

**Opening remarks by
H.E. Dr. Michael Doyle, Ambassador and Head of Delegation
of the European Union to the Kingdom of Lesotho**

at the workshop for the formulation of the description of activities for Phase III of
the European Union support to Social Protection in Lesotho

Maseru, 5 May 2015

Lumelang bo-'m'e le bo-ntate - Greetings to all.

Master of Ceremonies, allow me to start by paying my respects to:

His Majesty King Letsie III;

The Right Honourable the Prime Minister;

Honourable President of the Senate;

Honourable Speaker of the National Assembly;

Her Ladyship the Chief Justice;

His Lordship the President of the court of Appeal;

Honourable Deputy Prime Minister;

Honourable Ministers;

Their Lordships Judges of the High Court;

Dr. Tesfaye Shiferaw, Head of Office for the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF),
and his UNICEF colleague from Brussels, Mr: Ruben Rivas Pereda;

'M'e Chesipo, Principal Secretary, Ministry of Social Development;

Ntate Masasa, Director for Planning, Ministry of Social Development;

All other officials and dignitaries here present;

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen.

All Protocol observed.

It is with great pleasure that I am here with you this morning to address this important gathering that will be working on developing the detailed documentation for Phase III of the EU support to social protection in Lesotho, under EDF 11.

Today's meeting follows on years of partnership, extensive consultation and collaboration. The European Union is very pleased to have been closely associated with the Ministry of Social Development and UNICEF on all the work that has been done, and continues to be done, to better support vulnerable children in Lesotho, and to alleviate the situation faced by the most vulnerable families in those targeted areas where our support is being implemented.

Since 2008, the European Union has already committed **22 million Euros** (equivalent to about 300 million Maloti) to the area of Social Protection. With a further Euro 8 million for Phase III, the total investment of the EU in this sector will come to a total of **30 million euros**, or about 350 million Maloti. The commitment of, and strong collaborative partnership between, the Government of Lesotho, UNICEF and the European Union have been key to the success of our intervention.

When the EU first started this tripartite collaboration with the Government and UNICEF back in 2007, everything had to be put in place. Most of you know that the initiative first started with a pilot initiative, evolved towards a larger project covering 10,000 vulnerable families; it was then very successfully taken on by the Government as one of the key national social protection cash transfer programmes. Phase III will help the Government build a harmonized, more efficient and effective system of social protection.

Phase III will firstly help the Ministry of Social Development to lead, coordinate and implement the social protection strategy. **This will also require engagement from other line Ministries (such as Health and education, to name a few) and the setting up of a strong social protection sector coordination mechanism (it has been discussed how this could be inspired by the very successful example of the water sector coordination mechanism).**

Secondly, Phase III will help the Government to have a strong single registry, the National Information System for Social Assistance, which was initially created under Phase I for the Child Grant Programme, but that can and should be used for other interventions.

Thirdly, it will support the strengthening of capacities at community level, a necessary pillar of a strong decentralized social protection system.

Allow me to recall once more some of the milestones that have been reached in the last two years, here in the Kingdom of Lesotho. As said before, the Lesotho Child Grant Programme (CGP), is now fully funded and administered by the government. Within the Sub-Saharan African context, it is a unique example of an effective transition from a donor-led initiative into a national programme funded by the national budget. The EU support has been fundamental in helping Lesotho move towards a comprehensive and integrated social protection system aiming to reduce poverty and ensure that services actually reach those who need them most.

What is also notable is the tremendous progress in terms of coverage: from the pilot phase that reached about 5,000 children, there has been a steady increase to the situation today where some 80,000 children are directly benefitting from the CGP. Here I should also commend the great contribution made by our implementing partner UNICEF in helping bring this about - and indeed I commend their critical engagement throughout the programme.

Launching the National Social Protection Strategy in January this year was a milestone. However, the current challenge is to move towards the implementation of the strategy in an integrated and coordinated way.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

One cannot stress enough the commitment that is required from all Ministries, and I would underline, from all Ministries concerned, to ensure that the strategy is implemented and that tangible and concrete results are reached.

For all this to be achieved, adequate financial and human resources need to be set aside and the necessary administrative structures need to be in place. We need to see the position of the Director of Social Assistance filled, but also the other staff still required to manage NISSA and the IT manager need to be recruited. This is essential for longer term sustainability of the substantial investments being made by the GoL and EU.

Engaging Civil Society Organizations in the governance of social protection is also essential. A strong civil society interacting with government plays a key role in ensuring accountability in social protection programmes.

In the last few years, many significant results have been achieved, but challenges remain. Having sufficient capacities and resources devoted to social protection remains a challenge. If these human and other resources are not made available and maintained at the adequate level and quality, then we risk to significantly impede progress in the area of social protection.

Before closing, I would like to again commend the work of the Ministry of Social Development on taking forward these important interventions to ensure sustainable mechanisms for assisting the most vulnerable in Lesotho's society. I wish you a successful workshop in your efforts to fine tuning the Phase III documentation.

Thank you for your kind attention.

KHOTSO, PULA, NALA.