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“WE ARE 500 GRANDMOTHERS HERE TODAY, BUT WE REPRESENT MILLIONS MORE...”

Edward Echwalu
A Message from Stephen Lewis

It’s the honesty that staggers you. There’s nothing that the Ugandan grandmothers wouldn’t discuss or share from their own experience, their own lives.

The five hundred who gathered at the conference centre broke into groups of seventy-five to talk about issues. It was an articulate frenzy, an incomparable pandemonium of voices that were rarely quiet. Everyone wanted the floor. There was not a silent participant in the entire teeming gaggle of grannies. They did allow for translation, but could hardly wait to be recognized and make their individual points... hands shot into the air with excitement, but also a deep sense that they were being heard; that their friends, old and new, took them seriously; that for almost the first time, they had a sympathetic audience, and they were going to communicate every feeling that coursed through their emotional beings.

“These were the words of older women claiming their rights, loudly, brazenly, unselfconsciously.”

And the feelings knew no bounds. It was so fascinating to hear the probing sophistication of the personal stories. These were not the words of yesterday, where everything was focused on death and dying. These were the words of older women claiming their rights, loudly, brazenly, unselfconsciously. It was the march of resilience on display. The character of the conversation had changed, root and branch. Now the focus was on human rights: the right to property and inheritance and social pensions and income-generating opportunities and addressing trauma and psychological distress. Above all, they were determined to make the government take them seriously.

But what stopped the conversation in its tracks, what erupted with volcanic hilarity, was the sudden emergence of sex. And then you knew there were no limits to the delicious camaraderie in evidence. These wonderful women wanted to make it absolutely clear, wanted the world to know that regardless of age, regardless of HIV status, they were still blossoming with sexuality, and by God, they weren’t going to be discarded as sexual relics.

They almost collapsed... almost fell over one another with laughter. But the point was well and truly made.

Something very special happened in Uganda. Five hundred grandmothers, brought together by six special projects, took the measure of each other and loved what they saw. It gave them great strength. It gave them trust. It gave them solidarity. It gave them confidence and hope. And it spawned visible leaders. There was unmistakable evidence of a growing grandmothers’ movement. Overall, the gathering was a triumph.

At the closing ceremony, the cabinet minister, dispatched as the government representative, said that he saw the seeds of revolution. He was right. May it come tomorrow.

Stephen Lewis
Chair of the Board
Stephen Lewis Foundation
October 5–7, 2015: 500 grandmothers from every region of Uganda congregated for the First National Grandmothers’ Gathering! They came together to discuss urgent issues, deliberate, and march. Together, they expressed their grief, outrage, resilience and hope for the future. They formulated their demands—directed at government, media, and the international and donor community—culminating in a powerful call to action: the Ugandan Grandmothers’ Statement.
Deaths due to AIDS continue to wreak havoc in families’ lives, and grandmothers continue to shoulder the burden.

Grandmothers were grappling with the dilemma of providing for their families, and were eager to discuss the income-generating schemes they are engaged in, to address the problems that still remain, and to share what has been working.

There were deep discussions about disclosure. How do you tell a child they are HIV positive, reassure them of the future, and defend them from stigma?

Healthcare needs of older women were front and centre throughout the Gathering.

The Grandmothers Speak Out
The grandmothers are thrust into parenting all over again, and urgently need greater financial and psychosocial assistance to help support their traumatized grandchildren.

Over the three days the grandmothers explored issues ranging from HIV & AIDS, to economic empowerment, to social protection.

The government’s current plan to roll out social assistance is too limited and too slow. The grandmothers’ community-based organizations will be pushing for more.

Relatives are constantly trying to steal their land, and they were demanding legal intervention and protection.
The Grandmothers’ Gathering was made possible by the leadership, insight and determination of its organizing committee, a powerful group of Ugandan community-based organizations: ROTOM, PEFO, Reach Out Mbuya, Nyaka AIDS Foundation, St. Francis Health Care Services, and Kitovu Mobile AIDS Organization.

Their dedication brought everyone three glorious days of discussion, debate, renewed commitment, newfound resolve, a launch of the first book of African grandmothers’ stories, nights of dancing and singing, and joyful networking with tea on the lawn. The Committee has registered a new entity with the government (“The Grandmothers Consortium”) to keep moving the grandmothers’ agenda forward in Uganda.

Ugandan grandmothers were also supported in solidarity by delegates from abroad: women from Canada and the UK representing the Grandmothers to Grandmothers Campaign, from Kenya representing PENAF, from South Africa representing Grandmothers Against Poverty and AIDS, and from the Canadian Union of Public Employees.

At the gathering’s close, the Ugandan grandmothers issued their Statement, setting out an agenda for change. The grandmothers closed the meeting strong and unwavering in their resolve, and their community-based organizations are with them every step of the way. The SLF is proud to join them.

Thanks to everyone! The Grandmothers are moving forward!

*Profound thanks to Gary and Donna Slaight of the Slaight Family Foundation, who had the vision to support this Gathering, and the momentum that Ugandan grandmothers have created for meaningful change.*
We, 500 GRANDMOTHERS from every region in Uganda, have come together for three days in Entebbe for the first ever National Grandmothers’ Gathering. We are celebrating our triumphs over the devastation that HIV and AIDS has wrought: over the painful losses of our loved ones, over stigma and discrimination, and over the threat to our very survival. Our love and labour has sown the seeds of new hope for our grandchildren, our families and our communities.

Our journey has been a long one, but our strength has been growing. We joined with other grandmothers in Toronto in 2006, breaking through silence and stigma. In Swaziland in 2010, we looked toward the future. Now, united in Uganda, we are claiming that future.

We have done our part. We care for the sick, we work the land, we hold our collective memory, and fueled by our love we raise the next generations, provide food, schooling, homes and security.

For far too long we have not been counted, we have not been valued, we have been made invisible. It is time for our contributions to be recognized and our rights to be protected.

Health care services must respond to the needs and realities of grandmothers and the children in their care, including: accessible grandmother-friendly HIV related services, specialized clinics and mobile care.

We must be protected from land grabbing and our property and inheritance rights guaranteed—not just on paper but in reality.

We demand an end to violence against grandmothers, whether it is domestic violence, elder abuse, or rape.

We are productive members of our society, and every government programme and policy should be designed with us in mind. But that is not enough, concrete action must be taken to ensure we can access them.

Our efforts to secure livelihoods for our families must be supported. Economic opportunities should be expanded for those of us still able to work, and social benefits extended to those who cannot. Protection from theft is essential, as well as greater access to credit and markets.

We are raising generations of grandchildren ruptured by trauma, and require financial assistance and psychosocial support.

While we welcome the commitment to move the provision of social pensions from 15 to 40 districts, we urge our government to reach all of the grandmothers of our nation as soon as possible.

To our government, the private sector, civil society, media, UN agencies and members of the international community—the grandmothers of Uganda have a powerful vision for a future in which our families and communities are thriving, and have left the ravages of AIDS behind. With the support of our community-based organizations we have made huge strides, and we know a vibrant future is possible, but we cannot do it alone.

To our Canadian sisters in the Grandmothers to Grandmothers Campaign, you are an important part of our story, and we feel your solidarity as we build momentum.

We are 500 grandmothers here today, but we represent millions more. We are not young, but we are strong. We want the world to know how much we have achieved and how much we have overcome. We have breath to sing and energy to dance. We are moving forward! Join us!
African women experts speak out at the Ask Her Talks

This past May, the Stephen Lewis Foundation launched the groundbreaking speaker series, the Ask Her Talks. Designed to bring the voices of African women experts firmly to the fore, the Ask Her Talks provide a rare opportunity to hear directly from the grassroots leaders at the frontlines of the AIDS epidemic, as they speak truth to power.

For the inaugural Ask Her Talks, the Foundation was joined by five exceptional leaders from Uganda, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Zimbabwe, and Ghana—who came to share their insights on philanthropy, change and power with Canadian audiences in Montreal, Toronto and Ottawa. Speakers included Theo Sowa, CEO of the African Women’s Development Fund; Netty Musanhu, Executive Director of the Musasa Project; Marie-Jeanne M’bachu, Programme Manager at the City of Joy; Jessica Horn, Former Senior Advisor to the African Institute for Integrated Responses to Violence Against Women & Girls & HIV/AIDS; and Jennifer Ayot, Senior Legal Officer with War Child. The evening was hosted by gospel and blues luminary Jackie Richardson, and featured a performance by spoken word artist SashOYA Simpson. From beginning to end, the humour, chagrin, artistry and incisive analysis of these seven dynamic women gave us all something profound upon which to reflect.

We hope you will enjoy these excerpts from the powerful speeches of three of the inaugural Ask Her Talks speakers. These women work in daunting contexts and foster resilience and hope for the future with tenacity and vision. We turn to them for answers and insight, and we invite you to join us!
Someone asked me a while ago why it mattered to have African women’s voices heard. It matters for all kinds of reasons. For a start, so many of the current narratives are lies—demeaning, undermining, undignified falsehoods. African women are not victims, African women can look after their children, African women are not charity cases. No one wants their story told in that way and what legacy, what sense of self worth do we leave for African girls when we allow this to go unchallenged? In addition, sticking to false narratives is just downright stupid. How does the world make sound decisions if those decisions are based on false perceptions? And most importantly for me, when we don’t listen to or hear the voices of African women the world misses out. We live in a world where we seem beset by intractable problems. We need all of our collective intelligence, ability, experience to deal constructively with those problems. So when we ignore African women, or distort images, we end up missing out on some of the smartest, most innovative, most resilient, caring and committed people our world has to offer.

The narrative matters. When people act as if MSF and militaries from the global north ‘saved’ Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea from Ebola, they miss the point. MSF were wonderful and played a role—especially when the rest of the world was not listening—but the true first responders were the communities of those countries, and in particular, the women’s organizations.

Sometimes I wonder how many times we have to learn the same lessons. The Ebola response was like a mini déjá vu of early responses to the HIV & AIDS pandemic… ignoring the disproportionate impact of the virus on women and girls; ignoring the stigma, discrimination and violence the virus heightened for women and girls; medicalising the response instead of recognising that physical, social, economic and other impacts had to be dealt with; taking for granted that women would carry the burden of care with few financial resources, while huge organizations from the global north attracted large sums of money… and taking an incredibly long time to recognise that it was women, and especially grandmothers, who were keeping families and communities together and that they were the heart of the response which finally began to turn the tide. And yet, just as we found hope of AIDS-free future generations, the funds that should be driving further progress have suddenly started to disappear.

We need to make better decisions about where people put their philanthropic dollars, their development dollars, even their economic investment dollars. Donors have an opportunity to lead that change in perception and action. The tradition of philanthropic giving has been different to that of government aid, or business investment. I believe that the best philanthropic practice takes risks, looks at the longer-term bigger picture, and asks questions that bureaucracies ignore. Canada has so often led the way on social justice movements and support internationally. You have the opportunity right now to hear the voices, and act on the achievement of African women’s organizations. You have the opportunity to ‘Ask Her’—and then act on it. You have the opportunity to work in collaboration and partnership rather than imposing un-contextualised decisions.

The deliberate decision to partner with grassroots African organizations can make a huge difference in the effectiveness of your philanthropy. I am not saying that there should be an either/or in your giving. I am saying that if you listen to some of our amazing African women leaders (and I am not talking about politicians here, but the women leading families, communities, social change and justice in all spheres of our lives)… if you listen to them, you will want to support their causes, their movements, their activism.

That can be the difference between investing powerfully in real change led by women’s organizations, or deciding you will give a few pennies out of charity. And that difference in giving is marked: marked out in lives lost, or lives fulfilled; inequity fuelled, or sustainable worlds that thrive.

“You have the opportunity to ‘Ask Her’—and then act on it.”

Theo Sowa
Chief Executive Officer, the African Women’s Development Fund, Ghana

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The Ask Her Talks

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Direct services to survivors of gender-based violence (GBV) are at the core of our work at Musasa. Making a difference to women and girls drives our agenda both at the community and national levels. In 2014 alone, our One Stop Care and Counselling Centre assisted about 25,000 women and girls presenting with differing cases of GBV. The majority of these clients are young adolescents who have experienced rape and sexual violence within their families. It is these extremely vulnerable women and girls that we target through our direct services. Given the harsh economic situation that the country is facing, as well as strong religious and cultural practices that perpetuate GBV against women, we have a huge demand for services which, however, is unmatched with the resources available. Why?

It is widely accepted that changing people’s attitudes, behaviours, norms and practices is a long term issue because you are moving people from their comfort zones to unfamiliar territories. We, however, always face serious challenges with partners that expect you to have made impact and changed attitudes in one year or even six months. There is always a reluctance to fund long term interventions that bring communities to the centre of the programmes and accept that grassroots women already know their situations but also solutions to them.

And oftentimes donors only provide funding for the ‘actual work,’ forgetting that grassroots women also need to sustain their families as well as run offices. How can you have counsellors and lawyers putting all their time and effort in without any means to support themselves? For projects to be effective, they need to be supported by people and therefore there is a need to invest in us as the frontliners as well. Some of our environments are not safe and women human rights defenders are threatened, and therefore any support should also take this into consideration.

Right now, donors are only providing support for just a fraction of the survivors, because providing assistance to individual survivors is never a priority. In fact, often times we are reminded that investing in individual women and girls is not really the flavour of donors. They would rather be associated with so-called ‘big things’ like governance, elections, democracy, etc.—as if you can make any impact with these so-called ‘big issues’ without protecting and empowering women and girls!

“*There is always a reluctance to fund long term interventions that bring communities to the centre of the programmes, and to accept that grassroots women already know their situations, but also solutions to them.*“

Our work in the community is at the heart of our interventions with ordinary women and girl survivors of GBV, ordinary grandmothers who are taking care of orphans resulting from high levels of HIV & AIDS and, in some cases, semi-literate women taking leadership to turn the tide of both HIV & AIDS and GBV in Zimbabwe. It is these sometimes perceived ‘victims of abuse and poverty’ who drive our agenda in the communities because they not only know first-hand the impact of violence at a personal level, but for their communities. It is them, therefore, that should be at the forefront of any community-based interventions.

The perception that grassroots women are victims who need charity from the West and are helpless to their situations should be challenged. Whilst we agree that these grassroots women lack financial resources, it does not mean that they do not even understand their problems or even the solutions to them. It is a basic tenet of human rights that the most affected should be at the lead in fighting GBV and HIV & AIDS. Zimbabwe has made huge strides in turning the tide of HIV in the community through the interventions of these powerful but ordinary women.

Netty Musanhu
Executive Director, Musasa Project, Zimbabwe
I, and the other women I am sharing the stage with tonight, work in a world of human calamity. Our day-to-day is focused on hope and justice, sure, but it’s generally spent trying to work out how to respond to individual or collective catastrophes—to various forms of violations of women’s rights. I wanted to use this time together to share some insights that I have learned about what constitutes resilience, and the role that African women play in transforming the world.

I’ll begin in a place that I go back to very often in my mind when I think about activism. It is a field of sunflowers and green beans ready for harvest. It is a field just outside of Bukavu in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo. This field was once the site of one of the largest refugee camps in the world, housing people fleeing the Rwandan genocide.

It has been reborn in the form of a collective farm where women who are former patients of the sexual violence unit at Panzi Hospital come together to grow food to feed themselves and their families, and to sell crops at the market as a way to regain their economic agency. Many of the women involved did not know each other prior to the conflict. As a result of displacement they have found themselves together and have agreed to live together in a way that nurtures social warmth. They work together, they support each other’s emotional healing, and they remind each other that they are welcome in this world.

The resilience of the women’s spirits in that field is inspiring. However, I would contend that they don’t only do this because they are ‘nice people.’ To me, what they express there is a political stance. It is an intentional expression of collective care. They are standing in solidarity, and sharing the resources they have. They are being philanthropists.

We are here to talk. Dialogue is vital in coming to better understandings of the problems we face. But at some point something needs to be done. Philanthropy is a form of doing. Giving your resources—your time, your concern, your money, your voice—is an act that says, “I stand with you. I believe in your practical and intellectual capacity to remake the world.” And it may even be a way of saying, “I love you.”

“**We are here to talk. Dialogue is vital in coming to better understandings of the problems we face. But at some point something needs to be done. Philanthropy is a form of doing. Giving your resources—your time, your concern, your money, your voice—is an act that says ‘I stand with you.’**”

Large humanitarian mechanisms take a long time to shift their protocols and policies. Philanthropy can be far more dynamic: learning lessons fast and finding ways to support more directly where it is needed. I think it is time for us to change the game ourselves, and direct resources to where we have learned time and again that it is needed: women’s community mobilising.

I began in a field of sunflowers and beans, and I would like to end by asking you all to join me there in your mind, and look around at each other standing there and remember that we are together. And then, to look up to the wide open sky. As you say in Kiswahili ‘uwezo ni wetu:’ the power to change is ours.
The Ask Her Talks

African women on philanthropy, change and power

by Stephen Lewis Foundation

JOIN US THIS

World AIDS Day

A critical moment to hear from frontline experts and put AIDS in Africa back on the agenda!

In conjunction with World AIDS Day (December 1st), join the Stephen Lewis Foundation as we host the second Ask Her Talks. Come to hear directly from an all-new group of dynamic, African women experts at the frontlines of the response to the HIV & AIDS epidemic.

These Talks will address a range of urgent issues: from the state of the AIDS crisis, to the emerging powerful activist coalition of grandmothers and young women. Together, the speakers will address what is truly working—and what is not—in philanthropic support to AIDS initiatives.

Join us! You will leave the Ask Her Talks feeling inspired, challenged and informed.

Nov 23rd
Edmonton

Nov 25th
Winnipeg

Dec 1st
Toronto

Visit askhertalks.com to learn more about all five speakers and to purchase your tickets!

Speakers

Peres Abeka
Chairperson and Co-Founder of the Young Women Campaign Against AIDS (YWCAA) in Kenya

Kidist Belete
Founding Executive Director of Developing Families Together in Ethiopia (DFT)

Hope Chigudu
Co-Founder of the Zimbabwe Women’s Resource Centre and Network

Vuyiseka Dubula
Former General Secretary of the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) in South Africa

Dorothy Onyango
Founding Executive Director of Women Fighting AIDS in Kenya (WOFAK)

Special Guests

Jackie Richardson, Evening Host
Award-winning singer and actress

“Britta B” Badour
Spoken Word Artist
CanadAnd Grandmothers in Uganda

Members of the Grandmothers to Grandmothers Campaign in Canada and the United Kingdom were invited to the Ugandan Grandmothers’ Gathering as special observers. As representatives of thousands of grandmothers and granddaughters, they listened, learned and stood in solidarity with the grandmothers of Uganda.

“The strength and learning we bring back with us is like a fire that burns brighter than before. It pushes us to light more fires and strengthen our connections to grandmothers in Uganda, and across Africa.”

—Carol Barnhardt, Guelph, ON

“The Ugandan grandmothers spoke with such a sense of power in their voices. They wanted to be heard, and in the workshops and in plenary they spoke about the need for legal intervention to protect their land, the need for income-generating initiatives that meet the needs of all Jajas [grandmothers] in their communities, and their commitment to push for the faster roll-out of government social assistance.”

—Penny Lewis, Richmond, BC

“One of the things that I know I’ll always carry with me is the deep sense of trust and hope with which so many Jajas shared their HIV positive status. To be able to stand up in a session with nearly 100 people, and say ‘I am HIV positive and I will challenge stigma,’ and for us as members of the Campaign to be taken into that trust, drives my commitment and passion so much deeper.”

—Jo-Anne Page, Toronto, ON

The Campaign at ten years!

2016 will mark the ten year anniversary of the Grandmothers to Grandmothers Campaign in Canada. It was in 2006 that the SLF brought together 100 African and 200 Canadian grandmothers for the first-ever Grandmothers Gathering. It was a watershed moment—three days of workshops on topics ranging from grief to stigma to parenting, run by the African grandmothers themselves. Grandmothers from across Canada vowed “we will not rest until they can rest,” and an international solidarity movement was born.

Since then, 240 grandmothers groups have blossomed across Canada, and in the United Kingdom and Australia. Together these groups have raised over $22 million for the African community-based organizations that are the lifeline for countless African grandmothers and the children in their care.

Over the next year, the SLF and grandmothers groups everywhere will be holding special events to mark the anniversary: reflecting on the past ten years, building increased awareness of African grandmothers as a force for change in their communities and on the continent, and—most urgently—raising the funds necessary for these women to truly turn the tide of AIDS in Africa.

Get involved in the Grandmothers Campaign

Would you like to join a grandmothers group? Or start your own? We’d love to welcome you into the Campaign! We can connect you with a group in your area, or provide you with the resources and guidance to start your own.

Would you like to support your local grandmothers group? Visit grandmotherscampaign.org to see a calendar of events near you, send us an email at campaign@stephenlewisfoundation.org, or call us at 1-888-203-9990 ext. 309.
What we do
Since 2003, the Stephen Lewis Foundation (SLF) has been delivering resources directly into the hands of the grassroots organizations turning the tide of HIV and AIDS in Africa. Led by the grassroots experts at the more than 300 community-based organizations with which the SLF partners, over 1100 innovative and inspiring initiatives have been successfully undertaken—with astounding and tangible impact—in the 15 African countries hardest hit by the pandemic. We know from experience that in order to effect positive and lasting change it is critical to support committed grassroots organizations working to improve the lives of those infected and affected by HIV and AIDS in their communities.

How we do it
The principles of social justice, equality and partnership guide our process. Before partnering with an organization, one of our experienced field representatives visits to assess the organization’s connection to the community, its ability to implement programming, and the strength of its financial accountability systems. Importantly, the organizations with which we partner recognize that gender inequality drives the AIDS pandemic and have dedicated programmes that support grandmothers, girls and women. Once an organization partners with the SLF, our programme officers communicate regularly with the staff to ensure that our approach remains informed, responsive, relevant and effective.

Why we do it
The grassroots groups with which the SLF partners are lifelines for their communities. They provide everything from education and counselling about HIV prevention, to care and treatment for those infected with the virus. They distribute food, medication, household supplies and other necessities. Home-based care workers—often with little to no pay—visit the homes of the sick and vulnerable, bringing comfort and care to struggling families. Support groups give vulnerable children, including the many orphaned by AIDS and the grandmothers left to care for them, a safe place and counselling to help them cope with their grief. They tirelessly advocate for the human and legal rights of women and children. Children are sent to school, and child-headed households are given the support they need. The staff and volunteers in these community-based organizations are unwavering in their commitment to save lives and restore hope in every home and community. AIDS will not be defeated without them.

Imagine Canada Standards Program
The Foundation is committed to transparency and accountability. With this in mind, we are proud to announce that we are accredited under Imagine Canada’s new National Standards Program. Through rigorous peer-review, the Standards Program awards accreditation to charities and nonprofits that demonstrate excellence across 73 standards in the areas of board governance, financial accountability and transparency, fundraising, staff management, and volunteer involvement. We join a community of 150 Canadian organizations committed to operational excellence, accountability, and trust.

Prior to our designation under Imagine Canada’s new Standards Program, the Foundation had been a member of Imagine Canada’s Ethical Code Program since 2011. The Ethical Code Program was recently merged into the Standards Program.
Every year we post our audited financial statements and Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) returns online. For these full reports, please visit [stephenlewisfoundation.org/financials](http://stephenlewisfoundation.org/financials).

The Foundation’s fiscal year runs from July 1st to June 30th. Our auditors are Ernst & Young LLP Chartered Accountants.

The Foundation’s charitable number is **89635 4008 RR0001**.

If you have questions about our financial statements, please call **1-888-203-9990 ext. 244** to speak to Kellie James, Director of Finance.
The holiday season is almost here, and our holiday tribute cards are now available! Make a donation in lieu of a gift, and send a beautiful printed or electronic card to your family member, friend or colleague. We can send you one of our colourful tribute cards to personalize and deliver yourself, or we can mail it on your behalf. Or donate online and send an e-card for easy and immediate delivery. Strengthen the work of our grassroots partners by giving a gift that is truly meaningful!

Order your holiday cards today. stephenlewisfoundation.org/holidays

There are many ways to contribute! Visit stephenlewisfoundation.org/donate
Donate online · Send a cheque · Become a monthly donor · Plan an event · Donate stocks · Join a Grandmothers Group