I Want to Be Somebody!

paulina chiziane

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Preface

Today we live in a world affected by various natural disasters, where diseases like malaria, cholera, tuberculosis and HIV destroy millions of lives each year. Those who are left behind are always the most vulnerable – our children.

Children who at a very young age become adults, without time to play and be children. Despite the solidarity of many Mozambican families who raise other children as their own, we see, with great dismay, thousands of children assume the role of mothers, fathers and leaders of households.

Paulina Chiziane, the famous Mozambican writer, brings us this book to break the silence. She talks with children to better understand their world and how we can do something to help them. Chiziane interviewed children from various regions of the country, including Gaza in the South, Manica in the Center and Nampula in the North.

This anthology of children´s stories, the first of its kind in Mozambique, illuminates the hopes, fears and dreams of children living with HIV.

The testimonies of these young people provide a good lesson to every Mozambican about the difference each individual can make in the lives of children. These stories open the minds of adults showing them that there is always the hope that we can win the fight against HIV and AIDS. Some stories are humorous, others speak of suffering and discrimination. Above all, these stories demonstrate the remarkable resilience of children in the face of hardship.

The HIV pandemic is a serious threat to the development and growth of the Nation of Mozambique, from the point of view of the government or the point of view of each citizen, requiring us to take more action to create a generation free of HIV and AIDS, the noblest desires of our people.

These stories by Paulina Chiziane are important evidence and document the need for a louder and more visible response to the challenges that HIV poses to our society

This work is a point of reference for the design of local programs and iniciatives dedicated to the protection of children, as they inspire us to continue to remove the obstacles that threaten our children´s future: limited access to basic nutrition, hygiene and education among others.

As a mother and teacher, I am making this appeal to all Mozambicans to be more proactive in protecting and caring for our children, that each one of us does something for our children, to enable them to enjoy happy and healthy lives.

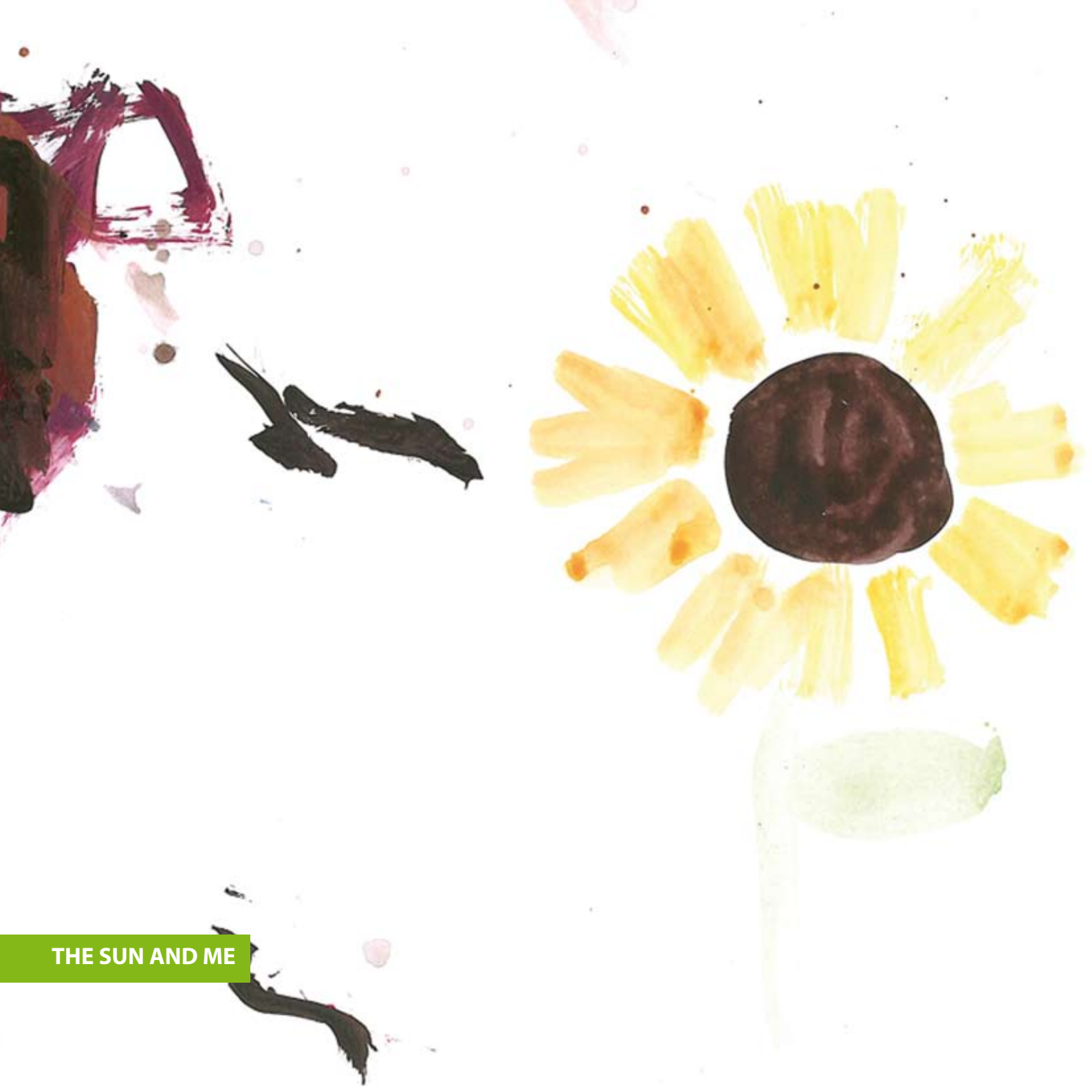
Dr. Maria da Luz Dai Guebuza
First Lady of Mozambique
Maputo, Abril 2010

CHILDREN AND HIV/AIDS

Travelling across the country, the author Paulina Chiziane listened to children from different genders and social classes aged between 5 and 17. They described with unusual capacity their vision of life with HIV/AIDS. They testified. They expressed their feelings. Some knew they were HIV positive; some had partial knowledge about it and others don't even imagine what is going on in their lives.

Controversial issues like disclosure or silence about the HIV status of a child are profoundly discussed by the little ones that observed and analyzed complicated issues, such as the right to information directed to children in the media. They also analyzed prevention messages about HIV/AIDS created by adults and wisely suggested their correction. They talked about the struggles and victories of children who live with the virus. They learned how to overcome fear and future uncertainty and now they study, dreaming of finishing higher education, getting married and having children. They pointed to antiretroviral treatment as the factor of hope that they intend to hold on until there is a cure for AIDS.

This book is an invitation to reflection for people to of all ages. With their testimonies, these little ones give the Mozambican nation a wise lesson about hope and victory in young fight against HIV/AIDS.



THE SUN AND ME

I WANT TO
BE SOMEBODY

SKY AND SUN

I NEVER HEARD OF HIV

I'm 10 years old. Before I was here at the shelter, I lived in Maputo. If I could fly, I would go all the way there right now. I miss my friends, my brother and my dad.

Now I live here at the shelter with my mom. She forces me to take pills. I don't know what they are good for, but if she gives them to me, it's because they must be important for me. Forgetting to take them? Never! I enjoy life, I want to live.

I want to live to go back to Maputo and see my brother again, and play with my friends. I'll grow up to be an airplane pilot. I'll fly a Boeing. After that, I'll get married; I'll have a house with a huge backyard for my children to play in it. I'll plant a lot of flowers.

I've never heard of HIV or AIDS but it seems to be an adult thing. Dating? I'm still a kid, I don't date and I don't want anything to do with that. January 1st this year was the saddest day of my life. They cut off my hair; my head looked like an egg. I cried a lot.

If I had God's strength, I would stop all disease. I'd make sure there would be enough food so that all kids could eat well and the right way and live happily with their parents.

THE KISS OF INNOCENCE

I always go to the hospital to take medicine; I don't know what it's good for. My grandma says that it helps me fight the disease I have. The doctor says that if I forget to take the medicine it's the same as forgetting to live. I saw my parents die. It was a slow, long illness. I saw them getting thinner and thinner, until they disappeared. I took care of them; I watched everything without being able to do anything. That was the reason I wound up with high-blood pressure. The medicine they give me must be to make me think less and miss my parents less.

I have heard of AIDS on TV, but I don't like that word. I don't know exactly why, but I don't like it. I'd rather play soccer and play with my girlfriend. I play hopscotch with her. We don't have sex, we just kiss each other. I like kissing her, its good. One day, I will marry her and we will have children. Having two wives? No way! That's crazy.

When I grow up, I want to be a doctor because that will make my life easy. I'll take care of patients and I'll take my pills, without having to wait in line for them.

I WANT TO GROW UP HAPPY LIKE ALL CHILDREN

My name is Dinho; I'm in the 2nd grade. I don't like going to school; the teacher hits the students a lot. I like to play soccer. I live with my dad, my mom and 3 brothers and sisters. I'm not sick, but I go to the hospital a lot to take medicines for a disease I don't know anything about and, after that, I play driver with my friends at the hospital.

I've never heard anything about AIDS and don't want to hear it, either. I don't want to talk about it; I never dated; don't ask me questions, that makes me dizzy.

If I had the power, I'd stop that so-called AIDS that only confuses kids. I'm not even sure that it's because of this virus they force me to take medicines for a disease I don't even have.

I want to grow up happy like all children. I want to be a driver when I grow up. I won't get married or have children, I don't want any of that. I just want to play as much as I want.

I WANT TO BE A NURSE

I'm in third grade. I like playing dolls with my sister. I've never seen anyone with AIDS, just heard about them. In the books, there are some very thin people and they say that's because they played with needles.

When my dad came back from South Africa, a female neighbor of ours asked him for a capulana[1]. He didn't give it to her and so she was furious. She did witchcraft against us and my dad died. I know my father died on the 25th, I don't know the year or the month. I was left with only my mom. Those spells still attack us. They give me and my mom headaches and stomach aches.

At the hospital, they gave us medicines to take every day. My mom doesn't let me talk about our disease to our family, friends or neighbors, so that we can avoid new witchcrafts and envy.

When I grow up, I'll have four children and I'll live with my husband. I'm studying to become a nurse.

1 **Capulana** is a traditional cloth worn by women in Mozambique

I WANT TO BE A SOCCER PLAYER

My dad died in 2005 and my mom is in Maputo. I now live with my aunt and I'm in the 5th grade. I've seen someone with AIDS at the hospital. Once, I went to the hospital to have some exams done, because of pain in my legs that wouldn't go away. The doctors didn't tell me the results, but they gave me some pills that I have to take every day.

Nobody knows that I live on pills. There's nothing behind it. I know other people that also live on medication and they don't tell anyone. So why should I reveal my secrets?

I like soccer a lot. I'll play for Costa do Sol when I grow up. If I ever meet the Mozambican President one day, I'll ask him for a soccer ball.

I'M AFRAID OF THE DAY THAT THERE WON'T BE ANY MORE PILLS

I had stomach aches that wouldn't go away and my aunt took me to the Health Center. Since then, I've been taking pills daily. Today, my greatest fear is not having pills to take. I'd rather starve than go without these pills. They are important for me to live, to go to school and become an engineer.

I don't know what disease I have. I'd also like to know how long I'll have to take these medicines but, if necessary, I'll take them until I'm old.

People talk too much, they say my dad died of AIDS and they make fun of me. I suffer, but I keep my mouth shut. I don´t tell anyone that I take medicines to prevent more gossip.

I'll beat this disease and I'll grow up. I'll raise cattle and I'll have fishing boats. I'll marry only one woman. My dad, who had a lot of wives, was always mad because of their fighting. They are all sick now; I think some of them will die. They don't want to go to the hospital and they say they suffer from the disease because their rivals were jealous and performed witchcraft to make them sick. My mom escaped the disease because she divorced my dad long ago.

If I had the power, I would do everything so that these medicines would always be available. I would teach people not to despise those living with AIDS.

ASTHMA?

MY HOUSE

NOBODY KNOWS ABOUT MY DISEASE

I'm in the 3rd grade. My teacher is beautiful but I don't know her name. I'm tired of taking medicines for this asthma that won't go away. The pills make me really dizzy because most of the time I take them without eating. Once, I threw out all the medicines and my mom was very upset with me. We are hungry at home, my mom sells ice candies, but she says she doesn't make enough money. My grandpa is the one who sends us food now and then.

Nobody knows about my diseases. Only my mom does. My dad died last year.

I DON'T WANT PATIENTS TO LACK MEDICATION

I'm in the 5th grade. I live with my uncles. I lost my parents when I was very young. I don't know how long I've had asthma; I don't know how I got it. It's uncomfortable. You have to spend your whole life taking medicines and can't even play all games you want. I don't know why God has given me this fate.

My classmates ask me what disease I have. I always tell them it's asthma, they pretend they have forgotten and they ask me again. It seems like they don't believe what I say and they gossip just because I lost my parents. I don't mind their gossip because each one of us has our own diseases. I'm not the only person in the world living like this.

I've heard of AIDS. One of my uncles died with a lot wounds on his body due to that disease. It attacks people that date and not virgins like me. Long ago, they said that people died because of it but it seems like now they don't die anymore.

I thought about having a boyfriend but I don't want to get married. A married woman has to get pregnant, carry the baby on her back, get water from the well and then cook. How it is going to be with my asthma? I don't have the strength; it's going to be hard, I don't want to.

I miss my parents. I'm a lucky person; my uncles take good care of me. I'm studying to become a doctor and hospital manager. I don't want patients to lack medication.

I KNOW I WILL HEAL

My dad got thinner and thinner and then died. My mom died giving birth to my sister. After that, I was sent to SOS village, I came back from there sick. Now, I live with my brothers and sisters and I'm in the 4th grade.

Talking about AIDS makes me remember my parents' death, I don't like it. The only thing I know is that I have been taking pills and I don't know what they are good for. I just take them because they make me feel better, otherwise, I wouldn't take them.

When I play ball, I don't run as fast as the others. The pills sometimes make me weak. I know I will heal; I'll grow up and get married. I want to have two children, a girl and a boy so that I can give them my mom and dad's names.

I'll be a doctor to help other children. If I could, I'd do everything to prevent AIDS from making so many children orphans.

I REALLY MISS MY MOM

I want to be an architect like my dad. I will build a beautiful house to live in with my grandma if she is still alive. I don't know why she gives me pills to take if I don't feel any pain. Now and then I have an asthma crisis, some allergies but that's all.

My mom is dead and my dad lives with a new wife. My friends live with both their parents; I'm the only one to live with his grandma. I really miss my mom.

I don't have a girlfriend yet; the girls in my school are all ugly. I want to have a baby girl as beautiful as my mom was.

I HAVE TO TAKE THE MEDICINES EVERY DAY

I went to the hospital with my grandma and they told me I have a disease. It's asthma. That's the reason I have to take medicines everyday to weaken this germ that's in my body. My grandma also takes medicines all the time, it seems like she got this germ when she was taking care of my mom. My mom died when I was still a little girl.

My grandma talks a lot about AIDS, but I've never seen anyone with this disease.

RURAL HOSPITAL OF CHIBUTO

SEXUALITY

THE GERM THAT EATS MY BODY

CAN A VIRGIN CATCH AIDS?

I studied until grade 8, but I had to stop 2 years ago because of health problems. I live with my parents and my brothers and sisters. I suffer from stomach aches due to eating fish, sardines and shrimps. AIDS? No, I'm a virgin. One day, I'm going to get married to a really fat, really tall husband. He has to be handsome though. I'd like to have 3 boys and a girl. Girls spend lots of money on clothes; boys don't. I'd like to have a better house and a car. I'd also like to have a lot chickens running around in the backyard and a pen full of goats.

I'M NOT GOING TO DATE

My dad died and left me with my mom and my three siblings. I suffer from allergies that give me with a lot of pimples all over my body.

I heard about AIDS already. My friends say that it's a disease that affects boys with girlfriends, that's the reason I'm not going to date.

Now I'm getting better. I always go to the hospital with my mom.

I like to play soccer, but my mom doesn't let me play because I get tired easily. I'm in the 1st grade and my teacher is pretty. When I grow up, I'm going to fly an airplane.

I DON´T WANT TO DIE WITHOUT A CHILD

I could even say that I was already dead, but the medicines made me live again. My blood is so used to antiretrovirals that I don't taste their flavor anymore. I started taking them when I was 11. Once I went on vacation and I forgot them at home. The doctor was so angry at me you can't even imagine.

My back pains come and go and because of them I can't sit still for a long period of time. Only my mom knows about this disease, no one else can know, otherwise they will start gossiping about me and I don't want that.

I don't like to hear about AIDS. That word reminds me of everything I want to forget: my disease, my poverty, my dad's death and all the friends I've lost.

I stopped going to school in the sixth grade when I lost my dad. My mom couldn't afford to pay the school fees. Now, I'm a waiter at a bar. There's too many people drinking, too many smoking and doing other things, but I'll never get into that life; I don't want to ruin my health. I earn 60 Meticais[2] a day to help my mom. I would like to go back to school one day to improve our situation, but I don't have anyone to support me. When my disease heals, I'm going to be a mason just like my dad.

I had a girlfriend; I broke up with her because she wanted to have sex without using a condom. She didn't care about AIDS and she ended up looking for other men. Now I have another girlfriend, I have protected sex with her.

2 **60 Meticais** is equivalent to 2USD at date of publication

I don't want to die without a child; but I'm afraid of infecting my girlfriend and I don't know how to solve this problem. Before I die, I need to finish the house that my dad started, in order to have my child, but I don't earn enough money. Despite the virus, I'm going to live until I'm a 100 years old or older, but that's too much. I'd rather die at 50.

CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

THE HEALTH CENTER WHERE I GO

GRINDING THE BODY WITH MAIZE

My name's Belinha. I'm in the 3rd grade at Patrice Lumumba Primary School and I live with my grandma and my dad. My mom died, she was very sick. After her death, I started working a lot. I wake up early to get water, then I come back to grind corn into maize that my grandma takes to cook. Because of that, I'm always sick, always sleepy. I take medicines every day to keep from being so tired.

At school, my teacher gets angry with me all the time because I fall asleep during class. At home, my grandma also gets angry with me because I don't finish chores. I don't have anybody to defend me. My dad is unemployed and my grandma is old. I have very little time left over to study; that's why I have bad grades. If mommy was alive, she would grind maize for me. But, she will never return, she left and left me with all this sorrow.

I've never heard of HIV or AIDS. When I grow up, I want to be a nurse to take care of people. If I'm a nurse I won't have to do heavy work. If I had the strength, I wouldn't let grandmothers force children to do tiring work.

IT'S NOT AIDS THAT KILLS, NEGLIGENCE DOES

I'm in the 8th grade. My parents died. I don't know what disease killed them. I miss them a lot. They died in November, that's why I don't like that month.

I've seen someone with AIDS. Elina. She was really skinny when she first came to the Center. She started the treatment and she got pretty. During the holiday season, she went to her family's home and she stopped taking the medicines properly. She got thin again and she died at age 14. In my opinion, it wasn't AIDS that killed her; it was her family's negligence and lack of love. They didn't care about her health and they didn't give her anything to eat.

I'm being treated for asthma. If one day I find out that I have HIV/AIDS, I'll take all medicines, because there's going to be a cure for AIDS one day, I believe in that.

I'm studying. All I think about is being a ballerina, I want to go on stage, travel all over the world and dance. I don't want to get married or have children.

If I could, I would educate all families to give a lot of attention to HIV positive children, because all AIDS patients need loads of love and care.

THE SADDEST DAY OF MY LIFE

I have 4 brothers and one lives in South Africa. I go to school here in Maputo. At home, no one is employed; we live on the small sales from the stand right in front of our door. I live with my grandparents and my brothers, my dad lives here in Maputo with another woman. I've had asthma since I was a little girl, that's why I take pills every day; but they are too strong, too bitter. Sometimes, they leave me a little bit dizzy, when I take them without eating first. At home, we don't always have food.

AIDS? I've seen people with that disease. My aunt has it and she is getting better. It's a disease that doesn't go away, the person just gets better. My neighbors say my mom died from this disease just to pick on me because I have so many pimples all over my body. That's the way my neighbors are. They make up things just to discriminate against others. That's why I don't like to hear about AIDS stuff.

One day, I was washing my flip flops at the drainage ditch with my friends and some other girls shouted: don't wash your flip flops there. Go and wash your AIDS somewhere else. I got out of there and went home running. I told my aunt everything and I cried a lot that day. It was the saddest day of my life.

At school, I play hopscotch with my friends. I enjoy that game. If I was a grown-up person, I would tell the girls from my neighborhood to stop dissing me. At church, I ask God to give us more food. It's hard to take pills while you're starving at home.

I will grow up and I'm going to live well. I'm going to study and be a doctor to help heal sick people. I don't know if I'm going to get married, but I'm sure I'm going to have children. I'm going to have a beautiful house. A colorful one. My house is going to have a lot of flowers. It's going to have a good TV, a huge dish. A husband? I don't want a husband like my dad. Children, yes; I'll have them. Beautiful children free from AIDS.

I FEEL THAT I'M GOING TO BE "SOMEONE"

Since I was admitted to the hospital, I take pills all the time. I was born with this asthma. My parents died when I was still a baby from a disease I know nothing about. My friends say they died of AIDS and they tease me. They talk about these issues whenever they want to discriminate against me.

When I grow up, I don't know exactly what I'm going to be, but I feel that I'm going to be someone, like my father was. I'm going to be a teacher like my mother. I like cooking. I cook rice and my grandma cooks curry. I have a younger brother whom I take care of. I bathe him and change his clothes. I like taking care of him.

HOSPITAL

CONTRADICTORY INFORMATION

I WANT TO BE A TEACHER

I KNOW I'LL LIVE

I don't get sick as much as I used to. I was taken from my home village to SOS village[3] when I was very sick, and then I got better. I lived at home alone after my parents and my brothers and sisters died. I take all my medicines by myself; nobody needs to remind me. I'm afraid of getting as sick as I was before.

In my village, everybody said I had AIDS, but here they tell me I have asthma. I know my parents are not going to come back but I ask God to live because I want to be a doctor and take care of children that suffer like me. I know I'll live. And I'll get married in a white dress and I'll carry white flowers. I'll have kids. My daughter is going to have my mother's name so that I can call her: mommy!

3 **SOS village** is an orphanage

WHY DOESN'T GRANDMA TELL ME THE TRUTH?

They said I had asthma. I believed it. But, once I was admitted to the hospital due to diarrhea and pimples all over my body. A lady that was in the same ward told me another story. To tell you the truth, I never had breathing problems, and I think my grandma is lying to me; I don't have any asthma. I don't see why it's difficult to tell me the truth about my life. My head is spinning round and round and I believe I have the right to know what is going on with me.

I heard about AIDS, at the ward, but I can't have that disease; I'm too young and I never dated. If I had AIDS, I would have died, just like my parents. It must be spirits; there are many cases like that in the family. My aunt, who is a healer, had a disease just like mine before she accepted the spirits. Could that be the case with me? If it is, why doesn't grandma tell me the truth?

I think they are giving me medicines for the wrong disease. Still, I take them, they make me feel better; I can't stop taking them.

DISCLOSURE

THIS EVIL VIRUS

CHILDREN MUST KNOW ABOUT THEIR CONDITION

I'm a 9th grade student. I like Portuguese and I hate Biology and Math. My health is improving. I've forgotten many times to take the medicines. It happens when I fall sleep early or when I stay up late, playing with my friends. I don't like antiretrovirals, but it has to be. It's better to take them then not to take them.

It all started with swellings in my head. After that, I got thin. I never went through my initiation rites or got tattoos. I was circumcised at Nacala Hospital and the material was sterilized. I never used somebody else's toothbrush. I got this virus in a barber shop, I'm sure of that.

My parents and my twin brother are the only ones to know about my condition. No one else must know, because for many, AIDS is a disease that is a result of bad behavior. I had a girlfriend once, I only kissed her, we sat and talked on the park benches and after that we went to eat popcorn. I broke up with her because she thought I was too slow and too quiet. Now I have a new girlfriend; she said yes last week and I still haven't kissed her. Now I just want to date, I've never had sex in my life and I'll never have, so I don't know if I'm going to marry her. Could I have children one day with this virus?

Nobody wanted to tell me the truth about my condition. Not my mom, not the doctor. I suspected from the medicines I received, the questions I was asked. I started searching on my own to find out what was going on with me. I insisted that the doctor tell me the truth, because it wasn't fair to keep a secret about a

subject that was only of interest to me. I wouldn't speak to my mother until she told me the truth. I was, at the time, 12 years old. They told me everything. On that day, I went to school very confused. Walked by that wall where it's written "AIDS kills". I was very frightened, believing I would die at that exact moment. During classes, I didn't pay attention to anything and at recess I wouldn't leave the classroom; I stayed alone, silent. I've been in treatment for three years now and I haven't died yet. And I'm not going to die before becoming a doctor.

So I think they could improve what is written on the walls and outdoors so that it doesn't frighten children. Children must be aware of their condition; so that they can take better care of themselves and they can give advice to other children. Adults need to think about us. When they have AIDS campaigns on TV, they just talk about dating and ugly things. It makes it seems as though we, children, are guilty and do bad things. It's not right. Children are innocent of this and they can't be overlooked due to misinformation created by adults. When I grow up, I'm going to deliver the right information about HIV/AIDS on radio and TV, just for kids.

I'M GOING TO RESIST UNTIL THERE IS A CURE

I don't know how I got this virus, but it doesn't matter to me. Once I got it the only thing left to do is to live with the situation. My mom is the one who overreacts with her worries. She thinks I'm going to die; I don't know who put that in her head. This is a disease like many others and I know how to take care of myself.

She didn't let me leave home to study in an junior college. I want to be an agricultural technician and the course is only taught in Nampula. So I figured out how to get my way. I sneaked out and enrolled in Agricultural School. Then, I went to the hospital and I lied. I convinced the nurses that I was going to move to live with an aunt and so I could get my medical records transferred to the Health Care Center closest to my new school.

I packed and I hid my clothes at a friends' house. Then, I just went out like I was just going out to play. I went like this: Mom, I'm going out, see you later. She believed me. I got my bag from my friend's place, I got on the bus and off I went. When I arrived at the school, I called my mom and I told her everything. At first, she didn't believe me. Then she shouted and yelled. Finally, she accepted it.

Yes, I'm HIV positive; but that's no reason for me to quit fighting for what I want. I'm sure I'm going to live for many years still to come. I'll resist until a cure is discovered.

I WANT TO BE LIKE EVERYONE ELSE

I'm in eighth grade in Nampula and I dream of becoming a nurse. I don't date because I'm not 18 yet. I've been through initiation rites and they didn't talk about AIDS during them, or preventing AIDS. There wasn't any of that razor or tattoo stuff. Nobody pierced or cut me.

I was very scared when I found out that I had HIV, because I thought I would die soon. I listened to the radio; I saw things written on the walls and outdoors saying that AIDS kills.

I don't want to tell anyone that I have this disease; I'm afraid people will start talking about me, a virgin. I've never even dated.

Me? I just want to be like everyone else. I would like to be freed from this disease and be like everyone else. Yes, I would like to get married. I would like to have many children. However, how can I have children if I always use a condom? This virus limited my dreams. If I had the power, I would prevent children from being vaccinated with HIV-infected material. I just ask God to look after my parents and the doctors who take care of me, because I don't know what I would do without them.

I'M A CHILD

I'm 11 years old and I'm in the 3rd grade. I'm HIV positive but I never dated, I'm a child. I was interned at the hospital when I was struck by one of those night witchcraft fires[4]. At home, no one is infected; everybody was tested and the results were negative. I'm the only one infected in the family.

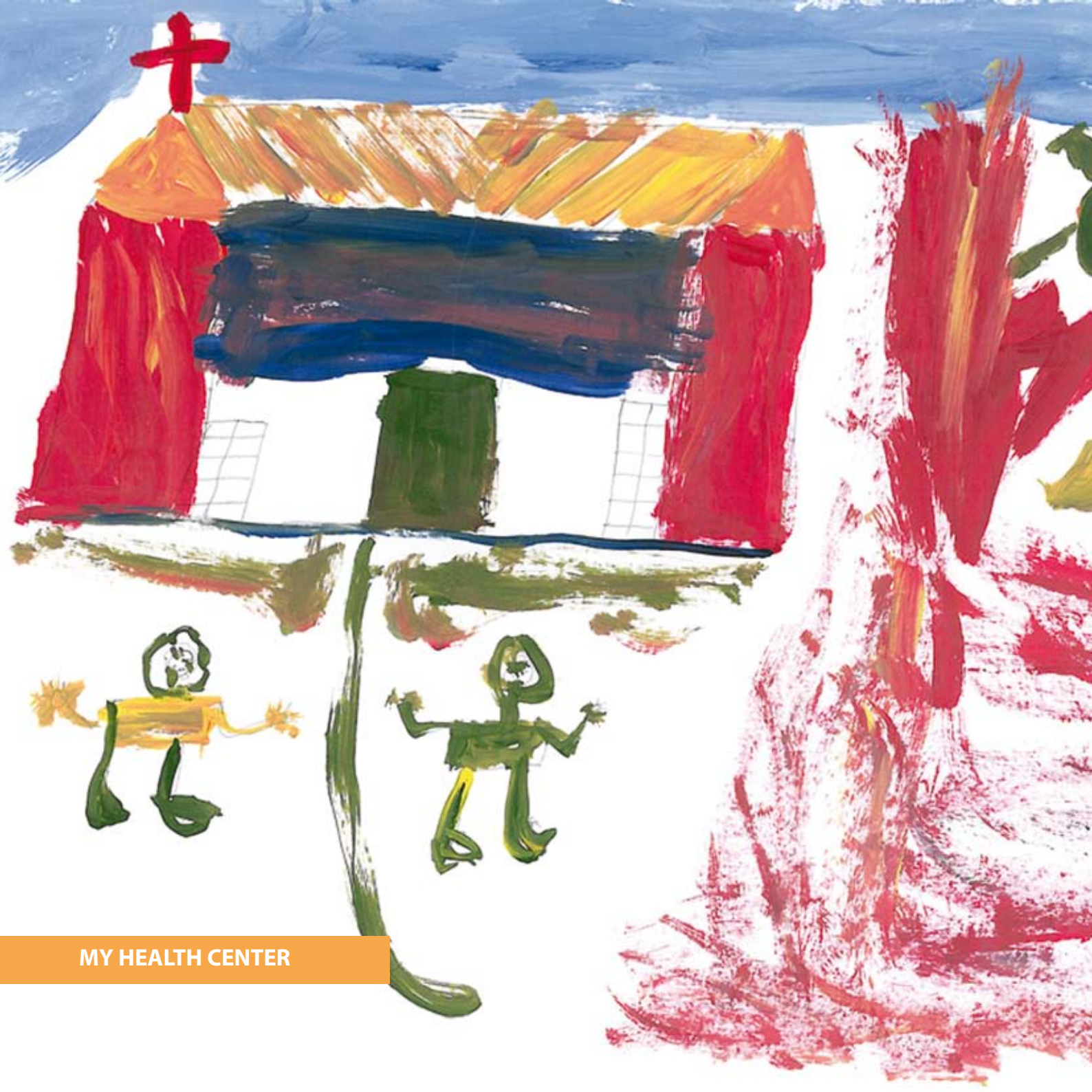
My mom suffers because of me and she cries a lot whenever I'm sick. She says she doesn't know what my future is going to be like. She also says that, even if I grow up, I won't have a wife or kids. She says I'll never be a miner, that I'll never make any money. She only says that when she's upset, so I don't mind. But, I'll live and I'll be a doctor. I don't want a girlfriend, I'm still young, but I like Mrs. M though. One day I'll marry her.

No one here knows about my disease. Just my mom and dad do. Not even my brothers and sisters know my secret. I don't want other people to know, they might discriminate against me. I don't like antiretrovirals, but I take them. If I was President, I would protect all children with this disease. I ask God to give me health, so that I can study and be a good doctor.

4 **Refers to herpes zoster**, most likely due an adverse effect of antiretroviral treatment

MY NEIGHBOR HOOD

DIFFICULTIES



MY HEALTH CENTER

FALSE EMBRACE

My parents died in 2005 and I was left home alone. When my uncle returned from South Africa, he offered to take care of me. I was happy. But, the first thing that he did was to take me to his house. Then he rented the house I inherited from my parents. It is a concrete house; it's very beautiful and renting it makes a lot of money. He uses the rent money to support his wife and kids. He doesn't even give me food. Or buy me school materials.

My aunt turned me into a housekeeper: I'm the one who cooks, sweeps, washes. I take care of the family. She doesn't give me time to rest, to play or study my school lessons. She doesn't let me go to the hospital to take my medicines. My uncle doesn't defend me, he doesn't have the power. Like me, he's also HIV positive, he's been sick, weakened.

Kuvumbana Association decided to give me basic food provisions regularly, to lessen my suffering. Instead of using the food for the family to eat, my aunt sells it at the street market.

I quit the antiretroviral treatment which helped me and now my pains and aches have returned: I have a bad cough and my chest hurts. I suspect my uncles are planning my death so that they can keep the big house, the plots, and the productive farms that my parents left me as inheritance.

The School Principal and my teacher know that I have AIDS, I showed them my card. The ladies from the association also know and they help me a lot. I have two brothers that live and work in South Africa. I ask God to bring them back home. They are the eldest and they have to run the family business that is being stolen. I want to restart my treatment in order to study and be a teacher.

DON'T LET CHILDREN BE BORN WITH THE VIRUS

On the day the nurse told me I had AIDS, I was really sad. I remembered what I had heard on TV, that AIDS kills and I thought I was going to die for good. I cried a lot. The nurse hugged me and told me he was going to give me medicine that helps people to get strong and grow up healthy. I haven't started taking that medicine, though. But, when the time comes, I'll do everything they tell me to do.

I'm in the 1st grade. My classmates and neighbors don't know that I have HIV, my mom tells me to hide it. She and my dad are also infected and they are already being treatment. They say I got this virus when I was still inside my mom.

I'll live, I'll grow up, and I'll be a teacher. I won't get married so that I don't pass on my disease. I would like to tell mothers not to let their children be born with this disease like it happened to me.

ADULTS MUST REDUCE ALCHOOL CONSUMPTION

I know I have AIDS. I learned it in a cruel way due to a family fight after my dad's death. My dad's relatives accused my mom of witchcraft and kicked her out of the house, when that was happening she blurted it out. She said all her children were infected and they would die soon. At the time, I was 8 years old.

After that, my family was torn apart and I was lucky to live with my uncle who treats me like his own daughter. He sent me to the Hospital and I started antiretroviral treatment at that time. Contrary to what my mom said, none of us died, not even her. My youngest brother is the one who's not growing up so well.

In my neighborhood, most of the people know about my condition. When my mom drinks, she talks uncontrollably, but I forgive her, she's my mother, what can I do? At the beginning, people talked about me at the wells, on the street, at school, in the market. But, I'm used to it now. Today, many people aren't afraid to talk to me although some still walk away. I tell them all the time that you can't catch my disease from a conversation. I explain everything I know about transmission to them.

My dad drank a lot and that is why he died so young. Adults must reduce alcohol consumption to avoid creating so much disgrace inside the families. I'm following the treatment well that is why I'm going to live for many years. I'm going to study to become a doctor.

I WANT MORE BREAD, RICE AND BEANS

I'm 11 years old and I'm in the 4th grade. One day, I'm going to be a teacher at my school. My mom and dad are in Maputo, working, and I live here in Xai-Xai with my grandma. My mom thinks I caught the virus during a blood transfusion, when I was hospitalized with malaria, because neither she nor my dad has it, neither do any of my brothers or sisters.

Nobody knows about my condition, except my parents. I don't want anybody to know it. It's good for someone to say he has AIDS at the hospital because they can receive treatment. It is not good to hide. I don't like the antiretrovirals because they make me really hungry. I really hate those yellow pills because they burn my stomach, but I take them.

Whenever I go to church, I pray to always have my parent's love. When I'm at the altar, I ask God: I want more bread, rice and beans.

GOOD ADHERENCE

THE SUN SHINING ON ME

I WAS REBORN

Mommy died in 2004, I was 7 years old. Many traditional rituals were held and we were vaccinated with razors. It must have been how I caught the virus. Or maybe I was born with it, I don't know. At the time, there were misunderstandings; there were accusations that my mom died because of witchcraft in the family for my mom's death. That pushed our dad away from us and my 9 year old brother took over the household. He worked in the streets, doing odd jobs, making bricks, helping the ladies carry their baskets in the market. He earned enough to buy food and candles. When he couldn't get work, we slept hungry and in the dark. One day, he left the streets and we don't know where he went.

When my father died in 2007, I was left completely on my own. I learned how to take care of myself and to beg the neighbors and relatives for food. I also begged in the streets of my neighborhood. Some gave me flour, rice, but others gave me food so rotten I couldn't even give it to the ducks. Others kicked me away, saying: don't increase my expenses; I'm not the one who created AIDS. Your parents died because they were bad, go beg somewhere else. I cried a lot because of that.

I was very ill. Some ladies from the association took me to the hospital; I was there for a long time. When I learned I was HIV positive, I cried a lot and I asked God to take me to my mommy's side and end all of my suffering. But I got better, I was released from the hospital and I went home. I confirm that with antiretrovirals I was reborn. I was taken in by one of my aunts and I live better now. In my new family, no one discriminates against me.

My girlfriend doesn't know I'm HIV positive. I'm going to marry her and have 3

children. I don't want to be polygamous, no. Two women make a lot of noise in a household.

When I grow up, I'll be a doctor like mine. She gave me medicines, food, clothes until I regained life. Like her, I want to heal all thin children until they gain weight. I'll grow up, now I'm sure of it. And I'll beat this virus, when a cure is discovered. With the money I'll earn, I would like to get a real plane, but I know I won't be able to afford it. If I don't, I'll be satisfied with a motorcycle or a car.

BETWEEN LOVE AND FRIENDSHIP

I didn't know my father. My mom died because of the disease I have. She died from stubbornness. My grandma told her to go to the hospital, but she refused, saying that she didn't have HIV/AIDS. I even think she didn't like me. Maybe that is why she didn't want to be treated, so that she could die and leave me alone in the world.

When I had stomach aches, my grandma took me to the hospital. They told me that I had HIV. On that day, I was really upset, mad and embarrassed. I'm a virgin, I'm a good girl, and I don't deserve this fate. Then, I realized the advantage of acknowledging my disease, because now I'm receiving medication and I'm healthy.

At school, no one knows that I'm HIV positive. I keep my secret to avoid my classmates' disdain. At Mulotana, all my friends and cousins know that I have AIDS, they buy me fruit and they treat me tenderly and with care.

I don't have a boyfriend. I don't want to. I'm in the 3rd grade. My dream is to be an engineer, to get married and have four children.

If I had the power, I would make all parents love their children more. I would make them get AIDS testing and treatment, to keep them from dying and leaving their children alone like my mom did. I ask God for AIDS medicines always to be available for all children.

I WANT TO BE SOMEONE

Before I came to live here at the shelter, I lived with my parents. When my parents were alive, my life was good. I had tenderness, company and all that is good in this life. Now I'm alone in this world. Alone, with this virus I caught while still inside my mother's body.

My friends know about my condition. They are also HIV positive. There is no rejection among us. When I'm alone, I think about my parents and of everything I lost. In those moments, I look for my friends, I talk, I play and I forget. I don't like being alone.

Some boys have asked me to date them, but I don't pay any attention to them. Dating, now? No, it's too soon. School is the only thing that interests me. But, I'll date one day and I'll get married dressed in white. And I'll rebuild the family I've lost. Then, I'll have a baby girl and I'll name her after my mom and have a baby boy named after my dad.

I want to beat this virus, I want to grow up, and that's why I take my medicine the way I'm supposed to. I study a lot to be a good accountant. I'm a math wiz; no one can fool me with numbers. It's just a pity that my mom isn't here by my side to help me out with homework.

I'll take the antiretrovirals until there is a cure for this disease. With God's help, I'll be somebody.

I WANT TO TAKE ALL MY MEDICINES NOW

On the day the nurse told me I had HIV, I was very sad and confused. I thought right away that I was going to die. At that time, I was very sick. My mom and dad had been sick too but they are better now, they already take their daily medicines, but I haven't started yet. The nurse says that my body still has strength and it can fight against the germ that's in my blood; but I want to take the medicines right away, so that I can stop all the pain and not miss school anymore. I'm in the 1st grade and I want to study to become a teacher.

Last year, I spent Children's Day at my brother's school. We danced and sang a lot. It was the happiest day of my life. That's why I don't tell anyone at school that I have AIDS, to avoid having my friends discriminate against me because I don't want to miss this year's Children's Day.

When I grow up, I'm going to build a good house, I'm going to get married and have children. My wife has to be strong enough to help me on the farm.

AIDS KILLS THOSE WHO DON'T TREAT THEMSELVES

I'm a student and I'm in the 2nd grade. I've been sick since I was little, that's why I only go to school sometimes; I only go when I'm feeling better. I have mommy's disease. I caught it while I was breastfeeding; or I was already born with it, I'm not sure. I take pills every day, two in the morning, two in the afternoon, because I have a germ in my body, which is HIV. I never fail, I always take them. I've never forgotten to take them, not even for a day. I usually watch the clock, see what time it is and then I take the pills. I don't need anyone to tell me, I already know. On my own! I even prefer taking pills than eating candies. Candies are great, I like them. Sometimes the pills are bitter, sometimes they even make me want to throw up, but they keep me healthy. I'm going to take the pills until I'm twenty years old or older, I don't know. I'm going to get married the way my cousin Maleia did: wear a long, beautiful dress, cover my head with a capulana , wear nice shoes, exactly like on my cousin's wedding. Aunt Olinda is going to be my godmother. I'm going to have four children, two girls and two boys. I don't date now because I don't have a boyfriend, but when I have one, I'm going to date.

Mommy died when I was 6 years old. Daddy died soon after. I'm with my new mom, who is my mom's younger sister. I'm going to study a lot to become a doctor. Then I'll drive a car. I would also like to fly an airplane.

The happiest day of my life was when I got a compliment from my teacher. I drew the best picture in the class: I drew a man, sitting by his wife's side, in a house full of flowers. The saddest day of my life was when my brother died. I cried a lot and I was angry. If anybody else dies, I'm going to suffer again.

I have a lot of friends at school and in my neighborhood. I play with them. I like dancing to drums; hopscotch is my favorite game, I almost always win, I know how to play. None of my friends know about my condition. Even at home, only the grown-ups know about it. If my friends found out, they would discriminate against me, they would move away from me, and I don't want to lose them.

I sometimes overhear my neighbors fighting all the time. Sometimes, the husband, angry, wants to hit his wife but then he says: it's not worth beating you: you have AIDS: if I beat you, I might kill you: they would call me a murderer when you are already a corpse: your AIDS killed you a long time ago. That's how I found out that they have this problem.

I don't like the word AIDS, because people use it to abuse others. If one day someone accuses me of having AIDS, I'll be angry and I'll reply like this: your momma is the one who has AIDS.

I've already heard about AIDS at school, on the radio and television. They say AIDS kills. How can it kill if I'm still alive? It must be a lie. For me, AIDS only kills people who don't take care of themselves.

I LIVE IN PEACE, DESPITE THE VIRUS

I was born with the AIDS virus and I have lived until today. I feel that I'm really going to live and fulfill all my dreams. I follow the treatment strictly. I forget to do homework, sometimes out of laziness, sometimes because I simply fall asleep. But I never forget to take the antiretrovirals. I'll take them until the day they discover a cure for me. Nobody takes me to the hospital to take the medicines. I always go alone. Nobody needs to remind me.

I'm afraid to look at a woman, that's why I don't have a girlfriend. I just stare at them from behind, never face to face. I believe that if they find out that I like them they will get angry and beat me. Even so, one of these days I'm going to find a chubby lady, who is not HIV positive, and I'll marry her. On my wedding day, I'm going to wear a black suit, white shirt and tie. She will be beautiful, all dressed in white, lace and flowers. We are going to have 12 children; that's possible, my grandma had 19 children and they are all alive. I just don't know how that's going to work since I have to have sex protected with a condom.

I don't want to be polygamous. Many wives create a lot of mess in a household: sometimes they do witchcraft for the husband to give them more money, sometimes they are jealous and they fight all the time. At home, that's what happens: my dad has many wives and we live in a total mess.

My mom had a madjini[5] that killed her, that's why I live with my dad and 5 brothers and sisters. I like my stepmother, who takes care of me when I'm sick. She doesn't

5 **Madjinini** refers to evil espirit or witchcraft

even know I have HIV, neither do my brothers and sisters. Not even my classmates know; they like to do things just to diss people. Just my dad and I know the truth.

I live in peace despite the virus. If I was older, I would advise men not to have many wives. I just ask God for there to always be enough antiretrovirals and pray that a cure for AIDS is discovered quickly, because I want to grow up and be a doctor.

THE SUN

DEPRESSION

MY HOSPITAL

I'M THE ONLY ONE INFECTED WITH THE VIRUS

It's all my mom's fault. And my dad's too. All because of their witchcraft; there are always witch doctors at home. I've never been to the barber shop. I haven't been circumcised yet. I never had a blood transfusion. I caught HIV from those vaccinations, razors and tattoos.

I suffer from headaches. I have a bad cough. I miss school a lot because I'm sick. I started getting ill when I was 8 years old and I'm still suffering. One day, the nurse called my mom, dad, brothers and sisters for testing. Result: the only one infected is me.

What did I do wrong to deserve this? Why did my parents send me to that healer? Didn't they know about the danger? Sometimes I think my parents don't like me. Everything in life was set up against me; because the healer's tattoos affected me and not the others.

Sometimes, I throw away the antiretrovirals when my parents aren't there. It would have been better to prevent than to make me take pills every day. It's all my mom's fault because she didn't protect me. It's my dad's fault because he didn't think things through. If they condemned me, why do I have to think about the future? I don't want anything from this life anymore. I'd rather die, so I could rest.

I JUST WANT TO DIE!

I'm 11 years old and I don't go to school. The school is far away and I can't go there because of this asthma that won't go away. My mom died when I was very little, but my dad died in 2007. I was left with my stepmother.

Sometimes when I'm sad, my mom comes. When I run to her, she disappears. Soon I remember she's dead and it was only a dream. Then, I cry. I run away from home, just wander with no destination on the village paths. I walk and I walk, just to forget. I reach the market and I start begging. Sometimes I get leftovers from restaurants. I hide from everybody so that no one knows where I am. I also run away from my stepmother who mistreats me. She's always saying that I'm nobody; that my life doesn't have any future and it isn't worth wasting food on me. I only feel ok at home when my brother returns from the South African mines. It's good living with him.

I've started and stopped antiretroviral treatment many times. I don't have anybody to bring the medicines home to me. It is very far from my house to the hospital. With this breathing problem, I can't make it there. My stepmother doesn't help me, but she's also sick and so is her baby. They say my mom was mentally ill, but I don't think my stepmother's mentally ok either.

I always play alone, I don't have friends. I can't even play because I get tired; I just sit in the corner watching others play. I don't want anything from this life. Not school, not work, the future doesn't exist for me. If my mom were still alive, maybe I could dream. All I ask God is for this suffering to come to an end. I just want to die!

SUPPORT

HEALTH CENTER

CHILDREN CAN HELP OTHER CHILDREN

I got very sick in 2006 and no one thought I would survive, but thanks to God I'm here. Now I take medicines to weaken this evil germ that tries to kill my blood. I don't know where this germ came from, because no one has it at home. I've never gotten tattoos or gone to a healer. I haven't been through initiation rites.

When I think about my health sometimes I cry. To push away the sadness, I play hopscotch, alone. I jump and jump and I get tired. After that, I fall asleep and I forget. The next day, I wake up with more joy. I found out not long ago that a girl at the hospital suffers from the same disease I do. Fortunately, she's from my neighborhood. I started visiting her and we became friends. When she's sad, I cheer her up and she does the same for me. Sometimes we spend hours playing and the sadness goes away. It's good to have a friend like her because she understands me. I play with her; we talk about our stuff without fear of being rejected. Unfortunately, many people don't understand yet that AIDS is a disease that can catch you even if you are innocent, just like in my case.

I'm in the 4th grade and I want to be a teacher. I'll have a husband and I'll get married. I would love to have children, but I won't, it can make my disease worse.

If I could, I would gather many HIV positive children for them to get to know each other, play together and help each other. Children can help other children fighting the fear of the disease; as well as teach everybody not to diss people with the virus.

I WOULD LIKE TO HAVE FRIENDS LIKE ME

On the day the doctor told me I had AIDS, I didn't react at all; at the time, I didn't understand what it meant. But now I know. On that day, the doctor told me: cholera has come; you need to be very careful and hygenic. You have AIDS, you have to take medicines, you cannot forget. You always have to take your medicines to soothe that germ that's inside your blood.

In my neighborhood, people often insult mommy with bad words. First the children start, then the grown-ups, all because of this disease that killed my dad. I don't know why they act like that, when they know very well that a person can die of many things. When they provoke me, I instantly say: you all are going to die first; from a car accident, malaria, I on the other hand am going to live until I'm old. That's why I only talk about my disease at the hospital; I don't say anything to my friends. I'm afraid they will discriminate against me and not play with me.

They are mean to us in the neighborhood. At home, we are hungry. It's difficult to take medicines when there's no food. For that, I ask you to help my mom. Helping her is the same as helping me, because she gives me everything she has.

I'm 10 years old and I'm the 2nd grade. I'm going to be a teacher and then I'll get married when I'm grown up. I want to have five daughters; just girls. Boys don't know how to play, they like to beat you up and they are thugs. I'll have a husband my size. I don't want a tall man or a fat man. I'm going to have a big, colorful, beautiful house.

The happiest day of my life was when I went to school for the first time. The saddest day of my life was when my dad died. I cried a lot. And I'm going to suffer again if anyone else in the family dies.

There are times when I'm sad about our situation. When that happens, I get out of my house to appreciate the landscape. I watch the goats jumping up and down in the fields. They are beautiful. I enjoy seeing them growing up to eat them later. I would like to know girls with the same disease as mine so that they could be my friends. I could talk to them without being afraid of being treated bad.

I WANT TO TEACH THE IMPORTANCE OF LOVE

We lived in a good house, but it was rented. When my dad lost his job, we left that house and went to with my mom's parents. My parents had a lot of sores and I was always coughing and had diarrhea. Granny was always humiliating us, yelling at us that we stank. Because of that we moved from there and we walked with no direction, until we found a tree's shadow where my dad made a roof with paper boxes. I was around 8 years old at the time.

The neighborhood secretary talked to my dad and he said it wasn't good to live on the street like vagrants. So he found us a plot of land where he put us. We started living there, in the open air. We ate what each of us could get from the market dump. The same secretary convinced my dad to take us to the hospital. We all went and we got tested. The result was positive for me and my parents. My two older brothers are free from the virus.

We started taking antiretroviral pills and my parent's wounds healed. My diarrhea and cough stopped. One day the secretary came to visit us with some ladies from the neighborhood. They talked with us and two months later, they built us a house. My dad has a job now and my mom has a stand in the market. Our life got back to normal and I got back to school. Thanks to the medicines, we lived. We'll live a lot and I'm going to fulfill my dream of being a doctor.

If heaven exists, I ask God for a place for that secretary. If God exists, I ask Him to put a love like that secretary has into the hearts of all of the people in the world. I

also want to be a priest when I grow up. I want to take care of sick people, but I also want to go to the altar to teach people the importance of loving one another.

MY HOUSE

DISCRIMINATION

MY SCHOOL

I WANT TO LIVE!

I'm 14 years old and I'm in the eighth grade. I'm HIV positive and I'm always sick, but one day I'm going to heal and I'll be a doctor when I grow up. I want to help other children that suffer like me. All my friends know I have AIDS, but they play with me anyway. When we play soccer, I'm always the goalkeeper and I'm good at it.

Last year, my grandma tried to enroll me in public school. The Principal of the school called her and told her that she couldn't enroll me, because he did not allow HIV positive children to study at the school he was running. By that time, I had a lot of sores on my body. My grandma tried to argue but the Principal called a meeting with the other parents to discuss my situation. At that meeting, that Principal yelled, turning all of the parents against me. The Principal asked the parents "How will you feel if your children go to school with a HIV positive classmate? Don't you think he looks like a leper?" He was pointing a finger at me, everybody was looking at me. I reacted and said, "I don't want to go to this school anymore!" I ran out of there, crying. Days later, a Principal from other school showed up at our home. He's a good person and he protects me. All my classmates know I'm HIV positive and none of them discriminates against me. I'm happy at his school and that's why I'm studying. And I'm going to be a doctor when I grow up. And I'm going to defend all children from evil people like that first Principal.

If I was powerful enough, I would do everything to prevent shortages of medicines. I would give more food to HIV positive children. I always go to church and I ask God for life, a lot of life, I want to live!

NO ONE SHOULD BE BLAMED

I don't like TV programs because almost all of them seem to say that HIV positive people are to blame for their condition, when that is not always true. At times, my brothers and sisters say when they are playing, "a world without AIDS begins with you". It seems like they are accusing me, and it makes me sad. So they won't see how upset I am, I disappear, I go far away or I stay in a corner, alone. In order to drive away bad thoughts, I go to the field and play soccer with my friends. For me, most of the information in those programs isn't any good. Instead of teaching about the disease, they end up encouraging discrimination; because instead of teaching, they blame people. We children are not guilty of anything, just because we caught the virus. I think they should talk about the disease before accusing anyone.

On the day my mom told me about my condition, I was desperate. She was tested too. My mom and my stepmom are both HIV positive; I don't know about my dad. I have a girlfriend. I usually kiss her. I think about having sex only when I get married, but I don't know if I'll marry her.

I take care of my image, in order to hide my condition. I eat well. I work hard to look good. My brothers and sisters can't know anything about it; otherwise they will tell my friends and other people. An HIV positive person is always seen as irresponsible, someone to be blamed; that's not true.

IT IS NOT WORTH HIDING

In my family, AIDS isn't new. It has already killed my parents and my aunt. I was left with my brother. When they told me I'm HIV positive, I was sad. On that day, I thought about my mother a lot. Now I know that I'm not going to die like her because I go to the hospital and I'm being treated.

The majority of my neighbors know about my condition, but I don't know who told them. Some don't let me play with their children and I feel so isolated. Even so, I don't think it is worth hiding, because good hearted people can help when they know what the problem is, like the priest who always visits me. The ladies from the church also help me with chores and they take me to the hospital when I'm sick.

With God's help, I'm going to win. I'm going to study to become an engineer. When I grow up, I'll buy new sheets of zinc siding to replace the ones we have now that let water leak in when it rains.

WHY DON'T YOU GET TESTED BEFORE PROVOKING ME?

Many people say I have AIDS. At the beginning, it bothered me, but now it doesn't. Why hide? I'm not the only one in my village. When they provoke me at school I reply, "My health is none of your business. You might have AIDS too, you don't even know. Why don't you get tested before hassling me?" And then I say, "Maybe you will die first, from a car accident, malaria or cholera, while I, with AIDS, will still be alive." Long ago, I used to punch the people who picked on me. My teacher got mad at me because of that and now I don't fight with anyone anymore. There are people who reject me, but I don't mind because there are many more people who respect me and even help me.

I have frequent headaches, stomach aches and these sores that just show up and go away. I was never healthy; I was born like this. My mom says we caught AIDS from daddy who brought it back from the mines. She also says that daddy thought that the disease was caused by witchcraft and bad spirits, that's why he refused to go to the hospital, and just let himself die and left us alone. Our life has changed since his death. When he was home from the mines, our house was full of people but no one comes here anymore. We don't have Christmas Supper anymore, or birthday parties. I never got another gift or a new dress. I really miss my dad.

I'm afraid of men; no, I will not get married. A husband can bring a new virus that can make my health worse, just like my dad did with my mom. I don't want to have any children, I will stay alone.

I lost my uncle, my aunt, my dad and my brother due to AIDS, but now I know that everybody died because they didn't want to go to the hospital, they wanted to hide the disease.

Here in the village, AIDS isn't news. There are children who live completely on their own in big concrete houses. At least I still have a mother who does everything to feed me. The pills I take are strong and they make me hungry. I follow the treatment so that I can get better and help my mom. One day, I'll be a teacher.

MY HOME