

Bill Gates has praised Rwanda's transformation of its healthcare system, saying the country's progress offers evidence that sustained investment, innovation and strong leadership can save lives and strengthen health systems.

The philanthropist and Chair of the Gates Foundation made the remarks on Wednesday during a visit to the University of Global Health Equity (UGHE) in Butaro, where he joined First Lady Jeannette Kagame and hundreds of global health experts at the inaugural Paul E. Farmer Butaro Dialogues on Health Equity and Innovation.

The gathering brought together researchers, policymakers, healthcare professionals, development partners and students to discuss one of global health's biggest challenges: how to ensure proven medical innovations are implemented widely enough to reduce preventable maternal and child deaths.



*During a visit to the University of Global Health Equity (UGHE) in Butaro, Bill Gates was joined by First Lady Jeannette Kagame and hundreds of global health experts at the inaugural Paul E. Farmer Butaro Dialogues on Health Equity and Innovation.*

Speaking at the forum, Gates said the world already has many of the tools needed to improve health outcomes, but too many communities continue to miss out because those solutions are not reaching them at scale.

He pointed to Rwanda as an example of what sustained commitment can achieve, highlighting the country's progress in reducing maternal mortality and improving child survival through investments in primary healthcare and equitable access to medical services.

Gates also used the occasion to pay tribute to the late Dr. Paul Farmer, the renowned physician and global health champion who founded UGHE and whose vision inspired the annual dialogue.

"I want to honor the legacy of the man who helped build this place, my dear friend Paul Farmer," Gates said. "I had the opportunity to visit Paul's grave here at UGHE and plant a tree at his memorial. As I stood there, I remembered my remarkable first journey to Rwanda."

He said Farmer's commitment to delivering quality healthcare to underserved communities continues to influence global efforts to build stronger and more

equitable health systems.

The conference was organized by UGHE in partnership with the Consortium of Medical Schools–Africa (COMS-Africa) and the Gates Foundation. Participants explored ways to close the gap between medical research and real-world implementation, particularly in maternal, newborn and child health.

Health experts at the dialogue said many interventions capable of preventing deaths among mothers and young children have already been proven effective. The remaining challenge, they argued, is ensuring those innovations are financed, integrated into national health systems and delivered consistently to the populations that need them most.

Rwanda has made significant progress in maternal and child health over the past two decades. Government data show that 95% of births now take place in health facilities. Maternal mortality has declined to 203 deaths per 100,000 live births, while neonatal mortality stands at 19 deaths per 1,000 live births. Infant mortality is 33 per 1,000 live births, and under-five mortality has fallen to 45 per 1,000.

UGHE Vice Chancellor Prof. Philip Cotton said the global health community must match its ambitions with greater investment.

“Today, we call on the global health community to examine the gap between what we claim to value and what we actually invest in, and then work together to close that gap,” he said.

Founded in 2015, UGHE has campuses in Kigali and Butaro and trains health professionals committed to advancing health equity across Africa. Its Butaro campus, inaugurated by President Paul Kagame in 2019, has become a regional hub for medical education, research and innovation.

Organizers said the Paul E. Farmer Butaro Dialogues will serve as an annual platform to bring together governments, universities, researchers and development partners to accelerate the adoption of evidence-based solutions and improve health outcomes across the continent.