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ZIMBABWE

FIRST PERSON

Reducing the HIV Stigma By Speaking Up

Campaign says, “Don’t be negative about being positive”

“Can you imagine me, a grown up man, weighing only 17 kg? (38 lbs),” says Davies Mazodze, a college lecturer who is living with HIV. This is the opening line of one of the public health television commercials developed with USAID funding in Zimbabwe.

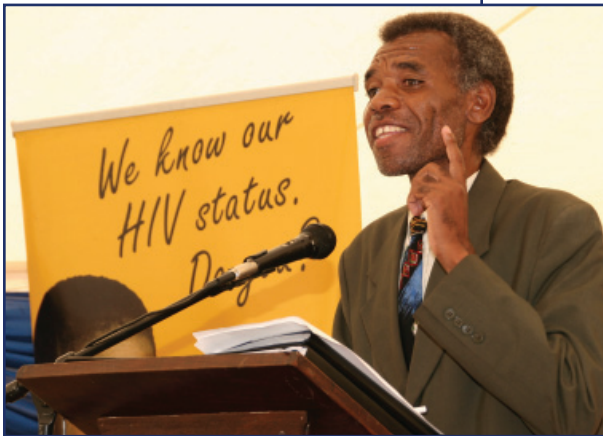


Photo: PSI/ Joseph Nkani

College lecturer Davies Mazodze speaks publicly about living positively with HIV.

In the USAID-funded television advertisement, Mazodze explains that he was so ill that his parents started distributing his property. His local pastor even advised his father to take him to a rural area in preparation for his funeral. Mazodze says that by publicly disclosing and accepting his status, he has learned to move forward positively and challenge the stigma associated with HIV at a community and family level. His testimony also provides evidence that people living with HIV/AIDS can improve their health and extend their lives with proper treatment.

The mass media campaign has generated much-needed dialogue and discussion regarding HIV-related stigma and discrimination. By portraying real-life experiences from role models, the campaign conveys the messages that everyone is vulnerable to HIV and that people with HIV can lead productive and happy lives.

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Mazodze is one of the few Zimbabweans who have publicly disclosed their status via electronic and print media. Despite having one of the highest HIV infection rates in the world (15.6%), there is little open discussion about HIV in Zimbabwe due to the stigma associated with the disease. As a result, those infected with HIV find it difficult to openly disclose their status to family and friends.

Against this backdrop, USAID funded the mass media campaign that provides a platform for individuals living with HIV to publicly disclose their status and share the story of the discrimination they experience daily. The campaign is a series of stories told by HIV-positive people from all walks of life. The speakers for the campaign have become public personalities both locally and internationally, giving talks about overcoming the HIV stigma.