

## **CLOSING REMARKS BY DR. TALKMORE MARUTA**

### **In this Symposium**

It is with great pleasure that that I have the honour of giving the closing words for this very successful 4<sup>th</sup> SLMTA/SLIPTA symposium under the befitting theme – **Sustainability: Make Quality Stick**

Before I Talkmore, there are some people I would like to particularly thank publicly for working tirelessly to ensure we have a successful symposium – Odafeni and MacPhaul

There are also many other partners that supported this symposium in many forms, the speakers and all of you the participants. When I first saw the program, it was unbelievably packed and very enriched in terms of areas of focus and the speakers. So let me ask the following people to stand up and we acknowledge you....Anna Murphy, Patience Dabula, Barbara McKinney, Beatrice van der Puije, Clement Ndongmo, McPaul Okoye and Sibongile Zimuto

Let me not forget the Boys in Black- who ran around to make sure technology is working, sound and everything. Whatever challenges we faced, we used each one of them as an opportunity for improvement and you will agree with me that we got better and better...our Quality Improvement Process was in motion

Outside of the opening and closing ceremony, this is the biggest gathering you will see for the entire conference...

I have titled my last words as ...*In this Symposium*

*In this symposium*, Yesterday, I started by talking about SLMTOsis - as an inflamtion caused by SLMTA which has so far had no cure. What a journey that this revolutionary, life changing program has taken, from a pilot in Uganda 2008, to the launch in Kigali 2009 to

being a PEPFAR's flagship program for laboratory system strengthening.

*In this symposium*, We heard from the Mother of SLMTA, the General herself that SLMTosis has affected and infected 1,333 laboratories in 52 countries across 3 continents and *In this Symposium*, Sten Westgaard even invited SLMTA to come to America. All we yearned for back in 2009 was to reach for the stars, but today, *In this symposium*, we celebrate 94 SLMTA Laboratories achieving the once a dream milestone of International ISO Accreditation - and the icing on the cake is that 72 of these 94 Labs are from Sub Saharan Africa of which 87% are Public Health Laboratories.

As SLMTA has evolved over the years, so was SLIPTA which was launched concurrently with SLMTA in 2009 as a framework for assessing and recognizing the incremental implementation of LQMS towards accreditation. *In this Symposium*, We heard of the next "country driven" frontier for SLIPTA that emphasizes on it being a country owned program that is housed and driven by ministry of health departments utilizing the resources available. The reflections by the Acting CEO of ASLM, Mr Nqobile Ndlovu really came at the right time, the time where as SLMTAns and SLIPTAns we not just basking in the sun of our trailblazing success but we are also taking stock and reflecting on our journey thus far. *In this Symposium*, Beatrice and her expert panelists came up here and spoke boldly about the critical role the audit process plays in this improvement process and gave us a very thought provoking diagnosis of our SLIPTA audit process and fortunately, because they are as clever as I am, they also presented to us some ideas that will need to be considered as we move to next version of SLIPTA. I have assurance from the Acting CEO that he values these reflections as said by Pema Chodron that "The most fundamental aggression to ourselves, the most fundamental harm we can do to ourselves, is to remain ignorant by not having the

courage and the respect to look at ourselves honestly and gently.” We all have to understand that where we will find ourselves tomorrow as a program, as a movement, is a function of the positive decisions and actions that we take today.

Rolihlala Mandela said - “Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.” Anyone who stops learning is old, whether at twenty or eighty. Anyone who keeps learning stays young.” – Henry Ford. *In this Symposium*, we listened and learnt from an array of experts, from, supply chain, equipment management, national EQA and Quality Control.

*In this symposium*, we had “A Westgaard” among us. Sten, we can't thank you more for gracing our symposium. I have a message to The Westgaard, your father to tell him that “You had the highest concentration of Westgaard Rule users that you will ever have in one place and that was *In this Symposium*. How does it feel, after this symposium to say “I actually sat in the same room with “A Westgaard”

*In this Symposium*, Dr John Nkengason, our Champion and greatest supporter of SLMTA and SLIPTA took us down memory lane and it was inspiring as he shared the 5 lessons he learnt from a decade of implementing SLMTA. He spoke of the many sung and unsung heroes and supporters of SLMTA who have stood by us, with us and for us and the battles fought in public and behind the scenes. I am reminded of The battle of Nairobi -2011

*In this Symposium*, we learnt that without continual growth and progress, such words as improvement, achievement, and success have no meaning, as was said Benjamin Franklin. This 4th SLMTA/SLIPTA symposium is a testimony to that - in 2012 we proudly spoke about number of people trained, workshops conducted, baseline and exit scores and stars and as ASLM indicated, no SLIPTA implementation statistics to report. But *In this symposium*, we have begun to talk about those specifics to accelerate the process of

accrediting even more laboratories, the Rapid Result Initiative from Kenya, the holistic approaches by S Africa, the high level commitment in Vietnam and the buzzword “sustainability” now featured in our discussions. This was a clear indication that we have grown as a program and as a movement

In this symposium, we met our very own SLMTAn following his ascendance to the peak of Mt Kilimanjaro – the Acting CEO of ASLM, Mr Nqobile Ndlovu. Footprints on the sands of time are not made by sitting down, Mr Ndlovu travelled the journey that many of you have also travelled, but it is a privilege that as one of us, he has been picked among us, to represent us. No leader, however strong, can succeed at anything of significance unless he/she has the support and cooperation of the people he is tasked to lead and sworn to serve. I therefore would like to request you to join me in assuring him that he is standing on our shoulders and we pledge that we will neither shake nor move to support him. Having known him since 1997 as my senior in Medical school and worked with him closely for the last 8 years, Mr Ndlovu is a true testimony of what the Legendary Pele said that Success is no accident. It is hard work, perseverance, learning, studying, sacrifice and most of all, love of what you are doing or learning to do.

It is unfortunate sometimes that we never get to see or witness the process, but only experience of see the end results.[ Personal Story.....]

Setting goals is the first step into turning the invisible into the visible. In this symposium, we have concretized the renewed collective vision we have as SLMTAns and SLIPTAns. The greatest danger for most of us is not that our aim is too high and we miss it, but that it is too low and we reach it. In this symposium, we have set our goals and targets even higher. For us to reach for these, we have deliberated and made some resolutions as follows

Ladies and gentlemen, cdes and friends, SLMTAns and SLIPTAns I would like to wish you successful rest of the conference and hope to meet you in the next Symposium. God Bless you