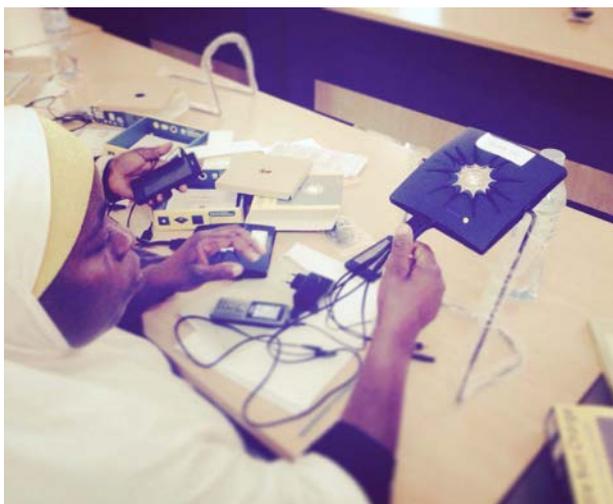


The power of solar: saving lives with digital health in Tanzania



Community Health Worker in Zanzibar training to use Little Sun Charge, August 2016

Berlin/Arusha, February 8, 2017 – Over the next few weeks, D-tree International, a US based non-profit, will deliver a second batch of solar phone chargers from the German solar company Little Sun to community health workers (CHWs) in rural Tanzania. The additional chargers will be distributed in Zanzibar and will supplement devices already being used by health workers since June of 2016. The chargers are the perfect complement to a low-cost Android phone equipped with a mobile application supporting the CHWs complete health visits and have helped to dramatically improve health conditions for pregnant women. One CHW said: “Working with pregnant women there are times when we [have an] emergency, this can be unpredictable; sometimes it happens in midnight where the pregnant mother can call for help. With this solar charger my phone is available all the time”.

Access to quality health care is still an issue in large parts of rural Tanzania. Approximately 50% of pregnant women deliver at home, leading to unacceptably high rates of maternal and neonatal mortality. Women and their families lack access to quality care. D-tree International, in conjunction with the Ministry of Health and other NGO partners and funders, is working in Zanzibar and Northern Tanzania to support 850 CHWs to conduct home visits with pregnant women, provide education to these women and their families, develop birth plans and support linkages to local health facilities for delivery.

A mobile phone job aide was developed by D-tree International to support CHWs with their home based visits – particularly with identifying pregnancy danger signs and counselling on the importance of delivering under skilled care at a facility. The data gathered by the digital health tool assists facility based supervisors to provide tailored support and helps program managers monitor and evaluate the program (for example, with real time access to heat maps displaying home and facility births). In Zanzibar, the program has increased rates of facility based deliveries from a baseline of 50% to 75% among more than 16,000 women.

This use of innovative technology can only be made possible with access to energy. A vast majority of CHWs are not connected to the electrical grid and have no means to charge their phones on a regular basis.

This is why D-tree International and Little Sun have partnered to provide solar-powered phone chargers to these health workers. With a 4400 mAh battery, a rapidly-charging solar panel and an integrated LED light, the powerful yet compact Little Sun Charge is the perfect fit for CHWs, who need to be very mobile and available at all times.

"We have heard back from a few of our community health workers in Zanzibar and they overwhelmingly prefer Little Sun Charge to the chargers which they were previously using. They say that they like the small size and ability to carry it with them when they are in the community conducting home visits," says Erica Layer, Chief Program Officer at D-tree international.

Little Sun's Managing Director Felix Hallwachs shares this enthusiasm: *"We are excited to supply the necessary solar power source for these essential health services. It is a step into a more equitable future, in which professional health care is more broadly available."*



Community Health Worker in Zanzibar showing the mobile phone she used to support a patient to safely deliver her baby. (Credit: Mark Leong, World Health Organization 2014)

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