

# Support for Dissemination Within University Structures

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of Research for Uptake and Utilisation  
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# The Importance of Institutional Investment

- Training academics vital – but
- Academics cannot make all the difference
  
- Professional support is vital – but
- Needs to be accessible
  
- Can institutional investment bridge the gap?

# Areas of Existing Investment

- Research support
- Technology transfer offices
- Extension and community outreach
- Public relations and communication

# Working within these structures could

- Help bridge the gap between a central facility and the individual
- Prove cost effective
- Be sustainable – universities already invest in the structures concerned
- Provide better access to new developments
- Contribute to wider capacity building

# And the potential exists to do so . . .

Organising annual exhibitions at the university. All the Units within the University present their innovations, research findings, projects and publications to stakeholders. Most recent is the Makerere University Academic Fair Exhibition held 1-14 July 2008 in the Freedom Square.

In addition, we also organised the Makerere University Stakeholder's exhibition in March 2009 "Repositioning Makerere to meet emerging development challenges." Still, University units presented their innovations, research findings, projects and publications to stakeholders.

Makerere University Public Relations Office also organises other units to participate in exhibitions organised by partner institutions and line ministries. These include participation in exhibitions organised by the National Council for Higher Education; Ministry of Education and Sports, and in different international fora.

NUST sourced funding from Kellogg Foundation for the development of rural communities with special focus on one community South West of Bulawayo. He then set up an Institute of Rural Technologies. The Vice- Chancellor strategically used our office to publicise and market the concept first to the rural community for them to buy into the projects and later to the University Community so as to involve as many faculties and departments as possible. The PR Department made visits to the community first to explain the merits of the impending projects and later to capture progress and put it in the media for all to see.

*NUST, Zimbabwe*

I have been running PR setup at North West Frontier Province, Peshawar, Pakistan since 2004 and in 2007 my university was awarded with ACU PR Award on presenting media campaign under outreach and community relations.

UET's PR office started informing the public of its state of the art centre, Gemstone Development Centre, first of its kind in Pakistan and with direct efforts of PR office, we have now successfully signed a contract with the FATA Development Program for Livelihood project, in collaboration with USAID-Pakistan to start a series of capacity building of individuals from this deprived region which will empower them economically, resulting in the social and economic uplift of the country.

*University of Engineering and Technology, Peshawar*

# . . . But there are also constraints

- **Perceptions** – Historical role of the PR office limited; perceptions of ‘administration’ role
- **University Agendas** – May be driven more towards academic prestige or student marketing
- **Skills** – writing, communication, cultural, internal tact and diplomacy
- **Internal Communication** – Research and PR offices talk to each other too little!
- **External Networking** – need to emphasise ‘professional’ status both within higher education and in the wider profession



# Possible Solutions 1

If we had more science writers on our staff, we would be able to disseminate research articles in a much more productive way. We have three journalists in our division, who respectively double up as editors of a weekly electronic newsletter ... we have various community interaction projects based on academic research which make for excellent stories.

# Possible Solutions 2

I believe we have identified a successful means of getting the news of excellent research out there. We employ a freelancer (who is well respected in the industry. She forwards the stories to the newspaper / magazine. They are generally only too pleased to have such well written articles (i.e. not the usual press releases).

# An Agenda for the DFID Initiative

- **INFORMATION GATHERING** – we need to know more about the current functions, capacity and skills of university research support and PR offices
- **NEEDS ASSESSMENT** – what interventions, additional skills or resources could improve the contribution to research dissemination
- **NETWORK DEVELOPMENT** – development of professional structures, benchmarking and other tools to share good practice and reinforce the notion of a profession
- **TRAINING AND SUPPORT** – development of a programme of central support for the development of institutional structures

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