



Brief History

The dream to put-up a unique Institute of Infectious Diseases at the University of Nairobi that resembles those in Europe and North America went all the way back to the mid-1990s. If done as envisaged in the dream, the Institute was going to be a home to one of the only three high level laboratory (enhanced level 3) in the whole of Africa (Johannesburg, South Africa has a level 4 laboratory and Gabon in West Africa has enhanced level 3 laboratory). Dr. Francis Plummer, a Canadian researcher from University of Manitoba who came to Kenya in early 1980s as part of the collaboration between University of Manitoba and University of Nairobi was the one who envisaged the dream. In 1980, the Department of Medical Microbiology, University of Nairobi and Department of Medical Microbiology, University of Manitoba had started a collaboration to study Sexually Transmitted Diseases in Nairobi. By early 1990s the collaboration had grown to include other international Universities from Europe and America and the research work involved had become extensive and complex that it was felt that the work could no longer be handled at the Departmental level. Hence the need to create an Institute of Tropical and Infectious diseases that could handle research on diseases people in Kenya, East Africa and the region.

In the mid 1990s a team from University of Nairobi and University of Manitoba put together a proposal to look for funding to build the institute. For three years no funding came through and the idea of the institute was shelved temporarily. However, in 1999 University of Manitoba team lead by Dr. Plummer presented the proposal to the Canadian Foundation for Innovation (CFI) competition. To everyone's surprise CFI agreed to fund the building of the institute. Immediately the approval process to set-up an institute at the College of Health Sciences, University of Nairobi was initiated and towards the end of 2003, the University of Nairobi of Nairobi senate and council approved the establishment of a virtual Institute to be house at the College of Health Sciences. The institute was named as the University of Nairobi Institute of Tropical and Infectious Diseases (UNITID). The institute was created as a virtual institute and therefore, officially able to attract diverse scientists and scholars highly accomplished in their respective areas of expertise such as basic sciences, social and behavioral sciences; epidemiology and biostatistics; from local and international research and training institutions. In the same year, Prof. George Magoha and Prof. J. O. Ndinya Achola journeyed to Ottawa, Canada to witness the signing of the funding agreement between CFI, University of Manitoba and University of Nairobi.

In March 2004, the Institute commenced its operations as one of the five fully-fledged constituent units of the College of Health Sciences, University of Nairobi.



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By December 2004, under the leadership of the then Director of the institute, Prof. Benson Estambale, a strategic plan was developed that would guide the operations of the Institute in the next 10 years. The strategic plan identified the following as key areas of activities that would be important in driving the institute's agenda forward. They include; Training of graduate students, collaborations with both local and international researchers, capacity building, income generation, resources mobilization and dissemination of information.

In January the 2007, a group of dignitaries from Canada and Kenya gathered under the hot sun of Nairobi to officially open building. Among the dignitaries from Canada were the then Canadian minister of health, Tony Clement accompanied by the then President of University of Manitoba, Eموke Szathmary and Dr. Frank Plummer. On the Kenyan side were the then Minister of health Hon. Charity Kaluki Ngilu, the then University of Nairobi Vice-Chancellor, Prof George Magoha, Prof Benson Estambale, the then Director of the Institute and Prof Machoki the then Deputy Director. The institute has since its inception trained Kenyans and Foreigners at PhD and Masters level as part of capacity building, it has also been involved in high level research in a number of diseases in the region.

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