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Mobile-izing Health Information for Women and Girls

Berkeley, United States

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Organization type:
nonprofit/ngo/citizen sector
Project Stage:
Growth
Budget:
$1 million - $5 million
Website:
http://hesperian.org/

🟠 SHARE

- Health care
- Health education
- Maternal health
- Information & communication technology
- Reproductive health
- Technology
- Women's issues

Project Summary

Elevator Pitch

Concise Summary: Help us pitch this solution! Provide an explanation within 3-4 short sentences.

Hesperian Health Guides is a nonprofit health information and health education source that has adapted our trusted health content to create our first mobile app, Safe Pregnancy and Birth.

About Project

Problem: What problem is this project trying to address?

Every day, about 800 women die in pregnancy or childbirth from complications that are entirely preventable. The majority of the world's population lives in poverty, lacking basic sanitation and nutrition, and most pregnant women will never see a doctor. At the same time, paradoxically, the last few decades have seen dazzling progress in technology, and today two thirds of the world's population has access to a mobile phone. This begs the question of how we can better take advantage of this burgeoning technology to provide practical, culturally sensitive information to women to make pregnancy and birth safer. How can we support women and girls to take control of their own health – and take ownership of these new digital technologies?

Solution: What is the proposed solution? Please be specific!

We designed an open-source prototype mobile app, Safe Pregnancy and Birth, which serves two purposes. The first is to provide pregnant women and health workers with lifesaving health information that is medically accurate, easy to understand, and empowering. The second is to explore how the field of mobile health (mHealth) could expand from focusing on collecting data, to providing information to health workers and end-users, and take its leadership from affected individuals rather than large institutions. The app is currently available for iPhone and Android, and we are working with partners to adapt it to other platforms and languages.

Impact: How does it Work

Example: Walk us through a specific example(s) of how this solution makes a difference; include its primary activities.

Safe Pregnancy and Birth gives pregnant women and their families the information they need to be advocates for healthy pregnancy and birth. It also gives health workers, midwives, and others a reference and tool to communicate with pregnant women about their health. For example, a community health worker (let's call her Rosa) visiting a pregnant woman (Mira) could use the app to discuss how to stay healthy during pregnancy. Looking at illustrations and friendly language about eating well, they might discuss their favorite local foods. Rosa could follow step-by-step instructions to check Mira's temperature, blood pressure, the position of the baby, and other signs. If Rosa noticed high blood pressure, she would be guided to learn about pre-eclampsia and check for other signs of this dangerous disease. If she determined that Mira had severe pre-eclampsia, the app would prompt her to urgently get medical help, and provide information for how to handle seizures if they occur on the way to care. The Safe Pregnancy and Birth app, in the hands of women like Rosa and Mira, becomes a tool for health and empowerment, offering clear, practical information and valuing the knowledge both women already have. The app is also a product of Hesperian's unique field-test model: community groups around the world provide feedback and shape design and content so that the final materials will meet their needs. As we continue to test and improve the app, we will work with other mHealth groups to advocate for applying this sort of people-centered approach to developing technology for health.

Sustainability

Marketplace: Who else is addressing the problem outlined here? How does the proposed project differ from these approaches?

We have been lucky to work closely with our great technical partner UnaMesa Association on this and other projects. There are many players in the field of mHealth interested in improving maternal health. However, their experience tends to be on the technical side. Hesperian's expertise is in developing health content, and for forty years we have been writing health manuals that give ordinary people tools to take action to improve their health and their community's health, from Where There Is No Doctor to A Book for Midwives. Translating this experience to the digital terrain, our app supports individuals to make health decisions using narrative and drawings – rather than diagnostic tools and checklists.

Team

Founding Story

I first used Hesperian's book Where There Is No Doctor when I was serving in the Peace Corps in Ghana in 2003. At the time, I couldn't have imagined using the book on a cell phone -- but just a few years later, as the youngest editor on staff, I found myself in the middle of Hesperian's efforts to marry it's strong tradition of creating empowering health material in print with new digital technologies. It was clear that our first challenge would be thinking about how to break long material into smaller, more flexible pieces without losing the low-literacy, action-focused approach of our full-length books. We started the same way our partners have for years -- by physically cutting and pasting parts of different books on one central topic, and re-arranging them. With the help of technology partners, priceless volunteer hours, and a shared vision, we eventually transformed those scraps of paper from 600-page books into a 100-screen app.

About You

Organization:
Hesperian Health Guides

About You

First Name

Zena

Last Name

Herman

Twitter URL

https://twitter.com/Hesperian

Facebook URL

http://www.facebook.com/HesperianHealthGuides

About Your Organization

Organization Name

Hesperian Health Guides

Organization Country

, CA, Berkeley, Alameda County

Country where this project is creating social impact
Age of Innovator

18-34

Gender of Innovator

Female

How long has your organization been operating?

More than 5 years

Has the organization received awards or honors? Please tell us about them

Hesperian's work has been featured in the New York Times and honored with recognition from President Bill Clinton, the United Nations Association, and the Communication Initiative Network, and with restricted funding from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Hesperian

Health Guides has a four-star rating on Charity Navigator.

The information you provide here will be used to fill in any parts of your profile that have been left blank, such as interests, organization information, and website. No contact information will be made public. Please uncheck here if you do not want this to happen..

Innovation

How long have you been in operation?

Operating for less than a year

Which of the following best describes the barrier(s) your innovation addresses? Choose up to two

Access, Equity.

Social Impact

What solution(s) does your initiative address to better the lives of girls and women by leveraging technology? (select all applicable)

Access to education/training, Access to health care.

What has been the impact of your solution to date?

Since the Safe Pregnancy and Birth mobile app was released for iPhone in January 2012, and for Android four months later, it has been downloaded over 10,000 times in 126 countries. Reviews have been overwhelmingly positive. Kanato Bo writes:

"Wonderful - Fantastic and helpful! Hesperian should make more of these. I work in rural communities in Guatemala and feel much more prepared with this simple guide!"

We have already received a number of requests to adapt the content for different platforms and languages, a demonstration of need for this type of product.

What is your projected impact over the next 1-3 years?

Our projected 1-3 year impact is to support thousands of women, midwives, and health workers to have, and ensure, safer pregnancies and births, and to help shift the field of mHealth toward ownership and leadership by communities. In the next several years, mobile phones will only become more ubiquitous. Mobile phones have the potential to be incredibly powerful tools for women's health and empowerment, but only if women have a chance to define how we want them to be used – what kinds of information, in what formats, will be most useful to us.

What barriers might hinder the success of your project? How do you plan to overcome them?

An important next step for us will be to adapt the Safe Pregnancy and Birth application to lower-end phones (basic and feature phones). These lower-end phones are less expensive and more widely available, but their smaller screens will pose a conceptual challenge as we aim to continue providing sufficient context and illustration, supporting individuals to make thoughtful health decisions rather than offering a simplistic check list. Fortunately, we are lucky to work with an incredible network of health workers, midwives, community leaders, and others who we can count on to provide crucial and critical feedback at every stage of this "translation" into a new screen size so that the content remains practical and relevant.

Winning entries present a strong plan for how they will achieve and track growth. Identify your six-month milestone for growing your impact

App is adapted for one additional platform (on a lower end phone) to expand reach.

Identify three major tasks you will have to complete to reach your six-month milestone

Task 1

Identify a partner for adaptation

Task 2

Work with partner on coding and additional field-testing as necessary

Task 3

Distribute app (in all formats) widely

Now think bigger! Identify your 12-month impact milestone

App is translated and field-tested in 3 additional languages; testing has identified improvements and topics for future apps.

Identify three major tasks you will have to complete to reach your 12-month milestone

Task 1

Identify partners for translation and field testing

Task 2

Translate and field test

Task 3

Analyze results from field testing to improve app, explore new distribution channels, and identify topics for future work

Sustainability

Tell us about your partnerships

Our main technical partner in this work has been UnaMesa Association. In addition, hundreds of partners from around the world work with us to develop, update, distribute, translate, and adapt our health guides – we could not do what we do without them. Together we work to make health for all a reality.

Please elaborate on any needs or offers you have mentioned above and/or suggest categories of support that aren't specified within the list

We are looking for technical partners, and are eager to offer our expertise in empowering health materials development.

Source URL: https://www.changemakers.com/girltech/entries/mobile-izing-health-information-women-and-girls#comment-0