

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

Science reporting capacity-building workshop for journalists and researchers Arusha, Tanzania, March 2008

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 better communicate research and development issues

As a pilot initiative, twelve journalists from Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda were selected to attend a one-week DFID-funded training course held in parallel with a meeting of more than 200 researchers and experts from over 50 countries on neglected plants, in Arusha, Tanzania during March 2008.

The symposium on "*Underutilized plants for food, nutrition, income and sustainable development*" provided the journalists with a focus for their reporting and the opportunity to improve their understanding of the issues.

Nature of the training

Sessions on content-gathering, photography, news and feature writing, as well as digital editing, enabled the trainees to improve their technical skills in science reporting. Training was needs-based and involved working with the participants on a range of styles according to their preferences, strengths and weaknesses. Those with different skills were partnered to work together on collaborative productions so one partner mentored another (digital editing, mixing, using a translator/dubbing in voiceovers]. Journalists participated in a field trip to a local market, an organic farmer and a biofuel factory. Whilst this gave journalists an opportunity to record interviews/collect stories from outside the conference, joining the conference participants and being tied to their schedule was not ideal as it limited their time and opportunities to interact with and interview key speakers of interest.

Collaborating with researchers: 'Making the most of the media'

An evening event was held for interested researchers attending the conference to learn more about interacting with the press. The evening was light-hearted in style with the journalists performing sketches, including caricatures of bad journalists/scientists in interview situations. The event also offered conference participants the chance to discuss the importance of making the most of the media and ways of developing good, clear messages appropriate to the audience. Over 40 researchers attended and feedback was very positive.

The value of this event was evident from:

- Number of researchers keen to interact with the journalists to highlight particular issues presented at the symposium.

- Awareness of participants to the presence of the journalists and the intended radio/print outputs from the week, thus building a foundation for researchers to be more comfortable and proactive with their local media.
- Increased confidence of the journalists in capturing and sharing science stories, and that a feeling that their contribution to communicating science was taken more seriously.

Journalist feedback

Overall, the feedback from the week's training was very positive and the journalists reported that all the training activities had been worthwhile. Feedback on the journalists' progress was also provided, which they found very constructive. The majority of participants requested longer training but emphasised the value of holding training alongside a major conference, providing a greater opportunity to enhance skills, whilst collecting stories and meeting a wide spectrum of researchers.

"The setting gave us the opportunity to meet scientists and to discuss the information, which helped to correct misunderstandings and avoid misreporting." *Salome Alweny, journalist for Monitor newspaper, Uganda*

"This week has helped to build relationships and friendships between the research community and the media. The participants have also learned we are an effective channel for them to convey their messages to farmers and the wider public." *Lazarus Laiser, radio journalist, Arusha, Tanzania.*

"I suggest that field trip for journalists should be a whole day or to have more of them to practice our skills and not be so rushed with having to travel with other conference participants." *Winnie Oniyimbo, radio journalist, Kenya*

Researcher feedback

Researchers at the conference responded very positively to the presence of the journalists and on the opportunity to get messages and stories across to a wider audience.

"In my new position at IITA I hope there will be opportunities (and need) to work with such excellent journalists." *Irmgard Hoeschle-Zeledon, Coordinator, GFU for Underutilized Species*

Beyond the workshop

Outputs from the training included [articles](#) and a summary of [viewpoints](#) in the current edition of [New Agriculturist](#), a series of radio programmes on making more of neglected species (see www.agfax.net), distributed to over 200 radio stations across Africa, as well as radio features and print articles for the journalists' own programmes and publications in three countries. A selection of case studies written by the journalists will also be featured on the [Global Facilitation Unit for Underutilized Species](#) (GFU) website.

Two journalists from the training have joined our existing network of correspondents (five also attended the training), which provides an opportunity to receive ongoing mentoring through commissions to produce radio for Agfax and the Radio Resource Packs, and articles for New Agriculturist.

Conclusions and considerations for further training

- Hold a pre-course warm-up session the evening before first full day of working together.
- Keep the interactive/participative content high. The role play and photography sessions were very good for this.
- Number of participants should be maximum of 10 (6 radio and 4 print).
- Recruit one of the past trainees as assistant producer/trainer.
- Need more laptops and cameras.
- Need separate field trip to gather material.
- Awarding prizes, certificates and photos on CD is good for morale.
- Journalists need business cards with contact details to hand to their interviewees to explain who they are and why they are at the event and in some instances to ease future collaboration.
- More detailed follow-up on broadcast/print activities in country as result of training.
- In the next courses (tentatively planned for either Cape Town, S. Africa or Mombasa, Kenya) we plan to make securing a place on the course a little more competitive so we have tighter selection criteria.

Annex 1a: Journalists attending training

Michael Wambi, radio journalist, Voice of Teso, Uganda Email: kangatiwambi@yahoo.co.uk

Pius Sawa radio journalist, Radio Sapientia, Uganda Email: sawapius@yahoo.com

Grace Musimami print journalist, Farmers Media, Uganda Email: musimamig_kez@yahoo.com

Salome Alweny, journalist, Monitor newspaper, Uganda Email: salomealweny@yahoo.com

Eric Kadenge, radio journalist, Trans World Radio, Kenya Email: ekadenge@yahoo.com

Winnie Onyimbo, radio journalist, Trans World Radio, Kenya Email: wonyimbotwr@yahoo.com

Ebby Watsami, print journalist, Biosafety News, Kenya Email: wamatsi2000@yahoo.com

Zablon Odhiambo, freelance writer, Kenya, Email: zedqbee@yahoo.com

Lazarus Laiser, radio journalist, Radio Habari Maalum, Tanzania Email: lazarusls@yahoo.co.uk

Yussuf Kajenje, First Mile Project, Tanzania Email: kajenje2002@yahoo.com

Rose Reuben, radio journalist, Tanzania Broadcasting Corporation Email: rosereuben2@gmail.com

Benedict Komba, radio journalist, Radio Tanzania Email: benkomba6@yahoo.com

Annex 1b: Researchers who registered for 'Making most of media'

Note: Thirty signed up for the meeting (names given below) although around forty-five people attended.

1. Lois Engelberger, Let's Go Local Initiative, Micronesia
2. Narayan Hedge, BAIF Development Research Foundation, India

3. Margaret Pasquini, Bangor University, UK
4. I Vorster, ARC-Roodeplaat Vegetable and Ornamental Plant Institute, South Africa
5. Gus Le Breton, Phyto Trade Africa (the Southern African Natural Products Trade Association), Zimbabwe
6. John Woodend, CTA, Netherlands
7. Gordana Kranjac-Berisavljevic, University for Development Studies, Ghana
8. Suzanne Sharrock, Botanic Gardens Conservation International, UK
9. Anbes Tenaye Kidane, Areka Agricultural Research Centre, Ethiopia
10. Mohammad Abdur Rahim, Bangladesh Agricultural University, Bangladesh
11. Bronwen Powell, McGill University, Canada
12. Citlalli Lopez, Centro de Investigaciones Tropicales CITRO, Mexico
13. Irmgard Hoeschle-Zeledon, GFU for Underutilized Species, Italy
14. Hayu Dyah Patria, Independent Researcher, Indonesia
15. Oladimeji Idowu Oladele, University of Ibadan, Nigeria
16. John Griffis, University of Hawai'i, USA
17. Israel Oliver King, MS Swaminathan Research Foundation, India
18. Dinkarrao Amrutrao Patil, LKPR Ghogrey Science College, India
19. Victor AJ Adekunle, Akure University, Nigeria
20. Gail Baccus-Taylor, University of the West Indies, Trinidad and Tobago
21. Francis Oundo, Matayos Self Help Youth Group, Kenya
22. Daniel Osmond Taylor, Ministry of Social Development, Trinidad
23. Kalyanasundaram Kumaran, Tamil Nadu Agricultural University, India
24. Timothy Motis, Educational Concerns for Hunger Organization, USA
25. Nieyidouba Lamien, Institut de l'Environnement et de Recherches Agricoles (INREA), Burkina Faso
26. Mary Onyango, Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture, Kenya
27. Bosco Kahindi, Kilifi Utamaduni Conservation Group, Kenya
28. Bhuwon Ratna Sthapit, Biodiversity International, Nepal
29. Dilip Nandwani, CREES Northern Marianas College, Northern Mariana Islands
30. Krishna Prasad Acharya, Department of Forest Research and Survey, Nepal