

CASE STUDY

Share the Warmth & the Tutu Anti-Xenophobia Campaign

Celebrities for Humanity (CFH) • Cape Town, South Africa • 2008

Partners: TBWA Hunt Lascaris • Protea Hotels • Delta Airlines • Archbishop Desmond Tutu

Founded and led by Sharm Pillay, Celebrities for Humanity

200+

Blankets distributed

400+

Children at Tutu event

10+

Celebrity ambassadors

National

IOL & SAPA news coverage

May 2008: xenophobic attacks displace thousands of foreign nationals across South Africa. Masiphumelele becomes the first community to publicly apologise to and repatriate displaced residents. CFH organises Archbishop Tutu's visit to honour them.

BACKGROUND – TWO CAMPAIGNS, ONE STORY

In May 2008, South Africa experienced a wave of xenophobic violence that displaced thousands of foreign nationals from their homes and communities. The attacks began in Johannesburg and spread across the country. Masiphumelele, a small township near Fish Hoek in Cape Town, was different: within two days of the attacks, community leaders publicly apologised to their foreign neighbours and personally went door-to-door to ask them to return. It was a remarkable act of moral leadership in a moment of national crisis.

CFH was already running its 'Share the Warmth' blanket drive in the Western Cape – collecting and distributing blankets to homeless citizens, street children, orphanages, and displaced foreign nationals. When Masiphumelele extended the olive branch, CFH saw an opportunity to do something more significant: to publicly celebrate and reward the community's act of humanity, and to use that moment to encourage other South African communities to do the same.

CFH brought Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu – South Africa's most beloved moral voice – to Masiphumelele to honour the community. What began as a blanket drive became a nationally covered statement about what South African humanity could look like.

PHASE 1 – SHARE THE WARMTH BLANKET DRIVE

Launched in the Western Cape in May 2008, the blanket drive was a zero-government-funded initiative to collect and distribute blankets to the most vulnerable South Africans during winter: children living on the streets, orphanages, displaced foreign nationals, and disadvantaged communities.

- Secured corporate partnership with TBWA Hunt Lascaris – one of South Africa's most prominent advertising agencies
- Secured Protea Hotels as a hospitality partner and blanket drop-off point
- Secured Delta Airlines partnership – Captain Bob Maier personally flew blankets from Atlanta into Cape Town

- Mobilised five celebrity ambassadors with public endorsements: Kim Cloete, Gardner Cole (USA), Christina Storm, Breyton Paulse, and Stephen van Niekerk
- Created campaign collateral, managed stakeholder communications, and coordinated donation logistics nationally and internationally
- Distributed 200+ blankets to children of disadvantaged households through local pastor Mzuvukile Nikelo and the Masiphumelele Community Forum

PHASE 2 – ARCHBISHOP TUTU VISIT, ANTI-XENOPHOBIA CAMPAIGN

When Masiphumelele became the first community to repatriate displaced refugees, CFH identified this as the defining moment of the campaign. The question was no longer just about blankets. It was about whether South Africa could model a different response to the crisis.

- Organised and managed Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu's official visit to Masiphumelele — a logistical and stakeholder coordination achievement given Tutu's stature and security requirements
- Coordinated a panel of celebrities for the event including actor Nico Panagio, rugby player Breyton Paulse, Big Brother's Ferdinand Rabie, supermodel Tammy-Anne Fortuin, and singers Darren Green and Vanessa Nolan
- Managed the public handover of 200 blankets to the Masiphumelele community in a hall filled with over 400 children
- Positioned the event as a public celebration of the community's moral leadership — with Tutu thanking them in both Xhosa and English before a standing ovation
- Secured national press coverage through IOL Independent and SAPA newswire — the story ran nationally
- Extended the campaign message from physical warmth to human warmth: publicly rewarding Masiphumelele to inspire other communities across South Africa to follow their example

The moment Sharm remembers

Archbishop Tutu stepped off the stage and stooped to high-five and hug the children in the front row. Over 400 young children filled the community hall to capacity — some sitting two to a seat. As Sharm described it in *Destiny Magazine*: 'Being on stage with him and holding his hand was amazing. He inspires me to keep making a difference to our beautiful country.' It was the most memorable moment of eight years leading CFH.

WHAT THIS REQUIRED OPERATIONALLY

This is not a story about attending a famous person's event. Sharm organised it. The operational requirements were significant:

- Multi-stakeholder coordination: TBWA, Protea Hotels, Delta Airlines, community leaders, local pastor, 15-member Masiphumelele Community Forum, and Archbishop Tutu's office
- Celebrity logistics: coordinating travel, scheduling, briefing, and on-day management for 6+ public figures simultaneously
- Community trust-building: working with the Masiphumelele Community Forum, chaired by Pastor Mzuvukile Nikelo, to ensure the event was culturally appropriate and community-led rather than externally imposed
- National and international donor coordination: managing blanket collections from donors locally, and coordinating the Delta Airlines international freight from Atlanta
- Press and media management: securing SAPA and IOL coverage without a PR agency or communications budget
- Event production: managing a 400+ person community event with national press present, celebrity panel, blanket handover, and Archbishop Tutu as guest of honour
- Campaign extension strategy: reframing the blanket drive as an anti-xenophobia message and creating the conditions for other communities to follow Masiphumelele's example

THE RESULTS

- Archbishop Desmond Tutu publicly thanked the Masiphumelele community in Xhosa and English
- to a standing ovation from 400+ children
- 200 blankets distributed to the most vulnerable families in Masiphumelele
- National coverage secured through IOL Independent and SAPA newswire
- Corporate partnerships secured with TBWA, Protea Hotels, and Delta Airlines — all at zero cost to CFH through relationship management alone
- 10+ celebrity ambassadors mobilised across both phases, with public statements and on-day attendance
- Masiphumelele recognised nationally as the moral example for how South African communities should respond to the xenophobic crisis
- The campaign extended CFH's reach and positioned the organisation as a credible convener of celebrity, corporate, and community power for social change

"We hear that the people of Masiphumelele say no to xenophobia, and the people of Masiphumelele asked people to come back to their homes, and for that we say thank you."

— Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu, Masiphumelele, 2008 (reported by IOL / SAPA)

"Archbishop Tutu is a man with truly angelic presence and charisma. He inspires me to keep making a difference to our beautiful country."

— Sharm Pillay, Founder & CEO, Celebrities for Humanity (Destiny Magazine, 2010)

WHAT THIS DEMONSTRATES

Coordinating a national anti-xenophobia campaign response, with a Nobel Peace Prize laureate as guest of honour, across multiple corporate partners, a celebrity panel, community stakeholders, and national press — with no government funding, no PR agency, and no operational budget — is not a communications achievement. It is an operational one.

Every element required systems thinking, stakeholder management under pressure, and the ability to hold together a complex multi-party operation while managing the human dimension of a community in genuine crisis. These are the same capabilities that scale early-stage businesses. The context was different. The skills are identical.

THE THROUGH LINE FOR FOUNDERS

If you can mobilise Delta Airlines to fly blankets from Atlanta, Archbishop Tutu to honour a township community, TBWA Hunt Lascaris to provide corporate partnership, and national press to cover it — all without a budget, a team, or a playbook — you can build the operational infrastructure a funded startup needs to scale. The scale is different. The capability is the same.

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