

Aga Khan University bets on new Uganda Campus to grow its impact

The launch of the construction of the new Aga Khan University Campus in Nakawa Division in Uganda's Kampala Capital City in 2023, has brought hope to many Ugandans that the expensive treatment they have always sought abroad, will come to an end.

STEPHEN OTAGE caught up with Aga Khan University's Associate Vice Provost Dr JOSEPH MWIZERWA for an insight of the expectations when the campus that will host a University Centre, student accommodation and a University Hospital is up and running. Below are the excerpts.

Who is Dr Joseph Mwizera?

My name is Dr Joseph Mwizera. I serve as the Associate Vice Provost at Aga Khan University in Uganda. I have been serving at Aga Khan University for 14 years now in various roles.

Where were you prior to joining Aga Khan University?

Way back, from 2003 to 2010, I was in another public University—Mbarara University of Science and Technology where I was a faculty member. That meant participation in teaching, supporting and supervising students in the nursing programs there. I was involved in many roles in the span of over eight years. I grew from assistant lecturer to lecturer and eventually by the time I left I was the acting head for the department.

Where are you from?

I am a Ugandan from Kisoro in Uganda in the South-Western part of Uganda. I grew up in Jinja. I spent a greater part of my life in Jinja.

Tell us about what you do at Aga Khan University.

At Aga Khan University, I oversee the school of nursing and

midwifery. The school of nursing and midwifery has been in existence since 2000 and has run upgrading courses for nurses and midwives. Initially, we started with two programs for upgrading nurses. From certificate in nursing to diploma in nursing and diploma in nursing to degree in nursing and later we were able to launch additional programs that helped us to support another category of people that is midwives. My work at Aga Khan University looks at supporting the school of nursing and midwifery in addition to looking after the interests of Aga Khan University in Uganda.

Having been in existence in Uganda for the past 20 years, what are some of Aga Khan University's key impacts?

Aga Khan University has greatly impacted the Uganda's higher education sector since establishment 20 years ago. We have graduated more than 1,400 nurses and midwives in our three courses – Diploma in Nursing, Degree in Nursing and Degree in Midwifery. These are professionals who are the backbone of the country's health across Uganda.

Beyond our academic programs, we have upgraded the skills of over 3,000 nurses through our Continuous Professional Development (CPD) courses. These courses last from just a few days to a few weeks and months and the students don't have to necessarily come to our campus as they can do them remotely. The programs range from emergency and critical care, infection prevention and control, respectful maternity care, vaccine control and

management. We partner with an online CPD provider--the World Continuing Education Alliance, which is a platform that allows health professionals to continue learning even when they are in their workspaces.

The role of nursing has been understated in many developing countries. What is the status in Uganda?

Uganda has posted some good milestones. We see that Uganda recognizes nurses and midwives. It has a recognized framework for their practice in Uganda. We have a professional regulator that regulates practice of nurses and midwives in Uganda. Nurses in Uganda can access training programs in both public and private institutions. This is from certificate level all the way to master's and PhD level.

Of the healthcare environment in Uganda, nurses and midwives constitute around 60 per cent of the workforce hence they are recognized as key contributors to healthcare. Of course, there are areas of improvement. The number of nurses per 1000 patients is still lower than the target. There is also need for improvement when it comes to remuneration.

We also saw that government didn't have a structure for graduate nurses to be recruited how is the situation now?

Yes, that was in the past. There was a huge backlog and a delay to provide access for graduate nurses to practice in government owned facilities. In 2018, government released a key document that allowed those nurses to participate in increase that number to allow the graduates to come and practice. We have a scenario where we have more nurses in the diploma levels than we have in the degree level. The desire is that many upgrade to the degree level and be registered nurses. A registered nurse is internationally recognised.

There is a lot of excitement about the ongoing construction of the campus in Nakawa. Highlight some of the facilities and construction progress?

The Aga Khan University has taken a bold step to improve its infrastructure in Uganda. We are building a University Centre that has spaces of learning as well as world-class accommodation facilities. Construction started last year, and we are making a lot of progress.

Already complete is the state-of-the-art Nakawa Specialty Centre offering tertiary level care especially diagnostics. We also expect that sometime next year, the hospital will also be commissioned for construction.

What treatments do patients come here for?

This facility joins our clinics in DTB branch, Acacia Mall and Nalya. It offers many specialised outpatient services like gastroenterology, nephrology, medical oncology. We also have chemotherapy services for cancer patients, dialysis services for our kidney patients, physiotherapy services, gastroenterology services, and endoscopies. We also do minor procedures and then we have laboratory services and a whole range of diagnostic medical imaging like the MRI, x-ray, ultra-sound, mammogram, OPG and a CT-scan.

What should Ugandans expect when the main hospital is complete?

Aga Khan University Hospital will be a mammoth project. We are optimistic that we shall share with other professionals the experiences of it running of its hospitals. We see a state-of-the-art facility which will stop Ugandans from travelling abroad for care.

As you may know, Aga Khan University already has several facilities outside Uganda and there has been some good brand recognition. When this hospital is in Uganda, we hope that some of the conditions that were taking people outside the country for care will be handled locally for them to be able to receive care and be at home and enjoy the convenience of having the facility at home.

How will this hospital impact on training the health workers in Uganda?

Our hospital will be a University hospital that will provide an excellent clinical training facility for nurses, doctors, midwives and several other healthcare professionals. We will collaborate with other institutions and hospitals for greater impact in medical training. We are already collaborating with Mulago National Referral Hospital and Kawempe National Referral Hospital, Kiruddu plus other level five general hospitals.

Are you challenging government

hospitals to step-up their quality of services?

We are optimistic that there are areas for collaboration with government hospitals. Aga Khan University Hospital is and internationally recognized brand with numerous international standards certifications. We will bring the expertise and experience here to help better healthcare in Uganda.

What synergies do you see between the university and government of Uganda upon the development of the campus?

There are many opportunities for collaboration in research, nursing practice and academic programs; there are many opportunities where we can synergistically work together. We are optimistic that there are several other opportunities that can be shared. That space is large and can be explored we look forward to seeing how that will evolve.

Besides East Africa, where else does Aga Khan University have presence?

Aga Khan University has presence in different parts of the world including Kenya, Tanzania, United Kingdom and Pakistan where the University was founded in 1983.

Is there anything else you would like to share with us?

Yes. We would like to invite the public to stay tuned to the developments at the Aga Khan University in Uganda. The developments have already rolled off the conveyor belt to the point where we cannot stop. Different developments will only come to add to where we are at. We see a very strong presence of Aga Khan university and its programs in Uganda.

Any other impacts in the East African region?

Aga Khan University is an International University with campuses in Tanzania and Kenya within our region. We have many Ugandans who pursue their education in these other countries. Tanzania has a Medical College, School of Nursing and Midwifery and the Institute of Education Development. AKU in Kenya also has the same faculties. Kenya also hosts the Graduate School of Media and Communication that has graduated hundreds of journalists across the region. We also have the world-class Aga Khan University Hospital, Nairobi which is a premier health facility.

