

Dwindling cash undermines Africa's malaria control goal

The African Leaders Malaria Alliance (ALMA) reports that progress has stalled since 2015, with only five member states meeting the 2030 target of reducing malaria incidence or mortality by 75 percent.

BY GITONGA MARETE

African heads of state have warned that Africa risks missing its 2030 target to eliminate malaria, as declining funding threatens to reverse decades of progress and drive-up deaths from the disease.

A report released during the 39th Ordinary Session of the African Union Assembly of Heads of State and Government in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, indicates that member states accounted for 270.8 million malaria cases (96 percent of the global total) and 594,119 deaths (97 percent) in 2024.

The African Leaders Malaria Alliance (ALMA), under the leadership of Botswana's President Duma Gideon Boko, reported that progress has stalled since 2015, with only five member states meeting the target of reducing malaria incidence or mortality by 75 percent. The report did not name the five countries.

"The perfect storm of converging crises threatening malaria elimination has intensified. Official Development Assistance for health in Africa has declined by 70 percent in just four years, and the Eighth Replenishment of the Global Fund fell significantly short of its \$18 billion (Shs64.31 trillion) target," President Boko wrote in the report released on February 15.

He added: "We cannot allow these challenges to reverse decades of progress that have prevented 1.64 billion cases and saved 12.4 million lives since 2000."

Founded in 2009, ALMA is a coalition of African heads of state and government working across borders to achieve a malaria-free Africa by 2030.

Malaria is transmitted to humans through the bite of an infected female Anopheles mosquito, which injects Plasmodium parasites into the



A nurse administers a malaria vaccine to an infant at the Lumumba Sub-county Hospital in Kisumu, Kenya, on July 1, 2022. PHOTO/REUTERS

bloodstream. Treated mosquito nets have been central to controlling the disease, providing both a physical and chemical barrier that kills or repels the insect.

The ALMA report warns that a 30 percent reduction in funding could result in 146 million additional malaria cases, 397,000 extra deaths (75 percent among children under five), and a \$37 billion (Shs132.2trillion) loss in Gross Domestic Product by 2030.

AU member states have called for urgent action, warning that malaria cases could rise significantly in the coming years, potentially exceeding 400 million annually, with

deaths surpassing one million each year.

To mitigate the crisis, countries across the continent have increased domestic financing commitments and appealed to global partners to honour pledges, renew the World Bank's Malaria Booster Programme, and align support with national strategies.

The original World Bank Malaria Booster Programme (2005–2010) committed more than \$1 billion (Shs3.57 trillion), delivering transformative results. Today, African leaders are urging a renewed programme to close funding gaps, deploy next-generation tools, strengthen community health

worker programmes, and build climate-resilient health systems.

Response to declining funding

In response to the funding shortfall, African leaders reaffirmed their commitment to mobilising domestic resources and engaging the private sector, philanthropic foundations, high-net-worth individuals, and the diaspora through a public-private health accelerator.

Tanzania is among the countries adopting new research-based strategies to combat malaria, which remains Africa's greatest health threat.

"Our approach has spanned the full spectrum of what it takes to beat this disease. Tanzania has invested in world-class research and is home to the Ifakara Health Institute, where our scientists are pioneering new technologies, including gene drive—an innovative approach that aims to ensure mosquitoes can no longer transmit the malaria parasite. This is African science, conducted by African researchers, addressing an African challenge," said Tanzanian President Samia Suluhu Hassan.

African leaders also emphasised the importance of local manufacturing to ensure affordability, access, and supply chain resilience.

According to the report, countries strengthening initiatives to reduce malaria prevalence include Benin, Burkina Faso, Nigeria, Senegal, and Sudan, which have increased funding or introduced new strategies for 2025.

Currently, Africa imports 99 percent of vaccines and 95 percent of medicines. The ALMA report highlights that Nigeria has entered partnerships for local production of antimalarial treatments and rapid diagnostic tests, and is working to establish the first Africa-manufactured next-generation nets.

The African Medicines Agency, now ratified by 31 countries, and Regional Economic Communities are harmonising regulatory frameworks to accelerate the registration of new commodities across the continent.

"Full deployment of existing and new tools, combined with full funding, could save over 13.2 million lives over the next 15 years and boost African economies by more than \$140 billion (Shs500.21 trillion). Every dollar invested in the Global Fund delivers \$19 (Shs67,886) in returns. We have the tools. We need the resources," said Dr Michael Adekunle, CEO of the RBM Partnership to End Malaria.

