

Press release

Malaria and rising child mortality put African health at a crossroads

A 20% decrease in health funding could lead to 12 million more children dying by 2045.

Kampala, Uganda, 15 December 2025 - The latest [WHO World Malaria Report 2025](#) highlights a critical reality: malaria remains one of Africa's most pressing health challenges. With an estimated 282 million cases and approximately 610,000 deaths globally in 2024, the African Region continues to account for most of the burden, particularly among children under five.

Five countries; namely Nigeria, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Mozambique, and Uganda contribute more than half of all global cases.

[According to the 2025 Goalkeepers report](#), in 2024, 4.6 million children died before their fifth birthday. In 2025, that number is projected to rise for the first time this century, by over 200,000, to an estimated 4.8 million children. That means more than 5,000 classrooms of children, gone before they ever learn to write their name or tie their shoes.

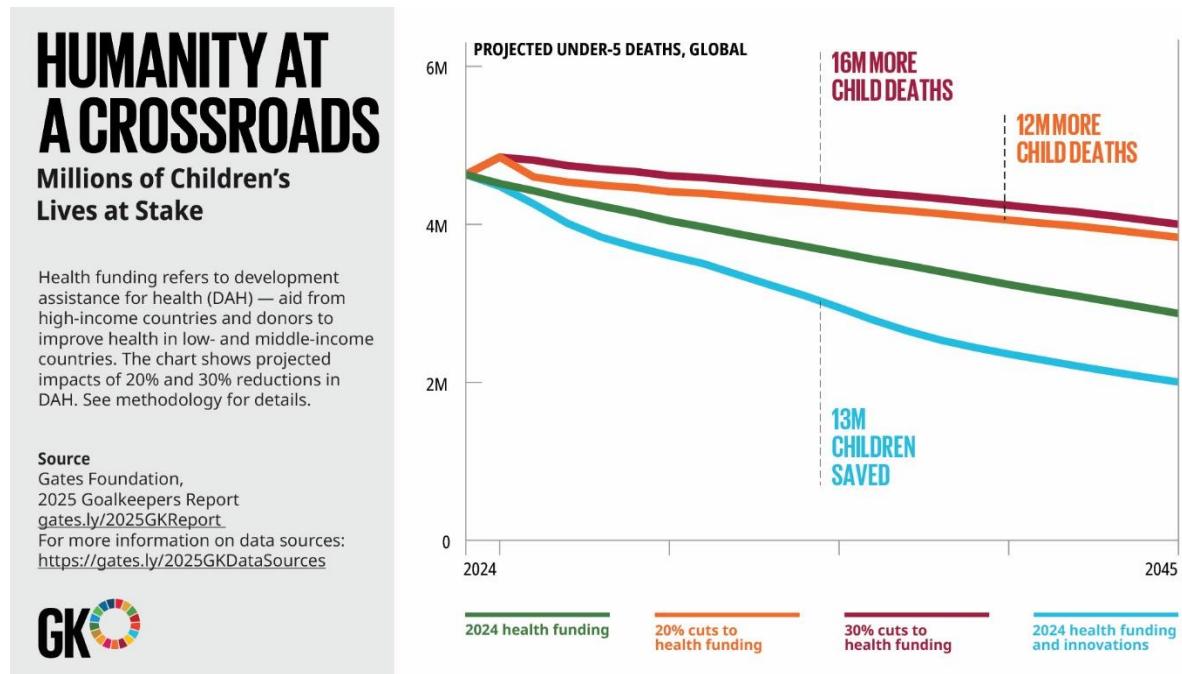
"Across Africa, we lose children every day to a disease we understand and know how to prevent. Each of those losses is a profound tragedy, not just for a family, but for communities and economies too. What makes it even more heartbreaking is that malaria is a problem we can solve. Our responsibility now is to scale up those solutions, innovate responsibly, and make sure no child's life is cut short by any preventable disease," said [Krystral Birungi](#), Ugandan scientist and malaria advocate.

WHO's [World Malaria Report 2025](#) highlights growing antimalarial drug resistance in Africa and the urgent need for complementary strategies. Progress in diagnostics, surveillance, vaccination, vector control, treatment delivery, and community-driven engagement will be key to achieving lasting gains.

In Uganda, malaria continues to exact a heavy toll, there was an estimated 13.6 million cases and over 16,204 estimated deaths. Despite strides in prevention and treatment, progress against malaria mortality remains uneven, with incidence and deaths concentrated in high-transmission districts. Neighbouring countries across East and West Africa face similar challenges, driven by drug resistance, climate pressures, humanitarian crises and gaps in access to interventions.

A roadmap to change

The [Goalkeepers Report](#) outlines a clear path forward at a time when global health systems are strained and progress is slipping. For the first time this century, child deaths are set to rise; a 20% decrease in health funding could result in 12 million more children dying by 2045.



The most impactful actions over the next decade include:

- Strengthening primary health systems so frontline workers can diagnose and treat malaria quickly and consistently.
- Scaling up proven tools, including malaria vaccines, insecticide-treated nets, rapid diagnostics, and timely treatment.
- Investing in next-generation solutions, from improved vector control tools to responsibly developed genetic innovations that can complement existing measures.
- Supporting local scientific leadership, ensuring African researchers and institutions drive the development and implementation of future tools.
- Integrating community voices, recognising that trust and understanding are critical for the success of any intervention.

The research and development of emerging tools like gene drive for vector control require not only scientific rigour but also clear, accessible and timely engagement and communication,” said [Naima Sykes](#), Director of Global Stakeholder Engagement for Target Malaria at Imperial College London.

“Communities and stakeholders want to understand how these technologies work, how they are developed, and how they, as people who are potentially impacted by this research, are involved in their development. Researchers, in turn, need to be open to understanding and considering the perspectives of these groups. When information flows both ways, is transparent and locally grounded, trust grows. Trust is essential for progress. Our role is to

equip stakeholders with the knowledge they need to engage confidently with the science, while actively listening to what we can learn from them, too."

She added that in an era of rising misinformation, communication becomes a public health intervention in itself. "When facts are clear, and people feel included, they are empowered to act. That is how we, as Africans, can build a sustainable future where malaria no longer steals the lives of our children."

Birungi stressed that Africa stands at a critical point. "The recent numbers are not just data, they represent lives, futures, and entire generations of potential. The continent faces a choice: continue on a trajectory where preventable diseases claim millions of young lives, or commit to scaling up proven tools, investing in science, and strengthening health systems that protect families."

A path forward exists. It is grounded in evidence, driven by African expertise, and supported by innovation and community partnership. With decisive action, the next decade can mark a turning point - one where every child in Africa has the chance not just to survive, but to thrive.

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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 by the Gates Foundation and Open Philanthropy. The lead grantee organization is Imperial College London with partners in Africa, Europe and North America.