Bristol-Myers Squibb Foundation’s SECURE THE FUTURE® Programme Announces New FindingsConfirming Grandmothers Against Poverty and AIDS (GAPA) Has Positive Impact on Mitigating HIV/AIDS Impact in the Community

Survey finds empowerment programme helps 57 percent of respondents reduce socioeconomic impact of HIV/AIDS by providing tools to reduce poverty and emotional burden of disease

(CAPE TOWN, South Africa, 18 October 2012) – New research presented today at the first Africa Regional Conference on Gerontology and Geriatrics concluded that Grandmothers Against Poverty & AIDS (GAPA), a nonprofit grantee of the Bristol-Myers Squibb Foundation’s SECURE THE FUTURE® programme, has been a driving force in empowering grandmothers whose families have been affected by HIV/AIDS to cope with the emotional and economic demands of caring for their families.

For most of Africa, poverty is prevalent and increasing, especially in rural areas. Several studies have explored the link between poverty and vulnerability to HIV/AIDS and suggest that, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, there is a strong association between socio-economic disadvantage and increased susceptibility to HIV/AIDS amongst this population.1

While multigenerational households are the norm in rural Tanzania, the burden of caring for children is usually shared by all members of the family. When a child’s parents die, the responsibility falls to the surviving grandparents. Findings show that grandmothers and grandfathers who join the group most likely need support to look after their grandchildren.

The GAPA study, which was based on 301 questionnaires administered in Swahili to 45 grandmother groups in three districts of Tanzania, found that GAPA members benefited from higher self-esteem and saw lower levels of poverty and stigma in their community as a result of the community-building, psychosocial support and income-generating activities that are part of the GAPA programme. The questionnaire focused on demographics, perception and the impact of peer support groups on quality of life.
Researchers particularly noted the impact peer support had on overall self-esteem. In addition, nearly six in 10 respondents (57 percent) reported earning money as part of a grandmothers group, while about three-quarters (74 percent) said participating in a group improved teamwork and cooperation.

There are an estimated 1.4 million Tanzanians living with HIV.\(^2\) About 160,000 children are living with HIV and over 1 million have been orphaned by AIDS.\(^3\) According to the GAPA study, 72 percent of group members reported that someone in their household died from HIV/AIDS in the past 10 years. Grandmothers, who are often faced with stigma and increased levels of poverty and isolation, have become an essential source of support to these children who have lost their parents to HIV/AIDS.

Recognising the critical connection between poverty and HIV, GAPA aims to combat poverty among the grandparents through sustainable entrepreneurship skills to improve their livelihood.

“Poverty in the rural communities is a real issue for people living with HIV/AIDS, but it is also the support that the community members can give to each other that really empowers them,” said Kathleen Brodrick, director of GAPA. “For the grandmothers who have been impacted by HIV, our work has really made a difference in their lives. Even just after one year of being part of a peer support group, grandmothers universally cited participation, interaction with peers, friendship and caring as more important than making money through income-generating activities.”

Empowering grandmothers to influence the policies and conditions affecting their families and communities was a key goal of Tanzania’s National Ageing Policy of 2003, says Rose Japhet Mkonyi, director, Kifaru Community Development in Tanzania (Kicodet) and co-author of the GAPA study.

“Grandmother groups that were introduced to the Tanzanian National Ageing Policy of 2003 learned that speaking out on issues affecting themselves and their communities was their right by law,” Mkonyi says. “Through the process of empowerment, there was an influx in the number of older people requesting meetings with local authorities.”
“GAPA has made a tangible difference in the lives of its members and the community,” said John Damonti, president, Bristol-Myers Squibb Foundation. “We are committed to providing care and support for communities affected by HIV/AIDS in Africa and look forward to the continued growth of GAPA. We are proud to see the sustainability of this programme and to see it replicated in Tanzania, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Kenya and other parts of Africa.”

About Grandmothers Against Poverty and AIDS (GAPA)

GAPA resulted from operational research supported by Bristol-Myers Squibb Foundation’s SECURE THE FUTURE® and undertaken by the University of Cape Town Centre for Gerontology to assess the impact of HIV on the elderly. GAPA encourages grandmothers to be leaders of their community and to educate their families and speak openly about HIV/AIDS. With support from their peers, group members develop practical skills, such as how to generate income for their families, and foster their creativity, self-confidence and problem-solving abilities.

The programme has continued to grow and, in 2008, partnered with the Bristol-Myers Squibb Foundation’s SECURE THE FUTURE® Technical Assistance Program (TAP) to expand its outreach to grandmothers across Africa. For more information about GAPA, visit www.gapa.org.za.

About Bristol-Myers Squibb Foundation and SECURE THE FUTURE®

The Bristol-Myers Squibb Foundation is an independent 501(c)(3) charitable organisation whose mission is to reduce health disparities and improve health outcomes around the world for patients disproportionately affected by serious diseases. For more information about the Bristol-Myers Squibb Foundation, visit www.bms.com/foundation.

SECURE THE FUTURE® is Bristol-Myers Squibb’s flagship philanthropic programme that provides care and support for communities affected by HIV/AIDS in Africa. Over the past 13 years, the programme has funded more than $160 million in programmes in 22 African countries, with special
emphasis on community treatment support programmes, care for children and building infrastructure.

For more information, visit www.securethefuture.com.

Media Contacts:
Joanna Ritter, +33(0)1 5883 6509, joanna.ritter@bms.com

References