The Mozambique Eyecare Project: Implementing a Model That Addresses Uncorrected Refractive Error in Lusophone Africa.

Stephen Thompson  
*Technological University Dublin, stephenjamesthompson@hotmail.co.uk*

Diane Wallace  
*Technological University Dublin, diane.wallace@gmail.com*

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THE MOZAMBIQUE EYECARE PROJECT: IMPLEMENTING A MODEL THAT ADDRESSES UNCORRECTED REFRACTIVE ERROR IN LUSOPHONE AFRICA

Diane Wallace MPA
Stephen Thompson MSc
Background: Eye care in Mozambique

- Population ~ 22 million
- Ophthalmology focused
- HR capacity
  - 11 Ophthalmologists (4 expats)
  - 1 Optometrist
  - 23 Cuban trained refractionists
  - 17 Ophthalmic Technicians (OCO’s)
  - 2 Orthoptists
- No training program for optometrists pre-2009
Rationale for program

• Burden of visual disability
• Optometrists lacking as part of the comprehensive eye care team
• In-country capacity development for sustainable, locally-owned eye care services
• North-South collaborative development partnership
• Research to understand local challenges and develop local capacity for future research
• Broader development impact on other countries in Lusophone countries
Educational Model

- MEEM:
  - 2 year diploma
  - 4 year degree

- Rationale for the model
Current Status

- Students enrolled in y1 and y2 at Unilurio in Nampula
- Revision of the model due to legislative changes
- Introduction of expat faculty (linguistic challenges)
- 3 x registered PhD students, 1 Masters
- Baseline studies being conducted
Challenges

Language of teaching

• Limited number of books in Portuguese

• Most Optometry books published in English

• 2 out of 3 students felt their reading skills in English were poor

• Lectures delivered by Spanish speaking faculty
Language

Programme

- Implications for Interaction with local partners
- Logistical challenges
- Language and official protocol
Faculty recruitment

- 63% of students preferred to be taught in is Portuguese
- Limited number of qualified post-graduate Portuguese speaking optometrists
- Two Spanish-speaking lecturers:
  - Maria Lopez (Spain)
  - Vivien Ocampo (Colombia)
Perceptions of the profession

- Eye care in Mozambique is currently Ophthalmology focused
- Limited local reference to Optometry
- 66.6% of students surveyed thought that Optometrists performed operations for cataract and eye disease.
- **Challenge:** To position the profession of Optometry in a country that currently has no reference point.
- Documentary describing the profession of Optometry aired locally
Government buy-in

- Creation of Optometry cadre
- Development of public sector Optometry posts
- Regulation and ongoing support
- Advocacy
- Synergy between Optometry and Ophthalmology

Icee
Partnership for Implementation

- Funded by Irish Aid
- Administered by Irish higher education institution as academic development support partner
- Restrictions i.e. meeting funding outputs
- Changes in regulation
- Flexibility
Regional concept

- Optometry school in Mozambique will act as a regional training centre
- Students expected to enrol from:
  - Angola
  - Guinea-Bissau
  - São Tomé and Príncipe
- Links developed between countries
- Broadening education opportunities
- Developing eye care human resources
Successes

- 42 students enrolled in the program to date
- Lots of awareness generated about the project through DIT’s marketing efforts (project website, Facebook, various networks)
- Keen interest from optometrists around the globe in working on the project
- 4 Post Graduate projects started
- Clinic and training centre being built; teaching materials being translated into Portuguese.
- Cross-institutional networks being developed
Conclusion: Lessons learnt

• Flexibility required to achieve outputs, especially with regards to impact of regulatory changes

• Government buy-in essential for long-term success

• Language factor needs to be seriously considered during planning phase, but should not be a barrier to implementation

• Countries where optometry and refractive services are non-existent should be addressed as a priority rather than excluded

• Despite challenges such programs have broader developmental spin-offs (education, social and economic development)
Thank you

Diane Wallace
Diane@iceeafica.co.za

Stephen Thompson
Stephen@iceeafica.co.za