

Lesotho: How mobile technologies are saving thousands

The Vodafone Foundation announced a mobile-based HIV programme in Lesotho, where an estimated 23% of the population is HIV positive, many of whom live in extreme poverty in remote rural communities separated by mountainous terrain with minimal infrastructure.



Lesotho

The Vodafone Foundation programme combines Vodafone's M-Pesa mobile money service – which is widely used across sub-Saharan Africa – with travelling clinics and a smartphone app designed for healthcare professionals which enables the tracking of patients in remote areas.

The travelling clinics – using a fleet of 4x4 vehicles – provide on-site HIV testing in remote areas as part of a wider effort to provide basic primary healthcare. When people are identified as HIV positive, they are immediately registered with the M-Pesa mobile money service and receive the M-Pesa funds needed to pay for transportation to a treatment centre.

At the same time, their details are recorded – via mobile – on a central database so that their future treatment and care can be planned and recorded. These details can then be recalled in real time by healthcare professionals in the field using a smartphone app produced by the Vodafone Foundation and Vodacom Lesotho.

As many as 5,000 children under the age of 14 are estimated to be undiagnosed and living with HIV and their lives are therefore at immediate risk if they are not identified and put on treatment. There are a further 7,000 children already

diagnosed who require ongoing specialist HIV treatment.

The programme is specifically oriented towards pregnant women, mothers and young children who are among the most vulnerable groups in Lesotho society as they are less able to walk many hours to the nearest HIV clinic.

The Vodafone Foundation has developed the programme in conjunction with the Lesotho Ministry of Health. The Lesotho government has welcomed the outcomes from the roll-out in the Maseru and Leribe districts and has now committed to integrating the programme within the country's primary healthcare strategy.

The costs of the programme will be fully funded by the Lesotho government from mid-2017. This is expected to be followed by a full roll-out across the other Lesotho districts, transforming the life prospects for vulnerable people in hundreds of remote villages across the country.

The mobile clinics are run in partnership with Baylor International Pediatric AIDS Initiative (BIPAI) and Riders for Health. Other partners in the wider Lesotho programme include some of the global leaders in HIV prevention, testing and treatment such as funding partners USAID, ViiV Healthcare, the Elton John AIDS Foundation and Elma Philanthropies. In addition to BIPAI and Riders for Health, the Vodafone Foundation is also working closely with NGOs Kick 4 Life and PSI to deliver the programme.

Vodafone Foundation director Andrew Dunnett said: "HIV is an immense healthcare crisis for the people of Lesotho. This pioneering Vodafone Foundation programme will ensure that thousands of mothers and young children in some of the poorest communities in the world receive the care and support they need."

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