



Developing Successful Research Proposals

Workshop report

Kenya Institute of Education, 20th to 23rd July 2010, Nairobi, Kenya

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and formed part of the project
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Developing Research Capacity among African 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



NATIONAL MUSEUMS OF KENYA

WHERE HERITAGE LIVES ON

Nature Kenya and National Museums of Kenya, Kenya



The University of Ghana, Ghana



Nigerian Conservation Foundation, Nigeria

The project is funded by the



European Union's ACP Science and Technology Programme.

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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 Kenya took place from 20th to 23rd July 2010 at the Kenya Institute of Education, Nairobi. The workshop trained Kenyan 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 18 participants represented 8 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 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 afterwards. The participants indicated their desire to train others at their institutions in the skills learned during the workshop. Presenting certificates to the participants, Mr Paul Ndang’ang’a, Species Programme Manager for Africa, Africa Partnership Secretariat of the BirdLife International, asked participants to apply what they learned in their work, adding that it is only by practising that they will improve their writing skills.

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“The workshop was well organized, coordinated and planned with the teachers being very excellent in their work”. (Workshop participant)

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 Kenyan 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 18 participants represented 8 institutions including universities, research institutes, NGOs and government departments (Table 1).

Table 1: number of participants by institutions

Institution /Department	# participants
Egerton University	1
International Centre for Insect Physiology and Ecology	1
Kenya Forest Research Institute	1
Kenya Wildlife Service	1
Kenyatta University	3
Moi University	2
National Museums of Kenya	7
Nature Kenya	2
Grand Total	18

Facilitators for the workshop were drawn from Nature Kenya, the Tropical Biology Association (TBA), the African Secretariat of the BirdLife International, and the Kenyan Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology (Appendix 1).

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 also 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

Opening the workshop, Mr Alex Ngari said that Nature Kenya, as one of the partner institutions in the project was pleased to host the workshop. He noted that the workshop was very relevant to Nature Kenya’s work. Mr Ngari acknowledged other partners in the project especially the National Museums of Kenya. He thanked the TBA for working tirelessly to get this funding and for initiating the 3 year programme.

Mr Ngari facilitated participants’ introductions to each other and invited the participants to share and learn from each other and from the trainers throughout the workshop.

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 fundraise 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 fundraising. Many of the barriers were tackled during the workshop through talks on how to go about fundraising.

The day’s exercise saw participants review funding proposals and in the process learn key features that make proposals successful. Mr Paul Ndang’ang’a presented a case study of funded conservation projects implemented at the African continent level but also with important lessons learnt in Kenya.

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 fundraising profile. The discussion was borne out of the realisation that the ability to write well, alone, is not enough in fundraising 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 was open to follow up requests at all times, participants will receive regular circulars to check progress with the targets, but more important, to ensure that no one feels left out and that each one gets the support they deserve.

“The workshop was very insightful. I learnt a lot and I am glad that our mentors will continue to follow up on our progress”. (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 1.2 on a scale from 1 (excellent) to 5 (very poor). 16 out of 18 respondents 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 2.2 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.

Participants	Workshop score	Teaching score	Correct balance between talks & practicals	I am “very likely” to apply what I learned
18	1.2	1.2	89%	100%

11 participants reported that they had written and submitted a total of 25 funding proposals in the last year. This translated to 1.5 (and a median of 2) proposals per year. A sample of comments received on the workshop is given below:

“Was very interactive. This helped me internalize and see things in a better way”

“The workshop was a fine example of what capacity building is all about. Personally, I feel more equipped to tackle the world of proposal writing and grantsmanship.”

“The workshop was very useful to me. It has been a milestone to my career.”

“I have gained a lot that I will use in future to improve my writing (skills) and contact the donors”

“The workshop was well organized, coordinated and planned with the teachers being very excellent in their work”

“It was held at the right time, has improved my understanding of what a successful proposal requires.”

Closing of the workshop

The closing remarks were delivered by Mr Paul Kariuki Ndang'ang'a (Species Programme Manager for Africa, Africa Partnership Secretariat of the BirdLife International). In his speech, Mr Ndang'ang'a thanked the participants for their efforts during the workshop. He asked participants to apply what they learned in their work, adding that it is only by practising that they will improve their writing skills.

The workshop closed with Mr Ndang'ang'a presenting certificates to the participants.

Acknowledgements

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. 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

20-July 2010	Getting your work funded
09:00	Word of prayer; Welcome and introductions (AK)
09:15	Overview of the training and expectations from the participants (RT)
	Fundraising - people's experiences so far
09:30	Discussion and feedback by participants (AK)
10:15	Talk: How to go about fundraising for your project (RT)
11:00	<i>Coffee break</i>
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)
14:45	Case Study: example of funded conservation project(s) in Kenya (PK)
15:30	<i>Tea break</i>
16:15	Proposal session: assessing and collating participants work (AK)
16:45	Word of prayer; <i>Day close</i>
21-July 2010	Proposal writing skills
08:30	<i>Word of prayer;</i>
	Talk: Writing a scientific proposal (MG)
09:30	Case study 2: example of a research funded project in Kenya (MG)
10:00	Practical intro: how to respond to a funding call (MG)
	<i>Coffee break</i>
10:30	Practical: how to respond to a funding call/announcement (MG)
12:30	Practical feedback: responding to a funding call (MG/AK)
13:00	<i>Lunch</i>
14:00	Practical feedback: responding to a funding call, cont'd
	Comments on responding to funding calls (MG)
15:15	<i>Tea break</i>
15:45	Talk: Top tips on writing skills (RT)
16:30	Proposal session: working on own proposals (all)
17:30	Word of prayer; <i>Day close</i>
22-July 2010	Decoding the application form
08:30	Talk: presenting budgets (AK)
10:00	Talk & discussion: De-coding the application form (RT)
10:45	<i>Coffee break</i>
11:10	Talk: preparing log frames (PM)
12:45	Questions and answer session (All)
13:00	<i>Lunch</i>
14:00	Proposal session: working on own work (all)
15:30	<i>Tea break</i>
16:00	Feedback: responses to questions asked during the 'Q&A' session
16:30	Discussion: building a success fundraising profile (all)
17:00	<i>Word of prayer/Day close</i>

23-July 2010**Finding money**

08:30	Talk & discussion: Where to get the money (AK)
09:00	Donor panel: donor fundraising (SM)
10:00	<i>Tea break</i>
10:30	Other sources of funding: Businesses, Corporates, etc
	Practical and feedback: making an impact (RT)
11:30	Proposal session: working on own work (all)
13:00	<i>Lunch</i>
14:00	Putting it into practice: lessons learned & personal targets for the next year (RT)
14:20	Feedback: lessons learned & personal targets for the next year (RT)
15:00	Comments on Follow up support (AK)
	Workshop assessment (AK)
15:30	<i>Tea break</i>
15:45	Group Photo
16:00	Closing remarks, presentation of certificates (PK)
	<i>Closing prayers</i>

Teachers and resource people

Dr Mwangi Githiru (MG)	Deputy Director, Directorate of Research Management and Development, Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology
Dr Rosie Trevelyan (RT)	Director, Tropical Biology Association
Mr Anthony Kuria (AK)	Project Manager, Tropical Biology Association
Mr Paul Matiku (PM)	Director, Nature Kenya
Mr Paul Ndang'ang'a (PK)	Species Programme Manager for Africa, Africa Partnership Secretariat of the BirdLife International
Mr Solomon Mwangi (SM)	Canadian International Development Agency
Mr Alex Ngari (AN)	Conservation Programme Manager, Nature Kenya