

Building an International School of Public Health at the University of Medical Sciences to sustain the implementation of Public Health Programs in Africa

- A concept Paper Prepared by the University of Medical Sciences, Ondo City, Ondo State, Nigeria

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Justification

The University of Medical Sciences in Ondo City, Ondo State in Nigeria was established by the Ondo State Government in April 2015 with the principal aim to promote excellence and innovation in medical education and service delivery. This is the first medical university of its kind in West Africa, and is envisaged as a regional hub for training, applied research and service delivery in major health sciences disciplines. Already the initial courses have been approved for the University by the National Universities Commission (NUC) while the first set of 189 students for the 2015-2016 Academic Session have been admitted and have commenced studies.

Since the beginning of the new democratic dispensation in Nigeria, especially within the last 7 years, Ondo State has led other States in achieving some of the most phenomenal milestones in the provision of comprehensive health care. From being the State with the worst health statistics in the south-west region, it is now the state with some of the best health indicators in Nigeria. Indeed, it is the only Nigerian state that attained the MDGs 4 and 5, and one of a few states with equitable and affordable health access in the country. Under the visionary leadership of the current Governor of the State, Dr Olusegun Mimiko, himself a medical doctor, Ondo State not only built excellent secondary and tertiary health care facilities, but also expanded its primary health care delivery system, which today is rated as the number one in the country. In 2015, the World Bank rated Ondo State as the number 1 state in Nigeria in terms of overall coverage of childhood immunization. Also, in 2014, Ondo State was rated the number one state by the Federal Ministry of Health in the quality and intensity of implementation of activities of State Primary Health Care Development Agencies. The State scored 91% to top the list of States in the domains of governance and ownership, legislation, minimum services package, repositioning, systems development, operational guidelines, human resources, funding sources and structure, and office set-up of primary health care services. When it is recognised that in this assessment, the national average score was 44% and that some states with better resources than Ondo state scored as low as 0% to 12%, the results confirms the dominance of Ondo State in the quality of provision of primary health care services in the country. Indeed, Ondo State is now recognised as a pace-setter in health care delivery in Nigeria, and is frequently visited by other States that are desirous to learn lessons on health positioning and the effective management of health systems.

Other prominent and recent achievements of Ondo State in the spheres of health include: 1) the establishment of the Abiye and Ebi-Abiye program of free maternal health care that has resulted in increased use of evidence-based care by pregnant women and in significant reduction of maternal mortality in the State; 2) the establishment of the Mother and Child Hospitals in Akure and Ondo City and the Trauma and Kidney Centres in Ondo City that provide some of the most excellent tertiary health care services in Nigeria; and 3) the constitution of a maternal death review law and panel that provides the only currently available annual Maternal Death Reviews and Surveillance (MDRS) in the country.

Clearly, Ondo State has achieved some of the most impactful achievements in health, but the challenge remains on how to sustain these achievements over time, and also how to scale the practices throughout the country and the rest of Africa. Political will has been majorly lacking in the provision of health services throughout the region. The fact that Ondo State has been able to leverage substantial political will to prioritize health care as a major agenda in development is a good example to showcase to other parts of the region. In particular, the use of public health approaches in developing its health care system, a principle which is

often not well understood by African governments is an example worth consolidating and entrenching in the region. It is within this context that the University of Medical Sciences provides a great opportunity to build human resources for future management of the health system to sustain the current achievements in health in Ondo State and to ensure its translation to other parts of the West African sub-region.

Despite its landmark achievements in health, Ondo State presently does not have the quantum of public health managers and scientists to sustain the present laudable public health approaches. Looking beyond the State, it is noteworthy that Nigeria as a whole despite its large size and its plethora of public health challenges, has few internationally recognised public health scientists, and indeed, does not have an international School of Public Health that match those in Western countries. Thus, many health policies and programming approaches are often derived from international donor agencies, while the lack of indigenous public health professionals deprives the country of the ownership and leadership structure that is needed to effectively manage the country's health system in a sustainable manner. What is being said of Nigeria is also true of the other West African countries. Indeed, Nigeria being the most populous country in West Africa can commit itself to championing the development of health professionals that would deepen the implementation of some of the best practices in public health for the entire region. We believe that unless an approach is found to build high profile public health professionals to develop West Africa's health systems, the current deficit of knowledge and skills to manage the health system will not abate soon.

It is from this perspective that the School of Public Health (SPH) at the University of Medical Sciences in Ondo City, Ondo of Nigeria (UNIMED) is being conceived and will be developed. The SPH at UNIMED is being proposed as an international Public Health Institute that would work towards building sustainable high quality human resource and conducting applied research and services for addressing the current multiple public health challenges in the West African region.

Goal of the SPH at UNIMED: The goal of the SPH at UNIMED is to build human resource capacity within West African region for implementing high quality training and applied research for health professionals to tackle policies and programs for strengthening health systems and reducing the region's high burden of ill-health and disability.

Specific Objectives of the SPH include the:

1. Training of students and technical experts/policymakers through short courses on relevant public health and health policy topics in the region
2. Bachelors in Public Health, delivered from a multi-disciplinary and basic science perspective to widen the scope of public health scientists working in the region
3. Masters in public health and related fields such as reproductive health, women's health, public health law, health economics, sociology/anthropology, epidemiology, biostatistics etc.
4. Doctorate degrees in public health and related fields as noted above
5. Development of capacity for applied research to address the health challenges in the region and to enable publication by indigenous practitioners of high quality papers in leading international journals.
6. Provision of public health services and consultancies to guide the administration of public health in the region.

Methodology: The development of the SPH at UNIMED is being proposed as follows:

- The University's Academic Brief has been developed and approved by the National Universities Commission (NUC). The Brief includes the SPH as one of six main Academic Faculties.
- As presented in the University's Academic Brief, the SPH consists of the Departments of Epidemiology/Biostatistics, Environmental Health, Occupational Health, Public Health Nutrition, Health Economics and Health Management, Demography, Women's Studies and Reproductive Health, Health Informatics, Public Health law and Ethics, and Health Education and Primary Health Care. These departments have been approved by Senate of the University.
- The position of the office of Dean at the SPH has been advertised and will be filled in January 2016. The Dean will work with principal officers of the University and other external members (including development partners) to constitute a committee of experts to finalise the proposal and work plan for developing the School. This committee of experts will begin work in February 2016. Experts to be invited to join the planning of the School include representatives of Development Agencies (Bill and Melinda Gates, Ford Foundation, Macarthur Foundation, the World Bank and the WHO, Sector Planners (Ministries of Health, Education, Macarthur Foundation, TY Danjuma Foundation, Dangote Foundation, Tony Elumelu Foundation,
- Women Affairs and Planning and the NUC), Industry representatives (Thomson Reuters, Phillips International and General Electric), and leading NGOs working in the field of Public Health in Africa (such as Trust Africa).
- The University has allocated a large portion of land within its Physical Master Plan for the construction and development of the SPH.
- The Director of Physical Planning and other architects and planners of the University have prepared the architectural plan and drawings for building the School. A copy of the final Architectural Drawings of the School will be forwarded soon.
- The University's time frame for completing the building of the School is October 2016, in time to enable the intake of the first set of undergraduate and post-graduate students during the 2016-2017 Academic Session.
- Applications for academic positions in the SPH have been received. The University will appoint HODs of Departments and other academic and principal administrative staff of the school in March 2016.
- The academic program and work plan of each Department will be developed and presented to Senate for review and approval in April 2015.
- The National Universities Commission (NUC) will be invited for resource verification of the Bachelors, Masters and PhD programs in June 2015/2016 Academic Session.
- However, the short courses (including online courses) in the School will begin in April 2016 immediately after appointment of academic staff of the School.
- Admission of students will begin in September 2016 and will be concluded by early October 2016. Students will come into residence by late October 2016.

Summary of Tabular Work Plan for Establishing the School

Serial Number	Activity	Project Dates	Comments
1	Appointment of Dean of School	January 2016	Already advertised. Interviews scheduled for January 29, 2016. Meanwhile, temporary offices have been identified for the School in the University campus.
2	Advisory Board formed to finalise curricular and advise On ways to meet its mission to attain international standards	February to April 2016	Apart from internal members, experts will be invited from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, UNFPA, World Bank, Ford Foundation, Macarthur Foundation, the World Health Organization as well as industry partners
3	Appointment of HODs, and Academic staff and key administrative staff	March 2016	Adverts will be out in February 2016
4	Finalization of School curricular of various Departments	April 2016	Curricular will be finalised with inputs from Advisory committee, School Board of Studies
5	Resource Verification and Accreditation of courses by the National Universities Commission (NUC)	June 2016	NUC will verify curricular, staffing and other arrangements made for take-off of the School.
6	Finalization of architectural drawings and costs estimates of the School	February 2016	Drawings are currently in progress but will be finalised with inputs from members of the Advisory Board.
7	Award of contract for the construction of the School	March 2016	Contract will be awarded by open bidding, after 4weeks of advert. The contract will be awarded to the lowest pre-qualified bidder.
8	Construction and equipping of the School	March to September 2016	A six months period for construction and equipping of the School is being envisaged
9	Advert for and Admission of students into various courses in the School for the 2016-2017 session	August to September, 2016	This exercise will be conducted in compliance with the existing laws of the University and JAMB
10	Students come into Residence	October 2016	Accommodation will be provided for undergraduate and post-graduate students.
11	Registration and Orientation of students	October, 2016	This is in compliance with normal University procedures
12	Lectures, research and academic activities begin	November 2016	

Special Features and Niche of the School

Some of the unique features of the SPH at UNIMED will be as follows:

- 1) Internationalization – the School will adopt international benchmarks and standards to development it's curricular and will seek the collaboration of international agencies to

develop the curricular. We will seek partnerships with leading international agencies to ensure that the public health and development concerns of these agencies are addressed in a new model of public health curricular that would be developed and implemented by the School. Our aim is to adapt the model of best performing Schools of Public Health in the world, and be the hub for public health-related activities in Africa.

- 2) Research in the School will be structured to address the development challenges of communities in the region. In particular, the School will address the many persistent and resilient public health challenges in West Africa such as high rates of maternal and child mortality, unsafe abortion, infections and non-communicable diseases, including cancers, hypertension and diabetes. The School's research policy will work in such a way that research findings are immediately translatable to policies and programs to reduce the burden of disease and disability in the region.
- 3) Industry Relationship. The School will work with industry partners right from the beginning to ensure that the concerns of industry are included in the curricular design and implementation of its academic programs. Industry partners would also be enlisted to provide opportunity for internships for students during the period of their training and also to participate in workshops, seminars and skills development programs being implemented by the School. Working with industry in program design and implementation would increase the employability of UNIMED graduates and their relevance in addressing the industry needs of the region.
- 4) Integrated Entrepreneurship Training on entrepreneurship will be integrated into all programs of the School, and will be a major feature of the school's learning methods and collaboration with industry.
- 5) Policy Think-Tank on Public health. The school will lead the policy framing and advocacy for promoting all elements of public health in the region. It will function as the policy think-tank agency on public health for the region and will also play advisory and supportive roles to governments wishing to implement high profile public health policies.

Key Outputs of the SPH at UNIMED (and indicators for measuring the School's success) include the following:

- 1) New Bachelors, Masters and PhDs programs in all aspects of public health that meet international standards
- 2) Short courses in public health that address the gaps in public health knowledge and skills by in-service public health providers
- 3) Meet accreditation benchmarks of local, regional and international accreditation bodies for all programs and courses within two years of the operation of the School
- 4) Exchange of staff and students with leading Schools of Public Health internationally
- 5) Staff and students participating in outreach experience into the private sector and other regional partners.
- 6) Formation of regional partnerships to increase regional faculty and students in the School. The membership of UNIMED in the World Bank Centre of Excellence in Reproductive Health at the University of Benin will help to develop essential linkages to achieve this key output.
- 7) Increased academic productivity by School's students and faculty through academic paper output and research grant applications.
- 8) Evidence of relevance of the School in overcoming the development challenge and the planning of public policies and programs for countries in the West African region.

Budget and Projected Funding

The budget for establishing and running the school in the first 3 years has been estimated to be \$15.0 Million (fifteen Million dollars), which translates to about N3.0Billion (three billion Naira).

These include costs of construction and building the School, procurement of furniture and key equipment, procurement of key research equipment, cost of establishing the School's library including e-library, ICT infrastructure and teleconferencing technology and initial over-head running costs.

A detailed budget justification will be provided at the submission of the full proposal.

A basket source of funding is being proposed for the School and requests will be made as follows:

- 1) Ondo State Government
- 2) UNIMED's Internally Generated Revenue
- 3) Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFUND) is being contacted to support the research infrastructure of the School
- 4) Individual Philanthropists including local community leaders
- 5) The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation
- 6) The Ford Foundation
- 7) The World Bank
- 8) Local Foundations – TY Danjuma, Dangote and Tony Elumelu Foundations
- 9) Embassy of the Chinese Government
- 10) The UNFPA
- 11) World Health Organization
- 12) Other Un-expected Donors

Donors to this project will be honoured in many ways. In particular, opportunity exists for the School to be named after the institution or individual that makes the largest single contribution to developing the School.

Conclusion: The University of Medical Sciences believe very strongly that the establishment of a School of Public Health that meets international standards is one of the most important ways to strengthen and sustain the implementation of evidence-based health policies and programs for addressing the current high burden and disability not only in Nigeria but throughout the West African region.