



## Press Backgrounder

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### **Marking five years of improving access to maternal care in Sub-Saharan Africa: key Philips Foundation programs**

*Through various innovative partnerships, Philips Foundation has made significant strides in bridging gaps in maternal care in Sub-Saharan Africa by collaborating with local universities and global NGOs – such as ICRC and UNICEF – touching areas such as health awareness, timely risk detection, and accessibility to quality medical services to ensure continuity of maternity care.*

#### **Award-winning tool to promote health awareness and early detection**

In order to encourage shifts in behavior related to pregnancy risks within underserved communities, Philips Foundation, alongside Philips Design and the ICRC, [developed easy-to-understand referral cards for high-risk pregnancies](#). These cards are aimed at promoting awareness of healthy and unhealthy behavior during pregnancy, and advocating for prompt referrals to primary healthcare facilities by local healthcare workers when complications arise. The [award-winning referral cards](#) [1] have demonstrated remarkable efficacy in boosting healthcare-seeking behavior among high-risk women residing in socio-cultural settings characterized by low literacy rates, leading to increased utilization of healthcare services.

“The ICRC successfully distributed thousands of referral card sets to 1,800 traditional birth attendants in Cameroon, Central African Republic, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, and South Sudan,” **Esperanza Martinez, Former Head of Health at ICRC**, said. “The high-pregnancy referral cards result from a simple, yet meaningful, co-creation process. Following feedback from both staff and communities, the cards can be seamlessly integrated into ICRC’s primary healthcare resource center and be made available to all health delegates to leverage in operations.”

[In collaboration with the Kenya Red Cross](#), the referral cards were also deployed in more stable environments with high maternal and child mortality. Philips Foundation aims to expand the distribution of these cards, further extending their reach and impact on improving maternal and child health outcomes globally, including a [recent deployment in rural China](#).

#### **Enhancing access to obstetric ultrasound services**

To improve pregnancy outcomes, the World Health Organization (WHO) recommends an ultrasound scan before 24 weeks of pregnancy to estimate gestational age, detect fetal anomalies and multiple pregnancies, and reduce the need for labor induction for post-term pregnancy [2].



In Uganda, Philips Foundation supported Imaging the World Africa in training over 250 healthcare professionals, identifying life-threatening complications. In Kenya, [Philips Foundation partnered with Aga Khan University](#) to train midwives, equip health centers, and enhance communication, resulting in improved antenatal experiences and early detection of at-risk pregnancies.

“We have explored the feasibility, affordability, and sustainability of implementing the WHO’s advice to have at least one ultrasound before 24 weeks gestation in a real-life situation in Kenya,” **Prof. Marleen Temmerman, Professor of Obstetrics & Gynecology at Aga Khan University**, said. “Our data indicate that pregnant women do come earlier for antenatal care where they have access to ultrasound, and early antenatal attendance is a key component of quality of care, resulting in better birth planning. In addition, prenatal ultrasound also resulted in more partner involvement, education, and awareness of danger signs during pregnancy.”

A joint [initiative between the Philips Foundation and Amref International University](#) in Kenya was designed to strengthen the capabilities of midwives and improve their retention in the health workforce. The study demonstrated that women were open to paying for these services – which confirms the feasibility of a financially sustainable, scalable model – leading to increased demand for ultrasound scans and heightened accessibility to maternal care in regions with scarce resources.

### **Improving service readiness for maternity care**

In an endeavor with the Kenya Ministry of Health to amplify medical equipment’s availability and improved functionality, Philips Foundation partnered with UNICEF to introduce a digital tool to supervise and upkeep medical equipment in 100 healthcare facilities. The realization of the project has simplified the process of managing medical equipment, giving facility managers the power to track the status of equipment proficiently, plan timely maintenance, and improve the allocation of resources, thereby ensuring the uninterrupted provision of maternity care.

[1] The design for the high-risk pregnancy cards has won as many as 10 awards spread across the US, UK, and Germany, including awards at Fast Company (2x) and DMI Design Value Awards. Just recently, it won the Grand Prix and Gold Award at the DBA Design for Effectiveness Awards 2023.

[2] WHO (2022). [Maternal and fetal assessment update: imaging ultrasound before 24 weeks of pregnancy](#)

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### **About Philips Foundation**

Philips Foundation is a registered non-profit organization established in 2014 – with a mission to provide access to quality healthcare for underserved communities across the globe. By leveraging Philips’ capabilities and combining them with the experience and expertise of non-governmental organizations and other community-focused and impact-driven enterprises,

Philips Foundation helps create innovative pathways to open up affordable healthcare for communities most in need. By also partnering with innovative social entrepreneurs rooted in the local ecosystem, Philips Foundation aims to increase access to healthcare for 100 million people a year by 2030. More information can be found at [www.philips-foundation.com](http://www.philips-foundation.com)