

The combined team rode to Cape Town, South Africa. You entered from the NE, but if you had taken Highway #2 from the SE you would have passed right through Khayelitsha, a low socioeconomic area approximately 20 km outside Cape Town, home to about 850 000 people. Homes are either brick structures or shacks or a combination of both. You could also cycle an additional 220 km all along the coast to visit Khayelitsha: <https://cycloscope.net/cycling-cape-town-bike-tour-western-cape>.



GAPA – Grandmothers Against Poverty and AIDS (<http://www.gapa.org.za/>) - started in Khayelitsha and spread throughout South Africa, then to **Tanzania, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Mozambique, Lesotho and Kenya!** GAPA was started in 2001 as part of a research project by the Institute of Ageing in Africa at the University of Cape Town. An occupational therapist organised workshops and support groups for grandmothers who were affected by the HIV&AIDS pandemic. The interventions were designed to meet the needs described by grandmothers who were part of the study. Grandmothers felt that the information and support they received was too valuable to end with the completion of the pilot program so they formed a committee with the occupational therapist, Kathleen Brodrick, and made plans to spread the information and support to others. They have been very successful at spreading this simple but critical model based on two prongs: education and psychosocial support. The board consists of community members and people committed to the development of grandmothers holding together families affected by HIV & AIDS and poverty.

GAPA has been very responsive as grandmothers continued to identify their needs. Each month GAPA runs an Indaba (meeting), whereby newcomers learn and members speak about current affairs affecting their communities. A local radio station, [Radio Zibonele](#), broadcasts GAPA workshops, reaching a far larger number of community members. Area representatives recruit emotionally vulnerable grandmothers to join the support groups that they run in their homes once a week (pre-Covid). Here the grandmothers meet others who have family members infected with HIV or who have died from AIDS complications. The group leader counsels them and teaches them about HIV&AIDS. Through the peer support they gradually come to terms with their losses and take charge of their lives. These groups consist often of up to 20 grandmothers. Once emotionally stable, they form cooperative groups more focused on income generation.

Handicrafts made in the income generation groups are often sold within the township. Grandmothers are encouraged to create their own markets and to make items that are wanted by their communities. GAPA has a store on the grounds of its multipurpose centre. In some places, grandmothers have produced items in large numbers for companies.

There is a vegetable garden shared by the Khayelitsha GAPA Centre and the nearby school. Numerous toddlers at group meetings highlighted the fact that their grandmothers could not afford to send them to preschool. Some applications to sponsors allowed them to send dozens of children to pre-school. This aspect of GAPA's intervention strategy has proved to be very popular and gives grandmothers a real boost to know that they can send their young grandchildren to a safe and stimulating environment while they have some time to themselves. In 2006, 145 children attended preschool through bursaries given by GAPA. The SLF sponsored 89 of these. Shortly after this initiative began, the need for primary school aftercare, especially for certain vulnerable children, was noted by their school heads, and GAPA responded with an aftercare program that now includes hundreds of children.



From a South African grandmother via *Powered by Love*: “Through GAPA I received training on how to care for my grandson and also they provided counselling sessions for the children. My grandson went to help him deal with the loss of his mother. They told him, “Write everything about your mum, how you feel,” and at the end of the session he was asked to place a picture of his mum on that letter. And he chose a picture of me and his mum to place on it. That touched my heart so deep, I can't really explain. I guess on that day I felt like my grief was also coming to an end.”

Prepared by the VG4A Education Working Group: Stage 1, #1 and #2, prepared by Laurie Wilson, #3 and #4 by Margie Cogill

The Stephen Lewis Foundation partners with all these community-based organizations (CBOs)



Week 4. As you cycled through Uganda during Weeks 2 and 3, you skirted the northern border of Lake Victoria, the second largest freshwater lake in the world after Lake Superior. The town of Entebbe is on a peninsula on the north shore of the lake. It was the location for the **Ugandan Grandmothers Gathering** October 5-7, 2015. Entebbe has an interesting history and a connection to a famous international incident in 1976. Click here if you'd like to know more about this city: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Entebbe>.

Five hundred grandmothers from across Uganda made history in Entebbe as they came together for the country's first national grandmothers' gathering. There were many workshops and planning sessions in order to move forward with their mission. Canadian grandmothers were also in attendance to learn and to listen and to take the information back to their Canadian grandmothers' groups.

On the final day of the Gathering, the grandmothers of Uganda, at long last, had the opportunity to talk directly to a high-level representative of their government. The Ugandan Minister of Gender and Social Development had provided a keynote address. However, he was not prepared for the sophistication and tenacity of the grandmothers' questions. In the Q and A, he grew progressively more defensive and angrier. "Why is it there are no legal provisions for those that are widows, even though they have so many responsibilities?" "I'm a pensioner. I wonder why I don't get my money for some months, and when they pay September, they don't pay July and August?" "Is there a way the government can support the elderly and the widows to make sure they can get titles on the pieces of land where they have lived for years?" "When a husband dies leaving a custodian, the custodians won't release the land to the ownership of the widows and children. They hold on to it for 10 years. Who is going to support us to resolve these issues?"



The Ugandan Grandmothers' Statement was forged at this Gathering. This is a part of that statement. "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!" Read the

entire statement here: https://www.stephenlewisfoundation.org/assets/files/uganda_statement_2015.pdf.

Information from: *Powered by Love*, pages 268-275

Photos from: <http://www.stephenlewisfoundation.org/get-involved/past-events/ugandan-grandmothers-gathering> and <https://www.stephenlewisfoundation.org/news-resources/grassroots-newsletter/fall-2015/2>

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Week 3. You rode past Nairobi, the capital and largest city in Kenya (9 million in greater Nairobi), last week. If you would like to get a visual of Kibagare, the “informal settlement” where this CBO operates, here is a short video of flooding that occurred here in April of 2020: https://youtu.be/Vw_cTuK75fQ).

Young Women Campaign Against AIDS (YWCAA) (<https://www.ywcaids.org/>) was registered as a community-based organization in 2002 for the promotion of equal rights and social justice for women, young people and the vulnerable. YWCAA founded a group called Bar Waitresses (BAWA) to support women, most of them grandmothers, living in the informal settlement of Kibagare in Nairobi, who were engaged in the dangerous and illegal business of making and selling alcohol from their homes. After years of YWCAA’s support, all of the group members are now earning their income through secure and diverse activities.

Nya Nya Lucia Nyangoso is the secretary of BAWA. She started businesses using her group’s revolving loan program: water vending and public bathroom stations, a food stand and a fully licensed bar. Here is Lucia’s story.

“My mom had to raise us on her own. She sold liquor illegally from home, but there is danger in this business. The clients are men drinking in your home where children are living. These men make passes at you, so you have to be keen to brush them off. We didn’t learn from our parents about how to protect ourselves, so I got pregnant when I was 14 and had to leave school. My mother got sick, so she went to her brother’s and I was left to manage the home. I had 5 younger sisters, so I went from being a small girl to an adult overnight. I continued selling the illicit brew, but the burden was heavy. I was so worried about getting enough money for us to eat and about the safety of my young sisters. At night I could never sleep and sometimes I would take a bit of the drink to help me forget.”

“Along the way, we took in other children who didn’t have a home, Stephen who was sleeping in the streets and Zebia, an orphan. I worried constantly about the future of all my children. I continued the illicit brewing until we met up with YWCAA. They helped the women brewers form the BAWA group and we were taught how to keep our children safe from clients, how to work together to save our money and how to stop drinking. After that, they gave us a loan and I started changing. Now I have 3 businesses and I found myself becoming an educated woman. I have learned how to write and take minutes. I have taken trainings and earned certificates. I was taught how to be open about HIV with children and I teach my own and all the children of my community, especially the girls. I can do this because of what I have gone through and what YWCAA has taught me. I have gone from no education to being a teacher in my home, in society, and the whole community.”



Lucia and grandson Lewis
Kibagare, Nairobi, Kenya



L to R: Lucia, Trina (Zebia’s daughter),

From *Powered by Love*. An abridged version of Lucia Nyangoso’s story, the youngest gogo interviewed for the book, age 36

To watch a 14-minute SLF documentary on YWCAA, click here: <https://youtu.be/pty8Dr59Z1w>

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Week 2 -- Negem Lela Ken New HIV Positive Women's Support Organization (NLK) is an excellent example of how community-based organizations can grow and evolve and make a big difference with the right kind of support. NLK is based in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, and has four branch offices located in Ambo and Sululta towns of Oromiya Regional National State, and ShewaRobit and Ataye towns of Amhara Regional National State. Here is the story of its evolution to date:

(NLK) is an indigenous, not for profit and nongovernmental association which was established in 2005 by 5 HIV positive women. At the time of its conception, it served as a meeting group for experience sharing and consolation. The 5-member group did not realise that one day it would become a large organization reaching thousands of women and children infected and affected by HIV&AIDS. Though NLK's primary target is those women living with HIV&AIDS and having very low economic capacity, it also attempts to improve the livelihood of the most marginalized and vulnerable women, who are susceptible to HIV&AIDS, through empowering them economically. The organisation now employs 19 staff and 2200 volunteers and has three training centres.

NLK's mission is "to contribute towards the fight against HIV&AIDS and the realization of the social, economic and health rights of HIV positive and vulnerable women". Between 2008 and March 2017, NLK programs reached:

- 36256 of the targeted HIV&AIDS affected and infected women, children, other vulnerable groups and members of the program community through HIV&AIDS awareness and skills building activities;
- 5000 low income and HIV Positive women with IGA (income generating activities)
- 1166 women living with HIV&AIDS with palliative care and peer support;
- 365 grandmothers and OVC (orphans and vulnerable children) households with food support and capital provision to expand existing household businesses;
- 340 OVC with educational and psychosocial support.

NLK has recently built its own building at Sululta Town. The purpose of the building is to create sustainable "safe spaces" for marginalized *People Living with HIV*, women, youths and children. The Building serves as one stop shopping for vocational and skill trainings, a community Library and resources to improve the economic and psychosocial wellbeing of the target groups.



Woman previously without income learning to weave at an NLK training centre



NLK volunteers, staff and graduates of a Parenting training program

This information, and the photos, came from the NLK website: <http://www.nlk.org.et/>.

Week 1 -- Developing Families Together (DFT) was started in 2002 in Kidist Belete's living room in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, with friends, relatives and colleagues in attendance.

Excerpt from a speech by Kidist Belete: My name is Kidist Belete and I am the founding Executive Director of *Developing Families Together*. For [18] years, our community-based organization has provided a range of support services to highly vulnerable persons and households in Ethiopia. We are working in five regional areas, providing care and support to over [40,000] adults and children.

I wanted to talk to you about one of our programs that has been making a considerable difference in the lives of one of the most vulnerable social groups in our society—namely, grandmothers who are burdened with the raising of their grandchildren orphaned by HIV and AIDS.

A woman shares her story at a grandmothers' meeting at Developing Families Together.



Because of the crippling poverty that sets in almost immediately upon the death of the bread-earners, grandmothers find the task of feeding their orphaned grandchildren, or of sending them to school, daunting. Things become a lot more complicated when the grandmothers themselves are advanced in age or have health problems.

Since 2007, with support from the Stephen Lewis Foundation, DFT has been implementing a care and support programme for grandmothers and their orphaned grandchildren in a small locality called Debre Sina, about 200 km north of Addis Ababa. When they started, all the women in these programs, about 300 of them, (*note: by 2015, DFT had already served 2000 grandmothers in this and a neighbouring locality*) were at the end of their rope. Many of them had several orphaned grandchildren left behind by more than one of their children. In many cases, the women themselves had been widowed, or had no one else to work the fields or engage in income-generating activities to help them. Many were reduced to begging in the streets or engaging in daily manual labour, often hard and painful at their age. Quite a few suffered from various kinds and degrees of trauma-induced psychological problems. In fact, in many cases the women had withdrawn from communal activities and become isolated, in part because they were unable to afford the little resources that were necessary to sustain active social engagement and in part because of the hopelessness that set in with the devastation of their households by AIDS.

The orphaned children themselves were in various conditions of stress. Many did not attend school, while some, particularly the older ones, had to engage in income-generating activities such as selling parched grains in the streets or engaging in hard daily labour to try to feed their younger siblings.

In Debre Sina and area, our interventions have two components—one component being what we do for the women to help them get on their feet, and the other being what we do with the communities in which they live. Over the years, hundreds of grandmothers have become self-reliant and have, perhaps more importantly, begun to feel more optimistic and hopeful.

Our work is with the poorest of the poor and, one by one, we can help them turn their lives around. Support one grandmother, and you are making a difference in the lives of generations. They are an inspiration to everyone who meets them, above all to their own families. There is nothing that gives me more pleasure than to see how one person's life has changed—and from that, how a whole family is uplifted—all because of our project's intervention. Together, we can change the world, one woman—one grandmother—at a time.

Developing Families Together information: <http://preventgbvafrica.org/member/developing-families-together/>

This is an abridged version of the speech printed in the SLF Grassroots newsletter spring 2013. Here is a YouTube version of a similar speech given by Kidist Belete for the SLF "Ask Her" Talks in 2015: <https://youtu.be/LMOGABtRwBc>.

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