

Main Theme: Health**The topic of panel discussion: Solutions Salon - Health**

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Introduction to the discussion topic:

In 2009, as we approach the two-thirds timeline of the MDG project from 2000-2015, the Health Goals are off track. The slow progress has been attributed to broken health systems, inadequate basic health infrastructure, and insufficient equipment, supplies, and human resources. If nothing changes, many countries will simply not attain the health-related Goals by 2015.

Three out of the eight MDGs relate directly to health: “Goal 4. Reduce child mortality”, “Goal 5. Improve maternal health”, and “Goal 6. Combat HIV/AIDS, TB malaria and other infectious and communicable diseases”. Health is also an important contributor to several other goals, such as “Goal 8. Develop a global partnership for development: Target 17. In cooperation with pharmaceutical companies, provide access to affordable essential drugs in developing countries, and Target 18. In cooperation with the private sector, make available the benefits of new technologies, especially information and communication technologies.”

In the past decade, WHO has recognized the potential impact of ICT in the health sector. It adopted the Global Health Strategy and numerous initiatives to strengthen health systems in developing countries and countries with economies in transition. There are at least three ways in which ICT can improve the health sector in developing countries (1) act as a tool for continuing education to inform and train health workers; (2) improve accessibility of health services remote regions; and (3) increase transparency, efficiency and cost effectiveness in the delivery of public health services. Educating health professionals on the potential benefits of ICT is essential to improving the odds of making significant progress. However, significant investment would be required given the challenges caused by lack of access, connectivity and ICT skills in developing countries.

The full engagement of the private sector in crafting innovative pharmaceutical and ICT-driven interventions in the context of MDG 8 will be vital. These encompass: awareness raising, advocacy and empowerment; education and peer-to-peer training; prevention strategies, healthcare choices and networks of practitioners; support & advocacy networks linking people living with HIV/AIDS, non-governmental organizations and activists; logistics of distribution, monitoring of treatment regimes and the use of essential drugs; policy formulation and implementation; and economic and social opportunities for empowerment.

The unique conditions of the 21st century have amplified the invasive and disruptive power of outbreaks *vis a vis* increased mobility and interconnectedness. Today, the best defense against emerging and epidemic-prone disease is not passive barriers at borders, airports and

seaports, it is proactive risk management. Using the speed and accuracy of information technology and new search capabilities to detect and track disease increases policy makers' options to intervene early and spread knowledge about effective treatment. While electronic transparency has made it difficult for any country to hide an outbreak, the awareness that there is now no such thing as a "localized" outbreak has increased the need for early warning systems that seek to detect an outbreak and stop it at source.

In recent years there has also been mounting interest in the field of mHealth - the provision of health-related services via mobile platforms and communications. The explosive growth of mobile communications over the past decade among those who had previously been left behind, offers a new hope for the promotion of quality healthcare. There is a growing body of evidence that demonstrates the potential of mobile communications to radically improve healthcare services, even in some of the most remote and resource-poor environments, offering the opportunity to leapfrog other applications and services.

The issues that need to be addressed in the landscape of eHealth and mHealth in the developing world include how to scale up the impact of projects. What are the building blocks and innovations required to make them more widely available through sustainable and scalable implementation? How to seed a multi-sector partnership dedicated to designing, funding, and advancing e- and mHealth projects in the developing world.

The United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) addressed the theme of Public Health at its Annual Ministerial Review last July. UNDESA-GAID contributed to the session by highlighting the role of ICT in the Health Sector. As a follow-up to the Ministerial Declaration aspect by ECOSOC, UNDESA-GAID, through its Community of Expertise on eHealth has produced a valuable database and a publication on ICTD-Directions, Initiatives and Reviews for Digital Health (e/m/tele Health).

So, my questions for the discussion today are the following:

1. How can UNDESA-GAID contribute to promoting ICT innovations transform the health system and help developing countries to improve their services?
2. What can participating organizations and entities contribute?
3. What are the complementing components in the programmes of participating organizations that can serve as the basis for collaborating partnerships?
4. How do you think can mobile and wireless technologies and broadband for the health sector be used more efficiently with support from participating organizations?

Please try to answer these questions in practical and concrete ways, as far as possible so that we can make progress on how to move forward.