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PRESS RELEASE

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Two Breakthrough Innovations to Address Maternal and Newborn Deaths in Sub-Saharan Africa

The Saving Lives at Birth partnership supports bold ideas to save the lives of women and their babies from innovators motivated by tragic personal losses

Ottawa. Although Kenyan Sam Agutu and Nigerian Aminu Gamawa come from different countries and backgrounds, they share a common passionate commitment – to save the lives of women giving birth and guarantee infants a healthy start. Both men suffered the loss of an important woman in their lives. Agutu’s sister died in childbirth on the way to the hospital. Gamawa’s mother died in childbirth too. Both men say the deaths were completely unnecessary if better care had been available. They’ve channeled that devastating loss into powerful motivation to improve the odds for women and their babies.

“These two bold ideas with big impact are testimonials to the loved ones these innovators lost in childbirth,” said Peter A. Singer, CEO of Grand Challenges Canada. “Their loved ones did not have to die, and these innovations aim to prevent other women from dying unnecessarily in childbirth.”

Sam Agutu’s Kenyan group, Changamka Microhealth based in Nairobi, is proposing e-vouchers delivered through cell phones to encourage women to seek care during their pregnancy and at birth. In remote areas health care costs and distance to clinics are barriers for women. The e-vouchers can be used to pay for pre-natal care and transportation.

“Research shows that not receiving adequate care is a leading cause of maternal mortality in the developing world. Mothers who attend their required ante-natal visits and who deliver in hospital stand an infinitely greater chance of surviving than those who do not” said Sam Agutu of Changamka Microhealth. “We will use Saving Lives at Birth’s support to validate the

effectiveness of e-vouchers, an SMS informational campaign and a transport subsidy in encouraging pregnant women to seek health care.”

The Development Research and Projects Centre in Nigeria is relying on persuasion and experience to change attitudes of some Islamic Opinion Leaders in the country’s Muslim northern states. The project will leverage the persuasive powers of progressive Islamic leaders to change opinions of more traditional leaders.

“The Development Research and Project Centre’s proposal is aimed directly at those religious leaders to change their negative messages about maternity and newborn care.” said Aminu Gamawa, Leadership Development Mechanism Fellow at the Development Research and Projects Centre. “We want to improve the survival of women and children in Northern Nigeria, which has the highest maternal and neonatal death rate in the country as well as one of the highest in the world.”

Each program will receive a \$250,000 seed grant from the Saving Lives at Birth partnership, which includes Grand Challenges Canada, USAID, the Government of Norway, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the World Bank.

“With the support and leadership of the Government of Canada, this innovative initiative from Grand Challenges Canada is contributing to our overall maternal and child health efforts. I commend the Saving Lives at Birth partners for their dedication,” said the Honourable Beverley J. Oda, Minister of International Cooperation.

“To deliver dramatic health results for women and children who may never step foot inside a hospital, we must harness the creativity of innovators and partners across the globe.” Said Rajiv Shah, USAID Administrator. “By doing so, we can increase the efficiency, sustainability and effectiveness of our work.”

“Grand Challenges Canada is proud to be working with our consortium partners, Canada’s International Research Centre (IDRC) and the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) to support this very important work in Sub-Saharan Africa.” Said Joseph L. Rotman, Chair of Grand Challenges Canada, “It takes bold innovation of all types to make substantial changes in the health and well-being of women and infants.”

To learn more about Saving Lives at Birth: A Grand Challenge for Development and the innovations, visit www.savinglivesatbirth.net.