



## **Professional education**

*Education in vocational colleges for future pharmaceutical-technical assistants in Burundi*

In order to respond to the lack of skilled workers in the health-care system of Burundi, a vocational college is being built in the capital Bujumbura where pharmaceutical-technical assistants will be educated. After their training, they will be qualified to work in pharmacies, pharmaceutical companies, hospital, pharmacies and in laboratories for the research of remedies as well as in medical diagnostics. There will be a chemical, a galenic, a microbiological and a medicine-diagnostic lab at the school's disposal. In the building, there will also be a ward which is to improve the medical care in the school's environment. A doctor will take over the management of the whole institute including the school and the ward. Two pharmacists and other experts will be available as native teachers. Besides, guest speakers will participate in the classes. Teaching will start in the autumn of 2008.

*Interview with Dr. Hans-Peter Häufel, project manager*

### **1. Dr. Häufel, how did you get involved with this project?**

After having finished my services in the pharmaceutical industry, I wanted to put my efforts into development cooperation\*. So I took up a position as a consultant in a pharmaceutical service company. My fee, by sponsor's agreement, is donated to the children's aid agency HUMAN HELP NETWORK ([www.HHN.org](http://www.HHN.org)). Thus, it has contributed to the construction of two elementary schools in Rwanda. HHN is further supporting the Foundation Stamm ([www.fondationstamm.bi](http://www.fondationstamm.bi)), a local aid organization in the neighboring country Burundi. During a journey to Africa that I was on with the general manager of HHN in the end of 2004, I got to know Mrs. Stamm, who is the founder of the organization and a former nurse who has lived in Burundi for over 30 years. She complained about the deficit of qualified staff in the health care system of Burundi and asked me to help her set up a vocational college to educate pharmaceutical-technical assistants. Ever since, I am strongly involved with this project.

### **2. Which kind of results do you hope to get with this project?**

We will surely achieve an improvement of Burundi's health care system in several respects: On the one hand, the integrated ward will ensure a minimum of medical care in a part of Bujumbura where the rate of infectious diseases is very high. Moreover, we will be able to meet parts of the demand for special medication within the ward and the faculties of the Foundation Stamm by the production in our lab. On the other hand, we will counteract the lack of qualified personnel in Burundi's pharmaceutical-medical field with the vocational college.

### **3. What specific features do you have to consider compared to education in Germany?**

It is a very important objective not to rigidly transfer job profiles that exist in Germany (or in a similar form in France as well) to a developing country with different needs. In Germany, professional associations or similar interest groups start off with a new job profile and further develop it in

cooperation with the appropriate authority. In this case, it was basically one person taking the initiative. Thanks to her numerous contacts with hospitals, doctors and pharmacists, Mrs. Stamm knows the needs in Burundi very well. She has a clear picture of the educational objectives. In contrast to Germany and France, the education is not to be focused on the dispensary. The pharmaceutical laboratory assistants are rather to have the chance to work in hospital pharmacies, in existing pharmaceutical companies, in the pharmaceutical research or in diagnostic laboratories.

#### **4. What are, in your opinion, the main difficulties within the realization of this project?**

First of all, there was no need analysis to take as a basis for fixing the general outline of the educational program. However, we will make up for that through close cooperation with vocational colleges in the neighboring country Tanzania. Another disadvantage is the lack of experience of the local responsible body concerning professional trainings on a comparable level. Moreover, the exchange of information between the responsible bodies and the appropriate authorities sometimes made very slow progress. Finally, the heavy burden on Mrs. Stamm is an additional difficulty. I am glad to say that she will be backed up by a very committed member of the children's aid agency "burundikids" ([www.burundikids.org](http://www.burundikids.org)), who will be sent to Burundi for two years with the volunteering service "weltwärts" of the German ministry of economic cooperation and development.

#### **5. How will things go on? What plans do you have for the future?**

For the further development of the project, we have a number of plans:

We are planning to get support from experts from home and abroad who join us for a fixed period, like guest lecturers backing up the teachers or doctors and nurses for special operations on the ward. With the help of the Senior Expert Service, a retired clinical pharmacist can offer his services. Together with teachers and students he is assigned to set up a small scale production of remedies for the requirements of the Foundation Stamm. The analytical equipment would even be suitable for an academic thesis. Moreover, we make efforts to implement school exchanges.

As a long-term objective of the cooperation with the vocational colleges in Tanzania, I see the establishment of a similar job profile in all the countries of the East African Community. The graduates of these colleges are to reach an educational level that meets the current standards whilst allowing them to adjust to the developments in their profession.

I personally would like to give my advice and support to those putting these plans into action for as long as I can.