



PROTECTION OF CHILDREN WHO ARE ORPHANED OR IN VULNERABLE SITUATIONS

Red Cross of the Lesotho

CASE STUDY

Photo description: Children participating in Kid's Club session at Kena Clinic
Photo credit: Lesotho Red Cross

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Background

The Lesotho Red Cross programme for children who are orphaned or in vulnerable situations applies an intersectional community health model that integrates mental health and psychosocial support, stakeholder engagement, livelihood support, and direct linkages to primary healthcare facilities. In this way the programme aims to achieve both clinical outcomes and strong community-level reach. It focuses on educating and empowering communities on climate change and its health impacts; providing in-kind material assistance and supporting economic empowerment; strengthening disaster preparedness and response through improved stock management and community involvement; and enhancing community awareness of HIV prevention, voluntary counselling and testing, and adherence to antiretroviral therapy.

The programme further improves access to comprehensive care, treatment, and adherence support for child orphans and children in vulnerable situations and their caregivers; supports educational attainment and retention through targeted educational assistance; strengthens household economic stability through income-generating activities and vocational training; builds community capacity on mental health and psychosocial support for orphans, parents, caregivers, and the wider community; and implements household strengthening activities that reinforce MHPSS outcomes.

Who was Supported and How

The programme aims to advance the overall wellbeing of children in vulnerable situations by strengthening community awareness of HIV prevention, VCT, and ART adherence, ensuring that children receive comprehensive, child-sensitive care and treatment support. Through targeted educational assistance, the initiative seeks to improve school engagement and retention, while capacity-building in Mental Health and Psychosocial Support equips parents, caregivers, and communities to create emotionally secure environments around each child. At the household level, economic-strengthening activities and vocational training reinforce the stability and resilience of families caring for orphans and children in vulnerable situations, helping ensure that children grow up in safe, supportive, and economically viable settings. Together, these interventions promote holistic child development by integrating health promotion, psychosocial support, and educational and economic empowerment in ways that prioritise the best interests of the child.

Successes

The project has reached over 550 children and adults. This has been achieved through action in several areas.

Education

- 60 children (38 females and 22 males) have received educational support in the form of school fees, exam fees for external students, book rental and stationery.
- All of the students that were supported were in secondary and high schools; the main schools were St. Rodrique High School and St. Thomas High School.
- During monthly Kids' Club meetings participants supported each other to adhere to their ARV regimens. Various topics were discussed with the children, and engaging with peers facing similar challenges positively impacted their mental health. This fostered a sense of belonging and reduced feelings of isolation, as children realized they were not alone.

- During Kids' Club meetings, children were taught about abuse, its different forms, prevention methods, and how to report it. They also engaged in interactive activities like games and songs, which supported their overall development. These activities have boosted self-esteem and improved social interactions.
- 16 Kids' Clubs gathered at Kena Primary School for peer-to-peer support. Children engaged in developmental, teamwork, and competitive games, which were both fun and interactive. The children were supported with skills and training to deliver peer education on life skills to other students.

Psychosocial Support

- A key part of psychosocial support was the organization of Kids' Clubs. Through the clubs, children had access to psychosocial support, life skills training, and a safe space for expression.
- Some of the child participants are now facilitating sessions for their peers.

Food Packages

- Food packages were delivered to 69 households. These were prioritized for children taking Anti-Retroviral treatment or Tuberculosis treatment.

Hygiene packs

- A total of 97 vulnerable households received hygiene packs, which included 2kg of washing powder soap and sanitary pads for older girls.

Child Protection and Gender-based Violence

- During the annual sixteen days of activism, public gatherings were held at Ha Moshe, C1, Tsukutsoana, Koenyama and Masaleng. The purpose was to improve community knowledge about Gender-based Violence (GBV); 109 (40 males and 69 female) people were reached.
- During the Sixteen Days of Activism, a public gathering was organized for children from all villages around Kena. An inspector from the Child and Gender Protection Unit at Ramabanta Police Station presented the Children's Protection and Welfare Act of 2011 of Lesotho. In total, 241 children (187 girls and 54 boys) participated.

Challenges and Difficulties

The project faced a number of challenges.

- Climate change has led to erratic weather patterns, causing either heavy rains or droughts, which result in food insecurity and exacerbate poverty in the already struggling community of Kena.
- An unrepaired footbridge isolates some villages, making access to services costly as residents must pay to cross using a cage rigged to a pulley system to cross a river that regularly floods.
- The challenging terrain during heavy rains worsens the condition of already poor roads, delaying the implementation of project activities.

- The lack of alternative employment for community members who previously worked in South African mines further compounds the issue.

Lessons Learned

1. **Holistic support, addressing multiple needs of children leads to better outcomes.** For example, important areas of support include education, healthcare, mental health and psychosocial support, child protection, and legal assistance.
2. **Embracing change is essential, and children are highly innovative with valuable lessons to share.** Children who have participated in Kids' Clubs for extended periods demonstrated the ability to teach their peers various life skills. Additionally, they showed a keen interest in learning about their ancestors' ways of life, believing that some traditional practices could help break the cycle of poverty.
3. **Structural issues can limit reach and impact.** For example, inaccessible roads, tolls to cross bridges, and climate change affected damages all create higher hurdles for children and families to access services.