

Yakub Mulla

MEPI Principal Investigator, Dean of Postgraduate Studies, University of Zambia, Zambia

MEPI is helping us in many ways. But I would like to highlight how MEPI has helped us increase the capacity for training.

Zambia is a country that attained independence in 1964. Two years later, in '66, the new medical school began, and population of Zambia has increased now from 4 million to 13 million. One of the failures of government has been the failure to increase the number of training, the training capacity for medical students. And for 45 years, even though it was initially in the health, strategic health plan to increase the number of spaces and to increase the training capacity for training medical graduates, there was no government drive to take up that initiative. I personally, as Dean of the School of Medicine over time had an opportunity to speak to three previous Ministers of Health, and I discussed with them whether it was possible for government to start a new medical school in Ndola. And I tried to convince them and make a point. But none of those ministers, including some of them that were doctors, could take up that initiative. In the last government just as MEPI came in, the new Minister of Health was an engineer. He was very energetic, young and over a conference on AIDs in Namibia, I had an opportunity to speak to him over a cup of tea and I told him of the health strategic plan and how we should have had a new medical school many years earlier, and that for 45 years government had not had a plan to start a new medical school.

He said, is that so? And to my surprise two weeks later, when I was back in Lusaka, he called me personally and said, I want you to come and that story you were telling me in Namibia about the new medical school, I want you to explain to my colleagues in the Ministry of Health. So I went over to the ministry and I talked to them of the issue of, my initial plan was to convert the Tropical Disease Research Center in Ndola Central Hospital, which is the second major town in the

copper belt, and has a huge hospital, seven stories high. To convert that into a medical school. He liked the idea and he said, we will start a medical school.

So he went and spoke to the president. We didn't know but he announced it in parliament and said that the government is going to start a new medical school. We just read through the newspapers that a new medical school was going to begin. And I had assured him at that conference that we had trained enough clinicians, but that we were now, through MEPI, going to start a basic science course that would train teachers for the new medical school. Once they announced in parliament a technical working group was set up, and I was part of that technical working group along with the Minister of Education, the Minister of Health and WHO.

The World Health Organization then sent a consultant to Lusaka and the minister asked me to go along with him. We inspected Ndola Central Hospital, we went through the 89 offices which were on the top two floors, which belong to TDRC. And he took photographs and very in detail studied the anatomy of the building. And then there's a new College of Biomedical Sciences which is within the hospital grounds and we looked at the lecture theaters, those state of the art new lecture theaters built by the Irish government and this was within the same grounds. Then we walked through the out patients where we saw the queues of patients and the rich learning material. And he remarked at that time that back at home in Nigeria this would have been a medical school 20 years ago.

So he wrote a very nice report which went to the minister and we formed a technical working group, which met on an almost weekly basis, to work out, and we invited the Vice-Chancellor of the Copper Belt University to join us together with officials from the Ministry of Health and Education. As a joint effort we worked together to form the new medical school. The Ministry of Health and Education for the first time worked together, because everything was compartmentalized. One ministry would say look this is not under us, higher education is not under health, it is under education and vice versa. But they worked together for the first time and the Ministry of Health provided funding to

the Ministry of Education. It went through the Ministry of Education, a gift to the Copper Belt University. They also gave up some infrastructure to the education sector. And together with MEPI that school has now taken off.

We are supporting, at the same time there are two other new medical schools that began at the same time. So MEPI is supporting all the three schools. It is supporting them in the intranet, which is the mobile platform and then the eGranary, which is the University of Alabama and ?? to our partners. We are helping them with teaching materials, computers, on screen projection to try and improve the facilities of all the four schools.

The main achievement of that was that government has been indirectly forced to double the funding to the training of health professionals. Because in the past they were supporting one university for one medical school and now they are supporting two. So there has been a 100% increase. When you look at the number of students that are admitted, our school has itself has now increased to up to 100. But then the new medical schools, the first intake was 72. Smaller amounts for the two private schools. But overall we have doubled, in one year, we have doubled the number of health professional training. But at the same time, in order to keep quality, we haven't just increased in one school, we could have made a class to 200, but what we have done is we have kept our numbers low but we have given that responsibility to a different university, and they have their mandate to train these students.

At the same time, with the help of the University of Alabama and our partners, we have now set up and improved our local area purchase of materials for their own teaching purposes, for skills purposes.

So those are some of the major achievements. There are many other areas in the library, in the delivery of our lectures, etc, which we hope to improve on with the help of MEPI.

It just means that a little bit of help with this funding will go a long way, just the fact that we were able to achieve so many things that we've achieved in this little time. Because even when we started the project, we started a few months late, funding arrived a bit late, but in spite of that we have achieved so much, and there is so much more that we are going to be able to do because we have just completed year two. And there's year three, four and five coming up and I think we will grow from strength to strength.