

Flemish support for health care in Mozambique makes a difference

Successful capacity-building of national health institute INS paves way for the tackling of antibiotic resistance, Minister-President of Flanders Bourgeois sees during Maputo visit.

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Dit is de omschrijving

An atypical project in development cooperation, financed by Flanders and facilitated by the Institute of Tropical Medicine Antwerp (ITM), is strengthening the evidence base of public health in Mozambique. The project builds the research capacity and management of the Instituto Nacional de SaÃºde (INS), with full ownership on the side of the Mozambican national health institute. INS and ITM are now looking to take a science-based approach to the containment of antibiotic resistance, a major threat to public health and patient safety in Mozambique. Geert Bourgeois, Minister-President of Flanders, visited INS on Thursday 24 August while in Maputo.

Results of five years of INS-ITM partnership

Since 2012, the Flemish government supports the institutional cooperation between INS in Maputo and ITM in Antwerp, one of Flanders' three development cooperation projects in Mozambique. In the BICMINS-project (Building Institutional Capacity at the Mozambique INS), full ownership lies with INS.

INS Director Ilesh Jani: "A noteworthy feature of this project is that responsibility is largely borne by INS, in line with our national priorities. For example, budget is foreseen for internal research grants that INS dedicates to the best scoring research projects. The support of Flanders really strengthens the foundations of the Mozambican public health system."

During the past five years, several INS staff members followed scientific and technical trainings at post-graduate level and the governance and management of the institute were improved. Three Mozambican researchers are currently working on their doctoral research in the context of the BICMINS-project and two more are expected to join their ranks soon.

ITM's role in the project is to provide its expertise in response to needs identified by INS. Researchers from Antwerp support their colleagues in Maputo, among others by teaching short courses and through exchange of expertise on specific topics like the functioning of the ethics committee and strengthening institutional research coordination.

Antibiotic resistance - research and surveillance priority

Because of the progress the institute made since 2012, it is now possible for INS to put further emphasis on health priorities, and antibiotic resistance is at the top of the list.

In Mozambique, bacterial infections represent an important cause of disease and death. Antibiotic resistance is a growing problem in this context, more so than in Europe. This is among others due to the excessive prescriptions by physicians who, in view of a lack of laboratory support, play it safe. This means most febrile patients are treated with antibiotics. Patient expectations and the fact that antibiotics are massively being sold without medical prescriptions also play a role. Finally, resistant bacteria are also transmitted in hospitals. Without a surveillance system able to monitor bacterial resistance against commonly used antibiotics, the likelihood is high that patients are not receiving the right treatment.

In the years ahead, INS aims at generating scientific evidence on the containment of antibiotic resistance. On the side of ITM, Professor Jan Jacobs and his team will contribute to the project: "Addressing antibiotic resistance starts with correct data, and the lack of effective surveillance is currently hampering an appropriate response in Mozambique. With better data, we can regularly update treatment guidelines and take preventive measures against infections in hospitals."

The details of this innovative project with a likely duration of five years are currently under development.

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