

Uganda Nutrition Fellowship 2013–2014
Year One Report
Creating Leaders in Nutrition



Introduction

The Uganda Nutrition Fellowship (UNF) is an innovative capacity-strengthening programme that targets university graduates studying nutrition with the goal of creating a contingent of future leaders in nutrition. Implemented by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)-funded Food and Nutrition Technical Assistance III Project (FANTA), UNF places recent graduates with host organisations where they are provided with a unique mix of work experience, professional development, and mentorship. The programme is an effort to narrow the capacity gap in implementing the multisectoral Uganda Nutrition Action Plan and to guarantee youth engagement in addressing nutrition challenges. This report provides a summary of the first year of the UNF program (2013–2014) and the activities of each of the eight Fellows.

Background

More than 60 students graduate with a degree related to nutrition every year in Uganda, the majority of whom study at Kyambogo and Makerere Universities. While graduates of these programmes have a solid theoretical grounding in nutrition they may have little practical, real-world experience or mentorship. Therefore, in collaboration with stakeholders, in 2010 FANTA initiated a nutrition internship programme to provide a unique combination of training and experience to recent graduates. The internship programme strengthened the graduates' professional capacity in nutrition service delivery, health promotion, and nutrition in the context of public health and disease prevention programmes.

Eight nutrition graduates were placed at agencies including the Ministry of Health; Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industries and Fisheries; National Planning Authority; and national nutrition professional bodies (Uganda Action for Nutrition and Uganda Dietetics Association) for 12 months. The programme was well-received, but it lacked the mentorship, leadership, and teamwork experience needed to create the next generation of leaders; interns filled a human resource gap but did not receive the type of professional experience necessary to advance their development as nutrition practitioners.

Drawing on recommendations from programme pioneers, consultation with stakeholders, and collaboration with partners, FANTA transformed the internship programme into the Uganda Nutrition Fellowship. A UNF advisory committee was formed to support the UNF programme by providing direction and vision for the programme. The advisory committee helped to inform the design of the UNF programme and to establish selection criteria for Fellows and host organisations. The committee was composed of representatives from academia, government, professional societies for nutrition, donor agencies, and host organisations.

Programme Objectives

The objectives of the UNF are to: (1) develop skilled nutrition practitioners by providing a unique mix of practical experience, professional development activities, leadership training, experience sharing, technical training, and mentorship; and (2) provide host organisations with highly motivated and well-qualified young professionals who will support their nutrition work.

Selection Process

The selection of host organisations and Fellows was competitive. Advertisements were placed in the local print media and on the Uganda Action for Nutrition Society website in February and March of 2013. As part of their application, host organisations were required to provide an outline of the specific activities the Fellow would perform, as well as the name of a supervisor and mentor at the

host organisation who would work closely with the Fellow. Twenty applications were received from potential host organisations, including government entities, development partners, community-based organisations, and organisations in the private sector. Approximately 65 applications were received from graduates in nutrition, food science, public health, and food technology.

With support from members of the UNF advisory committee, the FANTA team reviewed applications from potential host organisations and Fellows. The guidelines for selection of Fellows were: (1) the individual must have been a recent nutrition graduate (received an undergraduate or graduate degree after 2010); (2) the assignment could not extend the placement of someone currently working as an intern or Fellow at an organisation; and (3) applicants with less than 1 year of relevant work or internship experience would receive preference. Interviews were conducted for both host organisations and Fellows to determine their commitment to participate and complete the UNF programme. The following organisations were selected:

- USAID’s Community Connector project
- USAID’s Strengthening Partnership, Results, and Innovations in Nutrition Globally (SPRING) project
- World Vision/Uganda
- Mwanamugimu Nutrition Unit – Mulago National Referral Hospital
- International Baby Food Action Network (IBFAN-Uganda)
- Initiative to End Childhood Malnutrition – Rukungiri Mission Hospital
- AIDS Control Programme – Ministry of Health
- Nutrition Unit – Ministry of Health

The host organisations signed a letter of commitment highlighting expectations from host organisations, FANTA, and the Fellows and confirming that support would be available for the Fellows. Fellows received a monthly stipend of 894,770 Ugandan Shillings based on the salary of an entry-level nutritionist in the Ministry of Health.

Administrative Operations

Orientation of the 2013–2014 Fellows and host organisations took place in June 2013 in Kampala, and was attended by the selected Fellows and host organisation mentors/supervisors. The purpose of the orientation was to provide an opportunity for Fellows to meet their mentors and supervisors, understand UNF objectives, set goals, develop work plans, sign agreements, and learn about planned activities for the year. To streamline UNF activities and reporting, FANTA provided work plan templates, timesheets, and monthly reporting templates. Throughout the year, Fellows submitted timesheets and monthly reports highlighting the activities they participated in. Table 1 provides a timeline of UNF activities throughout the year.

Table 1. Uganda Nutrition Fellowship 2013–14 Activities

Date	Activity
February 2013	Applications for host organisations and Fellows are posted
March 2013	Deadline for applications from host organisations and Fellows
March 2013	Applications reviewed
March 2013	Selection of host organisations and Fellows presented to the advisory committee
March 2013	Selected candidates interviewed

April 2013	Selection finalized and approved by advisory committee
April 2013	Fellows and host organisations notified
June 2013	Orientation for Fellows and mentors (1.5 days)
July 2013	Advisory committee meeting
August 2013	First retreat
November 2013	Professional development workshop
October 2013	Advisory committee meeting
March 2014	Second retreat
July 2014	Third retreat
August 2014	Graduation ceremony (Fellowship project posters are presented)

Professional Development

To enhance Fellows' skills and competencies, UNF organized retreats and a professional development workshop, which were attended by the Fellows and select sessions were attended by mentors. In addition, Fellows developed a UNF project in response to a challenging issue that they identified at their organisation.

Retreats. Three 2-day retreats were held over the course of the year. The retreats provided an opportunity to share Fellowship experiences; build proficiency in writing, communication, management, and leadership; discuss professional development workshop themes; and work on UNF projects.



Roundtable discussions were held with Fellows and mentors at retreats.

Professional development workshop. A 3-day professional development workshop was conducted in November 2014. The workshop strengthened communication, leadership, and management skills through interactive learning sessions, experience sharing, and team-building

activities. Learning sessions focused on communication, management, leadership, and team dynamics in various contexts. The workshop also provided an opportunity for Fellows and mentors to check in on goals, review work plans, and begin work on their UNF projects.

UNF project. Each Fellow chose a topic for his or her UNF project to either address a challenge or highlight a key issue identified at the host organisation. Working on these projects gave Fellows an opportunity to refine skills in critical thinking, writing, and communication. The projects covered a range of topics, including policy implementation, value chains, health communication, and community-based interventions. UNF projects were reviewed and evaluated by members of FANTA staff, and the highest ranking project received a recognition award at the graduation ceremony.

Mentorship and teamwork. Building a network of nutrition leaders requires both mentorship and teamwork. Fellows benefited from the valuable professional advice and perspective provided by their mentors at the host organisations. The mentors had monthly check-ins with the Fellows to discuss the activities they were involved in, review the work plan, and discuss goals. The mentors advised Fellows about their professional careers and navigating day-to-day operations at the host organisation. They also provided assistance on individual UNF projects by helping Fellows develop project concepts and reviewing and advising on the projects throughout the process. Teamwork was incorporated throughout the UNF professional development workshops and retreats through experiential learning, group activities, working as a team to share UNF experiences, developing UNF projects, and working together to develop part of the programme for UNF graduation.



Fellows working on their UNF projects at the March retreat.

The UNF Experience

Fellows were exposed to a diverse range of nutrition topics, including policy development and coordination, capacity building, clinical management of acute malnutrition, outpatient care, and implementation of preventive services at the community level. The following describes the work that was undertaken by the Fellows in these areas.

Policy Development and Coordination

Two Fellows, Rebecca Namara and Catherine Ndagire, were placed with the Ministry of Health Nutrition Unit and the AIDS Control Programme, respectively, where they supported various aspects of policy development, implementation, and coordination. The Fellows contributed to the development of the work plan with their host organisations and conducted support supervision at health facilities to ensure that nutrition service provision aligned with protocols. The Fellows were also part of the working group that provided technical oversight for the development of the Integrated Micronutrient Guideline for Uganda.

During the Fellowship, the Ministry of Health launched the Partnership for HIV-Free Survival (PHFS), a global initiative designed to improve care and nutrition support for HIV-positive mothers and their newborns with the goal of preventing mother-to-child transmission of HIV and increasing HIV-free survival of children. Rebecca and Catherine were instrumental in mobilizing and coordinating key partners, keeping records of dialogues and meetings, planning the launch of the initiative in the country, gathering information from stakeholders, coordinating with district-level technical and political officers, and developing keynote addresses and speeches. The Fellows also participated in processes related to the development of guidelines for non-communicable diseases, child health days, infant and young child feeding, and health management information systems.

Rebecca and Catherine supported coordination of nutrition at national and district levels through planning and participating in the orientation of Nutrition Coordination Committees and other implementing partners on their roles and responsibilities as stipulated in the Uganda Nutrition Action Plan. The Fellows worked with the committees to develop nutrition plans and budgets and had regular dialogue with technical officers to advocate for prioritization of nutrition in meetings and plans. Additionally, they contributed to planning and mobilization for a number of advocacy and dissemination events hosted by the Ministry of Health, including World Breastfeeding Week, the PHFS launch, launches for the elimination of mother-to-child transmission of HIV, and the Bushenyi Nutrition Marathon.

In Their Words...

Rebecca Namara: I trust myself to be able to plan, budget, and coordinate activities successfully with minimal guidance. The ability to conceptualize ideas and put them in writing has also been a great achievement during this fellowship.

Catherine Ndagire: I had never written a speech or talking points for anyone. However, I was told to write the Minister's speech for the PHFS launch. It was difficult but I was so proud when I heard the Minister read it word by word.

District Nutrition Coordination Committees

Miria Twinomugisha was placed with USAID's Community Connector project and had the opportunity to assist in orienting key committees responsible for nutrition planning at the district and sub-county levels in Kabale, Kanungu, and Ibanda districts. These orientations introduced the committees to their roles in multisectoral nutrition programming, budgeting, and implementation. At these orientations, Miria helped to facilitate sub-county discussions on food security and nutrition issues for children and women of reproductive age.

In Her Words...

Miria Twinomugisha: I have gained enormous experience working with local government levels in the implementation of the Uganda Nutrition Action Plan; poverty reduction campaigns; capacity building and training in nutrition assessment and counselling; and programs related to WASH [water, sanitation, and hygiene], livelihoods and agriculture, and rural development, as well as handling gender-related issues.

Treatment of Malnutrition

Gloria Nabaasa was placed with the Mwanamugimu Nutrition Ward at Mulago National Referral Hospital, and Esther Nambuya with Nyakibale Hospital in Rukungiri District. Both Gloria and Esther were involved in inpatient management of severe acute malnutrition. The roles performed within the wards covered nutrition education for caregivers, nutrition screening and categorization of patients, review of patient's bed charts to monitor feeding, monthly reports on caseload and nutrition management (including reporting on therapeutic feeding for the Ministry of Health), and nutrition education for caregivers before discharge.

Both Fellows participated in training of trainers on nutrition assessment, counselling, and support (NACS) and management of outpatient care centres. They also took part in the training and follow-up of health service providers and diploma nutrition students under the supervision of mentors. These experiences allowed them to identify knowledge gaps among service providers and propose solutions to narrow these gaps.

The Ministry of Health conducts regular quality assurance visits to lower-level health facilities. The Fellows took part in planning and execution of support supervision visits to ensure the quality of nutrition services. This included review of support supervision tools, travel to health facilities, and discussions with staff at the health units. Some of the successes reported from this exercise include creating a patient flow system within Health Centres III and IV and designing sessions for continuous medical education.

The Fellows' skills in communication, negotiation, and mobilization were enhanced through interaction with caregivers, village health teams, media, and communities during nutrition education sessions, counselling, follow-up of clients, and interviews. For example, the Fellows discussed practical measures to provide messaging on therapeutic feeding, micronutrient supplementation, breastfeeding, and complementary feeding to improve nutritional rehabilitation and reduce mortality rate. Both Gloria and Esther's UNF projects focused on simplifying coordination and harmonization of nutrition messaging and follow-up on information for patients admitted in rehabilitation clinics.

In Their Words...

Gloria Nabaasa: I am very proud of my three articles that were published in the two national newspapers. I used this opportunity to enlighten people about the role of nutrition in national development and also about infant and young child feeding practices.

Esther Nambuya: I participated in the evaluation of the Village Health Teams trained in malnutrition protocol during the Child Health Days. This was followed by refreshing their knowledge in identifying and diagnosing malnutrition.

Social and Behaviour Change Communication

Behaviour change communication is critical to influencing habits and motivating the adoption of essential nutrition actions. Sheilla Businge and Joyce Nabwanika (placed at IBFAN and SPRING, respectively) contributed to changes in the attitudes and behaviours of beneficiaries using various approaches, such as food demonstrations (including preparation of highly nutritious meals for children being treated for malnutrition) and nutrition education on maternal nutrition, exclusive breastfeeding, complementary feeding, sanitation, and hygiene. They participated in community mobilization activities using approaches such as positive deviance/hearth, village health teams, and community videos depicting positive role models for infant feeding. For malnourished children who had no complications, the Fellows conducted nutrition counselling sessions. They also facilitated community dialogue sessions for caregivers and worked to identify community needs related to nutrition.

In Their Words...

Sheilla Businge: I managed children identified as being malnourished without complications using locally available mixed foods—Kitoobero—for 26 days in their respective sub-counties.

Joyce Nabwanika: I participated in training of research assistants and entered data for an assessment conducted in Amuru District.

Value Chains

Isaac Baigereza, who was placed with World Vision, worked with small and medium food processors to manufacture composite flours with enhanced nutrition quality to increase protein intake among children and caregivers. The process included developing guides and conducting consultations among households and small-medium enterprises (SME) to identify the major staples milled as well as acceptable and affordable combinations of staples to meet dietary needs for beneficiaries. SMEs are located within markets where households usually purchase food. Isaac identified that using SMEs as a channel to produce affordable nutritious food would yield positive results for a community that largely utilises flour processed from SMEs. In return, production of nutritious food would increase the market for SME products, thereby increasing profitability. Isaac also participated in training SMEs to make nutrient-enhanced flour and provided nutrition education to communities to create demand for the flour.

In His Words...

Isaac Baigereza: The caregivers who purchased the enriched flours for their children reported improved weight gain among the children utilising the composite flours.

Capacity Building

The Fellows participated in several capacity-building activities. Fellows placed with the Ministry of Health participated in working group meetings that provided oversight and guidance in the development of a NACS training package targeting health facility service providers. At the district level, Fellows supported host organisations in adapting capacity-building tools to the local context and in developing tools specific to host organisation mandates. The technical capacity of Fellows was built via training on NACS and supervised by the Ministry of Health through progressive district-level trainings to become certified national trainers. Other trainings that Fellows were involved with,

either individually or in small groups, included topics such as quality improvement in PHFS, integrated management of acute malnutrition, positive deviance/hearth, the baby-friendly hospital initiative, citizen voice and action, and nutrition in emergencies.

Fellows' skills in qualitative and quantitative research methods were strengthened through their participation in research activities undertaken by the host organisations. Research activities were mainly formative, covering a range of topics including facility readiness to administer ready-to-use therapeutic food, trachoma prevalence in severe acute malnutrition, community needs assessment, and baseline surveys.

Graduation

In August 2014, the eight Fellows celebrated successful completion of the 12-month Fellowship programme. Before the ceremony, the Fellows displayed posters of their UNF projects and explained their project to attendees, what they learned, and the recommendations they provided to the host organisations. During the ceremony, the Fellows shared some of their experiences from the 12-month UNF programme. The keynote address was given by Professor John Muyonga from Makerere University, who encouraged the Fellows to apply the lessons learned during the programme as they move forward with their careers. Roxanne Rogers, USAID Uganda Health Office Director, also spoke to congratulate the Fellows on completing the UNF programme. After a challenging, interesting, and exciting 12 months, the graduation ceremony was deemed an excellent way to celebrate the successful year.

Where Are They Now?

FHI 360/FANTA is extremely proud that, as of January 2015, all of the Fellows were employed or had the opportunity to continue their studies.

Name of Fellow	Employment as of January 2015
Miria Twinomugisha	Communication for Development Foundation Uganda, Southwest Region
Sheilla Businge	SPRING Uganda, Southwest Region
Isaac Baigereza	World Vision/Uganda, Northern Region
Gloria Nabaasa	Research Assistant, Mwanamugimu Nutrition Unit – Mulago National Referral Hospital
Joyce Nabwanika	IBFAN
Esther Nambuya	Masters Student, Makerere School of Public Health (Epidemiology) with a full scholarship
Catherine Ndagire	Research Assistant, Makerere University School of Food Science, Nutrition and Bioengineering
Rebecca Namara	Programme Associate for FHI 360/FANTA Project

What's Next for the UNF Programme?

Based on demand and interest in the programme, FANTA increased the number of Fellows from 8 to 12. In April 2015, 12 Fellows were placed with host organisations. The UNF programme was extended from 1 year to 18 months in order to allow for a longer placement period based on feedback provided from the previous year. FANTA plans to provide more professional development opportunities, additional mentorship, and close collaboration with selected UNF advisers to continue to develop the UNF programme. FANTA also plans to engage UNF graduates to create an alumni network that will serve as a networking and idea-sharing platform to keep former Fellows engaged in the programme.

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