

It is with great pleasure that that I have the honour of giving closing remarks for this very successful SLMTA/SLIPTA symposium. Let me begin by acknowledging the presence of invited guests, the SLMTA Governance Body and all of you who have been with us in the last 2 days.

It is amazing how SLMTA has become a global brand with over a 1000 Labs enrolled into the program. Be assured that you have been privileged to be part of a generation that has experienced a transformation in Laboratory, never seen before. A program that has seen 'Male TB Wards' being replaced by standard laboratories, A program that has seen "The walls of Bamenda Regional Hospital Laboratory" being brought down. Dr John Nkengason, a few years ago, called this a "Grass roots movement." Indeed it has been a movement, a movement that has reached the far corners of the world, beginning with Class of 2009 in Johannesburg South Africa and moving across oceans, landing in the shores of the Caribbean, turned the SLMTAns in Vietnam into Hollywood celebrities with an Award Winning SLMTA video. The young and old unknown Lab Scientist for a change, claimed their right place in the continuum of healthcare provision. We saw young scientist like Christa from Cameroon publishing for the 1st time in a peer reviewed journal and many others, who for the first time presented several abstracts in the last 2 conferences. The trademark of SLMTA has always been "Passion" – going beyond the call of duty. From the much feared SLMTA TOT Boot camps, to crossing of flooded rives in canoe boats in Lesotho, the Safety Officer in Rwanda who brought her sick baby on an IV Line into a SLIPTA debrief to defend her Section 12 of the checklist, to the training in the most unusual and not so ideal places to celebration of stars – this is what has defined SLMTA.

Honestly I have not seen a Lab Training Program that started with a class of 24 Trainers and within 6 years has a National Anthem, a currency of its own, an award winning video song and has infected thousands of people in all continents and received one of the highest global awards from CDC.

We have learnt that 242 Labs in 19 countries have now been audited under SLIPTA, 150 auditors certified by ASLM and endorsement of the program by governments. What gets measured gets fixed and SLIPTA has provided that mechanism for providing a yard-stick for measuring and tracking progress as well the recognition for progress. Looking ahead, SLIPTA will become more institutionalized within MOH and implemented on the ground by country and regional based institutions. ASLM has developed a “Framework for collaboration with partners in implementing SLIPTA” to guide this process that will bring more ownership and most importantly sustainability of the program

This 3rd SLMTA/SLIPTA symposium has been characterised by the reflections we have had in the last 2 years. We have turned a corner, and our program has gone through the PDCA cycle to remain relevant. You can see by the topics discussed in this symposium (i) bridging the gap between SLIPTA stars and accreditation (ii) Integrating SLMTA into Pre-Service curriculum (iii) Power of Partnership (iv) Life after SLMTA – tools that help transition to accreditation.

As I close I leave you with some few take home messages, let me highlight the 5 Key Lessons we have learned as eloquently laid out by Dr. Nkengason in his keynote address:

1. For any program to succeed there is need for clarity in your mission. And our mission was “In collaboration with national

and international partners, support countries to strengthen sustainable, integrated laboratory systems to provide quality diagnostic services for effective implementation of prevention, surveillance and treatment programs across diseases”

2. Success has many parents. There have been champions that put their heads on the block for the program, at laboratory, country, regional and global level. Some we have recognized publicly and some have remained the un-sung heroes of the movement
3. Strong Commitment - Determination to see it to the end. We started with “yes we can” and now we say “Yes We did”
4. Recognition – Every effort, small or big needs recognition. There is need to celebrate our success, which in most cases became our source of inspiration. Thanks to accreditation certificates, SLIPTA star certificates and other forms of local recognition that have kept the fire burning
5. There is power in partnerships – It is true that if you want to move fast, go alone, but if you want to travel far and further, do not go alone. Our partnerships between governments, development partners have been foundational in spreading the gospel of Quality improvement and Lab System Strengthening

The greatest failure is the failure to recognize your failures. As SLMTAs, we strongly believe that it does not matter how many times you fall down, but that each time you fall down, stand up, dust yourself and continue running. These failures have become our areas of improvement, which is the foundation of quality. It has been clear that the following need our urgent attention, as we move forward

1. SLMTA has been confirmed to funded countries

2. There has been limited engagement of the private sector - harness the power of public private partnerships
3. Uptake and impact of diagnostics – provide evidence of the impact of QMS on patient care

Our successes and publicly admitted failures will shape the future of our program. You have grown through snippets of what the next version of SLMTA and SLIPTA will look like.

Let me end by thanking you once again. I would like to invite you to the ASLM2018 SLMTA/SLIPTA symposium in Abuja Nigeria. Enjoy the rest of the conference

Thanks you