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Communique to the Commonwealth Ministers of Health by Youth Leaders for Health

Malaria: The Beat Continues, in the Time of COVID-19

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, various analyses from the WHO showed seven Commonwealth countries: The Gambia, Belize, Bangladesh, India, Malaysia, Mozambique and Nigeria are already on a trajectory to achieve the target to halve malaria by 2023.

COVID-19 will negatively impact these Commonwealth countries and move them away from achieving this target.

Nevertheless, 19 Commonwealth countries in 2017 recorded an increase in malaria incidence, and the number of deaths from malaria increased in 15 Commonwealth countries. During this time, Commonwealth countries accounted for just over half of the estimated 435,000 deaths from malaria, once again reinforcing the important contribution the Commonwealth can make towards achieving global malaria targets.

As national government prepare to manage the outbreak, there is a risk essential services such as malaria, TB, HIV and vaccination supplies are crowded out, potentially leading to a regression away from hard won gains. Furthermore, vulnerabilities caused by repeated malaria and malnutrition episodes makes susceptibility to COVID-19 higher.

We note in particular that sub-Saharan Africa accounts for more than 90% of global malaria cases and deaths. In 2018, nearly 900,000 children in 38 African countries were born with a low birth weight due to malaria in pregnancy, and children under five still accounted for two-thirds of all malaria deaths worldwide. In the time of COVID-19, it is critical that existing services and interventions are not disrupted.

As Commonwealth Ministers of Health meet, we Youth leaders for Health in Africa¹, take note that now, more than ever, ensuring that available health financing is mobilized quickly and effectively to African countries to support national health responses is of paramount importance. We therefore, call upon Commonwealth member states to:

1. ensure access to life-saving malaria prevention, diagnosis and treatment services continues in the time of COVID-19.
2. invest in strengthening health systems that are key to the fight against malaria and COVID-19.

As youth leaders, we pledge our ongoing support as partners and stakeholders towards ending the malaria epidemic, achieving universal health coverage (UHC) and creating lasting impact.

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