



UNICEF – ZAIN Partnership

A short background on the Integrated Nutrition and Food Security Surveillance System and RapidSMS:

UNICEF is currently assisting the Government of Malawi to revamp the Integrated Nutrition and Food Security Surveillance System (INFSSS). The INFSSS is designed to serve as an early warning system to assist the government and NGO's to strategically target regions with impending health crises. As part of this program, each month an estimated 2500 Health Surveillance Assistants (HSAs) take nutrition related measurements for 8750 children throughout Malawi. Currently, data is sent to the district offices using a paper-based system, and then onto the Ministry of Health in Lilongwe. However, under this system, data transfer is very slow, labor intensive and has high levels of errors.



In 2008, UNICEF pioneered a new text message based system for data transmission called RapidSMS. Adapted for the INFSSS in Malawi, the system allows field based HSAs to submit child nutritional data using a single text message instead of mailing data forms to the Ministry of Health each month. With RapidSMS, response time is significantly reduced, allowing HSAs to immediately provide needed assistance to children who are moderately or severely malnourished.

Currently this system is being piloted with 210 children in Salima, Kasungu and Dezda. Initial results are striking. At one site alone, ten children with malnutrition who otherwise would have slipped through the cracks were identified and given treatment, and data entry errors have dropped to under 3 percent. In the coming months, a national roll-out of this text based monitoring system is planned that will be the first of its kind anywhere in the world.

Details of text messaging component of the new system:



The RapidSMS system is based on data transmission (a string of numbers comprising key measurements) sent by HSAs via text message to two mobile phones linked to a central server. The data is then instantaneously analyzed and stored on this server. The server immediately texts back a feedback response to the HSAs with pertinent information on the children's health status and provides appropriate referral guidance. This is achieved through pre-programmed feedback loops based on the data analysis. For example, after submitting the data, an HSA could receive a text that says, "Child #03 is moderately malnourished, please refer to supplementary feeding program" if the child falls below a certain threshold.

For the national rollout, we estimate that within a period of 12 months there will be 154,250 texts coming in to the server from HSAs and 124,250 messages being sent back to HSAs from the server.

How ZAIN can be involved:

- Provide toll-free numbers, so the HSAs do not have to be involved in the billing process. The toll-free number would be set up to charge UNICEF to allow the HSAs to send text messages free of cost.
- Through a partnership with UNICEF, ZAIN could provide text messaging at a discounted price in return for marketing, sales, and corporate social responsibility publicity.

Direct benefits to ZAIN from this partnership:

- USAID called the RapidSMS nutritional surveillance system in Malawi “the best mobile innovation of 2008”. Partnering with UNICEF, ZAIN will be collaborating on a ground-breaking project that is reinventing the way mobile phones are being used, with ramifications far beyond the borders of Malawi. This project has already achieved broad media coverage and significant buzz throughout the development and mobile phone industries. We expect media attention to intensify once the project is rolled out at a national level. By partnering with UNICEF on this project, ZAIN will receive broad international media coverage in which their corporate citizenship will be recognized.
- RapidSMS Malawi will bring important public relations benefits at a local level for ZAIN in the corporate social responsibility arena. Through the RapidSMS system, HSAs share the feedback that they are receiving directly with the mother’s of the participating children. There is huge untapped market potential for increasing ZAIN users, and the brand name recognition linked to providing life saving services will influence this new market to towards ZAIN over competitors. Direct marketing linked to crucial social services is invaluable.
- ZAIN will benefit from significant advertising opportunities by partnering with UNICEF and the Government of Malawi on this project. The national roll out will include significant social marketing materials. The ZAIN logo can be incorporated on all materials distributed to the participants in the program (training materials, posters in the growth monitoring clinics, T-shirts, etc). Additionally, we could customize the feedback response messages to include ZAINs name (e.g. “ZAIN thanks you for your participation. Child #03 is moderately malnourished, please refer to supplementary feeding program.”)
- The RapidSMS project also represents an important market growth opportunity for text messaging, which is sure to fit in the business plan of ZAIN. Currently SMS texting is not a current habit of most HSAs. However, once they are trained, we expect they would also increase their SMS usage for personal needs.

