

Press release

From survivor to global malaria champion

KAMPALA, Uganda, 15 October 2025 – Kampala, Uganda - Malaria is a preventable disease that still claims over [half a million African lives every year](#), and mostly children under the age of five. Ugandan researcher, Krystal Birungi, a malaria survivor herself has dedicated her life, and profession, to changing this reality.

[Krystal Mwesiga Birungi](#), Ugandan scientist, malaria advocate, and Research & Outreach Associate at Target Malaria Uganda at the Uganda Virus Research Institute (UVRI), has achieved a string of outstanding achievements that reflect her lifelong commitment to eliminating malaria and protecting children's lives across Africa and beyond.

Her journey is deeply personal. Her childhood was marked by repeated bouts of malaria, and the fear that her younger brother might not survive. "Those early years embedded the conviction in me that malaria is not just a scientific challenge, but a moral and social injustice," says Birungi.

Today, Krystal brings that dual force of lived experience and scientific rigor to initiatives shaping the future of public health, equality, and child survival.



A voice on the global stage

In 2025, Krystal contributed a powerful essay to [Hope for Life on Our Planet: Inspiration for Seven Generations](#), a global collection of reflections edited by Osvald Bjelland. Her essay, “Breaking the chains: Addressing public health inequities in the fight against malaria,” was launched in London alongside contributions from voices, such as Dame Jane Goodall and Pope Francis.

She used her essay to spotlight the disproportionate burden of malaria on African women and children, and to argue for equity and investment in cutting-edge innovations and policy reform.

Elevating leadership - locally and internationally

In September 2025, Krystal Birungi was selected as part of the [2025–2026 Obama Foundation Leaders Africa class](#). Among over 200 global changemakers, she is one of just 35 Africans chosen to receive training in leadership, civic engagement, and cross-sector collaboration.

Krystal regularly participates in global advocacy missions (including with The Global Fund Advocates Network), educating policymakers, donors, and the public about malaria research, prevention, and equity.

[The Global Fund](#), a key partner in malaria control, reported in 2025 that its overall work (against HIV, TB, and malaria) has helped save 70 million lives since its inception, with a 63% decline in combined death rates.

Krystal’s fight for Africa’s survival

Krystal’s own survival gives urgency to her work for Africans. “In 2023, 94% of the world’s malaria cases, and 95% of malaria deaths happened in Africa. I am driven everyday by the data and by the faces behind it, because every statistic is someone’s child, friend, or family,” adds Birungi.

On many global stages, Krystal has shared a vivid account of childhood suffering. Her brother convulsing from malaria, her family repeatedly sick and not being able to afford life-saving medicine. That personal history fuels both her empathy and her resolve.

She has helped explain complex tools like dual-insecticide nets, spatial repellents, new drug formulations, vaccines and genetically modified mosquitoes - emphasising that no single tool is enough, and that community involvement, national leadership, and equity concerns matter every step of the way.

As an entomologist, Krystal reiterates the critical role of ongoing research, from understanding mosquito behavior to developing next-generation tools to support and strengthen public health equity.

By 2035, she believes the world can push malaria from a common threat to a manageable, largely prevented disease, using vaccines, better tools, strong health systems, and equity-driven research.

By 2040, the dream is elimination in many high-burden areas, with technologies like gene drive helping stop transmission entirely.

Krystal says her vision is not just scientific optimism, but a call to collective responsibility: global donors, African governments, research institutions, and communities must invest, innovate, and lead together.

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About Target Malaria

Target Malaria is an international 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

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