

# Vodafone Foundation



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Foundation**

## Principle 9



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Lee Wells

[Director of m-mama for Vodafone Foundation](#)



# About The Vodafone Foundation

Vodafone Foundation is the charitable arm of Vodafone Group Plc, a UK-headquartered multinational telecommunications company. Through their strategic aim of 'Connecting for Good', the Foundation combines Vodafone's corporate philanthropy with the company's expertise in technology to create long-term, sustainable programmes that help address the world's most pressing problems.

# What was the challenge?

The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) identify the reduction of maternal mortality as a top-priority global health challenge. Tens of thousands of pregnant women in rural areas of Africa are unable to travel to a hospital in a pregnancy-related emergency, and rates of maternal and newborn deaths remain persistently high despite improvement efforts. Weak health systems and delayed access to emergency healthcare are significant factors driving maternal and newborn deaths, with the lack of affordable transport for emergency referrals serving as a significant contributor to poor outcomes. Given Vodafone Foundation's commitment to using the company's technology, data, and communications expertise to create viable long-term social programmes, the Foundation's senior stakeholders sought out opportunities to work in partnership with African governments and major international development actors.

# What was the response?

In 2013, Vodafone Foundation initially collaborated in Tanzania with USAID, Vodacom Tanzania, and the regional government to develop what has now become known as the 'm-mama' programme. This programme uses a network of local drivers to act as 'taxi ambulances', in areas where such services are rarely available. If emergency healthcare is required by a mother or newborn, a free phone number allows an ambulance provided if available. In 80% of cases, ambulances are unavailable so the nearest volunteer emergency driver is identified by a trained dispatcher via the dedicated m-mama app. The dispatcher manages the collection of the patient and ensures appropriate transport to the nearest facility for stabilisation and then to a higher-level facility for treatment. On safe arrival at the final treatment facility, the driver is paid instantly for the journey via M-Pesa (Vodacom's mobile money transfer system) or another approved mechanism.

*"The free phone number and app are critical because they enable access to the service and ensure the dispatcher has all they need to respond to an emergency. They ensure efficient use of scarce transport and healthcare resources at levels affordable within local budgets",* says Lee Wells, Director of m-mama for Vodafone Foundation.

The challenge for Vodafone Foundation involved working out how they could build on the success of the m-mama solution and scale it across Africa.

Since 2015, in collaboration with local governments and authorities, Vodafone Foundation has been committed to collecting regular data on all aspects of the programme and using them to create a real-time dashboard that can be accessed by the local and national government and potential funders. Studies and ongoing data collection in Tanzanian regions where m-mama operates have determined that maternal mortality has been reduced by 38% and neonatal deaths by over 40%. Just as critical is the low cost of operation. m-mama is on track to reach national scale in Tanzania by September 2023, at which point it will cost the government USD 2 million per year to maintain whilst transporting an estimated 50,000+ emergencies per year.

Seeing the impact the programme had in specific regions, Vodafone sought ways to use the data they collected to create larger, more systemic changes in the African maternal health space by asking key questions:

- ✓ How can programme data be leveraged to demonstrate clinical effectiveness but also affordability to potential donors but also local and national government leaders?

- ✓ Can data be shared in such a way that supports the development of multi-stakeholder partnerships between the Foundation, governments and other health sector stakeholders?
- ✓ What data from this programme can be used to inform the Foundation's work in other countries?

They then used the insights gained from considering these questions to develop a range of actions:

- ✓ Use data to encourage governmental buy-in: The Foundation harnessed the power of m-mama's success in rural Tanzania to demonstrate the efficacy of transport and technology-based interventions in maternal healthcare contexts. By using data on taxi ambulance usage and maternal health outcomes, Vodafone Foundation liaised with the governments in both Tanzania and more recently Lesotho to secure a commitment for national m-mama expansion across both countries in 2023.
- ✓ Create sustainability without developing dependency: Vodafone Foundation remains conscious that their support through the m-mama programme should strengthen rather than replace government healthcare interventions. In addition to creating all information and communications technologies as 'open source' and donating it to the Tanzanian government, the Foundation has provided everything necessary for the government to sustain the programme. The Foundation built digital dashboards that track key m-mama programme indicators, using these not only to illustrate the programme's value to local and national policymakers but also to enable the government to target scarce resources more efficiently. Given their successful track record and commitment to long-term sustainable solutions, the Foundation will not expand the programme in any country where there isn't a firm commitment from the national government to fund and fully integrate m-mama into the existing rural healthcare infrastructure.
- ✓ Leveraging data for multi-stakeholder partnerships: The m-mama programme was initially seed funded by Vodafone Foundation's collaboration with USAID and other philanthropic investors. Given the success of the transport programme and its national roll-out in two African nations, USAID has committed USD 5m to the USD 15m nationwide set-up costs in Tanzania. USAID and Vodafone Foundation are currently exploring possible expansion to other African countries.
- ✓ Generating organisation-wide impact through programmatic data: As a large, multi-national organisation, Vodafone Foundation has dozens of concurrent programmes operating in 25 countries. As such, it can be difficult for key learnings from Tanzania or Lesotho to be translated across the organisation's entire portfolio. The Foundation is currently developing a wider data strategy, to facilitate a stronger learning ecosystem within their organisation and a sustained commitment to their internal transformation.

## What have they learned?

- ✓ Think creatively about your organisation's role in addressing a problem. Vodafone Foundation's parent company specialises in telecommunications, not healthcare. Yet by starting with an analysis of the healthcare problem rather than the technology, it has created a programme that tackles the essential causes of maternal mortality – and has provided crucial digital tools that support solutions. This systemic approach, supported by technology, has enabled a low-cost solution that provides a radical reduction in maternal and newborn deaths.
- ✓ Acknowledge your role as part of a much broader ecosystem around a challenge. Vodafone Foundation has avoided silo-ism in their approach to philanthropy by ensuring regional and national government buy-in for the m-mama programme – and that of several implementing partners – to ensure the support structures survive beyond the initial intervention.
- ✓ Collect the data that matters most, not just the data that supports your organisation's reporting requirements. Data from the m-mama programme serves a wider external purpose; it is used to develop key partnerships and share learnings publicly in addition to its importance for Vodafone Foundation's internal stakeholders. The app exists first and foremost to assist the dispatcher to save the lives of mothers and babies, with the intended secondary effect of collecting data to build the case for wider expansion of the solution.

# Key outcomes and impact indicators

50,000+

Estimated 50,000+ maternal health emergencies transported by m-mama programmes every year in Tanzania from October 2023.

38%

Up to 38% reduction in maternal mortality and 40% reduction in neonatal death in regions where m-mama operates.

## Expansion

Commitment from national governments in Tanzania and Lesotho to roll out services at a national level so the Foundation can move on to expand the programme elsewhere.

## Partnerships

Vodafone Foundation has publicly committed to expanding m-mama to other countries in partnership with donors and governments.