

Literacy, Gender and HIV/AIDS Series

Inherit Me, Inherit My HIV

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A product of a UNESCO-DANIDA workshop for the preparation
of gender-sensitive booklets on HIV/AIDS

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Written by Grace Maramba

Graphic design by Jarupan Chaianandana

Workshop organization by Dorothy Littler and Tirso Dos Santos

Project Co-ordination and training by Namtip Aksornkool

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I am Farai Shumba. Three years ago my husband Baba waKuda died after a long illness. And, according to our custom, I was to be inherited after my husband's death.



Look! Baba vaTapiwa is smiling. What if waKuda died of AIDS? I-ii-I! Me, I don't know. It's better I keep quiet.

I have to give this basin of water to my brother-in-law. A widow needs a man to give her all the protection. My three children have to grow up with a man around.

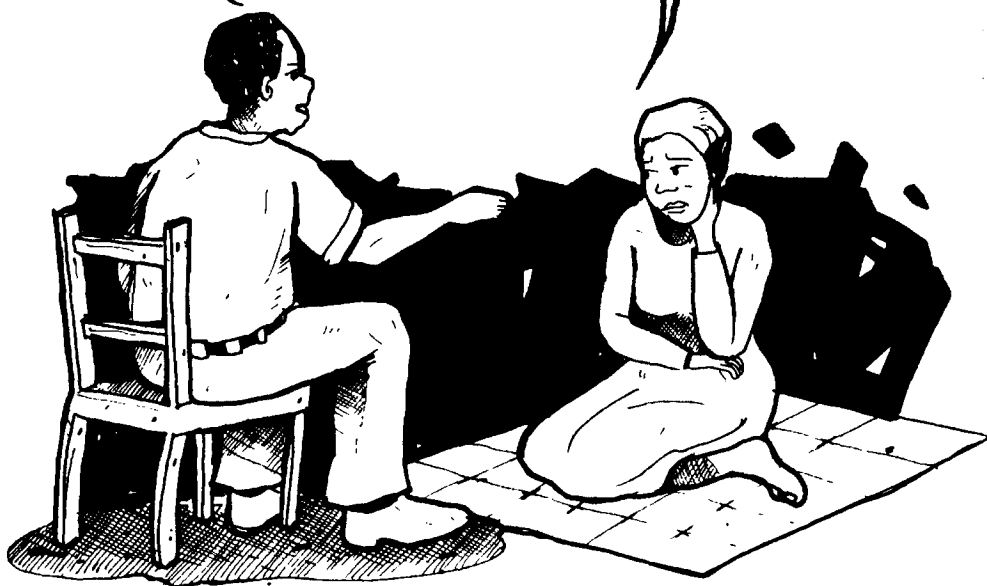


This is wonderful. The suit I wore today paid off. I am now a man among men. With two wives and more property to my name. I can walk the village with my head held high.

Six months after I was inherited, while living with Baba vaTapiwa...

How can you say *my* cow and *my* scotch-cart! Everything is now mine including you and I use it the way I like, woman.

Baba vaTapiwa, you have now sold my last cow. Last week you sold my scotch-cart. You told me you were going to give me the money for Sarah's school fees.



A few months later, Baba vaTapiwa started to become sick. Amai vaTapiwa was very cross with me.

My husband spends too much time with you, woman! And worse, he has gotten sickly-- coughing and all. You want to kill my husband like you did yours, don't you? You witch!

Mai vaTapiwa, I am very unhappy here. Very soon all children will not be attending school. Our husband is selling all my property.



Amai Mai vaTapiwa answered back..

Ii-shi-iii!! 'Our husband', indeed!! I wish he could sell you,too. What are you still doing here then? Go back to your home, witch!

For how long, my Lord, will I have these problems?! I wish I had known better...

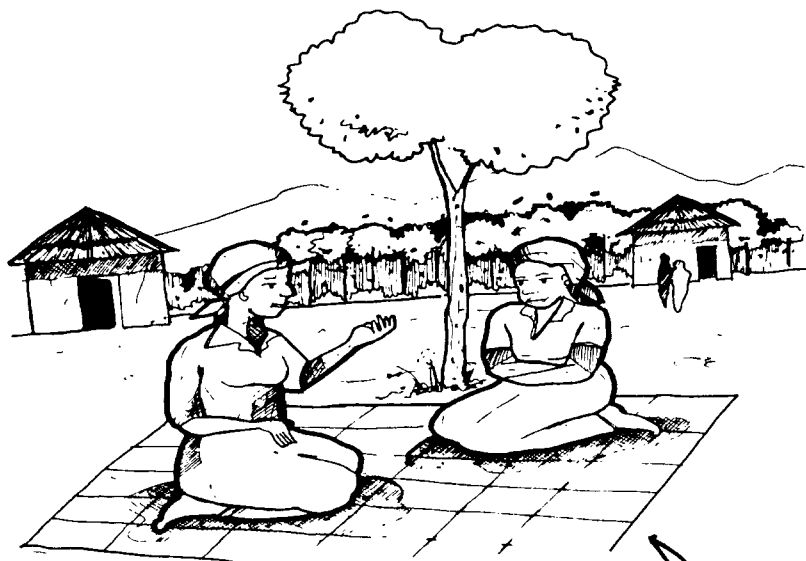


Saba vaTapiwa's cough worsened. He agreed to have an HIV test. I remembered clearly the day he told me and Mai vaTapiwa that he was HIV-positive. A lot of things went through my mind. I was confused and angry.

Could I have the virus too? Maybe my first husband died of AIDS? I never thought about it... Maybe Mai vaTapiwa has the virus as well! Iiiii, all three of us.



Baba vaTapiwa died a few weeks later. I continued to have the nagging fear that I might be HIV positive. I gathered the courage to talk to my aunt the next day.



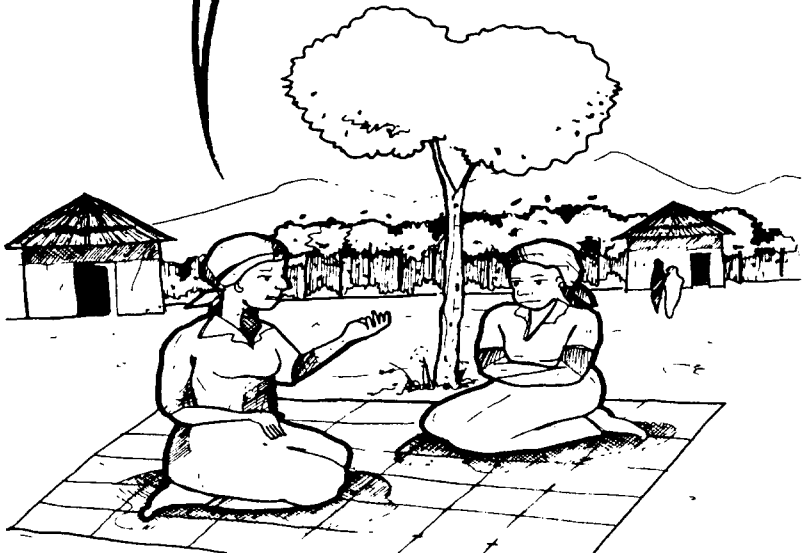
Oh my! This can't be! Better talk about it to your husband's people. Do this before they ask you to take another man. A whole clan can perish just like that!

I continued talking to my Aunt. I had a lot of worries. What about my children?

But Aunt, does it have to be a brother-in-law? This time I will give the basin of water to my son. After all I can look after myself.

I will make sure I send my children to school by working very hard in the field.

Aunt, I have also decided to have an HIV test. Whatever the results, I will learn to live with it. But I will talk to other women about what I went through.



Questions for discussion

1. Why did Farai Shumba give the bowl of water to her brother-in-law?
2. Do you think a widow needs a man to protect her and provide for her family? Why or why not?
3. What changes happen in a widow's life after she is inherited?
4. What changes happen in a man's life after he inherits his brother's wife?
5. How did Mai vaTapiwa's life change after Farai Shumba joined the family? Discuss.
6. Could Farai Shumba have avoided the trouble she faced? How?
7. Do you think Farai Shumba, Mai vaTapiwa and Baba vaTapiwa all had AIDS? Why?
8. Do you know anyone who has been inherited? What is her life like?
9. Why did Farai Shumba decide to give the bowl of water to her son?
10. What might happen if Farai Shumba is inherited the second time?