**Norway commits $9.9 Million to Maternal and Newborn Health**

Catalytic Grants to Support mHealth Scale and Evaluation

WASHINGTON, DC (March 5, 2012) – As International Women’s Day approaches, the mHealth Alliance announces that the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (Norad) has made a US$9.9 million commitment to support the use of innovative mobile technologies to improve women and children’s health.

This generous commitment supports the mHealth Alliance’s management of the Innovation Working Group (IWG)’s catalytic grant competitions for maternal, newborn, and child mobile health (mHealth) programs in support of the UN Secretary General’s *Every Woman Every Child* global strategy. The commitment covers a three-year period during which the mHealth Alliance, which is hosted by the United Nations Foundation, will sponsor competitions and award grants to organizations with capacity to scale up evidence-based mHealth interventions that improve health outcomes for pregnant women, newborns, and children.

“Some of the poorest countries are making significant reductions in maternal and neonatal mortality,” said Tore Godal, co-chair of the IWG and Special Advisor for Global Health to the Prime Minister of Norway. “But there is still much work to be done. The use of mobile technology demonstrates how innovation creates unprecedented potential for scale-up. With two out of three mobile users living in developing countries, these grants are critical to global health and development – important parts of achieving the Millennium Development Goals, particularly those related to women. Mobile phones make participation possible for women to access the health care they need, including family planning, birth, child care, and survival.”

These catalytic grants will be complemented with technical support provided by the mHealth Alliance, in partnership with the World Health Organization (WHO), to achieve objectives related to scale, sustainability, and partnership-building.

“The Norwegian government has long been a leader in supporting developing countries as they face challenges like maternal and infant mortality,” said Kathy Calvin, CEO of the UN Foundation. “Norad’s commitment combines this support with the convening power of the mHealth Alliance. These catalytic grants will assist innovative technologists and health experts who are working to improve health outcomes and achieve the Millennium Development Goals that seek to improve women’s and children’s health.”

The 2011 catalytic grants competition winners were announced in December at the 2011 mHealth Summit in Washington, D.C. The competitive grants facilitate public-private partnerships to support national scale-up processes and enable expanded reach to communities in need. Throughout each two-year grant period, the mHealth Alliance will provide opportunities for collaborative learning among the grantees. The mHealth Alliance initiated the next round of catalytic funding competition today as it announced the Call for Letters of Interest, the first phase of the grant application process. The competition is open to applications from public-private partnership-driven projects that have the potential to improve women’s and children’s health and reduce their risk of dying in developing countries; have evidence of positive outcomes from a pilot or early phase development; and are ready for scale-up. To learn more about the Call for Letters of Interest, visit [www.healthunbound.org](http://bit.ly/xSGJCB).

Work is already underway in Ghana where the [Grameen Foundation](http://www.grameenfoundation.org/), one of the 2011 catalytic grant winners in 2011, is creating a new public-private partnership with MTN Ghana to develop sustainable mobile health product that targets women in both urban and rural areas. In this model, a fee-based product targets individuals in urban areas, and the revenue generated from this service helps ensure the provision of free, or deeply discounted, maternal health information services to poor individuals in rural areas. The goal is to create a program that provides critical maternal and child health information to as many poor individuals as possible, especially those in rural areas, while operating with a sustainable business model. In doing so, Grameen Foundation is laying the foundation for the long-term success of national-scale mobile health products in Ghana while improving health outcomes for new mothers and their babies in rural areas.

In India, [Dimagi](http://www.dimagi.com/), which also won an IWG catalytic grant in 2011, is using mobile technology to improve case management for maternal and child health in India using CommCare, their open source support tool for community health workers. It is also contributing to the Maternal Concept Lab to establish common reporting outputs across multiple projects and by addressing issues of technological interoperability and integration – important for helping mobile technologies to become fully integrated into health systems.

Another 2011 IWG catalytic grant winner, [Interactive Research and Development](http://irdresearch.org), or IRD-(FZC), is taking an electronic vaccine registry to scale in Pakistan. Globally, vaccine-preventable deaths contribute to 25 percent of the 10 million deaths of children under five worldwide. The IRD-(FCZ) registry uses radio-frequency identification tag stickers to complement the government’s Expanded Program on Immunization, and is designed to bring life-saving vaccinations to those in high-volume government and private birthing centers.

"There is evidence that innovative uses of technology for health can be a major game changer," added Frederik Kristensen, Project Manager for the Innovation Working Group, and member of the mHealth Alliance Partnership Board, both on behalf of Norad. "From providing information related to maternal and newborn health via mobile phones to building technology that supports clinical decision-making for safer pregnancies, these initiatives all focus on helping the world’s most vulnerable populations lead a healthier life."

The IWG was established by the UN Secretary-General to support the *Every Woman Every Child*  global strategy, launched in 2010. Its strategic objectives are to build and cultivate innovative approaches that are potential major game-changers; coordinate with existing institutions and efforts that can bring the highest impact to *Every Woman Every Child*, drive greater private sector inclusion to bring innovation into *Every Woman Every Child*, and facilitate engagement and foster partnerships across public and private stakeholder communities to accelerate innovations. mHealth is explicitly highlighted as a tool in the global strategy to help facilitate this accelerated achievement of the Millennium Development Goals related to maternal and child health.

To learn more about the work of Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Norad focusing on women’s and children’s health, please see ***The Global Campaign for the Health Millennium Development Goals******2011****: Innovating for Every Woman, Every Child* at [www.norad.no/globalcampaign/innovation](http://www.norad.no/globalcampaign/innovation).

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**About the mHealth Alliance**  
The mHealth Alliance champions the use of mobile technologies to improve health throughout the world. Working with diverse partners to integrate mHealth into multiple sectors, the Alliance serves as a convener for the mHealth community to overcome common challenges by sharing tools, knowledge, experience, and lessons learned. The mHealth Alliance advocates for more and better quality research and evaluation to advance the evidence base;  seeks to build capacity among health and industry decision-makers, managers, and practitioners; promotes sustainable business models; and supports systems integration by advocating for standardization and interoperability of mHealth platforms.  The mHealth Alliance also hosts [HUB (Health Unbound)](http://www.healthunbound.org), a global online community for resource sharing and collaborative solution generation. Hosted by the United Nations Foundation, and founded by the Rockefeller Foundation, Vodafone Foundation, and UN Foundation, the Alliance now also includes HP, the GSM Association, and Norad among its founding partners. For more information, visit [http://www.mhealthalliance.org](http://bit.ly/rfV64o).

Photo:



Caption: Ofentse Rosina Phiri, 21 years old, uses her mobile phone outside Alexandra township, Gauteng Province, South Africa.

Credit: Wayne Conradie