

Rebuilding grandmothers' lives in rural Zimbabwe



In 2021, grandmothers supported by SLF partner Midland AIDS Service Organization, or MASO, started to recover from the devastation of COVID-19 in Zimbabwe. Women who normally rely on selling local products for an income had seen their savings dry up through lockdowns, and with no national social security program to rely on, they worried about their survival. They were carrying the stress of seeing a rise in drug use, sexual abuse, and unplanned pregnancies among the grandchildren in their care, who were also not allowed to travel or leave home. Many grandmothers who'd already lost family members to the HIV pandemic were now losing family to COVID-19, including a grandmother named Gladys Win. The 60-year-old, who is living with HIV, raised her nieces and nephews after her sister died of AIDS-related complications. Tragically, Gladys also lost a daughter to COVID-19.

Amid so much turmoil, MASO staff remained committed to the grandmothers. With the help of emergency funding from the SLF, they delivered masks, sanitizer, and food parcels to homes, and pamphlets to counter misinformation about COVID-19. Today, with MASO's support, Gladys and others are returning to their in-person support groups that help provide the strength to continue raising multiple generations, and the skills to earn an income. They have started a savings and loan collective where grandmothers pool funds for groceries to help counteract fluctuating prices in Zimbabwe's unstable economy, and they learn income-generating skills such as chicken rearing, gardening, and craft work.

After a difficult two years, as her community continues to recover, Gladys can finally say, "I feel like I have my life back."