



## Success Story

# Zuria, a GBV Survivor, Completes Her Education

### Background

WEI/Bantwana implements the *Força à Comunidade e Crianças* (FCC) project, an initiative aimed at improving and expanding evidenced-based models of integrated support for OVC and their households. FCC's goal is to reduce the socio-economic impact of HIV/AIDS on OVC and their caregivers by enhancing the capacity of families and communities to support, protect, and care for OVC and caregivers. In collaboration with the Government of Mozambique and a range of local implementing partners, the project utilizes schools and communities to reach over 125,000 vulnerable children and adolescents with integrated services to help them thrive and grow into productive and healthy adults.

With the addition of Determined, Resilient, Empowered, AIDS-Free, Mentored, and Safe (DREAMS) funding, WEI/Bantwana also delivers an integrated package of comprehensive services that address the age-specific needs of over 25,000 in and out-of-school AGYW. The package is aligned with the DREAMS Core Package to empower AGYW and reduce their risk, mobilize communities for change, and strengthen families. WEI/Bantwana leverages evidence-based materials and approaches and implements interventions considered part of the HIV/AIDS continuum of response.

### Zuria's Story

"Always smiling, engaged, determined, and passionate about girls' empowerment" is how Zuria Basílio is described by her peers. Zuria, a 24-year-old mother of three children, lives in Quelimane City, Zambézia Province, Mozambique. Her childhood was difficult and traumatic: orphaned at age 5, Zuria was taken in by her aunt and experienced corporal punishment, physical and verbal abuse, neglect, and stigma. Zuria reflects, "there was never a time that my aunt addressed me with words of affection, consolation, or even praise. It was always insult after insult about my mother's sickness and eventual death. My aunt beat me so much to the point that I even considered committing suicide!"



Zuria with her youngest daughter, two months old.

Zuria's situation worsened when she got pregnant at age 13 after being coerced into early sexual debut by a local man who denied responsibility, leaving Zuria as a single mother raising her child without any social or financial support. During antenatal care visits, she was diagnosed with tuberculosis and began treatment. She was also tested for HIV and treated for an STD.

Determined

Resilient

Empowered

AIDS-Free

Mentored

Safe



## DREAMS Success Story

Facing these health, social, and financial challenges, Zuria had no choice but to drop out of school in the ninth grade. After she got married in 2015, she hoped to improve her life circumstances by returning to school, but her husband was abusive and violent. Zuria returned to school for a brief period in 2016 until her husband forced her to drop out.

Zuria was invited by a friend, who was well aware of her difficult life with her abusive husband, to attend a session on gender-based violence and children's rights organized by the Bantwana Initiative of World Education, Inc. as part of the FCC/DREAMS project. Zuria shared her story and was immediately invited to the Girl Empowerment Club (GEC) at the Eduardo Mondlane-Micajune Secondary School. Zuria was eager for the opportunity to learn about her sexual rights and steps she could take when experiencing gender-based violence.

The GEC Mentor also referred Zuria to receive counseling and psychosocial support at the Friends in Global Health (FGH) clinic. Noticing the signs of violence and discovering Zuria's pregnancy, the nurse also asked Zuria's husband to join the sessions to help him too understand the consequences of GBV on the child and the family. According to Zuria, these sessions helped her husband learn to use dialogue instead of violence to solve disagreements. He also learned about the importance of education and let Zuria reintegrate into school night classes. She received a uniform and school supplies through the FCC/DREAMS school block grant. AMME, WEI/Bantwana's local implementing partner, is also working with the National Institute of Employment and Vocational Training to integrate Zuria into a vocational training program.

As Zuria turned her life around and remained a committed and active member of the GEC, she was selected to become a GEC mentor herself after one year. In her new role, Zuria receives a stipend of 2,000 MT (approximately \$33), which she uses to take care of her three children. As a mentor, she is dedicated to promoting women's rights and mentoring girls in the GEC to prevent them from experiencing violence in silence. Zuria has also received family planning counseling and vows to continue to spread the messages about GBV and SRH in order to help other adolescent girls and young women feel empowered and equipped to stay free from HIV/AIDS.



Zuria and her baby at the GEC.