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ZIMBABWE

FIRST PERSON

A Staunch Defender of Rural Children Living with HIV

USAID-supported field officer works tirelessly to provide home-based care to Zimbabwe's young



Mai Paraziva works with the Seke Rural Home-Based Care program to increase access to health care for rural children/ Credit: Children First

“This work needs more than money, more than desire for a salary — it’s a sacrifice,” Mai Paraziva says.

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Mai Paraziva's children can attest to the fact that she is not the typical mother and grandmother. For one thing, she spends most of her days riding a motorbike around rural Zimbabwe – rain or shine, fair weather or foul.

As a field officer for a local NGO, Seke Rural Home Based Care (SRHBC), Mai spends her days and nights tending to the needs of children sick with HIV/AIDS. For more than ten years, she has worked closely with nurses and local clinics to implement a USAID-funded program that aims to increase access to health care for HIV positive children.

Mai serves as the link between clients and services in the rural areas where communication by phone is unreliable and unrealistic. From the beginning, her work has been a labor of love. When she first started work in 2000, Mai conducted home visits on foot with a nurse. She carried a bag of medicines and blankets on her back, walking up to 25 km with only a drink and two bread rolls to sustain her for the day.

Since then, with USAID support, the organization has acquired motorbikes, which have allowed Mai to travel up to 160km through narrow and rough village footpaths. “At first, I was scared I wouldn’t have the stamina to push the bike. I can now ride with one hand, legs up, no problem,” she says.

Before USAID intervened, vulnerable and marginalized children were excluded from many basic social services, as well as from psychosocial support. Under the program, home-based caregivers are trained to identify sick children in their communities and encourage them to go for HIV testing.

SRHBC, in conjunction with local clinics and hospitals, provides a wide array of treatment, logistical, and other-care services to improve the lives of hundreds of orphans and vulnerable children in Seke District. Its focus on monitoring and psychosocial support has begun to fill in some of the gaps in social and emotional support for vulnerable children. “This is a serious issue,” Mai comments. “Our children are our future, our tomorrow. There is no way to fill in the gap of parents. We just have to keep continuing to help them until they grow up.”