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Advancing research to accelerate malaria elimination remains Target Malaria's priority

In 2012, a group of like-minded experts in diverse fields and from multiple countries came together to form Target Malaria, an international research consortium, whose mission was to co-develop and share new cost-effective and sustainable genetic technologies to modify mosquito populations and reduce malaria transmission.

Researchers at the Institut de Recherche en Sciences de la Santé (IRSS) in Burkina Faso were a natural fit to this new consortium, based on their world-class expertise in medical entomology and their country's leadership in malaria research and scientific innovation.

Over the last 13 years, in compliance with the national laws of Burkina Faso, Target Malaria Burkina Faso has reached significant scientific milestones, fostered a dialogue built on trust with local communities, helped strengthen African malaria research, and advanced our collective knowledge on innovative tools that could, one day, support the global fight against malaria.

Burkina Faso's research and scientists are vital to the fight against malaria, and their achievements remain an important foundation for future progress for all malaria endemic countries.

About the suspension of the field studies on the non gene drive genetically modified male bias mosquitoes in Burkina Faso

We have received notification from the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation of the suspension of our activities and we are cooperating with the authorities of Burkina Faso to implement the required measures. We are

saddened by the interruption of years of work by, and with, the Burkinabe team of researchers, technicians, and stakeholder engagement, communications and regulatory experts.

We respect the decision taken by the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation on our field work and reiterate our commitment to comply with this ruling. In all countries where we operate, we respect the sovereignty of the governments and work with the national authorities, who define the scope of our work in their country and the involvement of local researchers and experts.

Statements from Target Malaria spokespeople

“Target Malaria is proud of the progress achieved with our partner, the Institut de Recherche en Sciences de la Santé (IRSS) in Burkina Faso, a country at the forefront of research into new tools for combating malaria. Their research is published in peer-reviewed scientific journals, benefiting the African and the global research community. Following the discontinuation of our field studies, our priority now is to listen and keep the dialogue open with Burkina Faso. Our focus is on maintaining the relationship of trust we have built with this invaluable partner through the years.”

— Professor Austin Burt, Global Principal Investigator for Target Malaria at Imperial College London

“Burkina Faso and Uganda are two of the 11 highest malaria burden countries in the world. They are also leading the charge in the search for a solution to malaria. The IRSS team has world class expertise on the Continent and all the members of the Target Malaria consortium have been proud to co-develop our project with our Burkinabe colleagues.”

— **Dr Jonathan Kayondo**, Principal Investigator of Target Malaria Uganda at the Uganda Virus Research Institute (UVRI)

The malaria burden in Burkina Faso

A child dies of malaria every minute. Burkina Faso is one of the countries in the world with the heaviest malaria burden¹ (WHO²)³. In 2023, the WHO noted that there were an estimated 8.1 million malaria cases and over 16,146 estimated malaria associated deaths in this country of 23.5 million people. Children under the age of five and pregnant women are the main victims.

Despite the progress made over the last twenty years in reducing the incidence of malaria worldwide, the number of malaria infections and deaths has actually increased in recent years, with over 200 million infections and over 600,000 deaths (WHO World Malaria Report 2024). The WHO has stated that “new, complementary approaches are needed to close the gaps in current vector control interventions, such as effective control of outdoor biting, and to provide alternatives to manage the increasing threat of insecticide resistance. Research suggests genetically modified mosquitoes could be a powerful and cost-effective tool to supplement existing interventions”.⁴ This approach to vector control would be available to everyone within the treated area, not only those with access to health care or able to implement individual protection measures, such as bed nets.

In April 2024, the Ministers of Health of High Burden High Impact (HBHI) countries in Africa issued a “Declaration for accelerated malaria mortality reduction in Africa: commitment that “No one shall die from malaria” (Yaoundé Declaration)⁵. They acknowledge “the alarming stalling of progress in the WHO African Region, where approximately 95% of malaria morbidity and mortality persist” and commit to concerted action to end malaria deaths.

The leadership of African scientists in malaria research

Target Malaria is a not-for-profit international consortium that was formed in 2012 to bring together world class experts based in multiple countries both within and outside Africa. Each research team has been bringing their unique area of expertise (such as medical entomology, molecular biology, computer modelling, geographic information systems, stakeholder engagement practitioners, ethnologists, regulatory affairs and science communications).

The central role of African scientists is critically important because malaria is an African problem that needs African solutions. That said, most scientific advancements, especially in the field of global health – including breakthroughs in vaccines, disease eradication strategies, diagnostics, and treatments – have been the result of international partnerships that bring together the expertise of scientists from around the world. The current tools to fight malaria (insecticide-treated bed nets, rapid diagnostic tests, and artemisinin-based combination therapies) are prime examples, being the fruit of cooperation by scientists from many countries.

1 11 African countries together account for more than 70% of the global malaria burden

2 WHO Malaria 2024 Burkina Faso country profile

3 Burkina Faso accounts for 3.1% of global malaria cases, 2.7% of global malaria deaths and 6.6% of total malaria cases in West Africa in 2023: Malaria in Burkina Faso: Statistics & Facts | Severe Malaria Observatory

4 WHO issues new guidance for research on genetically modified mosquitoes to fight malaria and other vector-borne diseases

5 Declaration for accelerated malaria mortality reduction in Africa: commitment that “No one shall die from malaria”

Target Malaria's commitment to eliminating malaria

At Target Malaria, we remain committed to working hand-in-hand with national institutions and communities to work towards the elimination of malaria, guided by our values of scientific excellence, evidence-based decision making, and openness and accountability. We will continue our research work co-developing a blueprint for innovative tools to reduce the unacceptable burden of malaria across Africa, built on responsible science and ethical engagement, and mindful of the economic, social and cultural contexts in Africa.

New tools and technologies – such as dual-insecticide nets, malaria vaccines, and genetically modified mosquitoes – and the scientific partnerships that are developing them are essential to overcoming the current challenges faced by malaria endemic countries.

Media Contact

For further information about Target Malaria:

Email: info@targetmalaria.org

Website: www.targetmalaria.org

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About Target Malaria

Target Malaria is a not-for-profit research consortium that aims to develop and share new, cost-effective and sustainable genetic technologies to modify mosquitoes and reduce malaria transmission. Our vision is to contribute to a world free of malaria. We aim to achieve excellence in all areas of our work, creating a path for responsible research and development of genetic technologies, such as gene drive. www.targetmalaria.org

Target Malaria receives core funding from the Gates Foundation and from Coefficient Giving (formerly Open Philanthropy). The lead grantee organization is Imperial College London with partners in Africa, Europe and North America.