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To mark World Malaria Day, newly appointed Vestergaard CEO Amar Ali reflects on the progress the malaria community has made to date and shares his thoughts on the opportunities and challenges that lie ahead. He also reflects on the significance of two of Vestergaard's 2023 achievements - the launch of our first dual active ingredient net and the upcoming production of our one billionth long-lasting insecticidal net (LLIN).

## **What do you see as the biggest challenge to deliver zero malaria?**

Zero malaria is, unfortunately, a moving target. There is a perfect storm brewing that threatens to undo decades of progress with malaria: growing resistance to public health insecticides, new malaria vector species outpacing the science, widening funding gaps, and the potential impact of climate change on malaria transmission.

This year's theme for [World Malaria Day](#) underscores the approach we need to take to address these multiple challenges. Bolder investment, innovation and implementation will be crucial - not just for the funds needed to meet 2030 targets to reduce and eliminate malaria but for improved interventions that will bring broader benefits to malaria-affected regions.



[Time To Deliver - World Malaria Day 2023.](#)

## **What opportunities could bolder, more considered investments unlock for malaria prevention?**

The recent progress we've seen in malaria vaccines is a great example of the impact that focused investments can have on disease prevention. But that's just one piece of the puzzle.

More robust investments in multi-faceted malaria programmes will reduce illness and save millions of lives as well as contribute to economic progress and quality of life, particularly on the African continent. These include bolstering economies, empowering youth, and strengthening health systems. The investment case for improved interventions becomes really clear when you can see the bigger picture.

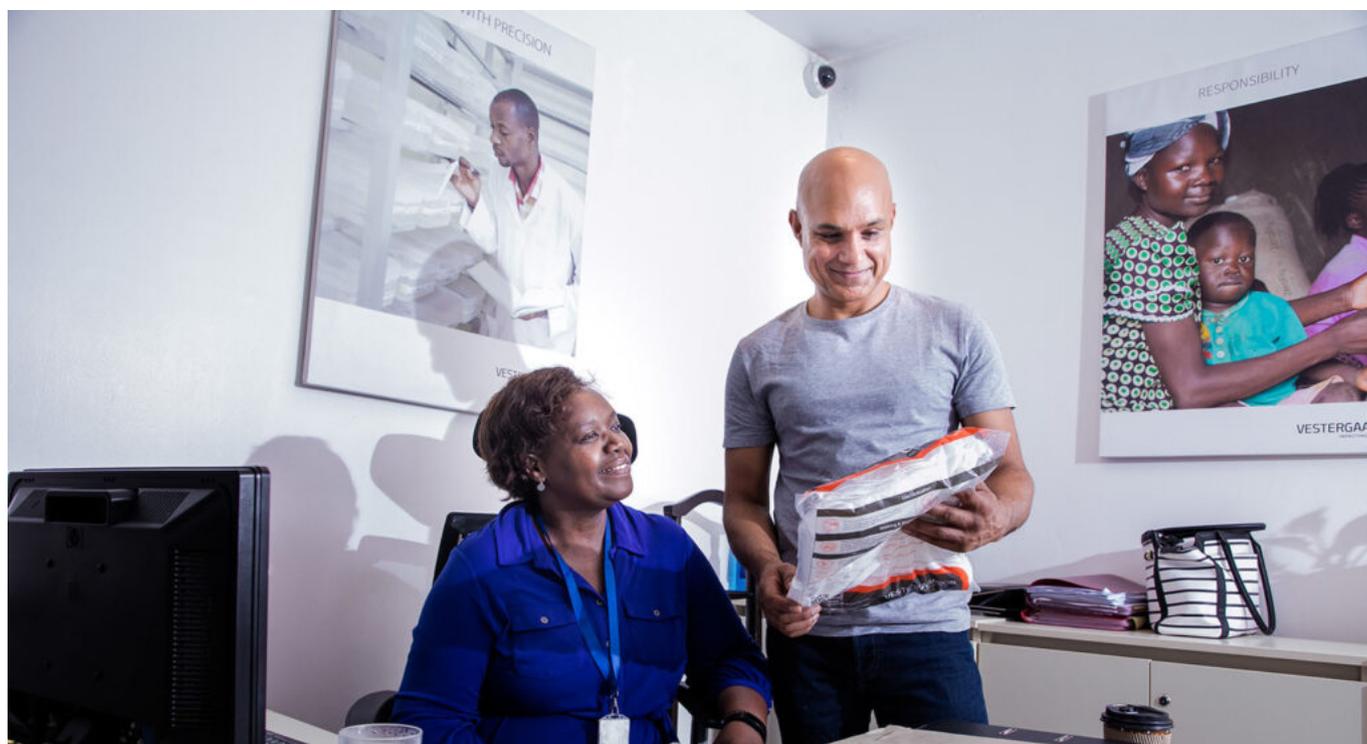
## **The billionth net will be a significant milestone for Vestergaard. What does it mean for you to be joining the company and the global malaria community at this time?**

I'm excited to be taking the helm as the company is within reach of producing and distributing its one billionth net. It's a good moment to pause and reflect on the progress that we, together with the broader global malaria community, have made: The World Health Organisation estimates that since 2000, 2 billion malaria cases and 11.7 million deaths have been averted thanks to the scaling up of malaria interventions, including LLINs (World Malaria Report 2022). We are proud to have been part of that effort.

It's also a reminder of how much more we can deliver with the continuous and collective commitment of our funders, partners and colleagues worldwide. Going forward, we will continue to focus our efforts on strengthening our partnerships, working closely with our implementation partners on the ground. We will continue to ramp up our innovation to deliver greater impact, even as we are confronted with new challenges.

## **How is Vestergaard innovating in response to emerging biological threats?**

Our first dual active ingredient net, [PermaNet Dual](#), was developed to combat widespread pyrethroid resistance in mosquitoes and to address the reality that our gains in the fight against malaria are plateauing. It combines two insecticides with two modes of action and provides the highest protection against pyrethroid-resistant mosquitoes.



CEO Amar Ali at the Vestergaard office in Kenya discussing PermaNet Dual, a dual-active pyrethroid-chlorfenapyr long-lasting insecticidal net that recently received WHO PQ recommendation.

The [WHO](#) recently issued a *strong recommendation* for the deployment of pyrethroid-chlorfenapyr nets vs pyrethroid-only nets to protect adults and children in areas where mosquitoes are resistant to pyrethroids.

Following this, PermaNet Dual gained [prequalification by the WHO](#) – a promising step towards more equitable access to life-saving vector control tools. We will leverage the PermaNet manufacturing platform to offer production at scale and accelerate the deployment of dual active ingredient nets to reach regions with the most acute need. Uganda will be the first country to receive these next-generation nets.

We are continuing to develop new dual-active ingredient LLINs with other modes of action in our R&D pipeline as part of our commitment to innovation. We believe this new generation of LLINs will play a critical role in achieving sustained malaria control and elimination.

## **From your experience, what strategies could public health and disease prevention adopt from food systems?**

I can identify many similarities. Both operate at the intersection of public, private and development sectors, delivering national strategies that are often intended for the hardest-to-reach regions.

As with food systems transformation and the humanitarian food space, the private sector can play a central role to deliver innovation in vector control, bringing our technical expertise and amplifying impact through the power of partnerships. Whether it is to provide access to nutritious food or bed nets, it is about working closely with donor-funded organisations to deliver life-saving commodities.

Multi-actor collaboration is crucial, and it is vital that we establish effective channels of communication to do this properly - many actors are involved, with significant differences in priorities.

In the case of localising food production in Africa, private and public sector players worked closely with major humanitarian organisations like the World Food Programme in order to resolve major supply chain issues. In doing so, we also improved livelihoods, agricultural production and nutrition in the region, creating a big positive multiplier effect through effective and ongoing collaboration.

My experience in transforming food systems in Africa has also underscored the importance of taking a more systemic approach when tackling developmental challenges, including disease prevention.

Climate change, for instance, will impact a whole range of issues, from food production and security to disease control and prevention. There are predictions that link warmer and wetter climates with a surge in malaria levels, which we are already seeing in parts of the world, together with the unwelcome arrival of invasive malaria mosquitoes in urban areas.

These issues do not exist in siloes, and we need to work towards solutions that address

these multiple challenges in a holistic and coordinated way.



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### **Lastly, how can the malaria community improve and accelerate implementation?**

In the development world, the days of implementing programmes and solutions ‘from the outside-in’ are over. The same goes for malaria prevention. It is essential that we work to empower communities and beneficiaries on the ground, opening channels of communication to understand what they think and how they want malaria prevention programmes to work. We also need to look more deeply at our environmental impact and ensure that we’re doing all we can as a global community to be more sustainable and reduce our overall ecological footprint.

I am encouraged to see, slowly but surely, a more integrated view of development taking hold within the sector. I hope that the call for bolder action across the global community on World Malaria Day can accelerate this shift towards a more connected approach.

Ultimately, we cannot become complacent with the progress that has been made and take our eye off the ball. Behind the science and the supply chains, it's really all about people and equipping them with the tools they need to protect themselves and their loved ones against malaria. That alone is the greatest motivator for my new colleagues and for me as we take the company into its next chapter.