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## Vaccination systems are failing children in Africa, say UCT experts

African children are still dying in large numbers as a result of failing vaccination systems for preventable disease in many regions, University of Cape Town experts have said in the latest issue of *PLOS Medicine*.

*PLOS Medicine* is an open-access, peer-reviewed medical journal.

In Africa, issues of vaccine supply, financing and sustainability require urgent attention if the Millennium Development Goals are to be achieved, said UCT's Professor Gregory Hussey, Dr Charles Wiysonge and Shingai Machingaidze from the Vaccines for Africa Initiative (VACFA). VACFA is an advocacy and research group based at UCT's Institute of Infectious Disease and Molecular Medicine.

While the trio commended African countries for their progress in immunisation programmes, they warned that infectious disease outbreaks such as polio and measles, as well as high vaccine dropout rates across the region, indicate failures within the immunisation system.

The authors argued that wide differences between countries and even within countries are responsible for large numbers of African children remaining unreachable, unvaccinated, under-vaccinated. As a result they are still dying from vaccine-preventable diseases.

In 2010, an estimated 1.5 million children died worldwide from vaccine-preventable diseases. The authors argued that with the 2015 deadline for the Millennium Development Goals approaching, it is necessary for Africa to take stock, critically assess its position, take ownership of regional and country-specific problems, and develop precise strategies to overcome challenges.

The authors said: "We believe that in order for Africa to take advantage of the new decade of vaccines and extend the full benefits of immunisation to its citizens by 2020 and beyond, a critical assessment is a fundamental first step."

They argued that strengthening immunisation systems is essential because most

health facilities are under-staffed and do not have adequate resources to function efficiently. Increased political commitment is also needed.

“African leaders must be held accountable for meeting agreed country targets and honouring international commitments made,” said the authors.

***ENDS***

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