



The minister of Health and Sanitation Mrs. Zainab Hawa Bangura on Tuesday 21st August 2012 launched the Central Public Health Reference Laboratory (HIV and other infectious disease) and the Inauguration of the National Surveillance and Laboratory Technical working group at Lakka in Freetown.

Launching the Reference Laboratory, Mrs. Zainab Bangura said that for far too long the importance of an effective laboratory has not been integrated into the health sector. Sierra Leone she said has not been able to do much in that direction but with the determination of the government a quality referral laboratory is now up and running.

The importance of a laboratory came into prominence in 2009 when president Koroma during his speech to parliament made a pronouncement on this very important sector. A team of healthy professional she said was put together to work in this direction.

The commissioning of this Referral Laboratory is as a result of the commitment and thanked partners for providing funds for the realization. This she said is a history day in the health sector and thanked the US Government, WHO, UNICEF and other partners for the achievement.

In his keynote address, the United States Ambassador to Sierra Leone Michael Owen pledged US support to Sierra Leone especially in the health sector. Ambassador Owen continued saying that health is wealth and congratulated the Government of Sierra Leone for the achievement. The United States has long before now supported surveillance in the health sector of Sierra Leone, nothing that development can only be possible through collaborative effort.



The US Ambassador H.E Michael Owen given a statement

The world Health Organization Country Representative Dr. Wondimagagnehu Alemu stated that the goal of having a National laboratory policy, strategic plan, an investment plan, and a central public health reference library laboratory. The World Health Organization he said is proud to be associated with the partnership, adding that three years ago the laboratory was only equipped to do HIV/AIDs tests.

With a joint effort the facility has been upgraded and equipped to conduct high level confirmatory test for major epidemic prone disease including yellow fever, measles, rubella, and bacterial meningitis.

Disease and surveillance and response is a major program in the Ministry of Health and Sanitation. Dr. Alemu said that successful surveillance and response system depends on a strengthened laboratory support able to diagnose and characterize caustic agents to guide interventions. Over the years Sierra Leone was however been dependent on neighboring countries for confirmation and characterization of some of the diseases mentioned earlier. This is not only inconvenient but also expensive, and the result may not be available on time for prompt action. He applauds the determination of the Minister and the commitment of the partners, noting that Sierra Leone has taken the first step in the right direction to ensure that the nucleus for the center of excellence has been taken.

In March this year, the World Health Organization accredited the National Public Health Reference Laboratory to undertake measles and yellow fever laboratory diagnoses in the country following thorough assessment of suitability of the laboratory setup, and an intensive training for the staff here on diagnosis techniques by expert from WHO headquarter and West Africa sub-region office. This he said was important for the country as it demonstrates improvement in the laboratory system.

Senior Consultant Central Disease Control (CDC), PLHR, Mrs. Isata Wurie giving an overview of the partners and the laboratory said that in 2006 the laboratory had only two staff with a dilapidated building. The partner in 2009 decided to come together with a merger of various components. The building she said was renovated in record time with WHO delivering a host of equipment to the center.

