

## World Vision Lesotho

### Stakeholder report – UPR Lesotho, 21<sup>st</sup> session

World Vision is a Christian relief, development and advocacy organization dedicated to working with children, families and communities to overcome poverty and injustice. World Vision serves all people, regardless of religion, race, ethnicity or gender.

#### Right to Health

During the first Universal Periodic Review of Lesotho in June 2010, three recommendations were made – by Argentina, Egypt and Philippines - relating to the right to health and specifically in relation to combatting the spread of HIV/AIDS.

Thousands of mothers and children die in Lesotho each year of preventable causes including neonatal complications, pneumonia, diarrhea and malaria. The high prevalence of HIV and AIDS has resulted in limited improvements in the maternal and child mortality rates as compared with 1990 levels. The most recent statistics are available from 2011 and 2012<sup>1</sup>. The under-five mortality rate fell from 88 per 1,000 live births in 1990 to 86 per 1,000 in 2011, and was as high as 117 in 2000. The maternal mortality ratio, which was as high as 690 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2000, has reduced slightly to 620 in 2010, but this is an increase on the 1990 figure of 520 deaths per 100,000 live births.

The increase in maternal deaths is mainly a result of the high burden of HIV, which is being addressed as antiretroviral therapy is becoming increasingly available. In 2010, 41.5% of all maternal deaths in Lesotho were attributable to HIV and 18% of all deaths among children under five were associated with HIV, despite recent progress in reducing this rate.<sup>2</sup>

Substantial progress has been made in extending antiretroviral therapy treatment to prevent mother-to-child transmission of HIV in Lesotho, reaching 63% coverage of the most effective antiretroviral regime in 2011.<sup>3</sup>

However, there are significant inequities in health care access between different groups in Lesotho, with women and children in rural areas tending to be the most disadvantaged. Norms and cultural practices grant women fewer decision-making powers. Access to healthcare and the quality of the care in Lesotho is limited due to low funding, lack of equipment and drugs

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<sup>1</sup>UNICEF (2011) *Children in an Urban World*; UNICEF (2012) *Committing to Child Survival: A Promise Renewed*

<sup>2</sup>WHO, UNICEF, UNFPA and the World Bank (2012) *Trends in maternal mortality: 1990-2010*.

<sup>3</sup> UNICEF (2011) *Children in an Urban World*; UNICEF (2012) *Committing to Child Survival: A Promise Renewed*

at health centres and lack of skilled health staff who are motivated to work. In addition, geographic, financial and cultural barriers often prevent people from seeking care. Despite the fact that health services are free at the access point, people's access to them is limited because of long geographic distances to health facilities and the mountainous terrain, combined with bad roads and expensive public transport. Community health campaigns through door to door and school visits from health workers have been halted due to shortages of staff, and many communities show poor understanding about health issues with the result that many people refuse to be tested or treated for HIV.

To address these challenges, the Government has committed under the Every Woman Every Child initiative to meet the target of allocating 15% of government expenditure to health, agreed in the Abuja Declaration. However, in 2011, health spending was 7.5% according to a budget speech by the Minister of Finance, thus remaining far from the Abuja target. Even though the health sector is underfunded, the existing health budget is not spent, due to lack of human resources and poor planning.

The Government has developed a range of policies and plans aimed at improving maternal and child health and nutritional services, including the National Health Sector Policy and Strategic Plan, and the Infant and Young Child Feeding Policy.<sup>4</sup>

Reforms in the structure of primary health care services together with the introduction of subsidised fees and free maternal and child health services at health centre level are aimed at improving the availability of and access to health services. Most of the health centres have been renovated, salaries for health personnel based at hard-to-reach health centres have been increased, and curriculum and training materials for village health workers have been provided.

The Government has been working with civil society organisations including World Vision to raise public awareness about maternal and child health issues and to support efforts to train village health workers.

Recommendations:

The Government of Lesotho must:

- 1) Act on its commitment to increase allocation of resources to the health sector to at least 15% of the total national budget and ensure effective utilisation and accountability, in line with their commitments under the Abuja Declaration and the Every Woman, Every Child initiative of the UN Secretary General.
- 2) Ensure equitable access and utilisation of quality health services to effectively address maternal, newborn and child health
- 3) Further raise community awareness of good nutrition and health practices to address child under-nutrition and improve health seeking behavior
- 4) Ensure that the new initiatives are extended to reach all ten districts of Lesotho.

#### Access to birth registration

During the first Universal Periodic Review of Lesotho in June 2010, no recommendations were made relating to access to birth registration.

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<sup>4</sup> [www.everywomaneverychild.org/commitments](http://www.everywomaneverychild.org/commitments).

According to the Government of Lesotho Situation Analysis of Orphans and Other Vulnerable Children of 2011, over half ( 57.9%) of all children did not have a birth certificate, and an additional 3.5% of children were in the situation that their caregivers were not certain of whether a birth certificate existed or not. Only 38.6% of all children had birth certificates. Updates from UNICEF in December 2013 indicate that now 45% of birth are registered. The impact of non-registration includes a lack of access to essential services such as public assistance, child grants and educational assistance, and a challenge in securing inheritance.

In 2012, the Government of Lesotho established the National Identity and Civil Registration Department under the Ministry of Home Affairs. The Department has been working with civil society organisations including World Vision and has intensified campaigns and outreach programmes in the communities to accelerate and promote birth registration countrywide. Particular challenges which remain include the lack of knowledge in the country on the documents required for registration, lack of supporting documents needed for registration, and in cases where guardians and relatives of orphaned children seeking to register them, they often do not have the particular information regarding the child's birth.

Recommendations:

The Government of Lesotho must:

1. Take the necessary steps to ensure that birth registration is effectively implemented and enforced.
2. Seek financial resources and technical capacity to fully equip the National Identity and Civil Registry Department as to promote the effectiveness of birth registration systems and processes.

### Child Protection

During the first Universal Periodic Review of Lesotho in June 2010, the majority of child-focused recommendations were related to the protection and well-being of children, with six recommendations specifically urging the Government to enact the Children's Protection and Welfare Bill. This Bill was subsequently adopted in 2011.

According to the Situational Analysis on the Orphans and Vulnerable Children in Lesotho, Lesotho has a total population of 1,072,974 of whom 363,526 are orphans. Approximately 10 to 13 per cent (125,000) of all children are considered to be vulnerable children. The Children's Protection and Welfare Act 2011 has defined a vulnerable child as "a person who is below the age of 18, who has one or both parents who have deserted or neglected him/her, to the extent that he has no means of survival and as such is exposed to dangers of abuse, exploitation or criminality and is therefore in need of care and protection".

The Situational Analysis redefined a vulnerable child as "a child whose rights to survival, development, protection and participation are not met because of certain conditions or circumstances"

According to World Vision Lesotho reports from the 17 Area Development Programmes in which it is active, as well as reports from other child focused organizations; the following are the major challenges facing children in Lesotho; child sexual abuse including incest, neglect, property grabbing, emotional and physical abuse, child/early marriage, pre-marital pregnancy and child labour in which boys work as herdboys while girls work as domestic workers.

Child trafficking seems to be taking place although it is still new and not yet understood by most of the communities.

In March 2011, the Children's Protection and Welfare Act was enacted, representing national efforts to address the provisions of both the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child and seeking to ensure that children's rights are respected, promoted, protected and fulfilled, and protect the social and economic well-being of all children particularly vulnerable children.

In collaboration with civil society, the Ministry of Social Development has developed a National Strategic Plan on Vulnerable Children (for April 2012 – March 2017). The strategic Plan will provide guidance for a national response to vulnerable children, facilitate a systematic approach on how to generate evidence required for decision making and planning, and adopt a human rights based approach.

Recommendations:

The Government of Lesotho must:

1. Fully implement the Children's Protection and Welfare Act, the Government ensure effective law enforcement as to strive towards creation of protective and safe environment for all children in Lesotho.
2. Enhance the working relations between formal and informal child protection structures and strengthen child protection systems and procedures at the community and National level, including through the strengthening of referral and reporting mechanisms.
3. Ensure that the Ministry of Social Development - as the key ministry for children - is allocated sufficient budget to cater for the needs of vulnerable children and their families countrywide.
4. Ensure the provision of quality support to vulnerable children and their families including psycho-social support and strive towards sustainable community participation and ownership.

#### Access to Education

The following are some major concerns for children in Lesotho with respect to education. There are a limited number of schools, especially secondary schools, in some of the rural areas, which results in children having to walk long distances to go to school. There is a lack of qualified teachers for children with special needs/disabilities. There is inadequate monitoring of pupil/teacher ratios. Some children drop out of school due to lack of resources to meet other school requirements such as uniforms. This particularly affects especially those who are from poor families.

In 2010, the Government adopted the Education Act, which emphasizes free and compulsory primary education. A non-formal education Unit under the Ministry of Education and Training has been established, and a child friendly school policy developed.

Lesotho has a system of "Initiation schools" – a cultural practice in which boys are expected to attend this type of school in order to be groomed to become strong men. The challenge is that, once the boys go to this school, they immediately consider themselves as men and no longer children, and they do not want to go back to either primary or secondary school. Some drop out of school and go to the initiation schools and this clearly limits their access to education.

Recommendations:

The Government of Lesotho must:

1. Take necessary steps to ensure that, community members are well sensitized on the importance of education for both boys and girls.
2. Ensure enforcement of Education Act 2010 and the Child friendly policy, to ensure that all children go to school
3. Allocate more resources to the Ministry of Education to ensure that all education standards are met, particularly the pupil/teacher ratio, and an adequate infrastructure to be conducive for all children especially those with disabilities. More teachers should be trained and qualified for children with special needs.
4. Work with relevant civil society actors to monitor and ensure that the standards are met.
5. Ensure that the initiation schools do not open at the same time with the primary and secondary schools in order to address the challenge of high school drop outs due to initiation schools, and ensure that only youth who are over the age of 18 years are allowed to enroll into the initiation schools.