



The MOVE Project in Summary July 13, 2009

In the mountain region of Lesotho, as elsewhere, communities are experiencing multiple negative effects related to the high HIV prevalence rate. As increasing numbers of adults are becoming sick and dying, the number of OVC continues to rise and outpace the communities' capacities for care and support. With this unbalanced equation of need and capacity, social cohesion slowly is being eroded and OVC rights are threatened. To ensure that Orphans and vulnerable children in Lesotho's mountain region grow up in communities where their basic rights are met, a multi-sectoral response addressing their education and training requirements, along with the adequacy of OVC care, support, and protection is necessary.

Catholic Relief Services (CRS) Lesotho, with support from the Lesotho National AIDS commission and Irish Aid is implementing the Mountain Orphan and Vulnerable children Empowerment (MOVE) pilot project in the mountain communities of Lesotho

The project is run in conjunction with Partners in Health, Mission Aviation Fellowship, and Peace Corps who together provide assistance to improve access to health care in general and more specifically for HIV prevention, care and support services within the target communities. The project focuses to support 6,000 OVC and 3,000 care givers in three project areas in Bobete of Thaba Tseka district and Nohana and Nkau in the district of Mohale's Hoek.



The MOVE Project Activities and Achievements

OVC Activities

- The MOVE project registered 5,562 OVC (2,719 boys and 2,843 girls) in Bobete, Nkau and Nohana.
- 4,226 students (including 2,058 boys and 2,198 girls) have been provided with school uniforms and educational supplies.
- 165 meetings were held with School Advisory Committees, traditional chiefs, and local councils to raise awareness of the importance of sending OVC to school
- 6 secondary schools are provided with resource exchange to support school fees for OVC in the secondary schools
- 311 Matsema groups with a membership of 2,828 were formed providing voluntary labor in agriculture activities to support OVC households.

- 20 Savings and Internal Lending Community groups and 102 Community Fund Mechanism groups have been established
- 64 OVC support groups have been formed to provide psycho-social care for OVC
- 1,432 CBO members have been trained in basics of HIV and AIDS, psycho social care for OVC and conflict resolution
- The MOVE project in collaboration with the department of social welfare developed a child protection manual, trained the project staff in child protection issues and raised community awareness of the Child Protection and welfare bill and other key legal frameworks

HIV Prevention Activities

The following HIV Prevention Activities have been playing an important role in the MOVE Project's approach toward assisting HIV affected households:

- HIV and AIDS basic education training was conducted for – community leaders, CBOs, teachers, caregivers
- Trained 86 peer educators
- 10 Life skills camps were held where 685 (including 89 out of school) OVC participated to be trained in life skills related to HIV and AIDS
- Established anti-AIDS clubs in schools
- Psychosocial care and support training for teachers, resource facilitators and education volunteers
- Child protection trainings for community leaders, teachers, CBOs, and volunteers
- Gender awareness training – rights of women and girls
- Engaging men in HIV and OVC awareness, counseling and testing through organizing Men's Pitsos.

Food Security activities

- 126 public gatherings (Pitsos) were held reaching 2,937 community members with information on dietary diversity
- 2,999 Households in 249 sub-villages in the three project sites are actively participating in homestead garden activities
- These households have been provided with 1,897 garden tool kits, each consisting of spades, rakes, hand forks, watering cans, 1,230 frost covers, and 2,830 vegetable starter seed packs of 25 Kg consisting 5 varieties of vegetables
- 2,999 households have built 4,162 key hole gardens, 1,721 trench gardens, 86 conservation farms and 263 compost pits.
- During project Monitoring, it is recorded that 76% of the households are consuming vegetables from their homestead gardens,

MOVE and the Male Initiative:

During a gender and HIV/AIDS workshop in Bobete, MOVE project staff realized that men normally do not participate in discussions of community, church, health and OVC issues since Pitsos have largely become events for women and elders to discuss community welfare. In response, CRS, PiH, and LCBC held a series of male focused Lipitso or community meetings in communities around the Bobete Clinic.

Through these male focused meetings the following topics were covered:

- Awareness: Basic Facts and Prevention and importance of being faithful with their partners as the scriptures recommend.
- Participation in the activities of the churches within their communities
- Providing care and support of OVC
- Group counseling (pre-test counseling) and testing followed by individual post test counseling.

The Men's Pitso's created a safe and comfortable environment to encourage men to participate in discussions about HIV and AIDS and to seek out VCT services made available through PiH at the Pitsos. With the right approach, men in the mountain areas can become key players in prevention of HIV both among themselves and women, and other care and support activities

Past HIV Prevention activities have had a noticeable impact in targeted communities as evidenced through focus group discussions. During a recent focus group discussion on HIV knowledge and attitudes with OVC Caregivers in Bobete, participants noted that due to the efforts of the MOVE Project, most of the community is generally informed about HIV and AIDS. They demonstrate an improved level of knowledge on HIV and AIDS issues compared to the time of the baseline study, and correctly identified at least three major modes of transmission and prevention. Participants reported that people at risk of being infected are those who engage in unprotected sex, orphans enticed by money, and people who use drugs and alcoholic beverages. When asked whether HIV is curable, caregivers responded with a confident "no" followed with the reason that HIV contaminates blood so the virus cannot spread when using medication properly. They noted that this increased knowledge has led to a decrease in stigma in the community towards people living with HIV. Caregivers also reported that community members are communicating and are able to discuss HIV issues, although it still seems difficult for caregivers to discuss HIV issues with children.

However, children have also demonstrated a change. Nearly all of the children who participated in the focus group discussions (or assessment) were quite knowledgeable about HIV and AIDS. Children reported participating in public gatherings by MOVE Anti-AIDS clubs which discussed HIV transmission and prevention. When asked how HIV is transmitted, all of the children responded that it can be contracted through blood contamination and unprotected sex. The children also reported that testing is important because it helps you know how to take care of yourself (e.g. by eating balanced diet) or to use

During the implementation of the MOVE project, CRS and the implementing encountered several challenges. These were related to harsh terrain and weather, poverty in the community preventing the rural households to address even the most basic services, limited funding sources which undermines the project sustainability.

Conclusion

The MOVE project is a holistic project providing comprehensive HIV prevention and impact mitigation services to the populations in the hard to reach areas in the country. Commenced three years ago, the project has been making significant impact on the lives of OVC and their households. The project is emerging as an evidence for public-private sector partnership in eliciting a sustainable community response to HIV and AIDS in the country.