

## Etabezahu from Developing Families Together, Debre Sina, Ethiopia



Developing Families Together (DFT), centred in Addis Adaba, started a small satellite office in Debre Sina. Until now, DFT's local staff had only worked one-on-one with the most vulnerable grandmothers, providing food and supplies, school support, income generation training and safe housing. But when the grandmothers came together, there was magic in the room.

Grandmother Etabezahu spoke first: "I have survived an avalanche of days. I have buried three of my children due to

HIV. My daughter left a grandchild that I raised as my own. She, too, died of HIV. Now I am raising her daughter, my great-grandchild. My sister died and I took in her child, too. I could not have escaped these hardships without DFT." Story after story followed, the grandmothers listening as if spellbound, shouldering each other's load while making room for their own surfacing grief. One woman sang a verse composed in the moment:

I am a cotton spinner  
When I spin my thread I sing my hymns of sadness.  
I sing the loss of my sons and daughters into my cotton  
And I wrap my pain upon the spool.  
My song is long and so is my thread.  
I sing and spin away my tragedies.  
This is how I go on.

Etabezahu stepped in to change the mood. Jumping to her feet, she rallied the women to participate in a mini-drama to illustrate how women help comfort and distract each other during times of grief. She led them in games, challenging a grandmother who had broken down while telling her story: "You must laugh without stopping until everyone else laughs." When the din had settled, Etabezahu voiced one final thought, "We try to create fun and laughter even in the most oppressive situations. It helps us to bear, because you cannot return the people who have been stolen. You know, these are not things you can forget. How can I forget my daughter? So it's not about forgetting, it is about bearing the pain with the help of others." This one meeting epitomizes the Grandmothers Movement across the continent – the same impetus, the same explosive energy, the same magnetic pull towards each other. Bearing the pain with the help of others.