

SPOTLIGHT ON

GRASSROOTS

SPRING 2012

Alexis MacDonald/SLF



Success at the grassroots

IN COMMUNITY AFTER community, African grassroots organizations are using limited resources to build programmes that are innovative, sustainable and tremendously effective in beating back the ravages of AIDS. Their work represents the success of frontline responses and the best hope for turning the tide of the pandemic in Africa.

In past issues of *Grassroots*, we have highlighted work that includes emotional support for grieving children; improved shelter for grandmothers and the grandchildren in their care; income-generating activities for people living with HIV and AIDS; and essential programmes to help break the stigma about the virus.

Success can be measured by the number of people who have access to treatment and counselling or who are reached by home-based care workers. Success can also be measured by the growing interest of governments in turning to community-based organizations for advice and partnership.

But sometimes, success happens almost unnoticed.

As Ilana Landsberg-Lewis, Executive Director of the Stephen Lewis Foundation, puts it, "We have learned from our African partners that success is so often deeply human and pragmatic. Success is in the everyday tasks and activities that, in the midst of turmoil, are so ordinary as to be extraordinary."



the Stephen Lewis
FOUNDATION

SUCCESS AT THE GRASSROOTS

Success is a doll

“We were surprised to see a number of men involved in our doll-making workshops,” says an *abaduduzi bez-ingane* (“children comforter”) running a family support group at dlanathi in South Africa. “One older man in the group is looking after his children and grandchildren, and told us that he had no relationship at all with his 15-year-old daughter. He said she was rude to him and even when he tried to talk with her, she did not listen.

“Making a doll in our workshop changed everything. At first, his daughter laughed at him so that the man felt ashamed, but eventually she asked if she could hold the doll. She stroked the doll’s hair and asked who it was for. The man told her he made the doll for her. She loved it.

“They started to talk that day and laugh together, and over time they became close. The man was overjoyed at this transformation, saying he didn’t realize the power of it at the beginning but was amazed that a doll was the tool he used to finally connect with his daughter.”

Success is a smile

In communities across Africa, grassroots organizations are pioneering remarkable programmes to support the millions of children affected by the pandemic.

At Ekupholeni, the staff care for their community’s most vulnerable children, many of whom are living with HIV, most of whom have been orphaned by AIDS. Through loving care, counselling, nutritious food and playtime, the staff of Ekupholeni guide children to healing and connection. But what of those children too unwell to heal?

When five-year-old Khulani arrived at Ekupholeni, he was sick and near death. Day after day, the staff at Ekupholeni worked gently and patiently



Kristina Laakkonen

Grassroots organizations across Africa are caring for their communities’ most vulnerable children.

with him, knowing that he would die as a result of AIDS, but determined to bring him some pleasure. It took weeks, but over time Khulani hesitantly began to talk and interact with the other children. When he finally did smile, it lit up the room. Although AIDS would eventually take his life, the staff at Ekupholeni helped Khulani find his smile again.

For those who rely on statistics and results-based reporting, this is only the story of one more child lost to AIDS. What those at the grassroots understand is that the return of a child’s smile, when that child will never again play outside, or go to school, or live to celebrate his next birthday, is the ulti-

mate triumph of humanity in the face of a pandemic that takes so much.

Success is a parking lot

At the Nyaka AIDS Orphans School in Uganda, approximately 500 students a year receive free education and find healing and hope through Nyaka’s holistic approach that “looks at the whole child and the obstacles they face.”

Two years ago, with the support of the Blue Lupin Foundation in Canada, the SLF partnered with Nyaka to build a library for students and community members. The now-completed library is stocked with books on almost every subject, and includes a public-meeting and conference space and a



Students read at the Nyaka community library.

computer lab. The library is located in the countryside so solar panels and water-harvesting tanks help to keep it self-sufficient.

So, where does a parking lot come into the picture? Well, it's not used for cars or trucks, which are almost unheard of in this community. Rather, it was built for carts, pull-trailers and wheelbarrows. The library is now such a beacon of possibility that those who cannot walk on their own are transported there by any means available. In communities fractured by death, illness and trauma, the parking lot represents the desire to make education and learning accessible to all – even those who are ill – so they can read and write, and come together as a community to tell their own stories and give voice to their dreams for the future.

The work must continue

Across countries and across the continent, the response to the pandemic has been scaling up in every way: meeting the increasing need for housing and food security; claiming the human rights that protect girls and women from sexual violence; and ensuring that treatment and prevention go hand-in-



Community-based organizations like SWAPOL in Swaziland refuse to be robbed of their successes.

hand. Our partner organizations know how to celebrate each achievement, large and small. They understand how each step forward feeds into a holistic community-based response to HIV and AIDS. It's all part of what sustains their

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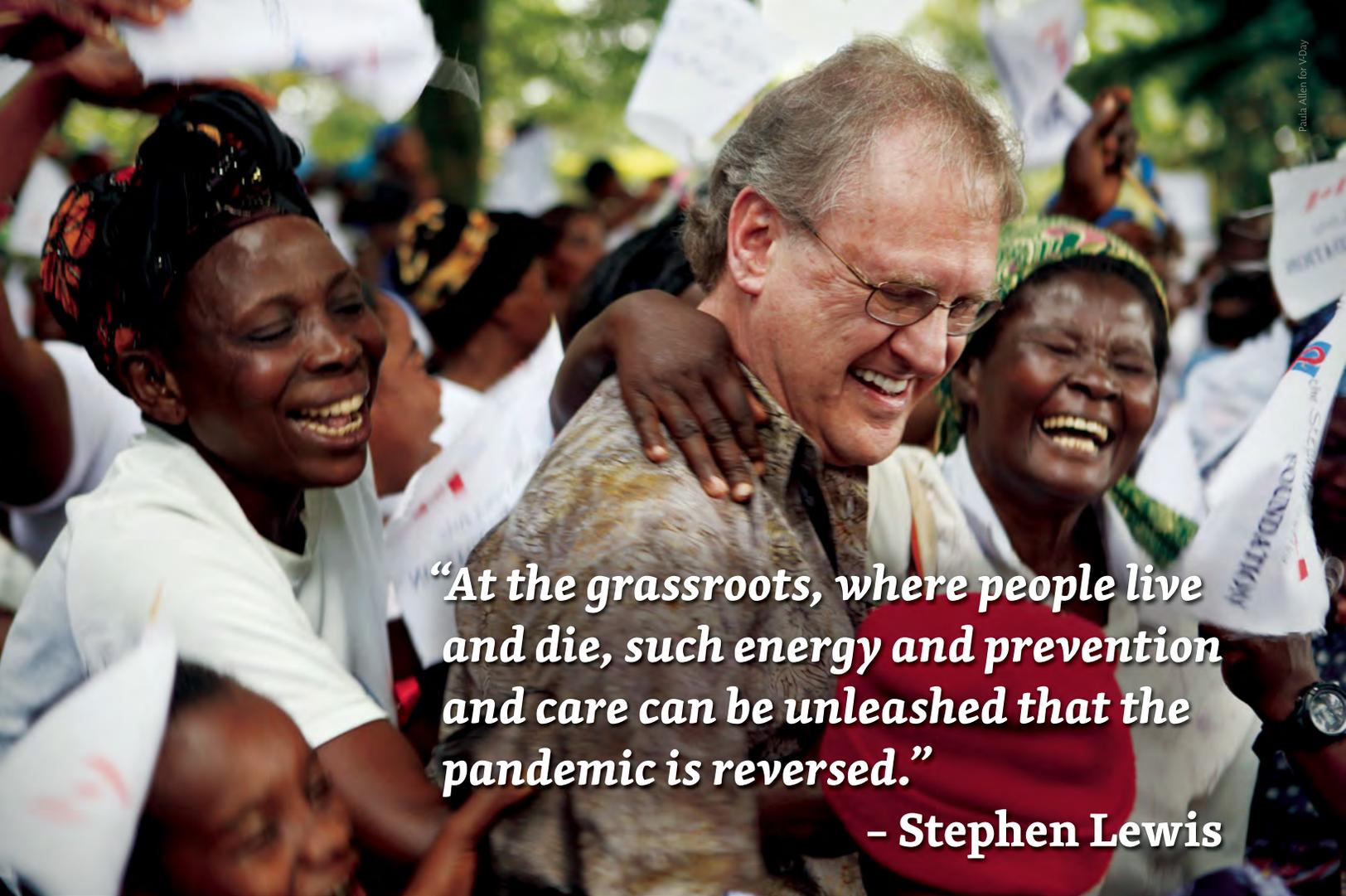
– Ilana Landsberg-Lewis

resolve in the face of desperate need and unrelenting, shifting challenges.

As you read this, international funding is drying up. The focus of the global community is turning elsewhere, and those who have access to treatment – hard-won over years of persistent

activism – are struggling to access the holistic support needed to keep the treatment effective and their bodies healthy: nutritious food, transportation to the clinic, support to understand complicated drug regimens, and counselling to cope with the crushing stigma and discrimination that often still accompanies an HIV diagnosis. In community after community, programmes are threatened once again. When so much progress has been made, the disappearance of funds is all the more devastating.

Community-based organizations refuse to be robbed of their successes, or their hope, at the whim of governments and international bodies for whom the lives of millions seem to be expendable. Through innovation, unwavering commitment and sheer will, they stand as experts, witnesses and agents of change. Our Foundation is determined to stand with them, to keep our partnerships in place and work with these organizations to ensure the survival of their programmes. From the individual stories of triumph over adversity, to the life-enhancing programmes reaching thousands of women and children, the work must continue.



Paula Allen for V-Day

“At the grassroots, where people live and die, such energy and prevention and care can be unleashed that the pandemic is reversed.”

– Stephen Lewis

Thanks to your generous support, the Foundation has invested over \$50 million through partnerships with more than 300 grassroots organizations in 15 countries – responsively, without needless bureaucracy, directly at the community level. Now that’s undeniable success. **A grassroots-to-grassroots movement.** Let us continue.

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