

Press release: Technology is helping to transform the way the UK delivers aid abroad

Entrepreneurs will explore how to use mobile technology, such as smartphones that give access to affordable and safe energy, to help tackle humanitarian challenges around the world, the International Development Secretary announced ahead of Mobile World Congress this week.

DFID is joining forces with leading mobile technology trade body the GSMA to launch Mobile for Humanitarian Innovation, a programme bringing the mobile industry and humanitarian community together to improve how we prepare and respond to emergency situations.

Speaking ahead of the congress in Barcelona, Ms Mordaunt said:

Technology and innovation have a huge role to play in improving the lives of millions of people in the developing world.

I want to harness the UK's renowned entrepreneurial spirit and use new technology to deliver smart solutions around the world on everything from health care to natural disasters. DFID's partnership with the GSMA is an exciting joint push to use mobile technology to boost our global humanitarian efforts.

Access to mobile networks can transform the way humanitarian help is delivered through access to information, services and connection to families. The GSMA have estimated that by 2025 there will be nine billion mobile connections globally, with 75 per cent coming through on smartphones.

Mobile for Humanitarian will find new ways of helping developing countries around the world on areas including mobile money, mobile-enabled energy, climate resilience and food security.

Director General of the GSMA Mats Granryd said:

The GSMA is pleased to further its partnership with DFID to accelerate the delivery and impact of sustainable digital humanitarian assistance.

The scale and reach of mobile networks make them uniquely place to help meet the challenges faced by humanitarian responders and affected populations. Together with DFID, we will build bridges between the mobile industry, other private sector partners and the humanitarian community to catalyse innovation and demonstrate the impact of digital humanitarian assistance.

Five ways technology and innovation funded by UK aid are improving people's lives around the world:

1. Rural Connectivity Project in Tanzania

A total of 1.6 billion people globally do not have access to 3G connectivity. The GSMA and DFID have worked with local network operators and government to facilitate a rural roaming agreement in Africa. The pilot in Tanzania explored how to reach unconnected citizens living in rural areas. Due to this partnership, and the new towers that were built, 70,000 people in Tanzania now have access to mobile internet, bringing education, health and financial services to previously unconnected communities.

2. 3D printing emergency supplies in Nepal

With support from DFID, Field Ready, a not-for-profit organisation which uses technology and design to transform the way humanitarian aid is delivered, is trialling 3D printing of life-saving and life-improving medical and other supplies in the field – such as umbilical cord clamps, wrist braces and water pipe components – so that vital equipment can be manufactured on demand, where and when it is needed. DFID funding has allowed them to test this approach in Haiti and Nepal, and they have also expanded their work to Syria and the recent response to Hurricanes Irma and Maria in the Caribbean.

3. Mobile technology helping women access essential maternal healthcare.

Tanzania remains one of the most dangerous places in the world to give birth and to be born, according to the high maternal, infant and childhood death rates. UK aid is funding a programme forging stronger links between the mobile and healthcare industries. Healthy Pregnancy, Healthy Baby is a free text message service in Swahili for pregnant women, mothers with newborns up to 16 weeks old, as well as supporters of pregnant women and new mothers. Subscribers register for the text messaging service by indicating the woman's current week or month of pregnancy, or the age of the newborn baby. The messages cover a broad range of topics from prevention of mother to child transmission of HIV/AIDS, family planning, malaria prevention and postpartum care. As of November last year, it has reached over 1.8 million users.

4. Mobile phones improving access to clean energy

Mobile-enabled solar technology is helping to keep families safe in Uganda. Many homes use kerosene for lighting, an unsafe and unhealthy way of using energy. The lack of clean affordable power limits development. UK aid has funded the development of a ready-pay power system which can be paid in instalments using mobile phones. The system uses solar power to charge mobile phones and power lights, radio and TV. 95 per cent of those lacking energy in their homes are covered by mobile access which means this solution helps them to unlock energy on a daily, weekly or monthly basis.

5. PayGo energy

Many households in Kenya cannot afford gas to cook because it comes in large, expensive canisters. The alternative, firewood, causes health issues from

inhaling smoke. With the support of UK aid, PayGo has developed a meter that goes on top of a gas canister and, using mobile payment technology mPesa, users are supplied with a standard size canister and are able to buy small units of gas as and when they need it. The start-up business is based in Nairobi.

Notes to editors:

The GSMA represents the interests of mobile operators worldwide, uniting nearly 800 operators with more than 300 companies in the broader mobile ecosystem, including handset and device makers, software companies, equipment providers and internet companies, as well as organisations in adjacent industry sectors. The GSMA also produces industry-leading events such as Mobile World Congress, Mobile World Congress Shanghai, Mobile World Congress Americas and the Mobile 360 Series of conferences.