

## PROGRAMS/INSTITUTIONS/DISCIPLINE

### NUTRITION HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT AT MAKERERE UNIVERSITY, UGANDA

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Makerere University, a public institution, is the largest centre of higher learning in Uganda with a population of over 20,000 students. Until recently, Makerere University was the only university in Uganda but in the last decade, a number of universities have come up all over the country; the majority of which are privately owned. In the mid 1990s; Makerere University introduced the private sponsorship scheme, allowing students who have qualified for a university education to enrol into the University but pay for their own tuition and other educational expenses, unlike in the past where all the students were fully sponsored by the Government. This new policy has more than tripled the student numbers, which increased from a meagre 6,000 students to 22,000 students. The Government still sponsors 2,000 students per year selected in order of academic excellence and are planning to double this number to address regional imbalances.

Makerere University was once upon a time the "Harvard of Africa". Its graduates consist not only of Ugandans but also prominent people from all over Africa such as the late Mwalimu (Teacher) Julius Nyerere, the founding President of the Republic of Tanzania. The political, social and economic turmoil of the 1970s and early 1980s, however, did not spare the great institution of learning and almost brought it down. Fortunately, the institution has recovered most of its past glory and is today the most preferred university in Uganda despite the fact that there are eight other universities in the country.

For decades, there was no programme that directly produced human resources in food and nutritional sciences at Makerere University. Yet the need to create an institution dealing with food and nutrition to produce human resource to work in various Government and private sectors in Uganda was recognised by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) as early as the 1960s. The 1976-81 University Grants' Committee Report proposed a study on the feasibility of establishing a university discipline for food and nutrition but implementation was deferred because of the social and political instability in the country at the time. When the country stabilised in late 1980s, the plan to establish a unit to teach food and nutrition was

put into operation. There was a big debate at the time whether to name the newly created unit the Department of Food Science and Nutrition or the Department of Food Science and Technology. In the end, the unit was named the Department of Food Science and Technology because technology was a catchword at that time and nutrition was not seen as a high status discipline.

In 1989, the Department of Food Science and Technology was fully operational with a four-year undergraduate programme in Food Science and Technology mandated to teach food sciences, food technology and human nutrition. To date, the Department has graduated over 300 food scientists and food technologists who are absorbed mainly by the food industry but also by Government ministries, and Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs). However, due to the fact that nutrition does not appear in the title of the Food science and Technology programme, the nutrition content in this programme is not adequate and has continued to fluctuate over the years. The recently revised programme has four courses directly on nutrition distributed evenly among its four years. These are: Principles of Human Nutrition in Year I, Applied Human Nutrition in Year II, Child Nutrition and Development in Year III and Food and Nutrition Security in Year IV. The programme also has a few other nutrition related courses such as Biochemistry and Food Chemistry.

In 1998, ten years after the establishment of the Department, a Masters degree in Food Science and Technology was introduced. This programme has two courses directly dealing with nutrition: Advanced Human Nutrition and Food and Nutrition Security for Health and Development. However, students are encouraged to do their research projects not only in food science and food technology but also in Human nutrition.

Other units in the university producing human resource with some nutrition knowledge include the Medical school, in particular the programmes of Paediatrics and Nursing and the Institute of Public Health. In these units, Biochemistry, Community Health, Child Growth and Development and Nutrition are some of the courses directly and indirectly dealing with human nutrition. In addition, the Institute of Public Health is in the process of developing an undergraduate Bachelor of Science degree programme in human nutrition. The faculties of Science and Veterinary Medicine also teach Biochemistry. The

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University has a Centre for Child Health and Development, which deals mostly with research in maternal and child nutrition, and health.

The need for a more active programme on nutrition and human resource development in Uganda in general and at Makerere University in particular cannot be over-emphasised. Despite a relatively stable food security situation at national level, Uganda has rampant malnutrition especially among its vulnerable groups of pregnant and nursing mothers and young children. Recent health and nutrition reports have found the levels of Protein- Energy Malnutrition (PEM) among the children below five years of age unacceptably high with 38% stunted, 25% underweight and 5% wasted (UDHS, 1995). More than half of the children suffer from various forms of Vitamin A deficiency diseases and Iron deficiency anaemia. Anaemia contributes about 30% to maternal mortality in the country (UNPAN, 1996). A major contributor to the poor nutritional status in Uganda inspite of a relatively stable food security situation is the general lack of knowledge on the importance of nutrition in health and development resulting largely from shortage of nutrition professionals to sensitise the public. Hence nutrition was always put at the low end of the priority list of the development agenda. Of recent, however, interest in nutrition has increased as the population, especially policy makers and community leaders, have been sensitised on the important role nutrition plays in promoting child survival, learning potential and economic productivity all of

which result in good health and social and economic development. A number of nutrition improvement programmes have been started all over the country both by Government agencies and Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs), hence increasing the need for more nutrition professionals.

The Department of Food Science and Technology is rising up to the demand for increased nutrition human resource and together with other interested stakeholders, has developed a proposal to establish a Department of Home Economics and Nutrition offering a Bachelor of Science degree in Home Economics and Human Nutrition which is being discussed by various University organs hoping to be launched in 2001/2002 academic year. The Department is also in advanced stages of preparing a curriculum for a Masters degree in Applied Tropical Nutrition, which will admit graduates of most science-based disciplines. It is hoped that these efforts, if given both national and international support, will result in improved nutrition human resource for Uganda and the neighbouring countries.

#### REFERENCES

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