



# Communicating and Disseminating Research Results



## Workshop report



8<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> March 2011, Ruiru, Kenya

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

Mr Anthony Kuria  
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Tropical Biology Association, Kenya  
Tropical Biology Association, UK  
National Museums of Kenya

**Developing Research Capacity among Africa Environmental Scientists**  
is a collaboration involving the following partners and countries:



The Tropical Biology Association, United Kingdom and Kenya

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

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Nature Kenya and National Museums of Kenya, Kenya

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The University of Ghana, Ghana

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Nigerian Conservation Foundation, Nigeria

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## Executive Summary

The workshop “*Communicating and disseminating research results*” trained 18 Kenyan conservation scientists in writing quality scientific papers and communicating to policy makers and civil society. Held in Kenya from 8<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> March, it inaugurated 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 were conservation scientists and managers who came from 12 institutions comprising government departments and research and conservation organisations.

The workshop received extremely positive feedback and received an overall rating of 1.1 on a scale from 1 (excellent) to 5 (very poor). Participants set personal targets, totalling 39 manuscripts, that they will use their new expertise and knowledge to meet in the 6 to 12 months following the workshop. Participants also received resources (workshop handouts and TBA’s “Scientific Writing and Publishing Results”) that will ensure they continue to apply skills learned. All 18 participants said that they would share their new skills with others at their institutions afterwards.

*“It has written a new page in my mind on how to think, plan, draft and publish scientific work.” (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 Kenyan 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 attending came from 12 institutions comprising 4 universities, 2 government departments and 6 research and conservation organisations (Table 1).

Table 1: Number of participants by institution

Type of institution	Institution	Total participants
Academic institutes	Egerton University	3
	Kenyatta University	1
	South Eastern University College	1
	University of Nairobi	1
Government agencies	National Museums of Kenya	4
	Kenya Wildlife Service	1
Conservation/Research	Birdlife International	1
	Mpala Research Centre	2
	Nature Kenya	1
	Oi Pejeta Conservancy	1
	World Agroforestry Centre	1
	Earthwatch-Kenya	1
<b>Grand total</b>		<b>18</b>

Teachers came from the National Museums of Kenya, Nature Kenya, the Tropical Biology Association, University of Exeter and Centre for Ecology and Hydrology, UK, and the Kenyan Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology (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 regarding how they would apply their new skills during the next 6 to 12 months. The sum of these targets amounts to 39 papers that will be submitted by the participants to 7 African journals and 10 international journals (Table 2). All participants said that they would share their new skills and workshop materials with colleagues at their institution afterwards.

Table 2: Number of manuscripts the participants plan to develop and targets journals

Target journal	Target papers
African Crop Science Journal	1
African Journal of Ecology	4
African Journal of Herpetology	1
South Africa Journal Wetland Research	1
Biotropica	2
Ecological Restoration	1
Int Journal of Remote Sensing	1
Journal of Applied Ecology	1
Landscape Ecology	1
Nature	1
Pachyderm	1
Research Journal of animal Science	1
Journal of Soil Science and Environmental management	1
East Africa Social Science	1
Journal of East Africa National History	3
Scopus	3
To be decided	15
	39

## Workshop content and themes

The workshop covered four themes: “why and how to publish; scientific writing skills; presenting data; and communication skills” during the four days (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 Peter Njoroge who shared his personal experiences in developing a publishing career.

Dr Tom Oliver 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. The session emphasised the importance of brevity and clarity. A practical in editing enforced these ideas and gave participants a chance to improve their skills in how to convey the right message while leaving out unnecessary words.

The afternoon session enlightened participants about how the publishing process works. Participants received advice on choosing journals as well as how to handle reviewer’s comments. The session successfully demystified the publishing process and gave participants more confidence in their ability to publish their own work.

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.

In a separate session, Dr Mwangi Githiru discussed the challenges of integrating publishing with a full-time job. Dr Mwangi shared his experiences as an established writer of scientific work, an editor, and senior employee of the Kenya Government.

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. Guest speaker, Serah Munguti from Nature Kenya, used her extensive experience in advocacy in Kenya to share key tools for and tips in communicating to policy makers. This was followed by a practical exercise that familiarised participants with the skills needed for writing policy briefs and advocacy letters. 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.

*“It was an excellent forum for me to learn more on how to write and publish.  
The many fears I had about writing have been addressed and much more  
my communication skills have been greatly enhanced”.*

## **Workshop assessment**

The workshop received extremely positive comments and was particularly praised for the quality and relevance of workshop overall. A majority of comments mention how useful the interactive nature of the workshop was. Overall, the workshop and teaching were rated as 1.1 and 1.2 respectively on a scale from 1 (excellent) to 5 (very poor). 17 out of 18 respondents said that the workshop had the correct balance between talks and practical's or discussions.

Participants rated their knowledge and skills in writing scientific papers before the workshop as 2.7 and after the workshop as 4 on a scale of 4 = a lot; 3 = a moderate amount; 2 = a little and 1 =none at all. All respondents said they were “very likely” to apply the lessons learnt at their work stations.

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

*“...information was simplified and easy to recall and very informative given that it was based on personal experiences. Thanks to the workshop, I have learned skills on writing, presenting and also communicating to policy makers in my field”.*

*“It was a privilege to be trained in the most practical and interactive approach ever. I had a manuscript that I thought was ready for submission but only to realize that it needed more improvement. Having one on one mentorship provided an opportunity to correct my manuscript”.*

*“It is the most productive training I have ever attended”.*

## **Acknowledgements**

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## Appendix 1. Workshop programme

### Communicating and disseminating research results

8 March 2011	Publishing your work: why and how
8:35	<b>Welcome and introductions</b> (AK)
8:50	<b>Overview</b> of the training and expectations from the participants (RT)
9:00	<b>Discussion:</b> personal motivation to publish and barriers (AK)
9:35	<b>Talk:</b> Why it is a good thing to publish your work (TO)
10:10	<i>Coffee break</i>
10:50	<b>Talk:</b> writing a scientific paper (TO)
12:00	<b>Practical:</b> writing an abstract (TO)
13:00	<i>working Lunch</i>
14:30	<b>Feedback from practical:</b> writing an abstract (TO)
16:00	<i>Tea break</i>
	<b>Paper session:</b> Collate participants' work/allocate supervisors (AK)
17:00	<i>Workshop close</i>
9 March 2011	Writing skills and publishing
8:35	<b>Feedback session from participants</b>
8:45	<b>Talk:</b> publishing from a local perspective (PN)
9:30	<b>Talk:</b> Top tips on writing skills (RT)
10:20	<b>Practical:</b> getting your message across
	<i>working Coffee break</i>
11:45	<b>Feedback from practical</b>
13:00	<i>Lunch</i>
14:00	<b>Paper session:</b> working on own work
15:30	<i>Tea break</i>
16:00	<b>Talk:</b> How the publishing process works (TO)
17:00	<i>Workshop close</i>
10 March 2011	Publishing cont'd & presenting data
8:30	<b>Feedback session from participants</b>
8:40	<b>Managing references:</b> available tools
8:50	<b>Discussion:</b> What the editors say (RT)
9:10	<b>Question &amp; answers session</b>
10:15	<i>Coffee break</i>
10:45	<b>Talk and practical:</b> Presenting scientific results (TO)
13:00	<i>Lunch</i>
14:00	<b>Paper session:</b> working on own work
16:00	<i>Tea break</i>
16:30	<b>Talk:</b> challenges facing local scientists: integrating publishing in one's work (MG)
17:30	<i>Workshop close</i>

**11 March 2011****Communication skills**

8:10	<b>Feedback session from participants</b>
8:20	<b>Participants presentations</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- <i>Ooga Omweri</i> (Egerton): Wetlands characterisation in Kisii</li><li>- <i>Kevin Mganga</i> (South Eastern University College), Improving hydrological properties of degraded soils using grasses</li><li>- <i>Mong'are Mariita</i> (Earthwatch-Kenya), The Samburu Research Initiative</li><li>- <i>Geoffrey Wambugu</i> (National Museums of Kenya), Landuse implications on forest conservation along the Kenyan coast</li></ul> <i>(short break)</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- <i>Priscah Rongoei</i> (Egerton University), Plant community response to water level changes</li><li>- <i>David Kimiti</i> (Mpala Research Centre), Impact of elephants (<i>Loxodonta africana</i>) on savannah woody vegetation</li><li>- <i>Paul Webala</i> (Kenya Wildlife Service), Bats in Australian logged Jarrah Forest</li></ul>
9:50	<b>Discussion:</b> What makes a good talk? (AK)
10:10	<i>Tea break</i>
10:40	<b>Presentation:</b> How to engage your audience: top tips for giving talks (RT)
11:15	<b>Talk:</b> Communicating to policy makers (SM)
12:00	<b>Practical:</b> Communicating to policy makers
13:00	<i>Lunch</i>
14:00	<b>Feedback:</b> Lessons learned & personal targets
14:30	<b>Follow up support:</b> information for participants <i>Workshop assessment</i>
15:00	<i>Group Photo</i>
15:15	<b>Closing ceremony, presentation of certificates</b>

**Teachers and resource people**

Dr Mwangi Githiru (MG)	Deputy Director, Ministry of Higher Education, Science & Technology
Dr Peter Njoroge (PN)	Senior Scientist, National Museums of Kenya
Dr Rebecca Fuller (RF)	University of Exeter, UK
Dr Rosie Trevelyan (RT)	Director, Tropical Biology Association
Dr Tom Oliver (TO)	Centre for Ecology and Hydrology, UK
Mr Anthony Kuria (AK)	Project Manager, Tropical Biology Association
Mr Paul Matiku (PM)	Director, Nature Kenya
Ms Serah Munguti (SM)	Communication and Advocacy, Nature Kenya