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## UCT leads groundbreaking effort to combat drug-resistant malaria in East Africa

A research consortium led by the University of Cape Town (UCT) has played a pivotal role in developing the first regional action plan to combat drug-resistant malaria in East Africa. Endorsed by health ministers from across the region, the plan represents a major step forward in preserving the efficacy of life-saving antimalarial treatments.

The Regional Detailed Action Plan for Responding to Antimalarial Drug Resistance in East Africa was officially endorsed in May 2025 at the 25th Ordinary Meeting of the East African Community (EAC) Sectoral Council of Ministers of Health. Developed through a partnership between UCT's [Mitigating Antimalarial Resistance Consortium in South-East Africa \(MARC SE-Africa\)](#) and the EAC Roll Back Malaria Secretariat, the plan unites national malaria programmes and global health stakeholders behind a common goal: safeguarding effective malaria treatment amid growing resistance and tightening global funding.

Senior researcher at UCT and technical advisor within the consortium, Dr Stephanie van Wyk, said: "This is a landmark achievement. This endorsement reflects the potential realised when scientific evidence, political will and regional solidarity converge. UCT remains committed to fostering solutions that not only assist our East African neighbours but also provide a template for responses to drug resistant malaria in other African regions. By enhancing case management and proactively addressing resistance challenges through regional collaboration, we contribute to safeguarding the effectiveness of antimalarial treatments throughout the endemic regions of Southern Africa."

The action plan targets drug-resistant *Plasmodium falciparum*, especially resistance to artemisinin-based combination therapies (ACTs) – the frontline treatment for malaria. The plan outlines a roadmap for optimised treatment protocols, improved supply chain management and strengthened regional cooperation by integrating the latest research and surveillance data. It also identifies evidence-based short- and medium-term interventions to address resistance before it undermines decades of progress in malaria control.

The plan's development involved intensive collaboration with leading national and international health partners, including the Global Fund, the President's Malaria Initiative, the Clinton Health Access Initiative, the African Leaders Malaria Alliance and Medicines for

Malaria Venture. The EAC Roll Back Malaria Secretariat, led by Dr Michael Katende, played a central coordinating role in aligning partner countries and institutions behind a shared vision.

"Malaria knows no borders, and neither should our response. This consensus-based regional action plan demonstrates the power of multinational collaboration in tackling drug-resistant malaria. Now is the critical moment for East African nations and international partners to commit to sustained action and ensure effective malaria treatment remains available for millions at risk," said Professor Karen Barnes, lead of MARC SE-Africa and coordinator of the initiative at UCT.

With more than 300 million people – over 80% of the EAC population – living at risk of malaria, the plan arrives at a critical juncture. Resistance is rising, and funding shortfalls threaten to reverse hard-won gains. The coordinated approach signals a shift toward African-led, research-driven and politically unified responses to one of the continent's most pressing public health threats.

Through this regional initiative, East Africa sets a new precedent for protecting the impact of ACTs, reinforcing its commitment to collective action, and demonstrating leadership in global health innovation.

The [MARC SE-Africa project](#) is supported by the Global Health European & Developing Countries Clinical Trials Partnership (EDCTP3) Joint Undertaking and its member organisations.

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