



## Maintaining the Focus on the Fight Against Malaria (ZERO by 40 and COVID-19)

As the world contends with the COVID-19 pandemic, we are reminded that we do not have, readily available, all the tools we need to tackle infectious diseases. For those of us working in the global health space, this is a fact that we are acutely aware of, particularly in relation to malaria. Tremendous strides have been made in the fight to end malaria. Current investments in malaria are saving hundreds of thousands of lives and preventing millions of cases every year. This is significant impact but progress has plateaued, and too many people continue to die. In 2018, there were an estimated 228 million cases of malaria worldwide and an estimated 405,000 deaths – of which two thirds were children under five in Africa.

In 2018, acknowledging the need for action to ensure a pipeline of new and repurposed insecticides for use in public health and vector control tools, we formed an unprecedented coalition of the world's leading agriculture chemical companies (BASF, Bayer, Mitsui Chemicals Agro, Sumitomo Chemical and Syngenta), in conjunction with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and IVCC. We all reaffirmed our commitment to staying the course on malaria eradication. There has always been innovation, product development and market access in vector control coming from the agrochemical industry but the need to move beyond “business as usual” to tackle insecticide resistance and reinvigorate the fight against malaria was clear. Through ZERO by 40 we have committed to collaborate in bolder and more innovative ways.

Collaboration and commitment are also proving key to tackling COVID-19, as we see partnerships spanning nations, sectors and industries. This is a tremendous show and tangible demonstration of dedication. However, these efforts must not compromise access to life-saving malaria prevention tools and treatments or threaten to reverse decades of hard-fought progress against malaria. Experience from previous disease outbreaks has shown the disruptive effect on already vulnerable populations and the World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that the COVID-19 pandemic may push malaria deaths to levels not seen for over 20 years. As well as such a devastating loss of life, the impact on health care systems and the social and economic burdens felt would be terrible.

Vector control interventions like long lasting insecticide-treated nets (LLINs) and indoor residual spraying (IRS) have been responsible for 78% of averted clinical cases of malaria in the last 18 years, so reports of the suspension of vector control programmes in several African countries due to COVID-19 are especially worrying. Lockdowns and restrictions on the import and export of goods in response to COVID-19 are also causing disruptions in the supply chains for essential vector control interventions. We support the WHO in strongly encouraging countries not to suspend the planning for or implementation of vector control activities, whilst, of course, taking all necessary precautions against spreading infection. We will play our part in addressing potential problems and hope other partners will do the same.

We remain committed to malaria eradication, just as strongly as when we signed the ZERO by 40 declaration. We passionately believe that now is not the time to relax or suspend efforts against malaria. As long as malaria exists, it threatens the poorest and most vulnerable and has the potential to resurge in times of crises, like COVID-19. Especially now, we must continue to pursue this goal together and reach a malaria-free world.

