

Transcribed by Alison Oppenheim

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Right from the beginning we decided that we will work on this as a network, as a consortium of institutions. At the time of planning and writing our proposal this looked like a dream that we may realize or not. And indeed it has come true. It is a great success having institutions across Uganda that are involved in medical education, working together for the common goal of assuring transformative medical education in the country. There are not many places that are doing this. As we know academic institutions, universities in particular, are usually in a spirit of competition, and here we are, we agreed to work together and it has been one of those very enjoyable opportunities for our institutions to be working very closely together. And we would like this sustained in the future.

MEPI has given us an opportunity to enhance our efforts towards being socially accountable institutions. Socially accountable institutions in a sense that we do the kind of things that are important and relevant for improving the health of our people. Social accountability is a critically important issue in health professional education today. And indeed MEPI has made it possible for us to have very deep reflections on the kind of things that we do. So it is not doing medical education for the sake of medical education, and producing doctors and nurses and health professionals, but for a purpose. And a purpose to enhance the quality of life, the health of the people of our country. So that is a very important successful issue that we keep in mind all the time as we implement. How are we addressing the human resource needs of our country. How is our education targeted to improving the quality of health in our country.

MEPI is a truly game changer in our country. And to me, that is a great success. There are many changes that are ongoing and that is what I referred to earlier on as many moving parts. So the success in being a game changer that is encouraging and supporting many innovative changes in health professional education, for example linking the education system to the health system is a major achievement. We are talking much more now and trying to plan together with the Ministry of Health officials, as well as the Ministry of Education. So at the end of the day our aspiration is to link the education system and the health system so that they have a shared vision, and mission, and plan, working towards the common goal of improving the health of the population of Uganda.

Well, our expectations of five to ten years down the road is that the platform that we have created, this national consortium of many educational institutions, is a true indigenous national platform for causing enhancements and improvements in the education of health professionals in Uganda. That this platform will have an impact well beyond the training of doctors, but also impacting on other health professionals. And already we are beginning to see some movement in that direction. We expect that in five to ten years this platform will have become a fully recognized national platform, recognized by the Ministry of Health, recognized by the Ministry of Education, so that this platform will be able to advocate for various policy changes in the country. Because then the medical institutions will be speaking one voice to all the departments in the country, be it government departments, be it funders, be it the general public. That's what we would like to see five to ten years from now.

In addition, we as ?? that is the medical institutions participating in MEPI in Uganda, we will have begun to see real impacts or effects on the health in Uganda. That we may, or we should in five to ten years see, for example, an increase in the quality and quantity of the health work force in Uganda. That we will see greater retention of health workers in the country. The students that are going through training now, they are beginning to have a different mindset and we hope that they will be retained in the country to a much greater extent than what is happening today.

That is why we are working closely with the government departments that are relevant in this endeavor. To make sure that each of those departments makes its meaningful contribution. And this goes back to the whole issue of the many moving parts. You cannot address education in isolation without talking to finance, without talking to public service, which is going to employ the graduates of tomorrow. So public service has got to be on board and engaged in these discussions and give the opportunity to the graduates to work in an environment that is supportive to these young people.

The role of libraries and information access excites me greatly. I cannot imagine a successful academic institution that is involved in medical education that has no link up with a library and information access. Therefore in our MEPI we see librarians as a critical and central piece to our efforts. As you provide education to young individuals but also those who are already in service, they need continuing health professional development, and librarians are critically important in assisting to build capacity for access to information. In today's world the information is right out there and it is a question of being conversant with the use IT to be able to access information. But also be capable of sorting out the quality information from that which is not quality information. We need to use librarians or to partner with librarians in order for our programs to be extremely successful. And the kind of library support that we are interested in are librarians who are conversant with IT because we cannot access information today without having IT skills.

So librarians and information access are really central to our efforts and we will do everything possible to make sure that the librarians play a very central role. Now, we have moved away from the old thinking that the librarians are simply supporters. They provide help to the other academic staff and students. Librarians are also academic staff in themselves. They should engage in the training of our students just like the other faculty do, and they should engage in research that is relevant to information access. And that is the way we would like library and information science to be placed in our MEPI. Already actually we are having

some movements one step at a time in this direction because we are engaging the librarians in our MEPI activities. And so we want versatile librarians who are really engaged with the educational activities at a high level. Training at PhD is extremely important, just like other teaching staff should be at PhD level.

MEPI was a God sent initiative, if I may call it that, in that it has opened up new opportunities for me and my colleagues to actually do the kind of innovations that we have long wanted to do, but what was missing are the financial resources to support this. So MEPI has opened up these opportunities, and what is even more interesting is the fact that these are not opportunities for Makerere as one institution, but for all the other institutions that are engaged in medical education in Uganda. So to me, MEPI has opened up tremendous opportunities for us to implement and to think deeply about what kind of innovations we would like to put in place.

And so it is a game changer, as I mentioned, and we just want to make sure that this succeeds as much as possible. And want to make sure that there is value for money, that all the resources that are spent in MEPI there is value for money. Every dollar spent should bring greater returns than we would otherwise have expected. So as we move along it is not thinking about the technicalities of medical education or health professional education, it is also thinking about the returns on investment. And so for me it is really a great opportunity that we have MEPI.

And through that MEPI is opening other doors, for example the Institute of Medicine did put out a call sometime last year requesting for proposals on interprofessional education. We have been doing interprofessional education for the last ten years at Makerere University. But this opportunity presented by the Institute of Medicine gave us a challenge for thinking more about interprofessional education and writing a competitive proposal and only four awards were to be made throughout the world, and indeed our proposal was one of the four. So at the moment we are part of the forum at the Institute of Medicine that discusses interprofessional education. So you can see that MEPI is

giving us an opportunity and opening up many other opportunities that we can respond to. There are funding opportunities, there are technical support opportunities and so forth.

One of the lessons I have learned in the last two years is working as a team is extremely important in order to make substantial achievements. Working as a team creates synergies and what we have done by working together as different institutions in Uganda, you can't take it for granted that the different institutions will fit well together and agree to move forward. And so the lesson is that one has to be patient, one has to have an open mind and be able to discuss in a very transparent fashion and plan together in moving forward. So that is very important in making sure that a network works as a network. But we have also to have in place a management system for ensuring that the network does what it is expected to do, does what we have agreed on as a group to annotate. Without that you may find that the consortium cannot stand the test of time. So we have to continue to nurture this consortium to ensure that it is sustainable over time.

What I would want to add is to appeal to all stakeholders who are interested in advancing health professional education for the purpose of improving the health of our populations, to work very closely with us in the countries so that we have systems that are well integrated within the existing systems and national systems so that we do not run parallel programs and projects. One of the things that we have done very well so far at Makerere and Uganda is that we are ensuring that MEPI activities, for MEPI activities there is local ownership. We discuss what we would like to see as Ugandans, there is local leadership, and thirdly there is integration within the university system. There are no parallel systems for MEPI, but rather that the MEPI funding supports the kind of systems that exist. If we create a new system, it is not a MEPI system but rather a university system which then will be sustained over time.

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