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SPOTLIGHT ON MISSION

Positive stories. Valuable work.

Health Partners working to save the world's most vulnerable people

Adam Kroeker
ChristianWeek Staff

A not-for-profit relief and development organization is taking the maternal and child health strategies it has been learning in Afghanistan into developing countries around the world.

In late 2010, Health Partners International of Canada (HPIC) decided it was time to focus on health care for mothers and children under the age of five. HPIC president Glen Shepherd calls them "the most vulnerable people in the world."

"Part of the problem with maternal death," says Shepherd, "is that when the mother dies, the child to whom she is giving birth (if the child survives) is an orphan and any older siblings become orphans."

"The mother is the glue, the bond of the society—and the consequences of the death of the mother are just devastating."

The World Health Organization estimates 1,000 women die every day from causes related to pregnancy and childbirth. More than 80 per cent of these deaths are preventable simply by access to basic supplies that can stop hemorrhage and infection.

That is why a shocking 99 per cent of all maternal deaths take

place in developing countries. HPIC, whose basic mission to increase access to medicine and to improve health in these parts of the world, saw this as a glaring need where they could make a difference.

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The organization is now halfway through a five-year project in Afghanistan, funded by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). Here, HPIC has found that the most effective way to provide care is to work with the systems that are already in place. Its field office in Kabul is entirely staffed by local Afghan professionals, and it has formed an official partnership with the Afghan Ministry of Public Health.

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Spots

- Health Partners International of Canada (HPIC) began as a one-man operation in 1990.
- The organization's first medical response was to an earthquake in northwestern Iran; a shipment of \$1.2 million in donated supplies was sent from five pharmaceutical partners.
- HPIC is a not-for-profit relief and development organization that works through partnerships, without discrimination and according to Christian

values, to increase access to medicine and improve health in the developing world.

- HPIC has helped vulnerable communities in more than 110 countries, from Afghanistan to Zimbabwe and beyond.
- In 2011 alone, HPIC provided nearly 3,700,000 treatments.
- \$1 donated to HPIC is multiplied to provide at least \$10 of medicine in the field.

Spotlight

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The same development strategy will be used as

HPIC takes its medicine programs into Africa. It is starting work there this summer, bringing a program called ALARM (Advanced Labour And Risk Management) to the country of Zimbabwe.

HPIC will bring Canadian medical professionals to train Zimbabwean doctors and midwives who are working under an organization called ZACH, the Zimbabwean Association of Church Hospitals. These church hospitals are often the only reliable health care available outside of the cities—and over 75 per cent of the country's entire population lives in rural areas.

"This program would also train village women to become birth attendants and help," says Shepherd, who emphasizes the dire situation of giving birth in an isolated village. "A mother can go to the witch doctor, or fend for herself."

HPIC has also been working with The Salvation Army and an organization called Visionledd to develop a basic health kit that can be given to these rural women. The kit will contain things like multivitamins, food supplements, and iron tablets that will help both mothers and young children to



survive.

After Zimbabwe, HPIC is hoping that the program will take root in the Democratic Republic of

the Congo, Tanzania, Kenya, and Uganda.

"We can't change the entire world," says Shepherd, "but we

can change those parts of the world where we have serious partnerships—and that's what we try to do."

"Upcycled" Canadian clothing helps African entrepreneurs

Monica deRegt
Special to ChristianWeek

HAMILTON, ON — Alicia Looyenga is on a mission to help people who are less fortunate than herself through simply re-using the extra "stuff" in our world. In her new business, Little Woolly Mama, Looyenga makes and sells clothing and accessories from "upcycled" woollen sweaters and other used materials.

The proceeds from the sales of her creations are donated to a revolving loan program with Partners Worldwide that supports women entrepreneurs in West Africa. Partners Worldwide is an extension of the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee. Its mission is working toward poverty elimination through job creation.

A member of Immanuel Christian Reformed Church in Hamilton, Looyenga first felt inspired to make and sell her

designs when missionaries Renita and Bob Reid did a presentation in her church about women working in the textile industry in Africa. They encouraged other people to consider partnering with them.

"I felt that this was something I would love to be involved with," says Looyenga. However, as a busy mom of three homeschooled children, she couldn't pursue the idea.

But a few months later, Looyenga heard the news that Bob Reid had died suddenly from a pulmonary embolism (blood clot in the lungs). It was the same condition Looyenga had survived following the birth of her fourth child. Because of this tragic connection, Looyenga felt pulled to further pursue her idea to support the ministry the Reids were involved in.

Looyenga started Little Woolly Mama in the spring of 2009, and began making her clothing and donating funds to Partners Worldwide. Recently, she also



5-year-old Anneke Looyenga models an upcycled woollen hat created by her mother, Alicia Looyenga.

Courtesy Monica deRegt

entered into a mentorship program with Partners, where she has been matched up with a woman named Felicia from Ghana, who runs a recycling business of her own, using textiles.

Looyenga says she loves the work of making new creations out of already existing materials, especially because the end result is a

benefit for those who buy it and for those who receive the money from the proceeds.

"We are blessed for the sole purpose of blessing others," she says.

Little Woolly Mama's line of clothing can be purchased through the Facebook site of that name or at the Button Pushers store on Locke Street in Hamilton.