Soda Wars

July 1, 2002 By Esther Kaplan

Madison Square Garden was unseasonably empty on April 17, with the Knicks and Rangers out of the playoffs, but the streets outside were teeming with protesters. A Coca-Cola shareholder's meeting had attracted dozens of puppet-wielding AIDS activists, there to launch a campaign to force the soda giant, the largest private-sector employer in Africa, to provide treatment for its HIV positive workers.

Coke made headlines last year by announcing a new African AIDS plan: a three-year prevention partnership with UNAIDS plus education, testing and treatment for employees. "Coke became the AIDS poster child among multinationals," said Health GAP's Sharonann Lynch, "which made them a bright, shiny target for us." Coke, whose Africa profits topped $200 million last year, has since turned over billboards in Kenya to HIV prevention and distributed HIV lit across Zambia.

While Coke now supplies antiretrovirals to its 1,500 "direct employees," the 100,000-plus who bottle soda or drive trucks are still *sans* meds. Coke Africa vice president Robert Lindsay emphasized that Coke's bottling partners "are separate companies with different ownerships," each of whom "are at various stages of developing their AIDS strategy." But Lynch scoffed. "How much of a subsidiary does Coke have to own before they take responsibility for their workers' health?"

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.

http://beta.docker.poz.com/article/Soda-Wars-912-5683