

Newsletter

Dear colleagues,

Several articles constitute the heart of this issue. First, a paper on the training of dietitians in Madagascar, followed by a report of a USF seminar dealing with the UN and about development also in Madagascar, in which one of our colleagues participated. They are followed by the signing of a collaboration agreement between the Paris Saclay University and the Congo Protestant University with the scope of training in public health at the Master and Doctorate level in dual diploma.

Finally, our colleague Professor Livian refers to the shortcomings of the doctoral supervision, particularly in the humanities and social sciences.

Wishing good reading.

Prof. Robert Laurini, Editor of the USF-AWB Newsletter. ■

Training of dietitians in Madagascar

Malnutrition problems are greatest in Madagascar. In recent years it has been found that about 76% of the population no longer reaches the minimum level of daily heat intake. At the same time, almost 47.3 per cent of children under five suffer from chronic malnutrition, while 32.4 per cent are underweight. Food insecurity affects approximately 35 per cent of Malagasy households.

The National Nutrition Office (NNO) is the agency responsible for monitoring the implementation of the National Nutrition Policy in collaboration with ministerial structures and United Nations agencies. It is attached to the Primature. Professor Marie Danielle Vololontiana, National Coordinator of NNO, recognizes that the situation is critical and that the problem of human resources is one of the elements of this problem. The prospect of professional university training for dietitians seemed to her necessary, despite the great lack of competent staff to accompany the provisions of aid to the inhabitants of the

south of the country: there was no training or dietitians or nutritionists in Madagascar. Hospitals do not have any, there is no control of the meals served in hospitals or schools, since meals for patients, sick and students are provided by families. There are also no professional nutritionists to accompany people affected by food insecurity.



Pr. Marie Danielle VOLOLONTIANA, National Coordinator of the National Nutrition Office

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The initiative taken by the University of Tamatave, in cooperation with USF, to establish such a professional Bachelor degree seems necessary and should be extended in the medium term to other Malagasy universities. A mock-up of relevant training in the Malagasy context must be prepared immediately, the necessary skills must be mobilized in Madagascar and international experience involved in similar vocational training projects must be associated with them.

For more information, contact Professor Xavier Alphaize <xavier.alphaize@gmail.com>. ■

Seminar on the United Nations and development in Madagascar

A seminar organized jointly by USF and the University of Tamatave was held in the premises of this university on the theme "the role of the United Nations in development in Madagascar". Several officials from United Nations agencies participated.

The United Nations Resident Coordinator in Madagascar recalled that his office aims to coordinate all United Nations entities (agencies, funds and programs), national authorities, bilateral donors, civil society, academia, media, the private sector and youth to achieve the goals set: the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) within the framework of the 2030 UN Secretary-General's agenda.



Through a precise analysis - social, political, economic, humanitarian and environmental -, it provides coherent support to the Malagasy Government and to the implementation of United Nations programs for sustainable development. The students asked questions about the assessment of the objectives of the United Nations system and, in particular, about the level of poverty, which seems to vary little. The Resident Coordinator recalled that, on the one hand, multiple natural disasters had seriously damaged the country

and, on the other, the United Nations was involved in support of the priorities defined by the Government.

The FAO team recalled that its organization, created in 1945 in a context of scarcity, aims to eradicate hunger and eradicate poverty through the sustainable use of natural resources. Its interventions and support focus on supporting smallholders, climate change, food security and protecting ecosystems. Like all United Nations agencies, they intervened within the framework of priorities identified by the Government, and turned to technical and financial partners to obtain the means to commit projects in the country.

With regard to the World Food Program (WFP), it was explained that it also intervenes in nutrition problems, but more specifically in providing essential food supplements to populations affected by malnutrition.

Madagascar has one of the highest rates of stunting in the world. Stunting is considered the biggest obstacle to realizing the potential of all children as a result of inadequate health care, inadequate nutrition and poor water and sanitation facilities. With an average stunting rate of 42 per cent, but in some regions, it may be as high as 50-60 per cent, it is imperative to take action to reverse this trend. A large-scale system comprising storage areas, land and air logistics makes it possible to intervene in support of the south of the country, which is particularly affected by this problem.

A WFP Volunteers program was presented to students: an opportunity for them to engage with WFP in the humanitarian assistance activities that are carried out.

The representative of UNICEF shared with the students the main objectives of the organization: protection of the rights of the child, they must have access to basic services (health, nutrition, social protection) and they must be able to evolve in a healthy health environment. The situation is far away in Madagascar: only 23% of children aged 12 to 24 months have benefited from a vaccine, only 14% of students are able to read at the end of primary school, one in five children is not registered and therefore have no legal existence... Madagascar is the only country in the world where social indicators are declining, while the country has not experienced conflicts. The organization is committed to improving the situation to the best of its ability and with many motivations.

For more information, contact Professor Xavier Alphaize <xavier.alphaize@gmail.com>. ■

Shortcomings of doctoral supervision

A statement of support validated by the supervisor, but proving bad, a student waiting for 5 months for comments on his text, a non-existent follow-up committee, a student leads peacefully after 5 years to two negative reports and therefore to a postponement of the scheduled defense... Such incidents are common and cause for concern. It is not by chance that for some years there have been testimonies of doctoral students about the difficulties that have lived (them) (books, blogs, videos...)

Twelve years of accompaniment of foreign students (within the framework of the Lyon association "Coup de Pouce Université"), in addition to thirty years of university career, allow us to make some alarming findings about the doctoral framework in our universities.

In addition to other problems (doubts inherent to the investigation, possible harassment, financial problems, administrative heaviness), the student often faces failures in the direction of his research.

Some of them are:

- An absent or inactive address: some doctoral students only have one appointment a year, some interviews are rare (sometimes at a distance); reactions to the texts produced are slow to arrive, emails remain unanswered.
- An existing direction, but diffuse or lax: no real debate on the problem, no clear methodological advice, no timetable for implementation, no precise correction of the texts ("my supervisor told me that it was not going well, but what exactly should I do?"). We know doctoral students in social sciences and humanities meeting in sixth grade... i And surprised that their Doctoral School forced them to abandon!
- A present direction but little committed in the background: having accepted the subject for mysterious reasons, the supervisor issues few opinions on the content and does not feel committed to the progress and defense of the work (hence uncertain theses and fragile sustains...) In the case of foreign students, the fact that they then return to their country seems to provoke a certain disinterest, since there is nothing at stake for the professor of posts, disciples, clans, schools...

We will be told that in any profession there are "black sheep" but they are still the exception. This is not what appears in the testimonies of the students, describing many problems. On the other hand, it would be wrong to be surprised, since the university does not provide any systematic training of professors for job management (even the so-called "habilitation to conduct investigations" does not contain any proof of actual managerial capacity). Nor does a job that, well done, can be very burdensome financially.

This finding is countered by happy initiatives (in some doctoral schools), but that does not change the general diagnosis. It should be equally nuanced according to the disciplines.

In nature and engineering sciences, the finding is different. In these areas, it is the supervisor who often gives the subject in relation to external financing of the European or industrial contract type. It is therefore directly motivated by the quality of the research results. In addition, the doctoral candidate is rarely isolated, since around him gravitate not only expensive equipment, but also other doctoral students, professors, engineers or research technicians. The main problem is that these people do not always agree on what to do.

While the decrease in the number of young people motivated by research and the loss of France's "market share" in international student mobility are due to other causes, the quality of the supervision plays a role in the attractiveness (or not) of the doctoral experience in France.

Not to mention the effect this phenomenon can have on the very quality of the resulting research. Except to be a masochist, the "galley" does not guarantee creativity and excellence at all.

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