mHealth: Building Partnerships for Sustainable Technology
Enhanced Innovation

What is the challenge?
Over the past several years, the number of mHealth pilot projects globally has grown exponentially. Yet many of these projects fail to extend beyond the pilot phase and achieve their potential for substantially improving health outcomes at the community level due to lack of planning, funding, or negotiated partnerships with the government, other NGOs and/or mobile network operators. This fragmentation has been a challenge for World Vision and many other NGOs, as well as for people in communities we serve.

The approach in Sierra Leone
The formation of strategic collaborations and partnerships has been a driving factor in determining the scale-up of pilot projects. Guided by our mHealth vision statement that our work is “ALWAYS in partnership with others,” our project in Sierra Leone exemplifies this approach. Our staff have built a network of collaborations and partnerships among NGOs, the government, technology providers, funders, and mobile network operators in Sierra Leone that have made the expansion of our mHealth pilot program viable.

An mHealth project is no different than any other in needing engagement and partnership with government agencies focused on sustainability. In this case, a country’s ministry of health should be highly engaged to assume a leadership role, since ultimately the government must be willing and able to sustain a national mHealth project once the scope and reach of NGOs and their donors have been fulfilled. Building on ongoing agreements and experience in Sierra Leone, the World Vision team worked with counterparts at the Sierra Leone Ministry of Health to establish mHealth as a strategic investment to be integrated into the national health system, and offer the promise of improved service delivery and community-level data in support of maternal and child health programs.

Partnering with key ministries in Sierra Leone
Together, World Vision and the Sierra Leone Ministry of Health worked closely with the Ministry of Information and Communications, which develops telecommunications policy, and the National Telecommunications Commission, which regulates and ensures policy compliance, to ensure our mobile solution was aligned with governmental strategy, policy and vision for mHealth. In addition, we shared the technical performance characteristics of the mobile solution with the Ministries of Health and Information and Communications, and hosted a field visit for several government employees to explain

MoTECH Suite

What is it?
The MoTECH Suite is an open-source software application that enables community health workers (CHW) or volunteers to facilitate health service delivery and capture key information using cell phones as they conduct household visits. They can:
- Register pregnant women or families with young children
- Track which households are scheduled to receive a visit each week
- Record key information about the health status of the pregnant women or young children being visited
- Create a referral when a pregnant woman or young child needs health services in response to an urgent need. The referral is received by the CHW or volunteer’s counterpart at the health facility to help manage services they provide.

How was it deployed in Sierra Leone?
To contextualize this software for Sierra Leone, World Vision collaborated with software developers to work in communities with groups of “users”—in this case, CHWs or volunteers—to optimize the software and improve ease of use, always in collaboration with the Sierra Leone government to ensure the program aligned with government policy.

Once the mobile technology was deployed, World Vision formed additional partnerships with the University of Sierra Leone, the Centre for Global Health at Trinity College Dublin, and the Sierra Leone Ministry of Health to obtain funding to measure the results of the mobile technology in improving the effectiveness of CHWs and to highlight areas for enhancement before starting scale-up.

World Vision was also able to develop and field test a common monitoring and evaluation framework in Sierra Leone. It will be used to measure the contribution and value-add of mHealth to health programming outcomes.

* The MoTECH Suite has been developed by a consortium of solution providers, most notably Dimagi, Inc. and Grameen Foundation.
In recognizing the government’s need to take ownership for implementing an overall long-term program, focusing on a nationally affordable, sustainable costing model and solution, the Deputy Minister of Health has led negotiations with Airtel, stressing that mHealth is a national program for Sierra Leone, with World Vision and other NGOs as key implementation partners.”

-Magnus Conteh, Health Program Coordinator, East and West Africa Regions, World Vision Ireland