

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

Science reporting capacity-building workshop

Kumasi, Ghana, February/March 2010

Summary

As part of WRENmedia's ongoing capacity building for African science reporters, seven West African journalists (print and radio) undertook a ten-day training workshop in Kumasi, Ghana. The workshop theme was Farming with Trees, with input from twelve resource people, including research staff from the Forestry Research Institute of Ghana (FORIG). Two days were spent 'in the field' at the Bobiri Forest Reserve. A local co-trainer (a participant on two previous better science reporting workshops) was employed to make contacts and arrangements prior to the course, and to give logistical and mentoring support during the workshop.

Lessons learned included: value of co-trainer, both logistically and to boost digital editing training capacity; having full formal partnership with local organisation proved difficult to arrange, but could be preferred for future workshops; trainees strongly valued the practical hands-on training format and the 'science safari' time, which allowed them to be immersed in the theme; technical difficulties with computer viruses and Windows/Mac incompatibility need to be addressed.

The trainees had a strong interest in the application of science in everyday life and business. This could form a theme for future workshops.

Context

The purpose of WRENmedia 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 WRENmedia'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 ten-day training workshop, using the following approach:

Selection of participants

A call for participant applications was made to print and radio journalists from West Africa with an interest in reporting on scientific topics, through communication and media contacts in the region, including members of a CTA forum on the role of media in agriculture and rural development. From around 55 applicants, eight trainees were selected, four working in radio and four from print media houses, including three Ghanaians, two Cameroonians, and one each from Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Liberia. Unfortunately, the Liberian participant, a radio



Nigerian participant Aveseh Asough interviews Lovans Owusu Takyi from the Kumasi Institute of Tropical Agriculture, to find out about urban tree planting and agroforestry (WRENmedia)

journalist with Radio Veritas, failed to join the group, which was therefore reduced to seven. The course was planned and run in collaboration with Kofi Adu Domfeh, a Kumasi-based radio reporter who had attended two previous Better Science Reporting workshops with WRENmedia, with the aim of building his capacity in event management and delivering training.

Duration

The course was longer than previously (10 days, compared to 8), partly because of longer journeys in-country to bring the non-Ghanaians to the training venue in Kumasi, and also to allow more time for gathering information from researchers, and to hone print and radio assignments.

Theme

The workshop introduced a new theme for coverage – farming with trees. Topics included: tree propagation techniques; extension approaches for tree crop farmers; agroforestry and integration of trees on farms; scientific validation of medicinal products; and improved production through pest and disease control.

Location

Following the format of the previous workshop, the training venue was in a quiet location, in an area where there are several training institutions, several kilometres from the centre of Kumasi. The facilities were comfortable but not luxurious, which helped to establish a focused atmosphere for the training, and perhaps differentiate it from previous, hotel-based, event-linked training courses the participants may have attended.

Scientist/research input

Twelve resource people, involved in the science of farming with trees, or communication of science, were invited to run briefing and Q and A sessions for the trainees during the course of the workshop. A ‘science safari’ was organised to the Bobiri Forest Reserve, where the trainees spent two days experiencing a forest environment, learning about forest tree species, and discussing community forest management approaches with researchers. This gave first-hand experience of the links between science, forestry and the livelihoods of forest fringe communities.



The ‘science safari’ to Bobiri Forest Reserve near Kumasi was the first opportunity for many of the participants to experience a forest environment, and learn about the different uses of forest trees.

(WRENmedia)

Experts included: several research staff from the Forestry Research Institute of Ghana, with expertise in domestication of wild species (seed preparation and grafting), community forest management and climate change mitigation; an extension specialist from the IITA Sustainable Tree Crops Program; a pharmaceutical scientist involved with medicinal drug development; a lecturer in agroforestry; a recently graduated agroforestry pioneer; a pest and disease specialist from the Cocoa Research Institute of Ghana; and a campaigner for forest protection. For insight into the commercial application of sustainable farming with trees, the group was taken to visit a farm to meet the agronomist and farm manager involved in integrating indigenous trees into pineapple production.

The trainees had each undertaken pre-course assignments to gather information and interviews in their own country hence they were well prepared to get the maximum benefit from their interactions with the visiting researchers. They had the chance for one-to-one interviews as well as a whole group question and answer session, which followed each researcher’s briefing. Each researcher spent approximately two hours with the group, and each had their own time slot within the course, without over-lapping with any other, except during the science safari, where two researchers took part in a discussion with the group.

Beyond the workshop

Outputs from the training included radio reports during the workshop on a local Kumasi radio station. On their return home participants reported on farming with trees on air and in print in four countries. An article from one of the correspondents was also featured in [New Agriculturist](#), and a resource pack on farming with trees (see www.agfax.net) distributed to 80 radio stations across Africa.

Since the workshop, several of the participants have taken up WRENmedia's offer of continued mentoring, through editorial guidance and support for their own work and through commissions, and editing of articles and radio features for New Agriculturist and AGFAX respectively. Two participants from Ghana and Nigeria showed particular promise and ability in their print and radio assignments, and have been offered commissions that could lead to them becoming regular WRENmedia correspondents.

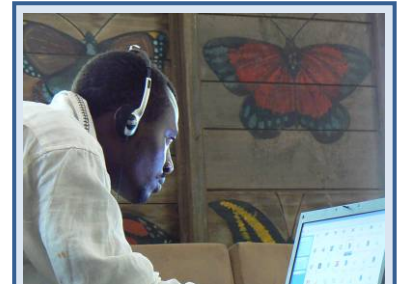
Lessons learned

- Role of local co-trainer was vital, in contacting people and making arrangements before the workshop, and giving logistical support during the training, as well as having digital editing skills to support and train participants. This last element was especially important as two radio trainees had little or no experience of digital editing, and needed a lot of one-to-one support.
- FORIG staff were extremely helpful in making arrangements for accommodation, transport and interaction with scientists. Without this help, the course would not have gone so smoothly. This was done out of generosity of spirit rather than a formal arrangement, and perhaps highlights the need for a closer, and more formalised involvement by a research institution or other partner organisation. Attempts by WRENmedia to attract such interest from organisations in the region prior to the course, were unsuccessful, and it is regrettable that researchers and institutions do not always value the opportunity to engage with the media in this way.
- Heat and humidity were a problem at times, especially in combination with frequent power cuts. While the trainers are keen to use relatively simple facilities, this must be balanced with having a suitable working environment.
- More detailed advance communication with visiting speakers needed. Some travelled long distances to reach the training venue, which should have entitled them to more money for transport costs. Instead, these had to be negotiated on the spot.
- Trainees strongly valued the input of the visiting speakers and time for interaction and interviews, and the practical nature of the training, in gathering and processing information, rather than having a more conventional training format.
- Some trainees commented that they wanted the opportunity to talk to farmers/community members, something that has happened on previous courses but did not on this one until the group was taken to visit a pineapple farm on the last day. Some also regretted the extent of the focus on Ghana, and wished to have speakers from other countries.
- Science safari to Bobiri Forest Reserve was important in maintaining motivation and energy for the training. The trainees enjoyed it as something very unusual and special. It gave a change of location, while remaining closely connected to the theme of the training.



Aaron Kaah learns the value of trees on a pineapple farm, with Blue Skies agronomist Ernest Abloh (WRENmedia)

- A daily competitive quiz on the science covered generated lively discussion and helped trainees to appreciate the importance of accuracy and detail in science reporting.
- Having largely young (25-35) participants contributed to a good group dynamic. The trainees also enjoyed being able to get to know people from other countries.
- A problem developed with the external hard drive on which the trainees' assignments were being saved, due to poor compatibility between Windows and Mac systems, as well as repeated power surges and failures and computer viruses on the participants' own laptops. We need to develop a rigorous system for cleansing all equipment brought to the course of viruses, and a triple back up system for saving course outputs.
- The theme of the training, Farming with trees, was sufficiently broad and varied to capture the trainees' interest.
- Some trainees remarked that the pre-course assignments were given too late, such that they didn't have enough time to gather sufficient information.
- While accepting the limitations of the venues, some trainees were not happy about sharing rooms for the first night and later for two nights at the Forest Reserve.



The Bobiri Forest Reserve guest house provided a quiet working environment for the trainees' assignments, during the 'science safari'. (WRENmedia)

Going forward

Whilst there is journalistic enthusiasm and merit in reporting research at the pure end of the spectrum there is often increased story-value, and greater audience interest, in the application of science in everyday life or business. For example the group was very interested in the commercialisation (and possible replication with other tree species) of the *Allanblackia* domestication research rather than just focusing on the research input that kick-started it; and farming with trees, and the economic and practical advantages, was really brought to life by an agronomist and a farm manager explaining how they apply the science in the field as part of a very successful business. Therefore the application of science, and enthusiastic explanations from those who are using it in the workplace, could be the focus of a future training event: giving more attention to science in action rather than just science in the institution.

Journalist feedback

Overall, the feedback from the week's training was extremely positive. Both numerical and anecdotal feedback was gathered at the end of the course by WRENmedia. The following scores were given for various aspects of the workshop, averaging the responses from the seven participants. All scores are out of a maximum of five.

Organisation prior to the course	4.93
Organisation during the course	4.43
Accommodation and meals	4.57
Length of course	5
Time spent in rural area	5
Training venue chosen	4.67
Variety of activities each day	5
Interaction with visiting speakers	4.86

“Having fun and working hard at the same time makes learning easier, and that’s just what we had - fun and great lessons. I feel lucky to have been part of this training.” Louisa Yeboako, Ghana

“I feel challenged, I will try to write more on science because before I saw it as a difficult task. But now I know I can easily do it. I am thinking of going to institutions especially FORIG, Soil Research, CRI to get information because now I know I can write easily.” Louisa Yeboako, Ghana



Local co-trainer Kofi Adu Domfeh (second from left) provided organisational and logistical support before and during the training, as well as one-to-one digital editing support to the radio journalists. (WRENmedia)

“Everything I learned here is new to me; how to be accurate in your reportage and be sharp - going straight to your point, making your audience understand what you are trying to get across to them. You have to be concise.” Kingsley Hope, Ghana

“The course content was particularly important to me because I am specialised in working with farmers and for farmers. I just feel like I am going to start reporting for the first time.” Joy Ful, Cameroon

“In the past, when you got information from the scientist and you did not understand, you would say, “Ah, but that is the way they said it,” and you take it and you put it in your article. But now I have seen something different. You take it and you make sure that you understand what they are talking about. That is what I have learnt here. You understand very well what they are talking about and then you transmit this information to people and make them understand.” Joy Ful, Cameroon

“We have the Savannah Agricultural Research Institute. They also do a lot of research but sadly most of what they do ends up on the shelves because it is not reported. Now that I have the skills, I will always visit them, interview them, go to their research work and try and break it down into interesting stories for people to read. This is what I intend to do.” Bernice Agyekwena, Ghana

“I have improved my reporting skills generally. First of all appropriate language to use as a reporter reporting science and in some editing techniques, some live reporting techniques and some writing skills. And as I said the appropriate language, being able to make science relevant to the common man. I will be able to, from what I gain from this course, be able to communicate with them and they would understand and find science important in their work, their daily work as farmers.” Aveseh Asough, Nigeria

“We have been able to touch, we have been able to see, we have been able to actively participate, we have been able to interact and I think that has been one of the strengths of this workshop for me. One of the other things I have learnt from the workshop is even to organise a workshop within my reach, we should be able to make it interactive, get resource persons, get the people who can tell the story the way it is, make it more practical. Let people not only hear, let them touch.” Aaron Kaah, Cameroon

“Before I came to this workshop I used to see scientists like people who were there just to do things that were pleasing to them. I did not see them as part of development. But now I have discovered that these scientists are people who add a lot of value, meaning to existence. I now think that for me to actually succeed and to get the messages to farmers, I have to incorporate researchers and scientists into my work.” Aaron Kaah, Cameroon

“I started science reporting just about six months back. In fact the best thing that I found interesting is the digital editing and also the feature writing, writing the cue and also how to gather information to do a certain report or certain features - who are the resource persons, who are we supposed to contact? I think I have gained all of that knowledge and it is very vital for me.” Yvette Cole Smith, Sierra Leone

Researcher feedback

“The encounter with the journalists was quite enlightening because I realised the yawning gap between us scientists and the media; in particular I recognised the need to make extra effort to use language that they could understand so that they could appreciate the essence of the work we do as scientists. My brief interaction was an eye-opener in many ways, and I have since been mulling over how to engage with the media more effectively.”

Ernest Foli, FORIG

“My encounter with the journalists gave a feeling that the work I am doing is important and relevant to people that I have not met or never will meet personally. Talking with the journalists and granting an interview makes a connection more than writing a scientific paper or giving a presentation to a scientific audience.”

Paul Bosu, FORIG

“I think my time was well spent and I value the opportunity to explain my area of work to the media. I think the encounter has improved my relationship with the media in that I now want to get the media to cover almost every program I present. It was a good experience.”

Lovans Owusu-Takyi, KNUST

“It was a good opportunity for me to explain to the media much about what I have been doing over the years. The coverage has been great and the public have learnt a lot about the species in question (*Allanblackia*). People who heard me on air were happy and were congratulating me on what I have achieved so far. And I was happy to hear that too.”

Theresa Peprah, FORIG

Annex 1a: Journalists attending training

Yvette Cole Smith, Sierra Leone Broadcasting Service	Email: yvettecolesmith@yahoo.com
Kingsley E Hope, New Times Corporation, Kumasi, Ghana	Email: Elikinhop7@yahoo.com
Aaron Kaah, Abakwa FM/Oku Radio/Radio Bamenda, Cameroon	Email: aaronkah@yahoo.co.uk
Aveseh Asough, Aso Radio, Abuja, Nigeria	Email: titana80@yahoo.com
Joy Ful, The Farmer's Voice, Bamenda, Cameroon	Email: yusimbom2001@yahoo.com
Bernice Agyekwena, Rural Media Network, Tamale, Ghana	Email: anice732001@yahoo.com
Louisa Yeboako, Ghanaian Times and Spectator	Email: yeboako@yahoo.com

Failed to attend:

Prince Collins, Radio Veritas, Monrovia, Liberia	Email: princecollinsyes@yahoo.com
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Annex 1b: Visiting experts

Ernest Foli, Senior research scientist, Forestry Research Institute (FORIG), Kumasi, Ghana
Theresa Peprah, Research Scientist (tree domestication specialist), FORIG, Ghana
Eric Nutakor, Social research scientist, FORIG, Ghana
Ralph Owusu-Antwi, Dispensing Technology (medicine development), Kumasi Polytechnic
Gilbert Anim-Kwapong, Cocoa disease and pest specialist, Cocoa Research Institute of Ghana
Lovans Owusu-Takyi, Agroforestry specialist, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi
Michael Ahala, Agriculture graduate, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi
Emmanuel Kwesi Nfor, public awareness campaigner, Rainforest Friends, Ghana
Paul Bosu, Research Scientist, Community Forestry, FORIG, Ghana
Stephen Adu Bredu, Research Scientist, Community Forestry, FORIG, Ghana
Sylvanus Agordorku, Extension specialist, Sustainable Tree Crops Program, IITA
Ernest Abloh, Chief Agronomist, Blue Skies Ltd., Ghana

Annex 2a: Print outputs in AGFAX Resource: Farming with trees

Print articles:

Allanblackia – a boost to the cosmetic industry

Children in the forefront to restore Ghana's forest

Moringa for food security

Communities encouraged to conserve forest

Cocoa farming – a promising future for youth?

Fact sheets

Using trees to improve soil fertility

Integrating trees into the farming system

Tree propagation

Glossary of tree science terms

'Meet my tree' factsheets

Sheanut

Kola nut

Moringa

Cocoa

Prunus Africana

Cashew

Annex 2b: Radio outputs in AGFAX Resource: Farming with trees

Interviews

Teresa Peprah – propagating trees through grafting

Ernest Foli – an overview of farming with trees

Ernest Abloh – linking environment and farming

Paul Bosu – children and trees

Paul Bosu – community forest management

Michael Ahala – agroforestry for young people

Gilbert Anim-Kwapong – Rejuvenating cashew trees

Features

Vox Pop on farming with trees

Urban trees

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

Oil rich tree unites farmers, researchers, businessmen – published in The Farmer’s Voice newspaper, Cameroon

Publication of further articles by Joy Ful and other participants in forthcoming editions of The Famers Voice, Cameroon

A tree that could change fortunes of Unilever and Ghanaian farmers – article in Ghanaian Times, 23/3/10

From Shea butter to chocolate – to be published in Ghanaian Times/Spectator

Radio and television reports on farming with trees – Sierra Leone Broadcasting Service

Broadcasting outputs from the course on ‘Calling the farmer’ programme, Abakwa FM (Bamenda, Cameroon)

Publication of ‘Journalists sharpen their skills in science reporting’ article in Ghanaian Times, 27th March, 2010

Trees in our towns and cities/ Herbs still heal – reports for Radio Netherlands International

Interviews recorded by Kofi Adu Domfeh and broadcast on Luv FM, Ghana:

- Theresa Peprah – Allanblackia seed treatment for propagation
- Dr. Anim Kwapong - Adding value to cocoa
- Sylvanus Agordoku - STCP and Video Viewing clubs
- Dr. Ernest Foli - Farming with trees overview
- Ernest Abloh - Blue Skies local expansion and investments in trees
- Stephen Adu-Bredu - projects in carbon credit trading
- Dr. Paul Bosu – Ecotourism
- Samuel Owusu-Takyi – Kumasi Institute of Tropical Agriculture support for farmers
- Eric Nutakor - Forest management to promote tourism