

grandmothers to grandmothers

a campaign to raise awareness and mobilize support in Canada for Africa's grandmothers

Grandmothers: Africa's Unrecognized Heroes

Sub-Saharan Africa has overwhelming numbers of children orphaned by AIDS — an estimated 13 million, projected to reach 18-20 million by the year 2010. As the death rate accelerates, countries and communities simply cannot cope. They are so impoverished that they're driven over the edge by additional mouths to feed and by the desperate efforts to absorb the orphan children.

Amidst this devastation, grandmothers have stepped into the breach. They bury their own adult children and then look after their grandchildren; often as many as fifteen to twenty kids. Somehow, these unrecognized heroes of Africa hold countries and communities together.

These women have lost everything. When the extended family dies and the orphaned kids have nowhere to go, a grandmother will invite these children into the family and just enlarge it. Without any pretense or overt demands, they simply care for children who are alone, abandoned, bewildered and confused. These are mums restored to maternity in a way that they never imagined: they have virtually no food, sometimes no shelter, certainly no money for school fees and uniforms. And they are traumatized by the magnitude of loss and suffering.

Grandmothers have become the heart of the response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic. As the guardians of children who represent the

future and hope of Africa, it is clear that a special intervention is needed on their behalf. The Grandmothers to Grandmothers Campaign is a small yet important contribution to ease the pain of HIV/AIDS on caregivers and guardians of AIDS orphans.

About the Grandmothers to Grandmothers Campaign

The Foundation launched the Grandmothers to Grandmothers Campaign on 7 March 2006; the eve of International Women's Day. The campaign aims to:

- **Encourage awareness** in Canada about Africa's grandmothers and their struggle to secure the support needed for a hopeful, healthy, and happy future for themselves and their orphaned grandchildren;
- **Build solidarity** amongst African and Canadian grandmothers in the fight against HIV/AIDS;
- **Actively support** groups of grandmothers in Africa who are dealing with the painful loss of their own children and struggling to care for AIDS orphans. Funds will provide grandmothers with much needed support, such as: food, opportunities to earn a living, school fees and uniforms for their grandchildren, counselling and social support, even coffins to allow for a dignified burial of their loved ones.



the Stephen Lewis
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From August 11-13, 2006, the Stephen Lewis Foundation hosted the Grandmothers' Gathering, an unprecedented meeting of nearly 300 grandmothers from sub-Saharan Africa and Canada, in advance of the XVI International AIDS Conference in Toronto. The Gathering offered a forum for grandmothers from across southern Africa to speak as experts about their experiences and drive the agenda for support. It also gave Canadian grandmothers the opportunity to engage directly with African participants to inform their fundraising and awareness-raising work across the country. The Gathering consisted of two days of workshops, all of which were created and run by the grandmothers and project coordinators, as well as a 'Solidarity walk, sing-in, and fair'. The key points of the Gathering were consolidated into a document known as the 'Toronto Statement.' It can be viewed by visiting: <http://www.stephenlewisfoundation.org/AugustGrandmothersGathering.htm>

Key statistics on orphans, grandmothers and HIV/AIDS

Global Figuresⁱ:

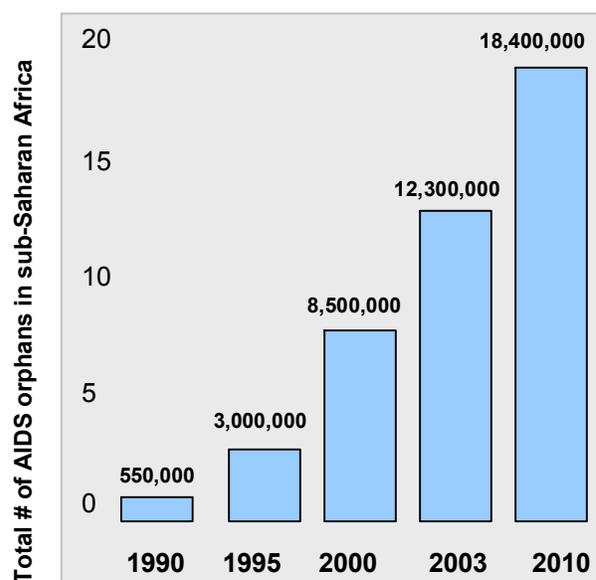
- Number of people living with HIV in 2006: 39.5 million worldwide (24.7 million in sub-Saharan Africa)
- Number of women living with AIDS in 2006: 17.7 million worldwide (13.3 million in sub-Saharan Africa)
- People newly-infected with HIV in 2006: 4.3 million worldwide (2.8 million in sub-Saharan Africa)

Statistics on grandmothers' role in caring for people living with HIV/AIDS, orphans and vulnerable children are scarce, since international HIV/AIDS data is not collected on people over 49 years of age.

What we do know:

- **Sub-Saharan Africa** has 10% of the world's population but makes up more than **60% of all people living with HIV**.ⁱⁱ
- In **sub-Saharan Africa** alone, approximately **13 million children have been orphaned by AIDS** — a higher number than the total of every under-18-year-old girl and boy in Canada, Norway, Sweden, Denmark and Ireland combined. That figure is expected to reach more than **18 million children by 2010**.ⁱⁱⁱ
- According to HelpAge International, older women are the backbone of AIDS care. **In some countries in sub-Saharan Africa, between 40- 60% of orphans live in grandparent-headed households**; the vast majority of them are cared for by grandmothers.^{iv}

Box 1.1: Children (aged 0-17) orphaned by AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa



Source: UNAIDS, UNICEF and USAID, *Children on the Brink 2004: A joint report of new orphan estimates and a framework for action*. New York: July 2004

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- Over 50 per cent of orphaned children live in **grandparent-headed households** in Botswana and Malawi and over 60 per cent in Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe^v
- Across 10 countries in sub-Saharan Africa, orphans living with their grandparents were found to fare better in school than those living with other relatives.^{vi}
- **HIV/AIDS** still carries significant **stigma**; people living with AIDS and their family members often experience discrimination and exclusion.

My message to the whole world is that the world should get up to fight HIV/AIDS and to try to get medicine for the people who are infected so that the children they are trying to bring up, the children they are fighting for now, can have at least hope in life... I want the whole world to see now [that] this epidemic is killing the young generation, leaving their children in the hands of the grandparents, who are weak, who are helpless. So I am appealing to the world if they can also look into the problem of the grandparents.

– Grandmother and caregiver of 28 orphans, Uganda

Support for African Grandmothers

Below are just a few examples of projects we support:

- Malawi's **Consol Homes Orphan Care** provides social, economic and educational support for orphans and grandmothers affected by HIV/AIDS. A Widows and Grannies Group provides counselling, start-up capital and training on income-generation, so that the women can buy food, clothing and pay for their orphaned grandchildren's school fees and uniforms.
- Based in Nairobi, Kenya, **Mothers' Rural Care for AIDS Orphans (MORCAO)** runs a therapy group for women living with AIDS with more than 134 registered members; the group is very active in its advocacy and includes grandmothers caring for orphans affected by HIV/AIDS.
- **Grandmothers Against Poverty and AIDS (GAPA)** in Cape Town, South Africa, offers grandmothers emotional support and counselling, educational workshops, handicraft training, income-generation opportunities and financial assistance for orphans' schooling.
- **TII KI KOMI Women's Group** was started in Gulu, Uganda by a small group of women (mainly orphans) who grew cotton and other cash crops as a way of increasing household income on their own. When the insurgency began, the entire village was uprooted to a displaced persons' camp but the group and its income-generating activities continue. To date, the group is composed of over 80 women, 75% of whom are grandmothers.
- **Chiedza Child Care Centre (CCCC)** in Harare, Zimbabwe strengthens the ability of grandmothers to cope with children in difficult circumstances, provides them with direct psychosocial support, and trains them in how to deal with bereavement. In addition, they help them develop a community-based model of orphan care and provide children with meals, school fees and medical assistance.

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Canadian Grandmothers' Groups

At the launch of the Grandmothers to Grandmothers campaign in March, only a handful of grandmothers' groups existed. There are currently well over 100 grandmothers' groups across Canada, from British Columbia to Prince Edward Island, with many others in the process of forming. Groups have also been formed in Australia, New Zealand and the United States.

For a list grandmothers' groups, visit: www.stephenlewisfoundation.org/grandmothers/groups. If you would like to form a grandmothers' group or join an existing one, please contact Julie Coultas, the Grandmothers Campaign Liaison, at campaign@stephenlewisfoundation.org or by phone at 416-533-9292 ext. 234.

"My daughter left the town for work and didn't come back for months. When she did, she came back with a child and HIV-positive herself. When she got the government grant money, she used all of it for her child, nothing for herself. She died in December. I have begged all of my children to come home. 'Please come back home,' I begged them. But instead, they are all coming back to me in coffins."

~ Grandmother from the **Ekupholeni Adult Bereavement Group**, South Africa

Getting Involved

The Foundation encourages Canada's grandmothers to:

- Use the materials on the Foundation's website to learn more about the issue and how you can get involved;
- Form a group, brainstorm and set goals for fundraising and awareness-raising activities.

The Foundation can share resources with grannies' groups and help grannies network with established groups and individuals.

About the Stephen Lewis Foundation

The Stephen Lewis Foundation works to ease the pain of HIV/AIDS in Africa where people have been hardest hit by the pandemic. Grassroots projects are at the heart of our work. We provide resources to small, front-line groups that make tremendously effective use of comparatively small amounts of money. On rare occasions, the Foundation supports larger undertakings where we are confident that funds will be disbursed at the community level.

The Foundation considers every project thoroughly. We currently fund more than 150 projects in 14 countries in sub-Saharan Africa that support women, orphans, grandmothers and people living with HIV/AIDS. All of our projects have been seen first-hand by Stephen Lewis, or by trusted colleagues associated with the Foundation to ensure that funds reach those most in need. In addition to monitoring projects regularly, and receiving the necessary financial and narrative reports, the Foundation develops close relationships with the projects — enabling us to work with them in a responsive and respectful way.

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We work diligently to disburse funds quickly once projects have been favourably assessed — often getting money into a project's bank account within two weeks from the time we sign the funding agreement. As we select new projects, we work judiciously to ensure that our support to all projects is sustainable. All of the projects inspire us with their resourcefulness, professionalism and dedication – bringing hope and dignity to the lives of those they reach.

The Foundation is seriously committed to ensuring that 90% of your contribution goes directly to those at the grassroots in Africa who need it most. We work very hard to keep our administrative costs as low as humanly possible.

Please check our website regularly for updates on the campaign materials: www.stephenlewisfoundation.org/grandmothers.htm

“We almost never think of the grandmothers, except in passing. Yet they are emerging as the unheralded heroes of the continent. They're poor, they're old; they live with the inconsolable anguish of having buried their own adult children. They're tired, they're hungry, and yet they're fast becoming the true, resilient, magnificent hearts of the struggle of the continent.”

— *Stephen Lewis, Chair of the Stephen Lewis Foundation*

Resources and Links

At the Grandmothers' Gathering in August 2006, the Stephen Lewis Foundation premiered a film entitled '**Grandmothers: the Unsung Heroes of Africa,**' directed by Liz Marshall. The film profiles four incredible grandmothers who are struggling

to cope with the burden of raising children who have been orphaned by HIV/AIDS and who receive support through the Foundation's projects in Kenya, South Africa, Uganda and Zambia. The film will be available for distribution by early October.

To read press coverage of the Grandmothers to Grandmothers campaign and Gathering, please visit: <http://www.stephenlewisfoundation.org/grandmothersmedia.htm/>

For more information:

- Global Fund on HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria: <http://www.theglobalfund.org/>
- HelpAge International: <http://www.helpage.org/Home/>
- HIV/AIDS and Older People: <http://www.eldis.org/hivaids/older.htm/>
- UNAIDS: <http://www.unaids.org/en/>
- World Health Organization: www.who.int/

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ⁱ UNAIDS. *December 2006 AIDS epidemic update*. Geneva: UNAIDS. December 2006.

ⁱⁱ UNAIDS, *December 2006 AIDS epidemic update*. Geneva: UNAIDS. December 2006.

ⁱⁱⁱ UNAIDS/UNICEF/USAID, *Children on the Brink*, 2004.

^{iv} HelpAge International, "Older women lead the lead response to HIV/AIDS." 8 March 2006.

^v *Ageing and Development*, HelpAge International, June 2004

^{vi} UNICEF. *Africa's Orphaned and Vulnerable Generations: Children Affected by AIDS*. New York: UNICEF, 2006. p.16