

Girl Power: Resilience during COVID-19

The earliest and most obvious effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on 16-year-old Ana Fasbem were not related to health. They were financial. Due to government restrictions on social and economic activities throughout the country, regular access to buses, taxis, and even markets was limited. Ana's small business selling rice, beans and self-made clothes in the local market suffered. It no longer generated the income she depended on to buy food, clothing, menstrual hygiene products, and school supplies.



Ana Fasbem sewing masks and clothes to sustain herself and other club members during the COVID-19 epidemic.

Ana, who lives in a small community in the Zambézia Province, Mozambique said, *“Lack of public transport made it harder and more expensive for me to buy supplies. And once I got my products to the market, there were fewer customers.”*

Ana participates in the USAID/PEPFAR-funded DREAMS¹ program, which focuses on empowering adolescent girls and young women at risk of HIV infection. Implemented by N'weti, the program creates girls' clubs in communities like Ana's to provide vocational and financial literacy training, promote individual and group saving activities, and facilitate discussions on prevention of HIV and gender-based violence.

In the club, Ana learned the necessary skills to save money and develop her business. Amid the economic turmoil caused by COVID-19, Ana was able to build on these skills and successfully adapt her business to the new COVID environment. With some additional guidance and sewing machines provided by N'weti through the DREAMS program, she and other club members learned how to sew masks that met the Ministry of Health's safety standards.

The priority of the DREAMS program is always to keep Ana and the other club members safe, so masks were distributed first among them. Ana and her fellow



Ana Fasbem sewing, with Fauzia Paulo (left), Leila Antonio (right) and other girls' club members of Nerir community showing clothes and masks sewn by Ana.

club members sell the remaining masks to make a profit. Ana uses the profits to

¹ DREAMS (Determined, Resilient, Empowered, AIDS-free, Mentored and Safe)

buy rice and beans, which she then sells out of her backyard. Ana proudly explains, "We are adapting to COVID-19. We are surviving. We are strong."



Photograph: Ana Fasbem, with Fauzia Paulo (left) and other girls' club members showing the clothes that Ana has made.

The DREAMS program is an innovative public-private partnership, led by USAID, focused on reducing the risk of exposure to HIV among adolescent girls and young women in 10 sub Saharan African countries. It provides comprehensive support that addresses key factors making girls and young women particularly vulnerable to HIV – including exclusion from economic opportunity, exposure to gender-based violence and lack of access to education. During the COVID pandemic in Mozambique, N'weti was able to adapt and maintain DREAMS activities to COVID-related restrictions. Between October 2019 and September 2020, the program reached 22,233 vulnerable adolescent girls and young women aged 10-24 in Nicoadala and Quelimane districts in Zambezia province.

Click on these links to learn more about [USAID's DREAMS program](#) and its implementing partner [N'weti](#).

Note: Story and photos by Claudina Lembe, N'Weti