



## **“SMS for Life” rolled-out nationwide in the United Republic of Tanzania** ***Improving access to essential malaria treatments on World Malaria Day***

- *A public-private initiative announces national roll-out of “SMS for Life” across the United Republic of Tanzania to improve access to essential malaria treatments*
- *Roll-out follows successful pilot where 99% of health facilities avoided complete stock-outs of artemisinin-based combination therapy thanks to innovative mobile phone technology<sup>1</sup>*
- *Malaria kills a child every 45 seconds<sup>2</sup> and limited access to treatment in remote areas remains a major hurdle in the fight against this deadly disease*

*Geneva, April 18, 2011*

In commemoration of World Malaria Day 2011 (25 April), organizations in an innovative public-private initiative announce the nationwide roll-out of a unique malaria treatment access initiative, "SMS for Life", across the United Republic of Tanzania. The roll-out follows a successful pilot project where mobile and electronic mapping technology was used to track the stock levels of anti-malarial drugs at health facilities to manage supplies of these essential treatments.

Launched in 2009, the “SMS for Life” pilot ran across three districts in Tanzania, ensuring access to essential malaria treatments for 888,000 people. 99% of health facilities involved avoided stock-outs of the artemisinin-based combination therapy (ACT), one of the main anti-malarial medicines.<sup>1</sup> “SMS for Life” will now be deployed across 5,000 health facilities in 131 districts in Tanzania, covering a population of over 40 million.<sup>3</sup>

Under the auspice of the Tanzanian Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, this roll-out is led by Novartis and supported by Vodacom, Medicines for Malaria Venture (MMV) and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, all under the umbrella of the global Roll Back Malaria Partnership.

Malaria kills about 800,000 people each year, the vast majority of whom live in sub-Saharan Africa where the disease is a leading cause of death for children under five, claiming the life of a child every 45 seconds.<sup>2</sup> Although malaria is preventable and treatable, life-saving medicines do not always reach the patients who need them, particularly those living in remote areas. Stock-outs are a major hurdle in the maintenance of access to essential malaria treatments.

H.E. Dr Hadji Hussein Mponda, Minister for Health & Social Welfare in Tanzania, said “the simple truth is that if there are no effective malaria treatments available in the health facilities then people will likely die, especially young children and pregnant women who are most at risk of the disease. Reducing antimalarial drugs stock-outs saves lives, and so we are delighted that the SMS for Life



programme that improves stock position information will now be rolled-out across Tanzania and we welcome this innovation.”

““SMS for Life” has demonstrated that we can overcome the longstanding problem of stock-outs at the health facility level. This flexible scheme can be implemented quickly and at relatively low cost in any country to track any medicine,” said Jim Barrington, “SMS for Life” Program Director and former Chief Information Officer at Novartis. “It’s rewarding to see how a unique partnership, which combines the specific skills and experience of its various members to deliver an innovative use of everyday technologies, positively impacts the lives of malaria patients, their families and communities. “SMS for Life” also has great potential to be implemented in all malaria endemic countries and within other disease areas.”

In addition to the roll-out in Tanzania this year, two further pilots will start. Kenya, with funding from Novartis via the global employee survey donation program, will implement a five district pilot to track ACTs and rapid diagnostic tests (RDTs), in addition to collecting weekly case management data. MMV, through partnership with University of Oxford, will provide technical support for the implementation and evaluation of the pilot project. Ghana, with funding from Swiss TPH, will implement a six district pilot to track malaria medicines, an antibiotic and RDTs.

Accurately monitoring the amount of essential medication, such as ACTs and quinine injectables, available in a given location, reduces the risk of shortages and stock-outs and ensures that treatments are available to malaria patients, even in the most remote areas, where and when they are needed.

Each week, automated SMS messages are sent to staff at participating healthcare facilities, prompting them to check the stock of anti-malarial medicines, and reply with an SMS detailing current stock levels. These messages are collected in a central web-based system that provides the District Medical Officers and other users with real-time stock level information, accessible via the Internet or their mobile phone. Using this information, District Medical Officers are able to re-distribute essential medicines to where they are most needed and coordinate emergency deliveries to health facilities if necessary.

The Global Business Coalition on HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria (GBC) Business Action on Health Awards Review Committee has recently selected the “SMS for Life” program as a Finalist for the Technology for Health award.

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## NOTES TO EDITORS

### About "SMS for Life"

"SMS for Life" is an innovative public-private partnership that harnesses everyday technology to improve access to essential malaria medicines in rural areas. It uses a combination of mobile phones, SMS messages and electronic mapping technology to track weekly stock levels at public health facilities in order to eliminate stock-outs, increase access to essential medicine and reduce the number of deaths from malaria.

"SMS for Life" was initially piloted across three districts in the United Republic of Tanzania, covering 129 health facilities and 226 villages, representing 1.2 million people. When launched in 2009, 26% of all health facilities did not have any ACTs in stock, but by the end, 99% had at least one ACT dosage form in stock. In addition, 888,000 people in the three pilot districts had access to all malaria treatments at the close of the pilot, versus 264,000 people at the start, which helped to reduce the number of deaths from malaria.

### About the partners

Under the **Tanzanian Ministry of Health and Social Welfare** and the **National Malaria Control Programme (NMCP)** is the Directorate of Preventive Services. NMCP is the custodian of all malaria prevention and control activities in the country. The NMCP is the owner and main user of the 'SMS for Life' solution and coordinates all project activities in the country, including planning, implementation & evaluation of the project. The NMCP also makes sure that all the districts selected are fully engaged in the process.

**Novartis** drives the overall initiative and has taken the lead in defining the solution, sourcing the partners, establishing a steering committee, liaising with the Ministry of Health in Tanzania and RBM Partnership Secretariat and providing all the resources and funding necessary to complete the pilot in Tanzania.

**Medicine for Malaria Venture (MMV)** is, along with SDC, one of two funders of the country implementation of the solution. They also manage funds from SDC, giving them the role of managing all project funding. In addition, MMV is coordinating the national training program and is contracting technology deployment required to affect this rollout.

**The Swiss Agency for Development (SDC)** is the second and major funder of the Tanzanian nationwide roll-out. Its grant is managed by MMV.

**Vodacom**, a local Tanzanian Mobile operator is providing, in addition to promotional materials like t-shirts, smart phones with Internet and data access for use by all District Medical Officers and Malaria Focal persons.

**Vodafone** supported the design, development and the implementation of the technical solution for the Tanzanian Pilot in 155 health facilities until its completion in February 2010.

**IBM** supported the overall management of the pilot project and the provision of an on-line collaboration tool, "Lotus Live". The tool allowed all the project partners to coordinate their inputs.



**RBM Partnership Secretariat** facilitates oversight, including the work of the steering committee and leads advocacy activities. It helps provide ongoing guidance throughout the project, placing it in the broader context of RBM's activities.

### About RBM

The Roll Back Malaria (RBM) Partnership is the global framework for coordinated action against malaria. It provides a neutral platform for consensus-building and developing solutions to challenges in the implementation of malaria control interventions and strategies. RBM is a public-private partnership that also facilitates the incubation of new ideas and lends support to innovative approaches.

The Partnership promotes high-level political commitment and keeps malaria high on the global agenda by enabling, harmonizing and amplifying partner-driven advocacy initiatives. Founded by UNICEF, WHO, the World Bank and UNDP and strengthened by the expertise, resources and commitment of more than 500 partner organizations, the Partnership secures policy guidance and financial and technical support for control efforts in countries and monitors progress towards universal goals.

For more information about "SMS for Life" please visit:

<http://www.rbm.who.int/psm/smsWhatIsIt.html>

### References

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3. World Bank. Available at <http://data.worldbank.org/country/tanzania> (accessed April 2011).

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