



# Malaria through an equity lens: meeting the goals for all

## Message from the Chairman and CEO

In 2015, the United Nations adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), calling for action by all countries to meet the comprehensive goals.

Target 3.3 of the SDGs includes ending the epidemic of malaria.

MMV has been answering this call, working to ensure inclusivity and equity in its end-to-end mission to discover, develop and deliver critically needed new malaria medicines, in alignment with SDG 10 (to reduce inequalities). Despite the continued challenges brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic — which exposed the extent of inequity in public health — in 2021, MMV and partners remained committed to that mission and to placing the people most at risk, front and centre of its initiatives. At this, the halfway mark of the 2030 Agenda, it is a moment to reflect on the successes in the malaria fight and take stock of what remains to be done.

### The case for malaria eradication has never been stronger

Over the last 20 years, the malaria community's work saved an estimated 10.6 million lives and prevented ~1.7 billion cases. Yet, we were sobered by the data from the World Malaria Report (WMR) 2021<sup>1</sup> that the global burden of malaria is 12% more than in 2019 — an estimated 627,000 people lost their lives to the disease in 2020; of these, 96% were in Africa and 80% of those from Africa were young children. These statistics underscore the reality of the malaria burden and the need for the work of MMV and its partners to continue.

### Seasonal malaria chemoprevention makes great strides

For 6 years, MMV has played a vital role in protecting children from malaria by implementing WHO-recommended seasonal malaria chemoprevention (SMC), sulfadoxine-pyrimethamine and amodiaquine (SPAQ). With partners, MMV helped over 33 million children in 13 Sahel countries receive SMC, ensured the scale-up of global and local manufacturers to provide

over 100 million SPAQ courses and coordinated regional collaboration to routinely deploy the intervention.

SMC campaigns demonstrated the advantages of drug-mediated malaria prevention. Moreover, studies that combined SMC with the WHO-endorsed RTS,S vaccine<sup>2</sup> showed greater protection in children than either intervention alone, leading some countries to consider joint implementation.

### Progress in the drive to push back resistance

Africa is facing the serious threat of resistance to artemisinin<sup>3</sup>. In 2021, MMV made progress in advancing next-generation antimalarial compounds to counter this threat. Notably, in September, MMV and Novartis reported positive Phase II results for ganaplacide-lumefantrine, a novel combination therapy for uncomplicated malaria in adults and children. Another Phase IIb study is ongoing.

### Tackling inequity in public health

Inequity in public health is present at many levels. A recent FCDO strategy paper<sup>4</sup>, *Ending preventable deaths of mothers, babies and children by 2030* reiterates

1 World Malaria Report 2021: <https://www.who.int/teams/global-malaria-programme/reports/world-malaria-report-2021>  
2 First-ever malaria vaccine to get WHO recommendation for roll-out: <https://www.mmv.org/newsroom/news/first-ever-malaria-vaccine-get-who-recommendation-roll-out>  
3 Evidence of Artemisinin-Resistant Malaria in Africa: <https://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMoa2101746>

the enormous number of annual maternal, new-born and child deaths. Given that the population is at high risk of malaria, but has little in targeted treatment, MMV has prioritized meeting the needs of pregnant women and their babies.

Our Malaria in Mothers and Babies (MiMBa) initiative aims to raise the standard of care for pregnant women and neonates affected by malaria. Activities include ensuring drug supplies, generating data on the impact of existing antimalarials, developing new medicines deemed low risk to the developing foetus and supporting the Speed Up Scale-Up Campaign<sup>5</sup>.

Furthermore, the MMV and Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine (LSTM) collaboration to establish pregnancy registries across sub-Saharan Africa is helping to fill the data gap on the use of antimalarials in pregnancy and will help us inform the development of appropriate options.

### Initiatives to expand equitable access of *P. vivax* cures

In 2021, in collaboration with partners, MMV launched two new tafenoquine<sup>6</sup>-related programmes: the VivAction initiative to expand the suite of tools for *P. vivax* case management; and the implementation of the TRuST study – the first-ever evaluation of the use of tafenoquine in a real-world setting, to allow the Brazilian Ministry of Health (MoH) to decide whether to adopt the protocol nationwide.

### Deepening our role in supply chain security

We are intensifying our focus on making antimalarial medicines more accessible, working with Kenya's Universal Corporation Ltd., as well as Nigeria's Emzor Ltd. and Swipha Ltd. to produce WHO-prequalified sulfadoxine-pyrimethamine to protect children and pregnant women.

### A new resistance strategy

MMV's new co-developed treatments are already saving lives while others are progressing through the pipeline. MMV continues to pioneer ground-breaking approaches to accelerate research into new compounds – for instance, a predictive assessment tool to gauge the risk of resistance of antimalarial compounds (p. 29).

Furthermore, in May 2021, *Trends in Parasitology* published MMV's new strategy of resistance identification<sup>7</sup> outlining early decision processes to stop/deprioritize a compound/series if a risk of drug resistance is identified. This tool will inform investment decisions and improve the quality of compounds over time from a resistance perspective.

### Continuing support for the COVID-19 response

MMV continues to leverage its assets, partnerships and end-to-end capabilities in contribution to the ongoing COVID-19 response. This includes support for compound screening against SARS-CoV-2; support to modelling and simulation platforms to predict potential drug-drug interactions and drug concentrations in human lung epithelium for several antimalarials; as well as support for the progression into clinical development of two existing antimalarials.

**“*MMV continues to drive towards equity, building on successes and redoubling our focus on malaria eradication and the attainment of the SDGs*”**

### A moment for reflection and gratitude

2021 saw the untimely loss of two much-respected MMV advisors; Ambassador Dr Konji Sebati, South African doctor, diplomat and MMV Board member; and MMV's Access and Product Management Advisory Committee co-Chair Dr Martin de Smet, physician and malaria coordinator, Médecins Sans Frontières.

These venerable members of MMV's governing bodies dedicated their lives to improving the health of others and provided crucial leadership and guidance to MMV over many years. They will be sorely missed.

MMV extends its thanks to outgoing Chairman, Per Wold-Olsen for his superb leadership over the years and heart-felt appreciation goes out to Dennis Schmatz and Win Gutteridge who reached the end of their terms as Board members in 2021.

In conclusion, while we face great challenges, we have reasons to be optimistic. We grow stronger with our expanding network of partners. With continued collaboration, over the years we have saved almost 3 million young lives and brought forward 13 quality medicines.

This work could not have been done without the partnership of our funders. Funding remains a lifeline for all sections of the malaria community, including research and development, and we applaud the WMR's call for donors to treble funding to meet the goals of the 2030 Agenda. The sustained commitment of MMV's donors has enabled significant progress over the last 2 decades and is essential moving forward to keep the malaria portfolio populated, advance the development of new compounds through the pipeline and achieve a future where everyone has access to the malaria interventions they need.

Meanwhile, MMV continues to drive towards equity, building on successes and redoubling our focus on malaria eradication and the attainment of the SDGs. With our deep commitment to ending malaria, we are working with partners to keep the heartbeat of health strong among all those at risk of malaria, until that vision is eventually realised. •

4 Ending preventable deaths of mothers, babies and children by 2030: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ending-preventable-deaths-of-mothers-babies-and-children-by-2030/ending-preventable-deaths-of-mothers-babies-and-children-by-2030-approach-paper>  
5 Speed Up Scale Up of Intermittent Preventative Treatment of Malaria in Pregnancy: <https://www.mmv.org/newsroom/events/speed-scale-intermittent-preventative-treatment-malaria-pregnancy>  
6 Tafenoquine: an antimalarial indicated for the prevention of *P. vivax* relapse co-developed by GSK and MMV  
7 MMV devises a predictive tool to assess resistance to antimalarial compounds and guide their development: <https://www.mmv.org/newsroom/news/mmv-devises-predictive-tool-assess-resistance-antimalarial-compounds-and-guide-their>



**Mr Alan Court**  
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