

## CLWA 2023 Ambassadors

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## **COMMUNIQUE ISSUED AT THE END OF CELEBRATELAB® WEST AFRICA 2023 CONFERENCE HELD FROM APRIL 25<sup>TH</sup> TO 28<sup>TH</sup> 2023 AT ABUJA, NIGERIA**

### **PREAMBLE**

The 9th Annual Professional Meeting for medical laboratory personnel and research scientists, CelebrateLAB® West Africa 2023 Conference, was held from April 25<sup>th</sup> to 28<sup>th</sup> 2023 at the Shehu Musa Yar'Adua International Conference Centre, Abuja, Nigeria. The theme of the conference was “*Empowering the Laboratory for Surveillance, Research, and Early Detection of Emerging and Re-emerging Diseases*”. Convened by the Liberia-based CelebrateLAB® West Africa, the conference was organized in partnership with Africabio Enterprises, Inc., the Association of Medical Laboratory Scientists of Nigeria (AMLSN) and other key partners. Based on the fact that laboratory information is critical for disease surveillance and control programs, the 2023 conference focused on empowering laboratories’ preparedness for prompt diagnosis and management of disease outbreaks in West Africa.

Before an outbreak, laboratory-supported surveillance allows early detection of cases, and during an outbreak, a sample of cases will have to be laboratory confirmed to assess changes in the etiological agent and guide decisions about the allocation of resources. Thus, preparedness and response support are provided by laboratories of differing capabilities. Field laboratories are useful in areas where resources are limited or nonexistent. More complete testing is usually done in regional laboratories. International reference laboratories may identify rare or dangerous pathogens, identify newly described organisms, and provide uncommon diagnostic reagents. In all, laboratory information must be accurate, timely, and subjected to quality assurance procedures.

It is apparent that despite significant scientific advances, emerging and reemerging diseases are still considered to be hazardous to humanity because of the unique nature of these diseases:

it is the encounter between two living organisms that have coexisted for millions of years within the people on the same planet without being previously recognized. The spectrum of human disease caused by pathogens varies considerably depending on the factors related to the ecological agent, the host, and the infectious agents.

Several emerging or reemerging infectious agents are organisms that could be used in biological control. The differentiation of a natural epidemic from a bioterrorism event is based on several epidemiological indices as well as on the molecular characterization of the pathogen(s) involved. Thus, the role of the medical laboratories is indeed very vital.

The conference had the following sub-themes:

1. Synergizing Competency and Quality in the Laboratory for Early Detection of Emerging and Re-emerging Infectious Diseases.
2. The Role of National Public Health Institutes in Epidemics and Pandemic: From Ebola to Covid-19.
3. Applied Biosafety/Biosecurity Issues in Medical Laboratories in an Era of Emerging and Re-emerging Infectious Diseases.
4. Understanding the Rise of Cardiometabolic Diseases in the Era of Emerging and Re-emerging Infectious Diseases.

The conference had the following objectives:

- To provide an avenue for stakeholders across West Africa to access information of importance to Laboratory Systems Strengthening (LSS)
- To provide continuing education to academics, clinical laboratory, and research professionals
- To provide an avenue for networking of medical laboratory professionals across West Africa.
- To strengthen the labor force for cross-border trade in skills, knowledge, and expertise.
- To showcase vendors and suppliers to share expertise and technology best suited for West Africa
- To provide an avenue for knowledge sharing in clinical and research best practices.

There were 16 workshop sessions, and a grand opening ceremony with high-level participation virtually and on-site, of Medical Laboratory Scientists from across West Africa, East Africa, the UK, and the USA.

The Conference recorded over three hundred onsite and virtual delegates consisting of laboratory professionals, physicians, regulators, policymakers, representatives of regional multilateral organizations, healthcare solution providers, product manufacturers, and suppliers. Participants were drawn from Liberia, Ghana, Uganda, Ethiopia, Zimbabwe, Sierra Leone, Congo, Cameroon, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

The keynote speaker, Professor Abimiku Alash'le, Executive Director of the International Research Center of Excellence of the Institute of Human Virology Nigeria (IHVN), was represented by Petronilla Ozumba, Assistant Director of Laboratory Services, IHVN. She discussed the roles of medical laboratories and medical laboratory scientists in national response against infectious diseases. She reiterated the need for early preparedness against the advent of infectious diseases in Africa.

### **Conference delegates, among other pertinent issues, deliberated on:**

- Building a framework for epidemic preparedness and Response in West Africa through North-South Collaboration
- West African consortium for clinical research on epidemic pathogens
- African initiatives to respond to diagnostic human resources capacity needs.
- Combating anti-microbial resistance in Africa: strategies, challenges, and suggestions for success
- Laboratory profession pathway: sustenance through a nationally approved scheme of service
- Assurance of patient safety through the clinical laboratory value chain
- Applied biosafety/biosecurity issues in medical laboratories in an era of emerging and re-emerging infectious diseases
- Medical Laboratory Science regularization in West Africa: The Medical Laboratory Science Council of Nigeria experience
- Developing the capacity and expertise of medical laboratory professionals in clinical trials

- Building professional capacity in clinical research to improve response to emerging epidemics and pandemics
- Biogenetic implications of Lassa fever virus transmission, recent epidemics in West Africa and Public Health challenges.

## Affirmations and Observations

### The Conference made the following affirmations and observations:

1. There is an urgent need to build a collaborative framework for epidemic preparedness and response in West Africa through North-South.
2. Noting that the burden of diseases is greatest in Africa, there is a need to ensure prompt and accurate diagnosis from the laboratory through continuous training and commitment of medical laboratory scientists to ensure the quality of services.
3. Going by the fact that the fight against diseases is mostly won and lost in the laboratory, there is a need for medical laboratory professionals to be engaged.
4. Participants noted that previous pandemics have highlighted the importance of laboratory diagnostics in disease surveillance and healthcare outcomes and acknowledged the critical role Medical Laboratory Professionals have played in building diagnostic and surveillance capacity in Africa during those pandemics. Furthermore, participants commended their involvement in contact tracing, case finding, sampling, specimen transportation, and diagnosis of the disease.
5. Participants noted that the conference offers a great avenue for medical laboratory professionals to gain recognition because despite them carrying a huge weight of diagnosis, they get little recognition for it.
6. Participants also noted that infectious diseases like HIV, Covid 19, Lassa fever, Ebola, etc., keep emerging and re-emerging, as such there is the need for early detection and response.
7. Participants agreed that infectious diseases would continue to emerge and re-emerge at national and subnational levels, as such, medical laboratories must

continue to rejig their policies and practices to effectively investigate outbreaks with the view to containing them early enough before they progress into pandemics and international calamities.

8. Participants advocated that in achieving Sustainable Development Goals, there should be a multi-sectorial integrated approach in areas of disease control integration. There should also be high-level political commitment as evident in most countries.
9. Participants noted the pivotal role of the medical laboratory profession in the Health System, stating emphatically that medical diagnoses and prescriptions most often, are dependent and contingent on the standard of medical laboratories and diagnostic competencies of the Medical Laboratory Scientists.
10. Participants lauded Medical Laboratory practitioners and other healthcare professionals for their resilience in the fight against pandemics, noting that in spite of a relative lack of motivation as demonstrated by the Government's opaque stance on hazard allowance, health insurance, and provision of safety kits and safe working environment, Medical Laboratory practitioners have stayed true to their professional calling of sacrifice to safeguard the health.
11. Participants noted that epidemics in Africa generally lasted long because they met the entire continent unprepared. It is therefore important that the life span and impact of subsequent pandemics be cut short through early preparation by all the pillars of an outbreak investigation.
12. Participants observed that nations cannot effectively fight off pandemics if they relegate in-country research and development efforts and depend on the importation of all diagnostic inputs. To this end, the conference resolved that medical and research laboratories in Africa must be rightly positioned to begin in-country production of diagnostics test kits, vaccines, and therapeutics if we are to make progress in combating diseases, instead of relying on importation which is usually challenged by global demand, travel restrictions, and antigenic mismatches.

## *Resolutions:*

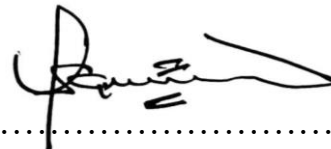
The Conference resolved that Africa needs to be fully prepared for emerging and re-emerging diseases. That could only be possible when medical laboratories are strengthened for testing, surveillance, and research. These laboratories should be fully digitalized and equipped with state-of-the-art gadgetry so that collection and analysis of data will meet international standards.

CelebrateLAB® West Africa most sincerely appreciates the Nigerian Government, through the Federal Ministry of Health for providing an enabling environment for the hosting of the conference in Abuja, Nigeria.

CelebrateLAB® West Africa equally appreciates the Association of Medical Laboratory Scientists of Nigeria (AMLSN) for the collaboration and huge support. All the sponsors deserve immeasurable gratitude for their financial and moral commitment, without which the conference would not have achieved the tremendous success it did.



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**Clarine Simpson Vaughn**  
CEO, CelebrateLAB® West Africa



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**Prof. James Garba Damen**  
President of AMLSN