



## **International Telecommunication Union**

Partnerships Clinic Session 2:  
**“Mobiles for Midwives and other Frontline Health Workers”**  
Wednesday, 24 April 2013,  
United Nations Headquarters, New York.  
3:00-5:00 PM

### **Concept Note**

#### **1. Overview**

The International Telecommunication Union (ITU) is the United Nations specialized agency for information and communication technology (ICT). ICTs are increasingly recognized as a critical enabler of all three pillars of sustainable development – economic progress, social inclusion and environmental sustainability.

Leveraging the power of ICTs and mobile broadband technology to improve the work of midwives, other frontline health workers, and the health of women and children, ICTs have the power to dramatically accelerate progress towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals and will help set the stage for the post-2015 Sustainable Development agenda.

#### **2. The Challenge**

According to UNFPA, “Every year approximately 350,000 women die while pregnant or while giving birth, up to 2 million newborns die within the first 24 hours of life, and there are 2.6 million stillbirths. The overwhelming majority of these deaths occur in low-income countries and most of them could have been prevented. They happen because women — usually the poor and marginalized — have no access to functioning health facilities or to qualified health professionals<sup>1</sup>”. If they do have assistance while birthing, it is most likely a midwife – either professionally trained or a woman elder in the community who has taken on this essential role. In the developing world where doctor-patient ratios can be two to 100,000 people, millions can be left without access to healthcare. The World Health Organization recommends that lower-level professionals such as associate clinicians, who usually are more accessible in the remote areas than doctors, are trained and enabled to perform certain

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<sup>1</sup> *The State of the World's Midwifery 2011: Delivering Health, Saving Lives.*  
[http://www.unfpa.org/sowmy/resources/docs/main\\_report/en\\_SOWMR\\_Full.pdf](http://www.unfpa.org/sowmy/resources/docs/main_report/en_SOWMR_Full.pdf)

essential jobs<sup>2</sup>. This recommendation could increase access to maternal and newborn healthcare and reduce mother/child health complications and mortality.

The Secretary-General of the United Nations, in his foreword to the report untitled "The State of the World's Midwifery 2011: Delivering Health, Saving Lives" pointed out that it is important to "Ensure that every woman and her newborn have access to quality midwifery services and demands that we take bold steps to build on what we have achieved so far across communities, countries, regions and the world."

Mobile health innovations provide a great opportunity to accelerate progress and contribute to reaching the MDGs goals 4 & 5 (reduce child mortality and improve maternal health by 2015). To meet these agreed upon international goals and the increased demand for accountability in the area of health care and development, it is essential that accurate birth records be available. If "*Every Woman, Every Child*" counts, then Every Child Must Be Counted!

The United Nations Human Rights Council Resolution on birth registration entitled: "***Birth registration and the right of everyone to recognition everywhere as a person before the law***" (A/HRC/19/L.24) seeks action for universal registration at birth of all persons to decrease the high number of people around the world whose births are not registered. The World Health organization (WHO) estimates that 40 million or around one-third of births are not registered each year.

Fortunately, among new technologies, mobiles have been the most rapidly adopted technology in history, by end of 2011; there were more than 1 billion mobile broadband subscriptions worldwide, over 100 countries with mobile-cellular penetration exceeding 100% (meaning there are more mobile-cellular subscriptions than inhabitants). In seven economies world-wide mobile-cellular penetration is over 200%. ITU's 2012 report: Measuring the Information Society 2012, pointed out that the number of mobile-cellular subscriptions increased by more than 600 million, almost all of them in the developing world, to a total of around 6 billion, or 86 per 100 inhabitants globally.

One hopeful result of this 'mobile miracle' is the potential it enables for providing front line health workers generally, and midwives specifically, with innovative solutions to a) officially register a birth and b) provide essential pre, para and post-natal health care information and services to mother and child.

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<sup>2</sup> Women Deliver: Invest in Girls and Women- It Pays: WHO Recommendations Enable More Health Workers for Maternal and Newborn Health, 2012. <http://www.womendeliver.org/updates/entry/who-recommendations-enable-more-health-workers-for-maternal-and-newborn-hea>

### 3. Economic and Social Council Special Event

On Wednesday, 24 April 2013, ECOSOC will host a partnerships event in support of its 2013 Annual Ministerial Review (AMR). The theme of the event is “*Science, technology and innovation, and the potential of culture, for promoting sustainable development and achieving the Millennium Development Goals*”.

In this regard, ITU is engaged in **the Partnerships Clinics Session**, and will organize a workshop on “***Mobiles for Midwives and other frontline health workers: An innovative approach for better health outcomes and information systems***”.

#### a) Long Term Outcomes:

- To reduce the high number of unregistered people around the world through the use of mobile phones by midwives, frontline community health workers and the health system workers.
- To leverage mobile technologies in the hands of midwives, community and frontline health workers as a powerful tool for birth registration.
- To contribute to universal registration at birth of all persons and prevent statelessness.
- To record deaths/births data as fundamental drivers to improve women and children’s health.
- To contribute to the reduction of the high maternal/infant mortality rate towards meeting the Millennium Development Goals, target of MDG5 ensuring 95 percent of all births are assisted by a skilled birth attendant by 2015.
- To raise awareness on ICTs catalytic role in all sectors of socio-economic development and environmental protection and to promote the use of mobile registration for birth and other health related issues.

#### b) Workshop Objective:

- To provide a one/two page white paper outlining the basic principles of a ‘Mobiles for Midwives’ platform that is scalable, interoperable, open source, affordable, secure, cloud based and standardized.

In order to achieve the goal of this workshop, a number of questions need to be answered and case studies used to best exemplify the answers.

#### c) Questions to be answered:

- How best to reduce interoperability costs?
- How best to address the potential of open source tools for frontline health workers such as midwives?
- What case studies exist which can best provide scalable and sustainable solutions for data gathering services and related software platforms?

- What are the most promising results from the field in gathering, collecting, and exchanging pre, para and post natal health information or community-based healthcare services?
- What are the most secure data strategies to ensure patient protection but which also provide easy data access for health workers, and government agencies?
- How can cloud based data services best be deployed for frontline health worker generally and midwives specifically?
- Is a global standard for application solutions necessary in order to ensure interoperability? If so, what are the basic elements necessary for this global standard?
- What are the key elements that need to be addressed to ensure affordability of the platform?
- What ICT regulatory reforms and policies have been or need to be taken in the developing worlds to ensure interoperability and scalability of the platform?

### **Panellists/ Participants**

Participants invited to attend will include officials of the United Nations, UN agencies, civil society, private sector, academia, permanent missions to the United Nations and NGOs.