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NEW YORK – Concern Worldwide US announced on July 28, 2009 that it has received a five-year, \$41 million grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to support the development and field testing of bold and inventive ways to overcome barriers to delivering proven maternal, newborn, and child health solutions in six countries.

The initiative will start in Malawi, India, and Sierra Leone, which face major obstacles to reaching the 2015 Millennium Development Goals for maternal and child health. In Sierra Leone, more than 25 percent of children die before reaching their fifth birthday, and in Malawi, one in every 18 women dies during pregnancy or childbirth. In India and Malawi, two-thirds of mothers and children lack essential health services like vaccinations, skilled care at birth and micronutrient supplements.

Proven interventions already exist, with the potential to save millions of lives. The challenge is to scale up effective delivery to ensure the interventions reach all the people who need them. There is an urgent need to focus on the critical obstacles to delivery, many of which are the product of weak, overburdened health systems or harmful practices such as discontinuing breastfeeding too early.

The initiative will seek out, field test and evaluate at least 27 breakthrough ideas that have the potential for rapidly increasing intervention coverage, as well as the characteristics most conducive to scaling-up. The project will reach out to a broad spectrum of constituencies—including mid-level and junior health workers, academia, civil society, the private sector, and community members—stakeholders with traditionally limited influence or decision-making power in the health sector.

“Even the most effective health interventions can only save lives if they reach the people who need them,” said Jaime Sepúlveda, Director of the Integrated Health Solutions Development program at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. “Concern Worldwide’s commitment to seeking innovation from diverse, non-traditional sources will be a key ingredient in the success of this program.”

“This project is all about discovering and testing new ideas. It requires good leadership, an extraordinary team, prudent risk taking, and a relentless commitment to improving the state of our world. That’s a cornerstone of our organization, and that is why we exist. We’re delighted to have this opportunity,” said Tom Arnold, CEO of Concern Worldwide US.