



Developing Successful Research Proposals

Workshop report

**Noguchi Memorial Institute for Medical Research, University of Ghana
6th to 9th September 2010, Legon, Ghana**

The workshop was organised by
Erasmus Owusu and Dr Dovie Delaliⁱ: University of Ghana
Mr Anthony Kuriaⁱⁱ, and Dr Rosie Trevelyanⁱⁱⁱ: the Tropical Biology Association, Kenya/UK

and formed part of the project
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ⁱ Dr Owusu <erasmus67@yahoo.com>; Dr Delali <delalibd@yahoo.co.uk>

ⁱⁱ Tropical Biology Association, P.O. Box 44486-00100, Nairobi, Kenya. Email: tba-africa@tropical-biology.org

ⁱⁱⁱ Tropical Biology Association, Dept of Zoology, Downing Street, Cambridge, CB2 3EJ, Cambridge, UK. Email: rjt34@cam.ac.uk

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



TROPICAL BIOLOGY ASSOCIATION

The Tropical Biology Association, United Kingdom and Kenya



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



NatureKenya
The East Africa Natural History Society



NATIONAL MUSEUMS OF KENYA
WHERE HERITAGE LIVES ON

Nature Kenya and National Museums of Kenya, Kenya



The University of Ghana, Ghana



NCF

Nigerian Conservation Foundation, Nigeria

The project is funded by the
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Executive Summary

The first of a series of training workshops forming part of EU-funded project entitled “*developing research capacities among African Environmental Scientists*” in Ghana took place from 6th to 9th September 2010 at the Noguchi Memorial Institute for Medical Research, University of Ghana, Legon, Accra. The workshop trained Ghanaian scientists on how to plan and write winning research proposals. Training themes covered included getting work funded; proposal writing skills; decoding (grant) application forms and making an impact; and finding money and follow up support for participants. The 22 participants represented 14 institutions including universities, research institutes, NGOs and government departments.

The workshop received extremely positive comments on the quality of instruction and relevance. Participants received guidance on how to improve research proposals they brought to the workshop with the aim of submitting them for funding in future, and set personal targets that they will work on for the next 6 to 12 months. Participants also received resources (workshop handouts and TBA’s “Fundraising guidelines” skills series) that will ensure they continue to apply skills learned. The participants indicated their desire to use their new skills to train others at their institutions afterwards. Presenting certificates to the participants, the Dean of Science, Prof. Daniel K. Asiedu encouraged the participants to apply what they learned, noting that it is only by practising that they will know if they are able to write proposals or not.

“Before attending the workshop, I thought it was just going to be 'one of those things' but it turned out to be extraordinary; It shed light on a number of grey areas in proposal writing that I always struggle with when writing proposal; I feel that am now in good position to be a lead person in developing projects and research proposal for my institution; I am very grateful to you all...”

Workshop participant



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Introduction

African environmental scientists play an important role in developing scientifically sound policies needed for sustainable natural resource management and poverty reduction. The aim of the workshop was to build the capacity of Ghanaian scientists and their institutions in planning and writing successful research proposals. It represents the first of a series of training workshops forming part of a 3 year, EU-funded project entitled “developing research capacities among African Environmental Scientists”.

The 22 participants trained represented 14 institutions including universities, research institutes, NGOs and government departments (Table 1).

Table 1: number of participants by institutions

Institution /Department	# participants
1. Council for Scientific and Industrial Research	
• Soil Research Institute	2
2. Environmental Protection Agency	1
3. Environmental Protection Association of Ghana	1
4. Forestry Commission	
• Resource Management Support Centre	1
• Wildlife Division	1
• Wildlife Division, Ankasa Conservation Area	1
• Wildlife Division, Kakum National Park	1
• Wildlife Division, Shai Hills Resource Reserve	1
5. Friends of The Nation	1
6. Ghana Atomic Energy Commission	
• Biotechnology & Nuclear Agriculture Research Institute	1
7. Ghana Wildlife Society	1
8. Institute of Professional Studies	1
9. International Water Management Institute	1
10. Kwame Nkrumah University of Science & Technology, Faculty of Renewable Natural Resources	
• Other Dept	1
• Fisheries & Watershed Management Dept	1
• Wildlife & Range Management Dept	1
11. Office of Parliament	
• Research Department	1
12. University For Development Studies	
• Faculty of Renewable Natural Resources	1
13. University of Ghana	
• Animal Biology and Conservation Science	1
• Centre for African Wetlands	1
14. University of Education	
• Science Education Dept	1
Grand total	22

Facilitators for the workshop were drawn from the University of Ghana, the Tropical Biology Association (TBA), and the French Embassy in Accra, Ghana.

The training was highly participatory and involved discussion and practical exercises as well as informal presentations and the participants remained engaged throughout. Participants brought research proposals in early stages of development and received advice and comments from the trainers during the workshop. All the trainees set personal targets detailing how they will follow through with their proposals in the next 6 to 12 months. It is expected that the participants will share their new skills with colleagues or engage in active fundraising at their institution, afterwards. In addition to the workshop’s training handouts, participants received copies of the TBA’s

“Fundraising guidelines” 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 opening

The workshop was officially opened by the Dean of Science, University of Ghana, Prof. Daniel K. Asiedu accompanied by Prof. E.O. Owusu and Prof. P. K. Ofori-Danson (Vice Dean of the Faculty of Science, and the Director of Ecological Laboratory Centre, respectively). In his key note address (Annex 1), Prof. Asiedu singled out ‘impact on reputation’ as a primary benefit of research to research institutions and universities adding that research can affect the ability to recruit and retain high quality students and staff. Prof. Asiedu observed that “training faculty to do quality research and acquire the capability to attract funding is critical for the survival of any university or any research institution”. Such training, he added, requires increased collaboration and the development of “innovative curricula that can be used to train emerging African scholars and decision makers”. He further observed that, acquiring the right proposal writing tools “can mean the difference between getting the money required for a project and getting an instant rejection”. Thanking the participants for beating a strong field of applicants, and everyone involved in making the project a success, Prof. Asiedu noted that for Ghana, the DRECA project represented “the beginning of a new era of innovative career development of...[Ghana’s]... third generation of managers, scientists and policy makers to bring change to conservation”.

Giving the overview of the training, Dr Rosie Trevelyan (Director of the Tropical Biology Association) noted that the workshop was designed around talks, case studies, discussions and practical exercises. She asked participants to maximise interaction and share experiences, noting that by working together one is likely to gain more. She added that though the workshop will be intensive, participants will get time to work on their own proposals. She ended by noting that the workshop will be informal and that she hoped that the participants will enjoy it and come out enthusiastic and empowered.

Workshop content and themes

The workshop covered four themes during the four days. These are: getting work funded; proposal writing skills, presentation skills, and finding money and follow up support for participants (see Appendix 1 for the training programme).

Day 1: Fundraising skills

In addition to raising funds to support priority research and conservation work, scientists are increasingly required to fund-raise to supplement institutional budgets. This module taught essential skills of “how, when and where” to ask for money. Participants shared their experiences on sources of funding they have targeted and the barriers they faced in fund-raising. Many of the barriers were tackled during the workshop through talks on how to go about fund-raising.

The day’s exercise saw participants review funding proposals and in the process learn key features that make proposals successful. Dr. Erasmus Owusu presented a case study of funded conservation projects in Ghana.

Day 2: Proposal writing skills

The module focused on skills in writing research and conservation projects. After listening to a talk on writing research proposals, participants were engaged in a practical on how to go about responding to a funding call. The practical required participants to apply what they learnt from the talk and translate sections of proposals they had developed to match a call from a specified grant.

The overall learning for the day was how to structure a funding proposal including the levels of details required for different components of a research proposal. The importance of having a logical flow throughout the proposal was emphasised. Specific sections of focus were the

introductions (how to write project background, problem statement and justification) and objectives. Additional discussions were held on writing project methods with participants being encouraged to think of how the data they collect will be analysed.

A session on writing skills outlined the importance of brevity and clarity. Participants were shown examples of good practice and bad practice and discussed how to ensure their writing conveyed the right message.

Finally, participants worked on proposals they brought to the workshop and received one-to-one advice and reviews from the workshop trainers. At least 3 proposal review sessions (or approximately 4.5 cumulative hours) were provided for in the workshop programme.

Day 3: Decoding the application form and making an impact

Poor presentation of one's application can kill a good project. In addition to hearing how to prepare and present budgets, participants learned how to decode application forms including demystifying donor terminologies and project log frames. The focus here was on general conservation research projects that tend to follow a slightly different suite of components from a purely academic research proposal covered on day 2.

An open question and answer session allowed participants to seek clarification on past presentations as well as highlight new topics and areas not included in the programme so far. The day closed with a general discussion on building a successful fund-raising profile. The discussion was borne out of the realisation that the ability to write well, alone, is not enough in fund-raising but individuals need to learn to network and collaborate with each other.

Day 4: Finding money and the way forward

Participants were taken through the sources of project funding available to them. This involved pointing them to top funding opportunities that are easy to access as well as how to identify relevant funders. Other sources of funding not yet covered by the workshop were discussed including donors and corporates. This was followed by a practical on how to market one's work in limited time. Participants then took stock of lessons learnt and set personal targets for the next six months after the workshop. The TBA committed to provide follow up to help participants realise their targets. Participants were informed that they will all be enrolled in the TBA contact database and receive follow up support through the TBA alumni desk in Nairobi. Participants were encouraged to send their proposal to TBA who will engage mentors to help review and improve the proposal for submission. The TBA pointed out that it has a wide network of experts who are willing to provide mentorship, but cautioned participants to go through the entire mentorship process as dropping halfway through will be a waste of time and energy and a big let down to the mentors.

Finally, participants were encouraged to continue, but also strengthen the networking resulting from the workshop. While TBA is open to follow up requests at all times, participants will receive regular circulars to check progress with the targets, but more importantly, to ensure that no one feels left out and that each participant gets the support they deserve.

“I really enjoyed as well as increased my knowledge in research proposal writing. I also like the mentorship approach to the training to ensure post training support for proposal writing”

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 1.2, respectively on a scale from 1 (excellent) to 5 (very poor). All participants said 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 2.4 and after the workshop as 1.0 on a scale of 1 = a lot; 2 = a moderate amount; 3 = a little and 4 =not at all. All respondents said they were “very likely” to apply the lessons learnt at their work stations.

10 participants reported that they had written and submitted a total of 13 funding proposals in the last year. This translated to 0.62 (and a median of 0) proposals per year. At least 60% of the proposals submitted last year were unsuccessful.

	Participants	Workshop score	Teaching score	Correct balance between talks & practicals	I am ‘very likely’ to apply what I learned
Ghana	22	1.1	1.2	100%	100%

Beyond following through with their individual targets, most participants indicated their desire to train others at their institutions in the skills learned during the workshop. A sample of comments received on the workshop is given below:

“The workshop has been a success. It has exposed us to the rudiments of securing sponsorship. I will say that some of us benefited a lot and as such it should be opened to other scientist. We should be made part of the subsequent workshops.”

“The presentation skills of the facilitators were excellent. I believe this is what other workshops on proposal writing that I have attended over the years lack.”

“I think this is an excellent job done. Personally, I liked the balance of talk and practical session. I believe the practical session made all the difference. Really impactful. Thank you.”

Closing of the workshop

The Dean of Science, Prof. Daniel Asiedu and his Vice Prof. E. O. Owusu graced the closing ceremony. In his closing speech, Prof. Asiedu thanked the participants for their efforts during the workshop. He encouraged the participants to apply what they learned, noting that it is only by practising will they know if they able to write proposals or not. The workshop closed with Prof. Daniel Asiedu presenting certificates to the participants.

Acknowledgements

We would like to acknowledge all those involved in the planning of the workshop, and the participants who made the workshop such a success. Special thanks go to the European Union’s ACP Science and Technology Programme for funding this project. 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: Developing successful research proposals

6 Sept 10	Getting your work funded
09:00	Opening ceremony, welcome and introductions (EO) Workshop opening speech (DA) DRECA project and workshop aims (RT) Other remarks (EOO)
9:30	Group photo/coffee break
	Fundraising - people's experiences so far
10:00	Expectations, discussion and feedback by participants (AK)
10:45	Talk: How to go about fundraising for your project (RT)
11:30	From theory to practice: Practical on funding proposals (RT)
13:00	<i>Lunch</i>
14:00	Feedback on practical [review of funding proposals] (RT)
14:30	Case Study: example of funded conservation project(s) in Ghana (EO)
15:30	<i>Tea break</i>
16:00	Proposal session: assessing and collating participants work (AK)
16:45	<i>Day close</i>
7 Sept 10	Proposal writing skills
08:30	Talk: Writing a scientific proposal (OD)
09:15	Cast study: example of a research funded project in Ghana (OD)
10:00	Practical: how to respond to a funding call/announcement (OD/RT)
10:10	<i>Working Coffee break/ Practical:</i> how to respond to a funding call/announcement
12:30	Practical feedback: responding to a funding call (OD)
13:00	<i>Lunch</i>
14:00	Practical feedback: responding to a funding call, cont'd
14:45	Talk: Top tips on writing skills (RT)
15:15	<i>Tea break/Proposal session:</i> working on own proposals (all)
16:00	<i>Day close</i>

8 Sept 10 Decoding the application form

- 08:30 **Talk:** presenting budgets (AK)
09:30 **Talk & discussion:** De-coding the application form (RT)

10:30 *Coffee break*
11:00 **Practical:** Generating project objectives and impacts (RT)

13:00 *Lunch*
14:00 **Practical:** Generating project objectives and impacts (RT)
15:30 *Tea break/ Proposal session:* working on own work (all)

9 Sept 10 Finding money

- 08:30 **Talk:** preparing log frames (RT)
09:00 **Donor panel:** donor fundraising (AD)

10:30 *Tea break*

11:00 **Discussion:** Where to get the money (AK/DD)
Questions and answer session (All)
Discussion: building a successful fund-raising profile (AK)
11:40 **Proposal session:** working on own proposals (all)

13:00 *Lunch*

14:15 Putting it into practice: lessons learned & personal targets for the next year (RT)
14:40 **Feedback:** lessons learned & personal targets for the next year (RT)
15:30 **Follow up support:** Information for participants (AK)
Workshop assessment (AK/EO)
16:00 **Closing remarks, presentation of certificates** (DA)

17:00 *Farewell dinners and departure*

Teachers and resource people*

Dr Delali Dovie (DD)	University of Ghana
Dr Erasmus Owusu (EO)	University of Ghana
Dr Arnaud Dornon (AD)	Embassy of France, Accra, Ghana
Dr Rosie Trevelyan (RT)	Director, Tropical Biology Association
Mr Anthony Kuria (AK)	Project Manager, Tropical Biology Association
Prof P. Ofori Danson (OD)	Ecological Laboratory Centre, University of Ghana
Prof. Daniel. K Asiedu (DA)	Dean, Faculty of Science, University of Ghana
Prof. E. O. Owusu (EOO)	Vice Dean, Faculty of Science, University of Ghana
*Mrs. Afia Asamoah Owusu	Centre for Human & Environmental Security
*Ms. Abigail Kuranchie	University of Ghana
*Mr Acquah-Lampsey Daniel	University of Ghana

Annex 1. Workshop opening – keynote address

DEVELOPING RESEARCH CAPACITY AMONG AFRICAN ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENTISTS

First Workshop on 'Developing Successful Research Proposal'
Opening Address by the Dean, Faculty of Science – *Prof. Daniel Asiedu*
September 6th 2010, University of Ghana, Legon

The Vice Dean of Faculty Science, Our Guests from the Tropical Biology Association in Cambridge and Nairobi, Faculty members present, Participant Colleagues from Academia and the Practitioner Community, the Media. Permit me to stand in for, and bring you greetings from the Vice Chancellor of the University of Ghana, who could not make it to this opening.

Distinguished participants, you will agree with me that if we are to manage natural resources effectively in Ghana, we must encourage theories and approaches that are based on the knowledge about Ghanaian ways of decision-making and which incorporate the variance of Ghanaian society-environment interactions. Ethno-ecological studies increasingly are recognizing the role played by ecological and evolutionary patterns in relation to natural resource use. The reverse (i.e., integration of anthropological thoughts into the natural and physical sciences) is inevitable but remains uncommon either because biophysical scientists have incomplete knowledge of the management styles of indigenous institutions or because there is cultural myopia within our professions, which must be investigated.

As a result, there is a desperate need to strengthen local indigenous institutions and organizations to encourage fine scale science and more people who are interested in patterns among relatively small units of space and time. We can advance such science and interests through collaborative regional centres and training programmes that are tailor-made. Thus allowing African and northern scholars to work together, explore alternative knowledge frameworks and thus, be able to develop innovative curricula that could be used to train emerging African scholars and decision makers just as we are going to experience in the next couple of days.

My dear friends, you will also agree with me that research is one of the most important tools for a successful scientific and development career yet it has become very costly and financially demanding in the past two decades. Competition for limited resources is on the increase and nationally, competition for the same resources by different development sectors has made it absolutely impossible to raise research funds locally. There is no doubt that all of us here (as managers, scientists and policymakers) would have to look elsewhere but again in a competitive environment. This can be a frustrating process when you have your proposals turned down, and more painfully when it is local with surety that, your PhD or Masters should give you the edge. This is the main reason why the Faculty of Science, I and the Vice-Dean *Prof Owusu* are very much fond of this particular training workshop.

In this world of uncertainties, it is important that decisions are based on firm and accurate research, which can only come by doing and doing by funding. In your professional positions of significant responsibility (e.g., mid-level managers, university faculty members), you will be required to manage in settings that have neither the tradition of, nor the resources for extensive research, whether biophysical or socioeconomic. You will be expected not only to improve yourselves but also local conditions and change people's lives especially those of you in the academia. Hence, we are fortunate to be hosting such a training programme for the next three

years I am informed, through series of three practical workshops and follow-up support in the areas of:

1. Development of successful research proposals
2. Writing and submission of papers for publication in journals and other media
3. Design and implementation of quality research in the field

I also do understand that Kenya, Uganda and Nigeria are part of the project and today mark the beginning of the first of the training series which is on “*Development of Successful Research Proposals*”. The overall objective is to support African countries in developing scientifically sound policies needed for sustainable natural resource management and poverty reduction, and thus strengthening the scientific capacity of eastern and western African institutions. The objective will thus help meet the Millennium Development Goal 7 on *Environmental Sustainability* and contribute to Africa’s Consolidated Science and Technology Plan of Action. For Ghana, it is the beginning of a new era of innovative career development for our ‘*third generation*’ of managers, scientists and policymakers to bring change to conservation. The wider scientific community will also benefit from more readily accessible research results that are useful for environmental management decisions. As a university we will welcome such innovations at all times.

May I also use this opportunity to thank the Tropical Biology Association for extending a hand of partnership to us in Ghana and in particular the University of Ghana. I also wish to thank the Vice Dean of the Faculty of Science for his enthusiasm in ensuring that this workshop becomes a reality. Permit me to congratulate two of our finest scientists who have been behind all the hard work that have lasted for over a year, *Dr Erasmus Owusu* and *Dr Delali Dovie*. To the participants from all spheres of disciplines and professions, coming forward to apply for the workshop amongst over fifty applicants, forty of whom I learnt were highly qualified and having at least a Masters degree, I say Ayeekoo!

Distinguished participants, I wish you all a successful stay and memorable participation in this workshop for the next four days. Take some time off and enjoy the new developments on our campus. On this note, I formally declare the workshop opened for business.

I thank you.