



mWomen

MUTUAL VALUE, MUTUAL GAIN

Best practices from successful social sector partnerships with mobile network operators

Executive Summary

For operators endeavoring to increase their revenues, resource poor women are one of the last untapped markets: the estimated 300 million fewer women subscribers than men in low and middle-income countries represent a \$13B missed market opportunity.¹ Developing countries are driving the growth in mobile as mature markets become saturated, and even in developing markets the divide between urban and rural active mobile subscriber penetration can be large. Ghana, for example, has 63% urban mobile penetration versus 30% in rural areas.² Mobile operators are increasingly aware of the importance of investing in rural markets: in 2012, Vodacom noted that future growth in Tanzania will come from rural areas that currently have low connection penetration rates (25% compared to 80% in some urban areas).³ Additionally, rural populations in emerging markets often have disproportionate numbers of women due to male migration to urban centers. For example, between 1970 and 1990, Malawi's rural male population declined by 21.8%, while the female population fell by only 5.4%.⁴ To take advantage of the revenue potential found in these untapped communities, the formation of efficient and effective partnerships between operators and social sector organizations that have long-standing networks and expertise in serving rural and marginalized populations is crucial.⁵

Partnerships are also vital to achieving scale, sustainability and success in the M4D sector. A 2014 GSMA Mobile for Development Impact survey of representatives from mobile operator Value Added Service (VAS) departments from 38 countries found that operators recognize that they cannot work alone and successful partnerships with third party providers are crucial to deliver successful content and other services.⁶ Social sector organizations that seek a partnership with an operator usually seek these partnerships in order to leverage operator capabilities to deliver at scale. The content or services some social sector organizations offer to operators, such as health or educational content or agricultural advisory services, would generally be considered mobile value added services by the mobile industry.⁷ Additional services or expertise social sector organizations bring to operators, such as existing distribution networks, consumer insights or market sizing data, can help operators along other parts of the VAS value chain such as product development or market opportunity assessment. This research paper focuses specifically on lessons learned in successful social sector/operator partnerships to bring value-added services to rural or marginalized populations, especially women.

¹ See [Women and Mobile: A Global Opportunity](#), GSMA mWomen 2010

² See [Mobile for Development Intelligence: A Diverse Stakeholder Mix](#), GSMA Mobile for Development Intelligence 2013

³ See [Sub-Saharan Africa Mobile Economy 2013](#), GSMA Intelligence 2013

⁴ See [Valuing Women's Work in Agriculture](#), World Watch Institute, 2012

⁵ The term "social sector organization" is being used in this report to represent both non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and for-profit social enterprises.

⁶ See [The importance of partnerships to mobile operators' value added services](#), GSMA Mobile for Development Intelligence 2014

⁷ Ibid, 2014

Methodology and audience

This Insights paper analyses qualitative research findings based on in-depth interviews with six social sector organizations who have established successful partnerships with operators. The purpose of these interviews was to better understand common norms and tactics for successful social sector/operator partnerships and inform a set of best practices to increase the social sector's understanding of how to successfully work with operator partners for mutual benefit. These partnership examples are not meant to be representative but rather focus on deep learnings from a small sample of social sector organizations and concentrate on partnerships in Africa and the Middle East. The primary audience for this report is organizations in the social sector who either currently or plan to operate or contribute to M4D services. We also hope this paper will be helpful for operators who seek to engage social sector partners as part of their strategic targeting of resource-poor women or other untapped market segments.

The interviews used to develop the content of this paper are structured around the typical value chain of a partnership formation process: the initial approach and negotiation, structuring and implementation of the partnership, and exit from the partnership. Common themes found in the research analysis are discussed alongside best practice implications for social sector organizations. Snapshots of a selection of the partnerships analyzed in this paper are found in the Appendix. We also encourage you to stay tuned for case studies and insights papers which will be made available on www.gsma.com/mwomen as the GSMA mWomen Innovation grant offerings from operator/social sector partnerships are tested and launched.

Why Partner?

Partnerships yield benefits for both the operator and the social sector organization. In addition to the diverse skillsets and expertise areas of commercial and social organizations that create synergies through partnership, there are often 'perception' benefits and other externalized benefits that form attractive value propositions to both the operator and social sector entity as they engage in a partner relationship.

The Unexpected Expert: Social Sector Value-Add to Operators

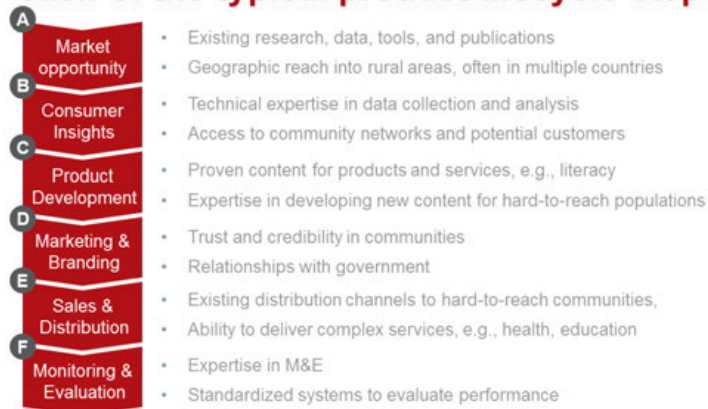
Partnerships with social sector organizations are of particular importance to mobile network operators in emerging markets who are targeting resource-poor market segments. For operators without visibility into these communities, or experience developing services for them, partnerships with social sector organizations yield a myriad of benefits such as increased consumer insights, proven content for products and services, and access to existing marketing and distribution channels. Social sector/operator partnerships are especially crucial to serve low and middle-income women in emerging markets – the persistent barriers that inhibit women's access to mobile services are among the most complex to solve in the M4D sector and prevent both the individual and community benefits that women's access to mobile services enables.⁸

⁸ See [Women and Mobile: A Global Opportunity](#), GSMA mWomen 2010

Social sector organizations have deep expertise in serving resource-poor women, as well as the community trust and offline network access necessary to successfully reach marginalized women in these markets. Operators can partner with social sector organizations at multiple points in developing their product offering. For example, social sector organizations can bring their unique experience and knowledge to inform the following product life-cycle steps:

The social sector has expertise across each of the typical product lifecycle steps

Figure A



- **Market opportunity:** Social sector organizations can help the operator size their market opportunity based on the specialized knowledge they have such as research, data, tools and publications, as well as their geographic reach in underserved areas.
- **Consumer Insights:** Social sector organizations often have deeper and more recent market research on hard-to-reach populations than their operator partners. They also can reach potential customers through their services in communities and access to offline community networks.
- **Product Development:** Social sector organizations are experts in serving base of the pyramid customers, including in localizing content and in designing products and services that provide value to these customers' lives.
- **Marketing and Branding:** To access hard to reach populations such as women in traditional societies, working with social sector organizations that are trusted in the community and have the relationships necessary to engage target consumers is crucial to a successful, scalable service launch. Additionally, social sector organizations are able to leverage relationships with government agencies that operators wouldn't normally engage with to promote services and build trust with customers.
- **Sales and Distribution:** For operators who rarely develop value-added services in house and don't have core competencies in the operation of complex value-added services such as educational programming, engaging a social sector partner with proven abilities to deliver such services yields both operational and economic efficiencies. Social sector organizations often also have access to existing distribution channels to be leveraged in such operational deployments.
- **Monitoring and Evaluation:** Operators generally don't have systems in place to conduct monitoring and evaluation of socially-oriented services beyond standard key performance indicator metrics. They also lack internal

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capacity and bandwidth to undergo the type of monitoring and evaluation that the social sector has expertise in and can bring as an additional value-add to any type of partnership along the product lifecycle.

Please see the Appendix of this document for detailed examples of successful operator-social sector partnerships along the value chain, including key pieces of advice for social sector organizations looking to partner with operators.

Savvy at Scale: Operator Value-Add to the Social Sector

The scale, visibility and commercial service expertise accessible through an operator partnership are extraordinarily attractive value propositions to social sector players in the M4D space. Operators have strong in-house capabilities and dedicated teams to conduct scaled above the line and below the line marketing campaigns that are often far more extensive than the outreach tactics available to and employed by social sector organizations. Additionally, the potential for sustainable, unrestricted revenue streams from revenue-share services and reduced risk and investment through an early-stage partnership are some of the unique benefits to social sector organizations found in mobile operator partnerships.

Why are Operator/Social Sector Partnerships so Hard?

Despite the clear benefits to social sector/operator partnerships and the rapid maturation of the M4D sector that catalyzes them, successful examples of such partnerships are difficult to come by and the lack of right business models is the biggest barrier to successful commercial value-added services in the M4D space.⁹ Additionally, significant knowledge gaps in the social sector talent pool on how operators are structured, what motivates them, and how to successfully 'pitch' a partnership are persistent challenges to social sector organizations looking to efficiently staff an operator-facing partnerships role. Lack of success in the design, negotiation and implementation of social sector/operator partnerships continues to be a significant challenge to scale in the M4D sector, and are rich topics for learning and guidance as the sector evolves.

Embarking on an operator/social sector partnership

Before we begin: a note on motivation

Amongst the interviewees, the decision to approach an operator partner was either an internally-motivated decision – i.e., the organization made the decision to try to engage an operator partner as part of their organizational strategy, or an externally motivated decision – i.e., the organization was pursuing donor funding that required an operator partner. Private sector partnerships are very attractive to donors and provide potential for both individual project funding and increased general funding flows due to the visibility and prestige of private sector partnerships. Either way, externally or internally motivated, operator partnerships need to be carefully approached and resourced to ensure success.

⁹ See [The importance of partnerships to mobile operators' value added services](#), GSMA Mobile for Development Intelligence 2014

How do you decide if you want to approach a mobile operator for partnership?

- **Assess your available resources:** Organizations who made the internally-motivated decision to approach an operator for partnership often made internal budget decisions early on, allocating C-level and other staff time for operator market research and partnership design to ensure their approach for the initial operator meeting would be as successful as possible, as well as intentionally hiring or allocating staff with private sector experience. After the initial meeting and throughout the negotiation phase, interviewed organizations often created dedicated teams within their organizations to ensure continued success and momentum, such as TechnoServe, who created an internal working group after their first operator meeting to drive the project concept forward according to the vision and needs they heard described in that meeting. Gathering the right mix of internal staff – business, technical and programmatic – ensures that the negotiation process moves forward in service of all aspects of the organization and keeps internal buy-in over the often long period of negotiation. Make sure your organization has the financial and personnel capacity to allot the necessary time to pursue the partnership in an informed and strategic manner.
- **Know your boundaries:** In the interviews, there was often an expressed consensus within the organization that an operator partnership was worth pursuing, despite the recognition of some common tensions facing operator partnerships within the social sector. Common pain points include exclusivity in the terms to a partnership and disagreement on marketing/public relations norms.

Working with an operator exclusively: Exclusivity means that the social sector partner works exclusively with that operator partner in the select country of operation, for the benefit of that operator's subscriber base only, on either a time-limited (i.e., the service operates exclusively with a given network for six months) or feature-based contract (i.e., all operator subscribers can access the general service, but only the operator's subscribers can access the premium version of the service). While this type of partnership is challenging for the social sector partner as it puts bounds on who can access their services and thus potentially compromises an organization's social mission, our interviewees with exclusive partnerships assessed the trade-offs and saw exclusivity as a necessary step towards scale of their services. In particular, partnerships often enable access to a large percentage of the population even with exclusivity in place, due to the large market shares of some operators. The need for exclusivity on the operator-side to push through project internally also often made negotiation unlikely or even impossible. If exclusivity is a non-starter for an organization, best to re-think the approach and consider partnership with an aggregator or other mobile service provider. For a discussion of exclusivity, see the HNI snapshot in the Appendix.

Deciding on marketing/public relations norms: In some of the interviews with social sector organizations who chose to partner with the corporate social responsibility (CSR) departments within operators, there was tension during implementation around the marketing and public relations (PR) tactics employed by the operator. The social sector partner sometimes felt uncomfortable with some of the PR campaigns by operators that included social impact claims they

might not have made themselves to their donors about the same project, or were blind-sided by large-scale media campaigns around the partnership that they had not been made aware of in advance. For social sector organizations considering partnerships, it is best to clarify the marketing and PR norms early in the relationship.

Explore options to work with other mobile service stakeholders: One important point for social sector organizations to consider is whether direct engagement with operators is the most effective means of accessing the mobile assets that they need. Depending on the geography in question, there are aggregators who make a business out of interfacing with all the mobile operators in that country (see ‘what is an aggregator’ side bar). The benefits of using intermediaries or aggregators are that the social sector organization is able to access subscribers of all the mobile operators in that country through a single technical interface point, without having to negotiate common short codes. These aggregators can also provide reporting across different mobile operators, and have a certain amount of technical capability to provide custom solutions. However, these aggregators tend to be limited to core connectivity services, and will charge a markup above the operators’ base tariffs.

There is also the potential to partner with a commercial VAS provider who has expertise in delivering a broad range of commercial VAS services to operators and often has strong relationships with VAS Managers and other operator in-house decision makers on new VAS services. Depending on the maturity of the market, VAS providers will either have exclusive or non-exclusive relationships with operators – in less mature markets, such as Afghanistan, VAS providers often have exclusive relationships with operators who invest heavily in ‘bringing’ that VAS provider into the market; in more mature markets, like Kenya, the same VAS provider works with different operators, usually differentiating on the content, type of application, pricing bundle, etc. For social sector organizations looking to push content out or leverage distribution networks for a commercial service, a VAS provider partnership can be a more efficient pathway for partnership with mobile operators: for organizations with low internal staff capacity to begin or manage an operator partnership negotiation, the commercial VAS partner can play that intermediary role through their existing staff and channels, without the social sector organization having to allocate significant budget or time to staff up an operator partnership. However, there will often need to be compromises on the social sector’s side around revenue-share agreements and content ownership rights, as well as the need to bear the risk that the mobile operator won’t contract the VAS provider’s services.

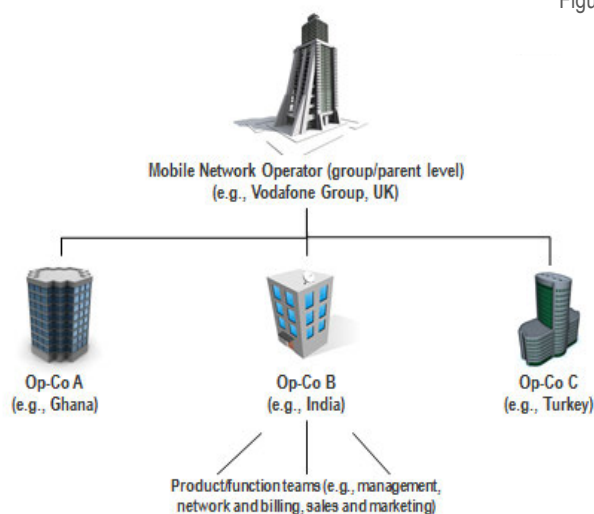
- **Discuss the issue of subsidization of the private sector:** Another concern to grapple with is the subsidization of the private sector – for some of the NGOs we interviewed, they feared that partnering with an operator to use donor funds to develop a service for that commercial entity would be akin to subsidization, or using donor dollars to give an operator a commercial advantage. Along with subsidization, some organizations feared they would crowd out the local private sector due to their partnerships with large operators, preventing the natural ecosystem of local private sector players and startups meant to serve operator clients. These are all valid concerns to discuss internally *before* approaching an operator for partnership to ensure there's no time wasted for either party.

Lessons learned in making the decision to approach an operator for partnership

- **Allocate resources** to ensure coverage for necessary staff time to pursue operator partnership.
- **Know your boundaries and your options** for how you want to engage the operator around key issues such as exclusivity and partnership public relations/marketing.
- **Educate yourself** on the pluses and minuses of direct operator partnerships vs. aggregators and make an informed decision on which path you're taking.
- **Agree internally and with donors** on exclusivity and boundaries when working with the private sector before approaching potential operator partners.

How do you get a first meeting with a mobile operator?

- **Assess your geographic footprint:** A key theme seen across interviewees in approaching an operator for partnership was the size of the geography in question. If your organization works in multiple markets, look across geographies to see which country might offer the easiest 'entry point' to the operator partner. For smaller



Source: GSMA Intelligence, 2014

organizations trying to get in the door for a first meeting in a smaller country or market, it was easier to build connections with the one or two dominant operators, as well as easier to get the final deal signed as smaller markets face less red tape and scrutiny at the group level. For large, multinational social sector organizations, getting traction in a small market with the local opco (operating company) of a large group like Vodafone or Ooredoo was seen as a strategic step towards further partnerships

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within the group in other countries of mutual operation (for a sample mobile operator structure, see Figure B, above). Additionally, markets with strong competition between operators give social sector organizations the potential to leverage an exclusive relationship to gain traction as a partnership of competitive advantage for their operator partner.

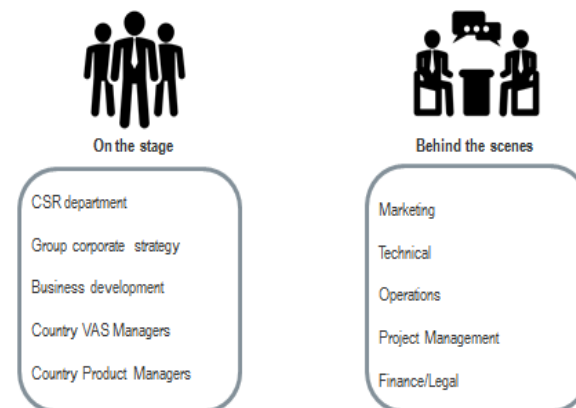
- **Leverage your personal and professional network:** Across all organizations interviewed, a robust networking effort was crucial to getting the initial meeting at the operator. The majority of the time, cold calls yielded little traction – initial meetings were always achieved by leveraging either personal network connections or strategic networking at events like conferences and summits. While this strategy of smart networking was crucial for getting the first meeting, it did not guarantee success, and often made for a higher stakes first encounter as a certain level of knowledge and/or importance was assumed by operator representatives tasked with taking the meeting.

How do you ensure a successful first meeting with an operator partner?

- **Prepare thoroughly:** Robust preparation prior to the initial meeting was undertaken by all of the interviewees. Commercially-focused staff at operators may not have a clear understanding of how a social sector organization brings value to their business, and internal operator confusion around where the initial meeting should take place – on the commercial or foundation/corporate social responsibility side of the business – can often lead to a rapid loss of momentum around any potential partnership as internal accountability gets passed around; early clarity on where the relationship ‘sits’ in the organization is key through a clear demonstration of the partnership’s value proposition to the targeted unit with the operator, commercial or otherwise. The ‘cast of characters’ as described in Figure C should be understood based on the unique structure of the group or country-level operator you are meeting with, as well.

The ‘cast of characters’

Figure C



Source: GSMA mHealth icon made by re:thinkproject/freemove.com/ ahm/freemove.com/ ahm/freemove.com/freemove.com

Additionally, understanding the private sector mindset and the operator’s commercial goals, norms and language is crucial to making a successful first pitch, and takes both intentional staff capacity building on the part of the social sector organization as well as research into the corporate strategy, successes and challenges of the target operator partner. CSR and/or Foundation internal reporting and strategy structures and norms differ highly from one operator to another, and even within groups there is sometimes both a CSR team and a separate Foundation entity that have very different mandates and KPIs within the organization. Also, keep in mind that group strategy may not be fully aligned with the priorities of the opco, and vice-versa: the two entities typically behave very differently, and have different objectives. Ensure that your pitch also recognizes that different opcos may have

different leverage within a group depending on how important and how much revenue that opco contributes, which in turn drives how much a group executive can dictate terms.

- Understand when in the project lifecycle to approach the operator:** The question of when in the programmatic lifecycle to approach an operator for partnership is also important. Because the majority of our interviewees had C-level relationships with their prospective operator partners before engaging in the first meeting, they engaged the operator in the design phase of the program. This is an atypical process, as it is generally recommended to approach the operator with a full service offering, as described in the Souktel/Ooredoo snapshot.¹⁰ Even when entering into the conversation with the operator

Figure D

Timing the pitch: early vs. late engagement

	Early Engagement	Late Engagement
Pros	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved buy-in Leverage of broader operator assets and experience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Round-robin negotiation with a ready-made product makes negotiations easier
Cons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Investment in business development and relationship development Need to put up with interference 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduced to hard bargaining conversations rather than collaborative discussions

Source: GSMA mHealth

at the design phase, interviewees asserted that coming to the first meeting prepared with a 'menu of options' and having a clear pitch around the value proposition of each option was crucial to getting early traction. The costs and benefits to different timings of "the pitch" are laid out in Figure D.

- Clearly articulate the value proposition of the partnership:** By framing the partnership pitch within a value proposition to the operator on either a commercial or CSR basis, a social sector organization is able to clearly demonstrate the value of the partnership in a way the operator will understand. The core of what the mobile operator is looking for here is the ability of the M4D service to provide a competitive advantage to: (1) improve usage of its current services (2) convert new customers (3) reduce customer churn (4) improve brand reputation. In addition to the framework laid out in the "social sector value-add" section of the report (page 2) the following value drivers can be helpful in constructing a clear pitch for the first meeting:

Diversification of revenue streams: For many operators, the ultimate measure of true commercialization of M4D is the extent to which the proposed service creates new revenue streams and converts new customer segments.

¹⁰See [The importance of partnerships to mobile operators' value added services](#), GSMA Intelligence 2014

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Leveraging existing infrastructure and ICT capabilities: Operators invest heavily in large infrastructure products such as rural towers and are eager to find ways to boost returns on these investments

Impact on social outcomes: The degree to which the service meets a clear and present social need will help mobile operators with the following: enhance their brand, improve government relations, improve employee satisfaction

- **Demonstrate expertise immediately:** Coming to the first meeting with strong data around customer insights or market intelligence that the operator doesn't already have access to, such as information gleaned from rural community research the social sector organization conducted, gives an early 'win' to the partnership and demonstrates strong value to incentivize the operator to take the meeting, and partnership, seriously.
- **Speak operator language:** Using common social sector terms such as 'beneficiaries', 'logframe' or 'M&E' will likely confuse or even alienate operator representatives in the room who are not familiar with such language. Make a conscious effort to switch to commercial language such as 'market segment' instead of 'beneficiaries' and spend time understanding common operator terms they are likely to use in conversation such as ARPU, MO:MT and churn so you can address them clearly. GSMA M4D Impact's glossary of M4D terms can be found [here](#).

Lessons learned in getting a first meeting and making it successful:

- **Assess your geographic footprint** if your organization works in multiple geographies to find the best 'entry point' for an operator partnership, keeping in mind that smaller markets often have easier-to-reach operators.
- **Leverage both personal and professional networks** to find a connection at the target operator, and if possible, have an initial informal meeting with that contact to gain insight into key insights that can help inform your initial pitch.
- **Do your homework** – research the target operator's structure, corporate strategy, in-country services and key existing partnerships. GSMA M4D Impact's [database](#) is a good research starting point.
- **Understand when in the project lifecycle to make the approach** to ensure you're picking a strategic time in the program to make the operator pitch.
- **Articulate the value proposition** of the partnership and where it sits within the operator (commercial or foundation/CSR).
- **Demonstrate immediate value in the first meeting** by presenting the operator with consumer insights and market intelligence gained through your organization's existing work with target communities
- **Speak the same language** as the operator representatives and don't alienate them with social sector terms they may not understand – e.g., use the term 'market segment', not 'beneficiaries'.

What are some tactics to ensure a strong negotiation and successful deal closure?

- **Prepare to take a different path from the initial pitch's vision:** Flexibility is key; keeping an open mind about the terms of the partnership both programmatically and financially/operationally leaves open the negotiation space necessary for the operator to modify terms as needed for internal buy-in.

- **Communicate early, communicate often:** A key theme seen across organizations interviewed is the emphasis on early, clear and continued communication that includes all key stakeholders to the partnership. Many of the interviewees learned a hard lesson when they assumed that once the group-level relationship was strong, operationalizing the partnership on a country level would be easy. What they found out was that buy-in from the C-level of the operator group doesn't mean the country-level team is similarly bought in and/or even aware of the partnership, and often the 'sales' process needs to start all over at the opco level. Facilitated internal operator communications need to be structured into the general partnership communications during the negotiation phase, and led by the social sector organization with an emphasis on creating partnership 'champions' at both the group and opco levels early on in the negotiation process.
- **Set timeline expectations accordingly:** In general, operator partnership negotiations took far longer than the social sector organizations interviewed expected – up to a full year in some cases. Being prepared financially to invest in the staff-time necessary for this process – including not just direct operator-facing roles but also support teams and financial, legal and technical staff – is crucial to sustain the long-tail of negotiation time needed to close the deal. Additionally to the financial cost, programmatic and donor/other stakeholder timing and needs need to be aligned accordingly, with expectations set that deployment timelines may be longer than usual.

Lessons learned in negotiating and closing the deal:

- **Prepare for a need for flexibility** when negotiating the final vision for the partnership, as it might be different than the initial pitch due to internal needs and wants at the operator.
- **Catalyze buy-in from both the group and opco levels** by facilitating communication between all stakeholders early on in the negotiation process to ensure efficient service launch once the negotiation process is completed.
- **Understand the possibility of a long negotiation** timeline and set expectations both internally and with external stakeholders like donors accordingly.
- **Balance trade-offs** by practicing open and transparent communication around social ROI metrics and mission-driven programmatic norms; in parallel, recognize and respect the operator's need for profitability.

You got the signature – now how do you actually get moving?

- **Focus on country-level relationships:** Confronted with high operator staff turnover and limited internal communication, interviewees faced the need to constantly champion the partnership and repeatedly lose progress on service launch. Additionally, technical or programmatic divisions within local opcos were understandably hesitant about adding more work to their already heavily burdened teams, creating an environment of resistance

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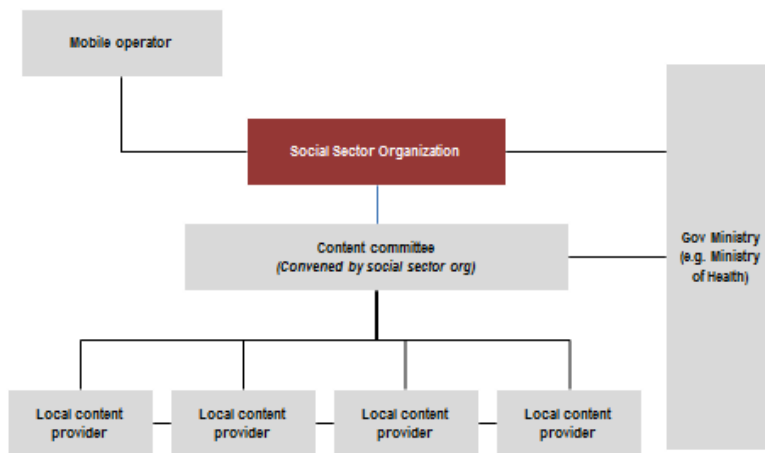
and distrust that made vital steps such as technical back-end integrations more time-consuming than initially expected. Lack of clarity and direction on where the project sat at the local level – commercial or CSR – meant risking getting passed back and forth between the two divisions at a local level and gaining little traction on actual implementation as internal operator accountability for partnership activities was not clearly defined.

- **Hit the ground running:** Timelines for social sector organizations and operators are completely different. Social sector organizations generally count in years, while a project in which payback period is longer than six months will hardly ever make it to the market on the operator side. Once you have the relationship investments made, it is crucial to begin service delivery as quickly as possible. Do all the prep work in advance to make sure that delivery can happen in the operator's normal timeframe.
- **Practice smart stakeholder management:** Key to partnerships involving multiple stakeholders is a management plan that shields the operator partner from management burden. Some partnership stakeholder models include:

“Hub and spoke’ model: The ‘hub and spoke’ stakeholder management model positions the lead

‘Hub and spoke’ partnership model

Figure E



social sector organization as the “hub” for all the stakeholder “spokes” to ensure streamlined implementation of partnership activities (see Figure E). Often times local organizations providing content or distribution networks for the partnership need weekly coordination meetings or committees to keep activities running smoothly – the operator

partner generally won't have the time to participate at this level, but can be kept up to date with a monthly steering committee call, for example. This can be an opportunity for the social sector organization to serve as matchmaker, as well – for example, strategically engaging governmental partners along with the operator partner to facilitate coordination between those two entities and add value both partners by catalyzing a relationship. This is especially useful when delivering content that has ethical implications (e.g., health). For details on a successful ‘hub and spoke’ stakeholder management model, see the HNI/Airtel snapshot.

Turn-key model: In a 'turn-key' model, the social sector organization plays the role of the project manager and comes to the operator with a ready-to-launch solution, after having already done all the content development and mobile optimization work. Often time social sector organizations that successfully run a turn-key model have strong in-house technical teams who have experience in mobile software development, or a partner who has those capabilities. For details on this model, see the Souktel/Ooredoo snapshot.

Expert consultant model: In an 'expert consultant' model, the social sector organization positions themselves as the external consultant to the operator, offering expertise and advice to the operator's dedicated project team as they launch and scale an M4D service. These types of models are often times utilized when the social sector organization has expertise in both content or product design as well as client insights and market knowledge, thus enabling the social sector organization to 'coach' the operator as they enter a new market. By treating the operator like their client, social sector organizations can provide advisory and consumer insights throughout the partnership to ensure they're making informed decisions about their services and offerings.

- **Invest in making it work:** Learning how to work together with operators was key to the success of the social sector organizations interviewed. Operators have deep internal tensions between expediency and quality, and project managers on the operator side may feel intense pressure to get the content or VAS to market far earlier than social sector organizations feel comfortable with – the level of tolerance for learning as you go is much higher in businesses than in the social sector, generally. Social sector organizations who were able to balance their own norms around quality with the market needs of operators and who were aware that this tension would be felt in the partnership were able to plan accordingly early on and strategically message the process accordingly to donors and other key stakeholders.
- **Set expectations and establish norms around data ownership and sharing:** For social sector organizations

Lessons learned: partnership implementation

- **Plan for a time investment** after contract signing to conduct country-level relationship building at the local, technical and programmatic levels.
- **Begin service delivery as quickly as possible** to ensure services meet the tighter timeframe expectations of operator partners.
- **Manage partnerships efficiently**, while trying to shield the operator from as much management burden as possible.
- **Invest in and commit to a strong communications process** such as the formation of a Steering Committee and/or monthly all-stakeholder meetings to create a forum for consistent feedback and provide a venue for internal operator communication around the partnership to ensure all key stakeholders are bought-in throughout the partnership.
- **Establish clear guidelines about data ownership/data sharing** norms and commitments, especially when it comes to data gathering for project monitoring and evaluation necessary for program feedback and iteration, and ensure that technical teams have clarity on what is expected of them for efficient data sharing on a scheduled basis.

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that have social impact KPIs they need to meet and donor-obligated monitoring and evaluation studies that require data to perform, there is generally the expectation that the operator will share their data from the back-end of the service so that such analysis can be undertaken. Operators, on the other hand, are not used to sharing their data with external parties and often will push back on that idea from both senior and technical levels. Confidentiality is a concern for operators, especially in competitive markets. Even if you have the agreement from senior management on data sharing, the technical team may be hesitant to share it. By establishing both guidelines and norms around data ownership and sharing early on, with a schedule and, if possible, technical integration that allows data to flow without the need to for operator teams to download it themselves and hand off to the social sector partner, social sector organizations can mitigate a recurrent uphill battle each time a data request is submitted.

A note on partnership exits

In many of the interviews conducted for this research, the conversation around an exit strategy for partnerships was a short one – often times social sector organizations are so focused on getting the partnership deal and successfully implementing it that what happens at the end simply isn't a priority focus area. However, a strong exit strategy is crucial to ensure the sustainability of the service for both the operator partner for whom it forms a revenue stream or key CSR initiative, and, importantly, for the clients it serves with crucial information and services.

Those organizations who did have exit strategies articulated them early on in the process, as part of the core value proposition to the operator partner and its clients. For partnerships of limited duration based on a specific period of performance or time-limited exclusivity clause, an exit strategy becomes especially important to the program design to ensure it includes the necessary steps for transferal or shut-down of the service. For international social sector organizations approaching operators with time-limited partnerships based on donor funding for a specific period, the question of 'what happens next?' should drive both the program design and the local partner selection, to ensure there is a capable, committed partner on the ground who can step in to play the international organization's role once their donor funding runs out.

Some best practices cited in interviews were:

- **Build multi-usage potential** into the program's investments such as agent networks or technical platforms that can be used for other services upon project completion. For a discussion of this model, see the D-Tree/Etiscalat snapshot.
- **Have an articulated end** goal and plan accordingly once you get near the end of the project – for example, if the end goal is to embed the service within the operator, plan for and execute the necessary staffing, training and business development to ensure it happens.
- **Include third party service providers** who can offer value added products on a commercial basis that are in line with the objectives of the program and cultivate an ecosystem around its operation.

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GSMA mWomen also encourages social sector organizations who have successfully partnered with mobile operators to share your experiences! Please contact GSMA mWomen (www.mwomen.org) to be included in our deployment tracker and have your work amplified through a snapshot, case study or other Insight publication.

Appendix

Partnership Snapshots



Snapshot 1: TechnoServe and Vodafone Group

Connected Farmer Alliance

Implementation dates: 2013 - 2016

Geographic Coverage: Tanzania, Kenya and Mozambique

Partners: TechnoServe, USAID and Vodafone Group

The Connected Farmer Alliance (CFA), a three-year US\$10m partnership between Vodafone, USAID and TechnoServe, designs, develops and deploys gender-inclusive, commercially-viable mobile solutions for the agriculture sector. Across three markets (Kenya, Tanzania, Mozambique), the partnership will enable 500,000 smallholder farmers to increase their productivity and income, and will offer agribusinesses the ability to increase their revenues. CFA works with farming communities and supply chain business partners across the three countries to develop and scale mobile applications that will enable rural households to make and receive payments securely, access other financial services such as micro-insurance, and connect to local and multinational agribusinesses.

The CFA is currently facilitating communications and transactions for approximately 7,900 smallholder farmers and four agribusiness clients. In Tanzania, the program is working with a flower seed exporter and a rice processor to facilitate management and disbursement of loans to farmers and outgrowers. In Kenya, the CFA is working with a multinational beverage firm and a dairy cooperative to manage information and communications with approximately 7,000 farmers.

- **Motivation and initial approach:** TechnoServe's belief, derived from previous work in mAgri, is that projects or services embedded in a private sector firm, like a local opco, are more likely to be sustainable and to continue delivering impact after donor funding ends. This focus on sustainability led them to approach the Vodafone Group after an initial encounter at a conference that established a mutual interest around the development of mAgri services. TechnoServe listened carefully in their first meeting with Vodafone and created an internal working group that developed the first draft of the project concept.
- **Operator value proposition:** TechnoServe knew Vodafone was looking to engage in the mAgri space, and put together a commercial value proposition around an agriculture-focused holistic mobile service that included content, mobile money integration and business-to-business services, run exclusively on the Vodafone network. TechnoServe positioned Vodafone as an innovator and market leader in the mAgri space in their pitch, focusing on both the reputational and commercial benefits of the service.

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- **Implementation:** While the initial engagement with USAID and Vodafone Group was effective and quickly achieved with an aligned vision at the leadership level, engagement with the country-level counterparts in USAID and Vodafone moved more slowly. In retrospect, a comprehensive plan for engaging the local partners, including clear senior contacts at the organization and an MOU defining explicit roles and responsibilities might have accelerated the initial phases of execution. The full negotiation timeline took just over a year. High-touch relationship management, including weekly meetings at the group level, biweekly meetings with the local opcos, and monthly meetings with all local stakeholders, smoothed the implementation process. Additionally, clear, early alignment with Vodafone, including explicit articulation of the workplan and rollout strategy and goals, facilitated a successful ongoing partnership.
- **Exit:** TechnoServe's articulated goal is to embed the products within the operator. When the time comes to close-down the project, they will facilitate that process via extensive training/capacity building of the opco staff and support their near-term business development activities. In addition, they aspire to crowd-in third party service providers who can offer value added products on a commercial basis that are in line with the objectives of the program.



Snapshot 2: HNI and Airtel

321 Service

Implementation dates: 2010 - Present

Geographic Coverage: Madagascar, Malawi

Partners: HNI & Airtel

In 2010, HNI launched a free, on-demand Interactive Voice Response (IVR) and SMS information service in Madagascar in collaboration with Airtel and the Government. A caller using an Airtel mobile phone dials "3-2-1" and follows a directory of choices to choose from over 350 messages on 6 broad topic areas (agriculture, public health, micro-finance, water and sanitation, land title and family planning). HNI has developed the message content in collaboration with local and international experts, with partners such as the Government of Madagascar, USAID, Better U Foundation, Catholic Relief Services, Population Services International, and the Merck Foundation. Since 2010, more than 2 million unique users have placed 7,100,000 calls and requested 25,800,000 SMS (the service now averages 200,000 calls and 700,000 SMS per month). In March 2014, HNI signed a contract with Airtel Malawi to provide the same service in Malawi.

- **Motivation and initial approach:** HNI's mission is to provide organizations and individuals the opportunity to use ICT in innovative, productive, and sustainable ways. HNI sought a partnership that traded content for access to an operator's subscriber base. They decided to approach all the operators in Madagascar, since it is a small market and thus easier to get access than in a larger market. To prepare for the first meeting, HNI put together a financial

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pitch and conducted a financial modeling exercise to show the partnership was in the business interest of the operator.

- **Operator Value Proposition:** Airtel was more focused on the VAS HNI offered as a solution for churn rather than for any of the financials HNI put together in the pitch. Airtel also wanted to partner on an exclusive basis. Airtel is the market leader with the largest rural subscriber base and most rural network coverage in Madagascar. Internally, HNI struggled with the exclusivity demand and the potential compromise of their social mission. In the end, they viewed exclusivity as a necessary trade-off and were able to time-limit the exclusivity and negotiate other concessions around marketing and the addition of access to other network channels like USSD for content sharing and service marketing to the project's benefit.
- **Implementation:** HNI organizes "content committees" that meet on a regular basis which are comprised of 15+ local content-delivering organizations. Government officials are often present and help craft the content and approve it for distribution. This streamlines the project for the operator, so Airtel doesn't have to manage the local organizations or committees themselves and benefits from HNI's process management with a constant supply of relevant, fresh and localized content. HNI curates the content and crafts it to the channel, then provides the hardware and software to enable service delivery. While HNI faced unexpected initial technical and logistics challenges to get the right server shipped and installed, and also continues to spend more time than expected coordinating the organizations providing content, dealing with disagreement around content and managing key content-oriented relationships, this process is undoubtedly a successful model for content-oriented, multi-stakeholder partnerships.
- **Exit:** HNI hopes that Airtel will hopefully operate the service indefinitely. Their exit strategy is to get Airtel to feel like and act like the project is 100% their service and take full ownership of its operation in the long-term.

Note: HNI is a current GSMA mWomen Innovation Grantee for the creation of new content module focused on women for their 321 service in Madagascar. More information on the HNI grant can be found [here](#).



Snapshot 3: Souktel and Wataniya (Ooredoo)

English Language VAS Services

Implementation date: March 2014 - indefinite

Geographic Coverage: Palestine

Partners: Souktel International Inc.; Wataniya Telecom; British Council

Souktel, Wataniya Telecom, and British Council have agreed to work together on the delivery of mobile learning (mLearning) services to offer Palestinian mobile users a cost-effective channel to access resources for improving their professional English language and work-readiness skills. The mobile service offered through Wataniya Telecom mobile network in the Palestinian Territories includes the following components:

- *A weekly SMS subscription service for English vocabulary and work-readiness advice, priced at low-premium¹¹ subscription rates, and*
- *An on-demand mobile quiz service on the topics of English vocabulary and work readiness, priced at low-premium SMS rates and offering a chance to win weekly and/or monthly prizes.*

The aim of this mobile service is to provide high-quality educational content that is directly relevant to the needs and interests of a major population segment -- youth. By offering the content in the form of two differentiated sub-services (push subscription and on-demand quizzes), the users have the opportunity not only to learn but also to test their knowledge interactively.

- **Motivation and initial approach:** Souktel ran a survey of their mobile service user base in Palestine that found that youth users desired training on social media and business English. Souktel sought an operator partner to run the new services as they recognized a need for marketing and outreach they couldn't do on their own to fully scale the services. Internally, there was initial debate around the trade-off between exclusivity and the ability for their userbase to access the content service equitably, but Souktel finally decided that an operator partner would be able to deliver content to far more youth than any other partner, even on an exclusive basis. In deciding to align with an operator, they also looked at the potential to scale to bigger markets beyond Palestine through the partnership. Because Palestine is a small market, it is easier to approach an operator there, and Souktel had contacts at Wataniya through an investor, so they used those contacts to get a first meeting.

¹¹ Low-premium subscription rates indicate a premium SMS rate slightly above standard SMS charges.

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- **Operator Value Proposition:** Souktel brought both content and product development as their value proposition to the operator partnership, making a hard business case around churn reduction and premium VAS revenue. In a 'hub and spoke' partnership management model, the British Council, Souktel's content provider, provides the educational content in an SMS-ready format to Souktel. Souktel's role is to design, develop, and operate the technical platform that enables the mobile service to function successfully on the mobile operator's network, shielding the operator from the burden of having to run the service themselves and manage content provision.
- **Implementation:** n/a (launching in Q3 2014)
- **Exit:** Souktel has an option to continue beyond the contract period, using a standard VAS agreement template.



In Zanzibar, half of all pregnant women deliver from home and only one third of mothers and newborns receive timely postnatal checkups. Home deliveries can, in part, be made safer by assuring the provision of adequate care. D-tree International, in collaboration with Etisalat Group and their local mobile service provider, Zantel, is utilizing mobile technology to meet this challenge through the combination of mobile decision support, data storage, on-line banking and communications on a single device at the point of care. Safer Deliveries is a complete suite of services enabling traditional birth attendants (TBAs) and midwives to ensure safer pregnancies and deliveries. This service not only enables health workers to quickly and accurately identify obstetric emergencies, but allows them to contact pre-screened taxi drivers and also features Ezy Pesa, a mobile banking service, which allows them to pay for the emergency transportation for the pregnant woman to a health facility where she can receive appropriate care.

- **Motivation and Initial approach:** D-tree knew they needed operator support for a number of grant applications, so they made calls to operators and were fortunate – the VP for VAS at Etisalat was visiting in Dar es Salaam and they secured a short meeting with him, along with the head of Mobile Commerce for Zantel. In the geographies D-

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tree sought to work in, Zantel was the majority mobile operator and thus their involvement was crucial for D-tree's program vision. D-tree constructed their initial pitch to work from two angles: first, a publicity component, including the global visibility of the partners, the prominent funders, and interaction with the Ministry of Health, and second, a commercial component, including a mobile money and national health system integration. Zantel was interested in the D-tree value proposition and their vision of how mobile money could complement mHealth and saw an additional benefit in providing crucial health services to their consumer base.

- **Operator Value Proposition:** This partnership is more of a mixed CSR/commercial play compared with some of the other profiled partnerships. D-tree did not pitch a revenue-based value proposition for the partnership. Instead, they focused on a strong business case in terms of marketing and visibility in rural, hard to reach areas, as well as with key governmental agencies. The VP from headquarters was specifically interested in a 'bottom line' analysis, so D-tree structured their value proposition around Zantel being at the core of the national health system in the country. If you have a smartphone in each health clinic running on their network, Zantel could then envision the entire public health system running on their network. The partnership was signed within two months, though actual implementation took longer due to shipping all equipment from the Dubai-based headquarters.
- **Implementation:** One of the assumptions D-tree made was that there was clear communication within Etisalat, both between group headquarters in Dubai and the country-level headquarters in Dar es Salaam and between Dar es Salaam and the local office in Zanzibar. However, they quickly realized they were dealing with three different organizations and needed to lead communications between the three groups, particularly at the frontline level. Additionally, D-tree found aligning and coordinating with Etisalat on external messaging and events was sometimes challenging – the two partners often had varying needs and visions when it came to the public relations role of other stakeholders like the Ministry of Health (MoH). D-tree managed key stakeholder relationships by strategically positioning the partners in relation to each other – i.e., being very positive about the partnership with Etisalat when meeting with the Ministry of Health and vice-versa, praising their cooperation and dedication to the project and working hard to find other ways for Etisalat and the MoH to partner. D-tree also approached their stakeholder management with an agenda to build an ecosystem around mHealth in Zanzibar with D-tree as a key player in it. Field visits also enabled local partners to share their expertise in dealing with logistical problems and built buy-in for stakeholders at the community level.
- **Exit:** D-tree specifically designed the project so Etisalat can continue to use the mobile money agents they established for the project for other services. Additionally, the robust relationship D-tree facilitated between the MoH and Etisalat, as well as the community of practice developed around mHealth and other mHealth projects, have fostered larger interest in the sector with more donor money and projects following the D-tree model.

Key pieces of advice for social sector organizations from the interviewees:

1. Communicate clearly your willingness to be flexible in accommodating the commercial needs of the partner; acknowledge that there will be tensions and identify forums and processes to successfully work through them.
2. Identify upfront the potential commercial benefits for the operator and social benefits for external participants/service users and quantify where possible to ensure that the level of investment in terms of human and financial resources is in proportion to the respective benefits for all.
3. Leverage staff that has private sector experience to ensure smooth interactions with the operator.
4. Make it very clear you're going to work with the first operator that says yes in order to create a sense of urgency around the project.
5. Communicate concisely – in the corporate world, time is very constrained.
6. If pursuing CSR dollars, present the operator with a menu of options for how they can engage with you.
7. Don't assume that because you've gotten one person's buy-in at the C-level that everyone else at the operator understands the vision and can provide the same level of support – you'll still need to do a lot of internal championing and dot connecting within the operator to get to where you need to be for a successful launch.

About the GSMA

The GSMA represents the interests of mobile operators worldwide. Spanning more than 220 countries, the GSMA unites nearly 800 of the world's mobile operators with 250 companies in the broader mobile ecosystem, including handset and device makers, software companies, equipment providers and Internet companies, as well as organisations in industry sectors such as financial services, healthcare, media, transport and utilities. The GSMA also produces industry-leading events such as Mobile World Congress and Mobile Asia Expo.

For more information, please visit the GSMA corporate website at www.gsma.com.

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Mobile for Development brings together our mobile operator members, the wider mobile industry and the development community to drive commercial mobile services for underserved people in emerging markets. We identify opportunities for social and economic impact and stimulate the development of scalable, life-enhancing mobile services.

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About the GSMA mWomen Programme

The GSMA mWomen Programme aims to increase women's access to and use of mobile phones and life-enhancing mobile services in low- and middle-income countries. The programme objectives are to encourage the mobile industry to serve resource-poor women, increase the availability of relevant mobile services, and promote innovation. The GSMA mWomen Programme aims to increase women's access to and use of mobile phones and life-enhancing mobile services in low- and middle-income countries.

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