

Community Volunteer Voices

The USAID-funded Força à Comunidade e Crianças (Community and Child Strengthening) project is an initiative aimed at improving and expanding evidenced-based models of integrated support for orphans and vulnerable children (OVC) and their households. WEI/Bantwana implements the Força à Comunidade e Crianças (FCC) project in collaboration with the Government of Mozambique and a range of local implementing partners to reach over 125,000 vulnerable children and adolescents with integrated services to help them thrive and grow into productive and healthy adults.

Community volunteers are trained by FCC to play an integral role in linking beneficiaries with services to meet their needs. FCC's impact would not be possible without the help of community volunteers. Below are highlights from a few outstanding FCC volunteers from the Beira District of Sofala Province.

Changing Community Perceptions on HIV/AIDS

Volunteer name: Ivone Feliciano Alberto
Age: 32
Location: Munhava Central
Time with WEI/Bantwana: 3 years
Case Load: 92 Beneficiares

With FCC support, my family was able to learn our HIV status. We had been referred for nutritional rehabilitation so my children could receive enriched porridge to help improve their strength and ability to stay healthy. After sharing both my appreciation for the nutritional rehabilitation of my children and my own personal story with FCC volunteers, I was invited to volunteer for FCC. I did not have to think twice about the opportunity because I felt compelled to help other people in similar situations. As a mentor I lead Girl Empowerment Clubs where adolescent girls and young women (AGYW) aged 15-24 years can learn together and share about HIV/AIDS, Sexual Reproductive Health, Gender-Based Violence, and life skills.

Overcoming Community Stigma

Training to become a mentor empowered me to speak openly about my HIV+ status. Previously, I had been afraid to disclose my status to my family and community for fear of divorce and discrimination. I had even been taking medication in secret. Now I can count on moral support from my husband. He reminds me to take my medication and ensures that our two HIV+ boys take theirs even when I am not at home.

As a mentor, I am able to share my new knowledge about sexuality, HIV/AIDS, and life skills with 70 members of my community, including 30 young mothers, 15 members of the Girls Empowerment Club, which my 16-year-old daughter has joined, and 25 members of the Child Rights Club that I lead. My biggest challenge is to ensure that people do not abandon their ARV or tuberculosis treatment.

For my mentoring work, I receive a monthly stipend of 2,300 MT (\$38) and I save 300 MT (\$5) of it through the VSLA group. The VSLA group not only helps me to improve my economic situation and overcome financial barriers, but also to develop the resilience of my family and support the needs of my children. The VSLA group truly is a space of knowledge sharing, moral and emotional support. It is full of teamwork and help.

Thanks to FCC, while volunteering to help others, I can also improve the well-being of my own family.

“ My own experiences with struggling to maintain my treatment, not having enough food to stay healthy, and having to face the consequences of being HIV+ have inspired me to be more persistent with sensitizing and monitoring patients. ”



Ivone (left), her son, and one of WEI/Bantwana's beneficiaries.

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Building Trust in Community Savings Groups

Volunteer name: Miguel Manuel Titos
Age: 29
Location: Matadouro
Time with WEI/Bantwana: 3 years
Case Load: 86 Beneficiaries

I was chosen by community leaders to become a Village Savings and Loan Association (VSLA) Facilitator for FCC in 2016. As a VSLA Facilitator, I establish and run VSLA groups for caregivers of orphans and vulnerable children (OVC) to strengthen their household economic resiliency. I received extensive training on the VSLA methodology, Financial Literacy, Parenting Education, Gender-Based Violence, Sexual Reproductive Health, and Early Childhood Development.



Overcoming the Challenges of Community Organizing

The experience of creating my first VSLA group with 25 members, who are caregivers of OVC, was very challenging. At first, there was a lack of trust among members, because they were not convinced that the model would be transparent and the money would be guarded. I gradually raised awareness about the advantages of joining VSLA groups and the economic development opportunities that they offer, and I strived to convince members that the VSLA approach used by FCC works. I described the regulations that ensure that VSLA groups function well, and I explained that members participate in decision-making and elect the guardians of the keys. This gave people the courage to join.

“The members display confidence and a spirit of mutual trust and support. Because the members have a sense of ownership of the VSLA methodology, my technical support role is gradually decreasing.”

Over the past two years, I have worked with 7 VSLA groups and 140 caregivers. With their savings, members have been using their loans to build houses, expand their businesses, and many are also happily paying for school fees and school supplies for their children!

Inspiring Behavior Change Through Parenting Education

Volunteer name: Cristina Jeque
Age: 36
Location: Manga Mascarenha
Time with WEI/Bantwana: 2 years
Case Load: 78 Beneficiaries

After spending five years volunteering on community development projects, I decided to become a Case Care Worker (CCW) for FCC. I was trained by SOPROC, a local implementing partner of WEI/Bantwana, on important topics such as Sexual Reproductive Health, Psycho-Social Support, HIV/AIDS Prevention, and Child Protection. I focus on developing links with health, education, and legal service providers such as the Office Against Domestic Violence.

“I think that case care workers are like birds because every morning they announce a new day and new hope for communities!”

I work with 78 beneficiaries in 30 households and regularly follow up with them through monthly home visits. I provide beneficiaries with a variety of services and make referrals. My efforts support HIV+ beneficiaries to stay on ARV treatment, help adolescent girls to avoid early pregnancy, and ensure that vulnerable children attend and progress in school.

I was especially happy and motivated to learn about parenting education. I have seen that in order to change the behavior of children, it is crucial to get parents and caregivers involved. As a CCW, I get a lot of support from families. Through the FCC project, I have improved my own parenting skills and knowledge of sensitive topics, which has empowered me to discuss sexual and reproductive health with my daughters.

