

## MAKERERE-BERGEN RESEARCH COLLABORATION MAKES 30 YEARS

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Makerere University and University of Bergen will celebrate the 30th anniversary of their collaboration tomorrow November 7 at Makerere University. The collaboration includes research, scientific research competence-building, teaching, student exchanges, infrastructure and related administrative affairs regarding human resource, university governance and library services.

An invitation to all university staff by the vice chancellor, Prof Barnabas Nawangwe, said the venue will be the Central Teaching facility Two at Makerere, starting at 2pm, when a high-level panel discussion on topic, 'The role of inter-institutional partnerships in attaining education for all and national development' will ensue.

The Makerere University-University of Bergen Collaboration Programme has an administrative coordinator, Kristin Svartveit, based at Bergen and two academic coordinators Dr Thorkild Tylleskär (based at Bergen) and Dr Ronald Semyalo (based at Makerere).

In an exclusive interview with The Observer, the two academic coordinators said the activities of Thursday morning will include a reunion of Ugandan alumni of Norwegian higher educational institutions. They estimated the number of the alumni to be above 2,000 including more than 450 of University of Bergen alone. There will also be a brief coaching of students invited from three secondary schools on Sustainable Development Goal 4, 'Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all'.

Tylleskär stressed that the collaboration is not yet due for closure as its benefits are many on both sides and still needed in more numbers.

"The collaboration is not about to close; 30 years is just the beginning! On our part, the collaboration has been helpful to us to learn about other parts of the world. We have trained many people on both sides. Me alone, I have trained 18 PhDs here in the field of pediatrics; next year they will be 21," he said.

He said the activities of the weeklong celebrations will include presentation of a review report, release of a documentary film and planning strategies for the future. The Norwegian ambassador and the vice-rector of the University of Bergen, who will be in Uganda, will be highly involved.

### ORIGINS

Tylleskär said the collaboration started in 1989, but its frame agreement was signed on November 18, 1999, with a timeframe of 15 years. In 2014, a second 15-year frame agreement was signed. He explained that a frame agreement acts as an umbrella shielding various

projects under diverse disciplines.

The frame agreement states that Bergen and Makerere are the lead financiers of research projects; however, any project that requires extra funding is free to solicit funds from any source globally.

The last celebrations were held at the Nile Resort, Jinja in 2009 to mark the 20th anniversary and included a review of successes and challenges, and a mapping of a way forward. The two-day (November 18 and 19) evaluation meeting was climaxed with the signing of the Joint PhD and Degree Cooperation Agreement. The collaboration is evaluated every five years.

### ACHIEVEMENTS

Semyalo said with the passing of years, what started as a mentorship has evolved into a powerful mutual partnership. The collaboration now also includes awards of joint PhDs and degrees and joint publications. It has put on board three young universities.

"Makerere has now grown into a sort of hub, and the collaboration now extends to staff training and exchanges for Gulu, Busitema and Juba [in South Sudan] universities," Semyalo said. He said Bergen sends more students to Makerere, while Makarere sends more staff to Bergen to upgrade.

Tylleskär said about 150 Makerere staff have acquired PhDs and more than 200 acquired master's degrees thanks to the collaboration. And more are undergoing training.

"The collaboration has also supported senior administrative staff from Makerere University to take specialized courses and best practices at the University of Bergen," Prof Nawangwe said.

A lot of research output is being put to good social and productive use. The collaboration has installed videoconferencing facilities at Makerere that can be used for meetings, supervision and lectures, among others.

Tylleskär was glad the collaboration contributed much to Makerere's rising global visibility and accumulation of expertise in attracting international funding and research collaboration. "About 15 collaborative projects are ongoing. In total, there have been at least 40 projects, and majority of them have been on for ten, fifteen or more years. These projects built networks and consortia beyond Uganda, including countries like Burkina Faso, Zambia and others."

"Many beneficiaries of the collaboration are in influential positions in Uganda in their respective disciplines. An example is former Makerere University vice chancellor Venansius Baryamureeba; he studied his master's and later his PhD in Bergen under the collaboration," Tylleskär disclosed.

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Collaboration's academic coordinators Ronald Semyalo (L) and Dr Thorkild Tylleskär during the interview