

# WRENmedia report to DFID: Communicating research: contributing to sustainable development

## Science reporting capacity-building workshop

Nairobi, Kenya – March 2011

### Summary

As part of WRENmedia's ongoing capacity building for African scientists and science reporters, 12 Kenyan journalists (print and radio) undertook a five-day training workshop in Nairobi. The workshop was organised in partnership with the World Agroforestry Centre (ICRAF), the Kenya Agricultural Research Institute (KARI) and CABI, and research staff from these institutes received media awareness training, as part of the workshop. The journalists attended three field trips – one organised by each institute – in order to gather stories on fodder shrubs, growing niche crops and CABI's Plant Clinic programme. Training sessions on better science reporting techniques were conducted by two WRENmedia trainers and one local co-trainer, a participant and trainer on several previous Better Science Reporting workshops.



Salim Chiro from Pwani FM in Mombasa interviews James Maina, who grows fodder shrubs to feed to his cattle in Kiambu, central Kenya (WRENmedia)

Lessons learned included: inviting participants from one country provides greater value for money; involvement of partner organisations offers shared benefits to WRENmedia, the workshop participants and the partner organisation staff; trainees would value more time for discussions with scientists; trainees want more information about training programme prior to workshop; reducing number of field visits to two might be worthwhile to allow more time for learning lessons during the production phase.

On previous Better Science Reporting workshops, one output was a resource pack of radio reports and print articles on the workshop theme – distributed through

WRENmedia's Agfax service. However, production of these resource packs was found to put the participants under a high degree of pressure, often necessitating very long hours, which the organisers felt was potentially compromising the objectives of the course, and taking advantage of those trainees who were prepared to commit so fully. Therefore, for this workshop, production of a resource pack was not included in the workshop aims, and the trainers felt that this decision was justified by the good levels of commitment and more reasonable level of demand placed on the participants. Despite this lower workload, several participants commented on the amount of hard work they were expected to do.

### Context

The purpose of WRENmedia's DFID-supported communication research programme is to change development partners' practices by providing information for quality decision-making through better communication of research and policy of sustainable development issues through multi-media channels. A key component of this programme is to provide:

- Improved capacity of development stakeholders (researchers, policymakers) and journalists to communicate research and development issues

As part of WREN*media*'s ongoing innovation in building the capacity of African journalists to report science, and of researchers to deal positively and productively with the media, we undertook a five-day training workshop in Nairobi, using the following approach:

### Selection of participants

A call for participant applications was made, using media and research contacts, to print and radio journalists in Kenya with an interest in reporting on scientific topics. Eighty applications were received, of which 40 were long-listed and 20 reached the shortlist. Twelve participants were finally selected (six men, six women), of whom six were print journalists and six were radio broadcasters.

### Duration

The course was shorter than previously (five days, compared to six for previous workshop in Lusaka), in the interests of creating a more cost-effective training model, involving more participants working for a shorter time.

### Co-trainer

Pius Sawa acted as co-trainer during the workshop, with a particular focus on giving technical and content-related coaching to the radio journalists. Pius has been reporting for WREN*media*'s Agfax and New Agriculturist since 2008, and has acted as a co-trainer on one previous Better Science Reporting workshop. Pius has been contracted by INASP to organise training for policy influencers on Evidence Informed Policy making, and has also trained scientists on making the most of the media. As well as reporting for WREN*media*, Pius freelances for Reuters Alertnet and Farm Radio Weekly. He recently established his own media company to train journalists and help communities in western Kenya to understand science and share information.

### Partners

Organisation of the workshop was, from the outset, conducted with the participation of the World Agroforestry Centre (ICRAF), the Kenya Agricultural Research Institute (KARI) and CABI. Staff from these organisations were involved in helping with logistical arrangements, such as food, transport, training venue and computer provision. They also identified suitable stories for the journalists to cover during the week, and selected researchers took part in training sessions at the beginning and end of the workshop, as well as field visits.

### Location

The participants were accommodated throughout the workshop period at the Jupiter Guest Resort in central Nairobi. The training sessions were held at ICRAF for the first two days and at KARI for the remaining three days, when not in the field. Both institutes were able to provide excellent training facilities at a competitive cost, including data projection, audio playback and computer suites.

### Scientist/research input

On the opening day, 10 scientists representing the three projects chosen for coverage during the workshop, plus several other CABI and ICRAF staff, attended an introductory session. This provided an opportunity to learn about what the media are interested in, in terms of science stories, how to generate media interest and ensure accurate, engaging coverage.

Scientists accompanied each field trip over the next three days, giving their perspective on projects: to introduce fodder shrubs to livestock farmers (ICRAF); to build skills such as grafting for fruit cultivation, and improved marketing strategies (KARI); and the introduction of plant clinics, to offer free diagnostic services and advice on pest and disease problems to small-scale farmers (CABI).



**Job Weru, Medina Asman and Tom Mathinji learn about the value of niche crops from Hannah Wairimu, who grows passion fruit and avocados (WREN*media*)**

On the final day, all participating scientists were invited to an afternoon session reviewing lessons learned during the field visits, and establish better contacts with the participating journalists. Unfortunately, apart from one scientist from ICRAF, only KARI Thika scientists attended this session (which was held at KARI HQ), because of other work commitments among ICRAF and CABI staff.

## Field trips

The three field trips lasted half a day each (with the day starting at 7.30 – 8am), involving an average of one hour's travelling time to reach the chosen location. The trips were a highly valued element of the workshop, as they gave the participants the opportunity to put the theoretical training into practice, and to gather the perspectives of both 'beneficiaries' and scientists. For many, this was an unfamiliar way of working, with the print journalists in particular, more familiar with simply reworking press releases in order to write articles. For the radio journalists, the trips were a vital opportunity for the trainers to critique their interviewing techniques and present new ones – such as using background sounds, translators, and descriptions of the interview location. Issues such as treating all interviewees with respect were also addressed.

## Reporting skills

Whilst on location, as well as during production time on return from field visits, the journalists were guided in print and radio production. Lessons learned from the field visits were discussed, and one-to-one guidance was given by the three trainers, boosting the trainees' ability to produce creative, effective print and radio stories, suitable for their audiences and readers. The co-trainer in particular gave support with digital editing to several of the radio journalists who were unfamiliar with the technique.

## Beyond the workshop

Participants were asked to report to the workshop organisers on any stories published or broadcast using material gathered during the workshop. They were also invited to submit their coverage from the workshop field trips into a competition. Through this, six journalists have won the opportunity to attend a further field trip, organised by one of the partner organisations. The winners, and winning entries, are listed below.

## Lessons learned

- Demand for the workshop in Kenya was very strong – 80 applications, compared to 50 for previous course from across southern Africa. Quality of candidates was also very high, with 20 shortlisted for the 12 available places.
- Costs for the workshop were reduced by 47% compared to the previous workshop held in Lusaka. Limiting participants to one country was a major factor, reducing the need for flights. Given the strong interest and calibre of applications in Kenya, this limitation seemed fully justifiable to the workshop organisers. Collaboration with partners also helped reduce costs in terms of venue, food and transport.
- Organisational logistics were relatively simple compared to previous courses. Having a single accommodation venue throughout the training was simpler, and arrangements for transport and food were largely made by partner organisations using their in-house service providers.



**Karanja Kinyanjui followed advice from the Wangige plant clinic and cured a pest problem in his potato and spinach crops using wood ash (WRENmedia)**

- Training venues and facilities provided by partner institutions were of high standard, although there were some ‘teething troubles’ in terms of getting computers set up with necessary software for audio editing. If the same partners are used again, this problem may not reoccur.
- Time pressure on the course – an issue raised by previous trainees – was less extreme, as production of an Agfax Resource pack was no longer part of the workshop objectives.
- Despite reduced pressure, time available to develop articles and audio reports was still quite limited. For future workshops, we need to think carefully about balance between gathering material and working on it, matching this to the ability level of the trainees. Those already skilled in field-based info gathering might benefit from having a greater proportion of time to develop more sophisticated reports and articles, with trainer advice and mentoring.
- Several trainees commented that the final afternoon session with the scientists was too short to allow sufficient interaction. If the number of field visits was reduced, more time might be available for trainees to discuss their reports with scientists during the training, rather than having just a single session at the end.
- Several trainees said they did not feel they had sufficient information before the course about the training venue and activities, and they were not aware that field visits would take place. This meant they felt underprepared, in terms of suitable clothing.

## Going forward

This revised model of training appears to have worked well, offering a good level of capacity building in a cost-effective manner. Given the high quality and quantity of applications from Kenyan journalists, holding another, similar workshop in Kenya later in 2011, would seem worthwhile. Working with the same partner organisations would help fine-tune the model and build stronger relationships with each of the organisations with the intention that these organisations might offer similar training in the future. To spread the benefits for the partner organisations, different projects would be chosen for coverage, thereby bringing in different scientists and increasing the range of good quality articles and audio reports on the partner organisations’ work.



**Peter Karanja of CABI explains to community radio coordinator, Medina Asman, how the mobile plant clinics are working** (*WRENmedia*)

Beyond 2011, the model could be rolled out to other countries in sub-Saharan Africa with relatively high numbers of science and agriculture journalists. Nigeria, Ghana, Uganda, South Africa and Ethiopia would all be worth considering as possible locations for the workshops.

## Journalist feedback

Overall, the feedback from the week’s training was very positive. The 12 trainees were asked to comment on five aspects of the course, and gave responses (anonymously if they wished) as follows.

**Organisation prior to course** 9/12 positive comments  
3/12 wanted more info, e.g. clothing required

**Accommodation and facilities** 9/12 positive comments



3/12 small room and/or slow service

**Daily training activities**

10/12 positive comments

2/12 'moderately likeable'/ 'too serious'

**Most important lessons**

4/12 Adding colour/interest to a science story

3/12 Value of field trip and scientist/farmer input

2/12 Preparing for interviews

2/12 Basic radio interview techniques

**Least useful session**

4/12 None, all were useful

4/12 Discussion with scientists (2/4 - session was too short)

3/12 Repetition of 'lessons learned' after each field trip

**Other comments**

6/12 Workshop should be longer/more frequent

4/12 More contact with scientists needed

**Post-workshop feedback**

"Nowadays I apply humour, simple language and my listeners are very happy i.e. from the SMS and phone calls I receive on daily basis. Through the training I have now established good rapport with agricultural officers from KARI-Mtwapa. We call one another, share ideas like friends. I am a third year student at Moi University Coast Campus. At the university we are studying a unit called 'Better science reporting' One of the questions they brought in our end of semester examinations was about good styles in science reporting and I was the best in that subject." Salim Chiro

"My reporting has improved and especially reporting right from the field. Conducting interviews is also not a nightmare anymore. Training was great fun because there was a lot to learn. However, the organizers should expand their budget. Cash at hand was too little." Judy Maina

"My reporting on agriculture has improved. I am able to paint an image of my topic in my listener's mind. I am also able to have confidence and ask the experts to explain the jargons for me and for my listeners' understanding." Gladys Njoka

"I feel my reporting on science has improved as I am able to write comprehensive stories. I also received positive remarks from my editor after I sent in the two stories. I also shared the published articles with the sources at KARI and they were really impressed with them and offered to give me more information on their other projects. The training was a good eye opener for some of us who had problems getting to field places and relating with sources. It

was a good one that has helped us write stories from first hand information instead of relying on releases and other documents.” Lilian Museka

“The training has helped me find new ways of getting my answers right by involving the farmers and experts directly. After sharing my experience from the workshop with my fellow colleagues, I now manage the science desk, besides continuing with my agricultural programme.” Lilian Otieno

“The training workshop has really improved my reporting skills. The kind of improvement I have achieved is on Intros, especially which cover the background sound effects of the environment. For example I visited one of the prisons in Kenya to cover stories on how long-term prisoners are practising agriculture and how it’s beneficial to them. The intro and the sound effects coloured the feature. I am now training some colleagues on agriculture reporting, and to me the training was well organized and it accomplished its purpose.” Tom Mathinji

“The course was such a huge eye opener to me. In the course I learnt to strategize, which is what I have been missing. I learnt how utterly important planning for a story is. From detailed research, to finding the right sources, to the right angle and structure that best relate to my target audience. Since the training I have learnt to get news leads very fast. I now write one story per day. Previously I managed 2 or 3 per week. I have also learnt to enrich my stories through talking to many sources, something that I got from the training.

Immediately after the training, my managing editor requested me to train the other staff in our agency on what I learnt at the workshop. So I have an additional docket as a trainer and I got promoted to associate online editor of our agriculture website.

The training has also been the best thing ever to me in terms of networking. The scientists I met at the training have been my biggest news sources and I now have a very cordial working relationship with them. I am also employing the tactic of getting the opinion of both the scientists and the farmers.” Bob Koigi

“My reporting has improved in that I'm able to put colour in my stories, which before the workshop I was not sure was the right thing to do in science stories. Also this knowledge now gives me confidence that no editor/reader will find me too boring while reading my articles. My freelance work has certainly been boosted, the confidence to tackle any story without the fear that my story will appear too dry/dull. I can face any editor knowing they will like my approach to a story. While the training was helpful I did not like the long hours. I'm freelancer/adult learner and need some time to do other things/rest. My life does not stop when I'm learning, and found your attitudes too patronising, sort of a superiority mentality on your side.” Maina Waruru

## **Prize winners**

Robert Koigi – *Fodder shrubs increase milk production* (ICRAF print article)

Lillian Otieno – *Fodder shrubs feature* (ICRAF radio report)

Maina Waruru – *Fruit farming technology lifting farmers out of poverty* (KARI print)

Gladys Njoka – *Importance of fruit and vegetables in our body and in our pockets* (KARI radio)

Lilian Museka – *Farmers benefit at plant clinics take root* (CABI print)

Tom Mathinji – *Plant health clinics for better crop production* (CABI radio)

## Researcher feedback

“I have never enjoyed myself explaining my job like I did on that day to the journalists. This was a very good opportunity for us to publicize the plant clinics in Kenya and beyond, through the outputs/results from the training exercise. Now I feel more confident to work with the media, especially in my area of expertise.” Peter Karanja, CABI

“It was important to learn how to structure communication messages, and how to make the maximum from the media cost effectively. I had a chance to interact with the media during the field trip at Wangige and it was interesting, not only to see them work, but identify the challenges they go through while sourcing information. I now believe in the power of building relationships with the media and maintaining that over a period.” Marsden Momanyi, CABI

“It was possible for us to understand the media more and dispel any fears we had about misreporting and negative reporting. It was a very good opportunity to explain our work and to see the way journalists do their field work. I feel I have warmed to the media and have since welcomed some to interview me on my other projects.” Margaret Muchui, KARI

“It helped me look at the research work I am doing as a story that needs to be told in a simple, clear and interesting way. We learned how to listen more to the media and emphasized that communication is about listening. I have learned that with good preparedness it is possible to engage journalists at different stages of our project implementation. It is however important to always think a little more on ‘what story needs to be told’. It would be interesting in future to also learn how to do interesting features for magazines that target some of the investors on our work.” Sammy Carsan, ICRAF

“One of the lessons was that journalists misquote scientists due to lack of information. Given the right information in a way that they can understand, they are instrumental in disseminating the research findings, they can help in making the information get to thousands of beneficiary in a very short time. I definitely have more confidence dealing with them now, because I know all I need is let them get facts in a way that they can understand. The experience would have been better if more time was spent together with the journalists. The interaction was so minimum and the impact was great, thus with more time and interactions, a lot more would have been achieved.” Esther Karanja, ICRAF

“The training has given me a chance to meet and discuss with journalists one on one, and has removed the fear I had about journalists. I now have linkages with a number of journalists, and also realized it is possible to develop a relationship with media. We needed to have more time with the media. For example, if we had participated in the other field trips it could have given us more chance to engage. Half a day field trip was not enough as it never gave us enough time to discuss and get to know each other for future linkages.” Josephine Kirui, ICRAF

## **Annex 1a: Journalists attending training**

Robert Koigi Muthoni, African Laughter news agency	Email: koigi@webaraza.com
Maina Waruru, Freelance journalist	Email: mainawaruru@yahoo.com
Wangari M Ndirangu, Kenya News Agency	Email: mawandi7@gmail.com
Lilian Museka, Freelance journalist	Email: lrmuseka@gmail.com
Lilian Otieno, Sauti FM, Kisumu	Email: atis44@yahoo.com
Gladys Nyambura Njoka, Ag Info Resource Centre	Email: gnnjoka@yahoo.com
Medina Ibrahim Asman, Community Radio Assoc of Kenya	Email: medibelle@yahoo.com
Judy Maina, Kenya Broadcasting Corporation	Email: judywamuyu@yahoo.com
Job Weru, The Standard Group	Email: joberu2001@yahoo.com
Tom Mathinji, Kenya Broadcasting Corporation	Email: tmathinji@yahoo.com
Salim Ndegwa Chiro, Pwani FM, Mombasa	Email: ndegwachiro2001@yahoo.com
Gitonga Njeru, Freelance journalist	Email: Charles.njeru@gmail.com

## **Annex 1b: Scientists and resource people**

Josephine Kirui, ICRAF
Yvonne Otieno, ICRAF (pre-course logistics; did not attend)
Esther Karanja, ICRAF
Sammy Carsan, ICRAF
Felister Makini, KARI-HQ (pre-course logistics; did not attend)
Margaret Muchui, KARI-Thika
Paul Kiuru, KARI-Thika
Samuel Kiiru, KARI-Thika
Joseph Karoga, KARI-Thika
Marsden Momanyi, CABI
Peter Karanja, CABI
Negussie Gurmessa, CABI
Kimani Chege, CABI



## **Annex 2c: Outputs in journalists' own publications and radio broadcasts**

### **Salim Chiro**

Three reports on Pwani FM, covering Fodder shrubs, Grafting and Plant clinics – in Swahili.

### **Judy Maina**

Fodder shrubs: a new partner to many farmers – report on KBC Radio

Plants get special 'doctors' – report on KBC Radio

### **Gladys Njoka**

Importance of fruit and vegetables in our body and our pockets - Radio Taifa/Sauti ya Mkenya (KBC) – in Swahili

Plant clinics - Radio Taifa/Sauti ya Mkenya (KBC) – in Swahili

### **Lilian Otieno**

Why we should venture into mixed farming - Sauti FM

Improve animal nutrition by planting fodder crops - Sauti FM

Creating awareness on Plant clinics- Sauti FM

### **Tom Mathinji**

Fodder production; pocket-friendly to farmers- KBC Radio – in Swahili

Plant health clinics for better crop production - KBC Radio – in English

### **Lilian Museka**

Farmers benefit as plant clinics take root – News from Africa website

Self-help group reaps from crop diversification – News from Africa website

### **Bob Koigi**

CABI plant clinics offer respite to farmers - Webarazafarmer.com

Plant clinics boost fight against diseases and pests - Business Daily

### **Wangari Ndirangu**

Farmers reap from fodder shrubs – Kenya Today

Passion boost to small-scale exporters – Kenya Today

Kiambu agricultural clinics expected to boost food production – Kenya Today

### **Job Weru, Medina Asman, Gitonga Njeru and Maina Waruru**

No information provided about published stories at time of report writing.

## **Annex 2d: Training timetable of activities**

### **Monday 14<sup>th</sup> March – ICRAF Campus**

AM – Scientists - Briefing on making most of media, and how to engage with journalists during the workshop.

– Journalists - Introduction to Better Science Reporting.

PM – Introduction for journalists on three projects to be covered during training workshop. Preparation for fodder shrubs (ICRAF) field visit.

**Tuesday 15<sup>th</sup> March – Limuru farm/ICRAF campus**

AM – Field trip to Limuru to interview ICRAF researchers and farmers growing fodder shrubs.

PM – Lessons learned from morning field trip. Preparation for niche crops (KARI) field trip.

**Wednesday 16<sup>th</sup> March – Thika farm/KARI-HQ**

AM – Field trip to KARI-Thika farmers' group to interview researchers and farmers diversifying into fruit crops.

PM – Lessons learned and processing material from first two field visits. Preparation for CABI field visit.

**Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> March – Wangige/KARI-HQ**

AM – Field trip to Wangige market Plant Clinic (CABI) to interview researchers, plant clinic staff and farmers.

PM – Lessons learned and processing material from field trips.

**Friday 18<sup>th</sup> March – KARI-HQ**

AM – Finalising reports and lessons learned from reporting activities.

PM – Concluding discussions between journalists and scientists from KARI, ICRAF and CABI. Evaluation of workshop and awarding of certificates.