Title: Thembi’s Story – Hope at the Epicenter of the Epidemic

On-screen Graphic: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Logo

On-screen Text: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services - Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

[Music] Starts

On-screen text: JUST A DECADE AGO, ESWATINI HAD THE WORLD’S MOST SEVERE HIV EPIDEMIC, AND WAS ON THE BRINK OF DESTRUCTION.

[Music] Singing begins

On-screen visual: Movie clips of a home and a person cutting bread.

[Music] Singing fades

Thembi speaks

>> I'm coming from the grave.

A black woman stands in a kitchen. She cuts a wedge of bread from a round loaf and places pieces of banana on it. The title is displayed: Hope at the Epicenter – Thembi’s Story.

On-screen text: HOPE AT THE EPICENTER – THEMBI’S STORY

[Music] Fades

Chicken and chicks walk through the yard. Thembi tosses feed out to them.

On-screen visual: Video clips of chickens clucking and rural landscape

On-screen text: Nhlangano, Eswatini July 2019

Thembi speaks

>> The early 90’s HIV was a disgrace.

[Music] Starts in background

On-screen visual: Video clips of woman sitting and speaking

>> I listened to the radio. They were talking about HIV. I remember that they told me when you have HIV, when the virus is in your body, then every sicknesses come to you.

On-screen visual: Movie clips of woman walking in rural landscape.

>> So, because of the symptoms, I decided to go and test. I was afraid. Maybe they're going to tell me that I'm HIV-positive.

Thembi sits in a clinic waiting room. Speaker, Dr. Caroline Ryan. Country Director, Eswatini. U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

On-screen visual: Video clips of woman sitting on couch speaking

On-screen text: Dr. Caroline Ryan. Country Director, Eswatini. U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

Dr. Caroline Ryan speaks

>> By the mid-90s and the early 2000's, there was a real question about whether Eswatini as a nation would survive.

On-screen text: IN 2011, ALMOST 1 IN 3 ADULTS IN ESWATINI WAS LIVING WITH THE VIRUS, AND HIV WAS DESTABALIZNG FAMILIES, COMMUNITIES, AND THE COUNTRY’S ECONOMY.

Thembi speaks

>> They said, are you ready for your result?

On-screen visual: Video clips of woman sitting in kitchen speaking.

>> I was shaking. Then I breathe in fast. She gave me water. I drink water. Then she told me that I'm HIV-positive. I cry. It was not that I’m HIV-positive. Was that, am I going to die?

On-screen visual: Video clips of man speaking

Speaker, Dr. Duncan Mackellar. Epidemiologist, Division of Global HIV & TB. U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

On-screen text: Dr. Duncan Mackellar. Epidemiologist, Division of Global HIV & TB. U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

Dr. Duncan Mackellar speaks

>> At that time, there was widespread recognition that many people weren't going to be eligible to receive treatment.

On-screen visual: Movie clips of woman sitting on bed

Thembi speaks

>> I was very, very sick for, roughly, two years. I've even been in a coma for two weeks. While I was in the coma, I could hear everybody. They used to say, "This person is already dead. Let us take off the oxygen." I was thinking of my son.

Photos of a young boy

>> Who is going to take care of him? And I was praying to come back to the world.

[Music] Continues in background

On-screen text: IN RESPONSE TO HIV’S DEVASTATION ON THE COUNTRY, THE KINGDOM OF ESWATINI DECLARED A NATIONAL EMERGENCY AND RADICALLY CHANGED THEIR NATIONAL RESPONSE TO THE EPIDEMIC. WORKING WITH THE CDC AND OTHER PARTNERS OF THE U.S. PRESIDENT’S EMERGENCY PLAN FOR AIDS RELIEF, ESWATINI DRAMATICALLY CHANGED ITS HIV RESPONSE, TRANSFORMING THE COUNTRY’S EPIDEMIC.

On-screen visual: Video clips of woman sitting in office speaking

On-screen text: Dr. Rejoice Nkambule. Deputy Director of Health Services, Kingdom of Eswatini.

Dr. Nkambule speaks

>> When HIV/AIDS was declared a national disaster, the country had outlined a policy against HIV, and the policy articulated the multisectoral approach that is needed to respond to HIV and AIDS.

Thembi smiles, walking through tall brown grass.

On-screen visual: Movie clips of woman walking through field

On-screen text: THEMBI RECOVERED FROM HER COMA AND SUBSEQUENTLY RECEIVED LIFE-SAVING ANTIRETROVIRAL (ARV) TREATMENT FOR HER HIV

Thembi speaks

>> When I started ARV’s, in two weeks’ time, I was more strong, getting stronger.

On-screen visual: Video clips of woman sitting and speaking

>> When I got sick, I was not thinking that I will have a baby at all, but I got pregnant. I was afraid that this child was going to be HIV-positive.

Thembi and her son sit on a couch together. She places pieces of banana into his bread.

Dr. Caroline Ryan speaks

>> Fifteen years ago, transmission from mother to child, about 34% of the children that were born were HIV-positive.

On-screen visual: Movie clips of children playing

>> Now less than 2% of the children that are born are HIV-positive.

Thembi speaks

>> My son is HIV-negative. It's where my new life began.

Thembi speaks with community members outside of the clinic.

>>I used to go to the community to tell people, hey, I'm HIV-positive. I also asked have you got tested? When I was going around and helping other people about HIV I was hired to be an expert client.

Thembi works inside the clinic, placing labels on bottles and meeting with clients outside and inside the consultation room.

On-screen visual: Movie clips of people in clinic

Dr. Duncan MacKellar speaks

>> Expert client counselors are just critical. These are HIV-positive, ART-adherent who have been trained to provide counseling here at Eswatini by the Ministry of Health. They serve as champions for their clients to help them absorb the shock of diagnosis, to cope with living with HIV, to testify that they, themselves, are doing fine living with HIV.

[Music] Continues in background

Thembi rides in a car with a young girl who makes a banana sandwich.

Dr. Caroline Ryan speaks

>> Eswatini is the only country that had a survey of HIV new infections in 2011 and then repeated that survey in 2016 and 17. And as a result, they saw a 44% reduction in new infections. It meant for the first time, we had tools now that we showed worked. Actually doing programs made a difference.

Thembi dances in her yard. Then, young men and women in traditional African clothing dance with bells on their ankles.

On-screen visual: Movie clips of people dancing

Thembi speaks

>> We are now families.

Dr. Caroline Ryan speaks

>> With PEPFAR and with the work that's being done, the story of Eswatini is a real success story, in terms of a country that wondered if it would survive as a nation, to now, a country that's fully functional and looking towards the future.

Thembi speaks

>> When I look back, where I'm coming from, I think God take me from the grave to tell the people to live.

[Music]

On-screen text: ESWATINI, ONCE THE EPICENTER OF THE GLOBAL HIV EPIDEMIC, TODAY HAS DOUBLED THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE SUCCESSFULLY ON HIV TREATMENT AND CUT THE NUMBER OF DEATHS FROM THE DISEASE IN HALF. WITH SUPPORT FROM PEPFAR AND CDC, GLOBAL EFFORTS TO STOP HIV HAVE SAVED MILLIONS OF LIVES IN COUNTRIES ALL OVER THE WORLD. BUT MILLIONS MORE REMAIN AT RISK. THEMBI IS ONE OF THE LUCKY ONES. TODAY, SHE CONTINUES TO THRIVE AND REACH OTHERS IN HER COMMUNITY IN NEED OF LIFE-SAVING HELP.

On-screen text: To learn more about CDC’s data driven efforts to fight HIV and TB, globally, visit: www.cdc.gov/globalHIVTB

On-screen graphic: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Logo. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Logo.

On-screen text: This film was created as part of a collaboration between the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and students at Yale University participating in the Visual Epidemiology Project.

On-screen graphic: U.S. President’s Emergency Plan for Aids Relief Logo. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Logo. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Logo.