Supporting the CHILD DEVELOPMENT study

Get involved in this pioneering project that uses artificial intelligence to create early-warning systems that can save lives and boost the future of children and youths in Malawi.

QUOTA: ADOLESCENT GIRLS
→ Reaching the most vulnerable and marginalized adolescent girls, particularly in rural areas of Malawi, enabling computer/tablet-based personal interviews
→ Deployment of large-scale face-to-face data collections aimed at developing evidence-based policies, strategies, and programs
→ Improvement of the capacity to generate knowledge and replicate this project in other contexts

Fig. 1: Donor fund quotas in CHF

MOTIVATION

Adolescent girls are trapped in a vicious cycle in developing countries like Malawi: they are born to young mothers, typically with poor health, and face challenging conditions when growing up. More often than not, they are malnourished and experience violence against children, poor health, and low-quality education. Many of them drop out of school early, get married and already bear children during adolescence. Those babies, in turn, will experience the same unequal opportunities their mothers had faced years before, and their grandmothers even earlier.

Timely interventions based on real-time data could help break this cycle. Firstly, girls born to young mothers would have much better programs designed to fulfill their basic needs and much better health systems to protect them from diseases thanks to these interventions, allowing them to fulfill their potential. Secondly, adolescent girls could thus be shielded against health shocks of violence that would lead them into early motherhood, allowing them to remain in school longer and enjoy improved health. If and when they eventually become mothers, their children will be born into much better conditions.

In this groundbreaking project, one of the first to use artificial intelligence in the developing world to enable real-time program design and evaluation, our research team aims to increase the volume of data collection about children and adolescent girls’ health conditions. This data, processed through machine learning algorithms and feeding early-warning systems with the help of artificial intelligence, could empower community health workers to detect health problems at an early stage – especially when it comes to epidemics – and implement immediate and preventive measures to address them.

Given the strong partnership already in place with the College of Medicine of the University of Malawi, UNICEF Malawi and the Ministry of Health and Planning of Malawi, real-time data will enable the design and implementation of evidence-based programs by Malawi’s public health system, taking informed decisions, cutting corners, and drastically improving the quality and cost-effectiveness of public health services.
The data collection, which specifically examines the mental and physical health of Malawian children and adolescent girls living in poverty, will be held across 180 villages, involving over 6,000 households. The most significant potential of this project lies in the sustainable and scalable interventions that digital health technology brings. Empowering government and health workers thanks to machine learning and artificial intelligence will boost children’s and adolescent girls’ future opportunities.

DONOR FUND FOR ADOLESCENT GIRLS

The Child Development Study aims to accompany the development of an entire generation of children and youth in Malawi. The project is divided into six phases of three years each. 3.2 Mio CHF is budgeted for the initial phase; UNICEF Switzerland and Liechtenstein and UNICEF Malawi have already committed to 1.7 Mio CHF. We have four donor quotas for the open budgetary needs, and your organization could support one or more of them. These quotas will be branded after your institution (if desired) and will also grant you a seat on the project’s Advisory Board. Learn more: www.ccwd.uzh.ch/cds