



Medical care powered by the sun: Solar power to support healthcare and safer deliveries in Zanzibar, Tanzania

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Berlin/Zanzibar, 28 November 2018 – Access to energy is key to human existence: it affects social life, work, education, and health. In rural areas of Zanzibar, much like in most of Sub-Saharan Africa, missing electricity makes healthcare more complicated. Almost half of Zanzibari women deliver their children at home due to lack of money for transport, traditional practices, or lack of planning. Community Health Volunteers have therefore been deployed to help pregnant women overcome these barriers and provide advice around key health topics. Using a mobile health app, over 400 Community Health Volunteers can help pregnant women better plan for facility deliveries as well as pre and post-delivery care. As many of the Volunteers lack electricity in their homes, Little Sun has equipped over half of them with portable solar-powered phone chargers. The chargers provide the reliable energy needed to power their most important tool: the smartphone.

Amina Rashid Bakari lives in Jugakuu, a little village with 15 houses on the east coast of Zanzibar. She is 43 years old and shares her home with her two children, Ummi and Ussi, as well as a few chickens. Every week, Amina visits women in her community to talk about their health and the health of their newborns. She is one of the first Community Health Volunteers in Zanzibar, trained by D-tree International – a global digital health organization that helps to design and implement solutions to strengthen local health systems. Seven years ago, the US non-profit started working with the Ministry of Health in Zanzibar to implement a safer deliveries and motherhood program. They developed the mobile health app used by Community Health Volunteers – trained community representatives, mainly women – who use the app which guides them to track pregnancies, screen for danger signs and refer to facilities as needed, and counsel on healthy behaviors. The Community Health Volunteers also encourage women to plan their delivery: when will it be, where it will be, how can they get there, and how to save money for getting there.

Powering their phones is crucial for Community Health Volunteers' work, as the use of innovative technology is only possible with access to energy. The Volunteers need to be mobile and available at any time, but charging their smartphones can be complicated and expensive. D-tree International estimates that 40% of Community Health Volunteers do not have electricity in their homes; they have to walk to the next power supply or pay neighbors to use their electricity – if they have it. Even those with electricity face regular power cuts which makes regular charging difficult.

This is why D-tree International partnered with Little Sun. Little Sun provided 250 portable solar phone chargers, ensuring the Volunteers' phones never run out of power. They also provide light at night, which is important for after-dark-emergencies.

Says Amina Rashid Bakari: *“I once found myself in the situation that I had to pick up an expectant mother at night. I took my Little Sun Charge with me, because I never leave it behind. Along the way it so happened that the women could not wait any longer and we had to prepare for her birth in the car. Our roads are terrible and the vehicle was small. But the solar light helped us a lot. It lit up the birth and I could help in the delivery – all went well.”*

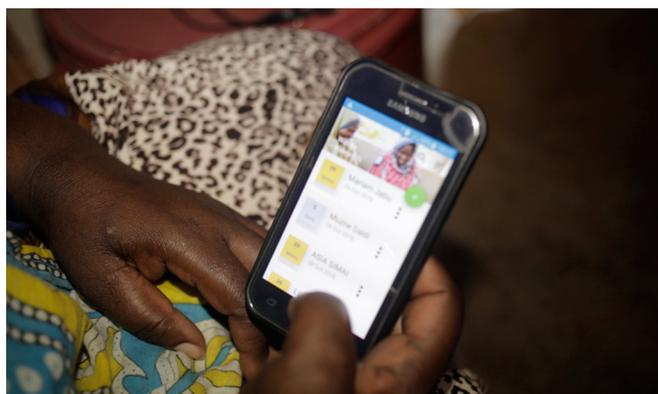
The success of the program is clearly visible in data collected by Community Health Volunteers: *“In 2015 about 60% of women in Zanzibar had home deliveries, rather than delivering at a health facility. Which means that if there is a complication with the birth or after the birth it can be very hard to get medical care in time,”* says Rachel Hofmann, Program Director for D-tree in Zanzibar. *“Since the program started, more than 30,000 women have been enrolled in the program, of which 75% now go to an official health facility for delivery – decreasing the risk of complications during birth and ensuring that women receive proper medical care.”*

“The Community Health Volunteers are very happy about the Little Sun Chargers, because they not only help Volunteers in their work with clients, but also help their own families. Many homes don’t have electricity, so the charger also powers the phones of other family members and neighbors. With the Little Sun Chargers, they are now always connected to everyone – for both personal calls and emergencies,” says Jalia Tibajuka, a professional midwife by training and Project Coordinator for D-tree in Zanzibar. She is responsible for training the Community Health Volunteers and overseeing their performance. During the recruitment process, the most important requirements are that a CHV is a trusted member of the community and literate. D-Tree provides each selected CHV with a smartphone with the health app preinstalled, but CHVs are not required to have previous experience with a mobile phone.

Says Jalia Tibajuka: *“Community Health Volunteers often have never used a smartphone, so we first train them on how to use that—starting from how to turn a phone on and off. Afterwards, we explain how to use the app in conducting visits.”*

With the shown success of the collaboration, the Little Sun Foundation has pledged to donate 500 more Little Sun Charges for the next training round, as D-tree is now supporting the Ministry of Health as it expands upon the current program to introduce a national digitally-supported community health program initially focused on pregnancy, early child development, nutrition, and child health which will provide community-based services to the entire Zanzibari population of nearly 1.5 million people. The goal of the upcoming D-tree – Little Sun collaboration is to equip all Community Health Volunteers that lack access to electricity with a Little Sun Charge solar phone charger, so that they can work efficiently in assuring safe and high quality health care to the women and families who need it.

Little Sun Foundation’s Director Felix Hallwachs: *“We have been working with D-Tree and digital health projects with rural health workers for two years now, and the impact that these great people have in their community still stuns me. I am very proud that Little Sun is a partner in this essential provision of health services by supplying solar light and device charging energy.”*



About D-tree's mobile Health App

When entering a new client, the app's algorithms help Amina and the other CHVs to calculate delivery dates, identify potential risks during pregnancy based on a woman's delivery history, and give advice on the ideal facility to deliver the baby. CHVs also use the app to provide clients with tailored advice about nutrition, hygiene, and healthy behaviors, and to prepare the women to breast feed and care for their babies after delivery.

The mobile application was developed using ThingsPrime's MangoLogic software.

About Little Sun Foundation

The Little Sun Foundation was founded by artist Olafur Eliasson to deliver solar energy to the most vulnerable communities worldwide. The charitable entity works with qualified partners such as Oxfam, Save the Children, UNHCR, and IOM to bring high-quality, durable, long-lasting solar products to displaced people and school children who would otherwise not have access to clean energy at all. Their solar-education programmes aim to provide children with tools and knowledge that empower them to shape a sustainable future for themselves and for the planet.

On average, people spend 1 USD per week on kerosene in Sub-Saharan Africa. Spending more than 1 USD per week and investing in a solar product is a huge step for people with little purchasing power. Without awareness and trust, people in remote villages will stick to kerosene and torches, and businesses will fail to serve BOP communities and be sustainable at the same time – a vicious cycle that hinders sustainable and economic development.

www.littlesunfoundation.org

About D-Tree

Working in over 12 countries since 2004, D-tree International is a leading digital health organization leveraging technology to build digital solutions that strengthen health systems, improve program quality and achieve health impact. D-tree International has demonstrated that digital health systems can improve clinical decision-making, increase health worker motivation and performance, and lead to better health outcomes. D-tree works through partnerships with Ministries of Health and NGOs to effectively integrate technology into health systems to improve the quality and efficiency of service delivery. D-tree has received funding from USAID, the Gates Foundation, Rockefeller Foundation, Fondation Botnar, Human Development Innovation Fund, Packard Foundation, UN Foundation and more than 20 international NGOs.

www.d-tree.org

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