

ASLM2020: Strategies and Vision to Strengthen Public Health Laboratory Medicine in Africa

Vision: Improve healthcare in Africa by strengthening laboratory services

Mission: Advance professional laboratory medicine practices, science and networks in Africa

The African Society for Laboratory Medicine (ASLM) is a pan-African professional body endorsed by the African Union and focused on improving healthcare by strengthening diagnostic testing. Laboratory testing is pivotal in disease diagnosis, epidemiological surveillance, outbreak investigations, initiation and monitoring of treatment, as well as research and development.

Medical laboratories in Africa are unfortunately underdeveloped and cannot meet the testing demands of rapidly growing health delivery services in the 21st century. Recognizing WHO Resolution AFR/RC58/R2 for strengthening public health laboratories in the African region and the 2008 Maputo Declaration on Strengthening of Laboratory Systems, ASLM will address these challenges by working collaboratively with governments, national, regional and international organizations, implementing partners, the private sector and other agencies to achieve the following goals by 2020:

Goal 1 – African Laboratory Workforce Development: Strengthen the laboratory workforce in Africa to achieve Millennium Development Goals for Health

Strategic Direction: According to the World Health Organization Regional Office for Africa (WHO/AFRO), Africa has fewer than one laboratory professional per 10,000 citizens. Delivery of effective healthcare and expanding health services to new areas requires a viable workforce. Major workforce gaps that ASLM will focus on include development of standards for training and career development in order to increase productivity and retention.

Key Targets: Train and certify 30,000 laboratory professionals and clinicians by 2020, advocate for National Laboratory Professional Regulatory Councils and develop standardized frameworks for workforce development, retention, and improving and maintaining pre-service training capacity.

Goal 2 – Laboratory Accreditation: Transform the quality of diagnostic services

Strategic Direction: Fewer than 400 laboratories in Africa are accredited to international standards and 90% are in South Africa. Accredited laboratories provide accurate, timely results that will be used to make impactful medical and public health decisions for the patient and community. ASLM will focus on laboratory system strengthening, improved planning and policies and the expansion of the WHO/AFRO Stepwise Laboratory Improvement Process towards Accreditation (SLIPTA) programme to increase the number of accredited laboratories.

Key Targets: By 2020, enroll 2,500 laboratories in the WHO SLIPTA quality improvement programme, and enable 250 laboratories to achieve accreditation by international standards.

Goal 3 – African National and Regional Regulatory Environments: Develop strong, harmonized regulatory systems for diagnostic products that guarantee patient safety and help assure accurate laboratory results

Strategic Direction: Africa lacks strong national and regional regulatory systems to prevent the use of poor quality diagnostic products. Working with governments and other organizations both within countries and across regions as a pan-African body, ASLM will focus on strengthening regulatory standards, systems for new product validation, standardized testing protocols and promoting regulatory harmonization through advocacy, consensus-building, mobilization and technical assistance.

Key Targets: By 2020, raise regulatory standards for diagnostic products to stringent international levels (as defined by the Global Harmonization Taskforce) in 25 countries (50% of the countries in Africa) and to enable harmonized regulation of diagnostics in the 5 economic regions of Africa.

Goal 4 – African Network of National Public Health Reference Laboratories: Strengthen national laboratory networks and promote South-South cooperation and collaboration

Strategic Direction: National Public Health Reference Laboratories play a key role in training, assuring quality and developing laboratory capacity throughout the healthcare system in their respective countries. Linking these laboratories in a regional network is critical to increase research capacity, quality management systems, disease detection and sustainability of health programmes throughout Africa. Moreover, the regional laboratory network will facilitate South to South cooperation and collaboration.

Key Targets: By 2020, at least 30 countries will have developed national public health reference laboratories that participate in an African Network of National Public Health Reference laboratories. This network will collaborate on training, research, quality assurance, disease detection and capacity development activities.