THE ARK OF KENYA 2.0
PRESERVING FOOD HERITAGE BY EMPOWERING A NEW GENERATION OF FOOD ACTORS

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Background
The Ark of Taste is a catalogue of forgotten and endangered foods that belong to the culture, history and traditions of our planet. The Ark of Taste records them under various categories and is a unique resource for those interested in discovering and promoting quality food. In 2017, the Ark of Taste project was enriched with a new initiative, the 'Ark of Taste Atlases', whose aim is to expand the body of knowledge in the database and offer useful tools for the promotion of the local food heritage of selected countries. The Atlases form a series of monographs edited and published in collaboration with the University of Gastronomic Sciences. These books organize and expand the materials available in the Ark of Taste database, providing a dedicated outlet that showcases traditional products and the underlying biocultural diversity to the general public, and specifically to local organizations, institutions, and professionals in the restaurant sectors, as well as to researchers interested in preserving and promoting local food heritage. In 2018 the first Atlas of the Ark of Taste in Kenya was published (Barstow, Zocchi 2018) . The Atlas includes a description of 75 endangered traditional products from Kenya and is aimed at being a reference book for people interested in the rural development of the country through the rediscovery and promotion of those products that are more closely related to the food cultures of the Kenyan nation. The book was the result of an anthropological and ethnobotanical survey of the neglected and underutilized species that characterize the local foodscape conducted as a part of the UNISG research project "SASS – Sustainable Agri-Food System Strategies". The selection and cataloguing of products, completed by researchers from the University, was made possible thanks to the collaboration with the local Slow Food Kenya network.

The Project
In 2023, it launched a new collaborative research project that involves researchers from the University of Gastronomic Sciences, together with the researchers and students of three Kenyan universities: Egerton University, University of Embu, and University of Nairobi. Together with them, the project involves local stakeholders, among which Slow Food Kenya, the Italian Embassy in Nairobi, and the Kenya Nutritionists and Dieticians Institute.
The project aims at editing a second edition of the book that will include new products as well as contributions able to describe the specificities of the Kenyan foodscape, and the perspectives of development in terms of farming, catering and hospitality.

A Collaborative Design
The entire project moves based on a collaborative design that involves all the actors and aims at empowering the present researchers and the new generation of professionals of the Kenyan food system. The flow chart (fig. 1) describes the structure of the work
The University of Gastronomic Sciences will lead the publishing work by conducting direct research, as well as coordinating the local research team of each university. These teams are composed of scholars and students (last year of undergraduate studies and those enrolled in postgraduate programs). UNISG will train the students through an online training program aimed at introducing the project and its methodology and training them in completing the product records. Students will involve in food scouting research to improve the quality of the available information and add new products to the Ark. Their work will be jointly supervised by their university researchers together with the UNISG team.

Impact
The project aims to:
- publish a new volume of the Ark that represents one of the few comprehensive tools to understand the traditional Kenyan foodscape;
- train at least 50 new professionals and enable them to continue research and undertake rural development projects concerning food heritage;
- intensify the collaboration between UNISG and Kenyan universities and stakeholders;
- support Kenyan in improving and diversifying its agricultural practices as well as its entire foodscape.

Resources
The project is led by M.F. Fontefrancesco and D.M.Zocchi.
The initial phases of the project have been financed through the UNISG departmental research funds with the support of the Italian Embassy in Nairobi and the Italian Cultural Institute in Nairobi.
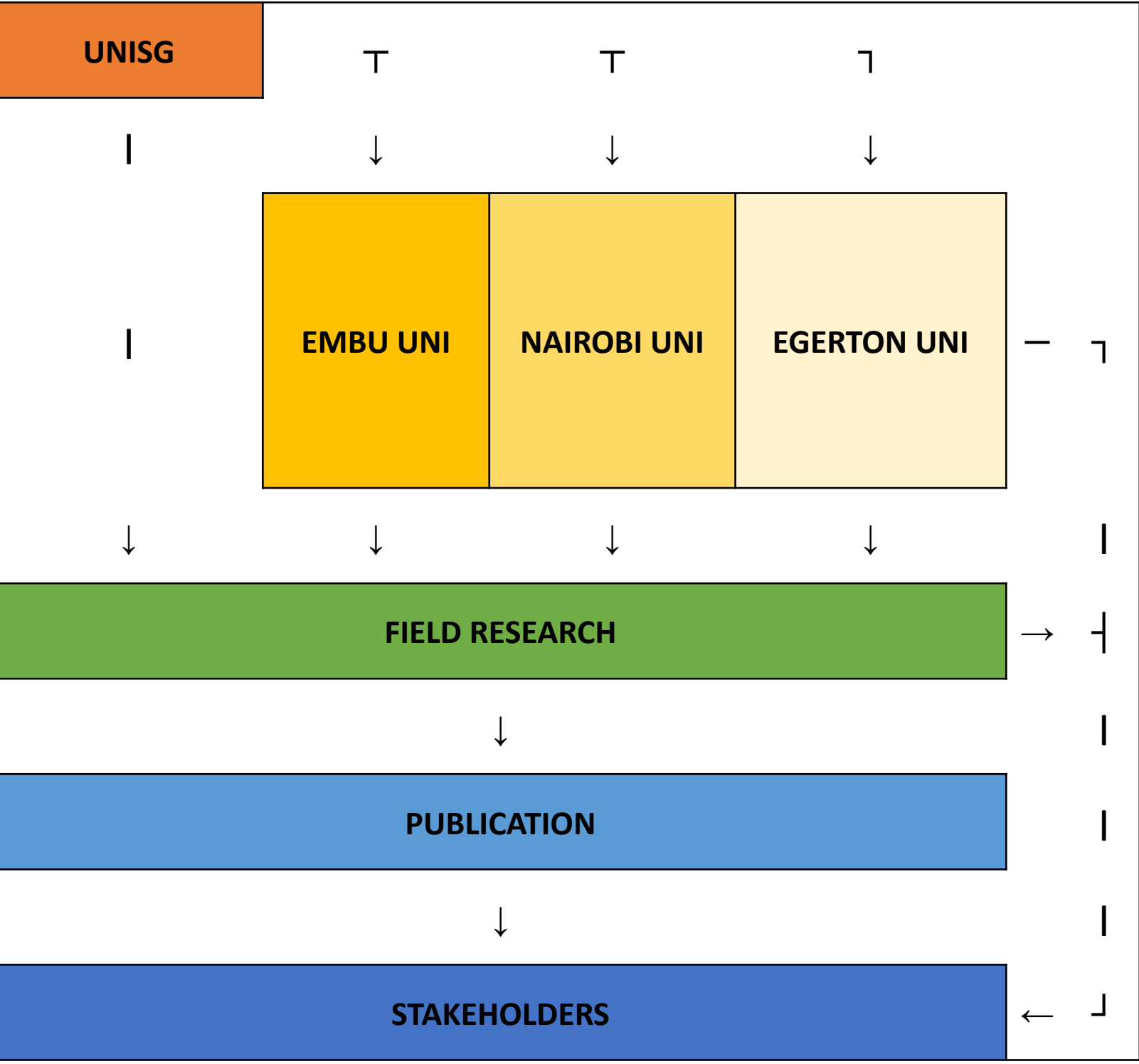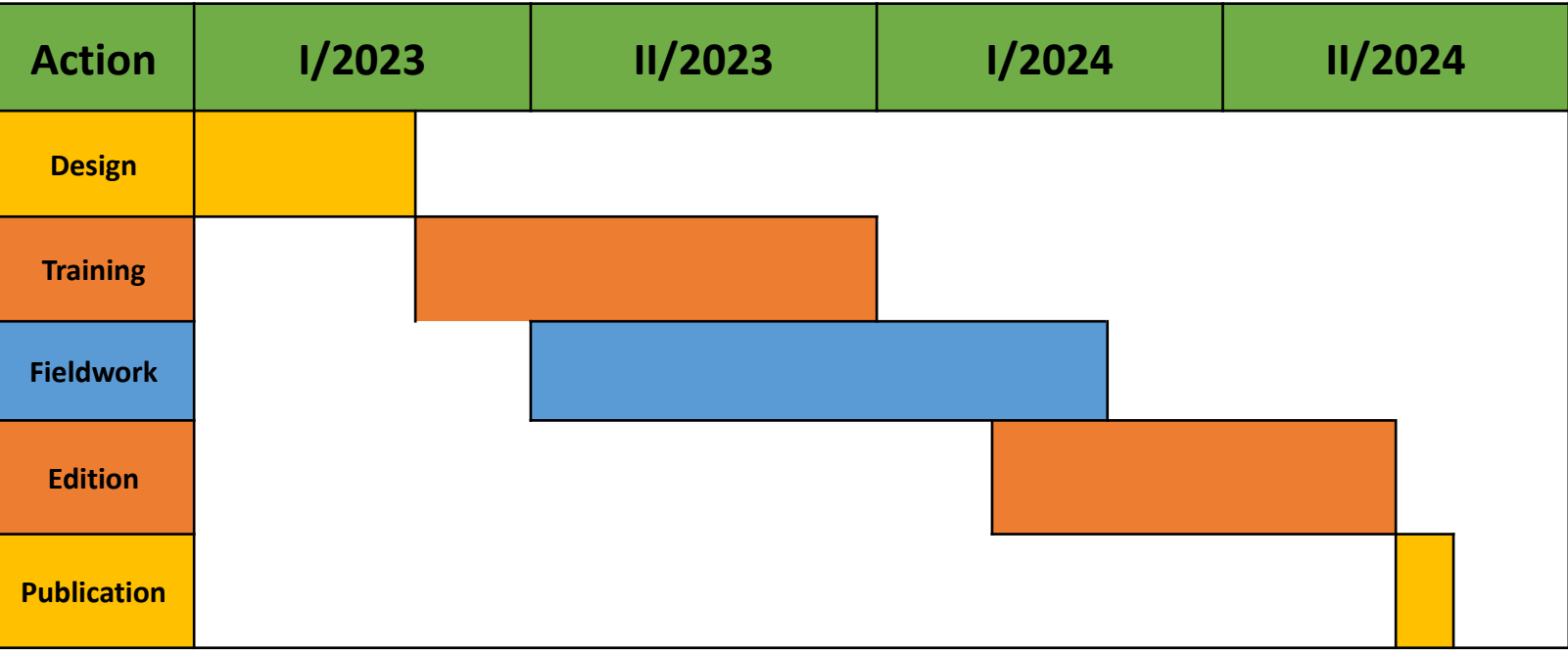

Fig. 1: Flow chart of the activities

Fig. 2: GANTT of the project activities

See also
- Barstow, C., & Zocchi, D. M. (Eds.). (2018). Kenya. Food, knowledge and history of the gastronomic heritage. Slow Food Editore.
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