

Health, Politics and Culture in Africa (HPCA): A Concept Note

Background and Organization:

Health, Politics and Culture in Africa is a strategic investment by the Vice Chancellor's Office of Uppsala University to create a new education and research environment that links the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences with the Faculty of Medicine and Pharmacology. The project is initiating its activities during the autumn 2015 and is funded for three years. Rooted in an already ongoing collaboration between the Institute for Maternal and Child Health and the Department of Cultural Anthropology and Ethnology, the project is located at the Forum for Africa Studies and is governed by the Board of the Forum for Africa Studies. Sten Hagberg (Professor, Dept. of Cultural Anthropology and Ethnology) and Stefan Swartling Peterson (Professor, Institution for Maternal and Child Health) are the scientific leaders of the project. Eren Zink (Post-doc Researcher, Dept. of Cultural Anthropology and Ethnology) is the project coordinator.

Forum for Africa Studies was established by the Områdesnämnden for the humanities and social sciences at Uppsala University and is located at the Department of Cultural Anthropology and Ethnology. The mission of the Forum for Africa Studies is to strengthen and improve the visibility of social and cultural research, as well as to encourage research and higher education in and on Africa. The Forum offers public events, research meetings, institutional collaborations and networks with African counterparts, advisory services, dissemination of research results, and the production of new scientific knowledge. The Forum for Africa Studies has a broad mandate that is inclusive of the humanities and social sciences, and with the inclusion of the Health, Politics and Culture in Africa project the Forum for Africa Studies expands its to include the medical and pharmacological sciences. More information is available via www.afrikastudier.uu.se and the Forum for Africa Studies Facebook page.

Project purpose:

The primary purpose of the Health, Politics and Culture in Africa project is to establish an important environment for teaching, supervision and research at the intersection of the medical sciences and the humanities, that engages with emerging issues related to global health, local governance, political and institutional decentralization, poverty and illness. Within this context,

the project will further strengthen interdisciplinary teaching and research at Uppsala University, while it promotes meaningful collaborations with universities, research institutes and networks in Africa and elsewhere. In addition, the project will facilitate the production and publication of new knowledge, and facilitate the writing of research grant applications that can generate additional resources and new scientific knowledge.

Themes:

The Health, Politics and Culture in Africa project will address four thematic issues:

1. The theme **health governance** investigates the relationships amongst health systems, the actors that contribute to the design of health systems, and the users of those systems (e.g. patients, health professionals, civil servants, local politicians). Furthermore, it attends to the interactions between health districts and local health centers. The theme is particularly attuned to the contrasts between medical and humanistic perspectives.
2. The theme of **the double burden of disease** focuses on the convergence of infectious disease epidemics and non-communicable disease in many African populations, not least expanding urban areas. The double burden poses new challenges for countries, health systems, local communities and individuals across the continent.
3. The **media representations** theme investigates the persistence of media representations of an Africa that is characterized by crisis, war, disease and malnourishment. What are the implications of such representations, and why do they persist in their dominance despite well documented improvements in health and quality of life on the continent?
4. **Rational use of antibiotics** is a theme that combines research and advocacy to redress factors leading to a growth in antibiotic resistance. The inappropriate and over-use of antibiotics as a first line of defense against ill health is undercutting the long-term effectiveness of antibiotics in Africa, as well as globally.

These themes are intended to evolve and diversify during the course of the project in response to the engagement of researchers, teachers and students at Uppsala University.

In the short term, it is expected that this new research environment will facilitate participants to elaborate common research questions from different theoretical and methodological perspectives, as well as to adopt interdisciplinary approaches. The research environment will also create opportunities for individuals and research groups to generate new research grant proposals.

In the longer term, the Health Politics and Culture in Africa project is expected to identify new research fields and implement new research projects that are inclusive of Masters and PhD

students. The project will be able to participate in and organize consortiums for larger research programs.

Forms of activities

The following activities are intended to contribute to the creation of a strong multidisciplinary network linking the humanities, social sciences, medical sciences, and pharmaceutical sciences:

Seminar series: A seminar series with 2-3 meetings per semester will be organized to generate interest amongst students, researchers and the public in the project themes. Seminars will generally be led by at least two researchers from different disciplines and be planned in order to generate multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary insights into the topics under consideration. It is expected that discussions and ideas generated during seminars will spawn follow-up workshops (see below).

Research workshops: These meetings bring together researchers to brainstorm new research projects, discuss ongoing projects, and to facilitate writing and analysis of research results. They build upon already existing workshop series at the IMCH and the Department of Cultural Anthropology and Ethnology, and they include additional researchers from different disciplines within the university and amongst African partner institutions (via Internet technology).

Proposal writing workshops: These writing workshops bring together multidisciplinary groups to produce research proposals that respond to national and international calls. They can also be used to stimulate and encourage both Masters and PhD projects.

Joint-supervision: Given that interdisciplinary projects often demand a team of supervisors that is normally not supported through standard models of departmental supervision, the project offers support for co-supervision of Masters and PhD students, also including internships and fieldwork in Africa.

Respond to calls for proposals: The project will support in-house capacity to respond to a range of national and international calls for research proposals relevant for the fields of Health, Politics and Culture in Africa. This capacity will be developed together with Uppsala University's grants office, as well as with respect to Sida calls for bilateral research cooperation with specific African countries.

Strategic meetings: Project members will organize strategic meetings with current and potential partners on the African continent and elsewhere to plan collaborations in research and teaching.

Publications: The project can, to a limited extent, support the collective production of interdisciplinary publications, including articles, anthologies, policy briefs, etc.

Planned Activities (HT 2015 – VT 2016)

The Vice Chancellor's decision to support the Health, Politics and Culture in Africa project was made during summer 2015. The Coordinator (Eren Zink) began working on the project in mid-September, and practical planning and initial coordination of activities began during August-October 2015. These included meetings amongst the two scientific leaders and the coordinator, as well as meetings with the Board of the Forum for Africa Studies and the Forum web developers. During this time the project concept has been further elaborated, information about the project has been made available on the Forum website, and initial activities scheduled in November-January were planned (see below for details).

The project will have a public kick-off with guest speakers on 26 November. The event is planned to attract a wide range of stakeholders and interested persons and will be followed by a reception.

Work has begun in planning and coordinating the seminar series. The goal for HT15/VT16 is to complete one seminar for each theme, as well as a start-up seminar to discuss the work plan and a first seminar targeted to primarily engage Masters and Bachelor's degree students. Seminars 1, 2, and 3 are in advanced stages of planning.

Already during HT15 preparatory work has begun to respond to an upcoming (1 Nov 2015) call for proposals from Sida for bilateral research cooperation with Mozambique, as well as a Wellcome Trust call for proposals within the "Our Planet, Our Health" program.

Strategic meetings with African partners will be carried out in Mozambique and South Africa (WISER) during 2015 using project funds, and other strategic meetings will be scheduled in Uganda (Makerere University, Uganda Council for Science and Technology, National Agricultural Research Organization), Burkina Faso and Namibia using other funds that are available.

Further meetings and workshops will be planned in VT2016 to respond to and encourage the interests of researchers, teachers and students to engage in and further develop the themes of the Health, Politics and Culture in Africa project.

Schedule of activities

Date/start date	End date	Type of event	Event content
Oct 2015	29 January 2016	Respond to Calls	Preparing a proposal to Wellcome: Our planet, our health
Nov 2015	18 January 2016	Respond to Calls	Preparing letters of intent to Sida for bilateral research cooperation with Mozambique
5 Nov 2015		Seminar 1	Presentation and discussion of HPCA work plan
24 Nov 2015 (tbc)		Seminar 2	Student seminar: Diabetes and Wellness in Africa
26 Nov 2015		Project Kick-off	Public event with invited speakers followed by a reception
Dec 2015		Strategic meeting	Visit to WISER, University of the Witwatersrand
Dec 2015		Strategic meeting	Visit to universities in Mozambique
15 Jan 2016		Seminar 3	Health governance
Feb 2016 (tbc)		Seminar 4	Double disease burden
April 2016 (tbc)		Seminar 5	Rational use of Anti-biotics (tbc)
May 2016 (tbc)		Seminar 6	Media representations (tbc)
7 Sept 2016	9 Sept 2016	Seminar 7	SANDORD Conference (Uppsala): HPCA convenes a conference panel

In addition to these planned activities, additional activities will be added as initiatives and opportunities arise that are of interest to participants in the project.

Communication and Participation

The Health, Politics and Culture in Africa project is intended to engage the faculty and students of Uppsala University, as well as partners in Africa and elsewhere. The seminar series is envisioned to be the primary means for faculty and students to engage with the project. Participants in the seminars can be supported by the project to elaborate upon their ideas and initiatives through the organization of smaller workshops and research meetings, and in some cases support for strategic meetings and joint supervision.

Information about activities of the project will be communicated via the Forum for Africa Studies website, Facebook site, and email list. If you would like to remain informed about upcoming activities, the simplest method is to send an email to the project coordinator and request that you be added to the email list (eren.zink@antro.uu.se).

Budget

The project is funded for the duration of three years at the level of 500.000 SEK/year. These funds can be used to cover a yearly workshop with invited speakers, costs associated with the seminar series, supervision, travel to strategic partners in Africa and elsewhere, and the preparation and writing of proposals. The budget also covers the cost of a project coordinator (30%).