

Building Uganda’s Next Generation of Nutrition Leaders

Every year Uganda's universities graduate more than 60 students with a degree in nutrition and high hopes of helping their local communities tackle nutrition issues, such as undernutrition, micronutrient deficiencies, and overnutrition. Although the universities' curriculums provide graduates with a solid theoretical grounding in nutrition, it hasn't always been easy to put what is learned in the classroom into practice in the real world. Universities also frequently don't provide training on practical implementation skills such as leadership, work planning, project management, and monitoring, all of which are essential for reaching objectives on time and on budget. Now, an innovative nutrition fellowship program is strengthening graduates' abilities to put their knowledge to work and is building the capacity of the next generation of Ugandan nutrition leaders.

With funding from Feed the Future, the Food and Nutrition Technical Assistance III Project (FANTA) established the Uganda Nutrition Fellowship (UNF) program in 2013 to enhance the skills of nutrition graduates by providing them with a unique mix of practical experience, professional development, leadership training, knowledge sharing, and mentorship. The program offers fellows the opportunity to work with host organizations and address nutritional challenges by participating in a range of activities such as conducting nutrition education and counseling, and screening children for malnutrition. Retreats are also hosted for fellows to share experiences and collaboratively work on their UNF projects.



Photo courtesy Brenda Namugumya

Fellows collaborate and work together during the UNF workshop.

“Implementing the multisectoral national agenda for nutrition in Uganda calls for strengthening nutrition professionals’ capacities to plan, implement, and monitor nutrition programs,” explained Brenda Namugumya, FANTA Nutrition Specialist. “Each nutrition fellow in our program is linked to a host organization, such as the Ministry of Health, World Vision, Nyakibale Hospital, and the Community Connector Project, where they support the application of multisectoral nutrition interventions within the mandate of these organizations.”

Over the course of 12 months, eight fellows cultivated skills in nutrition education, case management, capacity building, policy development, and community mobilization. Fellows also attended retreats and a professional development workshop organized by FANTA, which gave them the opportunity to enhance their skills in communication, leadership, and team building.

Miria Twinomugisha, a UNF fellow, wants to be a leader in nutrition within Uganda and focus on improving the nutritional status of children under 24 months and women of reproductive age. “They are the two groups critical to breaking the cycle of undernutrition and poverty,” she said.

Through the UNF, she has built her experience and knowledge in conducting community outreach, performing nutrition assessments and counseling, and coordinating and supporting

“I have gained enormous experience in working with different local government levels in the implementation of the Uganda Nutrition Action Plan; poverty reduction campaigns; capacity building; and training in nutrition assessment, counseling, WASH [water, sanitation, and hygiene], livelihoods and agriculture, rural development, and handling gender-related issues.”

—Miria Twinomugisha, UNF fellow

government programs, such as Child Days Plus, while working with her host organization, Community Connector (funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development).

The nutrition fellows are graduating in August with some, including Isaac Baigereza, staying on as full-time employees at their host organizations. As of July, Isaac will be coordinating the World Vision nutrition response for refugees in Ajumani in northern Uganda. World Vision acknowledged that they “benefited profoundly” from the skills and mentoring Isaac received as part of the fellowship program.

The multifaceted UNF program is helping to scale up Uganda’s nutrition expertise by providing graduates with mentoring and practical experience. For the second year of the program, FANTA anticipates accepting up to 12 new fellows—these graduates will be tomorrow’s leaders in the fight for a healthier future for Uganda’s population.



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