

Lesotho, July 12, 2010 - The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has signed a cooperation agreement with two organisations in Lesotho under which it will allocate over \$1.2 million to boost an integrated social protection system for orphans and other vulnerable children in the country.

The groups - World Vision Lesotho and Sentebale - will use the funds for projects that contribute to the achievement of Lesotho's vision for a society in which all vulnerable children are free from discrimination, live in dignity and have their rights and aspirations fulfilled.

The agreement signed last week falls under the overall umbrella of the Government of Lesotho, European Commission and UNICEF's Orphan and Vulnerable Children's (OVC) Programme (2007-2011), which seeks to empower 60,000 such children to cope with their challenging circumstances through interventions such as education, health, psychosocial assistance, life skills, food and nutrition and social protection.

GA_googleFillSlot("AllAfrica_Story_InsetB"); "The broader OVC programme, which is funded by the EU, seeks to reduce children's vulnerabilities, especially in light of the many challenges posed by HIV and AIDS, and ensure that we break the cycle of poverty that is passed from one generation to the next. Civil society is a key partner to foster community involvement at grassroots level and empower them to take care of OVC," said Naqib Safi, UNICEF Deputy Representative in Lesotho.

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World Vision Lesotho will receive \$950,000 to reach an estimated 60,000 orphans and vulnerable children with community-based interventions aimed at eliminating barriers to accessing services such as education, health, protection, HIV prevention and food and nutrition.

Sentebale, a charity supporting orphan and vulnerable children, founded by United Kingdom's Prince Harry and Lesotho's Prince Seeiso, will receive \$267,000 to strengthen its Letsema network of service providers working with vulnerable children.

One component of the overall programme implemented by the Government and supported financially by the European Commission and technically by UNICEF is the Lesotho Child

Grants programme, which was launched in April last year and to date has reached over 3,300 orphans and vulnerable children living in 1,250 households with a regular quarterly payment of about \$38.

"All these activities and the involvement of civil society organizations will be instrumental in reaching the most vulnerable OVC with a holistic package of social protection interventions to reduce their vulnerability, break the cycle of poverty that engulfs over half of the population and realize the right of every child to reach their full potential," said Mantsenki Mphalane, Chief Child Welfare Officer in Lesotho's Ministry of Health and Social Welfare.