



Facing AIDS: The time is now

AIDS is not over. Instead, the face of AIDS is changing. Increasingly, AIDS has a female face.

Globally, we have failed to protect women from becoming infected. In Sub Saharan Africa, 72% of 15-24 year olds living with HIV are women.

In this exhibition, we meet women living with HIV across Africa, Latin America and Ireland, at all stages of life - from birth to old age.

At every stage in a woman's life, her gender can make her more vulnerable to HIV, while HIV often worsens experiences of gender inequality. Throughout their lives, the responsibility for caring for the sick and dying falls disproportionately to women.

But women can also hold vast reserves of strength and compassion. Women are supporting each other to live with HIV and are growing in their strength as community leaders and political activists.

Note: The names of some of the women and girls in this exhibition have been changed to protect their identities.

The heroes of the global HIV response are women and girls. And this exhibition tells some of their stories – stories of enormous kindness, humility, bravery, and perseverance.

It also serves to illustrate how the international response has been inadequate to the needs of women, and inadequate in scale and resources. At this very moment, when we know what works to overcome the epidemic, the funding and the political will is diminishing.

The women in this exhibition are facing up to HIV with dignity. And now is the time to stand alongside them. They need to know that their treatment is fully funded, and that they will receive social and emotional support throughout their lives. But equally important if we are to end AIDS: we need to empower women and tackle gender inequality - now.

trocaire.org/hiv





Mercy and Agatha, 2, Malawi

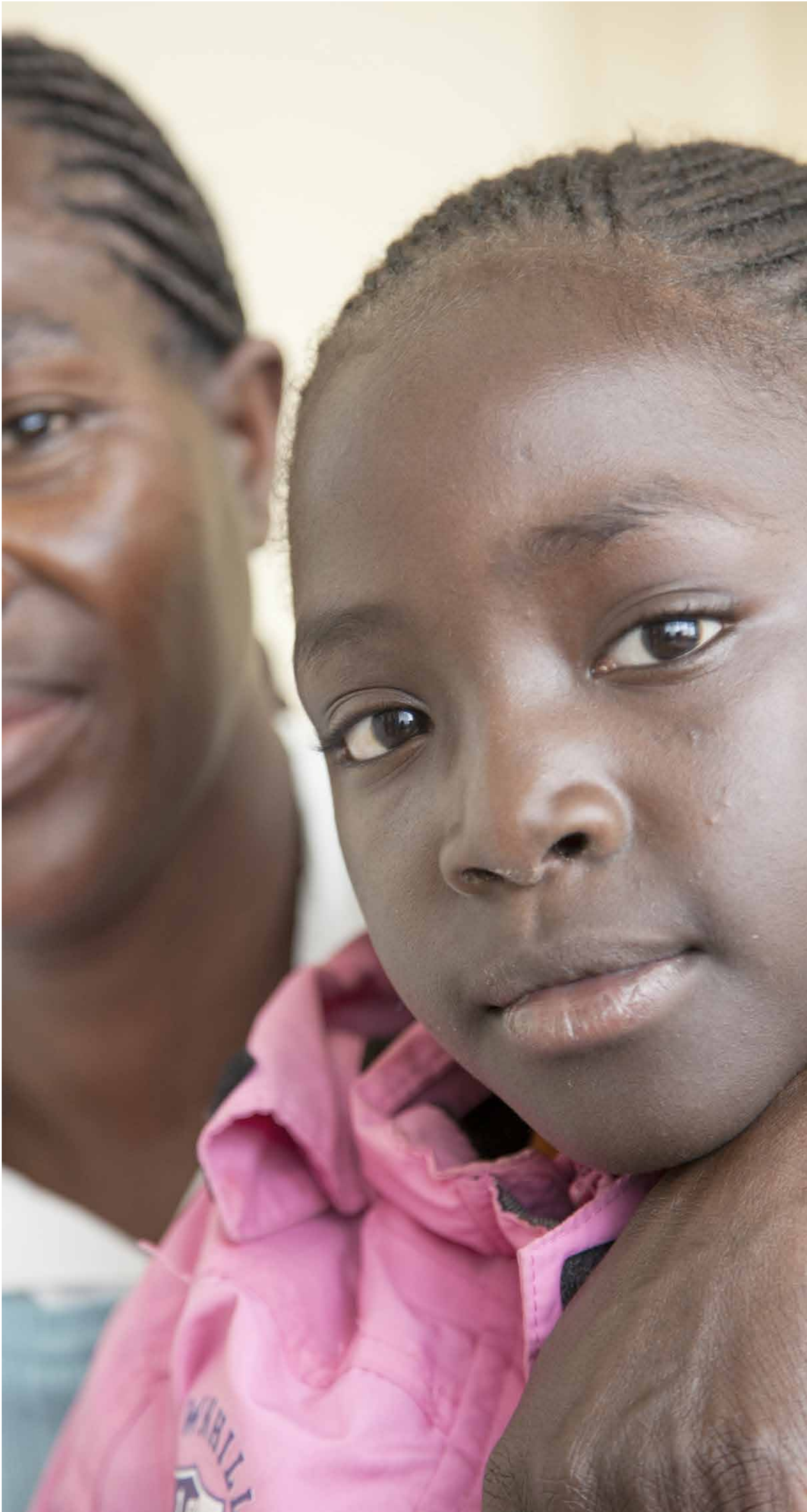
Mercy and Agatha are twin sisters, and they do almost everything together. But they are facing very different futures. Mercy is HIV positive – her sister is not.

The girls' mother, Mariam, is a member of a community network of people living with HIV, which helps her to protect her own health and that of her children. The programme is supported by Trócaire's partner, the Society for Women and AIDS (SWAM).

Mariam's husband left her to care for their children alone when she was diagnosed HIV positive. She worries about all of her children, but especially her daughters. When they turn 13, they are likely to be married, in exchange for a dowry. "We don't want this", says Mariam, but she can't see any alternative financially. She worries about the stigma Mercy will face and whether she will be accepted as a wife.

Mercy and Agatha's futures and hopes depend on a world that prioritises women and girls in the face of HIV.

Photographer:
Elena Hermosa/ Trócaire



Helen, 7, Kenya

Seven-year-old Helen is HIV positive, and so is her mother, Mary. They both gain encouragement, advice and help from the support groups they attend through Trócaire's partner organisation the Mater Comprehensive Care Centre in Nairobi.

Helen says:

"I like coming to the Centre here with my mum as I have made new friends. We sing, play, draw and read. One of the songs we sing says that positive or negative, all children matter. I don't mind taking my medicine too much as I know it keeps me strong."

"I want to study hard and be a doctor when I grow up so I can treat my mum."

Photographer:
Clare McEvoy/ Trócaire



Farai, 15, Zimbabwe

Farai was born with HIV but she does not want that to stop her from getting a good education. But, as a girl who is HIV positive, she is denied the right to education, while her older brother and sister – both HIV negative – remain in school. Her family just couldn't afford to send all three children to school.

"I stopped going to school at the age of 13 after completing primary school. My mother could not pay for the school fees because she is not employed". Farai's mother receives food supplements from Mashambanzou Care Trust, which is supported by Trócaire. This gives Farai the nutritional support she needs to keep taking her medication.

Instead of going to school every day, Farai goes to the market and does household chores. "I am not happy because a girl of my age is not supposed to stay at home. If I don't go to school it will be very difficult for me to get a job".

Photographer:
Godsway Shumba

Trócaire



Christine, 28, Uganda

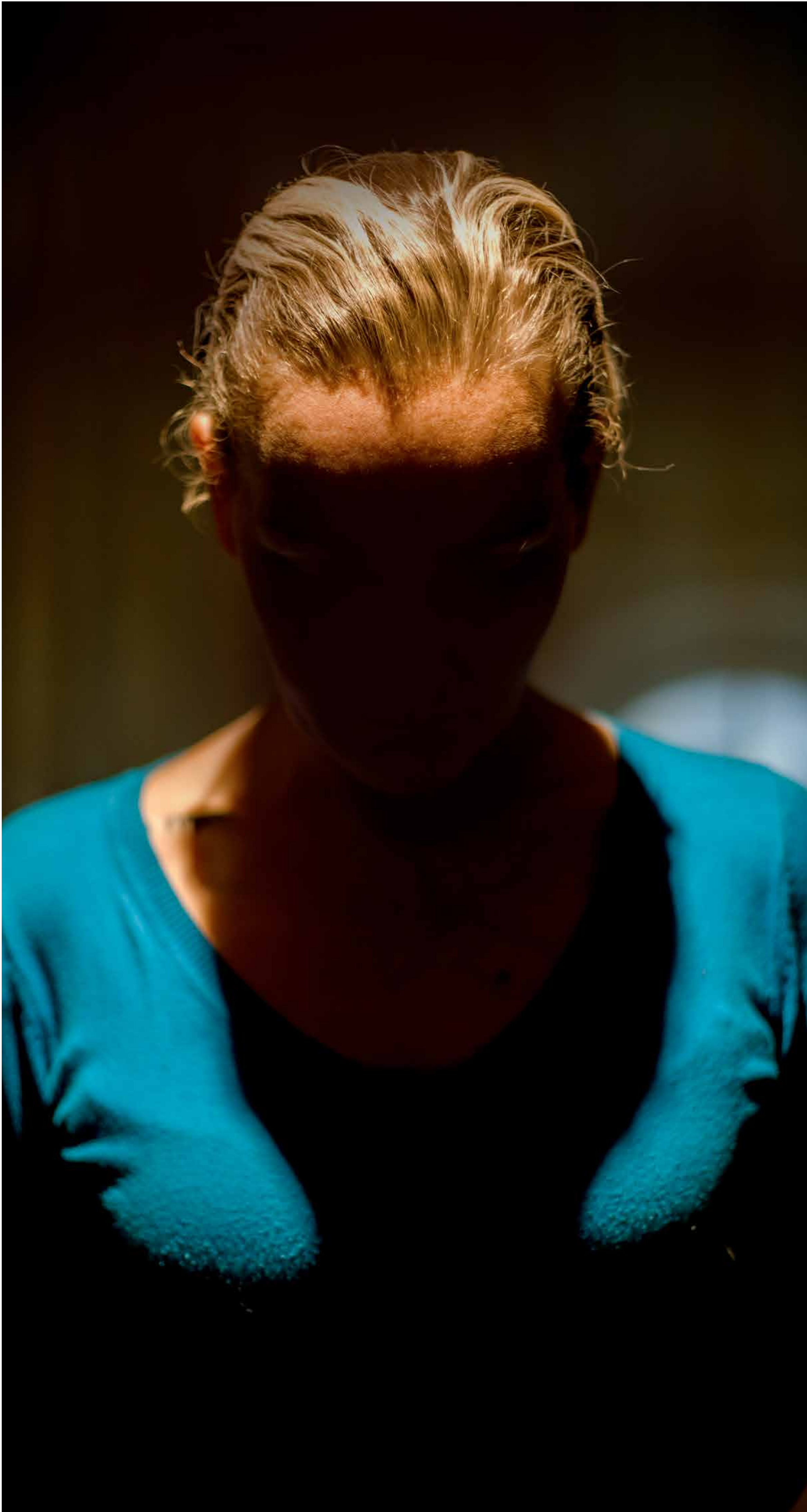
Christine Ariao was 21 when she became a widow. Just before her husband died, he told her that he was HIV positive. She realised that she might be positive too, but was afraid to take a test.

She was overwhelmed. "I had no resources to help me, to get treatment. There was no money. I didn't even want to get tested because I was fearing to find out the result."

When Christine did take the test and was diagnosed HIV positive, she began taking medication to build up her health. Outreach from parish activists supported by Trócaire helped her to overcome the trauma and depression of her diagnosis and seemingly hopeless situation. And her neighbour Sarah, a parish activist, saw Christine's need and helped her and her family to find peace and stability.

Christine's two daughters are both HIV free. Now they stand with her, looking to a more positive future.

Photographer:
Tine Frank



Claire, 32, Ireland

Claire, 32, from Wexford, was diagnosed HIV positive in a maternity hospital in 2010. Straight away, she had to ask her boyfriend to get tested too.

“We assumed he would be positive [but he wasn’t]. I said ‘right, you might as well just leave because what’s the point of you being with me, I’m disgusting’. When I found out I was HIV, I just felt dirty.”

“My child was born and thank God, she was fine. In the following year after that, I had a complete breakdown.”

While Claire’s partner and children are HIV negative, she feels responsible to protect them from stigma attached to her own status. “If it was up to me and I was on my own, I would be like ‘Yeah I am HIV positive, let me be a role model’, but society prevents me from doing that. I’d like to say ‘this is who I am, I’m proud of it and I own it’ but everyone judges you. That’s hard.”

Photographer:
Elena Hermosa/ Trócaire



Memory, 35, Zimbabwe

In 2008, Memory Shiriinorira was a community worker, earning just enough to feed herself and her two daughters.

But when she was accused of opposing the Zimbabwean government, she was abducted and

sent to a militia camp. There, she was raped by three men, one after the other. The police viewed Memory's rape as political violence and refused to even file the complaint. "I realised that the law could not protect me" she says.

Today, Memory is HIV positive. Months after the NGO where she worked closed down, she felt she had no choice but to turn to sex work. As a consequence, she has faced regular arrest, and has been denied her HIV medication while in custody – a life-threatening act.

Photographer:
Eithne Brennan/ Trócaire

Trócaire



Sandra, 42, Ireland

When Sandra found out her HIV status, the feelings of guilt and helplessness were overwhelming. But now she has got her spirit back and wants to make a contribution to society. “I was born on this side of the world, in Ireland, where I have access to medication, but I could do with a better emotional standard of living.”

Sandra went back to college to do behavioral studies, addiction studies and social studies. She became a support worker for people living with HIV. And she created a women’s space in what is a predominately male place. “A weight was lifted off me to actually meet other women who were living with it and going through the same thing”.

Sandra wants to give other people hope: “I am most proud that I am not a victim and I don’t want to be seen as a victim.”

Photographer:
Elena Hermosa/ Trócaire

Trócaire



**Evelyne, 44,
Kenya**

Making beautiful beadwork is the skill that transformed Evelyne's life. She learned the skill and became a trainer through St Joseph's, a care and support centre supported by Trócaire.

In 2003, Evelyne's life was very different. Her husband's death left her and her children impoverished and powerless. "When my husband died his family disowned us. They took his body away and left me alone with the children. Then they came and put me out of our home as they said it had belonged to my husband." Too often, women are dependent on their husbands for access to property and a livelihood. Without their husbands, they can be left destitute.

Evelyne discovered that she was HIV positive after her husband died. Her two children also tested positive. Their poverty and isolation were compounded by their HIV status.

She is facing up to her situation, independent of her husband and his family, with the support of others. "We would all be dead", Evelyne says, "if it wasn't for St Josephs."

Photographer:
Clare McEvoy/ Trócaire



Bertha, 45, Malawi

Bertha is a single mother of five children. She tested positive for HIV when she was pregnant with her youngest son Pemphero. Bertha underwent treatment for prevention of mother-to-child transmission when she was pregnant, hoping that Pemphero, now 9, would be HIV free.

Though health workers had advised Bertha not to breastfeed her son to avoid transmitting the virus to him, her husband persuaded her to, saying that otherwise she would not be a 'proper mother'. At six months, Pemphero was diagnosed with HIV. Bertha blames herself for transmitting HIV to her son through her milk.

Bertha and Pemphero are as close as a mother and son can be, helping one another to stay healthy. Trócaire's partner the Society for Women and AIDS (SWAM) supports them with transport costs to attend their hospital appointments.

Photographer:
Elena Hermosa/ Trócaire

Trócaire



Mildred, 44, Kenya

The newspaper headline couldn't have been more clear. Beside a picture of Mildred Macharia was the announcement: "AIDS victim sues doctor".

This was in the 1990s, and the headline exposed Mildred's status publicly. In spite of her fear of judgement, she felt she had no choice but to sue her

doctor for his extortionate and negligent treatment of her four-year-old daughter.

In 1997, Mildred's daughter Brenda died of AIDS-related causes. "At that moment, I decided I would become an activist so that no other mother and child would have to go through what we did."

Today, Mildred helps other HIV positive women at the DREAM centre, one of Trócaire's partners in Nairobi. She has appeared on national television and radio, demanding rights for people living with HIV.

Photographer:
Clare McEvoy/ Trócaire

Trócaire



Benita, 50, Honduras

At the age of 41 Benita Ramirez was added to the HIV statistics of Honduras. “I was a devastated woman,” she says, “and from that point my life would change 360 degrees.”

FEAR		TRIUMPH
<i>Fear</i>	<i>Mortal surprise</i>	<i>I dance</i>
<i>People’s look</i>	<i>That takes peace away</i>	<i>the sound of the wind</i>
<i>Fear</i>	<i>Fear of death</i>	<i>lifts my hair</i>
<i>Revealed diagnosis</i>	<i>Of contempt</i>	<i>of my old spirit</i>
<i>I do not want to see anybody</i>	<i>Of rejection.</i>	<i>I learned to succeed</i>
<i>Difficult situation</i>		
	<i>Benita Ramirez</i>	<i>Benita Ramírez and Trudys Perez</i>

Today, Benita is an activist, as well as studying for a career in social development. She writes poetry to express her experiences.”

Photographer: Gerardo Aguilar



Bayee, 82, and Bayee, 12, Ethiopia

Bayee Waqo (12) was named after her grandmother Bayee Chumee (82). Chumee is HIV free, but her life has been deeply affected by the virus. When her son and his wife both died of AIDS she took on the care of their daughter who was just two years old.

Some years later, after repeated illness, the young girl was diagnosed HIV positive, and she has been on treatment since.

At 82, Chumee is getting too weak for all the household chores, so her granddaughter helps by collecting firewood, fetching water, making coffee and baking bread. "My granddaughter is my guide; I am too weak to do these activities often." Grandparents often find themselves responsible for the care of children orphaned by AIDS; and this burden overwhelmingly falls on women.

Bayee Waqo goes to school and receives food aid and school supplies with the support of Trócaire's local partner Action for Development. "I have hope that she will complete her education and get a job to support us," says Chumee.

Photographer:
Tamiru Legesse/ Trócaire