

University Report

BBC AFRICAN SERVICE, LONDON

AS 21/17

UNIVERSITY REPORT.

No. 118

Broadcast 18th, 20th & 22nd October 1970.

NARRATOR -
JOHN JONES:

This week we go over to Makerere University to see how a small fledgling unit grows and develops into a University Department in its own right. And once again we shall see how, by the efforts of scientists at the University of Science and Technology in Kumasi, the ancient curative powers of African herbs are becoming respectable. In a contemporary Western sense there has been, and still is, a great shortage of professional social workers in Africa. It was with this in mind that Makerere University College in 1963, with the assistance of UNICEF started offering a two year diploma in this field, which continued until 1969. Over that period, some 90 to 96 graduates from all over East Africa passed out. In 1969, the diploma was up-graded to a three year degree course within the Department of Social Work and Administration. This Department itself started off as a unit within the Department of Sociology in the faculty of Social Science, and only became a fully fledged department in its own right in 1968, with the University taking over full responsibility for its running and financing. The Head of the Department is Miss Violaine Junod, and she spoke to our reporter Elizabeth Keeble. Elizabeth asked Miss Junod whether the Department had any difficulty in making the whole concept of social work fit into African culture.

MISS JUNOD: In some ways yes, but if you think of social work as a 'helping' profession, helping people who have problems, whether as individuals, groups, or as communities, the concept of helping is not foreign to African culture. It's deeply imbedded in African culture. In fact, the helping process exists in all societies. I should think that the basic difference is that in African societies, the people one helped were mainly one's kinsmen. And this concept of helping people beyond one's kinsmen may be a problem for some Africans to accept. We do have problems in terms of getting the students to really internalise what is necessary to make them into professionals, to develop attitudes pertinent to their profession, or role, or function, having values that are necessary to this role. And inevitably we come across cultural biases which may be even tribal. And these we do discuss with the students.

ELIZABETH
KEEBLE: What have you done actually to relate the concept of social work to the African culture?

MISS JUNOD: It's essentially in the area of social work method that this comes out most clearly. We have, of course, this main stream of teaching in social administration, and I might here say, the reason we included in our degree, is that most of the students who leave us, because they have had university training, do not go and practise at the field level. They tend to end up in Ministerial positions at District levels, with a considerable amount of administration to do. But the social work method is where we have been experimenting with ways and means of making this profession more real, and more part and parcel of their personalities, their outlook and their attitudes. One of the ways in which we have done this, is for example in the first year, not to throw them directly into a discussion of social work methods, case work for example, or group

work, but you discuss the kinds of problems that social workers deal with. From there, then, we tried this year a new way of introducing social work at the second year level, and that was to look at traditional society and to analyse the helping roles in the traditional society through a person's growth and development from infancy, through childhood, through puberty rites and initiation, through to marriage and old age. It was absolutely fascinating. It made the students think about the helping roles in their own tribal society, and from this discussion began to revolve round 'how do you play the helping role'. And from this we plunged then into the social work professional role, and what was required of it. We're in the middle of this at the moment, and it's all very exciting.

ELIZABETH
KEEBLE:

Well, it sounds then, that some of the work you do, must involve the students in work and projects outside the university itself. Is this so?

MISS JUNOD:

This is certainly so. In fact all the practical training of the students, which is an essential part of any professional training programme, is done either in Kampala itself, in agencies such as the Y.W.C.A., Y.M.C.A., Save the Children's Fund, Remand Homes and things of this kind, or in the field itself in rural areas. We have started a rural training programme, some 10 to 15 miles outside of Kampala. And our students from the second year on, spend two days of the week in the field, and do what we call 'long vacation placements' during the April to June vacation and during September. It is this vital point of training which enables us to bring out the discussions which we've had in class, relate them to real situations, and get the student to discuss them in such a way that they become internalised. If one can put it another way,

the point at which the theory taught in class and the practise becomes part of the social workers tool, is when the supervisor, the teacher is able to discuss the student's field work experience, and relate it to the classroom discussion. And I think it is at this point that we begin to get students to see the relevance of what we discuss to reality, and that the internalisation process really begins. The Department has got a great number of responsibilities by virtue of its function as a professional training programme, that is in participating in the activities of voluntary organisations in Uganda, and of course the Ministry of Culture and Community Development, which is the one most closely concerned with the development of social services in Uganda. So that all of the members of staff are very much involved in communities and boards of voluntary organisations, and helping in the thinking of the development of social services, and social policy generally. In addition, there is one area where UNICEF has been helping us and continues to do so - and that is in giving us each year an amount of money to hold what we call 'Regional Events', which brings together practising social workers to discuss problems or to be trained in certain fields. This started in 1967, when we held a large regional training programme; the title of which was 'Problems of Social Work Training in East Africa'. It was a very successful regional event, and out of this grew what we now call 'Workshops'. And every year in December, we hold workshops for much smaller groups - 20 to 30 delegates, usually from all three East African countries, and we're going to include Malawi, Zambia and possibly Congo-Kinshasa in our next one. And we have had training sessions on things like supervision and training trainers.

JOHN JONES: Miss Violaine Junod. She was talking to Elizabeth Keeble about teaching problems in Makerere's new Department of Social Work and Social Administration, of which she is the Head.

And now herbs that cure, and how science is probing into their secrets more deeply. I know from personal experience that I would rather be treated for malaria with local herbs than with any synthetic drug you care to name. It always does the trick much faster. Well in Ghana, as in other parts of Africa, herbs are still being used for the treatment of diseases and every herbalist will vouch for the effectiveness of his brew. Science however, is not satisfied with the claims of those who have been cured by herbs. Science wants to know the whys and the wherefores. In Kumasi, Ghana, in the faculty of Pharmacy at the University of Science and Technology, efforts are being made to explore Ghana's flora for its medicinal and pharmaceutical properties. There, Professor Takie, who has been working in this field for some 10 years, examines various plants given to him by herbalists. He screens them for their alkaloid contents. In Kumasi, William Sam asked Professor Takie why he concentrated on screening plants for alkaloids, since not all medicinal plants contained this substance.

PROFESSOR
TAKIE:

We know about many other known alkaloid plant constituents which have curative properties. But when one's human resources are limited, one selects an area in this type of work, one is likely to achieve much within available resources. Our choice for looking for alkaloids was also influenced by the fact that screening of alkaloids can be done with very limited facilities. And also the fact that some interesting alkaloids such as cocaine and morphine, derived from the coca leaf, and opium, have been

invaluable in medicine from time immemorial. And the recently acquired knowledge of their chemical structures has resulted in a manner of many synthetic anaesthetics and analgesics. Today, alkaloids from the common garden plant, the periwinkle or vinca rosea are being well used in the treatment of leukaemia and as anti-tumour remedies.

WILLIAM SAM: If by some luck, you stumble on something pharmacologically interesting, would such a compound then be introduced into modern medicine in this country?

PROFESSOR TAKIE: Well, pharmacologically interesting products may not necessarily be therapeutically useful. If such an interesting compound is found, that is when acute toxicity tests in animals have shown some promising result, then comes what I would describe as a crucial stage. Clinical testing of the compound will then be undertaken, together with chronic toxicity tests. Even when excellent clinical results are very satisfactory, one still has to keep his fingers crossed that the chronic toxicity tests, which may take anything up to two years, will give a reliable result that the compound would be safe for treatment of human beings.

WILLIAM SAM: It seems, from what you've said, that this work on herbs, to discover a new remedy, is both a prolonged and costly exercise. Is there anything else you could derive from our vegetation which perhaps could yield quicker results which may be beneficial to the public?

PROFESSOR TAKIE: As a matter of fact, we are also looking for other products from our plants, which may be useful pharmaceutically. For instance, we have prepared purified starch from the cassava and yam tubers, and have employed this starch in the making of cocaine

tablets. The tablets made with cassava starch in place of the imported potato starch, have maintained their white colour without any brownish colouration after keeping for six months. The tablets also passed all the official British pharmacopia tests stipulated for tablets. Work is also in progress to purify some local gums for internal use. Again we have isolated some substances which we are hoping could form important intermediate materials in the manufacture of some hormonal drugs. Some of our post graduate students are also engaged in the study of essential oils from local cinnamon tree, and also from orange peels. We are therefore hopeful that with sufficient financial support and availability of facilities, we will be able to develop our work on natural plant products in this country to yield some important results.

JOHN JONES: Professor Takie, Head of the Faculty of Pharmacy at Kumasi, and he was talking to William Sam about his work on medicinal herbs.

And that's it for another week. We'll be back again next week at the same time, so until then, from me, John Bankole Jones, it's goodbye for now.

Any material used from this programme must be credited to the BBC.