



HARNESSING INNOVATION FOR INCLUSIVE HEALTH CARE



DELIVERING HEALTHIER FUTURES FOR
WOMEN, CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE:
WHAT IS THE ROLE OF BUSINESS?

ANNEX

*This short insights paper is part of a larger collaborative research project, in partnership with the Global Financing Facility for Women, Children and Adolescents and its Deliver the Future campaign. Together with the Business Fights Poverty community, we explored how **the private sector can support governments to deliver healthier futures for women, children and adolescents.***

The outcome of this investigation was a discussion paper, **“Delivering Healthier Futures for Women, Children and Young People: What is the Role of Business?”**

This paper provides insights into the challenges that health systems are facing and the urgent need to strengthen healthcare provision for women, children and young people – for their sake, and for the flourishing of communities and economies. It outlines how businesses in any sector can leverage core business, social investment and advocacy to support the healthcare needs of women, children and young people in their own fields of influence.

The discussion paper also highlights three key areas – innovation, collaboration and finance – where businesses from diverse industries can help to accelerate progress by contributing to the strengthening of healthcare systems for women, children and young people. These industries include medical and pharmaceuticals, transport and supply chain logistics, energy, agriculture and nutrition, water and sanitation, data analytics, telecommunications and the finance sectors.

This short insights paper provides further details on how businesses can harness innovation for inclusive healthcare, with key recommendations and examples of action.

Deliver
The Future

Business Fights Poverty proudly supports the Global Financing Facility (GFF)'s [Deliver the Future](#) campaign as private sector advocacy partner.

GFF works with governments, civil society, communities, youth advocates and health workers to realise the right to health for women, children and young people in 36 lower-income partner countries. Continued investment in the GFF will enable 250 million women, children and adolescents to access lifesaving health services, helping build more resilient communities.

DESIGN THAT CENTRES WOMEN, CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS

A core strength of the private sector is its ability to innovate, demonstrate proof of concept, strengthen new products and services through rapid iteration, and bring successful models to scale.

To bring these vast capabilities to bear on improving the health of women, children and adolescents, we need to design and fund innovation in ways that prioritise inclusion.

Focus on solutions that overcome barriers to health care. The vast majority of ill-health and death in LMICs is treatable with existing solutions. The problem is that these solutions are often not available to vulnerable or lower-income populations, who may live far away from healthcare centres or be unable to afford the medicines or care that they need. Innovation can make existing solutions more affordable, practical or accessible. Furthermore, increasing the options for self-care can empower individuals and increase uptake – for example, self-injectable contraception implants.¹

Harness digital innovation and data-driven solutions to widen access to health care,

particularly in remote and under-served areas. Arm, a leading central processing unit technology company, has partnered with Unicef to scale innovative use of technology for children's health.² Its accelerator and incubator programmes, like [Wearables for Good](#) or the [Gates Grand Challenges](#), have supported over 700 innovators and young entrepreneurs to scale digital health solutions.³

Co-design solutions, including with young people. There is a need to build patients' trust in new models of delivery, and to continue to work to overcome the digital divide. One way to increase uptake is to co-design solutions with people from target markets, leveraging relationships with NGOs. Such solutions are likely to be better trusted, more suited to needs, and therefore more easily adopted. Organisations such as [YLabs](#) work with young entrepreneurs to develop solutions that work for young people (see Box 2).

Support grassroots innovators. Many solutions are being developed by social entrepreneurs in lower-income countries, often by young people and women-led SMEs. Innovative start-ups such as [Cloudline](#) in South Africa and [Dronflies Labs by CIELIUM](#)

BOX 1: SAVING LIVES THROUGH PRACTICAL, AFFORDABLE SOLUTIONS TO POSTPARTUM HAEMORRHAGE

Postpartum haemorrhage (PPH) is the leading direct cause of maternal death, affecting 14 million women every year and resulting in 70,000 deaths annually.⁴

USING NASA TECHNOLOGY TO HELP MORE WOMEN ACCESS CARE

Lack of easy access to healthcare facilities can stand in the way of women, children and young people accessing care. The non-pneumatic anti-shock garment, inspired by NASA technology, limits bleeding from PPH for up to 48 hours to provide time for mothers in remote locations to reach hospital and access treatment. It is reusable and costs as little as \$0.5 per use.⁵

OVERCOMING THE NEED FOR REFRIGERATION OF DRUGS

Oxytocin injection is used to prevent PPH, but it requires transport and storage at 2-8°C, which is prohibitive for many health centres in lower-income countries due to lack of low-temperature storage and transport facilities. Carbetocin Ferring, developed by Ferring Pharmaceuticals, is a heat-stable alternative to oxytocin that does not require refrigeration. This enables its use in healthcare settings without refrigeration facilities, and lowers transportation costs. Following a successful trial by WHO, funded by MSD for Mothers, Carbetocin Ferring is now being produced at a subsidised rate to public and not-for-profit healthcare facilities in LMICs.⁶

in Uruguay are taking new approaches to last-mile delivery, using drones to deliver medical supplies and blood to remote communities, and [MamaOpe](#) in Uganda is a woman-founded device and software company providing wider access to telemedicine and diagnostics in remote areas.

Embrace knowledge-sharing. Innovators can engage with networks that facilitate knowledge exchange to identify and help scale evidence-based practices. International coalitions include [the Global Network for Maternal and Newborn Health Research](#), the [Partnership for Maternal, Newborn, and Child Health \(PMNCH\)](#), the [Transform Health Coalition](#), and the [Coalition for Women's Health in Africa](#).

FINANCING INCLUSIVE INNOVATION

Bringing innovation to scale requires a strong business development case and the ability to finance each stage of the product or business lifecycle. This can present significant challenges for social entrepreneurs and SMEs, as well as for innovators in MNEs. It can be particularly difficult to demonstrate the business development case for solutions targeted at lower-income populations, due to the need to keep products affordable whilst delivering profits for investors.

Consequently, inclusive innovation depends on inclusive finance that is patient, creatively manages risk, and responds to the additional

challenges faced by innovators who are from and/or working in marginalised communities.

BRIDGING THE FINANCING GAP FOR SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURS AND SMES

Small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) often require technical assistance to refine their products, business models, and investment strategies, as well as support to find suitable investors and secure funding across the lifecycle of their growing business.

Create supportive financing opportunities and access to markets for grassroots innovators. Impact investors play a crucial role in offering more inclusive financial opportunities to these underrepresented business owners, through targeted networking platforms, pitching contests, incubators and accelerator programs. Moreover, helping small businesses integrate into new markets and supply chains is crucial.

Address additional barriers to finance for women entrepreneurs. Many innovators in this space are women, who are known to face additional barriers in securing investment. Africa has the highest proportion of female entrepreneurs globally – over one-quarter of businesses there are initiated or managed by women.⁷ However, these women receive only a fraction of the total tech investment on the continent. This disparity is more pronounced in health-related sectors,

BOX 2: YLABS

Y Labs is dedicated to creating technologies that empower youth and amplify opportunities. Collaborating with community partners, they develop and scale technological innovations aimed at enhancing adolescent health. Two notable initiatives include:

CyberRwanda: Developed using a human-centred design methodology, the CyberRwanda program was collaboratively designed and tested with over 1,000 Rwandan youths, educators, parents,

healthcare professionals, and community leaders. This digital education initiative seeks to bolster the health and livelihoods of urban adolescents. The program's core objectives are to enhance knowledge, access and the quality of health resources.

Tegura Ejo Heza: This pioneering project aspires to establish a digital self-care platform to promote mental health literacy in Rwanda. Co-designed with youth, Tegura Ejo Heza aims to combat mental health stigma prevalent among Rwandan youth. It also seeks to elevate knowledge and self-efficacy, enabling youth to access essential supportive services.

which have a higher representation of female founders, as compared to male-dominated areas.⁸ Consequently, talented women entrepreneurs are competing against one another for the investments that are available.

MAKING THE BUSINESS CASE FOR MNE INNOVATION

It is not only SMEs for whom finance is a barrier to innovation. Innovators in MNEs require a strong business case to invest in research and development of products designed primarily for use in low-income countries, where returns may be lower or more risky. Partnerships between governments, donors and the private sector can help create more certainty for these businesses, spurring development of strategic health interventions.

Leverage the Advance Markets

Commitments approach, pioneered by the Centre for Global Development, which involves donors committing ahead of time to purchase a product when it is developed. This approach was first used when five countries (Canada, Italy, Norway, UK and Russia) and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation committed \$1.5 billion to distribute a successful vaccine against strains of pneumococcus common in low-income countries. As a result, three vaccines were developed and administered to 150 million children, saving an estimated 700,000 lives.⁹ This approach was later used to accelerate the development of vaccinations against COVID-19.¹⁰

Partner with philanthropic donors. It is not only SMEs who receive grants from donors; these are needed by MNEs to reduce the up-front costs of developing products for lower-income markets, so that innovators in MNEs can develop products that would otherwise fail to meet stringent business development criteria. A grant of \$12 million from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation is enabling Bayer to invest in developing a new non-hormonal contraceptive that has potential to benefit women in lower-income countries.

However, mechanisms like these must be used judiciously to avoid distorting markets and undermining long-term sustainability.

SCALING INNOVATION THROUGH PUBLIC-PRIVATE COLLABORATION

There is an opportunity for innovators to scale effective solutions by partnering with public healthcare providers to accelerate their broad adoption. This requires concerted efforts across the private and public sector to collaborate on key national priorities for the health of women, children and young people. It also requires adequate funding of national health systems. These two issues are addressed briefly in the discussion paper, and in more depth in its Annexes B (Collaboration) and C (Finance).

BOX 3: TAKING AN HOLISTIC APPROACH TO SUPPORTING ENTREPRENEURS

[Investing in Innovation Africa \(i3\)](#) provides risk-tolerant grants of \$50,000 and access to customers and networks for 60 SMEs, with a focus on data-driven supply chains to increase affordability and access to health care products. i3 particularly emphasises supporting women entrepreneurs and those in Francophone Africa, promoting greater inclusivity and diversity in the sector.

A coalition of sponsors, including MSD, Microsoft and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, provides support in market access, scaling partnerships, and navigating policy and regulations.

[WINFund](#) leverages innovative NFTs (non-fungible tokens) alongside traditional funding methods to finance women-led health innovation start-ups from countries including Egypt, Kenya and South Africa, alongside bespoke business advice to bring its leading start-ups to scale. It is supported by partners including Reckitt and Health Innovation Exchange.

Endnotes

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