

UNC ENTREPRENEURIAL PUBLIC SERVICE FELLOWSHIP (EPS)

Assessing the feasibility, effectiveness and scalability of a therapeutic feeding program for moderate malnutrition in Bundibugyo, Uganda



2008 EPS FELLOW

Scott Ickes

HOMETOWN: Rochester, NY

MAJOR/DEGREE:
Doctor of Philosophy in Nutrition
Class of 2010

PROJECT TITLE:
Assessing the feasibility, effectiveness and scalability of a therapeutic feeding program for moderate malnutrition in Bundibugyo, Uganda

FACULTY MENTOR:
Alice Ammerman
School of Public Health

COMMUNITY PARTNER:
World Harvest Mission-Uganda

PROJECT LOCATION:
Bundibugyo, Uganda

“Malnutrition is a complex problem in Bundibugyo, and its treatment and prevention is as much social as it is preventative public health.”



My project was focused in Bundibugyo, one of Uganda’s most remote and under-developed districts, that lies along the Congo Border to the west of the Rwenzori Mountains. I worked with four groups of people in my evaluation of the *Byokulia Bisemeye mu Bantu* (BBB) Program (“Good Food for People”): 1) the local health center staff that operate the feeding program; 2) the production team members that produce the therapeutic food distributed in the program; 3) the World Harvest Mission’s BundiNutrition staff who coordinate the program; and 4) the beneficiaries of the BBB program—malnourished children and their caregivers.

The BBB Program was started in October 2007 in an effort to treat moderate malnutrition with a locally produced ready-to-use-supplemental-food (RUSF). The program enrolls 25 children in each of its two distribution sites in 10-week cycles. My work was to evaluate this program’s feasibility, effectiveness and scalability in order to help steer future programs.

Project Goals

1. Understand the determinants of successful and sustainable production and distribution and use of local ready-to-use therapeutic food (RUTF).
2. Determine the contribution of the Byokulia Bisemeye mu Bantu (BBB) food supplement to overall infant diets during and after the BBB program.
3. Perform comparative productivity, cost and supply chain analysis of this village-scale efforts in Uganda.

Heat, dust, hills. Each morning we would set out—by foot or by moped—for distant villages, some deep in the bush, others up in the mountains looking out onto the Congo. Our moped looked like a mule packed heavy with gear—bags of beans and rice (gifts to our participants); notebooks for recording data; water; and our solar charged technology—cell phones, digital recorder, and camera— anachronisms in this place where the people tack up signs of protest to the government: “Give us electricity, not DDT.” Uncertainty was the norm as we set out for caregiver homes. Would we find the right house? Would the mother be deep in the garden? Using the basic verbal directions we got from the mothers at the clinic, we asked wide-eyed onlookers—already curious about why we were in their villages—if they knew where Bakaswale, the wife of Mumbere, lived.

Oftentimes mothers would tell us the name of the one compound near their homes that had noticeable architecture: iron sheet roofs, partially-cemented walls—markers of affluence where most people still make their homes from the land they’re built on: mud-bricks, Eucalyptus tree poles for supports, and grass-thatch overhead. Eventually, with-



out fail, we would find the place we were looking for, greeted with the smiles and yelps of mostly naked children, sporting stitched-together textiles and moving in droves.

Mothers would come out from under the palm-branch covered outdoor kitchen, or wielding a machete from the garden, already having worked up a good sweat by the second hour of the day, and fix her appearance with small adjustments, done gracefully, with dignity. She would offer us a small, hand-made stool. We’d sit close to the ground, crouched under the biggest piece of shade we could find, shifting often to avoid the equatorial rays beaming overhead. We shared greetings, my few sentences of Labwisi would soon be exhausted, and I would rely on my translator to communicate as we began our research.

I enjoyed working with small communities, helping people think through social and health problems. I found it satisfying to collaborate with a small team to manage staff and coordinate project tasks. I truly enjoyed training staff to accomplish tasks independently and observing their newly developed skills, interest and confidence.

Bundibugyo cares deeply about its children; community members enjoy working together to address common health issues when they have the resources to do so. Leaders within the community are emerging with the skills and creativity to tackle complex problems. People are driven to work hard, and they derive much joy and empowerment from being involved in solving problems that affect their communities and people.



THE UNIVERSITY
of NORTH CAROLINA
at CHAPEL HILL

THE CAROLINA CENTER FOR PUBLIC SERVICE
Fulfilling the Promise of the First Public University

The UNC Entrepreneurial Public Service Fellowships are supported by the Donald P. Kanak Family.