



H.E. Eng. Ahmed Albaiz, Assistant-Supervisor General for Operations and Programmes at the King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Centre (KSrelief), and Dr Ahmed Al-Mandhari, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean, sign project contribution agreement

Riyadh, 14 March 2023 – H.E. Eng. Ahmed Albaiz, Assistant-Supervisor General for Operations and Programmes at the King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Centre (KSrelief), and Dr Ahmed Al-Mandhari, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean, signed a project contribution agreement during the 3rd Riyadh International Humanitarian Forum from 20 to 21 February 2023, entitled “Every breath counts: Reducing childhood pneumonia by increasing access to medical oxygen in the fragile humanitarian setting of Somalia”.

This landmark moment highlights the strong humanitarian partnership between KSrelief and WHO to better ensure health for all in vulnerable communities and comes at a particularly important time when Somalia is suffering from one of the worst droughts in its recent history, which has adversely affected 7.8 million people, including 1.1 million who have been displaced (on top of 2.5 million already previously displaced) in search of food, water and health care.

Child mortality, especially infant and under-5 death rates in Somalia are among the highest in the world. Any child born in Somalia today is 16.5 times more likely to die before the age of 5, than a child from any other country. Currently, the under-5 mortality rate in Somalia is 117 per 1 000 live births (higher than the sub-Saharan average of 76 deaths per 1000 per live births), whereby approximately 21% of these deaths among children under 5 are attributed to pneumonia, while 18–20% are attributed to diarrhoeal disease.

In response, this vital project aims to reduce the alarmingly high rates of childhood pneumonia- and diarrhoeal-related deaths in Somalia. The allocated resources from KSrelief will help WHO to undertake cost-effective and evidence-informed life-saving interventions in the target districts with a strong focus on strengthening community-based preventive care, as well as promotive and curative care for the treatment of sick children with signs of childhood pneumonia and diarrhoeal disease. The project will also contribute to strengthening primary health care, as well as maternity and child health centres and district hospitals (referral hospitals) by equipping them with solar-powered oxygen delivery system for improving access to medical oxygen for children, pregnant women and other vulnerable populations seeking health care in these public health facilities.

As a result of these activities WHO anticipates that morbidity and mortality among children under 5 attributed to pneumonia will be reduced by 10% in the target districts, while an estimated 230 000 children under 5 and over 3.3 million people will benefit from integrated health care and other priority interventions of this project. Thus, the goal and objectives of this project remain aligned with the Government’s overarching vision of achieving universal health coverage (UHC) through the implementation of its Essential Package of Health Services 2020, which focuses on leveraging community and primary levels of care to achieve Health for All by All.

Recognizing KSrelief’s contributing to saving the lives of Somali children, Dr Ahmed Al-Mandhari, WHO’s Regional Director, said, “Contrary to what the situation in Somalia looks like, WHO has shown that community-based outreach programmes involving visits by community health workers to individual households assists greatly in identifying and referring children suffering from any illness to a health facility, including for suspected pneumonia or severe diarrhoea. As we continue pushing forward and materializing our regional vision: health for all by all, we strongly believe that continuing to integrate such community interventions to primary level care can be a game changer, especially when facilities also have access to medical oxygen and deliver integrated health care. On behalf of the WHO’s Regional Office and Country Office in Somalia, I express our sincere thanks and gratitude to KSrelief for this life-saving support to Somalia.”

Note to editors

Under the patronage of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, His Royal Highness King Salman bin Abdulaziz, KSrelief organizes the Riyadh International Humanitarian Forum every 2 years in Saudi Arabia, bringing together humanitarian leaders, international partners, development practitioners, researchers, and others to promote dialogue on legislative, informational, and logistical mechanisms for delivering humanitarian aid to those most in need. The forum also addresses humanitarian challenges and seeks to identify innovative practical solutions in accordance with international humanitarian principles and standards, including the Sustainable Development Goals.

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