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SUCCESS STORY

Elizabeth Kimpuny, a Community Champion in Biyela, Kinshasa, reduces stigma for children orphaned by HIV/AIDS

Community leadership fosters behavior change around HIV/AIDS and mobilizes communities



Photo Credit: ProVIC

Ms. Kimpuny distributes school kits to two children as their grandmother looks on. OVC support activities like these are part of Champion Community outreach efforts organized by The Society of Women Against AIDS in Africa, a local nongovernmental organization partnering with ProVIC.

Just six months after implementation of the Champion Community approach in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), participating communities are noticing positive results. Community ownership of this approach is stimulating a culture of self-reliance and engagement in resolving issues related to HIV/AIDS that affect communities and their members. This approach is part of the *Projet Intégré de VIH/SIDA au Congo* (ProVIC), or the Integrated HIV/AIDS Project in the DRC.

In the Champion Community of Biyela, Kinshasa, Ms. Elizabeth Kimpuny, a steering committee member, goes door to door each week to contact people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA), orphans and vulnerable children (OVC), widows, and other affected families. She refers people needing care, treatment, and support to appropriate service delivery points and facilitates access to services. Through her work, Elizabeth has earned the respect of community members and community workers, who see her as a role model and leader.

During one of her visits, Elizabeth met an 80-year-old woman who had lost custody of her five grandchildren aged 8 to 14 years old. Accused of sorcery by family members upon their parents' death from HIV/AIDS, the children had been taken away to a church for spiritual cleansing.

Moved by the children's plight and separation from their family, Elizabeth mobilized church and community leaders, local administrative authorities, grassroots organizations, and community workers to recover them. Now reunited with their grandmother, the children enjoy a stable and peaceful life. They attend Luizi primary school, and through ProVIC, receive nutritional support, community protection, and health care.

Elizabeth later visited the children again, this time with school kits in hand. Touched by Elizabeth's continued care and follow-up, their grandmother thanked her and ProVIC for making it possible for her grandchildren to go to school and become productive citizens.

By mobilizing others in her community, ProVIC Community Champion Elizabeth Kimpuny helped change the local pastor's view of children orphaned by HIV/AIDS as sorcerers. Not only did he adopt more protective behaviors toward these children through Elizabeth's efforts, but he has also since reached out to his colleagues to advocate for reintegrating other orphans with their extended families. Interventions like this one in Biyela, and in other ProVIC Champion Communities in Kinshasa, Matadi, Bas-Congo, and Sud Kivu, are raising awareness about discrimination against PLWHA and OVC and stimulating positive behavior change among individuals, their families, and their communities in the fight against HIV/AIDS.