“Economic development is at the core of overall development. Improving the health of women and children contributes extensively to economic development which in turn contributes to better conditions for women and children. Economic development is also dependent on both the public and private sectors. The private sector can make large contributions to countries’ development in innovation, risk-taking and capital investment. It can increase access to goods and services and create new tools for improving the health of women and children at the national level.”

– Jens Stoltenberg, Prime Minister of Norway

“The [Global Strategy for Women’s and Children’s Health] emphasizes partnership, innovation and accountability. Already, it has demonstrated that building bridges among the public, private and non-profit sectors can help tear down barriers and equitable service delivery... Clearly, innovating to address the urgent health needs of the poor can be the aim of enterprises that seek profit, social impact or both.”

– Ban Ki-moon, United Nations Secretary-General
The Innovation Working Group (IWG) was created in 2010 to harness the power of innovations to accelerate progress towards achieving the health MDGs, in support of the Global Strategy for Women’s and Children’s Health and the Every Woman Every Child effort.

Innovation builds upon the existing market-based systems to advance creative and sustainable solutions through multisectoral approaches, drawing from lessons learned in public and private partnerships and collaborations to diffuse new market innovations and scale-up sustainable solutions to improve women’s and children’s health.

Four IWG taskforces (see Work Streams) have catalysed the development of innovations in their respective fields aimed at improving maternal and child health.

The IWG is a catalytic partnership which includes close to 70 leaders from 5 major Health Foundations, 6 Academic Institutions, 10 NGOs, 11 Government Organizations, 12 UN Organizations and 24 Private Sector Businesses. These partners work together to find new, effective and efficient ways to deliver enabling environments and solutions that can be brought to scale based on successful examples and pilots for a lasting impact in women’s and children’s health.

The Strategy
To fulfill the IWG’s mission and achieve its long term outcomes, the group seeks to foster cooperation among organizations to develop and scale-up service and educational initiatives in countries, ensure links to external organizations, political processes and innovation pipelines, advocate for political and practical interests in the continued need for cost-effective investment in women’s and children’s health, as well as establish thematic task forces and ensure their functionality.

Vision
Harnessing cost-effective innovations will improve the health of women and children in the poorest settings and connect them to the global economy; and will help achieve the health Millennium Development Goals.

Mission
In support of the Global Strategy for Women’s and Children’s Health, the IWG shall be the global hub for innovation in the UNSG’s Every Woman Every Child initiative. The IWG will catalyse the initiation and enable the scaling of innovations across technological, social, financial, policy and business domains.

Long Term Outcomes
The IWG’s work sets out to achieve the outcomes of the Global Strategy for women’s and children’s health to provide:

- Access to services and essential medicines, medical devices and other life-saving commodities
- Improved capacity, efficiency and impact of services
- Integrated packages of essential, quality interventions and services
- Enhanced coordination in research and innovation

Tapping Innovation
We know that progress is possible. Some of the poorest countries are now making significant reductions in maternal and neonatal mortality. Country-led innovations can achieve further reductions, enabling health services to produce better outcomes without added cost. These range from financial incentives to promote performance and results to innovative use of mobile phones and other communication tools.

Mobile phones are an example of how innovation creates unprecedented potential for scale-up. There are more than 5 billion mobile phones in the world and two-thirds of mobile users live in the developing world. Countries are now exploring the use of mobile phones for health purposes, such as referring people to their nearest healthcare facility, and advancing health literacy by assisting the education of families and service providers. Innovations can also come from using existing devices and mechanisms, or finding new ways to deliver interventions more effectively. An example is the use of simple, life-saving solutions such as checklists.

Work Streams

Sustainable Business Models
Co-chairs: Merck, Norad
Landscaping the field of sustainable business models which can result in improved maternal and child health and identifying ways to scale-up these new models to create shared value and collective impact by working in collaboration with NGOs, governments and businesses and seeking to mobilize community stakeholders.

Checklist Task Force
Co-chairs: Johnson & Johnson, Harvard School of Public Health
Developing a checklist program to measurably improve the health of women and newborns in low and middle income countries by supporting the delivery of essential health practices at crucial moments in care with user-friendly, evidence-based tools that identify essential health practices and provide key reminders to take action at the right place and time.

Medical Devices
Co-chairs: GE Health Care, PATH
Focusing on addressing barriers to scaling up medical devices for wider distribution by using case studies to introduce new and innovative practices and technologies.

Financial Innovation
A new task force will be launched in 2012 to implement the recommendations of the Financial Innovation Landscape Report. This task force will develop our thinking on financial innovation to attract sustainable funding to support Every Woman Every Child’s objectives by creating structures to channel more capital, philanthropic and investment, to improve maternal and child health outcomes.

mHealth
The IWG has focused considerably on the potential impact of innovations in mobile technology, initiated a catalytic funding mechanism for scaling up mHealth programs and cooperates closely with the mHealth Alliance on these initiatives.