

## **Child Marriage and HIV/AIDS Awareness**

Mecuburi and Mogovolas by Geraldo Antonio Sibinde [Mozambique]

### ***PROJECT SUMMARY***

#### ***Status summary***

*This project aims to raise awareness on Child Marriage and HIV/AIDS to make impact on the Citizens of Mecuburi and Mogovolas [Mozambique]. The project has brought considerable impact to the local communities which it was targeting. We were able to raise awareness about the illegalities associated with child marriage and how it can affect badly the future of the girl who is the most vulnerable. By illustrating the negative long term impact that child marriage brings to the lives of the girls to their families and to the locals, we were able to make both the of them question if the promises made by the prominent husband of providing good life to the girl worth the sacrifice. From our interaction with the local in those communities we noticed that the consequences of child marriage expose the girls to be beaten, locked up, they are exposed to starvation and are refrain from access to health care thus violating their human rights. In a nutshell, we were able to shift the thoughts of most of the parents and we believe that a deeper reflection will be taken when trying to give out there child to marriage.*

### ***Project overview***

During our time in Mecuburi and Mogovolas we have used different ways of communication to show the reality of child marriage to the locals and encouraged all individuals to report any case of child marriage around the area even if the victim is unknown. By interacting with the communities we find out that most of them do not know that child marriage is illegal and that if they report it they can be saving lives. The informal interviews I had with local most of them mentioned that girls in that areas get married at 13 and by 15 they have kids. They never had access to any sort of education some only went until grade 7<sup>th</sup>. I had a long conversation with Maria, a 14 years old girl who shared her story with me and mentioned that one of her friends was imposed to marry someone years ago with an old man and since they she never saw her and the family do not question since they received some money from the mysterious old man. Maria's friend story is one of the many that I was listening everywhere I went. In those communities there is a unanimous scaring agreement of not talking about this topic of child marriage, maybe because of fear of what's going to happen if those views are challenged. However we got many people who were ready to break the silence chain, they desperation of wanting to find a savior from that "turbulence or tradition as some may consider" is so deep but few is being done to solve it.

In our Pamphlets and one on one talks we had with the locals we shared the consequences of child marriage,

Child marriage are:

- ❖ Increasing poverty in local society by not allowing the girls to go to school and get better jobs to help develop their families;
- ❖ Increase the rate of death through HIV/AIDS to both the young mother and the kids who are born HIV/AIDS positive;
- ❖ Also increases the number of girls with obstetric fistula;

### ***Achievement and benefits of this project***

- Built trust between our team members and the locals which helped us to engage them in a more personal level and share the risk attached with child marriage, parents / population were now aware of the power and the tools they had to fight child marriage even if it was practiced by a stranger. They could report anonymously to the authorities and the rest would be taken care of.

Not only that, but through the sessions we conducted we had many people seeking to understand how they could contribute to reduce child marriage, and our small booklet was being read by people from all ages even men who are considered to be the best supporters of child marriages in those regions.

### ***Benefits***

The booklet contains the crucial information about child marriage, how to avoid and how and to whom to report it; spreading the word about HIV/AIDS associated with child marriage is a key word in the booklet.

Brought comfort to the victims of child marriage and we learn more about other organizations who work with Genital Mutilation and the relationship between our project and theirs.

### ***Budget overview***

The project involved books, transportation, accommodation and alimentation, here is the budget breakdown:

- Round trip bus ticket from Maputo to Nampula(Cheaper option instead of plane) - \$130
- Meals and Accommodation for the duration of my stay there - \$300;
- Pamphlet - \$100
- Transport around the districts - \$100
- We estimated to make 200 Booklets however with the help of UWC Costa Rica we increased to 300; - \$400

### ***Considerations***

From this project the lesson that we took is that we all can make impact in people's lives, we can force the government to elaborate more sticky laws on child marriage and make sure that girls received the necessary help until they reach the minimum official age to get married.

There are so many things that happened and we were not expecting. If I could run the project again I could print more than two thousand booklets, so more people can have the booklet. My project includes HIV/AIDS and I did talk about it as it is directly connected to Child Marriage, but something that I did not take into consideration is where people get the prevention methods, I mean Condoms and other contraceptives, but when I ran the project I had with me a package of 144 condoms and some people asked me for them without me showing them, having a box of condoms would be a plus in this project.

## ***Conclusion***

Apart from the hardship we faced with the authorities of getting a letter to be able to talk about child marriage in schools and public places, most of our objective we met, the project was a success, we believe that now people are aware of child marriage and its consequence as well as how they can contribute to reduce it. The project was really powerful it showed how privileged some of us are, when those young girls were telling their stories and as I could observe some kids walking down the streets with kids in their backs. I became more grateful and I empathize more with people's stories. I will share some pictures, I too pictures of more than 200 people holding the sign "I SAY NO TO CHILD MARRIAGE" and in that group includes woman, young boys and girls and also men, who play a huge role in this issue. I hope that the booklet, pamphlet shared with them will be useful in educating them more about the consequence of child marriage and how they can avoid it. Only their actions can actually make a difference.