

PRESS RELEASE

Grassroots Women's International Academy Features the Accomplishments and Challenges of Forty Community Activists Fighting HIV AIDS in 8 African Country

Groots Kenya--a network of grassroots women's self help groups and community organizations linking across ethnic and regional divides in Kenya--is sponsoring a three day Grassroots Women's International Academy as a pre-ICASA event, involving more than forty community practitioners from eight African countries. Beginning Tuesday September 16th at the Bounty Hotel, grassroots women and their partners from Africa will gather to describe their local approaches to fighting HIV AIDS in their communities and discuss how to pool their skills, ideas and resources in preparation for the 13th ICASA.

The pre-ICASA Grassroots Women's International Academy is organized to enable community practitioners to describe the types of local programs and strategies they have developed to respond to the pandemic and to explore the priorities and concerns they share in common. Groups will discuss how people living with the virus are organizing to break the silence, how communities are designing their own home based and orphan care programs, as well as how they are working with traditional healers to educate the community and apply traditional herbal supports and treatments.

Mindful of the themes the global ICASA meeting will address, GWIA participants will create a set of priorities and recommendations including the areas of:

-access to care and support, -challenges and achievements in relation to people living with Aids, vulnerable groups, widows and widowers, and -the role of community home based caregivers in relation to government programming.

Representatives of the following countries and groups will participate:

Zimbabwe-	Inter-Country People's Aid (IPA), and the Women's Coalition
South Africa-	Rural Women's Movement (RWM-KZL), and HIV/AIDS Awareness and Youth Development Project (HAPYD) in Soweto
Rwanda-	Rwanda Women's Network,
Uganda-	Uganda Community Based Association for Child Welfare (UCOBAC), Traditional Healers and Educators Together Against Aids (THETA), and Kamokya Christian Care Community (KCC)
Kenya-	28 self-help groups representatives from 11 Kenyan regions
Ghana-	Pro-Link
Nigeria-	International Women Communications Center (IWCC)
Lesotho-	Two community activists.

Groots Kenya also secured the opportunity to facilitate a daily community caucus at the community village at KICC beginning September 21st-26th, from 8-9:30 a.m. Esther Mwaura-Muiru, Groots Kenya Coordinator, explained the purpose of the caucus by saying:

"Grassroots communities bare the burden of care and support for infected people. As experts in their own rights, the communities also need support to understand and focus their interest at ICASA so as to ensure that their voices, perspectives and concerns are mainstreamed. The daily morning caucus will be a place where community people can reflect on the conference proceedings and plan on how they can strategically position their participation and contribution."

The Grassroots Women's Academy, a format and method pioneered by members of GROOTS International (see attached for additional information), at ICASA is financially supported by a range of development partners, including Novib, the American Jewish World Services, AFRUS (the Board of Global Ministries), the Ford Foundation, GROOTS International and the Huairou Commission.

*** Many of the groups involved in the GWIA are a part of a growing peer-learning African based network of grassroots groups working on aids and sharing strategies with each other. They are strengthening their voice and policy positions. They are supported by a variety of partners-- GROOTS International, AFRUS-a faith based US/Africa network, Huairou Commission-a global coalition of networks, American Jewish World Service and others.