Orange and USAID join forces to boost mHealth innovations across Africa

WASHINGTON, USA: The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and global telecommunications operator Orange announced a new alliance to develop innovations in mobile health (mHealth) at the Global mHealth Forum in Washington, DC. These mHealth innovations will help treat and care for individuals in developing countries across Africa.

"With the increasing use and decreasing cost of mobile phones, leveraging mobile phone technology to accelerate access to health information and services is a game changer," said Dr. Ariel Pablos-Méndez, USAID's Assistant Administrator for Global Health. "USAID's partnerships with private companies, such as Orange, enable us to have a larger impact in a cost-effective manner."

The first phase of these health system-strengthening programs will leverage the expertise, technology and local resources of both organisations to improve quality of care and ensure that health services are readily accessible to the public at large. Niger and other countries are currently under exploration.

Future services will use integrated mHealth platforms and Orange mobile networks to communicate alerts and share resources around family planning and maternal health. Healthcare workers will be able to use the technology to share medical expertise, collaborate with specialists regardless of location, and improve patient care. In addition, the public will be able to access health information via the mHealth platforms. Orange's global fooprint, with mobile and fixed networks in 20 countries in Africa and the Middle East, will provide seamless and reliable access to these services.

A maternal mHealth solution will provide medical practitioners access to the latest tools and medical information allowing them to monitor a mother's pregnancy from a distance. This is particularly useful in some parts of Africa where much of the population lives in rural areas without easy access to healthcare or readily available means of transport. By using mHealth solutions, medical professionals would be able to flag potential problems early and provide the necessary care that reduces risks to mother and child.

The goal of the USAID/Orange alliance is to create a framework for easily replicating these important mobile services in a number of African countries throughout the region. In West Africa, USAID and Orange are starting to develop a regional platform with a menu of mobile applications that ministries of health, donors and NGOs could use for consumer education, health worker tools, mobile money, and data collection.