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PRESS RELEASE

MRDC Supports 'Healthy Mothers, Healthy Babies' Program

The Mineral Resources Development Company (MRDC) is joining an increasing number of organisations and individuals supporting vital medical research aimed at reducing the high rate of maternal and infant deaths in the country.

The Company last week donated one hundred thousand Kina (K100, 000) to Burnet Institute in support of its Healthy Mothers Healthy Babies Program.

The Institute is currently running the first phase of a five year program in Kokopo, East New Britain led by Professor James Beeson and a team of medical and public health researchers in PNG and Australia.

As part of its five integrated studies, Professor Beeson and his team are currently recruiting up to 700 women and following the progress of their pregnancy through to delivery and for 12 months after delivery to identify key causes of death and disability. Once identified, a series of health interventions will be trialled to determine the most effective way of reducing the numbers of women and children dying.

MRDC's Managing Director Augustine Mano said *the company was happy to support the program and the important work of Burnet Institute because it recognises that PNG has some of the worst statistics of maternal and infant mortality in the world.*

"These infants are the future of this country and in order to have a healthy and happy future, we must do all we can to help make sure they and their mothers who give life to them survive the most crucial and delicate months of their lives," Mr Mano said.

Some of PNG's staggering high statistics show a woman in PNG is 80 times more likely to die in childbirth than a woman in Australia, more than 5000 babies will die in the first month of life and a further 7000 won't reach their fifth birthday.

Burnet Institute Director and CEO, Professor Brendan Crabb AC in thanking MRDC for the support said the *Healthy Mothers, Healthy Babies is a critically important research program designed to transform the health of women and children in Papua New Guinea.*

"I commend the Mineral Resource Development Company for recognizing the impact Healthy Mothers, Healthy Babies will make, first in East New Britain and soon after throughout PNG, and for showing exceptional leadership in supporting the project", said Professor Crabb.

He added that through this ambitious program, MRDC joins with the Burnet Institute, provincial and national government agencies and other research and health partners

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MINERAL
RESOURCES
DEVELOPMENT
COMPANY LIMITED

Level 12
Pacific Place
Cnr Musgrave St
& Champion Pde

PO Box 1076
Port Moresby
National Capital District

Papua New Guinea

T (675) 320 0100
F (675) 320 0299

mrdc.com.pg



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in PNG to identify ways to improve mortality and poor health in pregnant women and their babies.

MRDC's contribution along with that of others will support the program by helping to provide equipment for the fit out of a new laboratory, research staff to carry out tests, and help purchase new four wheel drive vehicles to ensure all women in the region are reached for the success of the program.

This donation is yet another example of the company's commitment towards supporting health programs and initiatives that contribute positively towards the health and well being of every Papua New Guinean.

**APPROVED FOR RELEASE BY
AUGUSTINE MANO
Mineral Resources Development Company
MANAGING DIRECTOR**

**For more information contact Iona Reto, MRDC Public Relations Desk;
Phone 3200100; Mobile; 73842155/76139651 or email isreto@mrdc.com.pg**

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