Obituary: Professor Arne Oshaug



Arne Oshaug, a cherished colleague and friend of many in the international nutrition community, died on 4 June, 2020, 75 years. A recognized academic nutrition scholar and teacher, he was among the early advocates for the need to understand food security and nutrition problems in their social, economic, cultural, environmental, and political contexts. Together with colleagues at the University of Oslo he was also among the pioneers to link food security and nutrition with international human rights norms and principles and contributed to giving content to the right to adequate food in a framework of household food security. These perspectives he brought with him in his various international activities of which the most articulated were related to collaboration with WHO and FAO and in his capacity of Chair of the bilateral constituency in the then reorganized UN Standing Committee on Nutrition from 2000 until 2010.

Arne had an extraordinary career. Professionally trained as a cook, and after ten years in practice as a restaurant chef, he felt the need for more theoretical knowledge about the effects of food on human health. He qualified for university and studies in nutrition at the then Nordic School of Nutrition which was affiliated with the Nutrition Department at the University of Oslo. His master thesis in 1978 had a physiological theme and he was recommended to pursue a further research career in nutrition physiology. However, events and personal interest wanted it differently. A "Group on International Nutrition" was about to

be established at the institute in the end of the 1970s and was planning a collaborative research project in Sri Lanka. Arne joined and this sparked his life-long interest in development and international cooperation to improve food security and nutrition in all forms.

The group received research funding from NORAD and joined the new trend to promote the introduction of nutritional considerations into agricultural development projects. There was not yet a proven way to do this; thus the focus for the project was to explore new methodological approaches to this challenge, more particularly in the context of a rice irrigation project under a NORAD-supported integrated rural development programme in southern Sri Lanka. The interdisciplinary Norwegian-Sri Lankan group saw the need for new working tools; it therefore developed a first framework for food security at *household level* which had several innovative components beyond the common "nutrition talk" at the time. Arne especially brought in in the concept of *sustainability* in regard to food production and availability in the context of resilient and fragile households. The framework had much similarity with that later adopted by FAO and others.

Arne then turned to a new interdisciplinary research programme funded by NORAD in response to the droughts in the Sahel, which led to many years of field studies and coaching master and PhD students in collaboration with researchers in Mali--probably one of the favourite periods in Arne's academic life. Here too he became a respected and dear colleague with friendships to last for many years even if academic contact ceased in the longer run--sadly due to the serious unrest that developed in the country.

In many areas Arne was ahead of his time. He revolted against the classical cathedral lecture style and picked up new pedagogical trends developing in the 1980s by medical education experts in the WHO. They were invited to the University of Oslo to train the nutrition teachers --with Arne as an assistant and "trainee"--in problem-oriented teaching methodologies characterized among other things by active and creative participation by students. At the time Arne met resistance from many colleagues, and twelve years should pass before the Faculty of Medicine itself introduced "problem-based learning" in medicine--albeit through a less student-friendly version. Arne also led several teacher-training workshops for WHO at several universities around the world on these new pedagogical methods. They also made it easier to integrate different aspects of nutritional sciences with the broader dietary environments--now a natural trend in most higher learning institutions. Based on a WHO handbook on the new approach for health personnel, Arne prepared a similar one adapted for nutrition teachers jointly with the WHO colleagues.[1] A few years later, he also published a practical manual for "planning and managing community nutrition work"[2] based on workshops conducted for

[1] Oshaug, Arne, Benbouzid, D, Guilbert, Jean-Jacques & World Health Organization, Nutrition Unit. (1988). Educational handbook for nutritionists: how to help educators to increase their skills so as to make learning easier for the students A. Oshaug, D. Benbouzid, J.J. Guilbert. World Health Organization. https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/59681

[2] Oshaug A (1992) Planning and Managing Community Nutrition Work. Manual for people working in community nutrition. Section for International Nutrition, Nordic School of Nutrition, University of Oslo. WHO Collaborating Centre for Higher Training in Nutrition/WHO, Nutrition Unit, Regional Office for Europe, Copenhagen (Second edition 1994). https://fagarkivet-hioa.archive.knowledgearc.net/handle/20.500.12199/225

WHO/EURO in several European countries. This manual has been widely used in teaching of public health nutrition students, and was translated to French, Russian, Spanish and Portuguese.



Arne (back in the middle) facilitating a WHO/EURO community nutrition workshop in Hungary in 1988, with co-facilitators Gabor Zajkas (back left) and Ivanka Gajic (front right). Courtesy: Tom Bergmann-Harris (front middle).

At home, Arne worked towards a PhD with a focus on: "Cornucopia–cardiovascular risk in the land of milk and honey." The "land" was a selected petroleum installation in the North Sea where shift-workers had high risks for CVD. The health staff of Statoil feared it could have to do with the daily diet offered in the platform restaurant and wanted a closer look at this. Arne found the buffet menu to be seriously rich in fat, exemplified by the 24/7 offer of "Steak with Bearnaise Sauce"! His professional background as a cook turned out to be an asset in gaining the confidence needed with the platform chefs about desirable adaptations.

After a sabbatical period as visiting researcher at IFPRI (International Food Policy Research Institute) in Washington DC Arne was in 1998 head-hunted by the Norwegian Ministry of Agriculture for a position intended to strengthen the ministry's responsibility for better diet and health among consumers. As co-responsible for a White Paper on Norwegian Agriculture and Food Supply he succeeded in bringing in food security and preparedness as a priority at all levels. He also introduced the right to adequate food as a human right, first met by scepticism among colleagues as being unnecessary in a country like Norway, however Arne insisted on its relevance for example in potential emergency situations, or at the individual level to specially vulnerable groups, including drug addicts. He also created a version of the well-known UNICEF "Framework for the causes of malnutrition" by making it a synthesis framework showing human/animal/plant health as a cluster of underlying factors for nutrition of all three groups, and used it in workshops with ministry colleagues. To see these three health scenarios together and interlinked was new, and, in retrospect, can be seen as Arne's vision of what was to come years later in the form of the concept "One Health".



Left: Arne at the "Gullfisk" oil platform with a student assistant in the project, Kari Bugge, and a Statoil employee. Right: In the platform-lab. Courtesy: Kari Bugge

Arne then felt drawn back to academia and was in 2000 appointed to the first chair in Norway as Professor in Public Health Nutrition at OsloMet – Oslo Metropolitan University. Here he got the opportunity to further develop this evolving branch of the nutritional sciences, both through teaching and research supervision at bachelor, master, and PhD level.

He played a major role in the construction of a laboratory and kitchens used for conducting randomized controlled dietary trials, engaged in research projects among refugees from Western Sahara in Algeria, and co-edited the first food composition table for West Africa and was involved in research and training with Universities in Uganda and South Africa.

Arne contributed actively to the more general nutrition debate within international forums. In professional organizations like IUNS and the Federation of European Societies he raised concern about the heavy and non-critical involvement of representatives from the industry and called for clear guidelines for interaction with the private sector[3].

It is however in his capacity as adviser to the Norwegian government at numerous occasions in the 1990s and the first decade of the 2000s that he was able to put his footprint on the UN global nutrition governance scene. He was the chief negotiator at the first International Nutrition Conference in 1992 in regard to the fight over sugar in the final texts, and a very active member of the Norwegian delegation in the intergovernmental preparations of the Right to Food Guidelines[4] in 2003-4. Furthermore, with the then new strategic

[3] Oshaug, A (2009). What is the food and drink industry doing in nutrition conferences? Public Health Nutrition, 12 (7): 1019-1020. https://www.cambridge.org/core/services/aop-cambridge-core/content/view/0AA54EB0D01A44CB237006B4E0870C5B/S136898000900593Xa.pdf/what_is_the_food_and_drink_industry_doing_in_nutrition_conferences.pdf

[4] FAO Council (2005) *Voluntary Guidelines to support the progressive realization of the right to adequate food in the context of national food security*. Adopted by the 127th Session of the FAO Council November 2004. http://www.fao.org/3/a-y7937e.pdf.

plan for the reorganization of the SCN in 2000, the committee was formally consolidated in three separate constituencies: UN agencies, the "bilaterals" (much widened from earlier to include states also in the South) and Civil Society/Non-Governmental Organizations. Among the bilateral representatives, Arne was asked and accepted to take the lead, which lasted for ten years until 2010. He was highly respected in this function with his style characterized by openness and by keeping a high level of exchange of information.



Arne receives a gift from UN SCN after ten years as leader of the "Member States Constituency", presented by Hanns-Christophe Eiden--Arne's successor as Chair of the Bilateral Constituency--at an SCN symposium during the II World Conference on Public Health Nutrition in Porto, Portugal, 2010. Courtesy: Lina Mahy.

Arne's contributions within the SCN context increased substantially his network of colleagues and friends, witnessed among other things through expressions from several them on the news of his death, some reproduced here with their permission.

Arne was also active in facilitating the UNU/SCN capacity development network in public nutrition in Central and Eastern Europe.[5]

Throughout his career Arne was known as one who had a lot of concern for, and ability to see and listen to the individual person. He had a passion for conveying knowledge to students in ways where they felt included. He was also generous in supporting colleagues including PhD candidates in their studies and research projects.

Last, but not least, Arne was a dear husband and father of three, and a warm grandfather to seven grandchildren--all of whom lost him much too soon.

Besides our personal sadness of losing a close colleague and friend over many years, we also regret that Arne's deteriorating health during the last years made him withdraw fully from academic life, and also prevented him from continuing to engage in the global nutrition debate on issues so close to his heart--and where he would still have been very much needed.

Wenche Barth Eide and Liv Elin Torheim

[5] Pavlovic, Mirjana; Pepping, Fré; Demes, Michal; Biro, Lajos; Szabolcs, Peter; Dimitrovska, Zlatka; Duleva, Vesselka; Parvan, Camelia; Hadziomeragic, Aida Filipovic (August 2009). "Turning dilemmas into opportunities: a UNU/SCN capacity development network in public nutrition in Central and Eastern Europe". Public Health Nutrition. 12 (8): 1046–1051. doi:10.1017/S1368980008004692.



Arne Oshaug will be remembered by many friends, including the now late Björn Ljungqvist who just before his passing (on 21st July 2020) had written

> *"Sad news, and my deepest condolences to all old and dear friends for the loss of our brother, Indeed, he was a rock and we will miss him very much. My prayers are with him and with you all."*

I am very saddened to learn of the passing of Arne. He believed in Human Rights, he relentlessly contributed towards realisation of the right to nutrition and he didn't spare his voice in calling out injustices. May His Soul Rest in Eternal Peace.

Olivia Yambi

This is indeed sad news. I remember Arne as always ready to speak up on issues he believed in and human rights was certainly one of them. It was always a pleasure to be in the SCN meetings with him because he never shied away from so-called controversial issues nor took the side of the "donor". In these meetings, he was an ally, a food security and nutrition champion, my friend and someone I looked up to. He was a good man and he is at peace.

Isatou Jallow

I am very sad to receive the news. Arne has been always such a visionary and optimistic person. My heartfelt condolences to his family.

Francesco Branca

A sad message from on the passing of Arne Oshaug. Arne was a passionate defender of the right to food, and all that this included. He left us all a strong legacy of his work which is now a mandate for us all to carry on the work that was his life and passion. I so valued his advocacy for human rights during those interesting times when the UN Standing Committee on Nutrition (SCN) included very active government and NGO sectors.

Elisabeth Sterken

Arne was a wonderful person. Enlivening any meeting he attended, he was also inspiring on a one-to-one basis – as well as being a great person to share a beer with. His passing will be a great loss for the nutrition community…at a time when his insights and expertise are more relevant – and more needed – than ever.

Stuart Gillespie

I am so sorry. I actually met Arne when I was looking for a consultant in Zambia and then we worked together within the SCN. The wheel turns. He had a great influence on students and colleagues and has certainly contributed to promoting the right to food.

Florence Egal

We were really sorry to hear this. We were very happy to work with Arne in collaborating re teaching human rights in nutrition in South Africa. Arne lived his life to the full and had such a diversity of experience and knowledge which he was able to share with us and inspire so many people with. The global situation currently is not good and we need to draw on this international inspiration and determination from people like Arne to take us forward. With our condolences to Arne's close friends and colleagues and Arne's family

Eleni Maunder
Peter Pillay

Really sad news. Arne's work on nutrition and human rights was truly ground-breaking. And I will miss his stories about when he was a cook! My condolences to his family who he was so proud of.

Lawrence Haddad

I follow the other people who already reacted to Arne's passing away and shared their thoughts, memories and respect. I am saddened by this loss. He was a great contributor to our thinking about human rights and human right to food.

Stineke Oenema

Sad to hear. It is an enormous loss for the world, and in particular for his family and friends. He had an amazing life, and he leaves a huge wealth with his wisdom and his formidable integrity as a human being, he will be missed. With love and deep sadness, I send my condolences to his family. He will be remembered.

Flavio Valente

I am in shock by the news. More than a good nutritionist and a right to food fighter, he was a superb human being, an excellent friend and a colleague you can always count on. My condolences to his family.

Mauricio Rosales

Arne was a key driver in so many intergovernmental developments over the last decades, constantly pushing the right to food agenda within FAO and the nutrition community. FAO in general – and me in particular – count ourselves lucky to have known him, learned from him and enjoyed his company. My condolences to his family.

Margret Vidar

I join my voice to offer my condolences to Arne's family and the nutrition family. Arne was a strong supporter of the Standing Committee on Nutrition, through which I had the fortune to work with him.

Lina Mahy

It is indeed very sad news. Arne was a great inspiration for many nutrition students, and a welcome relief from the theoretical biochemistry and physiology lectures at the medical faculty. He opened our eyes to planning and managing community nutrition work, bringing in examples from both faraway countries and Norwegian oil rigs, and generously shared of his experiences from the intergovernmental work, telling exciting tales of behind-the-scene work leading up to the resolutions. I vividly remember his passion for the right to adequate food, from the University as well as from the SCN meetings where he co-chaired the Bilateral group. My warm thoughts go to his family, and friends and colleagues around the world.

Kaia Engesveen

I am sorry to learn of Arne's passing. He was funny, and generous, and wise. I always enjoyed assigning his chapter in Wenche B Eide and Uwe Kracht's 2 volume work – it expressed so well the crazy complexities of negotiating an international human rights instrument, in this case the Right to Food Guidelines.

Anne C. Bellows

I am so sorry and sad to hear about Arne. He was a great friend and will be missed, even at this distance.

Harriet V. Kuhnlein

Arne was a good friend of IUNS. He attended all our ICNs.

Anna Lartey

I am so sorry to hear about Arne's passing. He was a wonderful friend. We had many good talks and good laughs at his home and my home and many conference sites. It was a pleasure and a privilege to know him.

George Kent

So terribly sorry to hear this news. Arne was a very special person and a great RTF Ambassador, among his many excellent traits. I feel very privileged to have known him and to have worked with him. My thoughts and prayers are with his family.

Isabella Rae

Lisa and I are so sad to hear about Arne's death. He was a very special friend to us and a great colleague. I remember how much I enjoyed working with him and you on food security and nutrition issues and visiting him in Norway and having him visit us in the States. Lisa and I remember when he was on sabbatical in Washington working at IFPRI watching the movie Fargo with him and making fun of the American-Norwegian accents, especially when he was mimicking them. We were eating Thai food that we made and it was so hot that Arne turned red and was sweating profusely but said it was not too hot! We loved Arne and will miss him terribly. Send our love to his family. Thanks for letting us know. He was definitely one of the big influences on my life and he was a great support to Lisa as she started out her career.

Tim Frankenberger

I am so sorry to hear of the passing of Arne; will think of him and family when he is laid to rest.

Ali Dhansay

I am sorry to hear this news and Tom would be very saddened too. Arne was a great friend to us during the year we spent in Oslo (1979-80, oh my -) and we were happy to see him in the U.S. on more than one occasion. I know he and Tom were in communication during all the years post Oslo and how much Tom appreciated Arne's friendship, both personal and professional. I appreciated his thoughtfulness, playfulness and his obvious interest, knowledge and dedication to his work.

Janna Marchione

So very sorry to receive this sad news. Arne will be truly missed by so many, he was such an inspiration. Remembering him in our thoughts and prayers.

Barbara Rae

How sad, this news about Arne's passing away. It has always been a privilege to work with Arne. He was a source of inspiration - I learned a lot from him, including about human rights & nutrition. And - also important! - it was really a pleasure to work with him in the UN-SCN. And it was fun, particularly during the PrepComs for the ICN and ultimately during the ICN in 1992 in Rome. 'Fighting the common enemy', as we sometimes said, made us - the bilaterals - a strong group. This helped all of us to develop the then trilateral collaboration in the UN-SCN - the bilaterals being one of the three constituencies. I think that a lot has been achieved in those years, thanks to (most of the time) constructive collaboration between the constituencies and the secretariat. Arne has been instrumental in getting it organized and getting work done. That is how I will remember Arne. May he rest in peace.

Elly Leemhuis

I first met Arne at a WHO/EURO workshop he conducted on Community Nutrition in Hungary in May 1988 when I was working as Nutrition and Food Aid Advisor to the League of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies in Geneva. Later, Arne invited me to attend – or so I thought - a workshop he was to run in Mali. The documents had not reached me in time before flying to Bamako, where he was happily welcoming me with the words "Great! You made it and I am particularly glad as you are my co-facilitator for the workshop"!! A bit of a shock but we both managed well as we worked together nicely. I have fond memories of Arne, including when I visited Oslo in the mid-90ies to report on UNICEF's work in Rwanda where I was the country coordinator. He invited me and a few others to dinner at his house serving salmon in a delicious white sauce with dill on baby potatoes! We continued to keep in contact and last met again in 2011 in South Africa just after I had left the UN. I am shocked and sad at Arne's passing.

Tom Bergmann-Harris

It was indeed sad news to hear about Arne's passing. I remember Arne as a very committed colleague and collaborator. His contributions were always valuable and sound. I have very good and pleasant memories of our collaboration. I am certain that Arne is in a very good place.

Maarten Immink

C'est triste. Un Grand Monsieur qui a été un grand ami du Mali 🇲🇱en particulier et de l'Afrique Sub-Saharienne en général. Il fut un pionnier pour l'avancement de la nutrition au Mali dans le cadre de la réalisation de la Table de Composition des Aliments du Mali fruit d'un partenariat entre la Norvège et le Mali. Mes condoléances à toute la famille de Arne Oshaug et à la grande de Nutrition de la Norvège 🇳🇴. Que son âme repose en paix.

Fatima Ouattara

Arne was a beam of light in the nutrition world. We had great times working together in the Bilateral Constituency of the UN Standing Committee on Nutrition, where he made important contributions and was one of the few who was knowledgeable enough about the human rights issue to help the rest of us understand it when it was introduced to us by Urban Jonsson at one meeting.

At the first International Conference on Nutrition in 1992, I noticed the sugar industry passing out literature to delegates. Suspicious, I went through every word of the Declaration and the Plan of Action and saw the word "sugar" never appeared. I alerted Åke Bruce, the head of the Swedish delegation, and he gave short speech calling for it to be appropriately mentioned. Delegates from a couple sugar producing countries immediately vigorously objected, asking why their crops always had to be the ones under attack. Sensing that the Chair was about to end the discussion, I desperately signaled to Arne in the Norwegian delegation, fortunately, located not far from us; we had already held Scandinavian delegate meetings and agreed, as usual, to support each other.

He got the message, raised his hand, and in his classic calming and diplomatic voice said, "No, that was not at all what the Swedes meant to say. We all know sugar can cause tooth decay and surely this should at least be referred to." Australia quickly seconded him, saying they could see historically how it destroyed teeth in each South Pacific island as it entered their diets. The Chair, unsure what to do, assigned a number of countries to meet with Arne in the corridor to iron out a compromise—carefully avoiding the inclusion of the rogue Swedes! They returned with a statement about disaccharides--scientific, but avoiding the risk of panicking the public!

Ted Greiner

Please note: Those who are interested in reading more about Arne's life and personality may enjoy this blog post written by Lawrence Haddad when Arne retired in 2013: *http://www.developmenthorizons.com/2013/11/in-praise-of-arne-oshaug-gentleman-hell.html*