

Maternal and Newborn Health Innovations Project launches in Kenya

In an effort to reduce the number of deaths of pregnant women and their newborn babies, UNICEF and The Philips Foundation, together with Concern Worldwide, Maker and Gearbox, have launched the Maternal and Newborn Health Innovations Project in Kenya.



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This will facilitate the development of innovative health technology and solutions in the field of maternal, newborn and child health. This cooperation will help catalyse novel health interventions for the benefit of the most vulnerable mothers and children. This investment is in keeping with the Government of Kenya's commitment to investing in innovative, homegrown solutions for maternal and newborn health care.

In developing countries such as Kenya, maternal, newborn and child mortality rates remain unacceptably high. Kenya has reduced under-five child deaths per 1000 lives from 90 in 2003 to 52 in 2014, but this still falls short of the Millennium Development Goal 4 target of 33 by the end of 2015. Neonatal mortality is also too high at 22 deaths per 1000 live births. One significant cause of these deaths is the lack of medical equipment and technology to support even the most basic interventions for pregnant women and their newborns, especially in remote areas where health care workers lack essential medical resources.

By 2018, UNICEF and The Philips Foundation, together with partner organisations and local innovation hubs with guidance from the Government of Kenya, aim to develop and scale up innovative, low-cost and locally designed health care devices. These will contribute to improved and more equitable access to life-saving quality care for women and children across Kenya.

"For 1 million babies worldwide every year, their day of birth is also their day of death," said Sharad Sapra, UNICEF Director of the UNICEF Global Innovation Centre. "However, with strengthened health systems and innovative solutions for both mothers and children, the chance for survival is greatly increased."

Improving local expertise

The Maternal and Newborn Health Innovations Project is financed by The Philips Foundation and uses the local expertise of Philips Research Africa in Nairobi to mentor social entrepreneurs and facilitate the transfer of health care technology expertise in Kenya.

"At The Philips Foundation, it is our belief that programmes that combine innovation, partnerships and empowering people will make a lasting and meaningful difference in communities," said Katy Hartley, Head of The Philips Foundation. "In the case of the Maternal and Newborn Health Innovations Project, we are doing just that, as the group can offer expertise and support from its Philips Research Africa, together with UNICEF and our implementation partners, to enable social entrepreneurs to improve health outcomes for their own communities."

"Royal Philips and The Philips Foundation share the same mission and vision: we want to improve people's lives and we strive to make the world healthier and more sustainable through innovation," Hartley concluded. "The Maternal and Newborn Health Innovations Project, with its focus on strengthening local health care systems, is a clear illustration for us of how private sector companies, together with governments and NGOs, can drive the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, especially the aim of Goal 3 to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages."

The project was launched ahead of the September 25-27 United Nations Summit for the Adoption of the Post-2015 Development Agenda, where UNICEF is promoting greater involvement of the private sector in improving children's lives. The Millennium Development Goals expire at the end of 2015 and are being replaced by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that represent a new set of targets for international development. The Philips Foundation and UNICEF will promote innovation and technology as a key strategy to realize the new SDGs and improve the lives of women and children where most needed. With the global presence of both organisations, worldwide engagement and scale is at the centre of the partnership.

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