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## PRESS RELEASE

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### **USAID Concludes Activity Supporting 625,000 AIDS Orphans, Vulnerable Children and their Caregivers**

Abuja – In a ceremony on November 28, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) concluded a five-year activity that provided support for 500,000 children orphaned or made vulnerable by the AIDS epidemic, and 125,000 of their caregivers.

Since 2013, the \$45.3 million Sustainable Mechanisms for Improving Livelihoods (SMILE) activity, funded by the U.S. President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), has scaled up support services for orphans and vulnerable children (in 47 local government areas across five states (Benue, Edo, Kogi, and Nassawara) and the Federal Capital Territory.

Presiding at the ceremony was a representative of Mrs. Ifeoma Anagbogu, Permanent Secretary Federal Ministry for Women Affairs and Social Development, joined by Dr. Zohra Balsara, Director of the USAID Office of HIV/AIDS and Tuberculosis Control, along with a host of state commissioners of Women Affairs and Social Development.

“Support to these vulnerable populations is critical for the future of Nigeria, a country whose human capital is its greatest strength,” said Dr. Balsara.

To achieve these results, SMILE provided grants to civil society organizations under a consortium led by Catholic Relief Services. SMILE helped establish referral networks, improve HIV/AIDS related service delivery, and support to households affected by the epidemic. The activity worked through schools on health education and school access, provided psychosocial support to AIDS victims, and trained their caregivers on parenting skills.

Sonia Gambo, a beneficiary from Bwari Area Council in the FCT, said she thought her life was over after her initial diagnosis. “I was dead,” she told dramatically to ceremony participants before recounting how the SMILE project helped her secure a loan and seed money to plant crops and start a firewood business, while coaching her on how to be a better wife and mother despite her illness. “SMILE taught me how live positively with HIV.”

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**ABOUT USAID:** *USAID leads international development and humanitarian efforts to save lives, reduce poverty, strengthen democratic governance and help people progress beyond assistance through social services, supports transparent and accountable governance, promotes a more market-led economy, and enhances Nigeria’s capacity as a responsible regional and trade partner. For more information about USAID and its programs, please visit [www.usaid.gov](http://www.usaid.gov)*

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