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LIFT's Recommendations for PEPFAR-funded Economic Strengthening Programs in Swaziland

Main Objectives:

- Assess PEPFAR-funded economic strengthening (ES) programs for people affected by HIV and AIDS, particularly OVC, by:
 - Conducting a desk review
 - Interviewing practitioners and beneficiaries of 29 programs
- Make recommendations to improve the impact of PEPFAR-funded ES programs.
- Base recommendations on three types of approaches—provision, protection, and promotion—each appropriate for a different level of vulnerability.

*The Livelihoods and Food Security Technical Assistance (LIFT) program is a 5-year cooperative agreement awarded by the USAID Office of HIV/AIDS to FHI 360 through the **FIELD-Support LWA**. Find out more at <http://theliftproject.org>*

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Communities in Swaziland face tremendous challenges in preventing the spread of HIV and AIDS, caring for the sick, and mitigating the social and economic impacts of the pandemic. In 2011, more than 25% of the adult population was infected with HIV, and the country was home to approximately 75,000 orphaned children. Economic indicators are also sobering; in 2011, more than 63% of Swazis lived below the poverty line and in some of the very poorest zones, households were able to meet only 67% of their basic minimum food needs. The links between HIV/AIDS, poverty and food insecurity are clear. Those who are ill have decreased ability to earn income, grow crops or raise animals. Households affected by HIV devote time and money to medical treatment and lose family members during their most productive working years. In 2010, according to the UN, there had been a 44% reduction in land used for cultivation, a 54% reduction in maize production, and diversion of at least 31% of labor to care for the chronically ill as a direct result of HIV.

The Livelihoods and Food Security Technical Assistance (LIFT) project conducted an assessment in Swaziland and made recommendations for improving the impact of PEPFAR-funded economic strengthening (ES) programs for people affected by HIV and AIDS, particularly orphans and vulnerable children (OVC). LIFT conducted a desk review to understand the levels of food and income insecurity in the country and interviewed practitioners and beneficiaries of 29 programs run by PEPFAR implementing partners, other donor-funded and community-based institutions, and agencies of the Government of the Kingdom of Swaziland. This brief summarizes the team's recommendations.

Recommendations

LIFT's recommendations were based on a model of ES that defines three types of approaches, each appropriate for different levels of vulnerability:

1. **Provision:** providing direct offer of food, cash or other essential services/products for the most vulnerable households to meet their basic needs.
2. **Protection:** helping very vulnerable households restore or maintain their resources, recover from economic shocks and build assets.
3. **Promotion:** helping households that are poor but stable to increase their household income and seize employment or self-employment opportunities.

Provisioning strategies for most vulnerable households

In Swaziland, the most vulnerable households are those that lack healthy adult income earners, have depleted their assets, have maximized their ability produce food, and require external food and income assistance to survive. In these cases, LIFT recommended that PEPFAR improve linkages to NGOs that provide social

and healthservices and add links to NGOs that offer ES services. LIFT suggested that PEPFAR should not fund large-scale food aid programs (which were already being carried out by numerous community-based organizations), cash transfer programs, or cash-for-labor interventions. In general, the costs of these activities would exceed PEPFAR's resources. Instead, efforts should be made to refer beneficiaries of these programs to savings groups and organizations that teach financial literacy.

Protection strategies for vulnerable households: Households that would benefit from protection interventions need assistance to maintain a more constant level of income, to reduce expenses, to self-insure against risks, and to protect their assets. For this group, LIFT recommended that PEPFAR support legal protection for especially vulnerable people, including women and OVC. Often, orphaned children, who should rightfully inherit their parents' assets, or widows who should inherit their husband's assets, have no standing to challenge other adult relatives who might preside over the estate. Activities could include counseling, asset protection, policy change, birth registration and enforcement of wills. The team also suggested that PEPFAR funds be used to investigate programs that help households "self-insure" against future financial risks. Examples include forming savings groups or other community-level groups to build social capital. Other recommendations included providing training on financial literacy to Swazi NGOs that implement savings groups and exploring the use of permaculture gardens for household production. Permaculture gardens are more productive, more sustainable and less costly, and they produce more nutritious vegetables than traditional gardens.

Promotion strategies for less vulnerable households: To support households that are relatively stable but need to build their income and assets, LIFT recommended that PEPFAR increase support for TVET, a system of 87 formal and informal training institutions, to improve workforce development efforts. At the time of the assessment, the system faced numerous challenges: limited funding for prospective students, a curriculum that is not driven by demands of students or employers, courses of study that take prohibitively long for some students to complete, and great variation in standards among the institutions.

The team also thought it was important to allocate funding for microenterprise development programs that are linked to larger firms that guarantee a market for their products and often provide training and transportation. Various programs that focused on smaller-scale income-generating activities often all produced the same kinds of goods, leading to market saturation and little to no financial return. The LIFT team recommended only limited support for entrepreneurial training programs, which as of yet, have done little to track the impact of their work, and it did not recommend funding microfinance programs in Swaziland or investing in income-oriented vegetable gardens.

Finally, one cross-cutting activity LIFT recommended was to strengthen referral systems to link organizations that serve OVC and people living with HIV with organizations that offer ES, legal, and financial services. At the time, there was no comprehensive database of programs and services available to meet Swazis' broad health, nutritional and financial needs.