

NEWS RELEASE

World Mosquito Day: SADC region needs strengthened collaboration to stop world's smallest killer, says UP Institute for Sustainable Malaria Control



Signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between the Roll Back Malaria Partnership to End Malaria (RBM Partnership) and the University of Pretoria Institute for Sustainable Malaria Control (UP ISMC). Left to right: Dr Michael Adekunle Charles - CEO: RBM Partnership (seated) facilitated by Brigadier General (Dr) Kaka Mudambo - Advisory Ambassador: RBM and Professor Tiaan de Jager - Dean: Faculty of Health Sciences and Director: UP ISMC (seated) facilitated by Dr Taneshka Kruger - Project Manager: UP ISM

PRETORIA - World Mosquito Day is observed annually on 20 August. On this day we commemorate the 1897 discovery by British doctor Sir Ronald Ross that female anopheline mosquitoes are responsible for transmitting malaria between humans.

Malaria elimination efforts in the SADC region have received a significant boost thanks to a recently signed memorandum of understanding (MoU) between the University of Pretoria Institute for Sustainable Malaria Control (UP ISMC) and the Roll Back Malaria Partnership to End Malaria (RBM Partnership).

The signing of the MoU, which is aimed at enhancing and consolidating malaria elimination efforts, took place at UP's Future Africa campus, with regional and international stakeholders in the fight against malaria in attendance, including representatives from the World Health Organization (WHO), the Africa Leaders Malaria

Alliance (ALMA), National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD), National Department of Health, and Goodbye Malaria.

The mosquito is the deadliest animal in the world, killing more than 700 000 people each year. A West African proverb says, **"If you think you are too small to make a difference, you haven't spent a night with a mosquito."** Just as a single mosquito can wreak havoc, small efforts – whether from individuals, communities, or organisations – can collectively make a massive difference in the battle against malaria. The Southern Africa Development Community (SADC), consisting of 16 member states, includes some of the countries most heavily affected by malaria globally. While all SADC nations share the goal of eliminating malaria by 2030, as of now only three SADC countries have achieved malaria-free status.

UP Interim Vice-Chancellor and Principal Professor Themba Mosia welcomed attendees at the MoU signing and lauded the UP ISMC and RBM Partnership. He emphasised that malaria elimination efforts need a sustained, integrated and transdisciplinary approach that combines biomedical sciences, public health, education and policymaking to form a unified discipline aimed at malaria management.

"Over the past two decades the world has made unprecedented progress against malaria, saving millions of lives," Prof Mosia said. "Today, more regions are malaria-free than ever before, with more countries reporting a decreasing number of malaria cases. However, half the world still lives at risk. For the first time in over a decade we are seeing the progress made stalling, and we are facing the real possibility of putting years of investment in jeopardy."

Dr Taneshka Kruger, Project Manager at the UP ISMC, provided an overview of the MoU, saying it's a collaborative agreement that taps into the partners' mutual dedication to addressing the multifaceted challenges posed by malaria.

"The aim is to make significant strides in reducing the burden of malaria and addressing major global concerns affecting its prevalence through capacity building initiatives, student support initiatives, the implementation of impactful projects addressing challenges such as resource mobilisation and climate change, and the strengthening of cross-border collaboration," she said. "Together, both partners endeavour to leverage our respective expertise and resources to drive sustainable progress towards malaria elimination and the improvement of public health outcomes."

Professor Tiaan de Jager, Dean of the Faculty of Health Sciences at UP and Director of the UP ISMC, said: "Malaria has long been a formidable enemy, particularly on the African continent. Partnership initiatives have demonstrated that regional collaborations, strategic planning and sustained efforts can yield remarkable progress. Our collaboration with RBM Partnership will enhance our capabilities and extend our reach. Together, we will leverage collaborative research, share best practices and develop comprehensive strategies to address the root cause of malaria."

The Honourable Dr Douglas Tendai Mombeshora, Zimbabwe's Minister of Health and incoming Chairperson of the SADC Ministerial Committee on Health, commended the MoU, saying it is an important milestone because it will, among other things, provide support to the region's medical practitioners, who are managing the disease at local level. He emphasised it is the role of governments to own the processes of eliminating malaria by providing clear, sound and impactful leadership.

"To do this, we need solid evidence to back up policies and strategies," Minister Mombeshora said. "This is where universities and academia come in. I congratulate the RBM Partnership to End Malaria and the University of Pretoria for signing this noble MoU, and hope the collaboration is emulated by more institutions on our continent, as we need practical, home-grown solutions in order to succeed and sustain our gains. When I assume the SADC Ministers of Health chairship, I will work with my colleague health ministers to ensure that the SADC region strengthens its accountability to malaria elimination."

Ednah Baloyi, Director of Malaria and other Vector-Borne Diseases at South Africa's national Department of Health, also emphasised the importance of cross-border collaboration and capacitating healthcare workers.

"We all know that malaria knows no bounds, borders or boundaries, and neither should our efforts to combat it," Baloyi said. "Together with you, the South African government, through its numerous cross-border initiatives, is committed to combating malaria transmission in all regions as we aim to foster a conducive environment for joint research projects and strengthened relationships with regional stakeholders and partners."

Dr Michael Adekunle Charles, CEO of the RBM Partnership, said: "The signing of this MoU for me demonstrates collaboration and the will to innovate and work together with academia. I believe innovation, from an intersectional point of view, is important. We need to explore linkages between malaria and gender, malaria and humanitarian efforts, malaria and the climate change challenges, and other important issues surrounding the disease."

After the signing of the MoU, Dr Charles presented an expert talk titled 'Qualities and attributes in leadership – Personal reflections and experience' to the UP ISMC's 2024 malaria leadership course cohort. The in-person module of the course emphasises the science of malaria, the critical role of leaders and managers in understanding the diverse aspects of the disease, and the importance of cross-border collaboration to achieve malaria elimination in the SADC region.

>> For more information go to www.malaria.up.ac.za

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ABOUT THE UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA

The University of Pretoria (UP) is one of the largest contact and residential universities in South Africa, with its administration offices located on its Hatfield Campus in Pretoria. This 115-year-old institution is also one of the largest producers of research in South Africa.

Spread over seven campuses, it has nine faculties and a business school, the Gordon Institute of Business Science (GIBS). It is the only university in the country with a Faculty of Veterinary Science, which is ranked the best in Africa. UP has 120 academic departments and 92 centres and institutes, accommodating more than 56 000 students and offering about 1 100 study programmes. It has the most academic staff with PhDs (70%), NRF-rated researchers (613).

The [2024 Times Higher Education subject rankings](#) placed UP first in South Africa in the fields of Law, Veterinary Science, Accounting and Finance; Agriculture and Forestry and Electrical and Electronic Engineering. Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) ranked the University among the top five in Africa, as part of their

2024 World University Rankings (WUR). UP was the only South African university featured in the 2023 World University Rankings for Innovation (WURI), falling within in the 101-200 range of innovative universities.

For more information, please go to www.up.ac.za