



Communicating and Disseminating Research Results



Workshop report

28th June — 1st July 2011, Kampala, Uganda

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



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 Ugandan conservation scientists in writing quality scientific papers and communicating to policy makers and civil society. Held in Uganda from 28th June to 1st July, it was the second in the 2011 series of training workshops forming part of 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 11 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 29 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 was very enlightening and I indeed learnt a lot about methods, procedures of publishing. I become more confident and energised to publish the work which was seated on my desktop.”
(Workshop participant)



Table of Content

Executive Summary	3
Introduction	5
Workshop content and themes	6
Workshop assessment	7
Acknowledgements	8
Appendix 1. Workshop programme	9

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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 Ugandan 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 (6 females, 12 males) in attendance came from 11 institutions including 4 universities, 3 government departments and 4 research and conservation organisations (Table 1).

Table 1: Number of participants by institutions and gender

Type of institution	Institution	Females	Males
Academic institutes	Busitema University		1
	Islamic University in Uganda		1
	Makerere University	5	3
	Mbarara University of Science and Technology	1	
Government agencies	Adjumani District Local Government		1
	Ministry of Water and Environment		1
	Ntungamo District Local Government		1
Conservation/ Research	Budongo Conservation Field Station		1
	Mbarara Zonal Agriculture Research and Development Institute		1
	National Fisheries Resources Research Institute		1
	National Livestock Resources Research Institute		1
Total number of participants		6	12

Teachers came from the Makerere University, Mbarara University of Science and Technology, the Tropical Biology Association, Centre for Basic Research, Kampala, and the Institute of Entomology of the Czech Academy of Sciences (Table 2).

Table 2: Teachers and their institutions

Teachers and resource persons	Job title and institution
Ass Prof Gerald Eilu	Senior Lecturer, Makerere University
Dr Bunny J. Lejju	Editor- African Journal of Ecology; Senior Lecturer, Mbarara University of Science & Technology
Dr Jackson Efitre	Lecturer, Makerere University
Dr Rosie Trevelyan	Director, Tropical Biology Association
Mr Anthony Kuria	Project Manager, Tropical Biology Association
Prof Vojtech Novotny	Editor, Ecology Letters; Researcher, Institute of Entomology, Czech Academy of Sciences
Prof Samson Opolot	Research Fellow, Centre for Basic Research, Kampala, Uganda

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 29 papers that will be submitted by the participants. All participants said that they would share their new skills and workshop materials with colleagues at their institution afterwards.

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 Ass Prof Gerald Eilu who shared general principles and benefits of publishing based on his personal experiences.

Prof Vojtech Novotny 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 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. Dr Jackson Efitre shared publishing tips from a local perspective. Later, Dr Julius Lejju talked about the African Journal of Ecology for which is editor. He also on talked on the challenges of integrating publishing with a full-time job, sharing his experiences as an established writer of scientific work, an editor, and senior lecturer of the Mbarara University of Science and Technology. 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.

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. Prof Samson Opolot used his extensive experience in policy research in Uganda 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. Groups of participants, formed on day 1, provided daily feedback on workshop progress highlighting key lessons learned on each.

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.

“This workshop gives me the benchmark for my scientific publication journey”.
Workshop participant

Workshop assessment

The workshop received extremely positive comments on the quality of instruction and relevance of the workshop. Overall, the workshop and teaching were rated as 1.1 and 1.3, respectively on a scale from 1 (excellent) to 5 (very poor). To the majority of the participants, the balance between talks and practicals/discussions was “about right”.

Participants’ knowledge and skills in writing scientific papers typically increased by an average 46.6% as a result of the workshop (Figure 1). All respondents said they were “very likely” or “likely” to apply the lessons learnt at their work stations.

Participants reported that between them and before the workshop they had written and submitted a total of 15 papers of which 6 had been accepted for publishing. This translated to nearly 60% rejection rate.

In summary, the participants said the following about the workshop:

“I think the objective of this workshop is very good and from the interactions, I noticed that perhaps not only upcoming scientists need the skills acquired”

“The workshop was an eye opener to young scientists who thought writing a manuscript is as easy as writing a report, thesis or a dissertation”

“Captivating and will change a lot of my approach to developing my career”

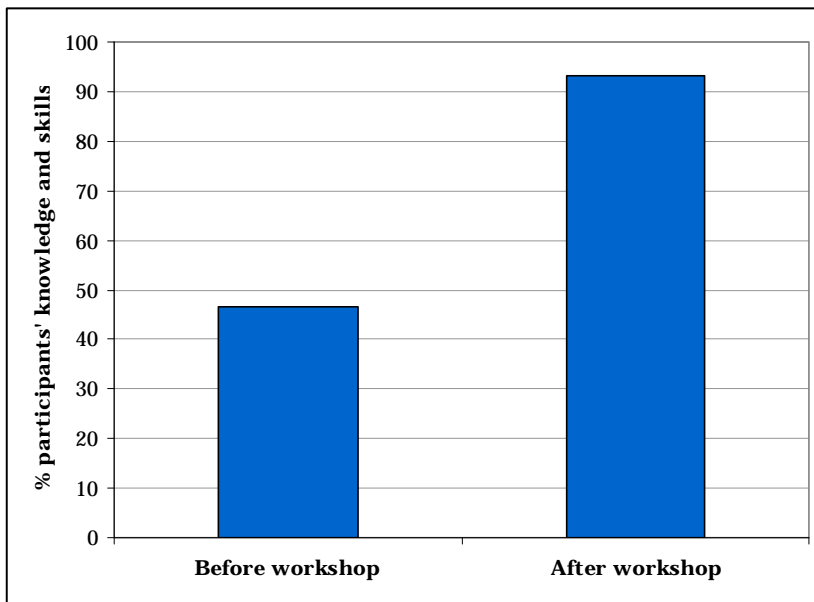


Figure 1. Participants' assessment of their knowledge and skills in writing scientific papers before and after the workshop (assessment scale: 4 = a lot; 3 = a moderate amount; 2 = a little and 1 =not at all).

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 - Ass Prof Gerald Eilu, Dr Bunny J. Lejju, Dr Jackson Efitre, Prof Vojtech Novotny and Prof Samson Opolot 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. We thank institutions that provided their staff for training and hope that when the staff 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,
Esella Country Hotel, Kampala, 28th June — 1st July 2011

28 June 2011		Publishing your work: why and how
08:35		Welcome and introductions (JE)
		Overview of the training and expectations from the participants (JE)
08:45		Discussion and feedback: why publish? (AK)
09:30		Talk: Why it is a good thing to publish your work (GE)
10:10		<i>Coffee break</i>
10:50		Talk: writing a scientific paper (VN)
12:00		Practical: writing an abstract (VN)
13:00		<i>working Lunch</i>
14:30		Feedback from practical: writing an abstract (VN & JE)
16:00		<i>Tea break</i>
		Paper session: Collate participants' work/allocate supervisors (AK)
17:00		<i>Workshop close</i>
29 June 2011		Writing Skills and publishing
08:30		Feedback session
08:45		Talk: publishing from a local perspective (JE)
09:30		Talk: Top tips on writing skills (RT)
10:20		Practical: writing succinctly (RT)
10:30		<i>working Coffee break</i>
11:45		Feedback from practical (RT)
13:00		<i>Lunch</i>
14:00		Paper session: working on own work (All)
15:30		<i>Tea break</i>
16:00		Talk: How the publishing process works (VN & JE)
17:00		<i>Workshop close</i>
30 June 2011		Publishing Cont'd & presenting data
08:30		Feedback session
08:40		Managing references: tools (AK/all)
09:10		Question & answers session (AK/All)
10:15		<i>Coffee break</i>
10:45		Talk and practical: Presenting scientific results (VN)
13:00		<i>Lunch</i>
14:00		Paper session: working on own work (all)
15:30		Talk: How to find your own research topic, complete and publish your research (VN)
16:00		<i>Tea break</i>
16:30		Talk: challenges facing local scientists: integrating publishing in one's work (BJL)
18:00		<i>Workshop close</i>

01 July 2011 Communication skills

08:00	Feedback Session
08:20	Talks: Participants presentations
09:50	Feedback: What makes a good talk? (GE/AK)
10:10	<i>Tea break</i>
10:30	Group Photo
10:40	Talk: Some top tips for giving talks (RT)
11:15	Talk: Communicating to policy makers (SO)
12:00	Practical: Communicating to policy makers (SO)
13:00	<i>Lunch</i>
14:00	Feedback Session
14:30	Feedback: Lessons learned & personal targets (RT)
15:00	Follow up support: information for participants (AK)
15:30	<i>Tea break and workshop assessment</i>
16:00	<i>Closing ceremony, presentation of certificates</i>

Teachers and resource persons

Ass Prof. Gerald Eilu (GE)	Senior Lecturer, Makerere University
Dr Bunny J. Lejju (BJL)	Editor- African Journal of Ecology; Senior Lecturer, Mbarara University of Science & Technology
Dr Jackson Efitre (JE)	Lecturer, Makerere University
Dr Rosie Trevelyan (RT)	Director, Tropical Biology Association
Mr Anthony Kuria (AK)	Project Manager, Tropical Biology Association
Prof Vojtech Novotny (VN)	Editor, Ecology Letters; Researcher, Institute of Entomology, Czech Academy of Sciences
Prof Samson Opolot (SO)	Research Fellow, Centre for Basic Research, Kampala, Uganda