



Communicating and Disseminating Research Results



Workshop report

26th to 29th July 2011, Kumasi, Ghana

The workshop formed part of the activities under the EU-funded project



Developing Research Capacity Among African Environmental Scientists — DRECA

The workshop was organised by

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Dr Erasmus Owusu	University of Ghana
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Developing Research Capacity among Africa Environmental Scientists,
is a collaboration involving the following partners and countries:



The Tropical Biology Association, United Kingdom and Kenya



Zoology Department and the Faculty of Forestry and Nature Conservation,
Makerere University, Uganda



Nature Kenya and National Museums of Kenya, Kenya



The University of Ghana, Ghana



Nigerian Conservation Foundation, Nigeria

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Executive Summary

The workshop “*Communicating and disseminating research results*” trained 18 Ghanaian conservation scientists in writing quality scientific papers and communicating to policy makers and civil society. Held at Anita Hotel, Kumasi, Ghana from 26th to 29th July 2011, it was the second in the 2011 series of training workshops under the EU-funded project entitled “*Developing Research Capacities among African Environmental Scientists*”. Teaching was participatory and used a variety of practicals with feedback. The four days covered: why and how publish; scientific writing skills; presenting data; and communication skills. Participants also received one to one guidance on their manuscripts. The 18 participants came from 14 institutions comprising government departments and research and conservation organisations.

The workshop received extremely positive feedback and scored an overall rating of 1.1 on a scale of 1 (excellent) to 5 (very poor). Participants set personal targets to publish at least 32 manuscripts using their new expertise and knowledge within 6 to 12 months following the workshop. Participants also received resources (workshop handouts and TBA’s *Scientific Writing and Publishing Results* series) that will ensure they continue to apply skills learned. The participants indicated their strong desire to share their new skills with others back at their institutions afterwards.

“The workshop was well organised and it should be encouraged for other young scientists...”

(Workshop participant)



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Introduction

African environmental scientists must be able to communicate their findings in order to influence the policies needed for sustainable natural resource management and poverty reduction. To help realise this goal, the workshop on ‘communicating and disseminating research results’ was designed to train Ghanaian scientists in writing quality scientific papers and in communicating to policy makers and civil society. The workshop forms part of a series of training workshops in the 3 year, EU-funded project “developing research capacities among African environmental scientists”.

The 18 conservation managers and researchers in attendance came from 14 institutions including 4 academic institutions, 6 government departments and 4 research and conservation organisations (Table 1).

Table 1: number of participants by institutions

Type of institution	Institution	Total participants
Academic institutions	Juaben Senior High School	1
	Kwame Nkrumah University of Science & Technology	1
	University for Development Studies	1
	University of Ghana	3
Government agencies	Council for Scientific and Industrial Research	2
	Environmental Protection Agency	1
	Forestry Commission	1
	Forestry Research Institute of Ghana	2
	Office of Parliament	1
	Water Resources Commission	1
Conservation/Research	A Rocha Ghana	1
	Ghana Wildlife Society	1
	International Water Management Institute	1
	Rainforest Friends Ghana	1
Grand Total		18

Teachers came from the University of Ghana, the Tropical Biology Association, Oxford University and Kwame Nkrumah University of Science & Technology (KNUST) (appendix 1).

The workshop was highly participatory and used a combination of talks, discussions and practical exercises as well as informal presentations. The participants remained engaged throughout and contributed their own experiences to discussions and practicals. Workshop teachers gave each participant comments on their manuscripts and guidance on how to prepare their work for publication. In addition to the workshop’s training handouts, participants received copies of the TBA’s “Scientific Writing and Publishing Results” skills series specifically designed for this workshop. The guidelines will be developed further and will form part of the research toolkit that the project will publish.

At the end of the workshop, participants set personal targets to submit, in the next 6 to 12 months, a total of 32 manuscripts targeting various journals publishing in Africa and internationally. The participants also indicated that they would share their new skills with colleagues and engage in active fundraising at their institutions afterwards.

Workshop content and themes

The workshop covered four themes on “why and how to publish; scientific writing and publishing skills; presenting data; and communication skills” (see appendix 1 for the training programme).

The workshop began by asking participants with why it is important for scientists to publish and what are the main barriers they face in this area. This was followed by a talk by Dr Delali Dovie who shared his personal experience in his journey towards developing a successful publishing career.

Dr Ashleigh Griffin led a session on how to structure a scientific paper which included a step by step analysis of published papers. The value of having a logical flow throughout the paper was emphasised. Participants then put these ideas into practice during an exercise on writing an abstract.

Dr Rosie Trevelyan led the module on day two on writing skills and used real examples to illustrate good practice. A practical in editing enforced these ideas and gave participants a chance to improve their skills in how to convey the right message succinctly and clearly. Dr Dovie shared his experience in publishing and gave some useful tips on how to write good papers. He also gave examples of collaborative research and how this can elevate one’s profile and help one’s career.

The third day started with feedback from editors of journals that publish African and tropical research. At the TBA’s request, editors had summarised their views on what makes a good paper alongside the common reasons that papers are rejected. This was followed by an interactive talk and practical on presenting scientific data and results for publication. Participants learned how to select the best way to present scientific data and which information to include when presenting statistics. This was followed by an open session on managing references and a talk and practical led by Dr Griffin on the best ways to present scientific results.

To cap the day, Prof R. Abaidoo talked about the challenges faced by local scientists while integrating publishing in their daily work. Prof Abaidoo shared his experiences as an established writer of scientific work and senior employee of the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science & Technology.

The last day of the workshop focused on communication skills. The day began with presentations from workshop participants. This was followed by a discussion and analysis on the qualities that make a good talk. Rosie Trevelyan wrapped up the session by giving an interactive talk on how to make engaging and memorable presentations to diverse audiences.

The rest of the day addressed the important issue of how scientists can engage effectively with policy makers. Dr Erasmus Owusu gave a talk on communicating to policy makers, drawing from his vast experience of working with local and international conservation policy makers. This was followed by a practical exercise that familiarised participants with the skills needed for making the case for science-backed policy. The session outlined the challenges of engaging decision makers, but more importantly, helped explain why scientists must share their work in order to influence policy.

There was time allocated during each day for participants to work on their own manuscripts and to receive one to one guidance on how to develop their papers for publishing. The three paper review sessions (about 3.5 cumulative hours) also gave participants a chance to directly put into practice their new skills they were acquiring from the workshop. Where set time was not enough, the trainers arranged extra sessions with participants to ensure all participants received enough comments to allow them take their papers to the next level.

Finally, participants were encouraged to continue and strengthen the networking that the workshop had started. The follow up support will be managed by the TBA who will also send out regular circulars to check progress against targets, and will make sure that everyone gets the support they require.

“[The workshop] was very timely and helpful. I am particularly grateful to the facilitators for all the help. I will want to re-emphasize on the use of statistics in our publications”.

Workshop assessment

The workshop received extremely positive comments on the quality of instruction and relevance of content. Overall, the workshop and teaching were both rated at 1.1 on a scale from 1 (excellent) to 5 (very poor). All the 18 respondents said that the balance between talks and practicals/ discussions was “about right”.

Participants rated their knowledge and skills in scientific writing and publishing before the workshop as 2.5 and after the workshop as 4.0 on a scale of 4 = a lot; 3 = a moderate amount; 2 = a little and 1 =not at all. All 18 respondents said they were “very likely” to apply the lessons learnt at their work stations.

Participants reported that before the workshop they had between them written and submitted a total of 27 papers of which 12 had been accepted for publishing. This translated to nearly 56% rejection rate.

A sample of comments received on the workshop is given below:

“...The workshop was an excellent one and I am really transformed and ready to work hard to bring out new knowledge to the existing one”.

“This has been the first workshop that has been excellently interactive and not the least boring. I came with what I thought was a vague idea of writing but now I know I had no idea of writing a paper. The talks and exercises have been very helpful and with the knowledge I have gathered, I will rewrite my paper and submit for publishing”.

“(The workshop was) very informative, educative and thought-provoking”.

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Appendix 1. Workshop programme: Communicating and Disseminating Research Results

26- July 2011 Publishing your work: why and how

- 08:50 **Welcome and introductions** (DD)
- 09:00 **Overview** of the training and expectations from the participants (RT)
- 09:10 **Discussion and feedback:** why publish? (RT)
- 09:35 **Talk:** Why it is a good thing to publish your work (DD)
- 10:20 *Coffee break*
- 10:50 **Talk:** writing a scientific paper (AG)
- 11:50 **Practical:** writing an abstract (AG)
- 13:30 *Working lunch*
- 14:30 **Feedback from practical:** writing an abstract (AG)
- 16:00 *Tea break*
- Paper session:** Collate participants' work/allocate supervisors (EOw)
- 17:00 *Workshop close*

27- July 2011 Writing Skills and publishing

- 08:30 **Feedback session (EO)**
- 08:40 **Talk:** publishing from a local perspective (DD)
- 09:40 **Talk:** Top tips on writing skills (RT)
- 10:40 **Practical:** writing succinctly (RT)
- 12:45 *Working coffee break*
- 11:45 **Feedback** from practical (RT)
- 13:30 *Lunch*

- 14:30 **Paper session:** working on own work (All)
- 16:00 *Tea break*
- 16:30 **Talk:** How the publishing process works (AG)
- 17:30 *Workshop close*

28- July 2011 Publishing Cont'd & presenting data

- 08:30 **Feedback session**
- 08:40 **Managing references:** tools (RT; DD)
- 08:50 **Discussion:** What the editors say (RT)
- 09:30 **Question & answers session** (All)
- 10:15 *Coffee break*
- 10:45 **Talk and practical:** Presenting scientific results (AG)
- 13:50 *Lunch*

- 14:50 **Paper session:** working on own work (All)
- 16:00 *Tea break*
- 16:30 **Talk:** challenges facing local scientists: integrating publishing in one's work (RA)
- 17:00 *Workshop close*

29- July 2011 Communication skills

- 08:00 **Feedback Session**
- 08:20 **Talks:** Participants presentations
- 09:50 **Feedback:** What makes a good talk? (RT)
- 10:10 *Tea break*
- 10:40 **Talk:** Some top tips for giving talks (RT)
- 11:40 **Talk:** Communicating to policy makers (EO)
- 12:40 **Practical:** Communicating to policy makers (EO)

- 13:30 *Lunch*
 14:30 **Feedback Session**
 14:30 **Feedback:** Lessons learned & personal targets (RT)
 15:00 **Follow up support:** information for participants (EOw)
 15:30 *Tea break and workshop assessment*
 16:00 **Closing ceremony, presentation of certificates**
 16.30 Group photo

Teachers and resource persons*

Dr Delali Dovie (DD)	Lecturer, University of Ghana
Dr Erasmus Owusu (EO)	Lecturer, University of Ghana
Dr Ashleigh Griffin (AG)	Lecturer, Oxford University
Dr Rosie Trevelyan (RT)	Director, Tropical Biology Association
Prof R. C. Abaidoo (RA)	Provost, College of Agriculture and Natural Resources, KNUST
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