ASSOCIATION OF MEDICAL SCHOOLS IN AFRICA

AMSA

Professor Luis Gomes Sambo's Key-Note Address at the

Hybrid Medical Education Conference in Lagos, Nigeria
26-29 March 2026

Medical Education and Health Systems Development

- Dear Professor Emiola Olapade-Olaopa, President of the Association of Medical Schools in Africa,
- Dear President of the World Federation of Medical Education,
- Distinguished Representatives of Medical Schools in Africa,
- Dedicated Educators,
- Leaders in Health Care,
- Dear Participants,

It is my great honour and privilege to address the 2026 AMSA conference on Medical Education, taking place in Lagos, Nigeria under the theme *"Increasing Capacity and Retention of the Global Health Workforce"*. Whether you have travelled to Lagos or participate online, your presence today, signals a shared commitment to shape the healthcare professionals who will care for generations to come.

You are all aware of the complex epidemiological transition we are facing in Africa. I emphasise the very high burden of infectious and chronic diseases, recurrent epidemics, and its overall negative impact on child survival, maternal health and life expectancy at birth.

Communicable, maternal, perinatal and nutritional conditions are on the top of causes of death in the African Region, followed by non-communicable diseases and injuries.

WHO - 2025 *World Health Statistics* Report, reveals a decline of about 40% on the trend of Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR) in the African Region since the year 2000. However, the current ratio of 442 deaths per 100.000 live-births, counts for about 70% of the global

maternal deaths. During the same period, child survival improved globally. However, the African Region remains with the highest Under-Five Mortality (U5M) estimated at 67 deaths per 1.000 live-births; and counting for 55% of the global deaths of children under 5 years old. The global average of Life Expectancy at birth is 71 years, while Africa stands at 64.

The epidemiological transition evolves alongside a demographic transition with youthful population that represents in one hand an important economic potential and on the other, an enormous pressure on education institutions, health services, and on employment market.

I am persuaded that two major constraints explain the poor health indicators in Africa: *First,* the weak health systems capacity and the resulting low performance both in terms of quality and access to healthcare. For example, the current Universal Health Coverage in the African Region is 44% compared with 80% in the Americas and in European Regions *(WHO and WB, 2023 – Tracking Universal Health Coverage: Global Monitoring Report)*. *Secondly*, the uneven distribution of other key determinants of health such as housing, employment, education, access to food, clean water and sanitation, which fuels multidimensional poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa, where extreme poverty affects 46% of the population *(World Bank, 2025 Poverty Report)*.

The economic performance of most of African countries, classified as Low-Income Countries; together with the demographic and epidemiological transitions, unveil insights that call for more comprehensive health system reforms. These reforms must be: evidence-based; founded on clear policy analysis, drawing from other disciplines such as political sciences, economics, sociology and management; and carried out within a broad framework that includes the determinants of people's living conditions. Medical Doctors should be involved as actors, with other relevant professionals, prepared to deal with an increasingly complex public health agenda driven by interconnected and changing determinants.

We are still witnessing a trend towards a highly hospital-centric approach to healthcare services, and the commercialization of healthcare, while primary health care and health equity remain significant and intractable challenges in Sub-Saharan Africa. That's why I think that we should consider alternative lens and see the reality in a broader perspective. I mean, to recognize that in practice, in addition to microorganisms, the immune system, and genetic factors, there are other determinants that also influence the individual and collective susceptibility to illness and diseases.

Therefore, African countries need to revisit their public policies to further promote the social determinants of health. This will pave the way towards *universal healthcare coverage*, to improve people's health status, a primary condition for more productive life and contribution to Africa's resilience and development.

Concerning human resources capacity, the continent faces a deficit of over 6 million health workers and continued brain-drain of highly trained professionals. The human resources crisis in the health sector goes beyond quantitative deficits and includes issues of quality, employment opportunities, professional distribution, and retention within national health systems. This is a key constraint, that affects the performance of health systems in Africa, and will be matter of discussion during this conference. We need to reimagine how we teach, how we assess and how we motivate the coming generation of health professionals in Africa. Governments and Policymakers should: make use of available evidence on health professionals; take into account the state of the art in medicine and related technologies; assess the needs and expectations of health services and medical education institutions; allocate adequate budgets for staff costs; and make a case for more suitable infrastructure investments on medical education, including postgraduate studies and continuing professional development.

Despite the ethical and regulatory challenges, I would like to mention the importance of training on innovative digital solutions, that are already transforming our daily practices in clinical care, public health and health system management.

I advocate for an eclectic approach to medicine that promotes transdisciplinary pedagogy integrating multiple disciplines and transcending traditional academic boundaries, within a competency-based training strategy; that fosters interdisciplinary research and; optimizes the equitable and safe use of new technologies.

I congratulate AMSA Local Organizing Committee for designing a very relevant and rich program for this conference, that should not be a usual academic gathering, but a call for action. We have among the participants visionary minds including leading deans, health care specialists, educational researchers, and representatives of students and residents who are the main "raison d'être" of this event. I invite you to look at the available evidence, celebrate what is working well, challenge the wrong assumptions, share innovations, and reform what must change.

I wish you live debates and the best deliberations.

I thank you for your attention.