

2025

REPORT ON THE STATUS OF LABORATORY ASSOCIATIONS IN AFRICA

A Continental Review of Capacity, Challenges, and Future
Directions for Laboratory Professional Bodies



FeLPA

Federation of Laboratory
Professionals in Africa



ASLM

AFRICAN SOCIETY FOR LABORATORY MEDICINE

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Executive Summary

Medical Laboratory Associations (MLAs) in Africa play a pivotal role in advancing healthcare outcomes across the continent. These associations, comprising laboratory scientists and technicians from both public and private institutions, are instrumental in capacity building, advocacy, and networking within the laboratory sector. The African Society for Laboratory Medicine (ASLM), in collaboration with the Federation of Laboratory Professional Associations in

Africa (FeLPA), conducted a survey to assess the status of MLAs across the continent. The survey aimed to identify areas for improvement and provide recommendations to strengthen these associations.

The survey, conducted between September 2024 and January 2025, gathered data from 12 MLAs across 12 African countries, representing a 60% response rate.

Key findings include:

Operational Status:

Most MLAs are legally registered, with some established as far back as 1968. However, operational capacities vary, with only a few associations reporting significant growth in membership and financial stability.

Mandate and Activities:

MLAs primarily focus on capacity building, advocacy, and networking. Common activities include hosting conferences, providing continuous education, and engaging in policy advocacy. However, involvement in research and publications remains limited.

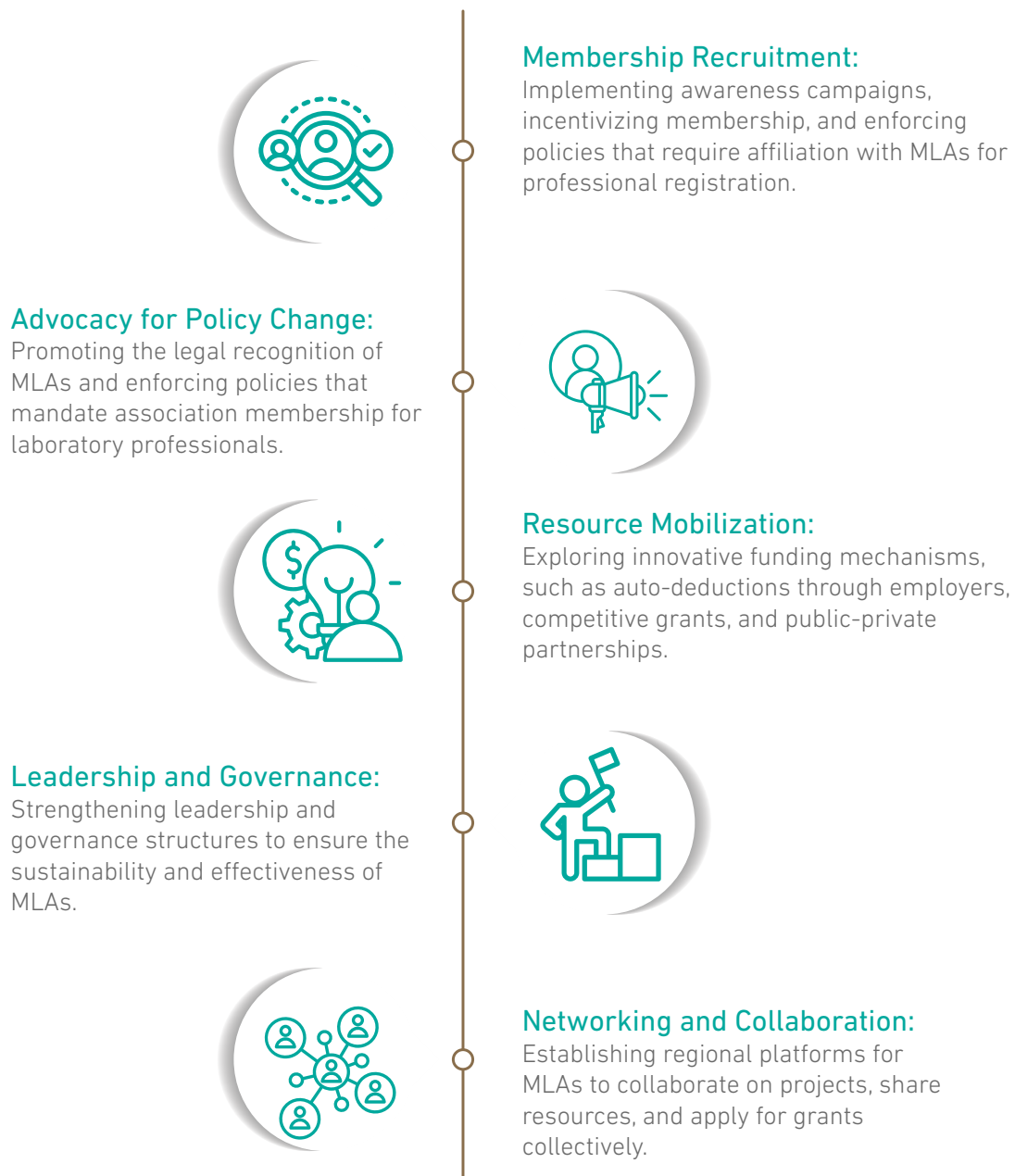
Financial Status:

Many MLAs operate on limited budgets, with annual revenues often below USD 10,000. Only a few associations reported revenues between USD 10,000 and USD 50,000.

Key Priorities:

MLAs identified membership growth, financial independence, continuing professional development, advocacy, and networking as their top priorities for the next five years. To achieve these goals, they require support in areas such as project management, resource mobilization, and leadership development.

The survey highlights the need for targeted interventions to strengthen MLAs, including:



While MLAs in Africa are making strides in capacity building and advocacy, there is a pressing need to enhance their operational capacities, financial sustainability, and involvement in research and policy

development. Strengthening these associations will not only benefit laboratory professionals but also contribute to improved healthcare outcomes across the continent.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Medical Laboratory Associations (MLAs) in Africa play a crucial role in improving healthcare outcomes across the continent. Their membership is comprised of laboratory scientists and technicians from both the public and private institutions. The associations are supported by subscriptions from members and sometimes grants for implementing some laboratory system strengthening activities.

MLAs play an important role in

(i) Capacity building: where they provide training and professional development for laboratory personnel to ensure high standards of practice;

(ii) Advocacy: they provide a strong and unified voice that advocates for policies and resources that

support the laboratory sector and improve public health;

(iii) Networking: they facilitate collaboration and knowledge sharing among laboratory professionals and institutions.

The African Society for Laboratory Medicine (ASLM) is in the forefront of these efforts, working to strengthen laboratory systems and networks across Africa. Efforts to strengthen MLAs in Africa align with ASLM strategic priority **2: Build and organize the laboratory profession**, where ASLM will ensure that the laboratory profession is structured, organized, and has the recognition and visibility on the African continent to deliver health outcomes.

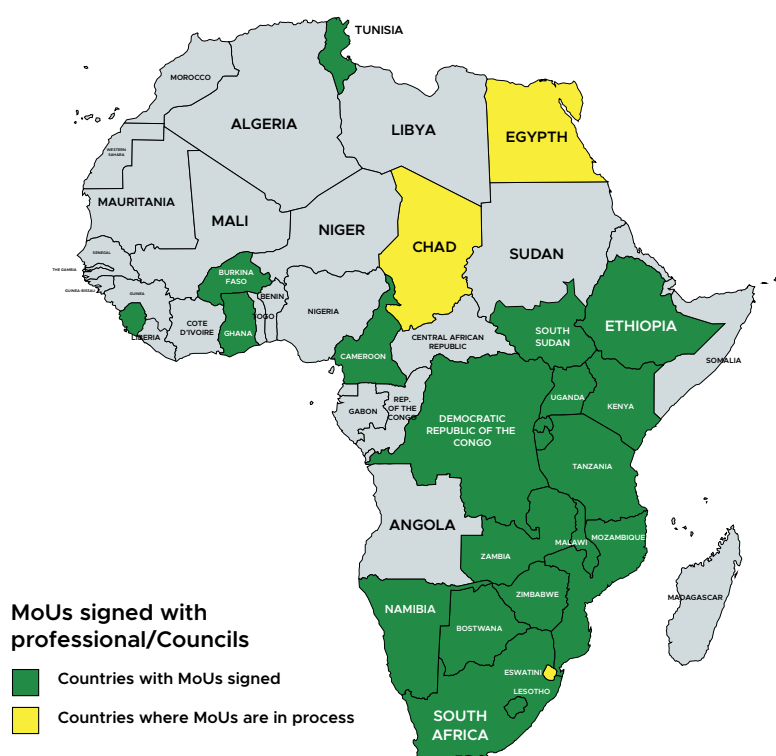


Figure 1: Medical Laboratory Associations that have been engaged by ASLM by December 2024

To date, ASLM has engaged 26 professional associations in Africa and entered into 23 memorandums of understanding, including a Students Association - African federation of Medical

Laboratory Students Associations (AFMLSA). Figure 1. Using limited resources, ASLM has supported some association activities, including co-hosting annual conferences.

2.0 RATIONALE

Several efforts have been made to support the establishment and operationalization of MLAs in various countries across Africa.

However, the visibility and impact of these associations at both national and regional level is still very minute. It is against this background that this survey was carried out, to identify areas such as training, organizational efficiencies and effectiveness, where improvements are needed in the establishment and operationalization of MLAs.

The collected data will be used to inform advocacy plans and operational strategies to promote recognition and allocation of resources for strengthening MLAs.



3.0 GOAL OF THE SURVEY

To assess the status of Medical Laboratory Associations across Africa and provide recommendations for their strengthening.

3.1 Objectives of the survey

The survey, specifically

- Established operational levels of MLAs in Africa
- Evaluated operational capacities of MLAs
- Makes recommendations for areas needing improvement to strengthen MLAs in Africa

4.0 METHODOLOGY

A questionnaire comprising both closed and open-ended questions was designed to collect data from leaders or focal personnel for the various MLAs across African countries. The areas covered by the questionnaire included: Operational status, regulatory compliance, capacities to implement projects, their strategic priorities now and into the future as well as identification of potential areas of collaboration with ASLM.

The questionnaire was emailed to 20 medical laboratory associations and data was collected between September 2024 and January 2025

5.0 RESULTS

The survey had a response rate of 60% (12 out of 20) from invited MLAs, representing 12 countries (see Table 1).

Table 1: List of MLAs that participated in the Survey, by country.

Burundi	Cameroon	Gabon	Mozambique
Namibia	Democratic Republic of Congo	Rwanda	Tanzania
Chad	Uganda	Zambia	Zimbabwe

The following findings were made from the survey.



5.1 Operational Status

MLAs have been established for periods ranging from 9 to 57 years, Table 2. The Zimbabwe Association of Medical Laboratory and Clinical Scientists (ZAMLCS) is the most recently formed in 2016, while the Biomedical Society of Zambia and the Uganda Medical Laboratory Technology Professionals Association are the oldest, 1968. All the MLAs were operational, with 11 out of 12 being legally registered within their countries. The only exception was the Zimbabwe Association of Medical Laboratory and

Clinical Scientists (ZAMLCS), which was operational but not yet legally registered. Among the 11 registered MLAs, 55% (n=6) were registered with a government ministry, and 45 % (n=5) were registered by a Regulatory authority within that country.

Seven out of 12 MLAs reported significant growth in membership over the past years, and all of these were registered associations. Three MLAs reported moderate growth while on 2 reported either a decrease or slight increase in membership.

Table 2: Medical Laboratory Associations by year of establishment and registration status

Country	Name of Association	Year established	Association registered
Mozambique	Associao De Laboratorios De Mocambique- Alm	Nov 28, 2011	Yes
Namibia	Namibia Association of Medical Laboratory Sciences (NAMLS)	Aug 20, 1990	Yes
Zimbabwe	Zimbabwe Association of Medical Laboratory And Clinical Scientists (ZAMLCS)	Jan 30, 2016	No
Tanzania	The Medical Laboratory Scientists Association of Tanzania (MeLSAT)	Jun 5, 1981	Yes
Zambia	Biomedical Society of Zambia (BMSZ)	Jan 1, 1968	Yes
Uganda	Uganda Medical Laboratory Technology Professionals Association (UMLTA)	Nov 10, 1968	Yes
Rwanda	Rwanda Organization Of Biomedical Laboratory Professionals	Aug 21, 2013	Yes
Tchad	Association Nationale Des Techniciens Biologistes Du Tchad (Asnatebt)	Apr 22, 1998	Yes
Burundi	Association Nationale Des Technologistes Biomedicaux Du Burundi (Antebbu)	May 9, 1994	Yes
Gabon	Association Gabonaise Des Techniciens Biologistes (Agateb)	Apr 29, 2003	Yes
Cameroon	Cameroon Association For Medical Laboratory Science	Jan 1, 2005	Yes
Democratic Republic of Congo	Conseil National Des Biologistes Madicaux Et Techniciens De Laboratoire, C.n.b.m/Rdc, En Sigle	Mar 18, 1978	Yes

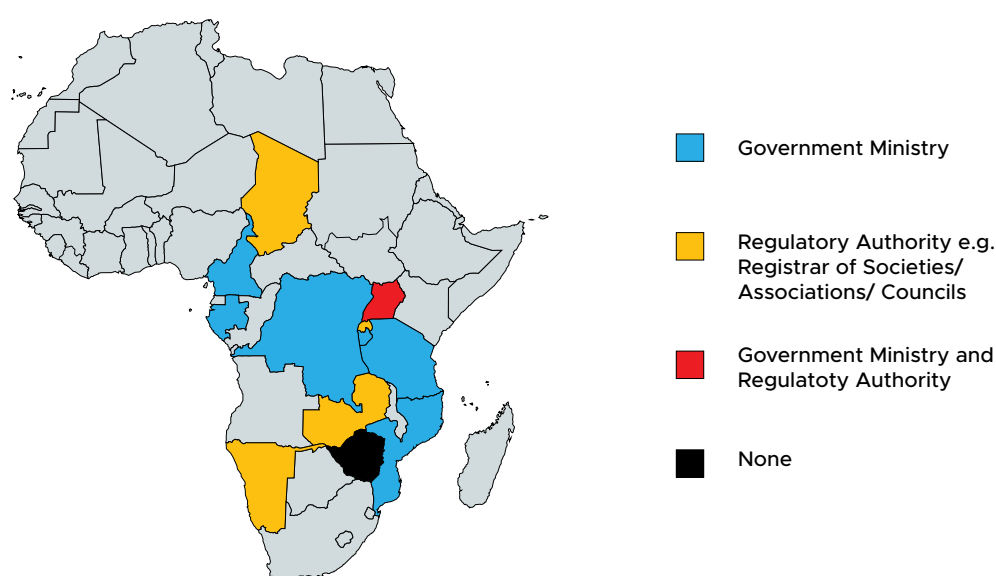


Figure 2: Registration status by participating MLAs

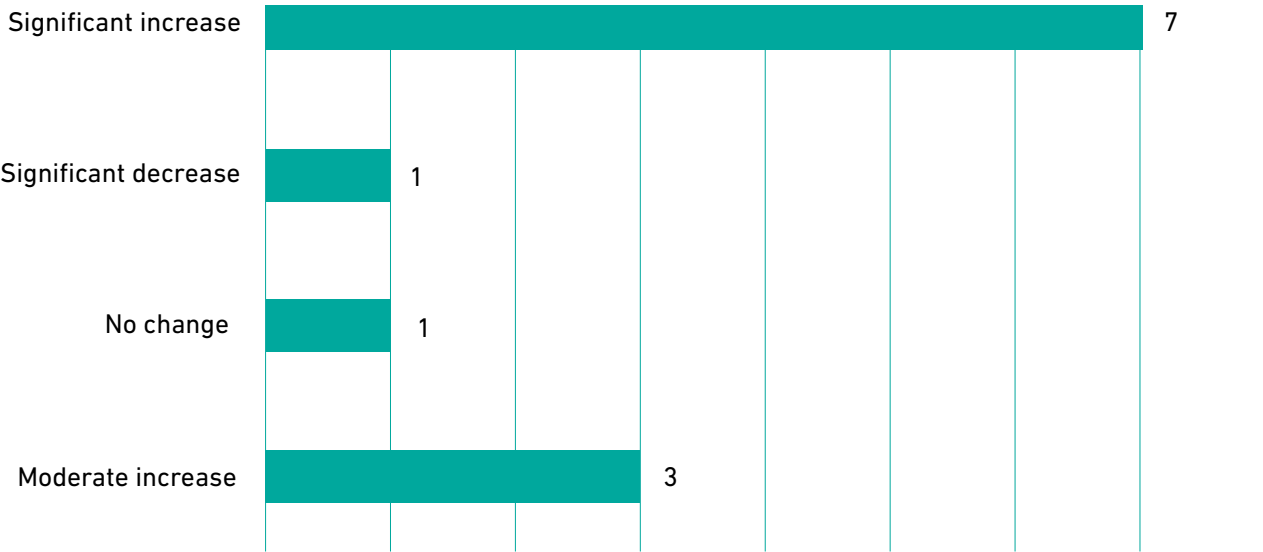


Figure 3: Growth of MLA membership in the past 5 years

5.2 Mandate of Medical Laboratory Associations

The participating MLAs indicated that their mandate is to promote the value of medical laboratory

professionals to ensure delivery of quality services through professionalism and innovation. Only 42% (5/12) MLAs (Cameroon, Chad, DRC, Tanzania and Zambia), Figure 4, reported they had implemented projects in the past and majority 83% (10/12) host Laboratory Medicine conference regularly, Figure 5.

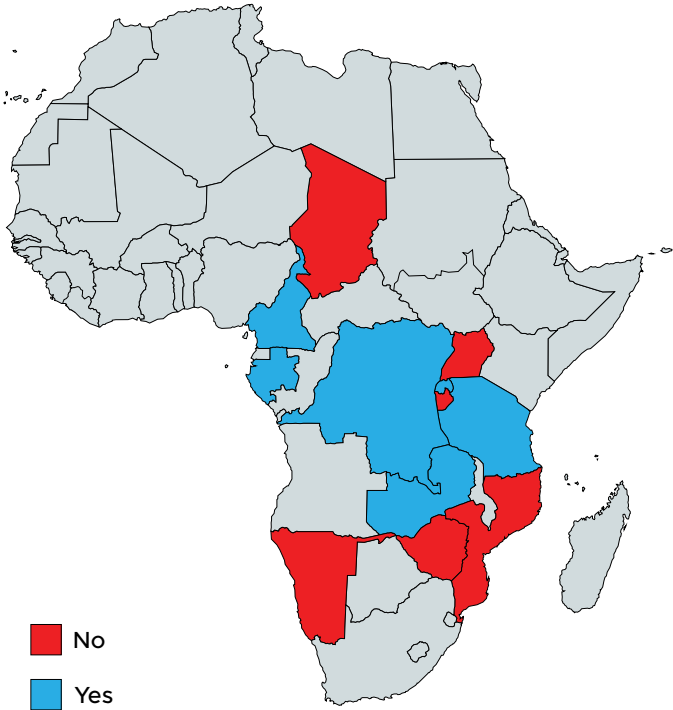


Figure 4: Status of Project implementation by MLAs (ever implemented a project)

The primary activities that MLAs engaged in over the past 12 months included conferences and workshops, continuous education and training, and advocacy and policy engagement (see Table 3).

Additionally, some MLAs were involved in research and publications, as well as community outreach initiatives.

Table 3: Activities carried out by MLAs in the past 12 months

Activity
Most implemented activities
Conferences and Workshops
Continuing Education and Training
Advocacy and Policy Engagement
Less implemented activities
Research and Publications
Community Outreach

5.3 Financial Status of MLAs

Only four MLAs being, the Namibia Association of Medical Laboratory Sciences, The Medical Laboratory Scientists Association of Tanzania, Uganda Medical

Laboratory Technology Professionals Association and Rwanda Organization of Biomedical Laboratory Professionals reported an annual revenue between USD10,000 and USD50,000, the rest of the MLAs reported annual revenue of less than USD10,000.

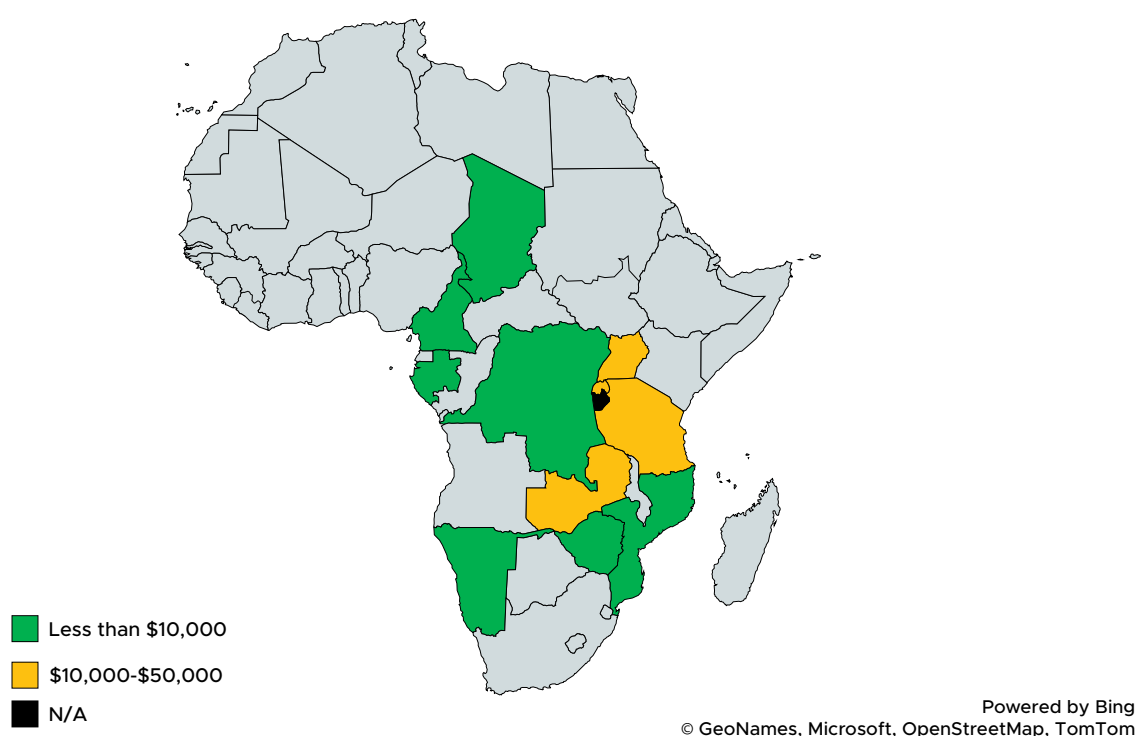


Figure 5: Medical Laboratory Associations Annual revenue

5.4 Key Priorities for the MLAs

The most top 5 work areas that MLAs are prioritizing for the next five years are listed below. (Detailed per country are in Appendix I)

- Membership Growth
- Financial Independence
- Continuing Professional development
- Advocacy and Policy Influence
- Collaborations and networking

The MLAs indicated that to achieve their priorities they need to be capacitated in the following areas

- Project Management
- Networking opportunities and fostering collaborations with other laboratory associations and professionals
- Resource Mobilization
- Advocacy and representation at regional and international levels

Research collaboration opportunities. When the MLAs were asked about their level of agreement with ASLM's current membership structure—where associations join individually for a \$200 annual fee—the survey results revealed a cautious endorsement.

Nearly half (46%) strongly support the model, with an additional 18% agreeing, indicating a general lean toward approval. However, 27% remain neutral, suggesting that a significant portion of respondents are either undecided, lack sufficient information, or see potential but are not fully convinced. Meanwhile, a small but notable 9% disagree, pointing to concerns that may include affordability, perceived value, or alternative preferences. This distribution raises an important question: Is neutrality a sign of hesitation or an untapped opportunity? The fact that over a quarter of respondents neither support nor oppose the fee suggests a need for deeper engagement, which is something that ASLM will work on.

6.0 DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Professional medical associations play a key role in representing the interests of members and provides them with opportunities for networking, professional development, knowledge sharing, and upholding ethical standards within their industry such as setting qualification requirements and advocating for policy changes that benefit the profession as a whole^{1,2}. In line with these roles, some of the surveyed MLAs were engaged in activities of education and training, advocacy and policy change as well as hosting of scientific workshops which is aligned with the expected mandate of professional associations. However, most were still not doing enough in terms of research and publications that is necessary to inform policies about the medical laboratory profession.

The low response rate on the survey, could also be a proxy for the operational status of the MLAs, highlighting a gap in representation and perhaps leadership of laboratory professionals' interests in the African continent. Most of the MLAs in this survey were registered with regulatory bodies, and this is a positive step that can be emulated for any new MLAs or those that are not yet registered.

The registration process of associations usually requires that the association to have defined governance structures, minimum numbers of members and these provide a framework for decision-making, ensuring transparency, accountability and effective management of associations activities. Additionally, having a legally registered association offers several advantages. It enhances the association's credibility, making it more trustworthy to members, partners, and the public. Also, the association gains official status, making it easier to enter into contracts, own property, and create opportunities for growth.

Members are also protected from personal liability for the association's debts and obligations, which can

promote membership growth by minimizing risks to members.

Regarding resource mobilization, registered associations are better positioned to access funding opportunities through grants and donations compared to their counterparts. Registration with governing bodies requires clear governance structures, which can improve the organization's management and decision-making processes, thus contributing to the association's sustainability. In some countries, registered associations qualify for tax exemptions.

Few of the surveyed MLAs reported prior experience in implementing projects and most of them had not managed budgets above USD100,000 which highlights the need to support members in resource mobilization including membership growth that can also aid the associations through member subscriptions.

Based on the results of this survey, the following recommendations are made to strengthen the medical laboratory association in Africa

1. Membership Recruitment

- a. **Awareness Campaigns:** Conduct regular awareness campaigns on the role of MLA e.g. at institutions of higher learning, during other national campaigns (e.g. national diabetic day
- b. **Policy that supports member recruitment:** Making affiliation to an MLA a requirement for professional registration and licensing
- c. **Incentivize MLA membership:** create innovative ways to incentivize membership to an MLA e.g. reduced membership fee of joining within same year of qualification from training school, discounts for those who bring referrals, discounted fees when accessing offerings like conferences, training

2. Advocacy for Policy Change:

- a. **Registration of MLAs:** Engage with appropriate Ministry to create regulatory mechanism to legally recognize MLAs.
- b. **Enforce Affiliation to MLAs:** Create policies of regulations that enforce affiliation to an Association before being allowed to practice or register as a profession

3. Resource Mobilization: Identify innovative ways for resource mobilization

- a. **Auto-Deductions Through Employers:** Where MLAs are legally registered, negotiate with employers for auto-deductions of membership fees (which can be spread over time) as a means for a secure
- b. **Competitive Grants;** Apply for publicly competitive the grants that are availed to support laboratory system strengthening. Association can begin as a sub-grantee while building its capacity to manage grants.
- c. **Investments:** Identify available opportunities to invest and grow reserves from the membership contributions
- d. **Collaborations:** Actively seek collaborations with established membership-based institutions and have mutually beneficial joint membership structures

- e. **Public Private Partnership:** Actively explore opportunities to partner with private companies, manufacturers within the diagnostic space.

4. Development of MLA Framework: This tool can be used by professionals on how to form an MLA, how to operate it and resource mobilization

5. Leadership Development: Most associations become inactive due to weak or poor leadership and governance structure. There is a need to strengthen the medical laboratory association forum at a regional level that can be duplicated at country level for effective running of national associations.

6. Networking and Collaboration forum: Create a regional body where National associations can work together in projects, sharing resources, research and application for grants.

7.0 CONCLUSION

The results from this survey though not comprehensive, as they are drawn from a small sample, highlight the status of medical laboratory associations in Africa- MLAs are at different levels of operations, with some engaged in many activities that include continuing education, advocacy, and policy changes. However, none of the MLAs indicated their involvement in the licensing of medical laboratory professionals, which is key in safeguarding the technical and ethical integrity of the profession in the African region. A few of the MLAs have experience implementing large projects and this highlights the need to develop strategies that can build the capacity of the MLAs and resource them.



Appendix 1: Priorities for MLAs and the Support needed

MLA, Country	Top 3 Priorities for the MLA in the next 5 years	Support needed from the Federation of Laboratory Professionals in Africa (Felpa).
Associao De Laboratorios De Mocambique- Alm, Mozambique	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Membership growth 2. Financial independence 3. Education and Training 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capacity building on Project Management and Hosting of Scientific Conferences and Workshop • Conduct the Project Capacity, • Conduct Conference and workshops
Namibia Association of Medical Laboratory Sciences, Namibia	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Continuing Professional Development (Organize a conference in 2025, host several workshops, advocating for research activities) 2. Advocacy for Policy Change to accommodate laboratory professionals interests Advocating for change in policy at MOHSS and HPCNA, Advocating for the laboratory professionals interests. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guidance on how the association can best influence policy change and implementation. • Strategies for membership growth • Resource Mobilization . • Modes of association growth and sustainability. Resource acquisition and mobilization.
Zimbabwe Association of Medical Laboratory And Clinical Scientists (ZAMLCS), Zimbabwe	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Promoting Best Practices - Advancing global best practices in medical laboratory science and national health services 2. Membership Growth: Growing membership and diversifying representation across various disciplines 3. Innovation and Collaboration: Fostering innovation, inclusivity, and collaboration among members and stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Platform for collaborations and synergies with other Associations
The Medical Laboratory Scientists Association of Tanzania (MeLSAT), Tanzania	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Training 2. Membership management 3. Networkng 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research assistance and training
Biomedical Society of Zambia (BMSZ), Zambia	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Mobilize membership and strengthen provincial branches 2. Strengthen the organization's systems 3. Expand the financial base to conduct more activities impacting regulation, education and research. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge sharing on professional matters relating to laboratory medicine and learning how other associations are making impact in their countries and beyond.

Uganda Medical Laboratory Technology Professionals Association (UMLTA), Uganda	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Have a well-developed membership database with progressive growth in membership 2. Have in Place a very vibrant students association uniting all individual students associations 3. Hold Annual medical laboratory students Scientific conferences, geared towards building on the Knowledge, attitude and skills in areas of training. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Networking Opportunities, Funding and Technical support in areas of system strengthening
Rwanda Organization Of Biomedical Laboratory Professionals, Rwanda	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Professional development and capacity building 2. Advocacy and policy influence 3. Technology and innovation adoption 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professionals' development resources, capacity building and trainings • Advocacy support • Networking opportunities • Research collaboration • Resource mobilization
Association Nationale Des Techniciens Biologistes Du Tchad (Asnatebt), Tchad	<p>Provide networking opportunities and have the national order of biologists of Chad</p> <p>Offrir des possibilités de mise en réseau et avoir l'ordre national des biologistes du Tchad</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training and collaborations in research projects • Formation et partage des projets de recherche communs
Association Nationale Des Technologistes Biomedicaux Du Burundi (Antebbu), Burundi	Missing data	
Association Gabonaise Des Techniciens Biologistes (Agateb), Gabon	<p>Establishment of the order of biologists and technicians, national biology day, international conference of biology associations</p> <p>Mise en place de l'ordre des biologistes et technicien, journée nationale de biologie, conférence internationale des associations de biologie</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training and research support, organization of conferences • Soutien en formation et recherche, organisation des conférences

Cameroon Association For Medical Laboratory Science,Cameroon	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Construction of a permanent secretariat, a Research center and a conference Hall, 2. Establishing Memorandum of Understanding with public and Private Higher Institutions of learning for undergraduate and post graduate programs to promote professional development and excellence in the practice 3. Active involvement in research projects to produce relevant data that will direct policy makers on measures to control, prevent and eradicate, where applicable Disease of great public health importance and other related challenges that appear to be a potential danger to the public. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technical support on our advocacy for the need of a regulatory body (a council) for the Laboratory profession in Cameroon, connecting and assisting for research grants and funding and networking.
Conseil National Des Biologistes Medicaux Et Techniciens De Laboratoire, C.n.b.m/Rdc, En Sigle, Democratic Republic of Congo	<p>Obtaining the order, organization of continuing training, creation of a laboratory</p> <p>Obtention de l'ordre, organisation de formation continues, création d'un laboratoire</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial support, exchange of experience, networking of associations • Appuis financier, Échange d'expérience, mise en réseau des associations

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