

## Engaging Communities of Faith on HIV during a Pandemic Experiences from the 4Children Lesotho Faith and Community Initiative

*The Faith and Community Initiative is a PEPFAR/USAID funded project with the aim of reaching men and boys with New Messages of Hope through faith-based platforms to encourage them to get tested for HIV and know their HIV status. Catholic Relief Services, through the Coordinating Comprehensive Care for Children (4Children) project, is one of the FCI implementing partners in Lesotho in partnership with Caritas Lesotho and the Lesotho Inter Religious AIDS Consortium.*



### CONTACT

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### LESOTHO CONTEXT

Faith and worship are an essential part of life for Basotho; gathering for worship is at the heart of what it means to be part of a community of faith. This is even more true in situations of crises like the COVID-19 pandemic.

Lesotho was the last African country to report a confirmed case of COVID-19 on the 13 May 2020. However, following the international community's lead, Lesotho nevertheless established response strategies to the COVID-19 pandemic by declaring a national emergency, restricting group gatherings, and ultimately imposing lockdown measures starting in March 2020.

### VIRTUAL REACH

With the rapidly evolving COVID-19 situation in Lesotho, programming had to be quickly adapted based on WHO, PEPFAR and Government of Lesotho guidance. Activities were largely moved to virtual platforms such as Whatsapp, Facebook, bulk SMS messaging, faith-based radio stations (jingles, talk shows, radio dramas and phone-in sessions) and conference call group discussions with COVID-19 messaging incorporated. When possible—and in adherence to COVID-19 guidance—small groups of community members were encouraged to come together to listen to, and discuss, radio programming.

Through the generous support of the American people through PEPFAR and USAID,

- **2,339 men** and **192 women** received messaging and participated in discussions through WhatsApp platforms;
- **57,000 faith community members** received HIV and COVID-19 messages through Facebook pages;
- **Many other people** were reached through faith-based radio (At this time, faith-based radio stations in Lesotho do not have a methodology for estimating listenership)

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