

## GROOTS India - Africa Learning Exchange

February 15<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> 2009  
Mumbai & Osmanabad, Maharashtra, India

*"I am confident with what I have learnt. Before I thought that HIV was something that would lead to death. Now as a community leader, I feel like I can take action on the issue. In the next three months we will create a plan to move forward",* said Kasthuri, an exchange participant from Tamil Nadu, India



On the 14<sup>th</sup> of February 2009, nine grassroots women from four African nations arrived in Mumbai to begin a five day learning exchange in Maharashtra state, India. This exchange was facilitated and supported by Swayam Shikshan Prayog (SSP) and GROOTS International in order to encourage knowledge sharing and transfer of effective practices in health, community led HIV/AIDS initiatives, savings and credit groups, and livelihoods.

The African participants came from four grassroots organizations - GROOTS Kenya, Uganda Community Based Organization for Child Welfare (UCOBAC), the International Women's Communication Centre (IWCC)

Nigeria and Ntankah Village Women Common Initiative Group, Cameroon - which together come under the umbrella of GROOTS Africa. On the Indian side, over 20 participants were the grassroots leaders of women's federations from Maharashtra, Gujarat and Tamil Nadu who partner with NGOs SSP (in all 3 states) and Covenant Centre for Development (CCD, in Tamil Nadu). These women, who have organized themselves after major earthquakes in Maharashtra (1993) and Gujarat (2001) and the tsunami in Tamil Nadu (2004), have undertaken pioneering work on savings and credit, enterprise, health, food security, water, sanitation, and leading local governance and Panchayati Raj Institutions (local governance institutions in India). Post-earthquake in Maharashtra and Gujarat, and post-tsunami in Tamil Nadu, these grassroots women undertook various health, sanitation, livelihood and enterprise initiatives to sustainability rebuild their communities and the effected areas, which were key areas of learning for the African participants of the exchange.

The first day of the exchange was based on saving and credit groups, with participants visiting the Yedshi village to meet with members of 3 different savings and credit groups and engage direct with group functioning and structure. The following morning was dedicated to exploring health initiatives undertaken by grassroots women in India and Africa, with the afternoon spent exchanging experiences with women and a number of key community figures in the village of Katagoen. The women from Tamil Nadu also during this day also discussed the impact of the 2004 tsunami and the health initiatives they have untaken post-tsunami as part of Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) within their communities. During the field visit their African counterparts shared the HIV/AIDS prevention strategies implemented within their communities, and the various initiatives taken by their organizations to counter effects of the HIV/AIDS pandemic which is devastating African communities.



The third day of the exchange was focused on livelihoods and federation/network structures, with the morning took place in Gondhalwadi village, wherein participants met with women community leaders and micro-entrepreneurs and learnt about village livelihood mapping and the latter half of the day took place in the workshop hall in Osmanabad where grassroots women presented their livelihoods initiatives and enterprise strategies. Sustainable agricultural initiatives such as alternating crops and organic farming, which were undertaken after the devastating effects of climate change and water shortages were also discussed by the grassroots women from Osmanabad. On the fourth day of the exchange a workshop was held wherein all women participants were given an opportunity to reflect and self-assess their learning over the past few days, identify and critically discusses core practices and initiatives which they planned to implement in their communities back home, and provide feedback on the exchange.

Through this exchange, the African participants learnt about savings and credit activity, federation structures, and how to undertake various health and livelihood activities which counter climate change and disasters. The Indian women in turn learnt about community based initiatives undertaken by African women to help HIV+ people and orphans/children and strategies which can be implemented to counter the HIV/AIDS pandemic worldwide. Both the women in India and Africa have now returned to their communities and are ready to implement new strategies and methods of development, by drawing upon the shared skills and experience of grassroots women they meet through this exchange.

*"I learnt from the Tamil Nadu women about community mobilization as a part of disaster management after the tsunami. This is something I will take this back with me to Kenya", said Jane, a GROOTS Kenya member and caregiver.*

