mNutrition and ICT:
Mobile Phones as the Next Avenue to Improve Nutrition

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This paper overviews of the nutrition problem, and locates ICT and mobile phones as a major role player in improving the nutritional status of the people, especially women and children, in developing countries. mNutrition is an initiative in which mobile phones will be used as a drive to tackle the problem of malnutrition among children and women. GSMA has undertaken the initiative to deliver a range of mobile services covering areas of nutrition, agriculture and healthcare and entail the launch of behaviour change communication services, agricultural extension services, population-level registration and data tracking.

Undernutrition is a major challenge to global human and economic development. It is estimated that almost one billion people globally face hunger and are unable to get enough food to meet their dietary needs. Undernutrition is associated with one third of all child deaths globally, and 165 million children (26% of children under 5 years) are stunted. Food and nutrition security is not only about access to and availability of food but also about its quality. A further one billion people do not consume sufficient vitamins and minerals which predisposes them to multiple negative health and development outcomes such as increased morbidity and mortality, and decreased educational achievement. Furthermore, many children are born undernourished because their mothers suffer from poor nutrition during pregnancy. But while many of these women may not have access to the healthy foods they need to feed their families, almost all of them have access to mobile phone.

Today, mobile phones are the most widespread personal technology on the planet, with global connections estimated to reach 6 billion in 2012. The GSMA (Groupe Speciale Mobile Association) Mobile for Development Foundation, a non-profit association has embarked on the mNutrition initiative in 14 countries with the aim of developing and scaling-up the delivery of nutrition messages through mobile phone platforms. GSMA representing 800 mobile operators serving over 95% of the market in developing countries, and to the associated independent evaluation and research component, will be providing technical assistance to mobile phone operators, and support new partnerships with content providers to develop and scale up these services. GSMA will ensure sharing of best practice and promote wider replication and uptake of effective business models. GSMA has appointed a consortium comprising of CABI, BMJ, the International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI), Oxfam GB and Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN).

On behalf of the consortium, GAIN is responsible for the implementation of activities in Nigeria, Tanzania, Ghana and Mozambique. GSMA and GAIN work with a range of partners, including content providers, content adapters, governments, mobile operators, NGOs and private sector companies to help deliver nutrition related information using mobile phones. GAIN links the mNutrition services to existing programmes and on-the-ground services, for example, community health services, bringing together the

mobile services with face-to-face advice and nutrition interventions. The mNutrition Initiative expects to ultimately contribute to improvements in nutritional status of the target population (women and young children) through the behavioral change in feeding and dietary practices.

In South Africa, the Govt. started a new service called StartSmart. The campaign went viral within a week it was launched. And now across South Africa, more than 100,000 people have signed up for the service. StartSmart is part of a wider program called NutriMark which focuses on the "1,000 day window of opportunity" for child and infant nutrition, measured from the start of a woman's pregnancy until her child's second birthday. In collaboration with GAIN, nutrition related information is being sent on the mobile phones of the mothers. This helps them to understand the nutrition issues and better nourish their babies and young children.

The impacts of mNutrition are expected to include improved nutrition, food security and livelihoods of the poor, especially women and young children in 10 countries in Africa (Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Nigeria, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia) and 4 countries in South Asia (Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka). This impact will result from the increased scale and sustainability of mobile phone based nutrition information services, delivered through robust public private partnerships in each country. Therefore public sector intervention is required to catalyse the industry to create affordable, high quality services for the rural population.