

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REMARKS

Welcome to our August issue. The first half of 2025 has been a season of momentum for IDRC, marked by scientific breakthroughs, strategic partnerships, and reminders of why locally driven research matters. We joined the national launch of Uganda's malaria vaccine campaign, commemorated World Malaria Day in Gulu, and showcased our work at the scientific colloquium before former Prime Minister Rt. Hon. Dr. Ruhakana Rugunda. Our regional collaboration continued at the Kenya-Uganda cross-border malaria control meeting in Busia, alongside the activation of the R21-PMS-01 clinical study.

On the global stage, our teams presented at CROI, INTEREST, and IAS 2025, sharing advances in HIV prevention, TB diagnostics, and integrated hypertension care. In July, we hosted Prof. Arthur Reingold for a public health lecture at Makerere University on outbreak investigation. Institutionally, we strengthened our foundation through strategic planning, technical advisory meetings, and our AGM, while bidding farewell to Dr. Sabrina Kitaka as Board Chair after a decade of visionary leadership.

As we look ahead to ASTMH 2025, we remain committed to turning research into measurable impact, ensuring every discovery brings us closer to healthier communities. Thank you for your continued support.



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IDRC PARTICIPATES IN LAUNCH OF UGANDA'S NATIONAL MALARIA VACCINE CAMPAIGN



Uganda has marked a historic step in its battle against malaria with the nationwide launch of the Malaria Vaccine (R21/Matrix-M) into its routine immunisation schedule for children aged 6 to 18 months. The Ministry of Health's bold initiative aims to protect over 1.1 million children under two years old, rolling out the vaccine free of charge across 105 high-burden malaria districts. This effort targets the very communities most affected by the disease.

At the heart of the launch event held at Booma Grounds in Apac District, the Rt. Hon. Prime Minister Robinah Nabbanja represented H.E. President Yoweri Kaguta Museveni as the Chief Guest at the launch—the Rt. Hon. Prime Minister was joined by the Minister of Health, Hon. Dr. Jane Ruth Aceng, and a coalition of government officials, NGO and private sector leaders, and health partners. Their shared message was clear: Uganda's fight against Malaria enters a new era, driven by science, collaboration, and the determination to save children's lives.

For a country that still ranks third in the world for malaria burden, according to the 2024 World Malaria Report, this vaccine comes not a moment too soon. Every day, 10 children die from malaria. Malaria remains a public health concern, responsible for approximately 38% of outpatient visits, 23% of hospital admissions, and around 13% of all hospital deaths in Uganda, statistics that underscore the magnitude of the crisis, especially for young children.



In 2023, Uganda was among the five African countries most affected by malaria, alongside Nigeria, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, and Mozambique.

Yet amid the urgency to strengthen control efforts, hope was embodied not just in the vaccine itself but in the collective energy of those gathered at the launch. The Infectious Diseases Research Collaboration (IDRC) played a key role, participating in the exhibition to showcase its latest research and breakthroughs in malaria prevention, treatment, and control. IDRC's contributions were more than scientific displays; they were living proof that consistent research, innovation, and local leadership can move the needle in public health.



Many of the advancements that paved the way for this vaccine, including clinical trials and studies on malaria's spread and treatment in Uganda, have roots in homegrown research, evidence that investment in science yields real, lifesaving results.

Prime Minister Nabbanja, echoing President Museveni's vision, called on parents to embrace the vaccine and protect their children's future. She spoke candidly of the immense toll malaria has taken on Uganda, robbing families of loved ones, draining the nation's productivity, and straining the health system for generations. "This vaccine is a step to liberate Uganda from the longstanding burden of malaria," she declared, urging parents to seize this opportunity to rewrite their children's stories.

The campaign, aptly themed "Vaccinate Against Malaria and Other Preventable Diseases, Protect Your Child for Life," is sweeping across 105 out of Uganda's 136 districts, each chosen for their high malaria transmission rates. Over 2.2 million doses of the malaria vaccine have already been distributed, and community mobilization efforts are in full swing, rallying parents and caregivers from every walk of life to participate in the immunization drive.

But the message from health leaders and researchers was consistent: the vaccine is a game changer, but it is not a silver bullet, Uganda's fight against malaria will continue to rely on proven interventions; mosquito nets, indoor residual spraying, rapid treatment and, most importantly, continued research to refine the malaria control tool kit. It is this ongoing investment in malaria research that made the R21/Matrix-M vaccine possible in the first place, and it will be science that delivers Uganda, step by step, toward a malaria-free future.

As dusk fell on the launch event, there was a palpable sense of shared purpose. Uganda's leaders, scientists, health workers, and families had come together to turn the tide against one of the country's deadliest enemies. With research at the center and an unwavering commitment to the nation's children, Uganda's journey toward a malaria-free tomorrow has never looked more possible.



IDRC team members engage Village Health Teams (VHTs) at their exhibition booth during the national launch of Uganda's malaria vaccine, sharing cutting-edge research and innovative strategies for malaria prevention and control.



IDRC team members at the IDRC exhibit during the national malaria vaccine launch, showcasing research innovations and engaging with attendees on the fight against malaria.

IDRC Builds Specialist Capacity to Reach Uganda's Zero-Dose Children for Uganda Learning Hub Initiative

KAMPALA, UGANDA – In a critical move to bolster Uganda's immunisation equity efforts, the Infectious Diseases Research Collaboration (IDRC) convened a specialised training for its research team from June 11th to 12th, 2024, at the Golden Tulip Hotel Kampala. This intensive program prepared a frontline force of data collectors for a pivotal survey for the Uganda Learning Hub, demonstrating IDRC's active role in the national push to reach every child.

IDRC's leadership in this initiative underscores its vital role in generating evidence that shapes Uganda's public health strategies. For years, IDRC's health systems and social science

research have provided crucial insights into healthcare access, community barriers, and the dynamics of serving vulnerable populations. This deep expertise in generating robust, on-the-ground evidence has been instrumental in supporting the Ministry of Health and partners, making IDRC a key implementer for a survey of this national importance.

Setting the tone for the project, IDRC's Executive Director, Professor Moses Kanya, delivered a powerful message emphasising the profound importance of their work. "The quality of the data you collect on the ground directly translates into the reliability of the evidence we use to shape national health policy," Professor Kanya stated. "Your integrity and diligence are paramount in our mission to reach every last child."

The two-day session was an immersive experience in research excellence, focused on mastering the cutting-edge tools for modern field research. Researchers engaged in hands-on sessions with GPS machines for precise household tracking and the KoboCollect platform for robust data capture. The training was praised for its practical methodology. "The interactive sections, such as role-playing the questionnaire in local languages, made each participant active and ensured deep comprehension," highlighted Researcher Team Lead Mariam Badru. Speaking about IDRC's comprehensive approach, Faith Namugaya, Uganda Learning Hub Survey Team Lead, explained the organisation's perspective: "This survey is about more than just numbers; it's about understanding the story behind each zero-dose child. Our mission is to combine quantitative precision with qualitative depth." She elaborated, "From using GPS to accurately map and find every single household (Data Collection), to conducting sensitive interviews that uncover the complex social and economic barriers preventing vaccination (Social Science), and ensuring every piece of data is captured with the highest integrity (Regulatory & Quality Control), IDRC is committed to providing our partners with the clear, actionable evidence needed to design interventions that work."



IDRC Executive Director Professor Moses Kanya underscores the importance of quality data in reaching every child with life-saving vaccines, as Faith Namugaya, the coordinator for the IDRC Uganda Learning Hub, presents on the power of combining quantitative and qualitative data to better understand barriers to vaccination.



A Junior Data Manager demonstrates the use of a GPS device during a two-day training session aimed at equipping participants with skills to master modern field research tools.



This work is a cornerstone of the Uganda Learning Hub, a collaborative initiative aimed at generating practical, localised evidence to tackle immunisation gaps. The Hub prioritises reaching zero-dose children and "missed communities," recognising this as the central challenge to achieving immunisation equity in the country. Its approach acknowledges that reaching these children is not just a health issue but a critical step toward building resilient primary healthcare systems and ensuring equitable development. IDRC's survey provides the granular, on-the-ground data needed to turn the Hub's strategic objectives into reality.

The impact of this meticulous preparation was immediate. Following the training, the team deployed to Mubende District, where the skills imparted were directly credited as the catalyst for success. The team successfully located and identified all 99 targeted households, a testament to the training's rigour. "The training was crucial," stated Charles Opio, Uganda Learning Hub Survey Team Lead. "The hands-on practice with the GPS devices and data platforms directly led to the successful identification of every household in a complex operational landscape."

The training and its successful field application have provided fresh impetus for the project. Building on this momentum, IDRC will intensify its efforts across all fronts. The next phase will see the Data Science team analyse the quantitative data to identify statistical patterns and geographic clusters



*This level of hands-on training will always be the crucial factor in our success.-
Dr Charles Opio, Field Team Lead*

"The quality of the data you collect on the ground directly translates into the reliability of the evidence we use to shape national health policy." --Professor Moses Kamya

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Simultaneously, the Social Science team will synthesise the qualitative findings to build a rich narrative of the barriers families face. Finally, these integrated findings will be translated into a comprehensive report with actionable recommendations for the Ministry of Health and project partners, helping to design and target future immunisation strategies effectively. By translating this cutting-edge research into practical strategies, IDRC remains steadfast in its commitment to helping turn the vision of immunisation for all into a reality.



Participants engage in a hands-on session during the two-day research training focused on mastering data capture platforms.

World Malaria Day: IDRC Highlights Research as Uganda Rallies Behind “Malaria Ends With Us”

GULU, UGANDA – April 25, 2025—The city of Gulu was alive with determination and hope as Uganda commemorated World Malaria Day under the rallying call “Malaria Ends With Us.” This year’s event drew together the Ministry of Health, global partners, and the Infectious Diseases Research Collaboration (IDRC), whose cutting-edge research has shaped Uganda’s malaria control efforts over the elimination campaign.

As crowds lined the streets for a vibrant parade ahead of the main ceremony at Kaunda Grounds, the IDRC team stepped to the forefront—leading with banners, conviction, and the proven power of science. Their visible presence symbolised the central role research and evidence play in the national fight against malaria, showing that real progress is made when communities and scientists march side by side.

IDRC’s impact echoed throughout the day in every speech, display, and discussion. The organisation showcased years of investment in malaria surveillance, beginning with the Uganda Malaria Surveillance Project in 2006, supporting over 70 major health facilities nationwide. This robust network means public health facilities can track malaria trends in real time, enabling quick, data-driven responses that save lives and guide intervention delivery. IDRC’s work has been fundamental in evaluating the effectiveness of tools like IRS and LLINs, helping Uganda to structure its approach to drug and insecticide resistance - threats that continue to derail malaria control progress.

At the exhibition, the air buzzed with curiosity and engagement as IDRC scientists explained how their entomology teams study mosquito behaviour and genetic adaptation, how data scientists and social science groups tackle the unseen barriers to prevention and care, and how immunologists unravel the body’s defences to create better vaccines. All these efforts connect at a single point: making malaria elimination a reality, not a dream.



IDRC joins the World Malaria Day march, walking in solidarity with partners and communities in the fight to eliminate malaria.



The IDRC team marches with pride during the World Malaria Day procession, reaffirming their commitment to research and the fight against malaria.



The urgency to intensify malaria elimination efforts was matched by the words of Hon. Dr. Jane Ruth Aceng, Uganda's Minister of Health, who called for intensified community action and vigilance, especially for the country's most vulnerable. "The fight against malaria is a fight for our children's future and the future of Uganda," she declared, urging every Ugandan to play their part in prevention, treatment, and vaccine uptake.

Development partners, including WHO, PMI, UNICEF, and UNDP, lent their voices and support, commending Uganda's leadership and highlighting the malaria vaccine rollout as a pivotal achievement. Mr. Ian C. King, representing UNDP and the UN family, underscored the broader impact of the effort, calling the malaria fight a public health and economic priority.

Building on the momentum from the World Malaria Day meeting in Gulu, IDRC's commitment to a broad range of malaria research topics has never been more evident, aiming to drive Uganda's malaria response forward on every front possible. Its genomics and immunology teams continue to study parasite and human genome variability, identify new drug and vaccine resistance markers, and guide national elimination strategies that cross borders and serve even the most vulnerable communities. Entomology experts work tirelessly to close gaps in human protection, while social scientists refine interventions to be more effective and equitable for real-world challenges. Meanwhile, IDRC's data science teams are powering a new era of malaria control with advanced analytics and real-time surveillance tools, delivering actionable insights directly to those making decisions on the ground.

As the commemoration in Gulu ended, there was a sense that something powerful had taken root—a spirit of unity, scientific rigour, and national pride. Uganda's World Malaria Day was not just a ceremonial occasion, but a living testament to what is possible when research leads the way and every stakeholder steps up. With Uganda's Ministry of Health committing to evidence-based action, IDRC at the heart of delivering high-quality scientific research, and partners across the spectrum standing together, the vision of a malaria-free Uganda is not just on the horizon - it is coming sharply into view.



The Minister of Health, Hon. Dr. Jane Ruth Aceng, visits the IDRC exhibit during the World Malaria Day 2025 celebrations.



IDRC's Dr. Samuel Gonahasa guides Minister of Health, Hon. Dr. Jane Ruth Aceng, through the IDRC exhibit, explaining key innovations on display during the World Malaria Day 2025 celebrations.



UPCOMING EVENTS

IDRC at

ASTMH 2025 Annual Meeting

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Knowledge

From scientific breakthroughs to critical health interventions, join global leaders as we push the boundaries of tropical medicine



Toronto, Canada



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IDRC will be presenting

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