

STORY OF HOPE:

Community collaboration ensures quick enrollment in care and treatment services, making a huge difference for PLHIV

Linda, a community animadora working with the PEPFAR-supported Strengthening Communities through Integrated Programming (SCIP) project in Nampula Province, noticed during her home visits that Maria had been ill for a while. Maria was in poor health, lacking even the minimum strength to complete her daily chores. Linda spoke with Maria about the importance of being tested for HIV and coordinated with Basilio Baltazar, the SCIP HIV Tester Counselor –Community based (HTC-C), to visit the house. The following day Basilio came to counsel Maria, her parents, husband and son about HIV and asked if Maria and her husband would consent to testing. The couple agreed to do the test together. The test results were discordant: Maria tested positive while her husband tested negative. This was a very emotionally challenging moment: Maria was devastated and her husband was furious. After Basilio confirmed Maria's results with a second test, he explained how to enroll in treatment, the importance of the continuum of care and how a discordant couple can live a positive life together.

Maria's husband initially wanted a divorce. Over time, through several visits of active listening and counseling, Basilio explained the courage it takes to disclose one's HIV status, the importance of supporting each other through the process and how condoms can be used to continue their life together.



Basilio with his thank you gift from Maria.

Less than a week after Maria tested positive for HIV, Linda accompanied her to the hospital where she met with Basilio. He brought her to the medical officer for psycho-social support and to initiate her treatment. When Basilio returned to visit Maria during follow up visits, he met a smiling and cheerful Maria as she was carrying water back home, clearly in a much better physical and emotional state.

Maria explained "I deeply appreciate the help I received. When I first got my positive result, I felt very depressed. Now I am feeling much better and I am grateful for all the support I received. My husband did not leave me." Maria took the opportunity of Basilio's visit to ask more questions and learn more about positive prevention, including how to have safe sexual relations.

There are 39 SCIP HTC-Cs like Basilio working in the 14 SCIP districts of Nampula Province, helping to bridge the link between the community and the health facility. HTC-Cs play an important role in the

continuum of care for those living with HIV: apart from offering testing and counseling services at the community level, they assist in integrating newly HIV+ individuals identified in the communities in treatment services, collaborate with the health facility on locating and re-integrating those patients who have defaulted on their treatment or are lost to follow-up, and support and encourage those on treatment to continue.