



Quarterly Update

Summer 2002



*Women and their children wait to see a doctor in a clinic in Uganda.
Photo by UNICEF/Pirozzi.*

Dear Friends,

GAIA's mission is big—to prevent the spread of HIV in developing countries—but that mission is accomplished by individuals. HIV in Africa will be stopped one person at a time, by individuals who are dedicated to getting the work done.

In this issue, I'd like to share some stories.

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At the Front Lines

April Update

Much of our work entails small grants in support of village-level programs resulting from action plans developed at in-country training sessions.

GAIA recently made a grant to Youth Net and Counseling (YONECO) in Zomba, Malawi. In this southern community YONECO works hard with out-of-school youth and commercial sex workers on HIV prevention strategies. (In Africa, sex workers are frequently women whose husbands have died or left them with no means of support. This is a survival strategy.) 15 young sex workers and 15 youth are being trained in peer education to reach scores of others for HIV knowledge, attitude, and behavior changes.

In Balaka, in southeastern Malawi, GAIA enabled the purchase of bicycle ambulances to convey sick people to distant clinics, and supported five part-time staff and 25 volunteer HIV community educators to visit rural areas for prevention education and to facilitate clinic referrals.

GAIA provided the means for some AIDS orphans in Nairobi, Kenya to attend school. Recently photos and letters came from some of the children. One such is from Sarah Awour, 10 years old. Unedited, part of it reads, "... My mother died in 1998 and my father died in 1999, both in May. By the time my mother died I did not feel very sad since my dad was still a life, but the time my dad died I felt not like proceeding with life. I knew no more education because we haven't a brother or sisters to educate us...Now I am so happy because I have got a person who was very kind to pay my school fees...My best friend is Eunice Wainjuku."

Back stateside, perhaps some of you saw a portion of the March 13, 2002 "Today" show when President Carter and Bill Gates, Sr. were interviewed after visiting three African countries with major HIV/AIDS problems. Matt Lauer asked why privileged Americans should care about the Africa/AIDS catastrophe. Mr. Gates seemed momentarily surprised by this, then replied, "it's simply humanitarian."



Two AIDS orphans on the grave of their parents inside their house near Gikongoro, Rwanda. Since the death of their parents, the children have had to take care of themselves. Photo by UNAIDS/Chris Sattlberger.

And apropos generosity, we are very grateful and very excited about a grant just awarded us by the John M. Lloyd Foundation to gather leaders from selected northern California religious congregations of various faiths. We will apprise them of the AIDS/Africa catastrophe and try to match them with African orphanages, clinics, hospitals, and the like, for direct, continuing support.

We want these leaders to grasp the urgency of the AIDS disaster, but from a faith perspective in which suffering and sorrow are finally reined in and each precious one has a hope for health and wholeness. Through all of us, may it be so.

Village-Level Projects

May 1, 2002

Last October, we convened 75 trainers of trainers (TOT) in Maputo, Mozambique for locally adapted action plan formation covering a variety of HIV prevention and care strategies. Several weeks later we visited a number of village-level sites and identified exemplary projects for follow-up funding. We recently sent a small grant to a United Church of Christ AIDS orphan care project in Beira, Sofala Province. This group provides children with school uniforms and fees, HIV education, and the general skills needed for them to become contributing members of society.

And following up on a major training session in the Rift Valley of Kenya, we sent a grant to the Presbyterian Church of East Africa Central Church in Ngong to train 20 parishioners and 10 others from the Ilparakuo Self Help Group in community based HIV training. The attendees met for a week to learn basic information on HIV, de-stigmatization, counseling of the infected and affected, nutrition (including vitamin supplementation,) and treatment options. They will take all that they learned to churches, schools, clubs, businesses, and opinion leaders in their community.

Confirmation of our approach

Regularly we get reports of the crucial role of African religious organizations in HIV prevention and care. A particularly clear statement is the February 13, 2002 testimony of Peter Okaalet, M.D., a Ugandan physician, to the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee: "In every community—from the smallest, most remote village, to the largest urban centers, there is an institution that is always present. It can muster tremendous human resources; it has an infrastructure in place; it is truly 'grass-roots;' and it can influence behavior, politics, and social justice.... Uganda, my home country, is often cited for the most dramatic reduction in HIV infection rates. It is not mere coincidence that the period when the rates plummeted, 1991-1998, was a period of



A young woman sick with AIDS lies in her bed at the Mother Teresa home for women and children with AIDS in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Photo by UNAIDS/Louise Gubb.

marked involvement by Anglican, Catholic, and Muslim religious organizations."

Various

In our mail we found a note from a young girl in Southern California with \$20: "Please send this money to the children in Africa. I think they deserve to have a healthy life, and they need this more than me. Love, Hannah."

Richard Feachem, a great friend of GAIA and a member of our health advisory board, has just been named Executive Director of the UN Global AIDS Fund, established by UN Secretary General Kofi Annan.

A GAIA article, "Dante's Orphans," appeared in the Journal of Pediatric Nursing Vol. 17, No 1 (February) 2002 p 64f.

*Thanks for your interest and your help. Bill Rankin
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GAIA Funds Praised

June 1, 2002

Last August we met a dedicated woman majoring in biology and home economics at Blantyre Teachers College in Malawi, Central Africa. A divorced mother of four with few resources, she wants to finish her schooling to become an HIV/AIDS educator of young children. In addition to her children, she cares for her father, a blind diabetic now dying. She asked our prayers for him.

GAIA sent money to the Blantyre Teachers College to cover her tuition for an entire year. Recently we received a letter from her, thanking us profusely for our help. Its phrases seem a bit florid in secular northern California where we work. But this is the genuine thing from Malawi: "It is my sincere prayer that God should open his heavenly windows and doors and pour his blessings into GAIA. I knelt down and praised God and am still praising him. God hears and answers the prayers of the people."

Small grants are an important strategy that GAIA employs for empowering women. We recently enabled a 28-year old Malawi woman, leader of the Mphungu Primary School anti-AIDS Club in the Lilongwe area, to attend an 8-week long HIV/AIDS counseling course in Lusaka, Zambia. She will return with strengthened ability to work with youth and with enhanced resources for HIV prevention and counseling. She will also have examined best practices for working with youth, in order to apply appropriate aspects of these to the Malawi context. Studies show the crucial importance of reaching Malawi young people in the 10 – 19 age range in

preventing the spread of HIV. Reported cases of AIDS in this group remain lower than among people in older age groups. If transmission of HIV in the 10-19 year-old group can be prevented, many of Malawi's citizens will be spared HIV infection as they enter their most productive years.

A recent report from South Africa indicated that rock star Bono, traveling with the U.S. Secretary of the Treasury, Paul H. O'Neill, had to interrupt his account of what he was seeing when visiting persons living with HIV/AIDS in Soweto.

His voice broke, said one source. I know little about Bono, but now I know he is an ally in the struggle. As long as one voice breaks, as long as one person is moved to speak out, someone understands and the work will go forward. (You can access NPR's Morning Edition May 29, 2002 story about the Bono/O'Neill trip at www.npr.org).

And one of the most affecting things you discover in Africa is the joy, the hope and the graciousness of so many people. This is not blind optimism; it is something else that is very good, that the rest of the world needs.

Three of us will be in Malawi in mid-June to meet with religious leaders, hospital personnel, youth workers, and front-line, village-level organizations trying to slow the spread of AIDS in that country.



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