

## Realizing a Dream: Securing women's inheritance rights through marriage

For Sofala resident Lina Carlos, marriage was always a dream. Last September, thanks to the USAID supported Christian Council of Mozambique (CCM) Sofala Delegation, that dream became a reality. Along with seven other couples, Lina and her husband Timócio were married in a CCM-supported religious ceremony at St. Theresa's Parish in Machanga.

These marriages didn't just represent a public declaration of love, commitment and fidelity, but also an important mechanism for securing female inheritance rights.



*Participants in a group wedding supported by CCM-Sofala.*

In Mozambique, many couples remain unmarried because the cost is prohibitive, or because there is a perceived lack of incentive for men to enter into legal unions with their girlfriends. Along with reinforcing a widespread social norm of multiple concurrent partnerships, the lack of legal union denies women inheritance rights in the event that their partner dies (of AIDS, for example.) Women and children in this situation are economically and psychologically vulnerable, which in turn puts them at greater risk for HIV transmission.

Through formative research in its target communities, CCM identified the problem of multiple concurrent partnerships, with relationship uncertainty as a barrier to fidelity. Based on this research, CCM initiated the 'Igreja Aberta II' project, working closely with churches to gain support for frank HIV/AIDS prevention discussions within church walls. Timócio was recruited to the project as a discussion facilitator, and Lina began participating in the discussion sessions as well. Through the sessions, Lina and Timócio realized that it was important to legalize their relationship through marriage, and proposed that CCM conclude its cycle of discussion sessions with a group church wedding for all willing participants. CCM immediately saw the benefit, as religious weddings are legally binding but less expensive than their secular equivalents – particularly when performed with a group.

The positive effects of the group wedding have been immediate. CCM has noted that, among target communities, marriage is increasingly viewed as a way for women to attain equal rights in the home. Furthermore, relationships between the newly married couples and their extended families have improved, as the marriages have improved the status of the married women and eliminated ambiguity about to whom the couples' children and assets legally belong. CCM reports that a total of 90 couples have expressed an interest in the next CCM-supported group marriage, which CCM hopes to facilitate in late 2013.

CCM is one of over fifty leading Mozambican civil society organizations participating in the Capable Partners Program (CAP) in Mozambique. Supported by the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) through USAID, CAP provides leading civil society organizations with grants and intensive technical assistance in organizational development, project design, and implementation. CAP also partners with the Health Policy Project (HPP) through PEPFAR's Gender-based Violence Initiative to help partners integrate gender and gender-based violence issues into select programmatic activities. Through this support, CAP supports Mozambican civil society organizations to expand their critical role in Mozambique's HIV/AIDS response

## A Motivating Force

*CCM-Sofala leverages strong community ties to create unprecedented turnout for community-based HIV testing and counseling*

When Irene José Siteo showed up for work on the morning of July 27<sup>th</sup>, 2013, she encountered something she had never seen before: a long line of people waiting for her services. Irene and her colleagues, Mozambican community health workers trained in HIV testing and counseling, usually test and counsel around five people a day in Sofala's Buzi District. Over the course of two days in late July 2013, Irene and her colleagues tested 344 people in Buzi.

"I never imagined I could test so many people," recounts Irene.

CCM, the Christian Council of Mozambique, has been conducting HIV/AIDS prevention discussion and debate sessions in the Búzi, Machanga and Chemba Districts of Sofala Province since 2011. Supported by USAID through the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), CCM's "Open Church" Project engages adolescents, youth and married couples in debates about high-risk behaviors associated with HIV (for example, early sexual debut and multiple concurrent partners ).

In July, CCM decided to link this debate about HIV with a concrete action step: getting an HIV test. Hypothesizing that its HIV prevention sessions represented a powerful mechanism for reducing barriers and increasing demand for HIV testing, CCM coordinated community-based testing campaigns in each of the three districts within which it works. Another PEPFAR-supported project (CHASS-SMT) provided trained counselors, the Mozambican Provincial Health Authorities supplied test kits, the Red Cross donated tents, and CCM mobilized participants. Lots of them.

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*"Without doubt, these numbers will elevate the data for our District."*  
*Búzi Medical Chief, Marlon Francisco*

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Over two days, according to CCM records, counselors tested 887 people in the Búzi, Machanga and Chemba Districts. An estimated 27% of those tested were CCM session participants and, by all accounts, the turnout was unprecedented.

"Without doubt, these numbers will elevate the data for our District," said Búzi Medical Chief, Marlon Francisco.

Not only did CCM manage to mobilize a *lot* of people, the organization appears to have mobilized some of the *right* people.

“I always had doubts about my status after having relations with other women without using a condom,” said one husband who reported changing these behaviors after participating in CCM sessions with his wife. “I never had the courage to get tested until our session facilitator encouraged us to participate in the testing that was happening near our church.” A total of 93 people tested positive in the three Districts and were referred to clinical services. In Buzi District, 16.3% of all people tested were positive, which is higher than the Provincial prevalence rate of 15.5%.<sup>1</sup>

CCM also managed to mobilize populations that had been unmotivated by previous efforts. “My husband really surprised me,” notes CCM session participant Anastácia Jorge. “When I was pregnant, he refused to get tested with me. But with the CCM debate sessions for couples, he changed a lot, and he participated in the CCM testing sessions.”

“It seems clear to me that CCM was able to leverage an investment in prevention sessions to produce incredible demand for HIV testing and counseling services,” says Hayley Bryant, Chief of Party for FHI 360’s Capable Partners Program (CAP), which provides organizational development and programmatic technical support to CCM. “We’re excited to see what the turnout looks like for CCM’s next campaign, and explore what CCM can do to support all of those people who are testing positive.”

CCM Sofala is one of 37 Mozambican civil society organizations that have received grants through the Capable Partners Program (CAP), implemented by FHI 360, in Mozambique. CAP provides grants and intensive, tailored capacity building in project implementation, organizational systems, and technical support in HIV prevention and health service demand creation.



**Caption:** HTC participants mobilized by CCM-Sofala wait to be tested.

**Consent:** None necessary.

<sup>1</sup> Source: PEPFAR Mozambique Provincial Factsheet for Sofala [http://maputo.usembassy.gov/pepfar\\_fact\\_sheets.html](http://maputo.usembassy.gov/pepfar_fact_sheets.html)

## **Walking Hand in Hand: Gender Equality Training Results in Positive Changes for a Pastor and his Congregation**

Last year, 50-year-old pastor Timoteo Bedane had a revelation. Like many other religious leaders around the world, Pastor Bedane had preached (and practiced) male dominance in marriage. However, thanks to a USAID-supported project through the Christian Council of Mozambique (CCM) Sofala Delegation, Pastor Bedane has happily embraced a new viewpoint.



*Timóteo Bedane participating in an HIV/AIDS prevention session facilitated by CCM*

Throughout the world, gender inequality not only hampers women's ability to participate in social and economic development, it can increase inhibit them from seeking services that maintain their health and prevent HIV. At its worst, this inequity is manifest through violence. Females who experience gender- based violence are three times more likely to become infected with HIV than those who have not, fueling the epidemic among women.

In early 2012, CCM began facilitating HIV/AIDS prevention discussion sessions at Pastor Bedane's church in Sofala province. Working through churches, CCM sessions focus on discussing abstinence, fidelity, and gender issues, and how they all relate to HIV. Often, CCM's messages challenge the beliefs and practices of the organization's target populations. Initially Pastor Bedane and his wife participated as an example for the congregation, and the Pastor did not appreciate the discussions about equality in marriage.

"I thought at the time that the people from CCM were just bringing me and my church problems," remembers Pastor Bedane. However, as the Pastor continued to participate in the sessions, his viewpoint began to evolve. "Over time I saw that these messages were the same as teachings from the Bible."

Pastor Bedane began helping his wife with housework, engaging her in decisions about the family's finances, and fostering more open and respectful communication in their marriage. Pastor Bedane noticed considerable improvement in his marriage, and began to preach about his experience. However, the Pastor's actions and words were met with concern and hostility from many of his friends, family and congregation.

Undeterred, Pastor Bedane invited his most vocal critics (three couples) to participate in the CCM sessions. Since then, these couples have become avid supporters of and recruiters for the sessions.

"In my church today, couples now walk hand in hand, embrace each other, and even kiss," reports Paster Bedane. "These things did not happen before CCM came to our church."

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