

## Towards Continuous Capacity Building of Medical Laboratories in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA)

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### Opinion

Medical Biology Laboratories in SSA are gradually increasing their capacity in Quality Assurance, although efforts are still needed. According to statistics of the World Health Organization, less than 10 % of the laboratories are accredited, that is certification of their performance at all stages of benefits.

For many years, African laboratory services were the "poor children" of health systems. Indeed, the most prevalent idea was that the essential role of a medical laboratory is to conduct observations of blood, stool and urine with a microscope. It took the development of medical specialties and training of high-level biologists to bring out that medical laboratories are essential both for curative medicine, preventive medicine and epidemiology surveys. The advent of AIDS and the continuing challenges posed by tuberculosis and malaria in particular have further strengthened the place, importance and convinced of the economic impact of laboratories in health systems. Thus, multidisciplinary laboratories were gradually developed, especially at the central level where leadership of biology was to be at a high scientific level, to enable especially the use of antiretroviral drugs and monitoring of co-infections.

For the past 30 years therefore, Quality Assurance has been more achieved regarding the 5 key areas: infrastructure, staff, equipment,

samples and procedures. Indeed, although the premises must be renovated or new one to be built especially in the periphery level, it is clear that efforts are being made to comply with international standards for infrastructures. This will end the occupation of confined spaces, with benches cluttered with equipment that are no longer functional in majority. Hygiene of the premises also needs more attention, with particular regard to biomedical waste management. Regarding staff, his quality is gradually improved in number and qualification. Personnel with high academic references are now available. However appropriate solutions must be found to the plethora of students in training institutions in our days. The quality of training suffers really because of organizational difficulties for practical works. For the technical platform, the evolution was marked by the gradual implementation of PLCs. But errors cannot be totally excluded. One should always bear in mind that the results delivered by a machine should be often checked. The quality of the samples is also improved with use of disposable tubes, although it is deplorable that tubes are still being recycled in some places. The procedures have also received attention especially at central and intermediate levels. But it is important to have complete and well written procedures manuals. So the effort must be continued to convince the staff that the availability of technical specifications and procedures should not be an end in itself. Let's hope that laboratories in SSA are in good situation for better contribution to strengthen care services!

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