

**Advancing nutrition, human rights and governance studies as a sustainable capacity building partnership to improve food and nutrition programming: Experiences from a North-South-South Inter-Universities project in Africa and Europe**

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**Abstract**

A South-South-North inter-university project 2010-2014 has launched an innovative model combining nutrition, human rights and governance in existing master programmes at Makerere and Kyambogo Universities in Uganda, Stellenbosch University in South Africa, and the University of Oslo and the Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Sciences in Norway. The project is financed by the Norwegian Government through the NOMA Programme aimed at strengthening universities in developing countries. This pioneer model can serve as an example for other African universities to form intra-Africa partnerships and international networks needed to strengthen capacity for dealing with food security and nutrition through a human rights-based approach, and especially inspire universities aiming at strengthening tertiary education in agriculture at large.

Key words: Food and nutrition security, human rights system, intra-African partnership, NOMA programme, Tertiary education

**Résumé**

Un projet inter-universitaire Sud-Sud-Nord 2010-2014 a lancé un modèle innovant combinant la nutrition, les droits de l'homme et la gouvernance, dans des programmes de maîtrise existant dans les universités de Makerere et Kyambogo en Ouganda, l'Université de Stellenbosch en Afrique du Sud, l'Université d'Oslo, et le Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Sciences en Norvège. Le projet est financé par le gouvernement norvégien à travers le Programme NOMA qui vise à renforcer

les universités des pays en développement. Ce modèle pionnier peut servir d'exemple pour d'autres universités africaines souhaitant former des partenariats entre institutions africaines et des réseaux internationaux nécessaires au renforcement des capacités sur la sécurité alimentaire et la nutrition à travers une approche fondée sur les droits de l'homme. Il peut surtout inspirer les universités visant à renforcer l'enseignement supérieur de l'agriculture au sens large.

Mots clés: Sécurité alimentaire et nutritionnelle, systèmes des droits humains, partenariat inter-Africain, programme NOMA, éducation tertiaire

## **Background and Rationale**

Evidence from many developing countries has demonstrated that lack of democratic governance and respect for human rights, including economic, social and cultural rights, are to a large extent responsible for much of the persistent hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition, especially on the African continent. There is today limited attention to such aspects in the formation of tomorrow's leaders, educators and practitioners in agriculture and food and nutrition policy. Modern capacity building in agriculture, food science and technology, human nutrition and health need to include a minimum of knowledge about the norms, principles and practice of international, regional and national human rights systems and how they can be systemically applied in governance and programming steered towards freedom from hunger and the enjoyment of the human right to adequate food for all people. African universities have a potential to take the lead in this endeavour on the continent and beyond.

## **Literature Summary**

There is now an extensive base of academic literature, official documents especially from the UN, selected country experiences and a growing body of reports from civil society organizations that together reflect conceptual and practical developments regarding addressing the right to adequate food and related rights for improved livelihood, nutrition and health. More evidence and experience is needed especially from universities that are prepared to embark on incorporating in their syllabi human rights and governance dimensions, which will become more and more important in the present era of globalization given the heavy weight that agriculture plays and will play in Africa's development. The opportunity to draw on such a varied literature base should facilitate bringing in such dimensions in strengthened curricula. Some selected articles

and documents relevant to capacity building in the field are referred below.

### **Design of the Model**

The NOMA project was planned in collaboration between the four academic institutions over a period of one year. The special feature of the joint module for 2 cohorts of students from the respective institutions starting in 2011 and 2012, is a four-month introductory module on theory and practice linking nutrition to human rights and governance. The module was divided in three six-week study units in each of the three countries, Norway, South Africa and Uganda from April-August. Through an interactive learning model involving human rights experts, policy and governance actors and civil society organizations, this approach has enabled the participants to fully explore the role of governance and human rights as both basic determinants and facilitators of food and nutrition security constraints and solutions. The learning process has been enhanced by cross-country and cross-cultural experiences and diversified field study visits at various sites in the two African countries implied, South Africa and Uganda, including in the meeting with relevant government institutions, national parliaments, human rights commissions, relevant United Nations agencies, and visits to selected districts and towns experiencing relevant situations and activities. This module has given the students a unique basis for embarking on their master theses with an explicit human rights and governance orientation of their chosen subject matter in the field of human nutrition.

### **Lessons Learned**

This project has provided a three way learning platform that has potential for further collaboration between government institutions, academic staff and students. Students and staff were able to interact with policy actors and other relevant stakeholders on issues of nutrition, human rights and governance. These forums provided a platform to explore the issue of multi-sectoral coordination and how human rights are being or can be integrated into national programming. Having this August successfully completed the introductory specialised track for the two cohorts of this project as the first of its kind in Africa and the world, Makerere University is in the process of integrating the course into other Master degree programmes in the College of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences (CAES), while Kyambogo University is in advanced stages of implementing a Master of Science in Nutrition Policy and Human Rights. Likewise Stellenbosch University is planning to

## Participating Institutions and Units



**University of Oslo Faculty of Medicine, Department of Nutrition, Norway**



**Kyambogo University Department of Human Nutrition and Home Economics, Uganda**



**Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Sciences, Norway**



**Norwegian Centre for Human Rights, Faculty of Law, University of Oslo, Norway**



**Makerere University School of Food Technology, Nutrition and Bio-Engineering, Uganda**



**Stellenbosch University, Division of Nutrition, South Africa**

### Expected Outcome of the Initiative

pursue the experiences from the module in their future curricula in nutrition.

As Uganda and other UN Member states have ratified the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), they have obligations to respect, protect and fulfil the right to adequate to food and other rights recognized therein.

Ensuring that these commitments become more than rhetoric requires institutional capacity to institutionalise and support the operationalization of the relevant tools and processes needed to prevent and manage hunger and malnutrition in a dignified approach cognisant of human rights principles. The expected outcome of this project is that a set of candidates will be produced who are well versed in the relations between their technical subject and human rights and governance principles and the constraints and opportunities for applying them for food and nutrition related work in practice; furthermore that they will fill important jobs in academia, policy work, civil service and various kinds of management and field level activities and thereby be able to make a difference. As formal or informal educators and mentors they will represent a new generation of nutrition workers who will in turn stimulate new ones to take on a human rights based approach to their professional activities.

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