

LabCoP QUARTERLY

African Society for Laboratory Medicine

June 2021

Volume 4, Issue 1



Diagnostics cascade topics in this issue of LabCoP Quarterly

Update on Social Media Campaigns Supported by ASLM in Collaboration with ITPC

LabCoP, in collaboration with the [International Treatment Preparedness Coalition \(ITPC\)](#), supported social media campaigns in five countries to raise awareness among people living with HIV on the importance of routine viral load testing and result utilization, having been previously identified as significant gaps in the viral load cascade. The campaigns ran from September to December 2020, and the five countries developed context-specific campaign messages delivered through social media such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, etc. and other media including radio, television and print. Countries collected campaign audience and reach data for each communication media employed. Table 1 summarizes the type of media used to reach the largest audience in each of the five countries

The use of social media platforms was effective but was limited in reaching certain populations (e.g.

rural, adults, low literacy, etc.). All countries used peer educators and in-person meetings to reinforce the messages, answer queries and correct misunderstandings. Hence, effective campaigns should incorporate two-way digital and non-digital communication methods. Additionally,

in implementing the campaign using the media with the greatest reach during the pilot phase. This next phase of the project runs from April to December 2021, and its success in creating awareness among people living with HIV will be evaluated through a survey.

Country	Audience	Media
DRC	Women	Website
Kenya	Youth	Twitter
Malawi	Women	Whatsapp
South Sudan	Youth	Radio
Zimbabwe	Adult	Radio

Type of media used by the 5 participating country teams in their social media campaigns that reached the largest audience in their country.

COVID-19 regulations and restrictions hampered the effective implementation of the campaigns. To mitigate these challenges and maintain the gains achieved, ASLM, in collaboration with ITPC, has extended support to the five countries



An advertisement on the Importance of viral Load testing in Zimbabwe.

Summary of the LabCoP ECHO Sessions

This quarter, LabCoP expanded the focus of webinars from the HIV Viral Load (VL) and COVID-19 ECHO sessions with the addition of a new ECHO series called 'LabCoP Extended', which covers a wide variety of topics on laboratory systems strengthening.

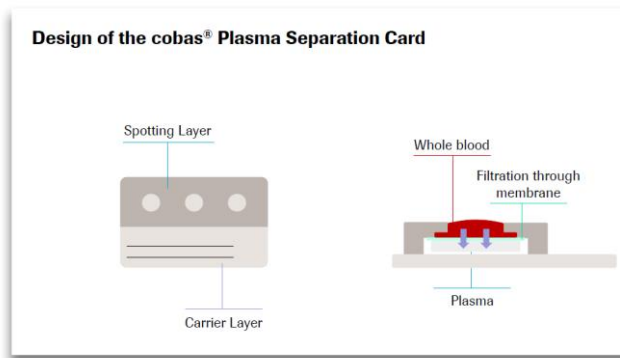
The January 2021 session presented the laboratory systems strengthening priorities of the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief Country Operational Plan 2021 (COP 21). The COP 21 guidance called for the adoption of diagnostic network optimization approaches to the scale-up of VL/early infant diagnosis (EID) testing to address gaps associated with low VL, EID, and tuberculosis testing coverage/rates. The guidance also recommended the inclusion of COVID-19 mitigation strategies such as streamlined clinic flow to minimise patient interaction with healthcare providers during sample collection, increased use of dried blood spot samples for sample collection outside facilities, and reactivation of safe sample transport systems. See more details [here](#).

The February 2021 session featured a presentation of newly-developed tools that can help enhance the quality and effectiveness of HIV-related testing. The public-private partnership between Roche Diagnostics and the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention designed a comprehensive training package to support the introduction of plasma separation cards to facilitate sample collection and transport for HIV VL/EID testing, and introduced a user-friendly online assay validation and verification tool intended to facilitate statistical calculations during the adoption of

new assays in the laboratory. These tools will soon be available to the laboratory community via the [ASLM Academy](#), providing a unique opportunity for the LabCoP countries and ASLM members to enhance their skills and knowledge. Read more [here](#).

In the March 2021 session, experts from the [South African National Bioinformatics Institute \(SANBI\)](#)

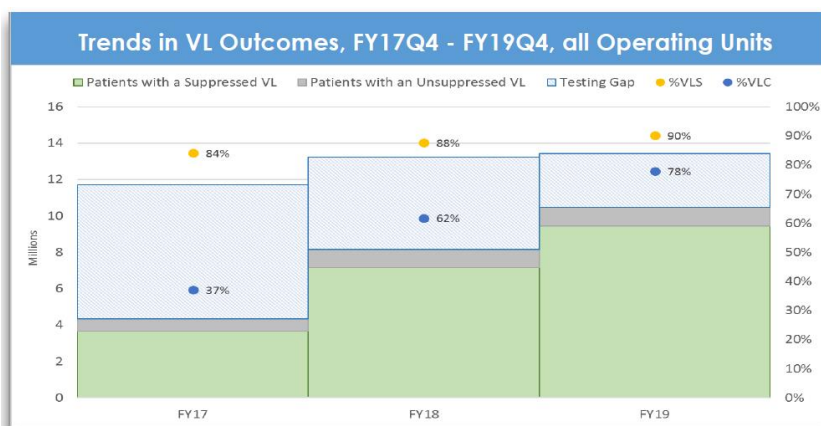
demonstrated an open-source Baobab laboratory information management system (LIMS) that allows interoperability and integration with other systems and platforms. LIMS are critical for strengthening



A slide from Asif Ali and Denise Heaney's February presentation depicts the design of the cobas Plasma Separation Card.

and managing biorepositories in the collection, processing, and storage of human biospecimens, which need to be of high quality and be easily trackable with their associated metadata to ensure research reproducibility and guarantee adherence to quality management standards. The SANBI is offering training opportunities to support hands-on experience using Baobab LIMS via the [ASLM Academy](#). Find out more [here](#).

Watch more Viral Load ECHO Session recordings [here](#) and the new LabCoP Extended series [here](#).



A slide from George Alemnji's January presentation shows trends in VL outcomes between FY17Q4 and FY19Q4.

Monitoring and Evaluation Sub-community of Practice ECHO Sessions

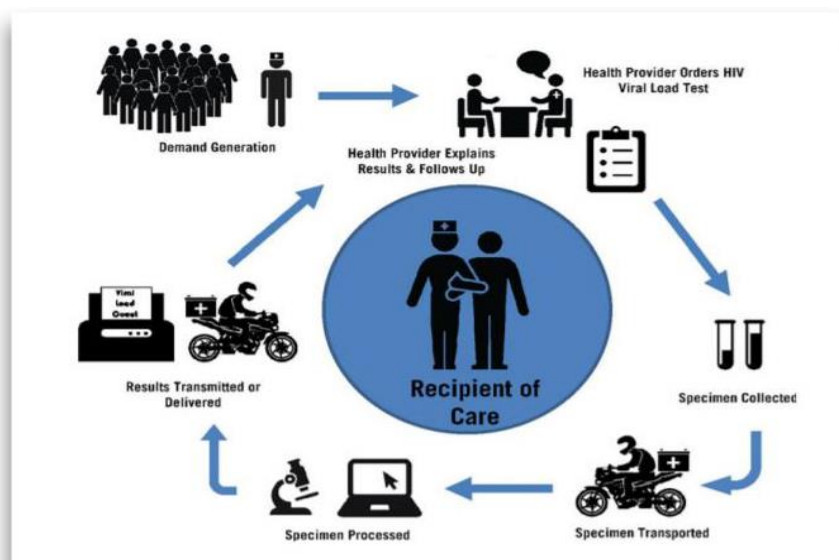
LabCoP's monitoring and evaluation (M&E) sub-community of practice kicked off in February 2021, with its bi-monthly sessions scheduled to run until the end of July 2021. The sessions enable country teams and stakeholders to discuss topical M&E issues and receive guidance for the development, review, and/or strengthening of their laboratory M&E systems using viral load (VL) as an entry point. In total, the M&E sub-community of practice comprises of over 90 members from thirteen country teams. A country team comprise both laboratory and clinical representatives to improve the clinic-laboratory interface in the context of HIV/tuberculosis/COVID-19 diagnosis, treatment, and monitoring.

The first session in February was an introductory session that highlighted the VL testing continuum and the rationale for the M&E sub-community of practice,

discussed data elements and sources for tracking VL cascades and outlined the activity implementation plan of the M&E sub-community of practice. The session also provided an overview of the strengths and weaknesses of countries' M&E systems, with the main strength in all countries being the availability of national-level data indicators to track the cascade of routine VL testing and virally suppressed patients. However, two critical gaps on

M&E plan, M&E frameworks, and components of an M&E system.

In March, a South-South learning session was held during which the South Africa team shared their experience in implementing M&E systems for VL testing. The session provided general guidelines for developing a data warehouse and dashboards to increase data use for patient management. These guidelines



A slide from Michael Maina Waweru 18 February session shows the viral load testing continuum.

SPECIMEN REQUISITION FORM (entered at the clinic)

- Patient identification number
- Collection site
- Date of birth (age)
- Sex
- Whether currently pregnant or breastfeeding
- If receiving ART, current regimen (first, second or third line)
- Previous exposure to ARV drugs, such as for preventing mother-to-child transmission, post-exposure prophylaxis or pre-exposure prophylaxis
- Date ART started (time receiving ART)
- Reason for the test
- Date and time specimen collected
- Specimen type
- Adherence assessment
- WHO clinical staging and DC4 count

A slide from Getch Kassa's 4 February session shows the key variables to consider for a laboratory requisition form.

availability of data at national level were noted across all countries and these are: a) data for virally suppressed people living with HIV on antiretroviral treatment referred to less intense model of care, and b) data for indicators to track cascade for patients with non-suppressed VL test results. The second session on 18 February was a general introduction to M&E concepts. It focused on the main components and functions of an

include the availability of laboratory information management systems, hardware and software license considerations, competent development and maintenance teams, and a micro-strategy for data visualisation using business intelligence solutions.

The presentations and session recordings are available [here](#).



Dr Samba Diallo

Expert Experience

ASLM recently sat down with Dr Samba Diallo, who helps manage the new Francophone LabCoP, to discuss with him the significance of this important group.

ASLM: What are the channels currently available for information sharing among the Francophone laboratory community, and what are the challenges with these channels?

Dr Diallo: Among the Francophone laboratory community, the information channels used are email, WhatsApp and Zoom platform. The most common channels to share best practices among countries are workshops organised by implementing partners, WHO online webinars, scientific articles, and south-south learning visits. Some challenges encountered include:

- Lack of defined criteria for assessing diagnostic cascades to identify gaps
- Lack of funding to address systemic issues, etc.

ASLM: Why is it important for LabCoP to foster a Francophone community of practice (CoP)?

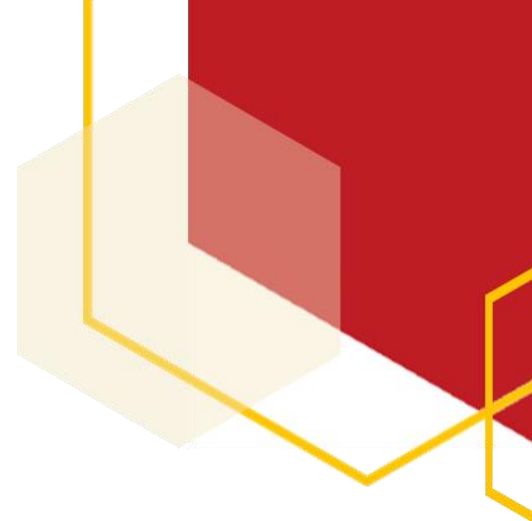
Dr Diallo: Having francophone LabCoP is a good opportunity for the engaged countries and teams to leverage on what was done with the Anglophone LabCoP, like the improved access to tools, sharing of best practices, developing a dedicated Country Operational Plan,

and essentially spreading the benefits beyond Anglophone countries, so that similar issues can be addressed collectively. Some benefits of a CoP include:

- Continual learning, professional development
- Access to expertise on laboratory systems strengthening from wider base
- Improved communication with peers and fellow countries
- Networking for keeping current in lab/clinical circles, sometimes beyond the entry point of HIV, TB or others
- Increased productivity and quality of outputs of the systems at national level
- Improved professional self-identity
- Enhanced professional reputation

Francophone LabCoP will also facilitate the knowledge creation and sharing among country teams for strengthening the national laboratory system and network and improving laboratory practices.

ASLM: What are some of the unique medical laboratory needs of Francophone countries in Africa?



Dr Diallo: These unique needs include the poor level of the implementation of Laboratory Quality Management System (LQMS) to demonstrate accuracy

and reliability of results released and the weak equipment maintenance and servicing processes. In addition, inadequate waste management and the lack of national funding for laboratories have been raised

ASLM: How can LabCoP better serve Francophone countries in Africa?

Dr Diallo: To better serve Francophone countries, through LabCoP, we can assist countries to document their gaps based on the efficient tools (Labnet Scorcard and [Viral Load Self-Assessment](#)) developed by ASLM, and help teams to develop a Country Operational Plan to address the prioritised gaps, using best practices shared in a CoP. Besides this, LabCoP can provide training or facilitate access to training for laboratory staff in the various areas (LQMS, COVID-19 PCR, and Ag RDT, HIV, Tuberculosis, M&E, etc.), and facilitate knowledge creation and sharing via platforms like Zoom and WhatsApp, and south-south visits. We can also contribute to increasing funds by mobilising partners.

What's New at LabCoP

LabCoP Welcomes New Members

LabCoP welcomes its newest country teams, Burundi and Burkina Faso to our community of practice! This brings the total number of LabCoP member countries to 16. The LabCoP Core Team is working with these new teams to conduct baseline self-assessments, so their progress can be tracked. The LabCoP Core Team is pleased to introduce 3 new members, Mr Francis Ocen, Dr Samba Diallo, and Dr Nadine Abiola. They bring to the team a diverse skill set that complements LabCoP's goals, including expanding LabCoP to Francophone countries. It is exciting to see the LabCoP community grow and we look forward to working with our newest members!

LabCoP Publishes 2 Papers

Members of the LabCoP Core team recently published two articles. One article focussed on maintaining routine HIV and tuberculosis testing services in sub-Saharan African countries in the context of COVID-19, is available here: <https://ajlmonline.org/index.php/ajlm/article/view/1413>. The other article explores managing laboratory waste from HIV-related molecular testing: lessons learned from African countries and highlights gaps and potential interventions for managing guanidinium thiocyanate (GTC)-containing waste from HIV-related molecular testing. The article is available here: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2666911021000186>

LabCoP Supports Members to Attend McGill Course

LabCoP proudly sponsored members of the country teams to take relevant courses at [The McGill Summer Institute in Infectious Diseases](#) summer school 2021. Up to nine online courses running between 31 May and 18 June were on offer, and included tuberculosis control, essential diagnostics, antimicrobial stewardship, HIV management, and clinical updates in tropical medicine and COVID-19.



Looking Ahead

Upcoming LabCoP Sessions

Exciting sessions are in the works! Get ready for presentations about tuberculosis innovations, tuberculosis guidelines, XDR TB and considerations for implementation. Best practices will be introduced for improving early infant diagnosis coverage, and of course we'll provide regular updates on COVID-19 diagnostics.

Viral Load Testing Demand Creation Campaigns

LabCoP country teams that participated in the routine viral load testing demand creation campaigns reached over 4.5 million people combined. In the next phase, LabCoP, through continued partnership with the [International Treatment and Preparedness Committee \(ITPC\)](#), will assist the participating country teams through small grants and technical assistance for an additional six months, in order to sustain gains of their RVLTA awareness campaigns to improve viral load demand creation and uptake.

WhatsApp Connections

There has been a lot of dynamic activity on the WhatsApp forum! Keep the conversations going and information flowing. Share your experiences, complications, successes, and resources with your fellow LabCoP community. Please keep the conversations professional, courteous, and free from personal beliefs about politics and religion.



<https://aslm.org/what-we-do/labcop/>