



# Communicating and Disseminating Research Results



## Workshop report

23<sup>rd</sup> to 26<sup>th</sup> August 2011, Ibadan, Nigeria

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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**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 Nigerian conservation scientists in writing quality scientific papers and communicating to policy makers and civil society. Held in Nigeria from 23<sup>rd</sup> to 26<sup>th</sup> August, it was the third in the 2011 series of training workshops under the EU-funded project “*Developing Research Capacities among African Environmental Scientists*”. Teaching was participatory and used a variety of practices with feedback. The four days covered: why and how to publish; scientific writing skills; presenting data; and communication skills. Participants also received one-to-one guidance on their manuscripts. The 18 participants came from 9 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 relating to revising, submitting and getting published over the coming months. They will use their new expertise and knowledge to meet these targets and will be assisted by the TBA follow-up support programme 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. The participants indicated their strong desire to share their new skills with others at their institutions afterwards.

*“The workshop was fantastic. The approach was effective through talks and practical sessions. I also liked the stepwise approach used to show us how to communicate the result of research.”*

*“The workshop was brilliantly informative and relevant to capacity building in communicating research results.”*



**Table of Contents**

Executive Summary ..... 3  
Introduction..... 5  
Workshop content and themes ..... 5  
Workshop assessment ..... 6  
Acknowledgements..... 7  
Appendix 1: Workshop programme..... 8

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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 Nigerian scientists and their institutions in writing quality scientific papers and communicating to policy makers and civil society. The workshop forms part of a series of training workshops in the three year, EU-funded project “developing research capacities among African environmental scientists”.

The 18 conservation managers and researchers (8 females, 10 males) in attendance came from 9 institutions including 4 universities, 2 government departments and 3 research and conservation organisations (Table 1).

Table 1: Number of participants by institutions and gender

Type of institution	Institution	Females	Males	Total participants
Academic institutes	University of Benin	1	1	2
	University of Port Harcourt		1	1
	Federal University of Technology, Akure	3	2	5
	Federal University of Technology, Owerri		1	1
Government agencies	National Horticultural Research Institute	2	2	4
	National Centre for Genetic Resources & Biotechnology		1	1
Conservation/Research	AP Leventis Ornithological Research Institute		1	1
	Micronutrient Initiative	1		1
	Nigerian Conservation Foundation	1	1	2
<b>Grand Total</b>		<b>8</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>18</b>

Teachers were drawn from the Nigerian Conservation Foundation, Nigerian Environmental study/Action Team, the Netherlands Institute of Ecology and the Tropical Biology Association (appendix 1).

The workshop was highly participatory. It involved talks, discussions and practical exercises as well as informal presentations and the participants remained engaged throughout. Participants received comments and guidance on manuscripts they brought to the workshop for ultimate publication. The participants set out to submit, in the next 6 to 12 months, a total of 32 manuscripts. The participants also indicated that they would share their new skills with colleagues or engage in active collaborations at their institution afterwards. 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.

## Workshop content and themes

The workshop covered four themes on “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 Professor Obot who shared his personal experiences in developing a publishing career and in mentoring others.

Dr Kate Lessells led a session on how to structure a scientific paper which included a step by step analysis 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 with talks and interactive sessions that 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, Prof Obot led a discussion on the ethics of publishing that included the topic of plagiarism and how to decide on authorship of papers.

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 then gave an interactive talk on how to make engaging and memorable presentations to diverse audiences.

Professor Okali talked about the importance of sharing scientific research with policy makers. He explained why scientists need to attract the interest of the general public and gave some examples of the communication skills that are needed to convey a scientific message to a lay audience.

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.

### **Workshop assessment**

The workshop received extremely positive comments on the quality of instruction and relevance of the workshop. Overall, the workshop and teaching were both rated as 1.1 on a scale from 1 (excellent) to 5 (very poor). 17 out of 18 respondents said that the balance between talks and practicals/discussions was "about right" (one did not complete a feedback form).

Participants rated their knowledge and skills in scientific writing and publishing before the workshop as 2.4 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. Before it, only two rated themselves as knowing “a lot”. All respondents said they were “very likely” to apply the lessons learnt at their work stations.

Participants reported that between them before the workshop they had written and submitted a total of 34 papers of which half had been accepted for publishing, so 50% had been rejected.

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

*“The knowledge gained will be employed in the presentation of my results and discussions in a well acceptable and logical manner.”*

*“As a young scientist in the lecturing profession it will help my research, teaching and communication skills (in journals, seminars and other talks). I will use this skill acquired to assist my students to build a fulfilling future in their career.”*

### **Acknowledgements**

The workshop was funded by the European Union’s ACP Science and Technology Programme (Contract no. FED/2009/218783: 28 Jan 2010) and the BAT Biodiversity Partnership. Special thanks go to the workshop teachers – Dr Kate Lessells, Professor Emmanuel Obot, Mr Alade Adeleke, Professor Okali and Oluwafunmilola Tsewinor, without whose expertise, commitment and enthusiasm, the workshop would not have been the huge success that it was. We would like to acknowledge all those involved in the planning of the workshop, and the participants on the workshop who made the workshop such a success. We thank institutions that provided their staff for training and hope that when the staffs return, they will do things differently and work to apply the skills and knowledge gained from the workshop to grow the profile of their respective institutions by writing better research proposals.

## Appendix 1: Workshop programme

### Communicating and disseminating research results

23 August 2011	Publishing your work: why and how
08:30	<b>Welcome and introductions</b> (NCF)
08:50	<b>Overview</b> of the training and expectations from the participants (RT)
09:00	<b>Discussion</b> from participants: why publish? (all)
09:30	<b>Talk:</b> Why it is a good thing to publish your work (Prof Obot)
10:10	<i>Coffee break</i>
10:50	<b>Talk:</b> writing a scientific paper (KL)
12:00	<b>Practical:</b> writing an abstract (KL)
13:00	<i>Working lunch</i>
14:30	<b>Feedback from practical:</b> writing an abstract (KL)
16:00	<i>Tea break</i>
	<b>Paper session:</b> Collate participants' work/allocate supervisors (all)
17:00	Workshop close
24 August 2011	Writing skills and publishing
08:30	<b>Feedback session</b>
08:45	<b>Talk:</b> publishing from an African perspective (NCF/Ibadan)
09:30	<b>Talk:</b> Top tips on writing skills (RT)
10:20	<b>Practical:</b> writing succinctly (RT)
10:30	<i>Working coffee break</i>
11:45	Feedback from practical (RT)
13:00	<i>Lunch</i>
14:00	<b>Paper session:</b> working on own work (All)
15:30	<i>Tea break</i>
16:00	<b>Talk:</b> How the publishing process works (KL)
17:00	<i>Workshop close</i>
25 August 2011	Publishing cont'd & presenting data
08:30	<b>Feedback session</b>
08:40	<b>Resources for publishing</b>
08:50	<b>Discussion:</b> What the editors say (RT)
09:10	<b>Question &amp; answers session</b> (All teachers)
10:15	<i>Coffee break</i>
10:45	<b>Talk and practical:</b> Presenting scientific results (KL)
13:00	<i>Lunch</i>
14:00	<b>Paper session:</b> working on own work (all)
16:00	<i>Tea break</i>
16:30	<b>Talk:</b> challenges of publishing conservation work and the ethics of publishing (Prof Obot)
17:00	<i>Workshop close</i>

**26 August 2011**

**Communication skills**

08:00	<b>Feedback session</b>
08:20	<b>Talks:</b> Participants presentations (8 talks of 10 minutes each)
09:50	<b>Feedback:</b> What makes a good talk? (RT)
10:10	<i>Coffee break</i>
10:40	<b>Talk:</b> Some top tips for giving talks (RT)
11:15	<b>Talk:</b> Communicating to policy makers (Prof Okali)
12:00	<b>Discussion:</b> Communicating to policy makers (Prof Okali)
13:00	<i>Lunch</i>
14:00	<b>Feedback session</b>
14:30	<b>Feedback:</b> Lessons learned & personal targets (RT)
15:00	<b>Follow up support:</b> information for participants (RT)
15:30	<i>Tea break and workshop assessment</i>
16:00	<b>Closing ceremony, presentation of certificates &amp; group photo</b>

**Teachers and resource people**

Dr Kate Lessells (KL)	Netherlands Institute of Ecology, editor Journal Animal Ecology
Dr Rosie Trevelyan (RT)	Director, Tropical Biology Association
Professor Emmanuel Obot	NCF/ University of Ibadan
Mr Alade Adeleke	Nigerian Conservation Foundation
Professor Okali	Nigerian Environmental Study/Action Team, Ibadan
Mrs Oluwafunmilola Tsewinor	Nigerian Conservation Foundation