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SUCCESS STORY

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Phelisanang Bophelong promotes community solutions in Lesotho



Phelisanang Bophelong staff

Launched in 2010, the USAID-funded Building Local Capacity for Delivery of HIV Services in Southern Africa Project (BLC) strengthens government, parastatal, and civil society entities to effectively address the challenges of the HIV and AIDS epidemic.

Throughout the Southern Africa region and with specific activities in six countries, BLC provides technical assistance in organizational development, including leadership, management, and governance in three key program areas: 1) care and support for orphans and vulnerable children; 2) HIV prevention; and 3) community-based care.

What motivates people to make great sacrifices to serve others? Thuso Khotso, Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVC) Program Officer at Phelisanang Bophelong (PB), recalls being moved by a television show when he was eight years old. “There was a family with a very sick child, and the father left because of the situation. A social worker came to support them and helped the child to get treatment. I loved the way she approached the family—as more of a mother than someone doing a job—the story affected me without even knowing and I was reminded of it years later.” Thuso studied social work and he joined PB after working as a rehabilitation officer in a hospital.

Under the Building Local Capacity for the Delivery of HIV Services in Southern Africa Project (BLC) in Lesotho, funded by USAID, PB provides services, including food security, health care referrals, economic strengthening, and psychosocial and spiritual support to OVC and their caregivers in Thaba Tseka district.

PB decided to start the OVC project by prioritizing the most remote areas to reach people who have little access to services. To reach the area furthest away, Thuso rents a horse and travels six or seven hours (“depending on your riding skills”), at times dismounting to lead the horse through deep gullies. This area is served by a Community Child Monitor (CCM), a volunteer recommended by the local community and trained to provide services to OVC.

Thuso remarks, “I was motivated by the CCM in this area. He is the only male CCM and is a hard worker. I asked myself, ‘Why is he so concerned about this area?’ He had previously been living in an urban area but was touched when he saw the way people were living in remote areas... I was motivated by his hard work; thereafter I was motivated by the appreciation of the community itself... now they understand the importance of skills rather than just food parcels... they understand that they have to help themselves.”

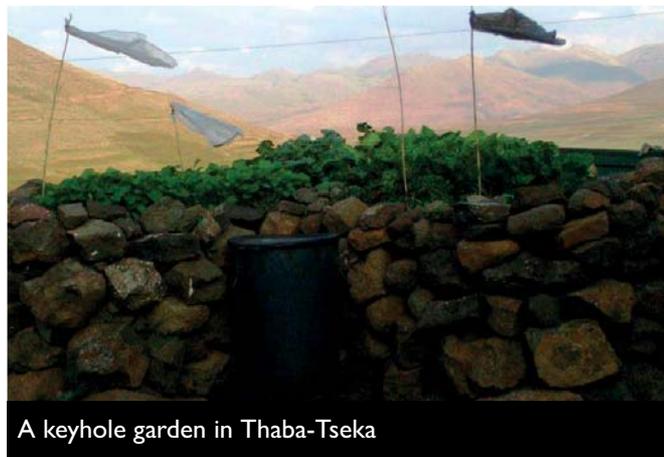
From the beginning of the project, PB has emphasized that community problems should be resolved by solutions available within communities. Thuso states, “We seek to consult, not impose on communities.” The organization believes that these interventions are more sustainable and longer lasting.

An example is support to create and maintain keyhole gardens. PB “reminded them [the communities] that communalism has always worked best... they collectively gathered materials for the gardens, with the OVC and caregivers taking the lead.”

PB runs psychosocial and spiritual support workshops that they consider a key service to OVC: “We have seen behavior change among youth who were previously wild or shy...boys who were sent to remote areas to herd cattle are now willing to go to school and have aspirations for their lives. The children feel open and comfortable and recognize that someone cares for them...it is the most important [service] because it covers all areas of life: stress management, grief, and bereavement.” These workshops incorporate children’s games that teach teamwork, assertiveness, and communication.

PB’s economic strengthening programs capitalize on natural resources and develop small business ideas and management skills. Guided by available resources (including a market for the goods), there are now groups of OVC and caregivers creating handicrafts such as traditional hats and brooms, flower pots, and earrings. A recent project is potato-growing: a group of 27 OVC and caregivers are working toward an agreement to sell potatoes to a local lodge.

Bana itjareng (“Children empowerment”), PB’s OVC project, is the first experience the organization has had working with children. They appreciate the technical and monitoring support that BLC has provided in OVC programming and management. The quarterly review meetings held with BLC’s partners provide opportunities to CSOs to network and learn from each others’ challenges and approaches.



A keyhole garden in Thaba-Tseka



Phelisanang Bophelong is one of 12 organizations that receive BLC-supported and USAID-funded small grants in Lesotho. Phelisanang Bophelong is focused on providing a variety of services to orphans and vulnerable children and their caregivers. Since 2012, their work has reached more than 5,600 beneficiaries.

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