

MSc. MIDWIFERY AND WOMEN'S HEALTH PROGRAM OFFICIALLY LAUNCHED



A team from the School of Nursing in a group photo with H.E. Ambassador Masaki Okada, Dr. Toshiko Ibe, Prof. Ephata Kaaya and officials from MUHAS and JICA

On December 8, 2014 the new Master of Midwifery and Women's Health Program at MUHAS School of Nursing was launched. It is the first such program in Tanzania.

This auspicious event was graced by the Ambassador of Japan to Tanzania, Mr. Masaki Okada; Senior Representative of Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), Mr. Yoichiro Kimata; Keynote Speaker (Expert of JICA), Prof. Tomohiko Sugishita; President of St. Luke's International University, Dr. Toshiko Ibe; Vice Chancellor MUHAS, Prof. Ephata Kaaya; Director of Planning and Investment MUHAS, Dr. Dinah Gasarasi; Dean School of Nursing MUHAS, Dr. Sebalda Leshabari; representatives of Tanzania Midwives Association, Muhimbili National Hospital, Ministry of Health and Social

Welfare; faculty members of St. Luke's and MUHAS; as well as the current, first, students of the new Masters program.

During the launch, the Dean School of Nursing explained why this is such an important programme for Tanzania. Dr. Leshabari explained that over 358,000 women die each year from complications of pregnancy and childbirth. Over ninety percent of the deaths are from the African Region. Currently, Tanzania's maternal mortality ratio of 454 deaths per 100,000 live births is among the highest in the world.

She said that there is growing evidence that most maternal deaths and disabilities could be averted if all births were attended by a skilled midwife. The persistence of poor maternal and infant health indicators are partly due to the inadequate numbers of skilled health practitioners with

special advanced preparation in midwifery and women's health.

She further explained that, "Humanization of Childbirth" and "Women/Family-Centered Care" are the models upon which the program is based on. These models are adopted from Japan. She emphasized that, candidates require more than midwifery advancement and research skills. They need a broad understanding of roles and responsibilities as champions in building a base of scientific midwifery knowledge for translation into research and evidence-based practice, as well as to influence policy and developments in midwifery education and clinical practice. "Your role is to promote excellence in Midwifery and Women's Health in Tanzania, Africa and beyond" she commented.

The Master students' class representative, Denis Kashaija, added that, "World Health Organization indicated that populations with less than 2.3 skilled clinical workers per 1000 people are unlikely to meet the minimum levels of quality health services needed to provide basic health care and to meet MDGs by 2015. Tanzania has a ratio of 0.52 skilled clinical health workers per 1000 people."

JICA Senior Representative, Mr. Yoichiro Kimata further noted, "Despite high coverage of pregnant women in Tanzania, 96% of whom attend at least one antenatal clinic, only half of the



The Dean Of Nursing, Dr. Selbada Leshabari holding a present received from the President of St. Luke's International University, Dr. Toshiko Ibe

women (51%) have access to skilled delivery”.

As part of the keynote speech, Professor Tomohiko Sugishita, explained why Japan in general and St. Luke's International University in particular are happy to be partnering with School of Nursing at MUHAS in developing this new Masters of Midwifery and Women's Health. His bright elucidating PowerPoint described a vision of “A Path to Universal Health Coverage through Transformative Learning in Midwifery”. Japan has a very interesting experience to share with Tanzania.

Japan has statistics on medical personnel and specific health parameters from the year 1900. One of the health parameters is infant mortality per 1000 live births. In 1900 about 160 babies of every thousand were dying before they reached 1 year. Around 1920, there was general increased spike in ill health at the time of the World War I which included a further increase to almost 250 deaths per 1000 births. By 1980 that dramatic

rate of loss had decreased to a world wide low of around 3 babies dying for every 1000 babies born. It has remained at about that low rate since then. It is a remarkable success story.

Throughout this time period the number of physicians remained the same: 80 per 100,000 population but in 1900 there were fewer nurses than physicians. By 1980 the number of nurses per 100,000 population had increased to 600; the increase of the rate of good health experienced by the Japanese people mirrors the increase of nursing professionals including (midwives, public health nurses, general nurses, and assistant nurses). Professor Sugushita said, “It's nurses and midwives who drive health change. They must be agents of change, not just observers.”

The official collaboration between St. Luke's and MUHAS officially started in 2009. Faculty and student exchanges have been conducted to develop the curriculum, they have jointly conducted seminars and research. As Professor Shigeo

Horiuchi pointed out, “Japan is far from Dar es Salaam and has very different culture, climate, language, economy, society and medical health welfare system from Tanzania. However, there are also many things in common, particularly our desire for good health for ourselves and our families. A midwife's responsibility is to ensure the health of women, families and newborn children – this professional goal is universal.”

Ambassador Okada noted that this Master's programme is another milestone of substantial exchange and cooperation between Japan and Tanzania. The launching of the program is a dream comes true for many people including Professor Shigeo Horiuchi, Dr. Yoko Shimpuku and MUHAS School of Nursing faculty who all worked hard to make it happen. Faculty and student exchanges will continue but with added focus and depth as St. Luke's and MUHAS mutually strengthen each other within this new shared framework.