

## **Integrating Social Accountability in Medical School Accreditation Standards in Uganda: A Policy Perspective**

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### **Abstract**

Medical education in Uganda has evolved in the recent past into competency-based medical education. Social accountability is the capacity of the medical school to respond to society's priority needs and health system challenges to meet these needs. The World Federation of Medical Education recognises the need for medical schools to be socially accountable as reflected in the accreditation standards. The National Council for Higher Education is responsible for accrediting medical schools in Uganda. We propose the integration of social accountability into medical school accreditation standards in Uganda.

The process will start with stakeholder engagement to develop a shared understanding of the concepts and goals. The stakeholders will be defined using the Partnership Pentagram Plus. Thereafter, through a process of co-creation, the team will work together to integrate social accountability in medical school accreditation standards in Uganda.

### **Introduction**

Medical education in Uganda evolved from the traditional medical curriculum to the Competency-Based Medical Education curriculum, which includes competencies related to social accountability (McKenzie-White et al. 2022). Social accountability for medical schools is the capacity of the medical school to respond to society's priority health needs and the health system challenges to meet such needs (Boelen 2016). Social accountability has four core values, including relevance, equity, effectiveness, and quality (Boelen et al. 1995; Barber et al. 2020). When medical schools are socially accountable, they recruit students equitably, train students to become socially accountable practitioners, and advocate for a work environment that supports social accountability (Strasser et al. 2018).

However, there are challenges in implementing social accountability, particularly in resource-limited settings like Uganda. These challenges include a limited understanding of social accountability, limited resources available for implementing and evaluating social accountability, and resistance from stakeholders (Oriokot, Rujumba, et al. 2024; Leigh-Hunt et al. 2015). In addition, student evaluations of social accountability in medical education have shown variable results, suggesting that students may have limited experiences related to understanding, teaching, and practice of social accountability in medical education (Oriokot, Munabi, et al. 2024).

Notably, the World Federation for Medical Education (WFME) recognises the need to implement social accountability in medical education. As a result, the concept of social accountability is embedded in all WFME standards (Lindgren and Karle 2011). Globally, steps have been taken to improve medical education, and key among these steps is the implementation of social accountability to improve the orientation of graduates towards the community (Frenk et al. 2010). In addition to these efforts is the drive to encourage accreditation bodies to integrate and incorporate social accountability into their accreditation standards. Accreditation standards drive quality by providing medical schools with aspirational goals that serve as a guiding light. Evidence suggests that utilising the accreditation process has benefits such as curricular and governance changes, continuous quality improvement, school recognition, and student satisfaction (Giroto et al. 2025). In Uganda, the National Council for Higher Education has the mandate to accredit medical schools. The accreditation function is supported by the Uganda Medical and Dental Practitioners' Council. However, the Uganda National Council for Higher Education is not limited to accrediting medical schools and does not have WFME recognition status.

This policy perspective describes the need and plans for integrating social accountability into medical accreditation standards in Uganda.

### **The Current Policy Environment**

Policies and guidelines in Uganda support the implementation of social accountability in medical education. Uganda has shown a strong commitment to achieving Universal Health Coverage, defined by the World Health Organization as all individuals having access to required health services of sufficient quality without facing financial hardship (World Health Organization 2023). The National Strategic Direction for the Fourth National Development Plan (NDPIV) refers to enhancing human capital development along the entire life cycle as its second objective. To meet this objective, the strategy includes improving access, equity, and quality of health care at all levels. This bold strategy is consistent with the values and goals of social accountability in medical education.

Furthermore, the National Health Policy envisions a healthy and productive population that contributes to socioeconomic development. The National Health Policy is operationalised through the Health Sector development plan and Health Sector Strategic Plan (Nyonjo, Nakibuule, 2024). However, a shared understanding and concerted effort from stakeholders is required.

### **Proposed Policy Solution**

We propose that social accountability should be integrated into medical education accreditation in Uganda. This goal will be achieved by engaging stakeholders in the process to achieve a shared understanding and co-create a step-by-step plan to reach the objective. Curriculum integration of social accountability will be necessary to allow students to learn social

accountability. The stakeholders will be defined according to the partnership pentagram plus and include community members, policy makers, health administrators, health providers, professionals, and linked sectors.

### **Anticipated Challenges and Proposed Solutions**

We anticipate resistance to change and will overcome this through mutual respect, cultural sensitivity, demonstrating progress, and celebrating wins.

### **Conclusion**

Medical schools should be accountable for the students they train. Integrating social accountability into medical education accreditation provides goals to which medical schools can aspire in order to implement social accountability.

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