

## Let's empower communities to achieve "Zero malaria"

(Lindi, April 25 2019) Since our inception in 1956 we, at Ifakara Health Institute (IHI), have been at the forefront of the fight against malaria. We're privileged to be part of a number of national as well as global malaria control initiatives attributed to advances in fighting the disease.

Since 2000, the world has achieved more than 50 per cent reduction in malaria prevalence, thanks to improved living standards, urbanization, improved diagnosis, greater access to appropriate medicines, and importantly the scaling up of effective vector control using insecticide treated bed nets (ITNs) and indoor residual spraying (IRS). We are now at a stage where malaria elimination is a potentially achievable goal, even in areas that were experiencing intense transmission at the turn of the century, just a decade and a half ago.

However, the latest WHO's World Malaria Report suggests that after these steady advances, progress has levelled off. No more gains in reducing malaria cases were realized in the period 2015-2017, witnessing around 435,000 malaria deaths both in year 2017 and 2018. This highlights an urgent need for supplementary interventions.

On World Malaria Day 2019, IHI joins with the Ministry of Health, Community Development, Gender, Elderly and Children through the National Malaria Control Program (NMCP), the WHO, and partner organizations in promoting the campaign theme "Zero malaria starts with me" **by urging each one of us in the fight against the disease to empower communities to take ownership of malaria prevention and care.**

While bed nets have proved to be useful, achieving and sustaining elimination require supplementary interventions. We strongly believe that tools such as mosquito-proofed housing, if prioritized and used as malaria control strategy in Sub-Saharan Africa, can help cut the spread of the disease. Window screening, the covering of windows or roof space with a material which can allow air flow but prevent entry of insects such as mosquitoes inside houses, extends more physical protection.

Already, there is preliminary evidence suggesting that house window screening can be an effective additional tool to step up efforts towards "Zero malaria". Findings from our study published on the *Lancet Planetary Health* last month which included re-analyses of previously collected data on malaria cases in Dar es Salaam, found that increasing coverage of complete window screening was associated with reduced bites of mosquitoes, resulting in malaria cases decline from 28 per cent in 2004 to less than two per cent four years later.

However, we would like to strongly underline that empowering communities require participation of stakeholders at all levels in the public health, development and industrial sectors. We believe so because "Zero malaria" can only start with an individual in communities after the three sectors have played their roles effectively. This approach and other initiatives must be adopted to get the global response to malaria back on track. #

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### About Ifakara Health Institute (IHI)

Ifakara Health Institute (IHI) is a world-class research organization in Africa, with a strong track record in developing, testing and validating innovations for health that save lives. Driven by a core strategic mandate for research, training and services, the institute's work now spans a wide spectrum, covering biomedical and ecological sciences, intervention studies, health-systems research and policy translation.

Registered in Tanzania as an independent non-profit organization, IHI's history dates back to 1956 when it started as a field laboratory. Now, it has offices in Dar es Salaam, Bagamoyo and at its birthplace, Ifakara.



Honorati Masanja,  
Chief Executive Director, IHI



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