

## Ghana Joins ASLM's LabCoP as the 24th Member Country

On October 2nd, 2024, Ghana officially became the 24th ASLM's Laboratory Systems Strengthening Community of Practice (LabCoP) member. The onboarding ceremony in Accra, marked a milestone in strengthening Ghana's laboratory services and enhancing healthcare systems across the continent.

Speaking at the event, Mrs. Deborah Djanie, Deputy Director of Program for Allied Health, welcomed the partnership, highlighting its potential to improve laboratory systems in Ghana and contribute to broader continental goals.



Deputy director, Mrs. Deborah Djanie, during the official opening of the workshop

On behalf of ASLM, Francis Ocen, the LabCoP Project Manager, shared ASLM's vision, mission and strategic priorities and the BMGF-funded LabCoP projects scope, approaches. He further highlighted the implementation structure of the project and country teams' responsibilities in ensuring successful collaboration.



Ghana LabCoP team during their onboarding

During the onboarding, the multidisciplinary country team was supported to conduct their baseline assessment of the laboratory systems and networks using the HIV (VL) cascade assessment tool, the WHO Early Infant Diagnosis and TB WRD (WHO-recommended Rapid Diagnostic) tools.

Keeping with the long running tradition of engaging from the onset, key partners and agencies supporting Laboratory services in each country, ASLM accompanied by a delegation from the Ministry of Health visited the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)-Ghana, and the Global Fund offices. During both visits, the team highlighted the complementary role ASLM through LabCoP will play in supporting the overall Ghana laboratory system strengthening.

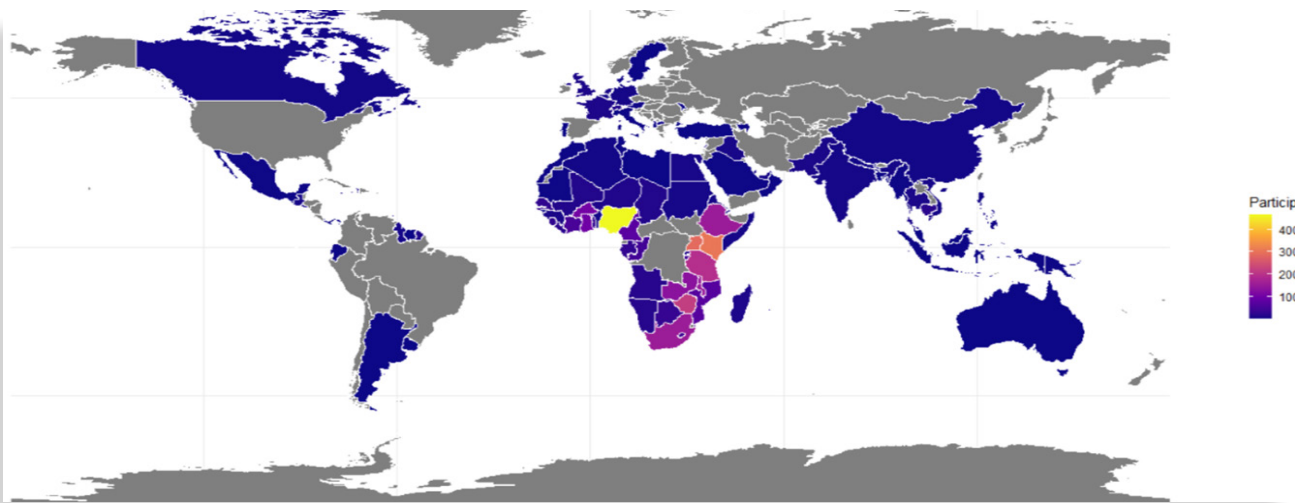


ASLM and Ghana MoH team Meeting Dr. Tony Ao and his team during the visit to the CDC office

# ECHO Sessions Summaries: August to December 2024

Between August and December 2024, ASLM's Laboratory System Strengthening Community of Practice (LabCoP) project, in collaboration with country teams, partners, and global agencies, convened eleven ECHO sessions. These sessions focused on critical topics such as health supply chain management, global guidelines, technical updates, diagnostic network optimization, data management, and early infant diagnosis.

From all three sessions, it became apparent that multiple quantification, stock management, and performance management tools, initiatives, and strategies can be adapted/adopted by countries to ensure convenient, effective, and efficient supply chain management.



Map Showing location and number of participants who joined the 11 sessions

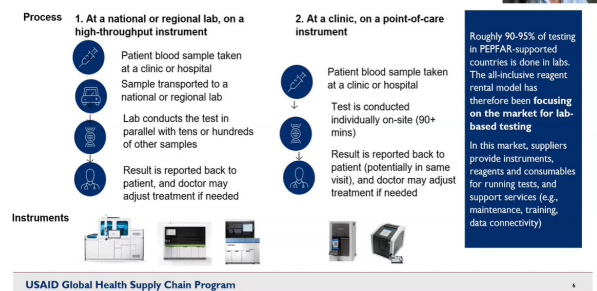
A total of 3,949 individuals participated across the 11 sessions, with an average attendance of 395 per session. On average, participants spent 49 (±29) minutes in these typically one-hour sessions, with the majority joining from project-supported countries in Africa.

## Health Supply Chain Management

ASLM in collaboration with USAID's Global Health Supply Chain – Procurement and Supply Management (GHSC-PSM) project convened three ECHO sessions: [Unpacking Service-Level Agreements for Molecular-Based Testing](#), [Boosting Lab Performance Through KPI-Driven Service-Level Agreements](#) and [Enhancing VL/EID Testing Efficiency with Vendor-Managed Inventory \(VMI\)](#).

These sessions, led by the USAID Washington GH/OHA/SCH team, GHSC-PSM project representatives, and country teams from Nigeria and Zambia, explored tools and strategies to streamline laboratory supply chain management.

## The focus of PEPFAR efforts on establishing the all-inclusive reagent rental model on HIV VL/EID testing in high-throughput laboratories (Process 1)



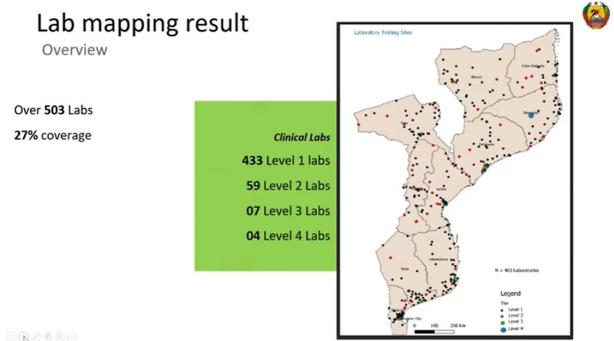
A slide from Yulia Johansen's presentation on PEPFAR efforts in strengthening HIV VL testing in laboratories during the GHSC-PSM August ECHO session

## Diagnostic Network Optimization Sub-Community of Practice (DNO-SubCoP)

In September and October 2024, ASLM partnered with the Foundation for Innovative New Diagnostics (FIND) to deliver two ECHO sessions: [GIS Laboratory Mapping: Lessons from Mozambique and Zimbabwe](#), and [Leveraging Geospatial Analysis for Diagnostic Network Optimization](#).

Discussions from these sessions showcased GIS mapping applications, network optimization strategies, and real-world case studies, offering actionable insights for country programs looking to enhance diagnostic networks.

Furthermore, they highlighted specific DNO use cases drawing from Mozambique and Zimbabwe experiences and available tools with their specific utilities in conducting GIS mapping, network optimization, and downstream analyses. Country programs and networks can select appropriate tools and use cases for applications based on their specific needs and implementation environments.

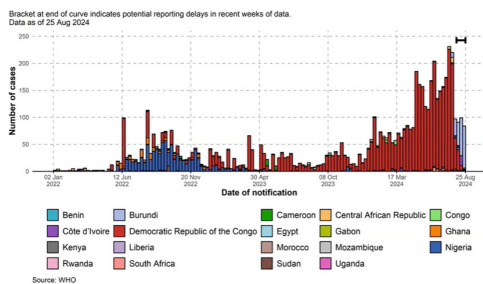


A Slide from Dr Felix Pinto's presentation showing the map coverage of labs in mozambique during the September DNO ECHO session

### Global Guidelines and Technical Updates

Three sessions focused on significant global updates. On August 8, a session focused on advancing Hepatitis Testing, WHO's Latest Guidance & Rwanda's Success Story. This session, in collaboration with Abbott Diagnostics, detailed WHO's 2024 hepatitis testing guidelines and Rwanda's implementation journey. Watch the session [here](#). On August 29, LabCoP hosted a special session on tracking epidemiology trends and strengthening public health responses to the Mpox outbreak. Hosted by FIND, Africa CDC, and the Botswana–Harvard AIDS Institute Partnership, this session examined how Africa can leverage existing infrastructure for rapid outbreak responses. Watch the session [here](#). The October ECHO session focused on maximizing the Potential of GeneXpert Systems.

### Mpox Epidemic Curves in Africa

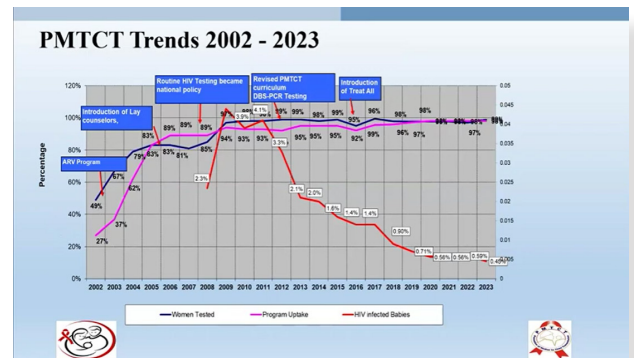


A Slide from Prof. Sikhulile Moyo's presentation showing the Mpox epidemic curves during the Special Mpox ECHO session

It explored strategies for optimizing GeneXpert diagnostic platforms for increased efficiency and the best position to leverage existing capacity, retool and respond, drawing from the SARS-COV\_2 lessons. Watch the session [here](#)

### Early Infant Diagnosis Sub-Community of Practice (EID-SubCoP)

Based on results from LabCoP country-level assessments and other complementary global reports, gaps in the progress toward achieving eMTCT and EID targets seem to be stagnating or widening in some cases. As a community of practice, LabCoP launched a new Sub-community of practice focusing on eMTCT and EID. In December 2024, the first session in this series was convened, focusing on the experience from Botswana in achieving elimination of Mother-to-Child transmission of HIV (eMTCT) and early infant diagnosis (EID) targets. In this session, Botswana shared their journey and innovations in achieving elimination and the evaluation process preceding their achievement of WHO silver tier. Watch the session [here](#).



A Slide from Malebogo Nthusang's presentation showing the Prevention of Mother-to-Child Transmission (PMTCT) trends from 2002 to 2023 during the December LabCoP ECHO session

### Spotlight Sessions

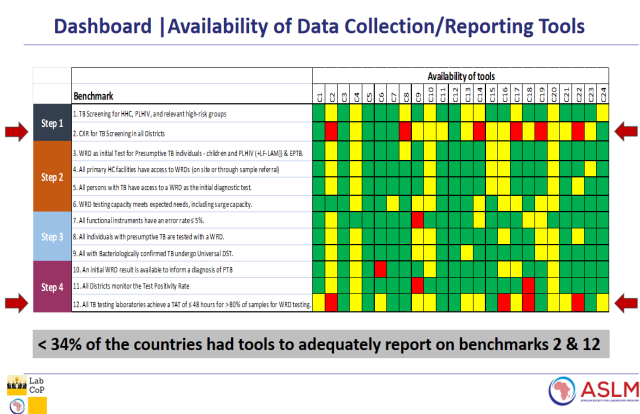
Two additional sessions provided valuable insights into laboratory data connectivity and private-sector engagement. This session on Transforming Data Connectivity introduced the SAVICS Academy which aims to transfer knowledge to local staff and ensure sustainable digital investments for adopting countries. Watch the session here. In September, an ECHO session was held to discuss the Nigeria's Guild of Medical Laboratory Directors (GMLD). This Session focused on unifying the private sector laboratories to better support the national healthcare service delivery. Watch the session [here](#)

These ECHO sessions served as a dynamic platform for knowledge sharing, equipping country teams with cutting-edge innovations, strategies, and best practices to strengthen laboratory systems across Africa.

# Closing the Gaps: The Status of WHO TB Standards in LabCoP Countries

Tuberculosis (TB) remains a persistent global health challenge, but the World Health Organization's (WHO) newly released cascade offers a transformative roadmap for identifying gaps and prioritizing interventions to improve access to TB diagnosis and treatment. This tool, structured around 4 steps and 12 benchmarks is set to revolutionize TB outcomes globally.

In alignment with this vision, the African Society for Laboratory Medicine (ASLM), through its Laboratory Systems Strengthening Community of Practice (LabCoP), is collaborating with WHO and key stakeholders to support the adoption of these standards across African countries.



Dashboard of Data Collection/Reporting tools for Tuberculosis (TB)

To drive this, ASLM conducted a survey during the LabCoP annual in-country review workshops to assess capacities for data collection and reporting against the 12 TB benchmarks. The findings highlight both significant progress and areas of untapped potential:

- 12.5% (3 out of 24 countries) have tools in place to fully report on all 12 benchmarks.
- 46% (11 out of 24 countries) can report on at least 9 benchmarks (≥75%).

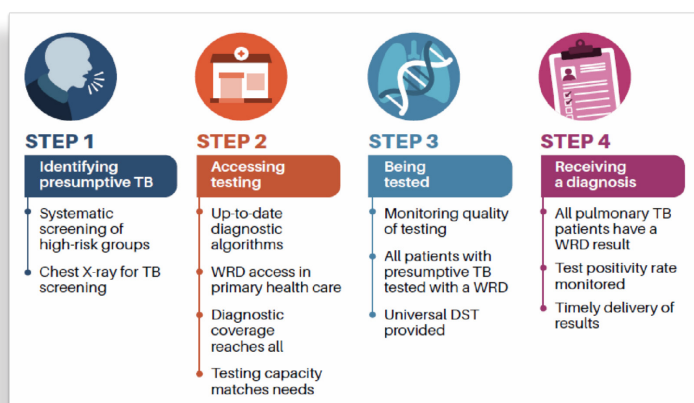
The most challenging are:

- **Benchmark 2:** Ensuring check X-rays are available for TB screening in all districts- currently only 7 countries are collecting and reporting data.
- **Benchmark 12:** Achieving a turnaround time of under 48 hours for WRD testing in labs, remains a struggle for many countries.

The survey underscores the urgent need for enhanced tools and updated processes. In response, ASLM and LabCoP have developed a strategic action plan to accelerate progress.

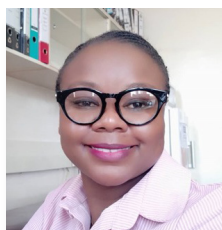
- **Tool Development:** Supporting countries in creating or updating tools to collect and report data seamlessly.
- **Knowledge Sharing:** Facilitating South-South collaborations to share lessons learned from pilot countries—Nigeria, Uganda, and South Africa.
- **Driving Adoption:** Supporting countries in implementing WHO standards and conducting baseline assessments to monitor progress.

With a united effort, LabCoP countries are poised to close the gaps and ensure faster, more reliable TB diagnosis and treatment outcomes for all.



Overview of the WHO TB Standard Benchmarks among 24 LabCoP countries

## Expert Experience



ASLM recently sat down with Agnes Juru Chibango, Coordinator of the National Microbiology Reference Laboratory in Zimbabwe, to uncover how Zimbabwe is leveraging South-to-South learning to revolutionize its laboratory systems after a learning visit to Uganda.

**ASLM:** What were the gaps in your laboratory systems and network that you sought to address through the South-to-South learning?

**Agnes:** Through the ASLM Viral Load cascade self-assessment and LabNet assessment, we identified some challenges in equipment calibration and external quality assessment (EQA) participation at lower-tier facilities. We needed sustainable solutions to ensure quality improvements and maintain the credibility of our laboratory network.

**ASLM:** How did you go about securing funding to implement these changes?

**Agnes:** We strategically incorporated these interventions into our national work plans and funding proposals, such as the The Global Fund's Grant Cycle 7 (GC7) grant application and PEPFAR Country and Operational (COP) planning. Aligning these proposals with national health priorities was key in unlocking the necessary funding to bring our vision to life.

**ASLM:** What were the standout moments from your South-to-South learning experience?

**Agnes:** The experience was eye-opening! We learned that prioritizing interventions in a phased manner, starting with what is immediately feasible while working toward larger, resource-intensive solutions is key in maximizing impact. A significant insight was that while we lacked in-house biomedical engineers, we could still move forward by focusing first on calibration and outsourcing repair services. This approach helped us stay efficient and proactive

**ASLM:** What tangible improvements has Zimbabwe's lab network achieved since the learning exchange?

**Agnes:** The transformation has been incredible! We can now calibrate essential laboratory equipment promptly, significantly strengthening our

Quality Management Systems (QMS). Moreover, EQA participation has increased substantially, bolstering our compliance with ISO 15189 standards. Expanding EQA participation has also improved diagnostic accuracy for crucial tests like Hepatitis, CD4, and TB Lipoarabinomannan test. (TB LAM)

**ASLM:** What advice would you give to other countries considering a South-to-South learning initiative?

**Agnes:** Dive in with confidence! The key is to start with evidence-based gap identification through assessments, integrate these insights into work plans, and secure funding through strategic proposals. Choosing the right mentor country and setting up a clear roadmap will help maximize the benefits of the learning exchange. Don't be overwhelmed by what others have already achieved - start where you are, use what you have, and build from there. The impact will follow!

## What's New

### Call for Papers: Advancing Sustainable Solutions in Microfluidics and Point-of-Care Diagnostics

The African Society for Laboratory Medicine (ASLM) invites researchers, scientists, and innovators to contribute to the open-access Research Collection: "Towards an Eco-Friendly Future for Microfluidics, Lab-on-a-Chip, and Point-of-Care Devices", hosted by Frontiers in Lab-On-A-Chip Technologies. This special collection seeks scientific, technical and clinical investigations in identifying, documenting and quantifying single-use point-of-care diagnostic waste streams, and case studies of good practices in waste management. Article processing charges waivers are available, please enquire with the editors:

Collins Otieno Odhiambo, ASLM : [cotieno@aslm.org](mailto:cotieno@aslm.org)

Maiwenn Kersaudy-Kerhoas, Heriot-Watt University, UK : [M.Kersaudy-Kerhoas@hw.ac.uk](mailto:M.Kersaudy-Kerhoas@hw.ac.uk)

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Zibusiso Ndlovu, MSF, South Africa : [Zee.NDLOVU@joburg.msf.org](mailto:Zee.NDLOVU@joburg.msf.org)

Submit your research [here](#) until the 23rd of July 2025.



## Looking Ahead

### Upcoming LabCoP Cookbook Recipe

The LabCoP Cookbook Recipe #10 is coming soon! This edition will focus on Operationalizing Geographic Information System (GIS) Laboratory Mapping to enhance systems and network capacities. It will explore how GIS technology can be leveraged to visualize laboratory distribution and accessibility, optimize diagnostic networks and resources and improve decision-making in public health responses. Stay tuned

### Upcoming ECHO sessions

Some exciting ECHO sessions are in the works! We look forward to a session on Phenotypic Drug-Susceptibility Testing for Mycobacterium tuberculosis. Also, get ready is also more to come on TB Stool Diagnosis uptake. Check out the full archive of past LabCoP ECHO Sessions [here](#).

