



Press Release

Five majors announce Project ĀSMĀN to reduce maternal and newborn mortality in India

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, MSD in India (through its MSD for Mothers programme), Reliance Foundation, Tata Trusts and USAID join hands to form first-of-its-kind Continuum of Care Health Alliance

*The alliance aims to create a **model for future private sector engagement with national and sub-national governments** by establishing synergies with existing government strategies*

New Delhi, November 3, 2015: Project ĀSMĀN, a major healthcare initiative aimed at reducing infant, neonatal and maternal mortality in India, was launched today by a consortium of leading private and development sector partners. The initiative is an alliance between the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, MSD India (through its MSD for Mothers programme), Reliance Foundation, Tata Trusts and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

Project ĀSMĀN will work towards facilitating the availability of quality healthcare under the five pillars of the Government of India's **Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn, Child Health and Adolescent Health Program (RMNCH+A)**.

The initiative was jointly unveiled by Mr. Alkesh Wadhvani, Deputy Director, Integrated Delivery, India, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Mr. Kenneth C Frazier, Chairman & CEO, MSD, Smt. Nita Ambani, Founder and Chairperson, Reliance Foundation, Mr. R. K. Krishna Kumar, Trustee – Tata Trusts, and Ambassador Jonathan Addleton, Mission Director, USAID/India, at a special event in the presence of Smt. Maneka Sanjay Gandhi, Hon'ble Minister for Women & Child Development, Government of India, and Dr. Jagdish Prasad, Director General Health Services, Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Government of India. Senior government officials, medical professionals and representatives from the development sector also attended the event.

Committed to reducing infant, neonatal and maternal mortality rates in India, the ĀSMĀN programme brings together the knowledge and expertise of each partner to create customised solutions for addressing state-specific requirements. In line with the government's agenda of reducing mortality rates, this first-of-a-kind alliance will support the introduction and implementation of high impact interventions at the health facility level.

India is the world's second most populated country and observes over 30 million pregnancies every year. Of this, 27 million women reach the stage of delivery and over 56,000 mothers die during or within 48 hours of delivery. The first 48 hours are equally critical for the child, as 50% of neonatal deaths happen in the first 48 hours. Presently, the states most acutely affected by concerns of Maternal Mortality Rate (MMR), Neonatal Mortality Rate (NMR) and Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) are Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh.



ĀSMĀN aims to create a model for bringing private players together to make significant progress in attaining the goals of providing healthcare for all, and to help India contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals. All partners of the ĀSMĀN initiative are bound by a common commitment and have been working for various causes in this space in their individual capacity.

Commenting on the partnership of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation with ĀSMĀN, **Mr. Alkesh Wadhvani, Deputy Director, Integrated Delivery, India, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, said**, “The foundation is deeply committed to improving maternal and child health in India. We believe that the health of mothers and children merits particular attention, given India’s share of the overall burden of maternal and child mortality, and we have made it the focus of our work in India. We decided to partner with ĀSMĀN because we strongly believe the combined efforts of our alliance will help significantly advance our collective commitment of expanding access to maternal and child health in India and help ensure that women and children not only survive but thrive. Through this alliance, our foundation will continue its commitment of partnering the government in achieving its ambitious goals to improve women and child health and prioritise equitable growth.”

Mr. Kenneth Frazier, MSD said, “We must never lose focus on the health of mothers and children, even one preventable death is unacceptable. Through our MSD for Mothers initiative we are working every day to help create a world where no woman dies giving life. And, by sharing MSD’s scientific and business expertise in this partnership, it is my hope that the combined strengths and contributions of all involved will help create a sustainable model for high impact solutions in India.”

Smt. Nita Ambani, Founder and Chairperson, Reliance Foundation added, “I believe that every life must be cared for and we should strive for a healthy India, where no mother is lost to child birth and every child can live life to his or her fullest potential. This is possible through smart, strong and sustainable partnerships. I am proud to be part of an alliance with which Reliance Foundation shares such strong synergies – institutions that share the same passion and commitment to tackle massive national challenges on a mission mode. For me, this partnership goes beyond just funding but leveraging our rich institutional experience, valued expertise and a strong shared commitment to improving mother and child survival in India. ĀSMĀN gives me hope that change is possible.”

Mr. R K Krishna Kumar, Trustee, Tata Trusts said, “Tata Trusts for the last hundred years, have been waging a battle against Maternal, Neonatal and Child mortality. With this alliance, we offer our support through resources and infrastructure; safeguarding and promoting the health and wellbeing of every mother and child.”

Reaffirming USAID’s commitment to ending preventable child and maternal deaths, **Ambassador Jonathan Addleton, USAID Mission Director to India**, said: “USAID, on behalf of the United States, is fully committed to partnering with the Government of India, private sector and civil society to identify and replicate high-impact solutions to ensure that no woman or child in the country dies due to preventable causes. USAID decided to partner with ĀSMĀN because it brings together the right partners from across sectors whose core competencies and technical expertise can build synergies with existing programs to achieve the goal of zero mother and child deaths by 2035. Through ĀSMĀN, USAID will continue to



foster the power of science, technology, innovation, and partnerships to create solutions to reduce child and maternal deaths more quickly and cost effectively.”

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Annexure – The members of the ASMAN alliance

ABOUT BILL & MELINDA GATES FOUNDATION

Guided by the belief that every life has equal value, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation works to help all people lead healthy, productive lives. In developing countries, it focuses on improving people’s health and giving them the chance to lift themselves out of hunger and extreme poverty. In India, the foundation focuses on four sectors: health, sanitation, financial services, and agricultural development and works with national and state governments, Indian businesses, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and development partners to generate economic growth for the benefit of all Indians. In the United States, it seeks to ensure that all people—especially those with the fewest resources—have access to the opportunities they need to succeed in school and life. Based in Seattle, Washington, the foundation is led by CEO Sue Desmond-Hellmann and Co-chair William H. Gates Sr., under the direction of Bill and Melinda Gates and Warren Buffett.

ABOUT MSD

MSD is a global healthcare leader working to help the world be well. MSD is a trade name of Merck & Co., Inc., with headquarters in Kenilworth, N.J., U.S.A. Through our prescription medicines, vaccines, biologic therapies, and animal health products, we work with customers and operate in more than 140 countries to deliver innovative health solutions. We also demonstrate our commitment to increasing access to healthcare through far-reaching policies, programs and partnerships. For more information, visit www.merck.com and connect with us on Twitter, Facebook and YouTube.

In India, MSD operates through three separate legal entities: MSD Pharmaceuticals Private Limited, Organon (India) Private Limited, and Fulford (India) Limited. Since its existence in the region, the company has moved quickly in laying the foundation for a business that is differentiated by its focus through launching innovative products relevant to India region.

MSD in India is committed to the cause of reducing maternal mortality - with its already functional ‘MSD for Mothers’ program, the company brings extensive technical and technological expertise for creating and implementing relevant interventions from its existing programs in India, Uganda, Senegal, Zambia, and the US.

ABOUT RELIANCE FOUNDATION

Reliance Foundation is an initiative of Reliance Industries Ltd. Among India’s largest social initiatives, it is focused on addressing the nation’s development challenges in domains of Rural Transformation, Education, Health, Sports, Urban Renewal, and Arts, Culture and Heritage. Its hands-on approach has directly impacted over 5,500 villages across India. Led by Founder and Chairperson Mrs. Nita Ambani, Reliance Foundation reaches out to the marginalized sections of the population living in remote corners of the country, to provide them with sustainable livelihoods. Reliance Foundation audaciously inspires and facilitates transformative change to ensure higher quality of life by developing the nation’s social capital. Since its inception in 2010, Reliance Foundation has impacted over four million lives through its work.

The foundation promotes Maternal and Child Health through screening, early identification of anaemia and malnutrition and setting up of **Reliance Nutrition Gardens** for balanced nutrition and increased household income. In recent years, RF has set up a successful **mHealth nutrition advisory program**, which focuses on tackling malnutrition- one of the biggest underlying causes of poor maternal and child survival. It has now extended its services to



actively raise awareness about reproductive health, anaemia, cervical cancer, menstrual hygiene, health and sanitation of adolescent girls through this platform. On the **service delivery** front, Reliance Foundation's '**Health for All**' has had commendable success in Health Outreach through Mobile and Static Medical Units in Mumbai, Uttarakhand and Madhya Pradesh. In addition, we have set up **several primary health centres, antenatal clinics** and the distribution of safe delivery kits, touching the lives of millions of people in communities around RIL's work sites.

For more information visit: www.reliancefoundation.org

ABOUT TATA TRUSTS

Tata Trusts are amongst India's oldest, non-sectarian philanthropic organisations that work in several areas of community development. Tata Trusts seek to be catalysts in development through giving grants to institutions in the areas of Natural Resources Management, Rural Livelihoods, Urban Livelihoods & Poverty, Education, Enhancing Civil Society and Governance, Health and Media Arts, Crafts and Culture.

For more information please visit <http://tatatrusters.org/>

ABOUT UNITED STATES AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT (USAID)

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) works to end extreme poverty and promote resilient, democratic societies. USAID is an independent government agency that provides economic, development, and humanitarian assistance around the world in support of the foreign policy goals of the United States. USAID/India funds activities implemented under contracts and grants with non-government organizations, public international organizations, and in collaboration with the Government of India. USAID support to maternal and child health focuses on high-impact interventions during a mother's most critical 24-hour period around labour, delivery, and post-partum. To save both mothers and new-borns, USAID is working to increase access to and availability of skilled providers for deliveries, comprehensive and integrated antenatal care, and immunizations for children. USAID is also addressing the key drivers of child mortality, such as pneumonia and diarrhoea by strengthening the Integrated Management of Neonatal and Childhood Illnesses program and improving the use of oral rehydration salts and zinc.