

Gates Foundation, U.S. partner to reduce infant and mother deaths

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Secretary of State Hillary Clinton at the launch of the U.S. Agency for International Development's "Saving Lives at Birth" initiative in Washington on Wednesday morning. (Photo by Alex Campbell / Medill News Service)

The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the U.S. Agency for International Development announced a new partnership Wednesday to reduce maternal and newborn mortality in developing countries.

“I believe this partnership will spark revolutionary advances that can dramatically reduce maternal and newborn deaths around the world,” said Secretary of State Hillary Clinton.

Other partners include the government of Norway, Grand Challenges

Canada and the World Bank. Partners are asking for proposals from innovators in technology, service delivery and family awareness. The coalition will then select ideas and technologies they believe will be successful and provide the funds to implement them.

Every two minutes, a woman dies during childbirth. More than 150,000 mothers and 1.6 million newborns die during childbirth or within 48 hours every year, according to a report issued by the groups. The effort, called Saving Lives at Birth: A Grand Challenge for Development, is a \$50-million, five-year partnership to bring new and existing technology and innovations to low-income mothers during and after childbirth.

Clinton stated that this partnership is about collaboration and not just repeating the work that has already been done by each organization.

“This is how we think development has to be done. We don’t want to be duplicating the good work of Canada or Norway. We don’t want to just be repeating what the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation does,” said Clinton. “We want to coordinate, so that we have a better outcome.”

The partnership comes at a time when the State Department is facing a 16 percent cut in funding. Clinton has been seen on the hill many times over the past couple of weeks advocating against these cuts.

“Everyone knows we are in a difficult budget environment. I feel so strongly that we are at a turning point in the rebuilding of USAID,” said Clinton, who cited a few of the recent efforts of the USAID. “This really deserves the support of the Congress, and I am trying to make

that case.”

Each partner emphasized that it's not just about creating new technology, but also helping communities learn about existing technologies and practices that are already widely used in developed nations, like the United States.

Melinda Gates, co-founder of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, cited immediate breastfeeding as a live-saving common practice that many women in rural areas still don't do. She said that while developed nations know that breastfeeding saves lives, the challenge is convincing women in third-world countries of the benefits and to adopt this practice.

“The women in Africa or India or Bangladesh care about their newborn baby as much as we care about ours and they often just don't have the tools or the knowledge to save that baby's life,” said Gates. “It is totally and completely possible to change that. That's what this initiative is about.”

The event coincided with the launching of the partnership's website, www.savinglivesatbirth.org.