



# AFRICA'S UNSUNG HEROES

## The National Grandmothers' Gathering

5-7th October 2015, Entebbe - Uganda

### REPORT

With support from



*the Stephen Lewis*  
FOUNDATION

Special thanks to the organising committee from the six founding organisations; Reach One Touch One Ministries (ROTOM), Reach Out-Mbuya (ROM), Nyaka AIDS Foundation, St. Francis Health Care Services (SFHCS), Kitovu Mobile, and Phoebe Education Fund for Orphans and Vulnerable Children (PEFO), for the tremendous effort to ensure an event that portrayed the strength and resilience grandmothers have in the struggle to turn the tide against HIV and AIDS.



Reach One-Touch One Ministries is a nondenominational Christian ministry dedicated to meeting the spiritual, social, physical and psychological needs of the elderly and their dependents so they may live dignified, independent and hopeful lives.



St. Francis Health Care Services is an HIV/AIDS clinic and service organization in central Uganda which serves clients of all ages in its efforts to mitigate the impact of HIV/AIDS for both the infected and affected population.



Nyaka AIDS Orphans Project is working on behalf of HIV/AIDS orphans in rural Uganda to end systemic deprivation, poverty, and hunger through a holistic approach to community development, education, and healthcare.



Reach Out Mbuya Parish HIV/AIDS Initiative (ROM), is a Community Faith-Based Non-Governmental Organization (NGO), founded in 2001 to provide HIV/AIDS care to the urban and peri-urban poor persons living with HIV/AIDS.



Kitovu mobile is a registered company that employs a multi-faceted, holistic approach to address the needs of those who are infected and affected by HIV/AIDS throughout Uganda.



PEFO envisions a society where older persons, OVCs and their caregivers have high self-esteem and are resourceful to themselves and their communities.

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# GROWING OLD IN UGANDA

## Context

**1.3 million** Older persons

**54%** are grandmothers

**2.1 million** Orphans under the care of grandmothers

*Uganda National Household Survey Report 2009/10 UNHS 2005/06.*

Many grandmothers are weak, sickly, poor, overburdened and cannot afford basic needs including health care, shelter and food for themselves.

But despite all these hurdles, grandmothers are often also tasked with taking care of their orphaned grandchildren who have lost their parents to AIDS. Some of these grandmothers are also HIV positive themselves.

According to the UNAIDS 2013 '*AIDS by Numbers Report*', out of the global total of about 35 million people living with HIV, an estimated 3.6 million are people aged 50 years or older. The majority (about 2.9 million) are in low-and middle income countries where the percentage of adults living with HIV who are 50 years or older is now above 10 per cent.

According to the 1995 Constitution of Uganda (article 32), the State is supposed to make reasonable provision for the maintenance and welfare of the elderly. However, grandmothers are yet to receive the attention, consideration and support they need and deserve.

# THE GRANDMOTHERS' GATHERING

## How it all started...

In partnership with the Stephen Lewis foundation (SLF), several Ugandan grassroot organizations have been working with grandmothers to turn the tide against HIV/AIDS. On September 7th 2013, The Stephen Lewis Foundation hosted a historical event-The people's Tribunal in Vancouver, Canada. The purpose of the tribunal was to shine public light on the denial of African grandmothers' rights in the context of the HIV and AIDS pandemic.

During the Tribunal, Grandmothers gave moving testimonies of how their rights had been denied. They stressed that grandmothers must no longer be left to struggle alone for the survival of their communities; and that it should be a human rights obligation of their governments and other stakeholders to protect them from violence and other forms of injustices that dehumanize them.

It is against this background that the SLF and her Ugandan partners organised the first ever National Grandmothers' Gathering in Uganda. Building on the gatherings in Toronto, Swaziland and Vancouver, the gathering in Kampala highlighted the plight of grandmothers in the face of the pandemic.

## Why the gathering?

To create awareness of grandmothers' issues across the country and establishing a national level consortium of organizations to address them.

### Main objectives:

- Increased advocacy for grandmothers' issues countrywide
- Inclusion of grandmothers' agenda in the national policy frameworks
- Inclusion of grandmothers' agenda in media, business, civil society, religious and bilateral planning.
- Establishment of National Consortium to foster the grandmothers' agenda at national level





# HOSTING THE GATHERING

## The minds behind...

The Grandmother gathering was planned and organised by six indigenous organisations working with grandmothers with support from the SLF. The organisations include; Reach One Touch One Ministries (ROTOM), Reach Out-Mbuya (ROM), Nyaka AIDS Foundation, St. Francis Health Care Services (SFHCS), Kitovu Mobile, and Phoebe Education Fund for Orphans and Vulnerable Children (PEFO). Not forgetting the unwavering effort of the grandmothers who supported the team all the way.

A committee comprising of representatives from the six founding organizations working with grandmothers was formed to spearhead the organizing of the first ever grandmother gathering in Uganda. Several committee meetings were held to plan the grandmother gathering.

### The event dates:

The 5-7th October dates were deliberately selected to maximize the public attention to the gathering since these dates are around the time when the world celebrates the international day of Older persons (1st October).

### The organising committee:

#### Name:

Jolly Babirukamu  
 Edmund Kenneth Mugayehwenkyi  
 Jennifer Nantale  
 Dr. Betty Nsangi Kintu  
 Joseph Nkurunziza  
 Justine Ojambo  
 Dan Kintu

#### Role

- Granny rep.  
 - Committee Chair  
 - Vice Chairperson  
 - Treasurer  
 - Secretary  
 - Member  
 - Member



# The support teams

In order to ensure a successful event, several service providers were identified, vetted and brought on board to support the committee.

## Event management:

After a thorough procuring process which involved identification of service providers, requests for bids for event management services and interviews with 3 shortlisted events management companies; one company – Evolv Concepts Limited was selected to manage the gathering event.

The company working closely with the committee was responsible for;

- Guest invitations and management
- Grannies' and guests accommodation
- Event program management; Breakout sessions, refreshments, meals, the granny procession and treatment center.
- Managing event promotional materials e.g. set up of banners and tear drops, distribution of T-shirts, bags and event brochures etc. to maximize publicity
- Managing the event entertainment
- Photography and videography
- Post event management; Sending 'thank you' messages to event participants/guests, event report, finalizing payments with service providers etc.

## The venue and accomodation:

Several procedures were undertaken to select the venue for the gathering: Identification and vetting of suitable hotels, collection of quotations from the hotels selected (venue costs), availability of affordable accommodation places in the vicinity of the potential venue for the grannies among others. The committee together with SLF zeroed in on the final venue - Imperial Resort Beach Hotel in Entebbe as the most appropriate venue for the grandmother gathering.

**19** hotels around the event venue contracted to provide accomodation for the grandmothers.

**473** grannies accomodated for three nights.

## Promotional materials:

Nomad designs a local company was also contracted to manage the development, design, and printing of the event promotional materials which included; event brochures, booklets, note books, banners, tear drops, pull up banners, T-shirts and bags.



*"I will never forget this experience  
I thank God for keeping me alive to  
witness this amazing event."*

Jajja Nabukeera-Mukono.



# THE EVENT IN FOCUS

## The program:

A 3 day themed program was developed with the purpose of promoting interaction and networking at the event; and most of all to propel granny voices and interests in their advocacy strive. The themes that guided the event were; Grannies' economic empowerment, HIV and AIDS and its effects on grandmothers and social protection for the elderly.

## Invited guests:

*“Celebrate eachother; if we do not celebrate and share what we have learnt, then that learning does not go further. This gathering is about solidarity.”* Ms. Theo Sowa, Chief Executive Officer-the African Women's Development Fund.

The event was graced by over 500 grandmothers many of whom were from Uganda, others from Canada, UK, Kenya, and South Africa. Several high profile dignitaries graced the event including: the founder of SLF - Stephen Lewis; the Minister of State special duties in the Prime Minister's Office - Hon. Tarsis Kabwegyere who represented the Prime minister of Uganda; the Minister of state for the elderly and disability - Hon. Sulaiman Madada; the Director social protection in the Ministry of Gender labor and Social Development (MGLSD) - Mr. Titus Ouma; the retired Minister of Education and sports - Hon. Namirembe Bitamazire; the retired Chief Justice Laetitia Kikonyogo who was the first woman to be appointed High Court judge in Uganda and Ms. Teresa Mbiire, a successful entrepreneur, presidential advisor and a model grandmother.

## Grannies speakout:

**On economic empowerment...**



*“Grandmothers are so poor to be able to meet the needs of their grandchildren on their own.”*

*“We need support to engage in Income Generating activities.”*  
Grandmother

The keynote address on this topic was made by Ms. Kezia Mukasa from Uganda Reach the Aged Association, an umbrella organisation of organisations working with the elderly. She highlighted issues to do with the economic challenges that grandmothers face and also the opportunities that can help them overcome such challenges.

The breakout sessions organised fully engaged the Grandmothers on specific topics at hand. During these sessions, they discussed about their saving, financial management, agriculture and wealth creation. Grandmothers also shared their experiences, challenges and suggested creative solutions to improve their economic status.

### On HIV and AIDS...



*“My first born died leaving me with 5 children to take care of. Then later my 4 other children died who also left over 10 children under my care; some of these children are in primary school and others in secondary school. The only child I am left with is also sick; and since I am a widow, I struggle to care for him in addition to working to earn some money for the family.”*

The grannies shared their personal experiences with HIV and AIDS and how it has affected their families; the challenges and benefits of disclosure, what they were doing to support their families, the support they need to take care of their orphaned grandchildren affected or even infected with HIV.

The keynote address for this session was made by Ms. Patience Ssentamu from TASO Uganda, an HIV and AIDS support organisation in Uganda. Ms. Patience highlighted the statistics of HIV among the elderly, stigma, care for HIV patients and the burden HIV and AIDS has put on the elderly, grandmothers in particular.

*“We feel out of place and not loved; the social ties are always broken upon knowing that a grandmother has HIV.”*  
Grandmother

Group discussions were guided by topics along; grandmothers living with HIV, raising HIV positive children, how grandmothers are benefitting from HIV programs and disclosure.

### On social protection...



*“Our relatives fight us for property after our husbands pass on. We don't have the money to process land titles, it is very expensive and a long and tedious process. How can our government help us?”*

Grandmother

This session was to enable grannies be aware of issues concerning social protection and suggest solutions to their different challenges in relation to child support, land and housing issues and social security. The session's keynote address was delivered by Mr. Titus Ouma - the director social protection at the Ministry of Gender labor and social development (MGLSD).

The grannies were particularly intrigued by this topic and the information being shared including government social protection programs, local government structures that they can access for more information and how to solve their land and property grievances among others.





## Demanding accountability

The grandmothers were also given the opportunity to have a dialogue with representatives of the government. Some of the grandmothers' critical questions included;

*“How are you going to help grannies at the grass root levels to benefit from government structures?”*

*“The government has intervened in many ways but why haven't they looked at widowed grandmothers?”*

*“How can the retired grannies be helped to get pension?”*

*“Is there a way the government can support grandmothers to get land titles?”*

*“How can people be helped to deal with custodians who refuse to handle over land to the true owners?”*

*“Is it possible for the elderly to get lawyers?”*

*“What can be done to help people with land issues or wrangles?”*

*“How is the government supporting those with disability?”*

Mr. Titus Ouma - the Director social protection (MGLSD) explained to the grandmothers in response to their questions and concerns;

### On accessing pension...

During the old government system, people only got their money through the ministry of public service. This was very challenging and bureaucratic which led to long delays but now there is a change in policy and this process has been decentralised to the local governments; however the process of changing to this new system is taking a while. When the change is complete it will be much easier for grandmothers to access their pension.

### On land ownership...

He highlighted the need to train grandmothers on 'making wills' to demystify this process and also encourage them to write their wills. This will solve so many land wrangles and property ownership issues.

### On older persons' representation...

He explained that government has put in place different structures at all levels like Village, parish, Sub-county and district. The National Council for Older persons is also being established whose priority is older persons and ensuring that they are catered for in government programs.

Mr. Titus Ouma went ahead to personally commit himself;

*“I will follow up and support as much as possible any recommendations to government from the grandmothers and their supporting organisations that are documented in the grandmother gathering report. And to be personally available to train grandmothers on specific issues relevant to my expertise.”*





# The grandmothers' statement

## A call to action...

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 fuelled 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!



## Marching for justice

On the final day of the gathering, grandmothers took to the streets of Entebbe town carrying placards with advocacy messages led by a brass band courtesy of Reach Out Mbuya. The determined grandmothers were dropped off at a central place in Entebbe town where the procession started at about 9am.

The procession was followed closely by service vans and an ambulance which picked up grandmothers who got tired along the way and provided medical attention to emergencies that arose. Policemen from the Entebbe Police Post also led the way to ensure minimal traffic disturbances.

## The unsung heroes of Africa...

### The book launch:



To crown the conference, the grandmother's book "Grandmothers-Africa's Unsung Heroes" was officially launched by Stephen Lewis. The book shares stories and real life experiences about 30 grandmothers from Uganda, Kenya, and South Africa. Copies of the book are available at a minimal price and proceeds will go to support grandmothers in the organisations (ROTOM-Uganda, PENAF-Kenya and GAPA-South Africa) that were part of the book writing.

## Time for fun

A local entertainment group - Ndere Troupe, provided delightful entertainment including local songs and dances from different parts of the country. The grandmothers had also prepared their own dances and songs which they performed at various interludes during the conference. There was additional entertainment by the Reach Out Mbuya Talents Club. The conference hall was filled with ululations and cheers from the grannies throughout the occasion.



# In the lime light...

## Media engagement:

A press conference was held on Monday 28th September 2015 with a total of 38 journalists in attendance. Subsequently members of the organising committee appeared on TV shows and participated in Radio interviews. Mr. Simon Kasyate, a popular local media anchor coordinated the major aspects of media relations, publicity and social media. Several media houses were involved in publicizing the event.

## Radio talk shows:

5 radio talk shows were aired specifically covering the event. The talk shows held at some of the most popular radio stations including; BBC world service radio - 'focus on Africa-talk back', Radio One - 'Spectrum on Fm 90', Capital FM- 'Desert Island Discs', KFM-'Hot seat' on 93.3 Kfm, CBS FM, and Star radio revolved around issues affecting grandmothers and culminated into the big event-the grandmothers' gathering.

Members of the organizing committee and grandmother representatives were hosted at the talk shows. Several people called in to contribute to the discussions which was evidence to the great listenership the talk shows had.

## Print media:



8 stories about the event run in local news papers before, during and after the grandmother gathering. These included;

**New Vision:** 'The grandma's voice'; 'Grandmothers demand government social support' and the front page cover story 'grandmothers meet to share experiences'

**Daily Monitor:** 'The Plight of Grandmothers Raising Orphans'; 'It is important to celebrate the elderly'; 'We must give equal attention to older persons living with HIV' and 'Grandmothers: Africa's unsung heroes'

**The Observer:** 'Grandmothers gather to highlight their HIV plight'

These stories helped popularize the event and also bring to the forefront issues concerning grandmothers.

## Television programs:



4 popular TV stations and news channels (BBC world, NTV, NBS and Bukedde TV) aired programs and prime time news stories about the gathering. These included; Morning@NTV's show- the big story segment: 'Status of the elderly-is it a forgotten group?' and NBS TV Breakfast show, segment - 'Morning Breeze': 'The national grandmothers' union-a move to highlight the agenda of grandmothers in the country.' The stories highlighted the immense role grandmothers play in the country and why its high time they get the attention they deserve.

## Social media:



A face book page and a twitter account were set up for the Grandmother gathering in order to publicize the event and boost the grandmother advocacy agenda even beyond the gathering.

# MOVING FORWARD

## Igniting Grandmothers' potential

### Efforts at the grassroots:



After the gathering, Ugandan grandmothers are now unstoppable. Grandmothers in Tororo district - North eastern Uganda mobilized their peers in the district and have now established a district based group-*Tororo grandmothers' association* to spear head their advocacy efforts at district level. This group will be involved in; advocacy, community mobilization and sensitization on issues that affect grandmothers with the intention of raising the grandmothers' voices to decision makers at district and national levels.

### Continuing the advocacy agenda:

In order to maintain the advocacy momentum created at the first ever grandmothers' gathering, the founding organisations have established the grandmothers' consortium which is a national member organisation mandated to advocate for grandmothers. The consortium's vision is; *'A country where grandmothers have an improved quality of life'*. The consortium's registration process is being finalised and it will be legally operational in May 2016. The consortium is currently led by a board of directors who are representatives of the founding member organisations.

The current membership of the consortium includes the six founding member organisations; Reach One Touch One Ministries (ROTOM), Reach Out-Mbuya (ROM), Nyaka AIDS Foundation, St. Francis Health Care Services (SFHCS), Kitovu Mobile, and Phoebe Education Fund for Orphans and Vulnerable Children (PEFO). However, this membership will grow including other organizations working with grandmothers in both public and private sectors. One key deliverable of the consortium is to follow up on the commitments made at the Grandmother gathering.



# **Grandmothers' - Gathering -**

Grandmothers; Our Unsung Heroes

*In the midst of despair, pain and  
tears there has been a silent hero...  
the African grandmother.*

*At this one of a kind event we  
celebrate this amazing woman;  
for her strength, her resilience and  
most of all, her unconditional and  
never ending love...*

*Thank you Jajja!*

*We love you Kaaka!*

*We appreciate you grandma!*



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