

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

Science reporting capacity-building workshop

Nairobi, Kenya – October 2011

Summary

As part of WRENmedia's ongoing capacity building for African scientists and science reporters, twelve East African journalists (print and radio) undertook a five-day training workshop in Nairobi. The workshop was organised in partnership with the Kenya Agricultural Research Institute (KARI) and research staff from this institute received media awareness training, as part of the workshop. The journalists attended two field trips in order to gather stories on a plant genebank, push-pull pest control in maize and Newcastle Disease vaccination. Training sessions on better science reporting techniques were conducted by one trainer from WRENmedia and two local co-trainers.

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 five-day training workshop, using the following approach:

Reporting skills

On the opening day, trainees were encouraged to think afresh about how they can report on science stories, in order to better engage their readers and listeners. This included basic rules for effective communication as well as ideas to introduce more human dimensions and description to their reporting. Discussions with scientists helped to dispel prejudices and clarify difficulties experienced by both sides in the communication process.

Two field trips, on days two and three, provided an excellent opportunity for the trainees to engage with scientists and farmers in a new way, on the basis of the insights gained on day one. Coaching in practical interviewing skills was done throughout both days, as needed. The final two days included one-to-one editorial guidance for the print journalists as they wrote up the field trip stories and some digital editing skill-building for the radio journalists, as well as tips on how to develop feature items and write linking narration. Both groups shared suggestions on where to obtain good ideas for news stories and helpful networks.



Sharifa Kalokola of The Citizen newspaper, Tanzania, interviews farmers who are using desmodium and Napier grass to protect their maize crop from stem borers (WRENmedia)

Workshop planning and format

Selection of participants

A call for participant applications was made to print and radio journalists in East Africa with an interest in reporting on scientific topics, through media and research contacts in the region. Response to this call was extremely high: two hundred and four applications were received, more than double the number received for any previous workshop. Of these, twelve participants were selected (six men, six women), of whom six were print journalists and six were radio broadcasters. The participants were from Kenya (four), Ethiopia (three), Tanzania (two), Uganda (two) and Burundi (one).

Duration

The course lasted five days, in line with the previous workshop, held in March 2011. While several participants commented that this was too short to adequately cover their training needs, they also acknowledged that they had learned a lot during the period. On balance, considering costs and also the stamina of participants to cope with an intensive workshop of this nature, this five day model works well but extending the workshop to six days would enable more thorough preparation for the field trips, maximising the benefits of these. .

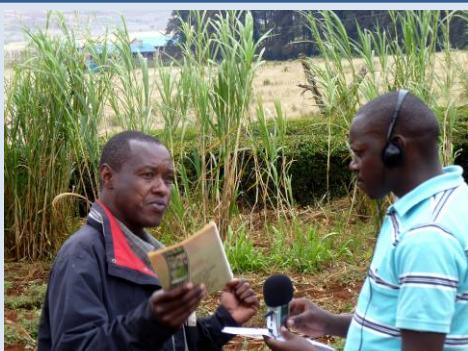
Partners

Organisation of the workshop was, from the outset, done with the participation of the Kenya Agricultural Research Institute (KARI), in particular the Communications and Media Officer, Wangari Ndungu. She liaised with research staff in organising two field visits, visiting KARI research campuses and farmer groups in Muguga, Thika and Naivasha. She also coordinated logistical arrangements, such as food, training venue and computer provision. Several research staff took part in a 'Making the most of the media' training session at the beginning of the workshop, as well as the two field visits.

Science reporting has remained a tricky beat over the years. The workshop simplified the subject and I leave an informed person. I now intend to seek clarifications from scientists on areas that are too technical for the common reader or listener to comprehend.

Dennis Odunga, Kenya

This involvement of KARI built on the partnership established during the previous workshop in March 2011. Both WRENmedia and KARI are keen to pursue future training projects together, particularly training for KARI science staff in effective communication via the media.



Caleb Chebaswony finds more about the Push Pull system for protecting maize from pest attack, at a KARI field site near Muguga (WRENmedia)

Location

The participants were accommodated throughout the workshop period at the Gracia Gardens Resort in central Nairobi, which proved to be an ideal choice, offering a quiet location with good facilities and relatively fast access to the training venue at KARI headquarters.

Scientist/research input

On the opening day, research staff at KARI were invited to attend an afternoon session on Making the most of the media. The session had a major impact on many of the journalist trainees, who were both surprised and inspired by the scientists' willingness to discuss the challenges the two groups face in bringing science to a wider audience. Several commented afterwards that the session had significantly changed their impression of scientists from being proud and inaccessible to being 'ordinary people' who had good stories to tell.

Scientists were also heavily involved in the two field visits. Four KARI staff were available at the institute's genebank at Muguga to explain its function and importance. A similar number, as well as several farmer research partners, were met and interviewed at a nearby demonstration plot for push-pull maize stalk borer control. The lead scientist on this project then accompanied the trainees to meet a farmers group near Thika, who were trialling the push-pull system.

On a second field day, the group were firstly given an introduction to the work of the KARI Livestock production centre at Naivasha, followed by a briefing on work to test the efficacy of a thermostable vaccine for Newcastle disease in poultry. Two of the lead researchers then accompanied the group to an IDP camp in the area, where political refugees had been supported by KARI to establish commercial poultry businesses, and had also been involved in vaccine trials.

A final workshop session with field trip scientists had originally been considered for the Friday afternoon, but it was decided that this was not time and cost effective for those involved, given the lengthy interaction they had already had with the journalists during the field trips.

Beyond the workshop

Lessons learned

- Demand for the workshop was extremely high. Over 200 applications were received. Participants were selected primarily on the basis of having a genuine interest in science. This appeared to work well, in that commitment to the workshop among the trainees seemed uniformly high.
- Digital file handling and audio editing skills in the group were quite limited. In addition, the radio journalists would have benefitted from basic interviewing tuition prior to the field trips. These radio specific skills are important, and could be met either by more targeted sessions for radio journalists during a combined print/radio training, or by a designated radio-specific workshop.
- The value of having two local co-trainers, with expertise in print and radio journalism, was clearly demonstrated throughout the workshop. The co-trainers were able to draw on their knowledge of the regional context in order to advise on numerous topics, including the value of various media networks and reliable sources of stories. The input from the co-trainers was greater than on previous workshops, and could be expanded further.
- The number of field trips was reduced from three to two, compared to the previous workshop. This worked well, in giving the participants more time to work on their recorded material. In future trainings it will be helpful to have an additional day in the schedule to enable the trainees to prepare even better for their first field trip. This would include basic skills coaching and more time for them to consider their story angles, questions and choice of interviewee. Continuing with two field trips is valuable – the participants' feedback indicates how much they valued the opportunity to get perspectives from farmers and scientists in the field, and having just a single day for this would be a negative step. Therefore, a six day workshop format would work well.

The interface with farmers made this training special. Others keep you in conference rooms and you miss out on real life experiences. My field interviews will never be the same again. They will be focused, won't have unexplained jargon and will have better sounds. My approach with scientists will be more candid; after all, these are human beings like me.
Emmanuel Okella, Uganda



Sadi Niyungeko of Radio Burundi interviews poultry expert Ann Wachira about the AVIVAX Newcastle Disease vaccine (WRENmedia)

- During the workshop, the training team were able to develop an excellent working relationship with the partner organisation, in particular with Wangari Ndungu, KARI Communication and Media Officer. Evidence of building a strong partnership with KARI included excellent provision of computer, conference and catering facilities and enthusiastic involvement from KARI staff selected as resource people during field trips. KARI have shown a strong interest in holding a series of communication and media workshops for their senior management and science staff; in capitalising on the partnership already developed. This is potentially a significant added value for the investment made in this workshop.
- Online mentoring of radio trainees prior to the workshop would be advantageous, covering basic elements of file handling and editing for example. This would allow for more sophisticated inputs to be made during the workshop, making better use of trainers' knowledge and experience. This would need some careful planning, but could be considered for any future workshops.

I will take it upon myself to do my audio editing personally, to improve my interviewing skills and concentrate more on science reporting and demystifying science to my audience.

Winfred Malala, Kenya

Going forward

Enabling the science and media communities to find common ground and shared values is hugely important in overcoming anti-science prejudice, and workshops of this nature have proved an effective tool in achieving this. Feedback from participants is extremely positive, with 'Usefulness and interest' of the workshop scoring a maximum five points from all but one participant (who gave it four). Clearly this model of training – albeit with continual refinement – does significantly meet the needs and expectations of journalists. From the feedback received there was a desire to make the training longer, and the addition of one extra day would certainly seem worthwhile.



Emmanuel Okella of Radio Simba in Uganda visits a camp for displaced families, and learns about how indigenous chicken rearing has improved their lives (WRENmedia)

The relevance of science to development in Africa has never been greater, with new challenges and new opportunities demanding greater understanding of scientific processes among both policy makers and the people they serve. Yet prejudice against science and scientists is high, not least in the media community – as discussions during this workshop revealed.

Rolling out Better Science Reporting workshops to other countries in sub-Saharan Africa would therefore be of enormous value in tackling prejudice, making the science community more aware of their communication responsibilities, and strengthening the place of research in policy formulation. Focussing on countries with relatively high numbers of science and agriculture journalists, such as Nigeria, Ghana, Uganda and South Africa, would be the logical way forward if such a programme were to take place.

Journalist feedback

The feedback from the week's training was very 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 twelve participants. All scores are out of a maximum of five.

Organisation prior to the course	5
Organisation during the course	4.3

Accommodation and meals	4.9
Length of course	3.8
Time spent in rural area	4.25
Training venue chosen	4.75
Variety of activities each day	4.8
Interaction with visiting speakers	4.75
Usefulness and interest of course	4.9

“Conducting an interview with scientists was very helpful to me. I know now how and when to interject. I am going to initiate agricultural features in my radio station. Just make it a two week course. Then you can have enough time to join theories to practices and the monitoring could be easily conducted.” Sadi Niyungeko, Burundi

“I will keep contact with my new sources in order to continue writing more stories, and also specializing on agriculture and livestock.” Lorraine Anyango, Kenya

“The course is an eye opener to me in many ways. I learnt how to conduct interviews, the need of going for further explanation to get clear ideas and pass clear messages to my readers. Also the need of avoiding the unnecessary details when writing a story.” Beletu Bulbula, Ethiopia

“I intend to use scientists as a major source of information, cover more ground in agriculture and environment, bridge the gap between scientists and the people they serve, and make science reporting more interesting for readers.” Anthony Otushabire, Uganda

“I changed my mind about the feeling I had that agricultural science issues are dry – they are filled with human emotion. It would be improved by incorporating samples of work from previous trainees or journalists who are working with WRENmedia, because people learn from people.” Netsanet Assaye, Ethiopia

“The course was really interesting, especially coming to realize that science has also to do with humour. I never thought that I can impress my listeners through science stories, but now Yes! I am 100% sure that I can!” Chelu Matuzya, Tanzania

Researcher feedback

“Mistrust was the order of the day. As scientists we felt that journalists are distorters of information and are best kept away. There was also some bad perceptions that they are not trained to understand and make quality reporting of technical matters. The workshop has given me confidence to regard journalists as friends and in fact will go out there looking for them to cover my work. Personally, I want to a friend of the media.” Samuel Njihia, KARI

“The time with the journalists was a rare opportunity to express my area of expertise. The interaction was cordial and very relaxed. This was time well spent and I would look forward to a repeat in the future. If only more scientists were involved in this deserving workshop, they would have benefited like I have done. Also these professional scientific journalists needed more time with the scientist for an initial coverage of some serious technical topics.” Samuel Njihia, KARI

“Many lessons learnt on how to use words to publish results. We may need a sitting with journalist before we go public with our results. Dissemination needs partnerships between journalists and scientists. This was a good

opportunity to share what we do but the time was short. I wish to receive feedback on topics covered during the visit and suggestions on how to improve the reports for the benefit of all.” Ann Wachira, KARI

Partner feedback

“KARI scientists learnt a lot from their interaction with journalists and vice versa. Each party had perceptions which changed after the workshop. Some scientists had never interacted with the media before! The Director and two deputies appreciated the partnership with WRENmedia, more so after our technologies got extensive coverage in the press. KARI looks forward to deeper partnership with WRENmedia specifically to train more scientists how to make effective use of the media.

The rest of KARI staffers appreciated the presence of journalists in their midst. We hope to host WRENmedia once again because of the advantages: our scientists get trained, and we get coverage!!”

Virginia Wangari Ndungu, KARI Media and Communications Officer

Annex 1a: Journalists attending training

Lorraine Anyango, Nation Media group, Kisumu, Kenya	Email: herine25@yahoo.com
Dennis Odungu, Nation Media group, Eldoret, Kenya	Email: dodunga@gmail.com
Caleb Chebaswony, Biblia Husema Broadcasting, Kenya	Email: ckemboi80@yahoo.com
Winfred Malala, 103.9 MMUST FM	Email: winniemalalavic@yahoo.com
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Netsanet Assaye, Shegar Radio, Ethiopia	Email: netsyassaye@yahoo.com
Emmanuel Okella, Radio Simba, Uganda	Email: okemaokela@yahoo.com
Anthony Otushabire, Daily Monitor, Uganda	Email: otushabireantony@gmail.com
Sharifa Kalokola, The Citizen, Tanzania	Email: sherriekola@yahoo.com
Chelu Matuza, Tanzania Broadcasting Corporation	Email: chelumaty@yahoo.com
Sadi Niyungeko, Radio Burundi	Email: niyusa@gmail.com

Annex 1b: Scientists and resource people

Felister Makini, KARI-HQ
Joseph Muriithi, KARI-HQ
Jack Ouda, KARI-HQ
Virginia Wangari Ndungu, KARI-HQ
Charles Ndiege, KARI-Genebank
Shadrack Moephuli, KARI-Genebank
John Kariuki, KARI-Naivasha
Ann Wachira, KARI-Naivasha
Leonard Wamae, KARI-HQ
Teresio Riungu, KARI-Muguga
Joseph Njihia, KARI-Muguga

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

Radio

Emmanuel Okella, Radio Simba, Uganda

- Local chicken rearing: the joys of a displaced community in Naivasha, Kenya –, broadcast 22/10/11

Netsanet Assaye, Shegar Radio 102.1 FM, Ethiopia

- Genebanks in Kenya and Ethiopia - broadcast

Caleb Chebaskwony, Biblia Husema Broadcasting, Kenya

- Newcastle Disease vaccine brings hope to indigenous chicken farmers – broadcast 23/09/2011
- Push and pull technology to increase productivity in maize production – broadcast 30/10/2011
- GeneBank technology to increase food security in Kenya – broadcast 17/11/11

Winnie Malala, 103.9 MMUST FM, Kenya

- Indigenous poultry story – broadcast 22/10/11 and 27/10/11
- KARI genebank story – broadcast 31/10/11

Sadi Niyungeko Radio Burundi

- KARI genebank story – broadcast 21/10/11
- Push pull crop protection story – broadcast 18/11/11

Print

Anthony Otushabire, Daily Monitor, Uganda

- Scientists find a cure for pests in maize – published 2/11/11
- Local chicken an almost forgotten breed – published 30/11/11

Dennis Odunga, Daily Nation, Kenya

- A poultry vaccine leaves farmers a satisfied lot – to be published
- Push and pull technology fights off maize disease – to be published
- Indigenous vegetables face a bleak future– to be published

Sharifa Kalokola, The Citizen, Tanzania

- Maize killer busted – to be published
- Rekindling indigenous diets could save lives – to be published

Lorraine Anyango, Daily Nation, Kenya

- Scientists warn over wrong trees in Mau (KARI genebank story) – published 25/11/11

Beletu Bulbula, Ethiopian Herald

- Push-Pull: Biological means to control maize stemborer – published 25/10/11