

GROOTS Tetu



Tetu is located in the Nyeri district of Central Province, near Mt. Kenya. It is a mountainous rural area populated by people of the Kikuyu tribe, who are primarily involved in subsistence farming, growing bananas, avocados and coffee. There are very few government or Non-governmental (NGO) resources in Tetu. The closest Voluntary Counseling and Testing Center (VCT) and hospital are in the town of Nyeri,

which is too far to be convenient—about a half hour drive down a steep mountain on dirt roads.

Home-based care workers must reach all of their patients by foot, traveling up and down steep hills all day in order to visit the sick and orphans. However, the work of GROOTS Tetu is vital in this area, as they are one of only a very few groups providing AIDS-related support to the sick. Four women were organized by an area politician in 2002 to be trained by GROOTS Kenya and have since founded sub-groups and held workshops in their four sub-divisions to train others in home-based

care and prevention of mother to child transmission. The group currently has 29 active trained members who care for 17 HIV positive people and 24 orphans.

Because there are so few economic opportunities in Tetu, the women in this group have a very



hard time supporting their work. Each of the subgroups has begun an income-generating project, such as pig-rearing or basket-weaving, but many of them have failed because of a lack of resources in the community. More than anything else, the women of GROOTS Tetu request training for ways to raise more income in order to support their work caring for the sick and orphans. . But even as these groups who are doing so much for their

communities are struggling to survive, there are men's groups being founded throughout the area in order to take advantage of the money being distributed by the government for AIDS. Because they are headed by men, who traditionally have greater access to money income, some of these groups have relatively large savings accounts from their income-generating activities, although they do not often seem to be undertaking any AIDS programs with that money.

One of the people being cared for by the women of GROOTS Tetu is Anne. She is married to a *matatu* driver (public transportation) who has been unfaithful since their marriage. Anne, who told her visitors that she has always been faithful to her husband, believes that he brought AIDS into their mar-



riage after sleeping with a wealthy widow in the community who is thought to have infected a number of men. Anne's husband only comes home occasionally, late at night, when he forces her to have sex with him. Fortunately, she has been able to negotiate with him to use condoms so that she is not re-infected with another strain of the virus. However, his visits leave her fatigued. Although they have a two year old son, Anne has to beg her husband for any money. As is the custom here, they live with her husband's parents. Her mother-in-law refuses to wash Anne's clothes, wrongly believing that doing so would leave her vulnerable to HIV infection.

GROOTS Tetu is attempting to lessen this type of stigma by providing education to the community through schools, churches and chief's meetings. Although Anne has not received any medication for her various opportunistic infections, her caregivers have provided her with information on inexpensive ways to strengthen her immune system, such as by growing and eating locally available, easy to grow, highly nutritious foods. She told her visitors that she always feels better after they visit, even if they aren't able to bring her anything.

