

News story: UK and US launch innovation fund for ideas to save millions of lives in conflict zones

International Development Secretary Penny Mordaunt and USAID Administrator Mark Green

The UK and US have joined forces to find the next technological breakthrough to save and transform millions of lives in the world's most dangerous conflict zones.

International Development Secretary Penny Mordaunt and USAID Administrator Mark Green announced the new Humanitarian Grand Challenge at an event held at the Overseas Development Institute today (Monday 19 February).

The Challenge fund will provide grants to help get innovative technology projects off the ground, and will provide further support to expand projects that prove the most successful.

This new fund is the latest of the Grand Challenges, which are a tried and tested way of leveraging the power of businesses, and it is expected to attract tens of millions of pounds in private sector funding.

It aims to drive innovation in the aid sector, with a call for projects to focus on developing new ways to deliver water, sanitation, energy, health assistance and life-saving information in hard to reach conflict zones.

In a departure from traditional forms of aid, this will see new low-cost technology being produced for the most remote places and extreme conditions.

The 'Saving Lives at Birth' Grand Challenge – which was backed by DFID, USAID and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation – attracted more than £60million in private sector investment and has already helped save 10,000 lives.

Successful projects backed by previous Grand Challenges have produced an electronic nose to smell tuberculosis from patients' breath, a maternal and child health app for people in Burma to give birth safely and give their children the best start in life, and low-cost microchips to diagnose diarrhoeal diseases.

International Development Secretary Penny Mordaunt said:

If we are to deliver the Sustainable Development Goals and help all those who need humanitarian support then we need to do things differently, and we need to lever all hands to that cause.

Our new Humanitarian Grand Challenge will create cutting-edge technology and leverage the power of the private sector to help respond to conflicts which will save lives, improve conditions for the most vulnerable and make humanitarian responses by the UK and US more effective.

The Challenge fund will give grants of up to £150,000 for innovative technology projects to get started and a further £600,000 so that successful projects can grow even bigger.

The £11million fund will be administered by Grand Challenges Canada and is equally funded by DFID and USAID, with each organisation providing £5.5million.

The event followed a strategic dialogue between Ms Mordaunt and Mr Green where they discussed how to work together to tackle sexual exploitation and abuse in the global aid sector and the action the UK has already taken; how best to boost economic development and help the poorest countries stand on their own two feet, and how to boost security at home and abroad.