

## Success Story

### **SALVA! Helps PLHA Get Tested, Adhere to Treatment, Fight Stigma, and Bring Hope to the Community** Prevenção e Comunicação para Todos (PACTO), USAID

“Salva a Vida” (Saves Life) is an Action Group based in the village of Chegua, administrative post of Malehice, Chibuto District. In September 2011, after the eleventh and last session of Tchova Tchova Community Dialogues on HIV Prevention and Gender Equity, a number of participants volunteered to continue activities. Facilitators Julieta Tivane and Feliciano Chambule assisted in creating an Action Group including 5 community leaders and 20 participants (18 women and 7 men). Members lovingly refer to the group as Salva!. They feel that Tchova Tchova “saved” them in a way, and they wanted to give back to the community by helping fellow villagers understand HIV, mobilizing people for HIV testing, following up on PLHA, and caring for orphans and vulnerable children (OVC). They work in pairs with a set schedule visiting homes of people living with HIV (PLHA) and OVC each week. Most Salva! members are farmers; many of whom are religious. Interestingly, 5 members are PLHA who already knew their status and are happy to share their stories to help others deal with their status.

Salva! follows 58 PLHA, 30 of whom were encouraged to get tested and 28 of whom know they are positive but have abandoned treatment. Members appreciate that Salva! changed the way the community thinks about HIV for the better. PLHA now have a new approach to life, as Salva! gave them courage to accept the disease, and face stigma, even from their relatives. Families of PLHA and other community members increasingly understand that those infected by HIV should not be blamed or ostracized. Furthermore, members explain that the health of those who were sick have rallied, some of whom have returned even to their livelihoods working their machamba (household garden) again.

“It’s true, this group saves lives indeed,” says Dulce, a 29 year old PLHA with 3 children aged between 1 and 12. Dulce continues, “When Salva! came to my home, I was just waiting to die... I was so sick, they told me to go to the hospital but I didn’t have money. They collected money for transportation. My husband came with me and was also encouraged by Salva! to get tested. We both tested positive, and now, after a few months in treatment, I feel good.” Dulce’s husband Aurélio, 34, emphasizes that, “Salva! made me understand that it was better to get tested before I got sick, that’s why I did the test even though I wasn’t feeling sick, just to know my status so that I could prevent diseases through hospital care.”

António Fabião, Salva! community leader, also works with World Vision, Child Sponsorship Program. He is happy to see how Salva! is helping 35 OVC who could not be included at World Vision’s program stay in school. He adds that Salva! also coordinates with the Coligação de Cuidados Comunitários (CCC – Coalition for Community Care) that aims to improve the village conditions. Fabião says, “Ten of us – the 5 leaders of Salva! and 5 regular members are part of CCC and as such organize savings groups, village cleaning brigades and maintain a health emergency community fund.”

Beatriz Uate, president of Salva! states that, “for cases like Dulce, who was so sick she couldn’t walk anymore, SALVA! collected money among its members and from CCC saving groups. Transportation is very expensive. Renting a car could cost 500 meticaís (US\$20) especially if the driver isn’t amenable to negotiate.” The other option is to walk the 3 kilometers to the main road to catch a bus to the recently opened Malehice Health Center for 10 meticaís. In an effort to reduce the burdensome cost of traveling to Chibuto for farmers, Salva! has assisted in transferring patient files from Chibuto to Malehice Health Center. In addition, Salva! has organized PLHA groups who take turns picking up their medication to further reduce transport costs associated with care and treatment.



PLHAAction Group Weekly



Weekly visit in pairs to



Beatriz negotiating with a driver