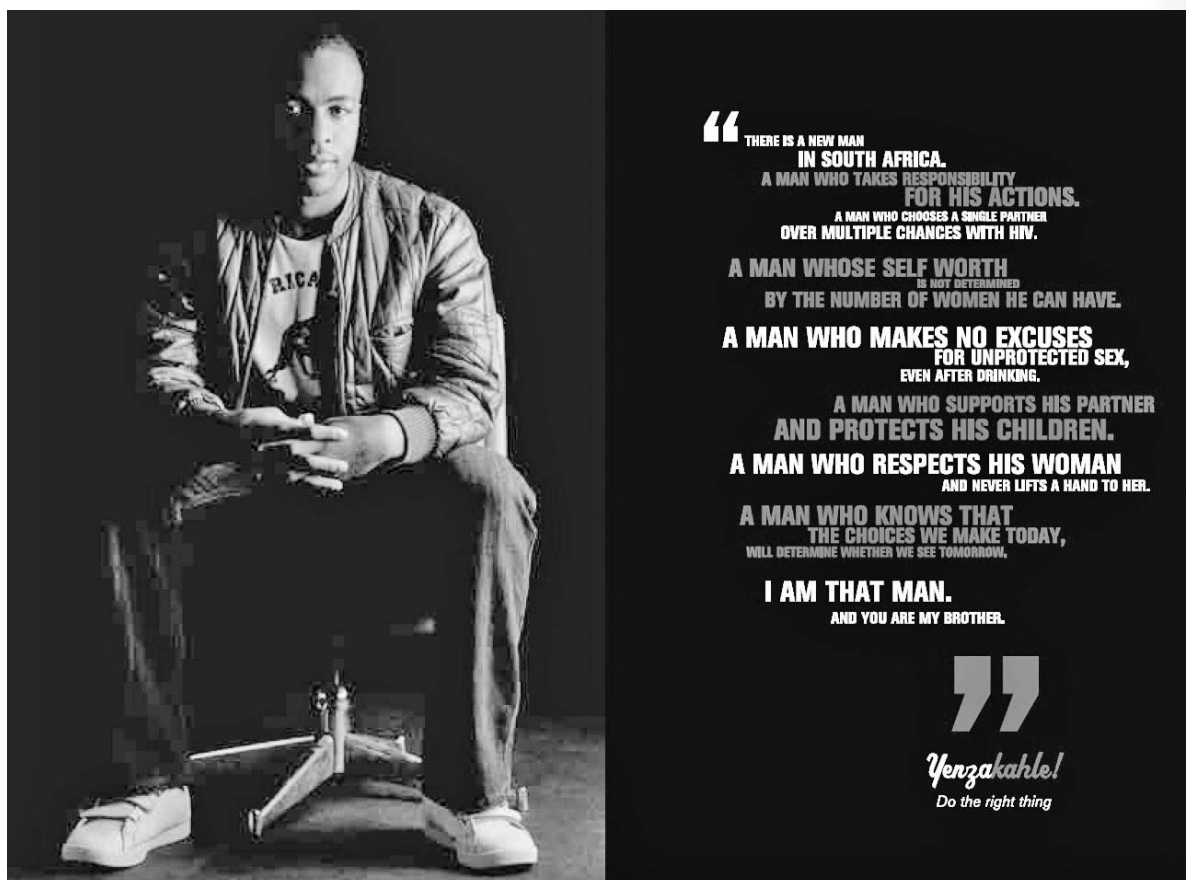
At the same time, there is a growing understanding among men that they have a critical role to play in addressing the gender norms, roles and relations underlying the HIV pandemic. Men are starting to recognise the vital role they can play in improving their own health and the health of their families.

A national men's campaign, called Brothers for Life, is now encouraging them to stand up and show other

men how to make the right choice. It mobilises men from all over the country to start working together to build a stronger and healthier society. It shows men how their choices can either help or harm their health – and how these choices can then help or harm their community and country.

The five-year campaign was launched by Johns Hopkins Health and Education in South Africa (JHHESA), the Sonke Gender Justice Network (Sonke), the South African Department of Health (DoH), the South African National AIDS Council (SANAC) and other key stakeholders in the country.

“Brother” is a word that resonates among men across South Africa – no matter what language they speak – “mfowethu.” “bra,” “broer” or “bru.” Brothers for Life capitalises on this and intends to wants strengthen the sense of brotherhood among men and encourage them to reach out to each other. The



campaign encourages them to support each other to project their own and women’s health and well-being.

“The campaign is based on the theory of positive normativity. Instead of focusing on what’s wrong, Brothers for Life builds on the positive,” explains Richard Delate, country programme director for communications at Johns Hopkins Health Education in South Africa (JHEESA), the strategy behind the campaign.

“If you focus on the negative, you create a sense that what is wrong is normal, and that can make people feel fatalistic,” he adds. “The Brothers for Life approach wants to engage those who are already positive examples and turn them into role models.”

For example, the often-quoted statistic that 30% of South African men are violent could be interpreted

in a way that highlights the fact that 70% of men are not. “We want to get those 70% to take responsibility, stand up and proudly talk about what they are doing right,” says Delate.

Men are central to preventing violence against women. More and more South African men are choosing kindness over cruelty and harmony over hostility. They have realised that an equal, respectful relationship with a woman is far more satisfying than one rooted in domination and violence. “If we want to induce change, we need to talk about the norms and values that underlie society. People are embedded within systems that inform their behaviour,” explains Delate.

Brothers for Life provides men with knowledge, skills and tools to contribute to a just and democratic South Africa in which men and women alike have access to health and dignity. The campaign asserts unapologetically that every man in South Africa has

a choice. Either he can choose to abuse the women in his life physically and emotionally. Or he can choose to protect their health and wellbeing – and his own.

“Men have to be partners. If you don’t involve men, the struggle against HIV and gender inequality will be futile,” says Sonke deputy director Desmond Lesejane. “Right now, there are not many programmes and services for men above 30, yet male HIV prevalence peaks between the ages of 30 and 39.”

Health and HIV are a critical focus of the campaign, because men have a critical role to play in addressing the gender norms, roles and relations underlying the HIV/ AIDS pandemic. To achieve this, the USAID and PEPFAR- funded campaign will address the risks associated with having multiple and concurrent partnerships, men’s limited involvement in fatherhood and in meeting the needs of orphans and vulnerable children, low levels of HIV testing and disclosure, condom usage, male sexual and reproductive health, including circumcision, and male involvement in pregnancy.

The campaign consists of four main components – awareness raising through South African mass media, community mobilisation through local organisations that work with men, advocacy for more and better services for men, and a fact-packed men’s health toolkit to help men and boys take action.

Launching the campaign

Until very recently, most efforts to involve men in responding to HIV and AIDS have been limited in scale and impact. Brothers for Life wants to change this.

The campaign positions itself within the policy framework of the South African Department of Health’s (DoH) National Strategic Plan 2007-2011, which recognises the need for a concerted effort around male sexual and reproductive health, and hopes to contribute to the national policy around male

circumcision, which is currently being developed by the DoH and SANAC.

The Brothers for Life campaign was launched on 29 August 2009 in KwaMashu, a township outside of Durban in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN), South Africa’s province with the highest HIV infection rate. More than 10,000 men and women from in and around the area attended the event – a clear sign of the need for a national men’s health campaign.

“The responses from people were amazing that day. Many said the campaign is something positive, something they have been waiting for,” says Sonke One Man Can (OMC) national manager Nyanda Khanyile. “Lots of men came to us during the launch to tell us they want to get involved and asked what they can do.”

Khanyile points out that many South African men over the age of 30 have previously not been directly addressed by HIV and gender equality campaigns, which are mostly targeted at youth. “Now they have something that speaks to them, that they can identify with.”

Numerous national and local government officials have announced their support of Brothers for Life. South African deputy president Kgalema Motlanthe, deputy health minister Dr Molefi Sefularo, DoH director general Thami Mseleku and SANAC deputy chair Mark Heywood gave speeches during the launch, in which they pledged to provide their assistance. The speeches were broadcast live by Ukhozi fm, an iziZulu radio station with more than five million listeners.

“When the speakers pledged that they will be a brother for life during the launch, they made the campaign part of the national debate,” believes Khanyile. The provincial governments of the Western Cape and KwaZulu-Natal committed to actively support the roll out of the campaign, while and various international aid organisations, including UNAIDS, UNICEF and UNIFEM, promised to back Brothers for Life.

The campaign also found active support from both SANAC’s men’s and women’s sector, which noted that, for far too long, issues of sexual and reproductive health have been directed at mainly at women. “Because there are hardly any health services that are particularly targeted at men, most men take little care of their own and their family’s health,” says SANAC men’s sector chair Bob Phato.

“We hope the campaign will change men’s mentality by mobilising men all over the country to join in and support each other.” SANAC stressed the importance of the campaign to encourage men to actively take up the challenge of curbing the rate of new HIV infections, by understanding their own bodies, having safe sex, treating Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs), testing for HIV, planning pregnancy, supporting their partner through pregnancy and being responsible parents.

“Currently men are not visible. Both men and women need to be educated about health-related issues and both need to seek health care services. That’s the sign of an equal relationship,” explains SANAC women’s section chair Nomfundo Eland.

She believes the Brothers for Life campaign is an important vehicle to involve men throughout the country to pay more attention to health and become aware of gender inequalities: “Men need to reach out to other men to mentor each other to grow a generation of men who don’t abuse and who take responsibility.”

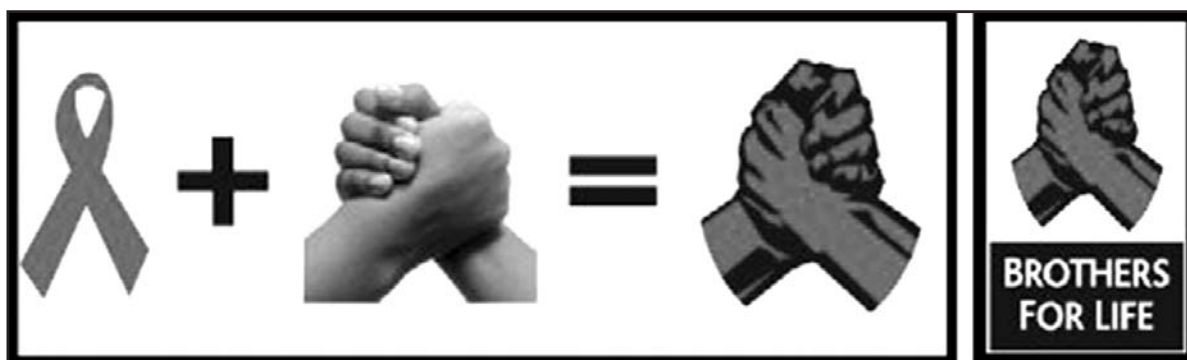
The campaign has also been endorsed by well-known South African actor and playwright John Kani, who called Brothers for Life “the most important statement to make in South Africa today.”

A key indicator for people’s early commitment to Brothers for Life was the fact that more than 400 people decided to test for HIV that day – the majority of whom were men. “This was an amazing achievement. We were very impressed,” says JHEESA programme manager, communications, Mandla Ndlovu.

Research and strategy development

Much thought, planning and research has gone into developing the Brothers for Life messages and approach. The campaign is based on the recognition that an individual’s decisions are influenced by his or her social networks, communities (including traditional and spiritual leaders) and the broader political and societal environment. Those can either facilitate or impede change, explains Delate.

Research was conducted between October 2008 and February 2009, including a literature review by Sonke, qualitative research to understand men as an audience by JHESA, Futures Group and others, as well as research on behavioural drivers of HIV on community level by Health Development Africa (HDA) in four high HIV prevalence districts – Lejweleputswa (Free State); Bojanala (North West); Ethekewini (KZN) and Merafong (Gauteng).



Background information was also provided by research with taxi operators and commuters in a high transit area in Gauteng and KZN and conversations with traditional health practitioners in KZN on constructions of masculinity and male circumcision.

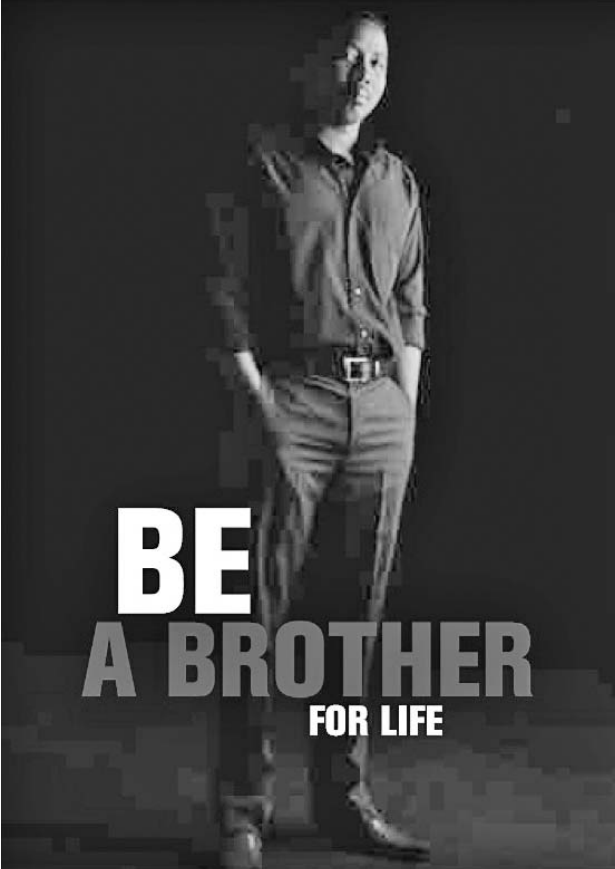
A 2008 Consensus Building Meeting, which was attended by 30 major stakeholders, including JHHESA, Sonke, SANAC, DoH, Perinatal Health and Research Unit (PHRU), JPHIEGO further informed the campaign strategy.

Sonke's literature review on men, gender, health, HIV and AIDS in South Africa shows that although much good work has been done to engage men in efforts to reduce gender inequality, most programmes have been small in scale and have limited sustainability. Most focused on running workshops and community education events. Rare exceptions, like Soul City in South Africa, have been national in scale or reached

large numbers of men. The findings indicate that there is potential for far deeper and more wide-ranging change if existing efforts are scaled up and replicated in more sites.

The review also found that those campaigns that have achieved results so far have shown that many men are willing to help promote gender equality and that this can improve both women's and men's health. This suggests that men need to be brought on board to stop the spread of HIV/AIDS and enhance the physical and psychological health of all people.

In addition to this, the surveys conducted by HDA gave important insights into how to work with communities on HIV-related issues. The findings were used to develop advocacy messages, activities, interventions and targets against which community changes can be measured over time.



**BE
A BROTHER
FOR LIFE**

**A MAN
WHO CHOOSES A SINGLE PARTNER
OVER MULTIPLE CHANCES
WITH HIV.**
Being someone's sugar daddy or undercover lover can place you and your loved ones at higher risk of HIV. Having a single partner reduces your risk of HIV infection. Make the right choices today, to make sure that you and your loved ones see tomorrow.

**A MAN
WHO MAKES NO EXCUSES
FOR UNPROTECTED SEX,
EVEN AFTER DRINKING ALCOHOL.**
Make sure you are always in control of your actions, drink responsibly. Too much alcohol may result in you having sex outside your relationship, and is likely to result in incorrect and inconsistent use of condoms. You also expose yourself and your loved ones to many dangers, including HIV, car accidents and you may harm your health. Do not put your wellbeing at risk because of alcohol abuse.

**A MAN
WHO SUPPORTS HIS PARTNER
AND PROTECTS
HIS CHILDREN.**
Support your partner during her pregnancy. Don't be afraid to be seen at a clinic or a hospital with your partner. Choose to test for HIV as it can protect the wellbeing of your family. If you and your partner are living with HIV you can still protect your unborn child from HIV.

The survey showed, for example, that there is a consistent proportion (about 14%) of men who feel that they cannot be faithful to their partners. About 30% of men, but only 7% of women, said they had more than one partner in the past twelve months. Most people who had more than one sexual partner, had two partners (17%) in the preceding year, but 12% of men had more than two partners. Only 4% of men had four or more sexual partners in the last year.

About half of people who had multiple concurrent partnerships (MCP) described them as casual. Interestingly, the casual relationships were not once-off events, but rather 80% involved regular sexual relationships over a period of time.

“Unlike qualitative research, our study found that MCP was not considered normative or acceptable,” says HDA managing director Dr Saul Johnson. “MCP is not as common as people assume and masculinity is not necessarily defined by the number of partners. Brothers for Life can build on that.”

There is, however, a consistent and quite large minority of people who have more than one partner, and the challenge for the Brothers for Life campaign will be in engaging these individuals with messages that encourage them to use condoms correctly and consistently and to reduce their total number of sexual partners.

The HDA study also found that, despite the fact that male circumcision rates are low in South Africa, there seems to be high acceptance of the benefits of male circumcision in the surveyed communities, which means that there could be wide-ranging acceptance of programmes promoting the practice.

“A receptive environment is a good starting point for the campaign. It shows that there is a willingness to receive the messages of Brothers for Life,” believes Johnson. Another important aspect that was highlighted by the survey was the strong link between high alcohol intake and HIV risk taking behaviour. Alcohol increases the risk of HIV infection

due to the strong connection between alcohol use and high-risk sexual behaviour, such as having multiple sexual partners or failing to use a condom during sex.

Many South Africans, particularly men, are at risk because ideas of manhood put pressure on them to drink to keep up with their peers and show their masculinity, and worldwide, many more men than women fall sick or die because of alcohol-related diseases. “These important findings also informed the campaign,” explains Johnson.

Media awareness campaign

Under the motto “educating while entertaining,” key messages around men’s health, HIV testing, violence and abuse, drugs and alcohol, condom use, family planning, parenting and male circumcision have been developed for the Brothers for Life mass media campaign.

The campaign is aired on local television and radio stations and will be shown on various sports channels around the time of the 2010 Soccer World Cup. In addition, a drama series on local television and radio stations will promote responsible male behaviour, while district and community radio stations will broadcast talk shows on men’s health. So far, Brothers for Life television advertisements have been broadcast since the launch of the campaign on all four public television channels in South Africa (SABC1, SABC2, SABC3 and eTV) as well as on all local language and commercial stations of the SABC.

That South Africans have a keen interest to find out more about the campaign is shown by the fact that almost 6,000 people sms’ed ‘Please Call Me’ messages to the Brothers for Life sms line, and the campaign’s website, www.brothersforlife.org received 45,000 hits and had more than 1,000 unique visitors within the first week after its launch.

Young men and boys in South Africa grow up exposed

to some of the highest levels of HIV, domestic violence and rape anywhere in the world. They also experience and witness high levels of violent crime. They hear many damaging messages about what it means to 'be a man' – including that they have to 'be tough', 'be in control', have lots of sexual partners – and that they must never ask for help. They need role models and be taught alternative ways of living.

"The media campaign reaches out to men with messages like 'be responsible', 'respect your partner', 'take care of your health', 'be a parent to your children', to give just a few examples," explains Lesejane. "It asks men to be a brother, to be there, show solidarity and connect."

Within the first week of launching Brothers for Life, campaign staff gave eleven radio interviews in Xhosa, English, Setswana and Zulu, to a variety of stations, including: SAfm, Metro FM, East Coast Radio, Ukhozi FM, Gagazi FM, Umholobo Wenene, Heart, Kaya FM, Lesedi FM and Thobela, Motsweding).

Live reads took place on Metro FM's Kevin Maistry Show and 5FM's DJ Fresh Show, while East Coast Radio, 5FM and Metro FM put up information about the Brothers for Life campaign on their websites. SABC Morning Live and eTV Sunrise discussed Brothers for Life during their television programmes.

In addition, ten newspapers reported on the launch of the campaign, including Isolezwe, Citizen, Business Day, Daily News, Sunday World, Die Burger, Volksbald, Beeld, PlusNews, Health-e, Daily Sun and Sowetan.

Social mobilisation

To link the mass media campaign to community level initiatives, the social mobilisation component of the Brothers for Life campaign will be rolled out in five high HIV prevalence districts in South Africa, including Thabo Mofutsanyane in the Free State, Ilembe and

Zululand in KZN, Bojanala in North West and Ukhahlamba in the Eastern Cape. Later on, the social mobilisation programme will be expanded to 13 additional districts.

"The social mobilisation component is the interpersonal aspect of the campaign, which will be driven by men and women within communities," explains Ndlovu the importance of grassroots involvement. "It's based on the thinking that if you want to light a good fire, you light it from the bottom, not from the top."

Instead of implementing an entirely new programme, Brothers for Life will collaborate with existing community-based organisations and piggyback on existing initiatives in the different districts. "We are planning to tap into forums that are already active, building on what is already there, so that we can roll out the campaign very broadly throughout the country," says Ndlovu.

Sonke will develop training materials on key issues, such as men's sexual and reproductive health, parenting, drug and alcohol abuse, violence against women, gender roles, HIV and STIs that can be used by different communities throughout the country.

"We will train trainers in existing community organisations who can pass on the messages," says Lesejane. "That way, brothers will help each other to deal with issues." This, he believes, will enable men to change the negative image of men as violators to a positive image of men as responsible citizens.

Key partner organisations in the five priority districts include Mothusimpilo, operating in Merafong, Gauteng, Lighthouse Foundation in Madibeng, North West, Lesedi Lechabile in Lejweleputswa, Free State, as well as The Turntable Trust and The Valley Trust in KwaZulu-Natal.

They will reach out to people through community gatherings, such as imbizos, entertainment, door-to-door mobilisation, sport events, activities in churches, community dialogues and events in

political wards. Apart from community organisations, activities will also target influential stakeholders, such as traditional leaders, religious leaders, taxi operators and tavern owners.

Advocacy

Part of the Brothers for Life advocacy component are community dialogues to engage people in conversation around the key drivers of the epidemic and to develop community action plans to respond to HIV/AIDS on community-level.

Most importantly, Brothers for Life advocates for the revision and strengthening of a men’s health framework within the national health policy, provision of male- friendly services in primary health care settings, as well as for health services specifically aimed at reducing the risk of new HIV infections.

Brothers for Life will work with service providers, particularly with the national health department, to improve health services for men and make them more patient- friendly. “We need better services for men. Otherwisewe mobilise all these men, but they will still have nowhere to go to,” stresses Lesejane.

In addition, prominent traditional, political, religious and business leaders will be called upon to lead the advo- cacy component of the campaign and speak to their communities about social constructions of men and male responsibilities.

Toolkit

An in-depth men’s health toolkit has been developed to support the campaign. It addresses a wide variety of issues affecting men, including:

- Sex and Sexuality
- Constructs of masculinity
- Fatherhood, including communication, prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV (PMTCT), orphans and vulnerable children, etc.
- Voluntary counselling and testing (VCT), including couple counselling
- Risk behaviour
- STIs
- Prostate cancer
- Alcohol and substance abuse
- Gender-based violence

The toolkit is designed to be a reference guide – a ‘book of life’ that men can consult to learn more about men’s health, sexual health, healthy relationships, pregnancy, fatherhood and more. Men can also use the practical tools within this kit to spread the Brothers for Life phi- losophy to their friends, colleagues and communities.

It will be used to help Brothers for Life partners, organisations, community leaders, traditional leaders, religious leaders and other interested parties to spread the campaign messages.

Yenzakahle! Do the right thing!

Writers Bio

Kristin Palitza has been working as a journalist and editor in South Africa, the US and Germanyfor the past 15 years. The focus of her work is on poverty, socio-politics, health/HIV, gender and environmental issues. She has written for a wide variety of publications, including the Mail & Guardian, The Weekender and Inter Press Service (IPS).