

# Bulungula Incubator

COVID-19 Emergency Response  
in Rural Eastern Cape, South Africa

## Document Outline

2020 BI COVID-19  
Emergency Response  
recap

2021 BI COVID-19  
Emergency response  
strategy

Emergency management  
of COVID-19 infection  
outbreaks and waves

Vaccination education,  
readiness campaign, and  
roll-out support

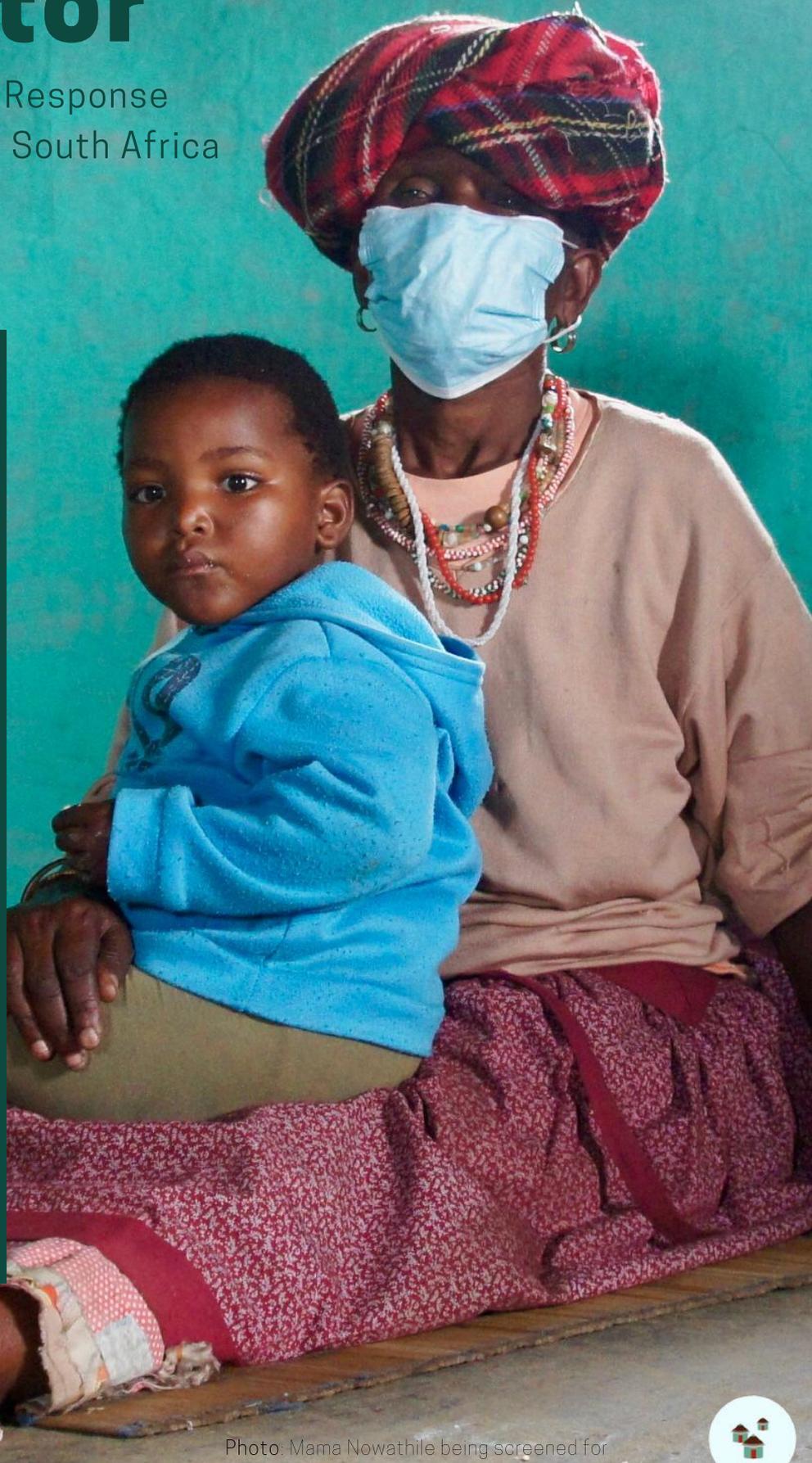


Photo: Mama Nowathile being screened for  
COVID-19 with granddaughter in Ngileni Village.



## BACKGROUND

The Bulungula Incubator (BI) is a non-profit organisation located along the Wild Coast of the Eastern Cape, one of the poorest and most remote regions in South Africa, with no running water, electricity, or adequate road infrastructure, and limited access to healthcare.

Furthermore, we have a high concentration of persons living with chronic illnesses and compromised immune systems, making them particularly vulnerable to COVID-19.



Photo: Nomsa Sipatana, community health worker, during home visit in Nqileni village

## 2020 BI COVID-19 EMERGENCY RESPONSE

In immediate response to the COVID-19 Pandemic, the Bulungula Incubator implemented a comprehensive COVID readiness strategy that kept our community members safe, distributed vital information about the virus, and provided our children with home learning and catchup strategies from March 2020 through the first wave in June and July, as summarised: [Bulungula Incubator COVID Rapid response Update](#).

At the end of November 2020, the second wave hit our community, with high infection rates (approx. 37% of those tested) across the four villages supported by the Bulungula Incubator. However, the rates of severe COVID-19 symptoms among elderly community members was low, with limited need for hospitalisation, and very few deaths. We implemented an immediate response, as summarised: [Second wave COVID-19 Emergency response report 4 December 2020 - 8 January 2021](#).



# 2021 BI COVID-19 EMERGENCY RESPONSE STRATEGY

In early December 2020, The Bulungula Incubator implemented an emergency response plan to the second COVID-19 wave in South Africa. When the second wave abated, we adjusted our plan as appropriate with continued surveillance.

We will continue to respond to any waves and outbreaks of infection until COVID-19 vaccines are available in BI communities.

## EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT OF COVID-19 INFECTION WAVES/OUTBREAKS

### Coronavirus Transmission Prevention Education & Support

- Community health workers (Nomakhayas), Bulungula Community Radio (BCR) and Community WhatsApp groups educate about ‘elderly protection’, including creating an isolation hut within a rural homestead, and other transmission prevention strategies
- Distribute masks to all elderly and educate on proper use.
- COVID-19 alert communication campaigns on BCR to strengthen community adherence to non-pharmacological interventions (NPIs), especially when interacting with elderly



Photo: community member prepping to be tested for COVID-19



Photo: Nomsa Sipatana, Nomakhaya, during home visit in Nqileni village



## Screen Community Members for COVID-19 Symptoms

- Nomakhayas conduct daily COVID-19 screenings (temperature, oxygen levels, self-reported symptoms) on rotational visits to all 650 community homesteads, prioritising households with elderly and vulnerable community members
- Nqileni Health Point Nurse identifies and tracks all community members who visit with COVID-19 symptoms
- All community members with COVID-19 symptoms are offered testing and educated about the importance of isolation



Photo: [left] Dr. Tom Boyles conducting COVID-19 PCR testing for symptomatic community member with [right] Bongezwa Sontundu, BI Health & Nutrition Programme Manager.

## Provide Community-Based COVID-19 PCR Testing to All Symptomatic Community Members

- Nqileni Health Point conducts daily COVID-19 PCR testing for symptomatic community members, prioritising elderly and vulnerable community members
- If community member is unable to walk, we organise and provide transport to the Nqileni Health Point
- We continue to conduct COVID-19 PCR testing at the Bulungula College and other community venues where there is an outbreak

## Providing Transport to Feeder Hospitals for Community Members with Severe COVID-19 Symptoms

- The BI funds trained local taxi drivers to provide emergency ambulance services for community members with severe COVID-19 symptoms to feeder hospitals



## Notification and Management of Super Spreader Events in Communities

- Community health workers and other key community stakeholders inform the BI of potential super spreader events
- The BI Provides one-on-one education to event hosts, to stop unnecessary super-spreader events
- In the case of funerals, the BI provides one-on-one education to the family of the deceased about the government regulations on funerals, coronavirus safety requirements, provides masks (for those attending the funeral without a mask), and sanitiser for visitors during the mourning period and at the funeral



Photo: Bulungula College Knot Tying Ceremony, advised by the BI on how to safely manage event.

## COVID-19 testing & symptoms monitored through e-tracking

- The BI captures all symptomatic, positive, and negative community members daily, and geolocates households on our electronic COVID-19 tracker dashboard
- Utilise the data to inform us about localised outbreaks for intensified screening and support



## Continue to Co-ordinate and Adapt COVID-19 Outbreak Response

- Review all screening and testing data on our COVID-19 tracker dashboard daily, including following up any missing data points.
- Review community response to interventions through debriefing and communication sessions with Community Health workers via WhatsApp and in-person meetings
- Conduct weekly BI COVID-19 emergency team meetings to review the response, and make appropriate adjustments for implementation.



Photo: Nomsa Sipatana, Nomakhaya, doing COVID-19 screening in Nqileni village.



Photo: Nurse Nonhlanhla Shoji with community member at Nqileni Health Point.

## VACCINATION COMMUNITY EDUCATION, CAMPAIGN READINESS AND CAMPAIGN ROLL OUT SUPPORT

Vaccination coverage of nationally prioritised target groups is essential. Unfortunately, there is a lot of negative social media around COVID-19 vaccines, with little access to information in isiXhosa, and rural context. Furthermore, our communities have had very little exposure to adult vaccination campaigns, contributing to vaccine hesitancy.

We are pro-actively educating communities around vaccination and debunking incorrect information. We are also advocating for vaccination in rural locations, and preparing our vaccination campaign to support the phased vaccination roll-out plan by the SA Department of Health.



## Vaccination Community Education

- Developed [vaccination literacy materials](#) in isiXhosa with context appropriate illustrations
- Use the vaccination literacy materials as teaching tools for Nomakhayas to use during home visits
- Use the vaccination literacy materials as scripts for DJs to broadcast on the BCR



Photo: Veliswa Dyubhele, Nomakhaya, using Vaccine Literacy tool to educate community member on the COVID-19 vaccination.

## BI Vaccination Campaign Readiness

- Working with civil society networks to push for distribution of vaccines in deep rural areas for priority target groups as national phases are implemented.
  - Coverage in news: [Financial Times](#), [Daily Maverick](#)
- Set up cold chain (solar, battery, and fridge) at the Nqileni Health Point for required vaccination storage, if necessary

## Support Delivery of Vaccination Campaigns by Government in our Area

- We continue to offer support to government and any implementing partners for vaccine roll-out in our feeder areas; including providing community venues, providing lists of community members eligible for vaccination, informing communities of vaccination campaign details, and supporting the provision of vaccines on our area.

