



MALAWI ASSOCIATION OF MEDICAL LABORATORY SCIENTISTS

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A REPORT OF THE 2025 MAMLS ANNUAL GENERAL CONFERENCE

INTRODUCTION

The Malawi Association of Medical Laboratory Scientists (MAMLS) held its Annual General Conference on 8th May 2025 at Amaryllis Hotel in Blantyre under the theme “Enhancing Access to Diagnostics for All Malawians: Strengthening Laboratory Services at Primary Health Centre.” The conference was patronised by over 100 Laboratory Scientists with key stakeholders from Ministry of Health, I-Tech, ASLM, CHAI, MCM, CDC, MLWT, KUHeS, Pacific Diagnostics, Thofu Investments, Inqaba, Hallmark, MAU and Laboratory Managers from Laboratories across the country. The conference convened key speakers: Mr. Bitilinyu Bangoh (PHIM, MoH), Professor Kondwani Jambo (MLWT), Dr. Andrews Gunda (CHAI), Dr Alice Mbewe (MLW), Mr Richard Ndovie (MCM) and Mr. Confidence Banda (MAMLS) to assess progress, address current gaps, and chart a sustainable and inclusive path for laboratory services in Malawi.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS AND STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

1. Decentralization of Diagnostic Services

A central message from the conference was the urgent need to bring diagnostic services closer to communities through strengthened primary health centres. Decentralization is essential to achieving equitable, timely, and affordable access, particularly for rural and underserved populations.

2. Translating Policies into Practice

While Malawi has developed strong health policy documents, including the National Diagnostic List, the conference stressed that their true value lies in effective implementation. Stakeholders called for intensified efforts to operationalize these frameworks at all service levels (central, district, and health centre) ensuring they translate into improved access and service delivery on the ground.

3. Technology and Innovation for Low-Resource Settings

Participants highlighted the importance of investing in context-appropriate diagnostic technologies that are affordable, resilient, and practical. Tools that

require continuous electricity or internet connectivity are often unsustainable. The focus should shift toward robust, easy-to-maintain technologies tailored for Malawi's health system.

4. Workforce Transformation and Capacity Building

The role of laboratory professionals must evolve to meet modern demands. Delegates advocated for redefining laboratory scientists as active contributors to clinical care. Priorities include upskilling in digital tools, real-time decision support, mentorship for young professionals, and improving data literacy across the sector.

5. Systemic Challenges Limiting Progress

Malawi's diagnostic landscape continues to face structural challenges, including workforce shortages, inadequate resources, fragmented systems, and persistent concerns around service quality and public trust.

6. Innovative Solutions Shared

A range of forward-thinking solutions were presented, such as:

- * Digital and connected diagnostic platforms
- * Task-shifting to better utilize community health workers
- * Mobile phone-based diagnostic apps
- * Use of drones for sample transport
- * Solar-powered mini-labs
- * Quality improvement initiatives that reduce turnaround time from days to hours

7. Preparing for the Future

Prof. Jambo encouraged stakeholders to adopt long-term strategic thinking, innovation, and bold investments in diagnostics. Without reform, he warned, Malawi risks facing "a future of health without care."

8. A Call to Action

The conference concluded with a strong appeal to reverse the current pattern of diagnostic exclusion. Malawi must aim for at least 80% of the population to have access to timely, quality diagnostics. Primary health centres must serve as the cornerstone of this transformation, supported by appropriate infrastructure, human resources, and sustainable financing.

9. Guest of Honour's Remarks

In his keynote address, the Guest of Honour applauded MAMLS and called for professional unity, stating that "laboratory professionals must be united to achieve progress." He emphasized collaboration, innovation, and shared responsibility as keys to transforming the sector.

The guest of honour through MAMLS presented an outstanding award to Mr.

George Kadewere, the former Director of Health Technical Support Services at the Ministry of Health, in recognition of his outstanding contribution to the laboratory profession in Malawi. The award celebrated his decades of dedicated service, leadership, and unwavering commitment to strengthening laboratory systems and mentoring the next generation of laboratory professionals across the country.

CONCLUSION

The 2025 MAMLS Conference presented a clear and collective roadmap for transforming diagnostic services in Malawi. Decentralized access, policy implementation, workforce empowerment, and homegrown innovations were among the top priorities. Achieving these goals will require unity, long-term commitment, and cross-sector collaboration to ensure no Malawian is left behind in accessing quality diagnostics.