



Maternal Outcomes Matter: How the MOMs Initiative is unlocking new financing solutions to improve maternal health

About MSD for Mothers

[MSD for Mothers](#) is MSD's global initiative to help create a world where no woman has to die while giving life. Applying the company's business and scientific expertise, we are working across sectors to improve the health and well-being of women during pregnancy, childbirth and postpartum.

Innovative Financing for Maternal Health

Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) requires resources far beyond what governments in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) are able to provide. It is estimated that USD \$371 billion is needed to meet the health-related SDGs in LMICs by 2030;¹ an estimated \$103.6 billion alone is required to meet SDG 3.1 – ending preventable maternal deaths.² These financing challenges are further exacerbated by current events, including, for example, the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change – which further threaten resilience of health systems and progress toward Universal Health Coverage (UHC).³

It is estimated that mobilizing less than 1% of the hundreds of trillions of dollars in global private capital markets would fill the SDG financing gap.⁴ Diversifying financing mechanisms and mobilizing private capital in global health holds strong promise to help fill the funding gaps in health and stimulate greater innovation and growth in local economies across LMICs.

Our Approach

MSD for Mothers is testing different innovative forms of funding to accelerate progress towards the maternal health SDG targets by bridging access to capital and technical assistance for early-stage entrepreneurs who are poised to scale their businesses and address challenges in their local health ecosystem. Grant funding from MSD for Mothers is often used to mobilize resources from other large-scale investors by strengthening and scaling the business models of small- to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) for long-term growth and sustainability.





The MOMs Initiative | Leveraging Catalytic Grants to Unlock The Potential of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises to Improve Maternal Care

The MOMs (Maternal Outcomes Matter) Initiative launched in June 2019 with a USD \$50 million commitment to increase access to large-scale financing for health businesses in sub-Saharan Africa and India that sought to address unmet health needs and expand access to health services to many more people.⁵

The MOMs initiative is a collaboration between the U.S. International Development Finance Corporation (DFC), Merck for Mothers, USAID (both the Center for Innovation and Impact and Office of Maternal Child Health and Nutrition), and others. The collaborators have used blended finance – a mix of equity, debt financing and grant capital – as the investment model to facilitate health entrepreneurs’ transition from grant-funded start-ups to scalable and sustainable businesses. This innovative financing structure enables SMEs to innovate, test and scale their business strategies and innovations to: (1) successfully identify and address unmet health care needs (2) foster equitable health impact and population reach, and (3) catalyze financial and business growth to secure their placement in the local health market for continued scale across local communities, including those of greatest need.

In many countries with poor health infrastructure and outcomes, SMEs and entrepreneurs are an untapped resource for innovation that can accelerate improvements in health care and the wider economy. It is estimated that 90% of all jobs in LMICs are created by the private sector, predominantly through SMEs.⁶

The MOMs Initiative invests in enterprises that are making a positive impact on maternal health outcomes and strengthening health systems with a successful track record in one or more of the following areas: health infrastructure, health service delivery, training for health care providers, digital solutions for more efficient and effective care, financial inclusion and supply chain.



How MOMs Investees are Improving and Expanding Access to Quality Health Care

Creating a Sustainable Supply Chain to Extend Potentially Life-Saving Care to Underserved Women

Post-partum hemorrhage is the leading global driver of maternal mortality, constituting approximately 27% of all maternal deaths worldwide.⁷ Access to blood is critical for the survival of women who hemorrhage during or after childbirth. In communities with underdeveloped infrastructure or hospitals with limited resources, women who need life-saving interventions like a blood transfusion may not receive them. LifeBank, a Nigerian health-tech company, is helping to increase access to blood and other vital medical supplies through technologically enabled supply chain management to reduce the number of maternal deaths.

Through the MOMs Initiative, Merck for Mothers and collaborators are providing grant funding and supply chain expertise to LifeBank to strengthen distribution operations, marketing and business development. As a result, LifeBank has scaled operations to provide access to blood and essential medical supplies across all states in Nigeria, as well as regions of Ethiopia and Kenya. Having demonstrated a strong business model using grant funding from the MOMs Initiative, LifeBank is now qualified to raise debt financing from the DFC for continued scale-up of services and expanded geographical reach.

Collaborator: LifeBank



Making Quality Care Accessible and Affordable

Lack of sufficient funds to pay for care and quality health care providers throughout the pregnancy journey as well as an overstretched maternity care staff contribute to the high rate of maternal deaths in Kenya. Jacaranda Maternity Hospital in Nairobi has achieved recognition for being one of the highest quality maternity care providers in East Africa, a pioneer in affordable, patient-centered care and one of the first Kenyan health businesses to successfully demonstrate that affordable maternity care can be financially sustainable.

Merck for Mothers' grant funding through the MOMs Initiative is supporting Jacaranda's development of a proof-of-concept for their business model to unlock new sources of impact investment. DFC is set to consider additional debt capital to enable Jacaranda to expand to 10 maternity hospitals and additional outpatient facilities across Kenya.

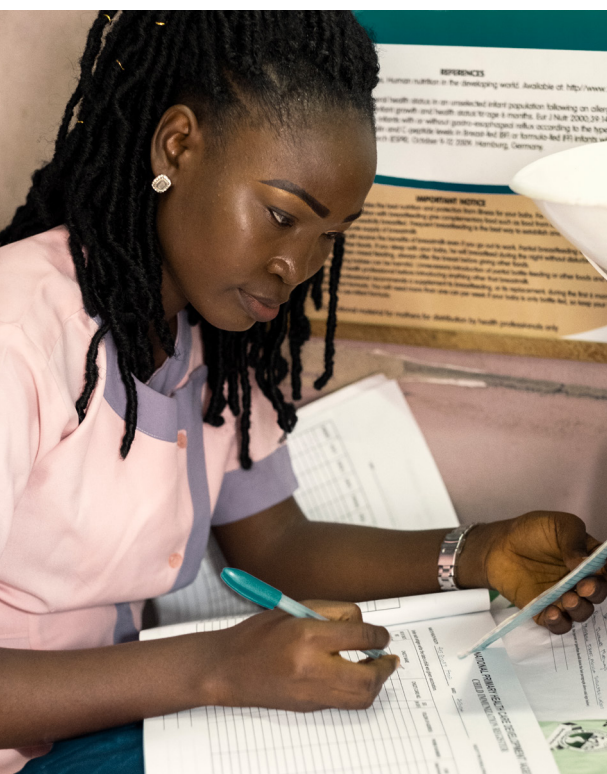
Collaborator: Jacaranda Maternity

Bringing Health Care Products Closer to Home

Many women in LMICs lack access to safe, high-quality and affordable women's health and personal care products. This includes menstrual products, over-the-counter medicines and family planning. Kasha Global is an e-commerce company addressing this challenge through a user-friendly platform that allows women to purchase supplies and arrange for delivery online or by phone. As of early 2023, Kasha has brought over 1 million products to over 130,000 unique customers in Rwanda and Kenya, of whom 63% are low-income.

Through a \$1 million equity investment from the DFC and grant funding from Merck for Mothers under the MOMs Initiative, Kasha is expanding its product offerings in maternal health and improving access to health education and outreach services in urban and rural regions across Rwanda and Kenya, with plans to reach more countries.

Collaborator: Kasha Global



Strengthening Health Referral Systems

In sub-Saharan Africa, whether in rural or urban areas, health referral systems often do not work well. Patients may be referred to unvetted facilities, where they may not receive adequate care for their condition.⁸

Penda Health is a network of health facilities in Nairobi, Kenya that offer a full range of high-quality, affordable outpatient services for the whole family. As part of the city's primary care infrastructure, Penda Health aims to implement a referral system that creates a continuous pathway of care for all patients, with a special emphasis on connecting pregnant women with high-quality facilities for labor and delivery. Penda Health currently refers about 200 pregnant women per month to maternity hospitals and the group expects this number to double annually for the next three years, with further growth planned.

Through a MOMs Initiative grant, Merck for Mothers is supporting Penda Health to improve labor and delivery referrals and maternity care in Kenya, helping the business to develop a data-driven system to refer pregnant women to the quality care they need.

Collaborator: Penda Health

Supporting Quality Care Through Business Acumen

The private sector accounts for more than 50% of all health care providers in sub-Saharan Africa.⁹ These private providers are primarily comprised of SMEs that deliver a narrow set of services with limited equipment and staff and do not use a recognized set of quality standards.¹⁰ Most of these private facilities are owned and operated by medical professionals without support or connectivity to the overall health system.

Through a MOMs Initiative grant and debt financing from Merck for Mothers and the DFC, the Medical Credit Fund and its collaborator, [SafeCare](#), are building a technical assistance program for small health care facilities offering whole of pregnancy care, as well as neonatal and child health care services in Kenya. The program combines both digital and offline methods of professional training and support to health care professionals in critical business domains such as clinical audits, quality improvement and more. Filling this knowledge gap among SMEs has the potential to drive positive maternal health outcomes and improve quality of care.

Collaborator: PharmAccess' Medical Credit Fund



Expanding Access to Primary Care Among Low-Income Communities

For South Africans, public health care facilities are insufficient to meet the growing health care needs of the population and the private health sector is largely unaffordable for the vast majority of the population, who continue to rely on overwhelmed government services. Unjani Clinic aims to re-engineer and strengthen the South African health system by creating accessible, affordable, community-based primary care clinics. Unjani Clinic consists of a network of over 90 clinics, each owned and operated by a local nurse who serves as a primary care provider as well as a business proprietor. Unjani increases the number of practitioners in smaller communities, creates permanent jobs and establishes a sustainable model for providing primary health care and maternal health services while promoting universal health care in South Africa.

Merck for Mothers is supporting Unjani Clinic through a MOMs Initiative grant to strengthen their organizational structure, enhance their systems and technology and test an innovative finance model that allows the network to scale faster. The network aims to expand at a rate of 100 clinics per year, with a strategic plan to open over 1,000 clinics by 2030.

Collaborator: Unjani Clinic

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