

David Olufemi Olaleye

MEPI Principal Investigator, Lecturer, University of Ibadan, Nigeria

The biggest challenge is actually, you know, getting everyone on board. Getting all the stakeholders on board. Getting my colleagues to understand the concepts that we try to put forward. This for me is understandable. I do not see it as a problem and I don't want to see it as a problem, because these are the proposal concepts that a few of us responded to the RFA based on the initiative, which I every time said at every opportunity that this is a great initiative, coming from the US government through the NIH to empower the African institutions to restructure and enhance the medical education program in the continent. So we responded, and we responded based on our background coming from our involvement in the PEFA program. Some of us have been involved in the HIV programs, responding to the problem of HIV in the country, for well over 25 years. And people came in and they integrated this into a structured training program. It is understandable that a lot of people they have questions. So we try to resolve this by engaging ourselves, making people to understand initiatives and particularly our own first aim is looking at our curriculum, our medical and other professional curricula, some of them have not been revised for so many years. So this has become a great opportunity to get ourselves to do things, the best practices, what is the current concept in medical education across the globe. So a few of us sitting down to do this and now grabbing your colleagues along to understand. So it's a quick lesson that is completely different from the kinds of projects that we do, as I said, I am a biologist, I have my projects, I have my ideas to investigate, myself and my teams in the lab.

But this is completely different. First it is the whole institution of the college, the medical school within your campus, and for me particularly to be able to carry my colleagues along in the other five schools for us to understand. Particularly in a place like Africa, communication is still a major issue. The work is done, but again

we meet regularly, we discuss this, we ensure that the leadership of the various institutions are on board

And then this is the second year of the program. People are beginning to see the results and so by now everyone is on board. Everyone wants to be part of MEPI. In fact as we see now, virtually everything is about MEPI to address the issue of our programs. So I am really enjoying the learning opportunity for me and my colleagues that are directly involved in the implementation of this project.

Success, it's actually being part of this program and able to implement this program. So particularly as I said, for the first time six universities in Nigeria are coming together to implement the same ideas, vision, collective, looking at, through these six universities, restructuring and enhancing our medical education in the country.

And good enough for us, these are six leading universities. If you look at the way they are spread out, and I tell you not that we searched for this, this came from a previous involvement working together on the HIV problem, as I said earlier, and they are all spread out across the country. So, hoping and believing that with the ability to implement this program in these six universities, we will quickly diffuse within the region and across. And we also have the university commission, which is the regulating body, the supervisory body for tertiary education in the country on board, fully on board. So through these six universities activities we believe will actually get across.

So, it is coming together. When we started with the support of our partners in the United States the Professor (name) from Harvard School of Public Health, Professor Murphy, the first advice was all, why not put your effort together and come up strong rather than competing amongst yourselves? This has really helped us. And now it is so strong that it is turning out like implementing six MEPI programs at the same time with one award that we have. So I would say this is the overarching success of able to come together, able to carry ourselves along, able to look at the same problem from six different angles. And each of these

institutions has its own team. So the leadership will meet formally every quarter and also as the situation arises. We call, we are so close, by email, on a daily basis I am on mail with my colleagues working at the different universities. We all have this commitment to achieve the objectives of this program and the specific things that we have laid out for ourselves but with the general support and funding by the US government.

I see really a changed, first very strong faculties and for me, much of the effort we are actually putting into faculty. In our program, I personally call it 'building the builders.' You know we look at the efforts, and I must give credit also to previous US support that my university has had, the McArthur Foundation. The McArthur Foundation has supported the University of Ibadan I think for the last 12, 13 years. We've enjoyed essentially capacity development. And being part of the administration of the university for some time, I can clearly see the result of this. People have enjoyed training, they have benefitted, their output, their attitude, their outlook. In terms of what you would expect to see in an academic environment, it is very clear, compared to... So part of our funding we have put essentially into faculty development, and we have pursued this aggressively in the six universities.

So with all this I see in five years, in ten years, a completely changed academic environment. A positive academic environment, and in Ibadan particularly we are looking at much of research capacity building. And in five years, in ten years, I see Ibadan very, very high on the radar of the NIH. I look at this to get my colleagues and others and we are investing so heavily from the MEPI fund.

All the young faculties, we are training them because this, you know the next generation, that will take over from us. And we are looking at, if you build a good academic but particularly research culture right from the beginning of their career, they will excel, they will perform, they will deliver. This we are doing through training, though ??, funding, mentored research, training of mentoring and mentorship, a whole lot of things we are doing. So in five years in terms of

our mandate at the university, we have a history of teaching, research and service, but research is a descent of the other two. If you are a good researcher with very good output, it will impact on your training and teaching, it will impact on your service as clinician, laboratory, whatever the area. It is going to be completely changed.

And looking, we will be contributing tremendously in Nigeria particularly, they have several medical schools, we have (names), so each of these schools may not quickly, but in terms of overall output, in terms of other programs that we are introducing, we are introducing post graduate courses in HIV medicine, HIV science, and one area we are thinking of making this possible is to get to elearning, distance learning. So we are at the stage of developing, actually improving, our elearning platform at the University of Ibadan. From the University of Ibadan, we will be delivering these courses to the other five universities. So from one point we can actually teach these courses at these six universities and from there, after piloting and establishing, this will become available to other universities across the world

New technology became available. My ??which through the support of the NIH and the National Library of Medicine new things are being introduced and that changed everything. For us we have a very good medical library established at the University of Ibadan. So with MEPI we sat down with the librarian and looked at the area and it forced us to bibliography for a young student, a post graduate student, so we have been having training programs that through support from MEPI have two or three days training and you just need to hear the comments of these individuals, not even the youngsters and post graduates, senior academics, Oh, we didn't know this was available.

So we are looking at this and the area of, my way of looking at these sustainabilities, the leadership of these six universities are on board, as I said earlier. A lot of these initiatives we are introducing and implementing we want to integrate them into the system. So for instance the library question. We want these training modules and programs to be part of what the courses the students take, young staff at orientation and there will be updates from time to time

because I work, your??depends on your access to information. Information to be able to identify ?? , to be able to come up with a very clear statement of problem, that you want to investigate as a researcher. So the library is a major cornerstone in the academic environment, teaching, research, service and at our level, we are a tertiary institution, the library should be there and strong.

And that's why, in our MEPI program the library is essential.

Dr. Olaleye: Thank you very much. Personally my, being part of this program, being part of this great laudable initiative, being part of the network of African institutions, and then particularly being one of the leaders as a PI, the first PI of this nature of program, or project. I have implemented research programs, but this is carrying a whole lot of people to be able to achieve the same common goal that we said. So it is a very great opportunity, but personally is able to put my ideas of what a system, an academic system should really be, in place.

Especially I personally had very good support growing up as an academician. I have, and I still say have, good mentors. Over the years I discovered this winning out over our system. So being in the leadership of this is a good opportunity to reintroduce some of this. I will tell you the University of Ibadan was once rated fourth in the commonwealth, of universities, and this we have lost over the years. But the idea, the concept, that got Ibadan into this, I see that. Luckily some of this trained, we had the support of people. It is a university with strong tradition, strong system established. Funding is a big problem. You have ideas, you cannot..... so now training young people along with a good partner in academia should be putting these ideas of how things should be done, giving them empowerment gives me a personal joy. We can put these and we can build the next generation of African and Nigerian academicians who will really be able to engage and become global players and contribute, particularly in the whole area of health in the future, gives me.... So I now know through my PI of these activities that the tomorrow of medical education and health professional education in Nigeria, is actually guaranteed.

The ripple, the fallout, the beneficial effect of developing more capital, you cannot just quantify it immediately. It grows with time and matures. Is catalytic. If you train one person now, that person trains several generations. So putting these ideas right at the early stage, the formative stage of many of our youngsters at this time is a great opportunity. And being part of that that has a personal blessing that I am able to do this through the support from the NIH.

The main lesson I would say, also from what I said earlier about the challenge, it is about engagement. Positive engagement of colleagues. Respect for others' ideas. Learning from others. I tell you, I have learned tremendously, particularly from the idea of symposium. Year one you know, you will recall it, each of the institutions put up its application. But very well organized and planned. Year one we all met and interacted and all those things. You know, we learned from each other. And even within the country, we learned from each other. You say about learning and learning. And much, a lot of works you think are so difficult you discover that discussing, asking people, you learn that it is possible. And with persistence you will be able to.... When we started I looked at it, this is a huge project, it is challenging. First I said, I am a Fogarty Fellow. I had a Fogarty fellowship research training in 1992. So I spent some time in the US and then '97-'98 I was at the NIH, the Human Genetics lab. So I have had this exposure and working relationship with NIH for quite a while. So when this came, people said this is really a test of your career and ability. But sitting carefully following, and also following rules of engagement are not difficult at all. You can do it. These are lessons.

I communicate a lot. We have the PI council, we have the network, the system, and I contribute to the discussions, I ask questions and my colleagues I know have been very open and frank with a person and an academician I can't afford not to. So I contribute and I learn from them.

So there is a program that I am trying to pull together with three or four universities in a different region, health Africa to respond to some RFA to have joint grant application on also some training program. So this I have had a great

opportunity of working together in the network. Without MEPI I wouldn't have met many of my colleagues doing their great work in their different universities in the country. But one thing we are all very similar but each of us are working in our different corners of the world before. Now we all know that we have a common objective, a common goal of enhancing medical education and thinking of the next generation of academicians in the region.

Again I do this every time I have the opportunity. It is an initiative of the US government and I let my colleagues know, and they always mean something I reflect upon every time as a Nigerian I really benefitted tremendously, as I said, from the generosity and support of the American government and I look at the role the American government and American citizens have played across the world and it is great. I mentioned, my university in the early days was supported tremendously by Rockefeller, by Ford Foundation, by Carnegie. So all these major foundations have really helped to build Ibadan. Now, I had just about got to the end of ?? when MEPI came. So I said, this is really great, this is helping the whole world and humanity as a whole and recommend this to other developed countries, and particularly the leadership of African countries.

They recognize the support we are getting from the US government and they reciprocate and contribute, whatever it may be. It may not be major, big, but contribute. For instance in this area I really want to particularly commend the leadership of my university, the University of Ibadan. The Vice-Chancellor while also being a member of the group understands very well the vision of MEPI said, we need the full facilities, I immediately approve a sum of money to put up a building for a clinical lab, the basic sciences where we started implementation, give a large sum of money to give to various departments. Up to \$750,000 have been released to us for the university side of it. That is contributing. And this is recognition, he has recognized that the university has to put something to ensure that these ideas really materialize, and mature with time. we are receiving this help, we should also help. Heaven helps those who help themselves.