

Grandmothers to Grandmothers Campaign

"Grandmothers have emerged as the unsung heroes of Africa. These magnificently courageous women bury their own children and then look after their orphaned grandchildren, calling on astonishing reserves of love and emotional resilience."

— Stephen Lewis

The Stephen Lewis Foundation launched the Grandmothers to Grandmothers Campaign in March 2006 in response to the emerging crisis faced by grandmothers in sub-Saharan Africa. It began with only a few groups of committed Canadian grandmothers, and has evolved into a dynamic and responsive movement that mobilizes support in Canada, Australia, the United States, and the United Kingdom for Africa's grandmothers. Currently, more than 240 groups belong to the Campaign. Many of the groups have organized into regional and national networks in order to support each other's development and fundraising efforts.

African grandmothers

African grandmothers are central to the life of their communities. With almost no support, they have stepped forward to care for millions of children orphaned by AIDS, sometimes as many as 10 to 15 in one household. They display astonishing reserves of love, courage and emotional resilience, even while grieving the loss of their own adult children.

The Grandmothers to Grandmothers Campaign raises funds for the Stephen Lewis Foundation's work with grassroots organizations that support grandmothers living in the midst of the AIDS pandemic in Africa. These community-based programmes provide African grandmothers with food, health care, school fees and school uniforms for their grandchildren, income-generating programmes, counselling, social support, essential shelter, and other necessities.

Grassroots organizations in Africa, run by and for grandmothers, are sharing insights, deepening their expertise, collaborating with other local organizations, and building their capacity to turn the tide of the AIDS pandemic.

Campaign goals

Through the Stephen Lewis Foundation's partnership with grassroots organizations, the Grandmothers to Grandmothers Campaign supports African grandmothers who are turning the tide of the AIDS pandemic at the community level. Members of the Campaign share three goals:

- Raise funds for SLF's work with community-based programmes that meet the needs of African grandmothers and the children in their care;
- Listen to African grandmothers, respect their expertise and amplify their voices, in order to promote authentic and substantive responses to the pandemic in Africa;
- Build solidarity among grandmothers in order to better understand the vital work being done at the grassroots to turn the tide of AIDS in Africa.

Grandmothers groups are tremendously active in their communities. They put on concerts, arrange card tournaments, sell jewellery, and organize national walks. They visit countless schools and community organizations. They bake, cook, sew, knit, paint, write and even ride motorcycles—all to promote awareness and raise funds for grassroots organizations that support grandmothers in sub-Saharan Africa.

History of the Campaign

Grandmothers' Gathering and the Toronto Statement

The Foundation held the first international Grandmothers' Gathering on the eve of the XVI International AIDS Conference in Toronto. One hundred Africans and two hundred Canadian grandmothers gathered for three days of workshops, run by the grandmothers themselves, on topics ranging from grief to traditional songs, from depression to fundraising, and from stigma to the care of children orphaned by AIDS.

The Gathering provided an international stage for African grandmothers to speak about their lives, voice concerns, and inform the support that was to come—both from Canadians and from the international community. It was an opportunity for Canadian grandmothers to hear the testimonies of African grandmothers first-hand, and for both Canadians and Africans to recognize and affirm a shared identity as grandmothers and leaders.

Together they created the *Toronto Statement*—a joint statement of commitment and intent—the result of three days and many lifetimes of laughter, tears, dance, song, pledges and promises:

Canadian and African grandmothers “have within us everything needed to surmount seemingly insurmountable obstacles. We are strong, we are determined, we are resourceful, we are creative, we are resilient, and we have the wisdom that comes with age and experience.”

African grandmothers “do not need a great deal, but we do need enough: enough to safeguard the health of our grandchildren and of ourselves; enough to put food in their mouths, roofs over their heads and clothes on their backs; enough to place them in school and keep them there long enough to secure their futures. For ourselves, we need training,

because the skills we learned while raising our children did not prepare us for parenting grandchildren who are bereaved, impoverished, confused and extremely vulnerable. In the long term, we need security. We need regular incomes and economic independence in order to erase forever our constant worry about how and whether our families will survive.

“We grandmothers deserve hope. Our children, like all children, deserve a future. We will not raise children for the grave.”

Since the Gathering, the Foundation has hosted many African grandmothers in Canada—to continue to share their experiences and expertise with Canadian grandmothers. African grandmothers came to Canada to speak publicly about the impact of the AIDS pandemic on their lives, and to participate in public educational forums, working through the Foundation to meet with Canadian grandmothers and the Canadian public at large.

Canadian Grandmothers' Educational Trip to Africa

In late February 2008, the Foundation organized the first ever educational trip for a delegation of 12 Canadian grandmothers to projects in Uganda, South Africa and Swaziland. Despite the demands on their time and resources, a few projects expressed their excitement and readiness to welcome Canadian grandmother-supporters—accompanied and facilitated by the Foundation. They wanted to show Canadian grandmothers first-hand the tremendous impact of their partnership with community-based work at the frontlines of the AIDS pandemic.

African Grandmothers' Gathering and the Manzini Statement

On May 6–8, 2010, 500 grandmothers from 12 African countries and 42 Canadian grandmothers gathered in Manzini, Swaziland, for the first African Grandmothers' Gathering on the continent. These are grandmothers who have heroically taken on the task of raising their grandchildren orphaned by AIDS, and are pivotal in holding their families and communities together at the frontlines of the AIDS pandemic.

On May 8, after a day of workshops to hammer out a strategy for the future, 1500 African grandmothers marched through the streets of Manzini. They delivered the *Manzini Statement*—a clarion call to both their governments and the international community—to recognize their critical role as caregivers and leaders in the AIDS pandemic and to articulate their needs and demands for a healthier, more viable future.

In each of the twenty grandmother-led workshops and in the streets of Manzini during the march, the collective resolve of thousands of grandmothers sparked like static before a storm. Whether from Ethiopia, Swaziland, Kenya, South Africa, Mozambique, Tanzania, Uganda, Rwanda, Zambia, Botswana, Namibia, Malawi or Canada, the expertise and central role of grandmothers in turning the tide of the pandemic is both astonishing and undeniable.

The *Manzini Statement* reflects a dramatic and important shift in the development of the grandmothers' movement in Africa. Four years earlier at the Toronto Grandmothers'

Gathering, the focus was fourfold: solidarity with Canadian grandmothers, the support needed for grieving grandmothers and their grandchildren as a result of the massive loss of life due to AIDS, the challenges of raising so many orphaned grandchildren, and the need to make visible and support the critical role of grandmothers in the struggle against AIDS in Africa.

All of these issues remain pressing for African grandmothers. But in Manzini, Swaziland, the grandmothers of Africa declared that they are no longer content merely to survive, struggling to provide adequate food, shelter and schooling for the children in the care. The African grandmothers are now seeking to secure the rights and the means to ensure that their families and communities thrive.

Members of the Grandmothers to Grandmothers Campaign are inspired by the indomitability of African grandmothers, and they, in turn, are encouraged and buoyed by the commitment of their sister grandmothers around the world. The Grandmothers to Grandmothers Campaign is an indispensable wellspring of support and solidarity for African grandmothers. And, as the *Toronto Statement* decreed, Canadian grandmothers “will not rest until African grandmothers can rest.”

To learn more about the Grandmothers to Grandmothers Campaign, visit www.grandmotherscampaign.org, or contact us at:

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