



**Home-Based Care Alliance**



Home-Based Caregivers at the  
**World Social Forum**  
January 20-25, 2007  
Nairobi, Kenya

***“Turning the HIV/AIDS Pandemic into  
a Development Opportunity”***

Participation made possible with support from the  
New Field Foundation Fund of the Tides Foundation



With support from the New Field Foundation and GROOTS International, GROOTS Kenya took the lead in organizing 45 members of GROOTS International to participate in the World Social Forum from January 20-25, 2007 in Nairobi, Kenya. Participating organizations were:

- GROOTS Kenya
- International Women's Communication Center (Nigeria)
- Kamokya Christian Caring Community (Uganda)
- Ntankah Village Women Common Initiative Group (Cameroon)
- Uganda Community Based Association for Child Welfare,



*Grassroots women from the slum of Kahawa Soweto singing at the opening ceremony of a community resource center during the World Social Forum*

Our delegation was able to bring the voices and lived experiences of grassroots women who are responding to HIV/AIDS in their communities to the World Social Forum. They hosted two well-attended and highly-participatory workshops, reached out to potential new members and partners, and strengthened their own relationships and network.

### **The World Social Forum**

The World Social Forum began in 2001

in Porto Alegre, Brazil, and is organized every January by anti-capitalist activists, timed to coincide with the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland. It is intended by organizers to be "an open meeting place where social movements, networks, NGOs and other civil society organizations opposed to neo-liberalism and a world dominated by capital or by any form of imperialism come together to pursue their thinking, to debate ideas democratically, for formulate proposals, share their experiences freely and network for effective action."

This year's WSF had at its theme "People's Struggles, People's Alternatives" and showcased "Africa and her social movements; Africa and her unbroken history of struggle against foreign domination, colonialism and neo-colonialism; Africa and her rich heritage of natural wealth, cultural, linguistic and ethnic diversity; Africa and her reputation for embracing communities from around the world; Africa and her contributions to world civilization; Africa and her role in the quest for another possible, more progressive global human society."

***"Policymakers and development agents are taking too long to recognize the capacity of grassroots women in shaping the world."***

*—Esther Mwaura-Muiru,*

Within the World Social Forum and in outside venues, GROOTS Africa showed the 50,000 gathered in Nairobi the reality of what women face in poor communities. The grassroots women and youth in our delegation did not dwell on the many barriers they face living in slums and poor rural communities; being marginalized by majority-male governments and civil society,

which is dominated by large NGOs. Instead, it was obvious, in their testimonies within the World Social Forum and the outside activities they anchored, that they are overcoming those barriers to create a better world.

**Planning Meeting**  
**January 19, 2007**

Prior to the opening of the World Social Forum, GROOTS Kenya organized a planning meeting to strategize on members' participation during the forum. Representatives from IWCC, Nigeria, the GROOTS International and Huairou Commission Secretariat, 7 representatives from Uganda and 29 Kenyans attended the planning meeting. In addition to planning for workshops, the session provided an orientation session, since this was the first experience for most participants to participate in an international forum, and GROOTS International has a long-standing practice of orienting grassroots women so that they do not float aimlessly during global events.

In preparation for the WSF, GROOTS Africa representatives comprehensively discussed the two planned workshops, making their contribution and providing concrete examples that related to these topics. This leveled the ground of understanding the themes of the two workshops among all participants, who found the topics interesting and representative of their community-led initiatives. To facilitate understanding of the work of each member organization in relation to the above themes, participants went into 6 groups to brainstorm on the various sections of the two topics, document, and select a representative to the plenary discussions. During the plenary discussions, the partici-

pants agreed on who would speak at each workshop, and gave input into their presentations. All participants unanimously agreed to fully participate, support and contribute towards the workshop presentation by their colleagues.

**“Turning the HIV/AIDS Pandemic into a Development Opportunity”**  
**January 22, 2007**

Grassroots women raised the visibility of their largely un-recognized work at this workshop attended by over 400 people. The workshop was facilitated by Esther Mwaura-Muiru, and featured presentations by Mathilde from the Uganda Community Based Organization for Child Welfare (UCOBAC) along with Jenifer and Violet from GROOTS Kenya, all of whom shared the ways that home-based caregivers are using the opportunities presented by the tragedy of HIV/AIDS to improve their communities and the position of women in society.

Mathilde began the presentations by discussing the ways that social fabrics in Africa have been torn apart by colonialism and capitalism, which have promoted individualism and destroyed many traditional family groups. When the AIDS pandemic came about, Mathilde explained, people began to grow closer and have created groups that are re-creating what has been lost.

One example is home-based care groups. Home-based caregivers demonstrate heart felt motivation to help those dear to them cope with



Mathilde of UCOBAC

HIV/AIDS. Drawn by need, they have reached out to wider communities as well. They have also aided people living with HIV to form support groups and have begun supporting orphans through direct resource provision, training them to care for themselves, and providing them with equipment (such as sewing machines) to turn that training into a source of livelihood.

Mathilde also brought up the Home-Based Care Alliance, which has been piloted by GROOTS Kenya and will now be launched by UCOBAC in Uganda. This initiative has helped grassroots women to raise the visibility of their work and to take advantage of many more opportunities presented to them. "It is not good for HIV/AIDS to have come, but in many ways it has improved our lives. When we are fragmented we cannot do much, but together we will push together and be much more effective."



*"Give me my land, I don't want to be bothered on the road" - Kenyan song*

Jenifer from Kitui, a semi-arid region of eastern Kenya, then explained the ways that home-based caregivers are improving resource allocation at the local level. Beyond starting income-

generating activities to support their care-giving work, they have begun to lobby for support for orphans and people living with HIV from the wider community, thereby getting food, clothes and improved shelter for the neediest. Grassroots women have also been lobbying for (and gaining) seats on various community development committees, including bursary funds (to send orphans to school), community development funds and constituency AIDS control councils.



*"The community knows: if you disinherit a woman, we are watching and will deal with it as a violation of human rights."  
-Violet Shivutse, GROOTS Kenya*

Home-based caregivers are using their intimate knowledge of their communities to ensure that resources flowing through these channels are going to those most in need. "We knew that the government had money, but what would make them appreciate the work we were doing? By coming together, and with our capacity built, we are now sitting on committees on the strength of our work, not by begging. The [development fund committees] are also benefiting from our day to day experiences. They have been accused of corruption, but grassroots women are now there to watch over what they do."

Violet then shared how the AIDS pandemic has spurred grassroots women and communities to take up the issue of women's land, housing and property

rights. Caregivers coming together at national meetings noticed that they were all finding cases of women having to run away from their land when their husbands or parents died of AIDS. Many of those women went to the slums, and with no other way to survive, resorted to prostitution.

Using a community-led mapping process, the factors identified by grassroots women were a lack of documents such as title deeds or death certificates; lack of knowledge about their rights; and lack of effectiveness of the structures put in place. Grassroots women reacted by increasing women's awareness of their rights, examining their culture (and through doing so discovering from traditional opinion leaders that women had the right to inherit land), forming support groups which contribute money to support women to go through legal proceedings; and re-building homes for women who have been dispossessed. They have also had dialogues and formed partnerships with chiefs to get women's property returned. Women now buy property in their own name. Violet ended by recommending that "you support us to strengthen these initiatives."

Esther wrapped up by asking, "Who would have thought before that grassroots women could sit on committees where money decisions are made? Or influence where governments put hospitals? We have all suffered so much due to HIV/AIDS. We have lost our children, our homes, our parents and our spouses. But we can still now talk about AIDS as an opportunity."

### **Is the Other Possible World My World? January 23, 2007**

This workshop provided a venue for young women and men from poor communities to share their many challenges, their experiences and to make recommendations for how they can best be supported. The workshop was premised on the fact that another world will not be possible without taking these experiences into account and without providing a space for young people from poor communities to express their needs and their contributions.

At the workshop, which was facilitated by Muadi Mukenge of the Global Fund for Women and Alice Kayongo of the Uganda Community Based Organization for Child Welfare (UCOBAC), four youths who are members of GROOTS International shared their stories. These youth, who are clearly becoming strong activists in spite of their challenges, have been orphaned, forced to care for parents and younger children, been forced into early marriages, have lost their land and homes when their parents died. Tears streamed throughout the room as they spoke, and a commitment to create support systems for these young people was evident.

Y-SAFE, a youth group member of GROOTS Kenya from the Mathare Slum, also performed a drama during the workshop to bring the issues being discussed to life.

Most events and workshops that concentrate on young girls bring young women from well-to-do families, who have had opportunities to be educated. This workshop was designed to contradict this trend, by bringing girls from poor communities, who have seen AIDS in their own homes, who have been orphaned, who have lost their land and homes, who have

been continually denied access to education. These girls do not feel that they are a part of “The Other Possible World” dreamed of at the World Social Forum, because their voices and issues are not being heard.

Rabina, a girl from the slum area of Kamokya, in Kampala, Uganda, and a beneficiary of the Kamokya Christian Caring Community, began the workshop sharing her experience as the oldest of four children. She cared for both her mother and father as they grew sick and died of AIDS. Her stepmother (her father's other wife), who is also sick, then moved in with Rabina and her siblings, and Rabina cares for her as well. Rabina and her siblings have chosen to rent a small house in the slum while renting out their father's home for income, so that the children can continue to go to school. Caregiving duties are one of the major barriers to girls' education.

John Githingi is a member of GROOTS Kenya from the Tetu division—in the central highlands. John is an orphan who was left to care for 5 children when his parents died of AIDS. Before they died, John would have to carry them in a wheelbarrow, over mountainous roads, to get them to the hospital. There, they would be mistreated due to stigma. Although John was young when his parents died, and still in school, he had to find a way to feed the children, to buy them clothes and to care for them in general. Fortunately, a group of home-based caregivers (from GROOTS Kenya) intervened to help him care first for his parents, and then for the children so he was able to continue with school.

The kindness of these caregivers per-

suaded John to be trained as a home-based caregiver, in order to show the community that it is not the end of the world if you contract HIV. He is the only man in his community doing home-based care. John recognizes that the government should recognize the situation the young people in marginalized communities face, and support and formally recognize those who are bridging the gaps in their lives, such as caregivers.



*“If I was born a boy, I would not have gone through what I went through. I want orphans to speak in one voice, and to be supported by those who realize that anyone can be an orphan. AIDS has taught us to prepare for our parents' death. Join our movement and say no to property grabbing!”*  
-Grace Waithira, GROOTS Kenya

Grace Waithira is a member of GROOTS Kenya from the region of Gatundu. Grace's parents died from AIDS in 1999. On the day her mother died, Grace returned to her home from school to find her own grandfather barring the door, demanding they show him a land title in order to get the house back. Grace and her younger siblings never thought to make sure they retained the land title, and so

had to rely on the kindness of neighbors to take them in. As poor orphans, it was very difficult for them to get help from the provincial administration. But Grace soon found out about a Watch Dog Group, which had been organized by members of GROOTS Kenya.

The Watch Dog Group was established specifically to identify and deal with cases of disinheritance, and has not only helped her to deal with her own disinheritance with the administration (still on-going), but has also supported her to organize other orphans throughout Kenya. She has led a mapping exercise among orphans involved with GROOTS Kenya, and has determined that 67% of those were left with absolutely nothing when their parents died. Grace, like many other girls, was denied access to quality education because she had nowhere to stay when her grandfather took her land. If neighbors or relatives suspect that orphans are also HIV positive, they are less likely to take them in.

In order to realize the other possible world, Grace requested a platform for orphans who are organizing, for the government to establish an easier method for disinheritance to be redressed, and education at the grassroots level on property rights.

The next speaker was Evelyn, from Miss Koch, a girls' organization in the large and very poor slum of Korogocho, in Nairobi. Miss Koch is a partner to GROOTS Kenya. Evelyn spoke about the marginalization of girls in terms of their education. They are sexually harassed by boys. They are unable to pay school fees. When parents are sick with HIV, girls have to stay home to be care-

givers. Bursary funds are established for bright students, "but if I can't go to school in the first place, no one will call me bright."

"How can we be supportive of young girls? How can we establish support systems so that they can create another world?" These were the questions that drove the open discussion facilitated by Muadi and Alice after the presentations. One major theme arising from the presentations was that some of the strongest support for these young people is coming from home-based caregivers in their communities who have taken care of their parents, linked them to vocational training and helped them form their own support groups. Clearly, a key factor in the empowerment of youth in poor communities is augmenting grassroots women's capacities to recreate nurturing environments for orphans and other vulnerable and abused youth.

### **Outside events**

*In addition to organizing 2 official workshops within the World Social Forum, the GROOTS delegation used the opportunity of this event to raise the visibility of local work and network with partners and within the GROOTS network.*

### **Opening of a Community Resource Center in the slum of Kahawa Soweto**

**January 23, 2007**

In the morning, representatives of the Italian Embassy, UN Habitat, the media and the Mayor of Nairobi traveled to a nearby slum area called Soweto, to witness the opening of a community resource center. Members of GROOTS International also attended the opening to show solidarity with the community. This resource center will be a meeting place for community groups, a place to host visitors and will also

hold enumeration records and documents dealing with land tenure. Its opening was the culmination of a process begun by the community of Soweto over 2 years ago when they were assisted by GROOTS Kenya to hold a Local to Local Dialogue. That was the beginning of a partnership



with the Area Counselor, who has become, in his own words, "a supporter of GROOTS."

An Italian priest living in Soweto also attended that dialogue, and was able to link the group to well-wishers and resources from Italy and South Africa. The group's daily saving was supplemented by these supporters and in the next year their village in the slum will be further upgraded.

At the ceremony, an Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs shared that over the next 10 years, Kenya will receive 4.4 million Euros per year to support such community upgrading. With persistence and support for their capacity-building and peer learning, such as was showcased in Soweto, women in their communities will be able to monitor and access that funding to re-create their communities.

**Faith-Based Dialogue  
January 24, 2007**

What does it mean for grassroots

women to fight AIDS everyday and what support can they use from women of faith? How are women of faith coping with HIV/AIDS within their congregations and communities and what support can women of faith working in their churches use from women working at the grassroots level? These were some of the questions that brought together members of GROOTS International and the Huairou Commission—GROOTS Kenya, the Uganda Community Based Association for Child Welfare, the International Women's Communication Center (Nigeria) and Ntankah Village Women Common Initiative Group (Cameroon)—with women of faith from the Grail, the United Methodist General Board of Global Ministries and United Methodist Women for a dialogue on January 24<sup>th</sup>, 2007, during the World Social Forum in Nairobi, Kenya.



*Carol, a United Methodist Women leader from Texas*

Both the General Board of Global Ministries and the Huairou Commission are members of the Africa-US Women's Partnership against AIDS—the AFRUS-AIDS Partnership, and this dialogue was convened

*"There is still so much stigma in the church. These people of God we are supposed to depend on are the ones who are driving us to our graves"*  
-Maria Asumpta, Women living positively, Kenya

under the auspices of that organization. The dialogue was facilitated by GROOTS Kenya.

Grassroots women in the dialogue felt it was important to convene this dialogue because of the strength of the church in their communities. Until the faith-based community clearly understands the impact of AIDS at the community level, they said, we cannot make headway against the pandemic. HIV positive women who participated in the dialogue shared their negative experiences with stigma in their churches. They have not even been allowed to sit in church. Worse, some have had to exchange sexual favors with their pastors for support for themselves and their children. But while these stories deeply saddened and shamed us all, these strong women are turning those experiences into positive lessons. They are teaching people that



Members of GROOTS, the United Methodist Church and the Grail at the Faith-Based Dialogue

AIDS is not a sin. They are rejecting harmful practices and cultures such as wife inheritance. They are starting support groups within their churches.

*“Never look down upon even five cents that you put into a basket.*

The majority of the dialogue consisted of women representing various grassroots and faith-based organizations sharing their experiences and challenges in responding to or coping with HIV/AIDS, using only the small financial resources and the huge spirit they have available. One woman shared how she

and her fellow congregants started a hospital with just 5000 Kenyan shillings. As she said, “at first, we almost felt ashamed [to have so little money]. But now we say don’t be ashamed of anything you can give.”

One member of GROOTS Kenya is a leader in her Catholic church. She is the parish secretary. And she has become an educator in the community about condom use. Since the church cannot condone the use of condoms, the priest has given her space to tell the congregation that she has condoms available in her home, and that condoms save lives. “I’m proud of my work. I don’t feel condemned, I’m doing the right thing.”

This story began a long and deep debate about condoms and abstinence. While no common viewpoint was created in this dialogue, everyone felt bonded by a desire to reduce the burden on caregivers by helping to lower infection rates.

*“As women of faith, we are challenged by our sisters who have suffered alone to care not only for our friends and family, but for those who we do not know within our congregations.”*

The women who participated left the dialogue meditating on the promise to find ways to come together and advocate for messages that our peers, women who are leaders in their churches, can carry forward. The AFRUS-AIDS Partnership, which was founded with this goal in mind, will continue to find opportunities such as these to bring together women of faith and grassroots women so that they can find common ground and areas for mutual support. Our next major activity and dialogue will take place at the YWCA’s International Women’s Summit in July 2007 in Nairobi, Kenya.

**Peer Exchange Meeting on the Home-Based Care Alliance in Africa  
January 27, 2007**

Members of GROOTS International used this opportunity provided by coming together for the World Social Forum to share experiences, strategies and challenges as they are at various stages in forming the Home-Based Care Alliance in Africa in their various countries and regions. GROOTS Kenya began mobilizing on a large scale for the Alliance in 2006, with support from the New Field Foundation. Using an innovative and highly participatory, grassroots-driven process, the Alliance has greatly raised the visibility of home-based caregivers within Kenya. Grassroots caregivers from GROOTS Kenya have been asked to sit on national-level AIDS councils and consultations, and within communities, caregivers have begun to access decentralized funds for AIDS through the Constituency AIDS Control Committees. Members of GROOTS International who are just beginning to mobilize have been inspired by GROOTS Kenya's successes and the grassroots-led structure they have formed, and are now hoping to learn organizing processes from GROOTS Kenya.

As autonomous organizations, each member of GROOTS International approaches community organizing from a different place. As they form an international network, these organizations are not only sharing successful strategies, but also debating issues such as the role of the organization versus the role of caregivers. The participants shared the strategies they have already used to organize caregivers within their organizations and communities, which of those strategies have

worked well, which have not worked, as well as their vision for the Alliance, and where they hope to see the Alliance in their countries in the coming year.

Everyone in the meeting seemed to feel that it was an important step in creating a vision, in sharing practical experiences and, perhaps most importantly, in creating solidarity and feeling that, as one participant said, "all of us are now sisters. We are all under one umbrella."

**Conclusion**

The World Social Forum was a new venue for GROOTS International. Grassroots women who participated with us made it clear that in order to create another possible world, they must join together in solidarity, contradicting the fragmentation of South-South, and particularly pan-African development efforts led by grassroots women.



*"I don't need someone to speak on my behalf as a grassroots woman. I need to be facilitated to speak for myself."  
-Ann Wanjiru, GROOTS Kenya*

Our major successes at the World Social Forum were:

- Significantly raised the visibility of grassroots women's work and the Home-Based Care Alliance among civil soci-

ety, donors and media through two well-attended workshops, a booth and a march.

- Deepened linkages with existing partners and donors including the New Field Foundation, African Women's Development Fund, the Global Fund for Women and the United Methodist Church Women's Division.
- Strengthened and deepened our own network through time for sharing of practices and relationship building, and laid strategic plans for the coming year
- Laid plans for the continued mobilization and expansion of the Home-Based Care Alliance

## **Acknowledgments**

*The World Social Forum was a successful event for GROOTS International. Thank you to the following people and organizations for making it so:*

- *GROOTS Kenya staff and members for their tireless planning, hosting, logistical and content support, and spearheading of our events. GROOTS' participation in the WSF was wholly initiated and designed by GROOTS Kenya. Thanks in particular to Esther Mwaura-Muiru, GROOTS Kenya's director and regional organizer for GROOTS International, whose vision guided us during the WSF.*
- *The New Field Foundation, for both their financial contribution, and also their spirit of solidarity, supporting and attending our events and linking us to other opportunities, partners and grassroots women's groups*
- *Global Fund for Women and the African Women's Development Fund, our allies in creating a platform for grassroots women*
- *Carol Barton and The United Methodist Women's Division for co-hosting the Faith-Based Dialogue and taking time and energy to understand the work of GROOTS and deepen our relationship*
- *Above all, thank you to the 30 grassroots women who left their daily labor, their families and communities to share their experiences with each other and with the world.*