

## When will she discover she is HIV positive?

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An article from the HDN Key Correspondent Team

"NO ONE WANTS TO PLAY WITH ME IN MY CLASS, THEY ARE ALWAYS LAUGHING AT ME, AND I AM ALWAYS IN MY TEARS. I WISH I HAD PARENTS LIKE OTHERS. MAYBE THAT WAY I WOULD HAVE FRIENDS IN MY CLASS", SAID RUVIMBO.

Ruvimbo Mazhange\*, 15 years old, intelligent, innocent and HIV positive. But she does not know about her status and is unwittingly taking the life-prolonging anti retroviral drugs (ARVs) that she receives every month from a local clinic.

Ruvimbo has lived with her ageing grandmother since her mother and father died in 1993 and 2001, respectively. Her father was a police officer and her mother a peasant farmer. They were too poor to leave any material inheritance to their children.

With the assistance of Dananai Home-Based Care (HBC), Ruvimbo is attending Grade 7 in a primary school in Manicaland.

Apart from her swollen and constantly aching head, Ruvimbo has recurrent stomach problems and pain in her legs. She has suffered these symptoms from birth and is often absent from school despite her great academic potential. Against all odds, Ruvimbo managed to achieve the 29th position in a class 140 students in her mid-year examinations this year.

But as if her illness is not enough, Ruvimbo is also a victim of stigma and discrimination.

"No one wants to play with me in my class, they are always laughing at me, and I am always in my tears. I wish I had parents like others. Maybe that way I would have friends in my class", said Ruvimbo.

However, Ruvimbo's teacher gives her moral support and ensures that any one who attempts to demean Ruvimbo is punished. Ruvimbo also said that her headmaster helps her to stay in constant touch with the Irish Aid-supported Dananai HBC programme so that she can receive educational, material and medical support.

Dananai HBC also supports Ruvimbo with blankets, clothing, soap and food packs.

She does not receive any material support from her relatives and the only property that she and her grandmother own is a single hen.

Through Dananai HBC, Ruvimbo has managed to get access to treatment at the Roman Catholic-funded Murambinda Mission Hospital's Opportunistic Infectious (OI) Clinic. She used to travel approximately 25 kilometres to the hospital to obtain drugs, but now, due to the decentralization of drug distribution, Ruvimbo collects the drugs from a local clinic.

The question is, how long can she take these drugs without knowing the real reason for them?

"That is the responsibility of the OI clinic; it does not fall within the jurisdiction of the HBC programme," said Nonia Temberera, Dananai HBC's coordinator. Luckily for Ruvimbo, treatment usually goes hand in hand with psychosocial support and counselling to help cope with the disease.

"I am more comfortable in the company of other patients of Dananai HBC than anywhere else", said Ruvimbo when asked about how she interacts with other people involved in the programme.

"I might not have friends, except one in Grade 5, but in my caregiver, I find solace, care and hope," said Ruvimbo, adding that Nonia gave her a lot of encouragement and had become something of a mother figure for her.

". . . in her presence, at times, I forget that I am an orphan," she said.

Ruvimbo wants to be a nurse when she grows up and for her dream to come true, Dananai HBC and other organizations need to collaborate to ensure sustainable medication, nutrition and psychosocial support for the growing girl.

Most importantly, Ruvimbo and other children like her, need to be told of their HIV status so that they can make informed decisions about their future.

\* Ruvimbo Mazhange is a fictional name.

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