

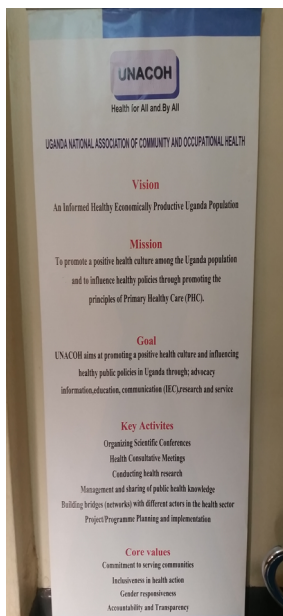
“Think globally and act locally”

Text & Photos:
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Internship experience in Uganda on the project “Pesticides, Health and Environment” The project was developed by Diálogos in collaboration with Uganda National Association of Community and Occupational health (UNACOH). It is currently in its second phase and is covering two districts of Uganda. The largest one which is Wakiso district and the smaller more rural district of Pallisa.

UNACOH:

“Health for all and by all”



The global North together with the global South

To get a chance to come to Africa has always been one of my dreams and after being in contact with Diálogos, the dream came through. I left late in the evening on a cold February night from Copenhagen for my first journey to the African continent to complete my first out of two internships as a part of my bachelor degree in Global Nutrition and Health. After traveling for about 15 hours I arrived in Kampala at 13.30 on the 4th February 2016. The project coordinator of the PHE project, Moses and the driver Otim picked me up from the airport and drove me to the residency.

The sun was warm and the weather was amazing. A lot of questions ran through my mind and I was very curious to know how Ugandan people were perceiving the PHE project and what Moses thought about the collaboration between Diálogos and UNACOH. He told me about some of the strengths and limitations of the project and briefly about what I should expect for my two months visit and participation on the PHE project. He immediately highlights the importance of the project and states that *“The vast majority of the Ugandan population are active in the agricultural sector and everyone in Uganda consumes agricultural produce, therefore the project is relevant for the whole population”*

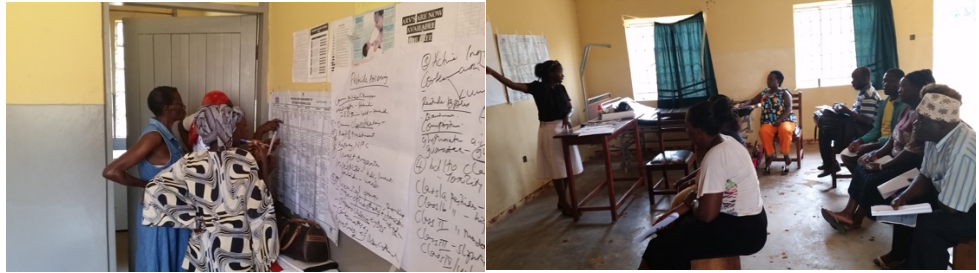
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During my two months I joined the field workers in educating health care workers on recognizing, managing and treating patients with pesticide poisoning with the project health officer Victoria. She explains about the difficulties and opportunities in implementing this knowledge to the health workers. Although the motivation of the participants for the trainings are not always the best since they have a very busy schedule, she is very effective in getting their attention and making clear how important the information is that she is trying to teach them.



For every training she makes the participants do an exercise in the material she teaches, which really strengthens the understanding of the health care workers. The material is about classifying the pesticides into chemical groups and active ingredients and then use a chart which has been created by the PHE project to manage and treat according to the symptoms.

“The PHE project is really like a drop in the water, the hope is that it will expand in that sense”



The cases with pesticide poisoning are rare but because many of the patients that do come in are often unconscious or not able to speak about what has caused their injury, the need to have knowledge about the symptoms of a pesticide poisoning is vital for the health workers to know how to treat the patients.

A farmer shows an example of what the farmers in Uganda are fighting, in this case a tomato plant has been destroyed by bugs

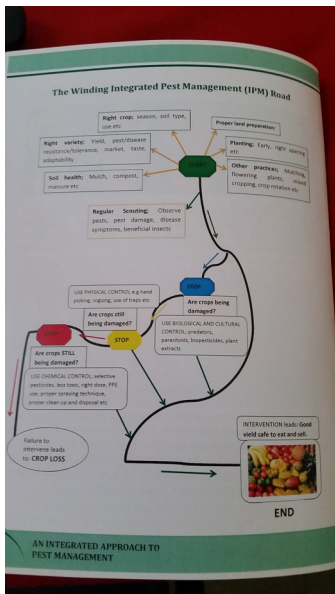
After visiting health care centers across the Wakiso district I got to be part of the monitoring of the farmers in Wakiso, to see what of the things that they have put in practice after receiving training from the project. As the project coordinator several times pointed out in my time in Uganda *“The PHE project is really like a drop in the water, the hope is that it will expand in that sense and that the beneficiaries will share their knowledge in their local community and thereby in the long run it will reach the whole Ugandan population”*

It became very clear to me in the monitoring that the project is doing well because every single farmer we visit had become aware of the importance of protecting themselves when spraying and most of them did have things in place such as overalls, goggles, boots and gloves. Also, many of them stored the chemicals away from where they spend most of their time and some had created a separate room with a lock for storage. The farmer on the picture below had all the material provided by UNACOH on the wall together with the chemicals in a separate locked room away from his house. He had also begun to use alternative methods in fighting the pest in his crops and a barrel for disposal of the empty containers.



Considering that many of the farmers that have been a part of the project did not have any knowledge about personal protective equipment nor the importance of not keeping the chemicals inside their house and the fact that they now have gone to great measures in correcting that with the above mentioned practices, it is fair to say that the project is on the right track.

Road map of the integrated pest management strategy



The most important aspect of the PHE project is teaching about alternative methods in treating the crops and reduce as much as possible the use of pesticides. The method that is promoted is called integrated pest management (IPM). The method was detailed and intensively taught in Pallisa where farmers and pesticide retailers were trained in IPM and also encouraged to create cooperation's to strengthen their ability to be part of future projects and to give them a stronger voice in their local community.

In Pallisa, the agricultural sector of the project has come a long way in learning the farmers on safely handling pesticides and has now moved on to collaborate with other Ngo's with similar agenda's which has benefited the quality of the trainings a lot. What was most impressive was the introduction of the fruit fly trap and the push – pull technique. Both of them being methods in fighting pest without the use of spraying with chemicals.

The first a tool to fight the oriental fruit fly which has spread over the African continent since 2004 and is now a huge problem for farmers with citrus fruits such as mango, oranges, lemon and many more. The way it works is that a small cloth is dipped in some chemicals and then put in a plastic bottle and hung up in the garden with the fruit trees. The chemical releases a smell that attracts the male fly and when the fly enters the bottle it immediately dies. Consequently, it makes it harder for the female fruit fly to reproduce which reduces their ability to lay eggs on the fruits, thereby reducing the potential damage it can cause to the farmers.



The first picture shows the trap example that was used in the training and the second picture is of Aggrey the district project officers, facilitating a training in Pallisa.

A farmer showing his personal protective equipment



Another element that is important for the sustainability of the project is the creation of a National poisoning information center, created in collaboration with the Directorate of Government Analytical Laboratories (DGAL) in Kampala. During my stay the final stages with implementing this call free centre was done with UNACOH providing the facility with digital equipment such as computers, telephones, printers etc. The idea is that health workers as well as the general population will be able to use this call free centre and get advice on how to treat poisoning cases. This will be the first of its kind in Uganda and will be good for the continuing mainstream of managing both pesticide poisoning as well as other poisoning cases.

The project coordinator Massy Moses Kasule handed over the equipment to the executive director of DGAL.



To see this small group of people working intensively and with such a passion for their work in improving the situation in Uganda was really inspiring. Everywhere I was I felt welcomed and appreciated for my presence and the staff was more than willing to provide me with the information I requested, such as interviews, filling out questionnaires and doing observations. Doing my internship and gaining experience and knowledge in the field of sustainable agriculture and how two small Ngo's from Denmark and Uganda work together was a great learning experience, both academically and personally. The PHE project is a major step in the right direction and the staff of UNACOH is doing a great job implementing it. Considering that the project is set to end in September 2017, I hope to see that a third phase will prolong it so it can continue further into the future.