AllerGen NCE receives $36.5 million for Allergy, Genes and Environment Research to 2019

On March 23, 2012, the Honourable Gary Goodyear, Minister of State for Science and Technology, announced that the Allergy, Genes and Environment Network – or AllerGen – will receive $36.5 million over seven years to continue its work. Minister Goodyear noted that “this investment will support the application and development of world-class excellence in the knowledge and people necessary to provide relief to the millions of Canadians suffering from the complications of allergic diseases.”

In his remarks, Dr. Denburg noted that “over the next seven years, AllerGen aims to focus on research with commercialization and knowledge mobilization potential. AllerGen’s research and development efforts will also create new “high value” jobs, prepare the next generation of researchers, entrepreneurs and experts to fill them, and leave international legacies of socio-economic benefits and improved quality of life for individuals and their families living with allergies, asthma and anaphylaxis.”

Patrick Deane, McMaster’s President and Vice-Chancellor, remarked it’s an honour to be the host institution of AllerGen — a network that shares McMaster’s philosophy on research. "We’re aligned in our thinking and approach to research through innovation and multidisciplinary collaborations," he said. "The blend of talent and expertise within AllerGen is second to none and its collective work will improve the health and well-being of many Canadians."

On behalf of entire Network, AllerGen thanks the Minister, McMaster University, NCE representatives and the many partners, investigators and friends of the Network, who participated in this celebratory event.
Online Learning Tool Wins Two Awards from the Canadian Society for Training and Development

Last November, the Canadian Society for Training and Development (CSTD) recognized AllerGen and its collaboration with Anaphylaxis Canada, the Canadian Society of Allergy and Clinical Immunology (CSACI), and Leap Learning Technologies (a young Canadian start-up company based in Hamilton, ON) with two awards for the educational online program: How to C.A.R.E. for Students at Risk of Anaphylaxis: What Educators Need to Know (C.A.R.E.)

The on-line training course, which aims to increase anaphylaxis education among school personnel, was recognized with two prestigious awards: “Gold” for Training Excellence in E-Learning as well as “Winner” of Best Practices in Workplace Learning at the CSTD’s annual awards ceremony.

Congratulations to AllerGen Investigator, Dr. Anthony Levinson, MD, FRCP, Associate Professor and Director of e-Learning Innovation for the Michael G. DeGroote School of Medicine, McMaster University and partner organizations Anaphylaxis Canada, led by Laurie Harada, Executive Director and CASCI, led by President Dr. Stu Carr, for their work in developing and disseminating this outstanding knowledge mobilization tool.

“We were fortunate to work with so many committed stakeholders including the Government of Alberta, Canadian allergists and educators, and experts in the fields of e-learning and research to develop a state-of-the-art product. We believe that this course will be of value to many different user groups,” said Laurie Harada, Executive Director of Anaphylaxis Canada.

NCE Funding Renewal Process

Over the last year, AllerGen Board of Directors, Research Management Committee (RMC), Advisory Committees, partner organizations, and Administrative Centre Staff, prepared AllerGen’s NCE Phase II renewal application, which was submitted August 10, 2011. The rigorous review process included developing a detailed Progress Report documenting the first seven years of achievements and impacts, a Strategic Plan outlining the next seven years of focus and a compendium of Letters of Support from 110 partner and stakeholder organizations. In advance of the written documents, the Network held numerous partner consultation meetings across the country, which informed the Strategic Plan and aligned AllerGen’s future research focus with partners’ strategic priorities and research needs.

On September 20, 2011, AllerGen representatives assembled to present highlights of the full application before an NCE International Expert Panel. The Expert Panel’s role was to provide a report on the strengths and weaknesses both of the Network and the application to the NCE Standing Selection Committee, which in turn provided recommendations to the NCE Steering Committee for final decision.

Major areas of strength for the Network are its research and knowledge mobilization partnerships. AllerGen secured partner cash and in-kind contributions over the next seven years in the amount of $45.3 million, which leverages the NCE funding awarded at a rate of 1:1.24. In the current economy, this level of commitment from so many organizations is a testament to AllerGen’s efforts to build value-added collaborations across sectors to fight the allergy and asthma epidemics.

CHILD Study Achieves Major Milestone

To date 3,560 pregnant mothers have been recruited, representing over 10,000 participants (babies-to-be, mothers and fathers) in the Canadian Healthy Infant Longitudinal (CHILD) Study birth cohort. The target of 5,000 subjects should be achieved by 2013.

Home visits at three months of age have been completed in well over 2,000 families, with collection of baby’s urine, stool, and nasal swabs, dust from the bedroom and baby’s bed, and breast milk samples, along with extensive questionnaire data. Over 1,000 study participants have reached the one year visit when skin allergy tests are performed and a full health review is undertaken.
Strategic Plan 2012-2019 Highlights

During the first phase of NCE funding, AllerGen moved from five research themes to three integrated programmes: Gene-Environment Interactions; Diagnostics and Therapeutics; and Public Health, Ethics, Policy and Society. These programmes have provided the conceptual framework for Network research to March 31, 2012. The Strategic Plan for Phase II of NCE funding required further integration of these research programmes. Moving forward, AllerGen will focus its research investments on three Legacy Projects that integrate with three Enabling Platforms.

Legacy Projects:
The Canadian Healthy Infant Longitudinal Development (CHILD) Study led by Dr. Malcolm Sears, Professor, Department of Medicine, McMaster University, will generate important new data on maternal and infant health in Canada and will serve as a national resource for multiple research endeavours. The CHILD Study will enable and inform many scientific constituencies and stakeholders within and outside of AllerGen, in Canada and globally, for decades to come.

The Clinical Investigator Collaborative (CIC) is led by Dr. Paul O’Byrne, Professor and Chair, Department of Medicine, McMaster University, and will continue clinical trials in Canada as well as expand to add the capacity to undertake studies of Severe Asthma and Allergic Rhinitis. With new international sites launching in Sweden, the Netherlands and the UK, the CIC is a global resource for the development of novel diagnostics and therapeutics in allergy and asthma in Canada as well as internationally.

The Canadian Food Allergy Strategic Team (CanFAST) is a highly-innovative, cross-network approach to food allergy and anaphylaxis that incorporates biomedical, clinical, population and psychosocial information in order to translate understandings about food allergy into disease management and public health measures. This group’s leaders are Dr. Jean Marshall, Professor and Head, Microbiology and Immunology, Dalhousie University, Dr. Ann Clarke, Professor, Department of Medicine, McGill University and Dr. Susan Elliott, Professor and Dean, Faculty of Applied Health Sciences, University of Waterloo. CanFAST will position Canada to develop a national food allergy strategy with key partners and stakeholder groups.

Enabling Platforms:
Gene-Environment Interactions will involve well-established teams of AllerGen investigators working nationally and globally. These teams will apply genetic and environmental research for innovations and gather new knowledge on nature and nurture with respect to epigenetics, maternal-child interactions, lifestyle and stress. This group is led by Dr. Andrew Sandford, Associate Professor, Department of Medicine, University of British Columbia and Dr. Jeffrey Brook, Senior Scientist, Air Quality Research Branch for Environment Canada. Its twin goals are discovering novel therapies and diagnostics as well as implementing novel public health interventions and policies across AllerGen’s Legacy Projects.

Biomarkers and Bioinformatics is led by Dr. Dean Befus, Professor, Department of Medicine, University of Alberta and by Dr. Kelly McNagny, Professor, Department of Medical Genetics, University of British Columbia. It will bring together successful members of AllerGen’s diagnostics and biomarkers research, new partners with various ‘omics’ capabilities, biological sampling standard operating protocols (SOPs) and animal models to create an integrated, world-leading systems-biology and bioinformatics approach to developing and commercializing products across AllerGen’s Legacy Projects.

Patients, Policy and Public Health will focus on benefits for patients, policy and public health across AllerGen’s Legacy Projects. This team, led by Dr. Ann Clarke, Professor, Department of Medicine, McGill University and Dr. Susan Elliott, Professor and Dean, Faculty of Applied Health Sciences, University of Waterloo, integrates expertise in the social sciences, including psychology, sociology, medical geography, ethics, law and health economics to inform evidence-based public health policy.

AllerGen Trainee Wins Research Assistantship and Admission to PhD Program in Sweden

AllerGen trainee, Huan Shu, supervised by Network Investigator Dr. Tim Takaro, Associate Professor, Faculty of Health Sciences, Simon Fraser University, won a lucrative competition for a Research Assistantship and admission to the PhD program at Karlstad University in Sweden. Ms Shu has finished her Masters of Science degree and will be working with prolific phthalate investigator Dr. Carl Bornheg to gain valuable experience and knowledge. Even though she will be missed at Simon Fraser University, this is a unique opportunity to not only work with Dr. Bornheg and gain international expertise but also to further enhance connections between Sweden, AllerGen and The CHILD Study.
AllerGen Investigator receives an Alberta Innovates KT Grant

In November 2011, AllerGen Investigator, Dr. Miriam Stewart, Professor, Faculty of Nursing, School of Public Health, University of Alberta, was awarded the Alberta Innovates Health Solutions Knowledge Transfer and Innovation Research Grant in the amount of $24,810 for her project, Sustainable Online Support for Children and Adolescents Affected by Asthma and Allergies.

This project leverages an AllerGen Knowledge Translation Strategic Initiative grant and two previous AllerGen-funded studies that assessed support and education needs, and intervention preferences of children, adolescents and their parents living with asthma and allergies. The Alberta Innovates grant supplements current AllerGen funding and leverages in-kind support from three partners, The Asthma Society of Canada, Anaphylaxis Canada, and the Alberta Asthma Centre. This project ensures excellent mobilization of insights arising from the pilot online support initiatives.

During the first phase of the project, the research team will engage stakeholders in interpreting, applying and adapting the existing evidence to deliver online support and education to children and adolescents with asthma and allergies across Canada. The team will consult with various stakeholders and users across sectors to determine how online support interventions can be adapted and integrated into sustainable programs followed by the development of a Knowledge Translation Tool Kit based on the pilot program evidence. The previous online program content, based on AllerGen-funded studies, will be adapted to fit national partner contexts and preferences.

Phase two will develop an additional pilot support program for groups of up to 30 children that will be delivered on the Asthma Society of Canada and Anaphylaxis Canada websites. In Phase three, plans are in place for a National Symposium of knowledge users conducted by video conference, involving policy makers, policy influencers, program planners, and other decision makers from relevant organizations. This group will propose innovative accessible online programs and services. Participants will also discuss implications for adapting the online support programs for vulnerable children and adolescents in low income, Aboriginal and immigrant/refugee families.

Clean Air Champions Launch New Educational Video

The Clean Air Champions Air Aware team launched a new video that features the Air Aware message in one entertaining, fast-paced package. Air quality, active living and lung health, specifically asthma and allergy, are all interconnected and this video explains how and why. The video also provides information about what we can do to improve the quality of the air and our health.

Air Aware Video English  Air Aware Video French

Support Local Communities - 5 km Take Action Against Reactions Walk

Join the Allergy/Asthma Information Association (AAIA) for various community walks across Canada to increase awareness about allergic reactions, raise critical funds for research, share stories and learn from other families and peers about anaphylaxis management.

Take action this May in support of the Allergy/Asthma Information Association and see how one small step can lead to big changes.

To register, donate or volunteer visit www.aaia.ca

ONTARIO
Brooklin: Saturday, May 12
Mississauga: Sunday, May 27
Ottawa: Saturday, May 5
Windsor: Saturday, May 26

MANITOBA
Winnipeg: Saturday, May 12

BRITISH COLUMBIA
Vancouver: TBA
International AllerGen Consortium Convenes in Sweden for Gene-Environment Interactions Workshop

Over the last several years, AllerGen and its investigators and trainees have been benefiting from a strong partnership with the Karolinska Institute in Sweden. On August 29th-30th, 2011, the National Institute of Environmental Medicine at the Karolinska Institute hosted a two-day workshop for collaborators within the International AllerGen Consortium.

This workshop was focused on “Gene-Environment (GxE) Interactions using Genome-Wide Data” and was aligned with the AllerGen-funded Traffic pollution, asthma and genetics (TAG) project, which is led by AllerGen Investigators Drs Michael Brauer and Christopher Carlsten from the University of British Columbia. This event also facilitated networking and strengthened relationships within the AllerGen consortium and between researchers and trainees engaged in gene-environment interactions research and the TAG project.

The two-day event focused on relevant GxE interactions including statistical methods to assess interaction effects, genes, smoking and lung function, applications of GxE interactions in cardiovascular diseases and GxE analysis using an additive model. Following a day of presentations, an internal meeting of selected international participants in the AllerGen-Karolinska–led research collaboration was held. In attendance were students and faculty from the Karolinska Institute, AllerGen investigators, trainees and Administrative Centre staff as well as international collaborators in the consortium from Helmholtz-München and University of Düsseldorf in Germany, and the University of Groningen and Utrecht University in the Netherlands.

Workshop objectives included dissemination of knowledge, sharing of applications and methodologies amongst research experts in fields related to genetics, allergic and immune-related diseases and epidemiology. The workshop also provided an opportunity for members of the International AllerGen Consortium to update others on research progress, current happenings, facilitate synchronization of cohort data, and identify and explore future research needs, goals and opportunities relevant to the development of AllerGen’s strategic plan to 2019.

The Asthma Society of Canada Names Rob Oliphant President and CEO

The Board of The Asthma Society of Canada recently named Dr. Rob Oliphant as successor to President & CEO Christine Hampson, PhD.

Dr. Oliphant was born and raised in Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, and graduated from the University of Toronto with a Bachelor of Commerce. He holds a Masters of Divinity from the Vancouver School of Theology and interned in the outports of Newfoundland, at the World Council of Churches in Geneva, in a downtown Montreal social service agency, and was Chaplain at Simon Fraser University.

As a Minister in the United Church of Canada, Dr. Oliphant served first in rural western Quebec, then at Timothy Eaton Memorial United Church in Toronto with responsibility for adult education and outreach. While there, he was approached by the then Premier of Ontario, David Peterson, to work as a Senior Advisor in his office and subsequently served as Chief of Staff to two different Ontario Cabinet Ministers.

He then returned to active ministry and earned his Doctor of Ministry degree from the Chicago Theological Seminary at the University of Chicago in 2008.

Dr. Oliphant served as a Member of Parliament for Don Valley West from 2008 to 2011. His responsibilities included being the Official Opposition Critic for Veterans Affairs and for Multiculturalism, as well as sitting on a variety of House of Commons Standing Committees. Throughout his career he has had extensive volunteer involvement in numerous community and national organizations.

Please Join us in welcoming Dr. Oliphant to the AllerGen network!
Innovation from cell to society – AllerGen’s Annual Research Conference

AllerGen’s Seventh Annual innovation from cell to society research conference took place in Toronto, Ontario from February 5 to 7, 2012 at the Fairmont Royal York Hotel.

This conference provided an exclusive opportunity for AllerGen investigators, collaborators, trainees and new professionals to network with one another and share research outcomes with partners and stakeholders, including policy-makers, patient advocacy groups, healthcare providers and representatives from industry, government, and clinical, academic and not-for-profit sectors.

The theme was birth cohort research with special focus placed upon AllerGen’s CHILD Study. The opening keynote session featured Dr. John Henderson from the University of Bristol speaking about his experience with the Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children (ALSPAC), including key findings and lessons learned from a networked, birth cohort approach to research on childhood asthma and allergies in the United Kingdom. Dr. Malcolm Sears followed offering the Canadian perspective on birth cohort research and various aspects of the CHILD Study.

Network Investigators presented their research on:
• Viral infections and lung function, dietary assessments, immunology, common pathways and multiple exposure effect as part of the CHILD Study
• Value added partnerships with Health Canada and Environment Canada
• Clinical Trials
• Microbiome research in Canada
• Ethical challenges with cohort studies
• Immune markers and therapeutics
• Asthma education, and
• Research benefiting patients.

An interactive lunchtime session was delivered by one of AllerGen’s stakeholder partners, Clean Air Champions, who showcased their Air Aware program. This interactive presentation highlighted the challenges and opportunities of raising awareness among coaches, athletes, youth, parents and administrators on the important connections between asthma, allergy, air pollution and active lifestyles.

For the first time, the AllerGen conference was an Accredited Group Learning Activity as defined by the Maintenance of Certification Program of the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada. Continuing Medical Education (CME) accreditation was secured to make this event even more attractive to family doctors and clinician specialists.

Roger Martin, Chairman, Institute for Competitiveness and Prosperity and Dean of the Rotman School of Management at the University of Toronto, closed the conference by sharing his vision for innovation in Canada - Opportunities and Challenges 2012 and Beyond. He discussed the difference between invention and innovation, identifying what Canadian researchers and educators can do to promote innovation and the role of modern education in fostering an innovation-oriented culture. He recommended having an open mind that allows one to solve problems more creatively, be willing to collaborate with others in order to achieve bigger and better outcomes and to experiment and co-create with users throughout the development process.

AllerGen Trainees Take Centre Stage at Conference

Fifty-four trainees and new professionals representing 14 universities and affiliated institutions participated in AllerGen’s annual Research Poster Competition. In total, $2,800 in cash prizes was awarded to top poster winners. Members of AllerGen’s Students and New Professionals Network (ASNPN) also participated in a HQP dinner meeting and networking reception.
Conference Sponsors
AllerGen NCE extends sincere thanks to its 2012 Conference sponsors and supporters. Their contributions were invaluable and without their support AllerGen’s conference would not have been possible.

Sponsorships were received from the following organizations:

**Gold Sponsors**
- GlaxoSmithKline
- Merck Canada
- Pfizer Canada

**Silver Sponsors**
- McMaster University
- Novartis Pharmaceutical Canada

**Bronze Sponsors**
- Boehringer-Ingelheim
- Maple Leaf Foods
- Michael Smith Foundation for Health Research
- Nycomed: a Takeda Company
- Roche Canada
- Sun Butter – Red River Commodities

In-kind contributions were made by the following organizations:
- Allergic Living Magazine
- Anaphylaxis Canada
- Asthma Society of Canada
- Canadian Allergy Asthma and Immunology Foundation
- Canadian Lung Association
- Canadian Network for Respiratory Health
- Canadian Society of Allergy and Clinical Immunology
- Canadian Thoracic Society
- Clean Air Champions
- National Asthma Patient Alliance
- The Sandbox Project
- UBC James Hogg Research Centre

The Sandbox Project Announces First President and CEO and Holds Second Annual Conference
The Sandbox Project is one of AllerGen’s new stakeholder partner organizations and last November, AllerGen Board of Directors member Christine Hampson, PhD, became its first President and CEO. The Sandbox Project was established to improve Canadian child and youth health outcomes related to the four areas that affect young people most significantly: injury prevention, mental health, growing healthy bodies and the environment. The Sandbox Project is home to a Working Group comprised of subject matter experts, health care professionals, industry leaders, parents, government policy makers, non-governmental organizations and academics, focused on achieving national results in each of these four areas. Their vision is to help make Canada the healthiest place on earth for children and youth to grow up. The Sandbox Project sets out to achieve this vision by making measurable progress against international health indicators over the next five years.

On January 19, 2012, The Sandbox Project held its second Annual Conference in Toronto, ON titled Towards a Plan of Action in Priority Areas. AllerGen Investigator, Dr. Susan Elliott, University of Waterloo, is one of the Environment Co-Chairs for this organization. AllerGen Administrative Centre staff in attendance were Dr. Diana Royce, Managing Director and COO, as well as José Mangles, Manager of Research and Partnerships. Over 225 academics, industry leaders, health organization representatives and interested individuals attended this event. The morning featured breakout sessions to develop The Sandbox Project’s White Paper that will outline the goals and operational priorities of the organization. Breakout sessions were held to debate operational priorities for The Sandbox Project’s four strategic foci - the Environment, Building Healthy Bodies, Injury Prevention and Mental Health. An Innovation Exchange session featured short presentations including talks by AllerGen Investigators Dr. Malcolm Sears, McMaster University, about The Canadian Healthy Infant Longitudinal Development (CHILD) Study and by Dr. Susan Elliott, University of Waterloo on the Canadian Index of Wellbeing. Deirdre Laframboise, Executive Director of Clean Air Champions, one of AllerGen’s stakeholder partner organizations, delivered a talk focusing on sustainable health and happiness.
Fonds de recherche du Québec – Santé Announces New Scientific Director

On February 23, 2012, Dr. Renaldo Battista was appointed scientific director and member of the Board of Directors of the Fonds de recherche du Québec – Santé (FRQS). Dr. Battista has been a professor in the Department of Health Administration at Université de Montréal since 2004 and held the Canada Research Chair in Health Technology Assessment since 2005. In 2008, he was appointed Senior Scientific Advisor to the Health Technology Assessment Unit (UETMIS) of the Centre hospitalier universitaire (CHU) Sainte-Justine and made a member of its research centre.

His most significant scientific contributions are driven by three themes: the integration of preventive services into clinical practice, the development and implementation of guidelines for clinical practice and health technologies assessment. Dr. Battista’s extensive expertise constitutes an undeniable asset to the development of Québec’s health research sector and his appointment is effective July 3, 2012. For more information, visit www.frqs.gouv.qc.ca

AllerGen Participates in CSACI’s Annual Conference

The Canadian Society of Allergy and Clinical Immunology (CSACI) is a long standing AllerGen stakeholder with a shared goal of advancing the Allergy and Clinical Immunology profession in Canada. Both organizations also share a commitment to improving the quality of life of people with allergies through research, advocacy, continuing professional development and public education.

Each fall, numerous AllerGen investigators and trainees present at and attend the CSACI Annual Conference along with Administrative Centre Staff. Highlights of the event include:

AllerGen Project Leader Receives Special Recognition

Dr. Jean Marshall, Professor and Head of Microbiology and Immunology at Dalhousie University and AllerGen Food Allergy Program Leader, received the respected CSACI Award for Research in Immunology, which is given to a highly respected Canadian scientist in recognition of their contribution to the science of Allergy and Clinical Immunology. AllerGen Investigator and Professor at the University of Alberta, Dr. Dean Befus, presented Dr. Marshall with the award, noting that her “tremendous contributions in Canada and internationally have so clearly led to being selected for this prestigious award.” He went on to say that

“Allen has an outstanding, internationally recognized research laboratory, has directly supervised over 30 MSc, PhD students and postdoctoral fellows, and is widely acknowledged as an outstanding mentor, scientist, scholar and leader.”

AllerGen congratulates Dr. Marshall on her receipt of this prestigious award!

AllerGen Students Take Top Honours at CSACI

AllerGen Trainees and ASNPN members took top honours in the 2011 CSACI Poster Competition.

1st Place - Asthma and Allergic Rhinitis
Megan Azad, PhD, University of Alberta

1st Place - Case Reports Category
Philippe Bégin, MD, Université de Montréal

2nd Place - Basic science/Clinical Immunology
Claudia Hui, PhD Candidate, McMaster University

Best Turnout to Date for the Special Joint Student Networking Event at CSACI

AllerGen and CSACI, once again, co-sponsored the Young Allergy Professionals Networking Reception at the 2011 CSACI Annual Conference. This event was hosted by Dr. Anne Ellis, Assistant Professor, Queen’s University and AllerGen Investigator. Invited guests included AllerGen trainees and researchers, Fellows-in-Training, National Residents Educational Program (NREP) participants, Sub-Specialty Program Directors and the CSACI Board of Directors. The largest to date, this event was well received with over 50 attendees. AllerGen used this opportunity to promote its Emerging Clinician-Scientist Research Fellowship as well as to illustrate the benefits of becoming an AllerGen Students and New Professionals Network (ASNPN) member.
Upcoming Events

**Canadian Respiratory Conference**, April 26-28, 2012 - Vancouver, BC *(Visit AllerGen’s Booth!)*


**AllerGen Trainee Symposium**, May 27-29, 2012 – Calgary, AB

**CIHR Young Investigator Forum**, June 4-6, 2012 – Montreal, QC

**Canadian Knowledge Mobilization Forum**, June 19-20, 2012 – Ottawa, ON

**XXI World Congress of Asthma** - August 18-21, 2012, Quebec, QC *(Visit AllerGen’s Booth!)*

**Canadian Society of Allergy and Clinical Immunology (CSACI) Annual Scientific Meeting** – October 11 to 14, 2012 – Calgary, Alberta

**29th Symposium of the Collegium Internationale Allergologicum**, October 14-19, 2012 - Jeju Island, Republic of Korea

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**Annual Report 2010-2011 Available**

The 2010-2011 AllerGen Annual Report is available electronically in English and French on AllerGen’s home page or [www.allergen-nce.ca](http://www.allergen-nce.ca)

The Annual Report 2010-11 highlights Network accomplishments, research accomplishments, capacity building program results and commercialization and knowledge mobilization outcomes to March 31, 2011.

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