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EXPERIENCES FROM THE NUFU COLLABORATIVE PROGRAMME FOR SAN (BASARWA) RESEARCH AND CAPACITY BUILDING

Ms. Sidsel Saugestad, from the Department of Social Anthropology at University of Tromsø, presented some of the basic ideas in the NUFU Collaborative Programme for San (Basarwa) Research and Capacity Building. Using her experiences from The Remote Area Development Programme (RAD) in Botswana, Saugestad pointed to the role of universities and the role of research in the process of emancipation of indigenous peoples. Sponsored by NORAD, the RAD programme initially targeted “a poor marginalised section of the people of Botswana”- characterized by the absence of certain characteristics; not living in villages, not speaking the majority language, and with a non-hierarchical power structure. Saugestad suggested that another way to characterise them would be to describe them as the indigenous people, San, Bushmen or Basarwa. The “neutral” term “remote area dwellers” used to identify the target group reflected the government’s insistence of not recognising a minority group according to cultural or ethnic criteria. Additionally, the research connected to the programme consisted of new, rather haphazardly commissioned reports, while all the existing research on the San people were not considered relevant for the implementation of the programme.

Cooperation based on Local Legitimacy and Local Institutions

Turning to the NUFU- financed cooperation programme between Botswana and Tromsø, Saugestad emphasised the need to build on local legitimacy, and to cooperate with local institutions specialised in producing knowledge. Further, these should be institutions with the right connections; enabling the transmitting of knowledge to society as well as interacting with the power structure of the country. In Botswana, and within the NUFU program, the University of Botswana has been such an institution.

According to Saugestad, the collaboration between the University of Tromsø and the University of Botswana is further influenced by the experiences from Tromsø, and from northern Norway. The University of Tromsø has always had a special obligation related to regional issues, and especially relevant to the NUFU programme were the relations between the Saami and the Norwegian Society.

The Importance of Research on Indigenous Issues

Acknowledging the problems of “over-research” and “exoticism”, Saugestad emphasised that the critique of the “excessive” focus on indigenous peoples should not lead to a critique of research as such. She would rather advice the critics to have a closer look at the way in which research is currently undertaken. Saugestad mentioned that she had experienced significant changes at her own university, from being an institution doing research *with* the Saami, to an institution where research *on* the Saami is mainly also done *by* the Saami. Thus, Saugestad concluded, capacity building related to indigenous competence building can be understood as removing the old distinction between researchers and the objects of research and introducing a new situation where all parties are involved in all stages of the process.

For two reasons, Saugestad still found room for representatives from majority populations in indigenous research. Firstly, she argued that if indigenous relations are defined and understood as relationships between a distinct, culturally defined minority and a nation state, there are always at least two parties involved. Each party has some rights and some responsibilities. Secondly, Saugestad generally disliked the idea of research being a monopoly of any one party. In favour of equal access, she argued against replacing one monopoly with another. In her opinion, research should be shared and open for all. Consequently, she also saw the need for affirmative action whenever one group is systematically disadvantaged in access and entry into institutions of higher education.

Saugestad’s counterpart in the NUFU programme, Dr. Onalenna Selolwane from the Institute of Sociology at the University of Botswana, continued the presentation of the cooperation programme. Ms. Selolwane emphasised that the programme has a broad perspective on research, not only academics “finding the information”. Within a human rights context they wanted to view research as bridge building, - between cultures, internally in Botswana as well as North - South. According to Selolwane, research is helpful in breaking cultural stereotypes and bringing about a better understanding of a common humanity, nationally as well as internationally. In the dominant discourse indigenous peoples tend to be looked upon as people without future and people who cannot think for themselves. These are stereotypes, which keep the minorities in a position of inferiority. Selolwane was of the firm opinion that research may in fact show how minority cultural aspects enrich the majority culture. She further saw research as an important basis for policy making and lobbying, as information on the needs and life situation of disadvantaged groups make policy makers better armed when dealing and intervening with these matters.

The Important Role of Universities

Selolwane continued by emphasising the importance of universities, through their vast area of resources and capacity to influence policies, national policies as well as educational policies. She further focused on the universities’ internal policies; *how do they relate to human rights issues and how, and to which extent, do they address minority and indigenous issues?* In relation to these questions, Selolwane expressed interest in the experiences from Saami research in Tromsø, and the role it has had in advancing Saami issues. In order to promote the same development in

Botswana she saw the need for institutional capacity building, and the need to capacitate the University of Botswana to play this important role.

However, Selolwane and other participants in the programme soon had come to realise that capacity building often meant capacitating the majority population, rather than the disadvantaged groups. Within the academic institutions, there was an absence of people of San origin, as well as lack of research on San issues. Consequently, the aims of the Tromsø - Botswana collaborative programme has been extended to empower people of San origin and try to secure that San students are qualified to enter universities, in Botswana or elsewhere. One of the lessons learned is that in order to encourage more San students to qualify, one has to start supporting them at an early stage in their educational career, and much earlier than what is normally considered relevant for university programmes.

Although it is a problem to introduce ethnic based programmes in Botswana, they have also chosen to focus on the University of Botswana's obligation and right to target relevant research interests regarding the San population. Maintaining the moral responsibility to help disadvantaged people catch up with the rest of the nation, the programme also plan to establish a database and has produced an extensive bibliography on the San.

One of the main objectives, according to Selolwane, is to find out where the "glass ceiling" has stopped the San from entering the academic fields. Meanwhile, the NUFU programme is supporting "non-San" students at the university who are interested in indigenous/San issues, guiding them towards a way of research focusing on San issues *with* the San in stead of *on* the San, as Saugestad mentioned from the Saami areas.

Guidelines for Researchers

Based on their experiences, the programme has developed guidelines for the researchers involved in the cooperation on San/Basarwa issues between Tromsø and Botswana;

- Apply innovative strategies to promote San access to higher education
- Identify ways in which research can make positive contribution to San development
- Promote and further develop research capacity and competence among university staff and students
- Ensure that capacity is reflected in appropriate teaching in studies within and outside the university
- Establish a network for San research (North-South as well as South-South, and indigenous-indigenous: San-Saami)

(More Information about the Programme:

<http://www.uit.no/semut/aktiviteter/NUFU/PRO20-96-main.html>

Link to the University of Botswana: <http://www.ub.bw/home.html>)