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REVIEW ARTICLE

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## KUWAIT FUND PARTNERSHIP IN DISEASE CONTROL PROGRAMS

A.M. Bahman<sup>1\*</sup> and Maryam Al-Ateeq<sup>2</sup>

Kuwait Fund for Economic Development, 2921 Safat 13030 Kuwait

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\*Corresponding Author: Dr. Chandrika Bhoi

### ABSTRACT

This article shows the strength of cooperation in prioritizing health as a vital part of development. The disease control programs are flagship initiatives of public-private partnerships aimed at helping poor communities in different parts of the world through the collective mobilization of financial, political and technical resources to alleviate the burden of diseases around the globe under the umbrella of World Health Organization (WHO). The efforts of partnership between Kuwait Fund (KF) and others have been instrumental in improving lives of millions of poor people and significant progress have been made towards eliminating many diseases as public health problems. The highlighted achievements are due to the effective collaboration fostered through such programs between global partners.

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## INTRODUCTION

According to the World Health Organization (WHO) <sup>(1)</sup>, more than 500 million people around the world suffer from one or more diseases, especially in the tropical regions. More than two billion people, 25% of whom are children under five-years-old, live in areas exposed to many diseases and about 2.5 billion people lack access to basic sanitation facilities, thus contributing to the exacerbation of diseases and general health problems in many of the poorest and most vulnerable communities in the world. Additionally <sup>(2)</sup>, there are about 560 million people in Africa suffering from neglected tropical diseases (NTDs) which comprises about 35% of the global NTD burden. Known to be as a leading cause of disability, blindness and other morbidities, these diseases also undermine educational attainment, economic productivity, and overall well-being in affected areas. Great achievements have been made in treating, preventing, reducing, controlling and eliminating many diseases. Millions of people have been saved around the globe as a result of effective international partnerships, where generous financial contributions, provisions of medicines, political support, and the efforts of voluntary organizations paved the way to achieve the collective goals of sustainable development. This article sheds light on the efforts of Kuwait Fund in financing disease combat and control programs that have since seen a significant positive impact in different parts of the world in partnership with others.

**Kuwait Fund Partnership:** Kuwait Fund was established in December, 1961<sup>(3)</sup> as the first development institution in the developing countries. The Fund has been participating in the international economic development efforts through the provision of

loans on highly concessional terms in order to finance development projects that focus on improving societal and individual quality of life. It also provides technical assistance and grants to international and regional development institutions to strengthen capacity building and knowledge sharing. Today, the Fund forms a solid bridge of friendship and solidarity between the State of Kuwait and developing nations. Kuwait Fund's geographical distribution of grants and technical assistance as of the end of 2024<sup>(4)</sup> spreads across Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, Middle East and North Africa, Asia, and Europe. Additionally, the Fund has provided grants to various international development institutions. In total, Kuwait Fund grants amount to USD 1.2 billion, spanning 320 grants. Moreover, the total amount of concessional loans reached US\$ 22.0 billion distributed among 105 countries to support a variety of sectors, of which 7% cover health infrastructure projects. The obligation of Kuwait Fund is to provide aid and support to those in need because the Fund's philosophy and heritage of social relationship rests on helping others to help themselves.

**Kuwait Fund Participation in Health Programs:** The Kuwait Fund has played a vital role in financing essential health programs through a collaborative partnership under the supervision of the WHO. This partnership involves ministries of health in endemic countries, financial donors, the private sector (as medicine providers), and non-governmental development organizations (NGDOs). Together, they work to ensure effective coordination, provide technical guidance, undertake regional planning, and carry out surveillance, monitoring, and evaluation. The partnership also focuses on advocacy and communication, facilitating ministerial engagement, coordinating cross-border activities, promoting scientific research, and managing

logistics efficiently. The following section details the disease control programs that Kuwait Fund has participated in financing:

***Onchocerciasis (River Blindness) Control Program in Africa (1974 – 2015):*** The operations of the program under the auspices of the WHO began in 1974 and was completed at the end of 2015 in various stages with great success. Covering 31 countries, a cure for the disease was achieved through vaccinations and the development of special medicines. One of the most important result of the program is the protection of hundreds of millions of people from contracting the disease due to its current controlled status and the availability of the necessary treatment.

***Guinea Worm Eradication Program (1997-2020):*** The Global Guinea Worm Eradication Program started in 1986 by the Carter Center and has since achieved a remarkable decline in the incidence of the disease. The disease has been virtually eliminated as a major health problem and as an impediment to socioeconomic development due to the successful coalition of many donors, financial agencies, institutions, and non-governmental organizations.

***Foundation for Tropical Diseases (1994):*** The Foundation for Tropical Diseases was established as an independent foundation and functions as an endowment Fund aimed at supporting the efforts of the WHO to control major tropical diseases. The foundation collaborates closely in research and training with the division tasked with the control of tropical diseases program.

***Roll-back Malaria Partnership (2012-2015):*** The Roll-back Malaria Partnership was established to combat malaria at the global level. Malaria is the leading health problem in many countries, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa, where most of the population live in highly endemic areas. This partnership led to a general improvement in the conditions of many people due to the introduction of preventative measures such as early detection, indoor spraying and the use of insecticide-treated bed nets, as well as the provision of technical support, training and awareness campaigns. The operation of the program began in 2008 under the supervision of WHO.

***Expanded Special Project for Elimination of Neglected Tropical Diseases (ESPEN, 2016-2028)***

The program was established in 2016 under the management of the African Regional Office of WHO. Kuwait Fund is one of the co-founders and early financiers of the program. It focuses on addressing 5 diseases: Lymphatic Filariasis, Onchocerciasis, Soil Transmitted Helminthiasis, Schistosomiasis, Trachoma. The program covers 47 African Countries suffering from one or more of these diseases. It is estimated that between 300-400 million people benefit from the program annually, where the majority live in poor areas. ESPEN is a public-private partnership and aims to accelerate the elimination of preventive chemotherapy NTDs (PC-NTDs), which comprises of 90% of NTD burden in Africa.

***Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria (2016-2025):*** The Global Fund's partners have established targets to reach the goals of ending HIV, Tuberculosis and Malaria as epidemics by 2030. The program is designed to save millions of lives, cut the mortality rates for the three diseases, and build stronger health systems to achieve the "Health and well-being for all" (SDG3). The Global Fund was established in 2000 and remains an international partnership between public and private sectors that supports more than 100 countries.

***Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance (2016 – 2025)*** <sup>(5+6)</sup>: Established in 2000, the Gavi Vaccine Alliance is a public-private global health partnership tasked with increasing access to immunization in vulnerable countries. Gavi Alliance has helped low-income countries protect nearly 127 million children against vaccine preventable diseases and has averted 2.5 million potential deaths. A further 200 million people have been reached by campaigns supported by Gavi during 2016-2020. With the support of KF and other partners, Gavi

has embarked on an immunization program (2021-2025) to immunize 300 million children to save a further 7-8 million lives. Gavi, through the COVAX initiative, has delivered more than 1.2 billion Covid-19 vaccine doses to 145 countries, all thanks to international partnership.

***Fighting Cholera in Yemen:*** The Fund contributed to the growing humanitarian needs in Yemen with a grant to fight against Cholera under the supervision of the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) for the years 2017-2019. This is to support the situation in Yemen and protect the population, especially children, from the seriousness of the deadly disease.

***Measles Campaign in Lebanon (2019-2021):*** The Fund participated in financing a campaign to support UNICEF through a grant to provide vaccinations to Lebanese and Syrian children refugees in Lebanon. The grant was used to launch national campaigns to combat measles and polio targeting about one million children between 6 months and 10 years old in cooperation with the Lebanese Ministry of Health and the World Health Organization. The grant increased the vaccination and accelerated immunization activities.

***Regional Program for Combating (Transboundary) Animal Diseases (2017-2024):*** The program aims at combating and controlling transboundary animal diseases through the coordination and cooperation between Arab and African countries to improve the efficiency of early detection, diagnosis and evaluation of treatment vaccines. Additionally, it supports epidemiological investigations by designing precautionary preventative measures to protect the general health of livestock and, therefore, the human population. The program is under the supervision of Arab Organization for Agricultural Development (AOAD) in cooperation with concerned governments and international organizations related to animal health.

***Spare Corona Virus Impact (2020):*** The Kuwait Fund contributed to supporting the efforts of the Kuwaiti health authorities in combatting the outbreak of the corona virus by enhancing the capabilities of the state to confront the pandemic through a generous grant provided to the special account of the "Contribution Fund" against the spreading of the virus. Also, Kuwait Fund allocated funds to Lebanon, Palestine, Uzbekistan, the African Union Organization and to the Syrian Refugees in Lebanon through the Kuwaiti Red Crescent to fight against the pandemic.

***The success of above-mentioned programs is mainly due to:***

1. Recognition of the diseases by population and governments concerned as major impediment to health and socio-economic development.
2. The commitments of donors and governments to operations lasting the time necessary to reach the objectives.
3. The effectiveness and applicability of the technical and scientific research approaches to fight and control diseases with the positive involvement of the private sector.
4. The role of competent staff management with emphasis on decentralization, flexibility, and transparency.
5. The prominent role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in health awareness campaigns and guidance focused in remote communities, where public health services tend to be the weakest.

***Challenges and Lessons learnt:*** Despite the success and achievements of the above-mentioned programs over many years, the long journeys of implementation were not without challenges. These challenges were marked by many crises such as economic instability, adverse impacts of climate change, political conflicts, and forced displacements as well as the Covid-19 pandemic and overpopulation in many regions are reflected in the escalating demands for humanitarian needs. Also, the limited allocation to the health services budget in numerous countries continues to face several challenges. In the midst of such challenges, several lessons have been learned from such programs and are summarized as follows:

- Good health brings good wealth. Every dollar invested locally in health programs to fight diseases results in between 5 to 30 dollars in health gains and economic returns<sup>(7)</sup>.
- Focus should be towards “leaving no one behind” within a comprehensive and building resilient health care system for a healthier population.
- Increasing domestic resources towards the health sector is a crucial step forward.
- Shaping the health markets to make prices of vaccines and drugs affordable for all.
- Turning political commitments into action is essential for health improvement.
- Empower civil society organizations and communities to engage in all aspects of health services.
- A need for more understanding of the impacts of climate change on health and a need for a commitment to mitigate the negative impacts through scientific approaches in collaboration between public & private sectors, civil societies and academia to bridge the gap with policymakers.
- Strengthening capacity building and training to gain more understanding and knowledge in health services. That includes improving data collection analysis and reporting as well as improving laboratory practices to conduct epidemiological and entomological surveillance.

**Looking Ahead:** There is always a need for improvement in all aspects of life. Health services and combatting diseases are no exceptions. Countries must prioritize achieving comprehensive health care for all.

Governments in collaboration with international partners and private sector ought to move forward in accelerating progress by strengthening actions needed in health activities in order to mitigate the many challenges for reaching sustainability. As the key measure of success, partnership is a minimum requirement to our collective goals. Kuwait Fund and partners remain committed to safeguarding “health for all”, whether in humanitarian or development contexts. These partnerships aim to reach and maintain high treatment coverage with a vision that disease transmission will be interrupted and end in all communities around the world.

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