



Credit: UNICEF

Conclusion: Looking Forward

The field of mHealth is at an inflection point. With dozens of projects implemented and proven benefits, all trends indicate that investment will continue and mHealth projects will serve an ever wider range of constituents in the years ahead. At the same time, technological innovations will bring enhanced benefits, particularly in the areas of data collection, patient monitoring, and remote diagnostic and treatment support, where application development is already proceeding at breakneck speed.

Health needs in the developing world are rapidly evolving to include chronic diseases, in addition to the communicable diseases most often associated with developing countries. mHealth is well-positioned to address these challenges using currently available technology. For example, SMS alerts can be equally useful in raising public health awareness of HIV/AIDS and in ensuring patient adherence to treatments for chronic diseases such as diabetes. Emerging technologies, such as wide-area wireless systems, will also be an asset in tackling today's health challenges and those of tomorrow.

As this paper has shown, mHealth projects are operating in a wide variety of developing countries and providing demonstrable impacts. Documented results—in both the developed and developing world—reveal that mobile technology improves the efficiency of healthcare delivery. The next stage in the evolution of the mHealth field is to increase the scope and scale of operations. By learning from examples of similar projects, mHealth organizations will enhance their opportunity to scale and increase their health impact. Case studies detailed in this paper reveal some of the key benefits of mHealth and provide examples of how to structure successful mHealth initiatives. These studies also reveal key building blocks of success for mHealth projects, such as forging strong partnerships and designing with the end user in mind.

The transformational power of mobile networks and devices is helping drive the adoption of scalable and sustainable health initiatives, particularly in the developing world. To move forward, leading players in the field of mHealth agree that multi-stakeholder collaboration on a global level is needed.

Due to its nascent stage, mHealth presents a tremendous opportunity to create a global facilitation body, enabling maximum innovation and impact on global health. There is an agreement among participants in this arena on the need for a body to address the many informational and logistical gaps in the mHealth ecosystems; from basic market research to best practices; from policy engagement and standards advocacy; to support scalable implementations of mHealth pilot programs through public-private partnerships.

An alliance cultivating the cross-sectoral and pan regional partnerships and projects necessary to expand the existing embryonic mHealth ecosystem would be a significant step in enabling closer collaboration on mHealth initiatives by multi-sectoral organizations.

The long-term goal and expectation underlying all these efforts is that mHealth programs will have a significant and lasting positive impact on health outcomes such as reduced infant mortality, longer life spans, and decreased contraction of disease. This report is designed to move the field one step further in the achievement of this ambitious goal by outlining the current state of the field, highlighting mHealth initiatives taking root around the globe, and outlining the building blocks required for successful and sustainable mHealth initiatives. ■



Credit: DataDyne