Lesotho has the second highest HIV prevalence in the world at 25%.

Pediatric antiretroviral treatment (ART) coverage remains low, at 57%, mainly due to long turnaround times and poor access to early infant diagnosis (EID) among HIV-exposed infants.

The UNITAID/EGPAF point-of-care (POC) EID project in Lesotho aims to improve HIV diagnosis and early ART initiation among HIV-infected infants through the strategic placement of POC EID technology in health facilities.

In February 2016, selected sites in Lesotho underwent a standardized assessment for suitability for POC EID testing.

METHODS

15 high-volume sites were assessed for readiness of EID POC using a checklist for assessing their EID capacity.

The checklist was adapted from the Stepwise Process for Improving the Quality of HIV Related Point of Care Testing Checklist and inspected eight quality essentials (QE) relevant to POC testing: 1) possibility of integration of POC service to HIV care; 2) personnel management; 3) physical space; 4) safety; 5) pre-testing phase management; 6) post-testing phase management; 7) equipment and inventory management; and 8) quality monitoring.

Percentage scores were determined for each QE and checklist gives an overall score of site readiness for POC EID introduction graded from Level 0, as the lowest grade, to Level 4, the highest.

RESULTS

Only one (6.7%) of the sites was fully eligible for selection as a pilot site (scored as Level 4).

Seven (46.7%) were graded as Level 3, mostly due to the need for minor upgrades (e.g. provision of temperature monitoring) to reach Level 4.

The remaining seven (46.7%) sites were partially eligible and needed some improvements (Level 2) such as infrastructural upgrades (e.g., suitable storage space for commodities or a work bench).

No site was at Level 1 (not ready; needing improvement in specific areas) or at Level 0 (not ready; needing improvement in all areas).

CONCLUSIONS

Given that only minor upgrades were required in more than half of the sites that were assessed, the results indicate that the country is well-positioned to pilot POC EID in these selected sites.