

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

Science reporting capacity-building workshop Nairobi, Kenya, September 2009

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 chose to trial a new approach as follows:

Selection of participants

We selected 8 participants from those who showed most promise and interest in reporting on science at three earlier courses (held in Arusha, Mombasa and Ibadan), in order to further build their skills.

Duration

The course was longer than previously (8 days, compared to 6), to allow for more and better quality time gathering information from researchers, and to hone print and radio assignments.

Theme

The workshop introduced a new theme for coverage – livestock science. Topics included: animal health in remote areas; poultry feed development; controlling livestock diseases; pastoralist land management; and small-scale dairy production and marketing.

Location

The workshop took place in a more focused environment than the previous workshops, with the trainees and trainers based in a private guesthouse, about 5 km from the centre of Nairobi. As a result, participants continued to work on assignments and retain their focus outside formal training hours, rather than be distracted by other opportunities.

Scientist/research input

Eight resource people, involved in an aspect of livestock science, or communication of science, were invited to brief the trainees during the course of the workshop. A 'science safari' to the South Rift valley, where the trainees spent two days interviewing researchers and Maasai pastoralists, gave first-hand experience of how science relates to the lives of livestock keepers.

Experts included: a private poultry consultant; Kenya's Community Animal Health Network coordinator; an ILRI scientist; an FAO epidemiologist; the chairman of Kenya's Science and Environment Journalists' Association; the chairman of a Maasai group ranch and landowners

association; and two science communicators who have been developing Science Cafés in Africa.

The trainees had each undertaken a pre-course assignment 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 2 hours with the group, and each had their own time slot within the course, without over-lapping with any other.

Beyond the workshop

Outputs from the training included articles and a personal perspective in the current edition of [New Agriculturist](#), a resource pack on livestock science (see www.agfax.net), distributed to 80 radio stations across Africa, as well as radio features and print articles for the participants' own programmes and publications in six countries. A short video made by the journalists, documenting 'a day in the life of livestock science in Africa' can be found at this link: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BULdKEUhNGs>

Building from the workshop, WRENmedia is planning to develop its mentoring of southern print journalists, through increased commissioning and editing of articles for [New Agriculturist](#), and through the development of a [New Agriculturist](#) writers' network. This will enable greater sharing of advice and guidance, with writers more able to share experiences, editorial lessons and other writing tips. Since the workshop, several trainees have followed up with the visiting researchers, to clarify points made etc.

Lessons learned

- More time (2 days) spent on location to see science in action enabled greater breadth and depth of understanding of issues
- Small group and one-to-one interviews gave scientists and journalists maximum contact in time available Invited science speakers need to be strongly advised not to rely too heavily on powerpoint as means to inform and inspire their audience. Preparing a briefing sheet of main issues/findings/implications is a good idea.
- A daily team quiz helped in consolidation and assessment of participants' grasp of key points
- Lack of synchronized arrival and particularly departure of trainees was unfortunate, but hard to avoid given differences in flight times
- Limited internet availability helped to maintain focus on the course
- Size of accommodation and training rooms a bit small
- Small, private venue meant good interactions between participants outside training hours
- Immersion in livestock-keeping area was valuable learning experience
- Change of pace and environment over middle weekend was beneficial

- Attempting to provide personal, professional and technical support to trainees was challenging
- Visiting speakers were invited to attend for 1 hour each, but most stayed for 2 hours, which should have been anticipated
- Individual trainees were responsible for meeting and greeting visitors, and facilitating the question and answer sessions, which worked well
- While the daily training schedule was flexible and responsive to learner needs, further development of training materials, for both print and radio, could be helpful in strengthening key skills, both for future and former trainees.
- The ratio of 8 trainees to 2 trainers was excellent, in allowing a sufficient level of one-to-one support
- Livestock science was a good choice of theme, as none of the trainees were very proficient in reporting the subject. But the theme was very wide; less breadth and more depth of focus may be a better option for future courses.

Going forward

Taking these lessons on board, an eight day course for a new group of trainees is now in preparation, to take place in February 2010 in Kumasi, Ghana. Applications are being invited from print and radio journalists in West Africa, particularly Anglophones working in Ghana, Nigeria, Cameroon, Sierra Leone, Liberia and The Gambia. The intention is to select four radio and four print journalists for the course. The theme for the course will be trees and agriculture – to include topics such as fruit farming; domestication of wild species; shade farming; coffee, cocoa and nut farming; and multiple use trees on farm (fodder, fertilizer, firewood, medicinal etc). Kofi Adu Domfeh, who attended the training courses in Ibadan and Nairobi, will be a co-trainer.

The course will include a ‘science safari’, to give the participants extended contact with farmers and scientists and a chance to learn more about trees at close quarters.

Journalist feedback

Overall, the feedback from the week’s training was very positive. Both numerical and anecdotal feedback were gathered at the end of the course. The following scores were given for various aspects of the workshop, averaging the responses from the eight participants. (All scores are out of a maximum of 5) :

Organisation prior to the course	4.25
Organisation during the course	4.25
Accommodation and meals	3.85
Length of course	4.5
Time spent in rural area	4.88

Training venue chosen	4.5
Variety of activities each day	4.13
Interaction with visiting speakers	4
Usefulness and interest of course	4.88

“It helped me focus on the writing of the intros, because I think the intro is the heart of your story. If it is focused the rest of the body flows. And secondly, also that science reporting in itself is scientific.” Busani Bafana, Zimbabwe

“I was one of those people who used to think that pastoralists were backwards people. But having gone to the South Rift Valley I have discovered that these people have a wealth of knowledge. These people know so many things that can be validated by science. And I have come to really respect them because they do things in a systematic way. Pastoralists are not backward people.” Oluyinka Alawode, Nigeria

“The task I’ve set for myself now is to call or to draw the attention of people who do policies, to do them better, and to present them for all to see.” Adeleke O’Adeyemi, Nigeria

“I think the element of going behind the scene, by that I mean besides just listening to a scientist or the so-called official statistics, we also need to get down to the grassroots and see what is it that maybe corroborates whatever is being said. I think that is what I’ve learnt to do, that I need to also get to know the perspective from the communities.” Henry Neondo, Kenya

“It’s quite a new venture and I should be proud to say maybe I should be the first Ugandan journalist to be going deep into animal health and livestock. Because I’m sure none, any other journalist can be able to report the way I have, the knowledge I have is better than any other person in Uganda.” Pius Sawa, Uganda

“The selection was very good simply because we came to a very quiet place and we had time with our resource persons to ask what we wanted. It’s more helpful in the sense that we had huge amount of time, unlike Mombasa where researchers were rushing to do their presentations and other things.” Geoffrey Onditi, Kenya

“I have just realised that livestock is science. I have been producing about agriculture and livestock but I didn’t think it was science. So I am going to educate the pastoralists more about diseases, how they can treat the animals, through the radio. I have a 30 minute programme which is broadcast at least once per week. So I’m going to do that. And also about dairy, how they can keep milk, but also adding value.” Lazarus Laiser, Tanzania

“I am going back home with the mindset of doing everything possible to take a critical look at the livestock sector in my country. I want to look at other sectors of livestock, poultry, sheep and goat, pig and any other livestock activity, whether domestic or commercial. I will be able to use my media outfit to help improve that sector for food security and of course improving livelihoods and incomes.” Kofi Adu Domfeh, Ghana

Researcher feedback

“I did value the opportunity to talk about the work that we are doing, and it gave me the opportunity to think about the main messages that I want to put across – something I had not really done before. I will definitely think about how we can engage more directly with the media in future, rather than simply working within the scientific

or NGO world. But it has to be in this more direct way, where you can spend time making sure perceptions and facts are correct.” Samantha Russell, ACC

“I had a wonderful time, trying to get the journalists to understand what we are trying to do. Pastoralism is not well understood by many who report on it. Journalists need ample time to understand issues, because if they don’t then you get wrong media coverage that can be disastrous. I have always seen the media people as a team who like to harass you with many questions. But this trip made me feel like they try to do this for the right reason.” John Kamanga, SORALO

“Yes, it was great to share part of my work with the journalists. I feel that for the media to be objective, critical and educative they need to get the facts in a clear simple way. Most scientists unfortunately are unable to put their research results across.” Humphrey Mbugua, independent consultant

Annex 1a: Journalists attending training

Pius Sawa radio journalist, Radio Sapientia, Uganda	Email: sawapius@yahoo.com
Lazarus Laiser, radio journalist, Radio Habari Maalum, Tanzania	Email: lazarusls@yahoo.co.uk
Adeleke Adeyemi, print journalist, Timeless Courage media, Nairobi	Email: mainasara@gmail.com
Oluyinka Alawode, print journalist, Business Day newspaper, Nigeria	Email:ajiyinka@yahoo.com
Henry Neondo, print journalist, Africa Science News Service, Kenya	Email: neondohenry@yahoo.com
Busani Bafana, print journalist, University of Science and Technology, Zimbabwe	Email: bafana@netconnect.co.zw
Geoffrey Onditi, radio journalist, KBC, Kenya	Email: aglife@kbc.co.ke
Kofi Adu Domfeh, radio journalist, Luv FM, Ghana	Email: adomfeh@yahoo.com

Annex 1b: Visiting experts

Josephine Mugambi, Community Animal Health Network Coordinator, Kenya
Humphrey Mbugua, independent consultant on poultry production, Kenya
Sam Okuthe, Epidemiologist, FAO Transboundary livestock disease programme, Kenya
Samantha Russell, Grassland ecology researcher, African Conservation Centre, Kenya
John Kamanga, Chairman of South Rift Landowners Association, Kenya
Amos Omore, Dairy and dairy marketing researcher, ILRI
Ochieng Ogodo, Chairman of the Kenya Science and Environment Journalists' Association...
Juliette Mutheu and Ruth Wanjala, science communication experts, Kenya