

Project ASMAN aims to reduce maternal & newborn mortality in India

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Project ASMAN, a major healthcare initiative aimed at reducing infant, neonatal and maternal mortality in India, was launched on November 3, 2015 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).

It is important to note that 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 percent 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.

Commenting on the partnership of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation with ASMAN, 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 ASMAN 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."

ASMAN was jointly unveiled by Mr Alkesh Wadhvani, deputy director, Integrated Delivery, India, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Mr Kenneth C Frazier, chairman and CEO, MSD, Ms 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 Ms Maneka Gandhi, minister for Women and Child Development, Government of India, and Dr Jagdish Prasad, Director General Health Services, Ministry of Health & Family Welfare,

Government of India.

Project "SMAN" 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). Committed to reducing infant, neonatal and maternal mortality rates in India, the "SMAN" 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.

Mr Kenneth Frazier, chairman and CEO, MSD mentioned, "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."

As per Ms 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. "SMAN" 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 decided to partner with "SMAN" 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 "SMAN", 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."