

Spotlight on Grassroots



SPRING 2020



SLF community-based partners, like Hillcrest AIDS Centre Trust (South Africa), are adapting to ensure community members have access to health and nutrition supports during restrictions to movement and market closures due to COVID-19 responses. Photos provided by Hillcrest AIDS Centre Trust.



A Message from the Executive Director

The SLF's community-based partners are a force to be reckoned with, providing life-changing support to communities affected by HIV and AIDS.

With the arrival of the new coronavirus pandemic, these grassroots organizations are well positioned to meet this new challenge. They are the trusted service providers who are now addressing the impacts of two pandemics – HIV and AIDS, and COVID-19.

Recently, we received an email from Sthembile Ndlovu, Director of Izimbali Zesizwe, an SLF partner in South Africa. "It's so amazing, because the big organizations cannot reach the local level, but we are here and we are with the community. We are hands-on, even during lockdown we can carry on supporting the community."

But the economic impacts of the new coronavirus are hitting grassroots organizations as well. Many funders are shifting their support to COVID-19 responses. But the SLF is steadfast in our commitment to our partners and their work.

In this issue of Grassroots, you will read about how our partners are reshaping programs during lockdowns and restrictions on movement. You will learn about how the Grandmothers to Grandmothers Campaign is adapting their fundraising in this era of social distancing. And we will introduce you to Partners in Pride, a new campaign in support of LGBTIQ organizations who are facing increased demands as a result of COVID-19.

Sthembile finished her email with a note of thanks. "Thank you for understanding us. Without your method of support, this community would be suffering a lot." And I would like to thank you as well. Without your support, it would not be possible for the Stephen Lewis Foundation to be the reliable partner these community-based organizations need at this time. Your support is a true act of global solidarity.

With much gratitude,

Meg French

Executive Director, Stephen Lewis Foundation

Until the Day We Can All Meet Again

Community-based organizations respond to the COVID-19 pandemic

COVERD-19 and the response to the pandemic have changed our lives in many ways. From restrictions on movement and gatherings, to school and business closures, we have all had to adapt to a new ‘normal’. This is true as well in many parts of sub-Saharan Africa where children are out of school, and grandmothers have to find new ways to source food for the children in their care, and where people living with HIV face increased challenges accessing the treatment and healthcare they need.

The Stephen Lewis Foundation’s partners are helping to navigate these new challenges. These grassroots organizations are well known and deeply trusted in their communities. When crises hit, they are often the first to respond. The strain of COVID-19 on under-resourced healthcare and support systems threatens to undermine decades of progress made in turning the tide of HIV and AIDS in Africa. Recently, WHO and UNAIDS announced estimates that COVID-19-related disruptions to the supply of HIV medication (called antiretroviral therapy) could lead to more than 500,000 extra deaths from AIDS-related illnesses, including from tuberculosis, in sub-Saharan Africa in 2020-2021 alone. With expertise gained from their response to the AIDS pandemic, our grassroots partners, with limited resources, are already adapting and innovating to meet the challenge of two pandemics.

With restrictions on movement, home-based care workers have become an integral part of the COVID-19 response. “Grandmothers depend on the healthcare workers to take them drugs for their grandchildren, because we are not done with HIV and AIDS,” explained Idah Mukuka Nambeya, Senior Advisor to the Grandmothers to Grandmothers Campaign, from her home in Zambia. In South Africa, **Tateni Community Care Services** distributed medicines and food parcels to clients in self-isolation, including the children who were being fed at their drop-in centres. And **Hillcrest AIDS Centre Trust**’s outreach team has mobilized door-to-door COVID-19 screenings for vulnerable households.

Handwashing is critical in the fight to stop the spread of COVID-19. However, for many people who rely on community wells, this new pandemic makes accessing

water difficult. “You find that people go without water for five or six days.... You will find 40 people waiting for water, so social distancing is quite a challenge,” said Idah. In many countries this is a challenge, and SLF partners, like **Positive Life Kenya**, in Kenya, and **Reach One Touch One Ministries (ROTOM)**, in Uganda, are providing clean water to their clients’ homes. As ROTOM explained, “We must not be found wanting at a time like this, when the vulnerable need us most. Let’s rise up and do whatever it takes.”

Amid the response to COVID-19, access to food is another challenge for people living with HIV who need adequate nutrition to stay on treatment. **Community Research in Environment and Development Initiatives (CREADIS)**, in Kenya, explained how the closure of crowded markets is making it difficult for clients who depend on the markets for food and income.

“The minimizing of activities and travel – and business stalls and open-air markets not operating – is negatively impacting vulnerable communities and caregiver support groups that we serve, who live from hand to mouth,” CREADIS added. “These are women who are widows, grandmothers who have to go to the nearest marketplace to buy and sell products, so as to get a small profit to put food on the table. In the current situation this is very difficult for them, and they need more direct support to cope.”

And with schools shut down, many children have lost the daily meal they were receiving. **Ripples International**, in Kenya, reports that most of the children in their community program rely on their school for meals. They are working to provide food to 150 households whose livelihoods have been affected.

In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, SLF partners are working tirelessly to ensure that communities affected by HIV and AIDS continue to have the support they need. These community experts are best placed to protect and support the most vulnerable populations and their work is making a life-saving difference in communities in sub-Saharan Africa.

While we don’t know how long COVID-19 will continue to reshape our lives, Idah closed our conversation with a hope we all share, “If this disease can come to a standstill then we can all meet again.”

Join us in a walk from South Africa to Ethiopia – Virtually!

Stride to Turn the Tide 2020 goes virtual in support of African grandmothers

Stride to Turn the Tide is an annual fundraising event in support of the Grandmothers to Grandmothers Campaign. Typically, groups gather together for walks throughout the month of June. This year, Stride to Turn the Tide has gone virtual, thanks to the creative thinking of grandmother leaders within the Campaign. They are committed to continue to raise funds in support of African grandmothers, and their families and communities during the COVID-19 pandemic. All are welcome to join!

This June, Grandmothers Campaign members and their supporters are walking independently, or running, cycling, or doing another activity of their choice. Participants track their steps or activities each day to reach a personal goal, and to contribute to a grand tally of kilometres collectively walked by all participants. Our virtual journey began in South Africa and will conclude in Ethiopia. Each week in June, participants receive an email update sharing inspiring stories about the expertise and impact of the Stephen Lewis Foundation's community-based partners as we 'walk' from country to country.

Members of the Grandmothers Campaign are inviting everyone to join this year's Virtual Stride event. Whether or not you're a member of a grandmothers group, you can Stride in solidarity and take steps, wherever you are, to support our community-based partners' vital work for the health and human rights of African grandmothers.

Join us for Virtual Stride to Turn the Tide 2020 by visiting www.stridetoturnthetide.org.



Photo provided by Mountain Grannies.

"In the midst of the COVID-19 lockdown that has put an end to many events and activities, I feel lucky to be participating in Victoria Grandmothers' Virtual Stride Walk. It's a beacon of light in my day, beckoning me outdoors to walk, garden or cycle in support of the African grandmothers. As I convert my solitary activities into kilometres, I feel connected to the rest of our group, and to the other grandmothers groups. While other fundraising activities are on hold, the Virtual Stride is keeping me healthy, raising my spirits and best of all connecting us all in solidarity with the African grandmothers. We're strong together!" - Lisbie

Championing LGBTIQ Health and Human Rights in sub-Saharan Africa



Partners in Pride is our new campaign to champion health and human rights for LGBTIQ communities in sub-Saharan Africa. The SLF has been supporting over 15 community-based LGBTIQ organizations since 2017. The campaign aims to raise funds to expand that support to reach 100,000 people per year over the next three years.

Stigma, discrimination and violence against LGBTIQ communities create dangerous barriers to healthcare and social services, including HIV prevention, testing, and treatment. Now, our grassroots partners are also reporting a surge in violence and discrimination linked to the COVID-19 pandemic, which is further threatening the safety and health of LGBTIQ individuals.

LGBTIQ organizations are a lifeline for their communities. Holistic programs run by and for community members provide vital healthcare, psychosocial support, legal services, solidarity, and hope. To learn more, visit www.stephenlewisfoundation.org/partners-in-pride.



Photo provided by Sexual Minorities Uganda (SMUG).

We Need Your Continued Support. Please Donate Today.

As a supporter of the Foundation, we're asking you to **please consider making a donation today**. You can donate online at www.stephenlewisfoundation.org/donate, or by phone at 1-888-203-9990, ext. 0.

The SLF is particularly well placed to support grassroots responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. We're currently partnered with over 125 community-based organizations who are already on the frontlines of the COVID-19 response and we have mechanisms in place to get funds directly to them, quickly and reliably.

Your donation will make a difference for grandmothers, children and young people, LGBTIQ communities, and people living with HIV and AIDS across sub-Saharan Africa. Together, we can help safeguard the progress grassroots organizations have made in turning the tide of AIDS.



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