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Community Mobilizers Become Stars

HIV-positive actors promote HIV testing, prevention and disclosure



Photo:EGPAFI Mathews Maruva

Blessing (left), Clemence and Tinashe (front) in front of their home.

“Disclosure of HIV status is still a problem in our community and we hope that through this film, people will appreciate the benefits of disclosing one’s status, especially to your spouse,” said Blessing, an HIV-positive mother and community mobilizer.

Blessing and Clemence Kanukai, husband and wife, play two of the lead acting roles in a USAID-funded film aimed at encouraging disclosure of HIV status between women receiving prevention of mother-to-child transmission (PMTCT) services, their partners, and other significant people in their lives. But, the Kanukais aren’t actors, they are community mobilizers who are both HIV-positive.

Blessing was first tested for HIV in 2000 when she went to a clinic for prenatal care. She was found to be HIV-positive and enrolled into the PMTCT program. Six months later, Clemence was also tested and was found to be HIV-positive. Blessing gave birth to a baby boy, Tinashe, who is now six years old and HIV-negative. In 2002, Clemence and Blessing became full-time PMTCT community mobilizers in an urban area called Chitungwiza.

The film that has made Blessing and Clemence stars is entitled *Ndizvo Zvandiri (That Is What I Am)* and was developed and performed by local Zimbabwean community mobilizers. All actors in the film are graduates from the PMTCT program.

“I have spent the last several years teaching people in Chitungwiza about HIV/AIDS,” said Blessing. “But now we have the opportunity to teach the whole world about HIV and AIDS... Tinashe is still too young to understand anything about what I do. He thinks mine is just a job like any other. But thank God for this film because I’m going to put it into our memory box and when he grows up, he is going to learn about HIV and AIDS from his parents first. Hopefully the film will teach him to avoid getting HIV-infected. It’s the best thing I could ever do for him and the many other children who have been orphaned through HIV and AIDS,” Blessing said.

“Disclosure of HIV status is still a problem in our community and we hope that through this film, people will appreciate the benefits of disclosing one’s status, especially to your spouse,” Blessing said. “Clemence is now my best friend and he encourages me to look at the brighter side of life always. I wish the same for every courageous mother we brush shoulders with every day.”