



Fund for Innovation
and Transformation

Fonds pour l'innovation
et la transformation

For Immediate release May 1, 2023

Canadian Innovators & Local Partners Tackle Global Health Inequities Close to Home

Social Entrepreneurs in the Spotlight During Canadian Innovation Week May 15-19

CANADA— Two Canadian innovators, motivated by personal stories and experience, are working closely with organizations in Somalia to design solutions for pressing health challenges. Their projects are being funded through the Fund for Innovation and Transformation (FIT), a national program that supports small and medium-sized Canadian organizations testing innovative solutions that advance gender equality in the Global South.

Faduma Gure - Inventor of the Solar-Powered Breast Pump

Faduma Gure, founder of LISS Technologies, was inspired to address breastfeeding challenges for mothers with limited access to breastfeeding support after giving birth to her first child. Gure became a mother while training to be a midwife in Ontario and, in order to exclusively breastfeed for the first six months, used a breast pump while away from her infant. During this time, she reflected on her experience conducting a research study looking at access to reproductive health services in Somalia, where many mothers spoke about the challenges they faced being able to breastfeed and provide breast milk to their babies. Gure applied her experience as a maternal and newborn health researcher, midwifery student, and breastfeeding mother to invent a low-cost, solar-powered breast pump for mothers living in settings like Somalia. A published author of Somali origins, Faduma has a robust understanding of the context.

“When it comes to breastfeeding, women in Somalia, like in many parts of the world, face multiple barriers,” said Gure. “They deal with competing priorities like work, household responsibilities, or schooling and may not be able to breastfeed consistently. This means that they must rely on formula, which can be harmful for some babies and can constitute a significant amount of some families’ household income.”

Exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months of life is recommended by the World Health Organization, has several scientifically proven health benefits for mothers and their babies, leads to major cost savings for families, and can even help women plan their families by delaying fertility. In Somalia, most women are aware of the benefits of breastfeeding but due to multiple barriers, only 34% of women do it exclusively in the first six months.

Supported by FIT, LISS Technologies tested an innovative solution that provides easy-to-use, low-cost, solar-powered breast pumps to mothers in Somalia and tested their experiences breastfeeding against those of a control group. Preliminary findings from this testing show that mothers with access to a breast pump had a 14% reduction in exclusive breastfeeding rates overall over the course of the testing period, whereas a 37% reduction rate was observed in the control group. Despite the novelty of this innovation, mothers, like Hawa, relayed the many benefits they experienced as a result of using the breast pump: “I remember the first day I used it I thought “will it be painful?” But it was actually very simple. Without any effort from you, it will express your milk, and you will actually get a lot of milk from it. I have gotten a lot of benefits from it. I am able to save money because I don’t need to buy extra milk.”

“Ensuring all babies have access to breast milk and that all mothers have the support they need to breastfeed is vital. We are working with our local partners to ensure that existing breast milk expression and storage solutions are as accessible as possible, so that we can provide the support where it is needed.”

Faduma Gure, Founder
LISS Technologies



Fund for Innovation
and Transformation

Fonds pour l'innovation
et la transformation

Khalid Hashi – Medical Record Keeping Can Save Lives

When Khalid Hashi visited his sick grandmother in a Somali hospital in 2017, he noticed a significant gap in the continuity of care due to the lack of proper information management and medical record keeping. There was little to no record of his grandmother's medical history, and very little communication between the medical professionals attending to her.

"It was an incredibly frustrating experience - something that families, especially families under stress, should never have to go through," said Hashi. "The onus falls on patients and their loved ones to navigate a very complex health system. For many, it's impossible."

Hashi's experience inspired the creation of OGOW Health, an award-winning tech start-up that is dedicated to using data and technology to improve health outcomes. The innovative approach has since been adopted by Governments and Non-Governmental Organizations (World Vision and Save the Children) to strengthen maternal, newborn and child health interventions.

Supported by FIT, OGOW Health worked with local partners to test a contextualized solution that empowers mothers by increasing their knowledge, awareness, and confidence in making decisions about their child's and their own health. This solution also provides reliable and timely data to healthcare providers, administrators, and government offices for routine decision-making. The test was aimed at addressing the country's devastating child mortality rate – currently one in six Somali children die before they reach the age of five.

A participating mother reported that the system has made a major impact on her family: "Before the OGOW application, I did not know my children's vaccination schedules and why they needed to get vaccinated," said Zahra. "Now, I receive SMS reminders regarding my children's vaccination appointments, which is helpful because now I know the importance of protecting my children against polio and measles, and I can plan ahead and make sure we get to the clinic as needed."

During the pilot test, a total of 2059 mothers/caregivers and 1821 children under one year were on-boarded to the SMS program. For each child, an individual immunization calendar was created based on their date of birth. At endline, patients demonstrated a 99.1% adherence rate to SMS appointment reminders and were on track with their child's immunizations.

"This impact would not have been possible without the incredible partners, organizations, advisors and experts that supported the work. Thanks to FIT, International Development and Relief Foundation (IDRF), Response Innovation Lab (RIL), Ministry of Health and implementing partners World Vision Somalia and Save the Children Somalia, and many others we have now improved access, tracking and monitoring of public health programs across 4 regions and 10 districts in Somalia."

Khalid Hashi, Founder, OGOW Health

Powered by The Rideau Hall Foundation, Canadian Innovation Week is a 5-day celebration recognizing and supporting ingenuity across all sectors.

For more information contact:

Christina MacIsaac, Director of Innovation
Fund for Innovation and Transformation
204-987-7402

Details and stories about FIT-funded SMO and local partners collaborating in the Global South are available on [FIT's website](#).



Fund for Innovation
and Transformation
Fonds pour l'innovation
et la transformation



Fund for Innovation
and Transformation
Fonds pour l'innovation
et la transformation

The Fund for Innovation and Transformation (FIT) is a 5-year, \$16.5 M initiative of the Inter-Council Network of Provincial and Regional Councils, funded by Global Affairs Canada and administered by the Manitoba Council for International Cooperation (MCIC). FIT is designed to support Canadian small and medium-sized organizations (SMOs) testing innovative solutions that advance gender equality in the Global South. The program is open to civil society organizations, social enterprises, post-secondary institutions and the private sector.



The **Inter-Council Network** of Provincial and Regional Councils for International Cooperation is a coalition of the eight Provincial and Regional Councils for International Cooperation. The independent Councils are committed to global sustainable development, social justice and social change. They are rooted in communities across Canada and represent over 350 diverse civil society organizations from across Canada. Council membership varies from locally based cultural community civil society organizations to highly recognizable international organizations.



The **Manitoba Council for International Cooperation (MCIC)** is a coalition of Manitoba-based organizations involved in international development. Its mission is to support, connect and amplify the work of its members and partners, while directly engaging and collaborating with Manitobans for global sustainability. MCIC encourages dialogue on global issues and helps empower Manitobans to become active global citizens — individuals who understand that their actions here make a difference around the world. MCIC is also responsible for distributing Government of Manitoba and Government of Canada funds designated for international development and humanitarian projects.



Global Affairs Canada manages Canada's diplomatic relations, provides consular services to Canadians, promotes the country's international trade, and leads Canada's international development and humanitarian assistance. FIT is a program undertaken with the financial

