

# **Evaluation of NTW supported research projects**

**Results from a questionnaire based evaluation  
completed by former grantees**

**2007**

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## **Background**

Since its foundation in 1984, Nutrition Third World (NTW) has supported applied scientific research by emerging researchers from the South. In 2007, researchers that benefited from NTW grants were contacted to get feedback on NTW's support and to review the actual impact their research had. A questionnaire-based survey was carried out to see how the research results have been applied and what the benefits there were for the target population.

In January 2007, researchers from 19 NTW research projects funded in 2002-2005 were contacted and invited to complete the questionnaire forms. The letters, list of researchers and questionnaire are included in Annexes. Two letters were sent to remind the researchers in order to improve feedback.

The scope of the evaluation questions - including with regard to project impact - was deliberately kept large. Since this is a first evaluation attempt, open ended questions were used in order to maximise the scope of feedback and explore lessons learned.

## **Findings**

9 (47%) completed questionnaire forms were returned: 1 from Uganda. (F. Byekwaso), 2 from Kenya (J. Waweru and R. Oniango), 2 from Bolivia (A. Perez-Cueto and E. Sejas), 1 from Tanzania (P. Mamiro), 1 from Zambia (F. Sinkala), 1 from Cameroun (R. Ngouffo) and one from an international non-governmental organisation ICCIDD (F. Delange). As far as can be assessed from the answers, most of the former NTW beneficiaries now take on key positions in universities, local government or scientific community.

## **Benefits**

Benefits or direct impact from the NTW supported research was commonly reported at 3 main levels: international, national and at beneficiary level.

NTW has financed 2 research projects that have impacted on various countries in the African continent: the support to the African Journal of Food Agriculture, Nutrition and Development (FJAND), based in Kenya and the Thyromobil operational in West Africa. At international level and for the scientific community at large, the outcomes of the research were valorised through

participation in international conferences. All but the respondent from Zambia mentioned this specifically. In most cases, the results were presented in high profile conferences such as the 18<sup>th</sup> International Conference of Nutrition in Durban South Africa. This is the key conference for nutrition researchers worldwide and was a particular opportunity for researchers in the south. This time it was organised for the first time in Africa and special emphasis was given for the continent and development issues. Another example is the participation of the researcher from Cameroun in the 2007 international colloquium on health and environment in Alexandria. Others have presented their findings in meeting at international fora such as meetings at the United Nations International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) in Rome, World Health Organisation, UNICEF or at research group gatherings such as the International Nutritional Anaemia group in Peru. Peer reviewed articles were published by all of the respondents, often in leading and highly cited international journals such as the British Journal of Nutrition (Bolivia project) or the Food and Nutrition Bulletin of the United Nations University or Thyroid International (Thyromobil)

At national level, project benefits have been valorised in various different ways. Most of the researchers (Bolivia, Kenya) have used their findings for advocacy at NGO's and at government level. At national level, the findings have been incorporated in the national policy in Uganda and Bolivia. In Bolivia for example, the methodology developed in the research was adopted and published by the Bolivian National Institute of Statistics. The operational research from Thyromobil directly enhanced the general understanding of the magnitude of the prevalence of iodine deficiencies in East-Africa. The results in Cameroun provided direct evidence for policy makers to address health aspects of street food consumption.

Government offices have consequently been a first line beneficiary of the research outcomes. The results of the screening were used to create awareness and call for action in the government of the countries in the study but some research project also engaged with the private sector. In Tanzania, contacts were made with private enterprises to produce complementary foods or foods for diabetics or for those living with HIV/AIDS. Similarly, in Zambia, the research has lead to advocacy and lobbying for industries involved in manufacturing of food for children under five to invest into the product which was used in the study. In Bolivia, public awareness on the research findings was also raised during a presenting in a nationally broadcasted TV program.

Direct benefits for the population were reported in terms of improved design of the interventions. Direct benefit in the population was not quantified by the researchers apart from the Thyromobil project. For instance, the methodology developed in the Ugandan research project paved the way for better design and implementation of food and nutrition interventions in Uganda and Northern Somaliland. This may have impacted directly on the nutrition status of the population. The

research projects where complementary foods or education material were developed claimed direct impact through improved nutrition or practices. The improved screening methods as developed in the Thyromobil project have led to timely identification and treatment of iodine deficiencies in various countries in East Africa. More than 5000 6 to 12 year old school children were screened by the researchers. In Kenya, improved strategies and nutrition counselling procedures for women improved treatment of patients. A number of families have taken up the research recommendations and feed the children improved foods in Tanzania. In Zambia, acceptable and cost-effective strategies have a positive impact in the reduction of malnutrition and improvement in child survival. The project in Cameroun sensitised the consumers of street foods and children through messages in school and collaboration with schools.

### **Research capacity enforcement**

One of the central aims of supporting research project is to strengthen the local research capacity. In Uganda, specific training and supervision of Masters-level research is conducted by the former grantee. Specific areas of improvement included: student skills to design research protocols, develop research instruments, data analysis and write-up of scientific reports. Specific education materials and manuals were developed and distributed for public use.

Various researchers at the university and other institutions have adopted and replicated the study methodology. In Tanzania, the former NTW grantee has now become a full fledged staff member a nutrition unit in the Sokoine University in Tanzania and consequently trains and supervises undergraduate and post graduate students. Collaborative efforts were started with UNICED and COUNSENUTH<sup>1</sup> and new research is currently being conducted “Developing nutrition interventions for improved health and productivity in Morogoro and Iringa Regions in Tanzania”. For instance, in Zambia, integration of good practices into the curriculum for training of both professional health workers (i.e. MCH nurses and community health workers) involved in programmatic implementation of nutritional interventions definitely improved the capacity of health workers at the MCH department in community mobilisation and education on child survival and nutrition. In Bolivia: NTW research gave the opportunity to develop inter-institutional work considering the community as beneficiary of health programs. The local researchers reported to benefit a lot from experience sharing with external partners. In Kenya but at the same time in Africa at large, institutional and national research capacity was improved through the support to the AFJAND.

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<sup>1</sup> Centre for Counselling, Nutrition and Health Care (COUNSENUTH), a Tanzanian nongovernmental organization (NGO)

Also, research groups in the North have benefited from the work done in the South. Main benefiting organisations mentioned were Ghent University, Institute of Tropical Medicine and various researchers working in United Nations agencies.

### **New research generated**

Most of the research yielded new research questions and the researchers have pursued to get funding for this. In Bolivia, the study on use of household budget data and the metabolic syndrome lead to a new PhD and national study, participation in a new EU project and collaborative efforts to compare datasets from other South and Central American countries. The other grantee from Bolivia also opened new research lines – to explore the effect of micronutrient on tuberculosis and Leishmaniasis- after completing research on anaemia in school going youth. In Tanzania, the research has also generated a new PhD on mycotoxins and complementary foods. Local students are involved in small research project to continue on points where the NTW supported research has ended. The results of the research funded in Zambia provided also data for a large randomised control trial of different complementary feeds to improve health and development of children. The Kenyan respondent is currently still seeking to secure funding for new research projects.

### **Obstacles to disseminate findings**

The main obstacles to disseminate research findings listed by the respondents were: 1/ government and institutional protocols which are not inline with the research findings, 2/ limited time or opportunities to distribute findings due to the combination of a busy job and the time for review by international journals, 3/ the fees that have to be paid for publishing an article, 4/ organising a dissemination meeting with strong attendance by policy makers and NGO's involved in nutrition programs is difficult and 5/ the fact that little nutrition research is carried out nationally.

### **Open remarks**

In general, open comments or remarks on NTW's support have been very positive. All agree that supporting applied research in Africa is truly relevant and beneficial. The insistence by NTW to disseminate results was recognised and greatly valued by the grantee from Kenya. The researcher from Tanzania states

*“ By financing research that aims to solve third world nutrition problems, NTW has done a wonderful job. Please continue with the efforts when resources allow.”*

NTW active and flexible support is appreciated. The researcher from Zambia states that applied nutrition research is a difficult area to get funding for from other donors since it is not neither basic science, nor large programmatic research. Single researches in developing countries have often difficulties accessing funds. In various cases, the NTW support has been used complementary to other funds e.g. in AFJAND, Thyromobil under the coordination of African researchers. As stated by the researchers

*“The support provided by NTW has completed the means available, more specifically equipping a vehicle and the prices of taking it to any point in Africa. This work has been a nice example of complementarity of using resources.”*

## **Recommendations**

Following recommendations were listed by the survey respondents:

- Create awareness on the presence of the website (Kenya);
- Decentralise the organisation of NTW with regional boards (Kenya);
- Funding research project through local institutions may slow down their implementation. Revise policy so that researchers can apply independently for grants (like IFS) provided they can warrant scientific quality with a local institution (Bolivia);
- I think NTW has to be more aggressive to advertise itself. Most people know VLIR, BTC but not NTW? Why? (Tanzania);
- Promote collaboration between current and former NTW grantees, specifically if they are working in the same country (Cameroun);
- Stimulate the researchers to make NTW more visible in the field through specific activities (Cameroun);
- Identify other donors where additional funding can be applied for so researchers can increase the total budget (Cameroun).

## **Conclusions**

The 2007 evaluation generated a rich and very positive feedback. Despite repeated incentives by the NTW administration, only 9 of the 19 project participated in the review which makes a complete evaluation of the support by NTW difficult. All respondents of this survey however, have

provided very positive comments towards the support and scope of activities of NTW, which indicates the value of NTW's mission. No negative comments were provided.

The present evaluation was created to get a general view of the applications of the financed projects. It was not focussed on one particular point. As a result the answers are not specific towards providing information on the number of beneficiaries as would be the case if one had asked who precisely benefited and how many people of the target group benefited.

The evaluation does show that the applications have been very diverse, context specific and that many have disseminated the results in various ways and through teaching. Teaching and using the evidence of an intervention has a strong effect on what alumni will do later, so this is already a strong means to influence decision making and project implementation.

Next to teaching, the research projects have in many instances allowed the researchers to get more responsible position within their own institutions or in service delivery organisations with large areas of influence. How important that is for dissemination of the research results is difficult to measure but the fact that the researchers have gained credibility and experience as judging from the success of the project implementation, lets us assume that the investment of NTW has a wider application.

A number of respondents have been able to secure other funds. They also mention a direct relation with this and the fact that they have received a grant from NTW. Most researchers are isolated and have difficulties to access competitive funds. NTW allowed them to do studies that benefit the local population in a field that is relevant for developing countries and by doing so to gain experience, the necessary precondition to find additional funds. Remarkably, some mentioned specifically that they increased their networking with regard to applied nutrition research

One also finds that many researchers want to divulge their research results but they find it difficult to interest policy makers. This does not come entirely as a surprise given that many donors now have opened specific research areas to “get research into practise” as they call it.

Specific remarks can be found in the narratives that underline the importance of the scope of NTW's grant policy. Many remarks are made to underline the importance to support the local needs of the population which are not necessarily the target priorities of institutional research donors. Also the fact that NTW focuses on applied research, or aiming to improve the application of already known tools, is definitely highly appreciated and responding to a felt need.



## Annexes

### Annex 1. List of researchers contacted for evaluation of their project.

Projects	Researchers
<b><i>Phasing out in 1999</i></b>	
- Actors and evaluation of development projects	Pierre Lefèvre
<b><i>Phasing out for 2000 till à 2002</i></b>	
- Hypovitamin A (Brasil)	Alcides Diniz
- Nutrition Planning (Uganda)	Francis Byekwaso
- Iodine survey (Togo)	A.L. Bahun-Wilson
- Thyromobile Phase I (West-Africa)	T. Ntambwe Kibambe, François Delange
- Nutrition & HIV/AIDS (Kenya)	Elisabeth Kuria
- Thyromobile Phase II (Niger, Ghana)	T. Ntambwe Kibambe
<b><i>Phasing out in 2003</i></b>	
- Promotion of Growth (Congo, Bolivia, Peru)	Patrick Kolsteren, Iris Pecho, Félicité Tchibindat
- Anaemia in school goings (Bolivia)	Edgar Sejas
- Household budgets (Bolivia)	A. Pérez Cueto
<b><i>Phasing out in 2004</i></b>	
- Anaemia and HIV/AIDS (Kenya)	Joseph Waweru
- Bioavailability of iron and zinc (Kenya)	Anselimo Makokha
<b><i>Phasing out in 2005</i></b>	
- Physical activity and adolescents (Bolivia)	A. Pérez Cueto
- Natural sources of vitamin A (Kenya)	Ruth Oniang'o
- Complementary food (Zambia)	Sinkala, Filteau
- Complementary food (Tanzania)	John Van Camp, Peter Mamiro, Patrick Kolsteren
- Iron salts (Bangladesh)	Sarker Shafiqul
- Prevention RCIU (Burkina Faso)	Dominique Roberfroid
- Street foods (Cameroun)	Robert Ngouffo

## Annex 2. Evaluation questionnaire

### *Nutrition Third World: Collaboration request to NTW's sponsored researchers*

#### Example of NTW's fields of interest

(Attention: this is not a questionnaire or an evaluation of your work. This is simply a checklist where you will freely choose the points that you feel deserve being reported)

- **Application/Implementation efforts** (What have you done for your results to be applied/exploited:
  - Advocacy (Government Authorities, NGO's, etc.)
  - Direct action/interventions at population level
  - Dissemination of your findings through scientific publications, specialised conferences and consultations
  - Production of teaching/educational materials and/or manuals
  - Knowledge sharing (trainings, courses, etc.)
- **Effective use of your research's results**
  - By government services (national or local)
  - By international organisations or the bilateral cooperation
  - By NGO's
  - Others (please specify) .....
- Please list the **major obstacles** found (once or repetitively) to the effective use and dissemination of your research results
- **Benefit to the population** in terms of the improvement of the nutritional situation or its determinants
- **Research capacity reinforcement**
  - In your institution
  - In your country
  - Please specify how this reinforcement happened
- **New research activities derived from your previous research**
- **Other ways of valorisation of your research**
- **General remarks:** If you have any general remarks, comments, either positive or negative about NTW's functioning, or counsels that you consider may improve our way of work, please do not hesitate to write them down. We will appreciate your valuable input.

**Thank you very much!**

### **Annex 3. Letter to the researchers**

## ***Nutrition Third World***

***A Not-for-Profit Society***

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Brussels, January 16, 2007

Dear .....,

Nutrition Third World has decided to launch a new fund raising campaign in 2007 in order to assure the durability of our Association's goal : to finance and support researchers in applied nutrition.

As you may know, our Association functions with private gifts or donations. These donations are given with the global objective to improve the nutritional status of vulnerable populations. Both, our Board of Directors and our donors wish to document how the research results have been applied and what the benefits have been for the target population.

We believe that the researchers themselves are the best placed to provide this kind of information. Therefore, we are contacting researchers who benefited from our financial support in 2003, 2004 and 2005 in order to kindly request their help in this matter. Could you please be so kind to inform us about the effects of your research, how they were valorised, your efforts to apply and implement your findings, your successes and failures, etc. Your answer does not need to be long, and the annexed page will give you a thorough idea of the type of information that we wish to receive.

We believe that these three years are representative of the way in which our financial allocations are used. We also believe that with your answers we will be able to sensitise our potential donators better and at the same time improve our own work.

I want to thank you in advance for your valuable collaboration.

Sincerely yours,

Ivan Beghin  
Managing Director

P.S. We will appreciate if your answer arrives in the following 30 days