

Plan to expand child HIV prevention programmes

By Ntsebenz Motsoeli

MASERU — The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Elizabeth Glaser Pediatric Aids Foundation (EGPAF) say they plan to expand programmes dealing with the prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV in Lesotho.

USAID and the foundation, working closely with the Ministry of Health, also plan to scale up HIV care and treatment in all health facilities in Lesotho.

Speaking at a press conference in Maseru yesterday Charles Lyons, the president and chief executive officer of EGPAF, said preventing mother-to-child transmission is one of the most successful HIV prevention strategies.

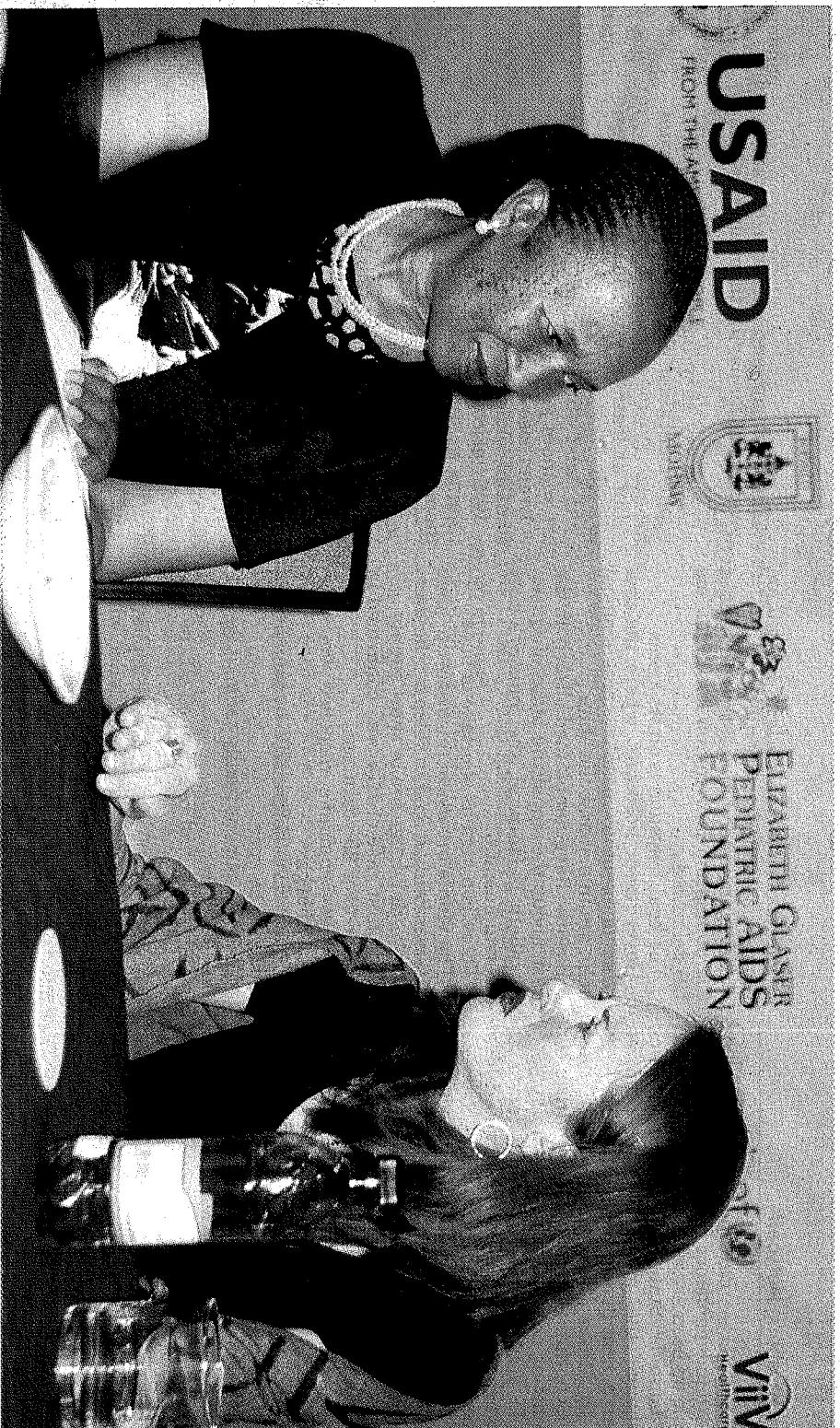
"By reducing the numbers of new infections and therefore the need for lifelong therapy, PMTCT is cost-effective and it also holds the promise for virtual elimination of pediatric HIV," Lyons said.

He said if services to prevent transmission of HIV from mother to the child were made available to all eligible women "it is possible to virtually eliminate pediatric Aids".

"Only a few years ago few would have dreamed that we could be here together and talk about virtual elimination of pediatric AIDS, to imagine a generation free from HIV in Lesotho," Lyons said.

The USAID, EGPAF and the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare said they had set new targets to reach 200 000 HIV positive individuals with care services over the next year.

They also plan to enroll 75



HEALTH Minister Mpho Ramatlape chairs with US deputy chief of mission in Lesotho Elizabeth Powers at the launch of the Call to Action report for Lesotho yesterday.

000 HIV positive people on antiretroviral therapy.

The aim, the organisations said, was to provide nationwide HIV care services by 2011.

Health and Social Welfare Minister Dr Mpho Ramatlape said the results of the PMTCT were quite impressive.

"We are very pleased with the results of PMTCT. We have set new targets to reach more people. We hope we will be very

close to the 90 percent coverage target by next year," Ramatlape said.

"That way we might see our goal of achieving an HIV free nation."

Lesotho has the third highest HIV prevalence rate in the world with a quarter of the country's 1.8 million people said to be living with the virus.

Over half of 260 000 adults living with HIV are women.

There are an estimated 50 000 deliveries and approximately 13 500 HIV infected women give birth annually.

Without PMTCT more than 5 000 children could become infected with HIV each year.

An estimated 12 000 children are living with HIV in Lesotho. In 2004 through early 2010 a USAID-funded Call to Action (CTA) project in Lesotho was instituted to support the scale-up

of services for the prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV.

The project helped to establish and expand PMTCT services from an initial nine sites to 103 health facilities in six out of 10 districts.

Through the CTA project, more than 55 000 pregnant women and 44 000 infants were provided with antiretroviral drugs.