

Minayo Celebrates 84th birthday.....with a big smile!!

Minayo celebrated her 84th birthday this weekend. It was one of the most colorful events for the *Wesakhula* group, one of GEMINI's grandmothers support project. "I still have almost all my teeth!!" she beams, opening her small mouth wide to the amusement of everyone.

Minayo is a small woman. But very jovial. And talkative too. "Why should I be worried about my grandchildren's future? With all these people around me, give me one reason why I should cry." She is caring for 7 of her grandchildren, 6 of them in school. Both parents passed away a few years ago and Minayo has been taking care of them since then.

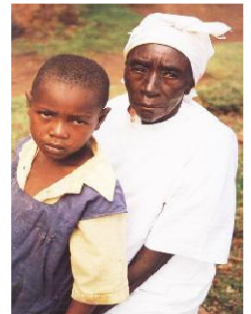


"I only have a small piece of land. It is enough for a few goats, chicken and vegetables. I don't have much strength to do a lot but I've never slept hungry!" She is very popular among community members and indeed, most of her chores are taken care of by neighbors and friends.

Just last week, GEMINI received a donation of about \$500 from GlobalGiving. As we had planned, we purchased a few bags of fertilizer for a community farm that is being cultivated by GEMINI supported groups. "We hope for a good harvest though we are worried about the current food crisis in the country," says Daniel Kiptum, Project Officer.

But Minayo is more optimistic. "I have seen worse times than this...it will all pass away," she predicts, flashing a smile.

For the past eight months, GEMINI has expanded its support to grandmother groups in rural areas. One of the key strategies includes empowering older carers with information about HIV/Aids. "In the African community, grandmothers pride themselves as walking libraries, providers of information. With a little coaching, we have enabled them become great village ambassadors to young people," says Kiptum.



GEMINI's HIV/Aids project seeks to encourage behavior change among young people. It also seeks to provide HIV-related services to marginalized communities in rural areas, including mobile VCT and Home-based care to families affected and infected with the disease.

"I don't need to speak a lot for people to believe me," says Minayo. "Everyone knows what happened to my three sons and one daughter. I simply tell people not to allow the same catastrophe to befall them. They listen!"

In the coming months, we shall be holding a lot of outreach campaigns and reaching out to more vulnerable families. We hope to strengthen family safety nets and thus enable peasant communities become active participants in the fight against HIV/Aids.

On behalf of all the frail grandmothers who benefitted from your contribution, I'd like to extend my heartiest gratitude to all of you. We have come to understand just how significant small contributions play in our program.

"One of my granddaughters had failed to attend school because she had no school uniform. But I think Stella now knows why I hug her every time she visits our village. As I said before, do I have a reason to cry?" quips Minayo.

Like Minayo, I wish I could hug each one of you. But kindly accept our sincere thanks. We know we can always count on you.