



# Developing Successful Research Proposals

## Workshop report

Royal Suites Hotel, 22<sup>nd</sup> to 25<sup>th</sup> June 2010, Kampala, Uganda

The workshop was organised by  
Dr Jackson Efitre<sup>i</sup>: Makerere University, Uganda  
Mr Anthony Kuria<sup>ii</sup>, and Dr Rosie Trevelyan<sup>iii</sup>: the Tropical Biology Association, Kenya/UK

and formed part of the project  
**Developing Research Capacity among African Environmental  
Scientists**

funded by

### **The EU's ACP Science and Technology Programme.**

A programme of the ACP Group of States, with the financial assistance of the European Union; contract no. FED/2009/218783: 28 Jan 2010



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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

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

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**NatureKenya**  
The East Africa Natural History Society



NATIONAL MUSEUMS OF KENYA  
WHERE HERITAGE LIVES ON

Nature Kenya and National Museums of Kenya, Kenya

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The University of Ghana, Ghana

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**NCF**

Nigerian Conservation Foundation, Nigeria

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Union; contract no. FED/2009/218783: 28 Jan 2010



## Executive Summary

The first of a series of training workshops forming part of EU-funded project entitled “*developing research capacities among African Environmental Scientists*” took place in Uganda from 22<sup>nd</sup> to 25<sup>th</sup> June 2010. The workshop trained Ugandan scientists in 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 12 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, Associate Prof. Gerald Eilu, Director of Administration at Makerere University’s School of Graduate Studies, thanked the participants for their loyalty and urged the to take home what they learned and apply in their work.

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***“The workshop came just in time when I most needed it. It was such a “well selected” course for the group of participants; Well located in a quiet environment good for learning.” (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 Ugandan 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 12 institutions including universities, research institutes, NGOs and government departments (Table 1).

Table 1: number of participants by institutions

Institution /Department	# participants
A Rocha Uganda Initiative	1
Coalition for Crisis Prevention	1
Islamic University in Uganda	1
Islamic University in Uganda / National Fisheries Resources Research Institute	1
Kyambogo University	1
Local Government	
Adjumani	1
Kabale District	1
Makerere University	
Botany	1
Zoology	2
Makerere University/ A Rocha Uganda Initiative	1
Makerere University/ Local Government/Mpigi Fisheries	1
Makerere University/Oracle consultancy	1
University of Malawi / Mbarara University	1
Makerere University Institute of Environment and Natural Resources	2
National Agricultural Research Organisation / Mbarara Zonal Agricultural Research & Development Institute	1
University of Malawi Aquaculture & Fisheries Science	1
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>18</b>

Facilitators for the workshop were drawn from Makerere University, the Tropical Biology Association (TBA), and the Uganda office of the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) (Appendix 1).

The training was highly participatory and involved practical exercises, discussion and lectures and the participants remained engaged throughout the duration of the workshop. Participants brought research proposals in early stages of development and received guidance from the workshop trainers on how to improve their work. 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, Dr Jackson Efitre noted that the workshop will be participant-focused and output-based. He challenged participants to not only take advantage of the opportunity to sharpen their proposal development and writing skills, but also use the skills and knowledge gained to influence policy, and contribute to sustainable development, afterwards. He noted that the success

of the workshop will be determined by the number of winning research proposals developed and submitted after the workshop.

After a round of participants' introductions, Dr Jackson outlined guidelines for the workshop that included:

- **Appreciation of any contribution:** participants were encouraged to be open and ask any questions ("there was no stupid question") they have. He added that not everyone was familiar with scientific writing concepts.
- **Creativity:** participants were asked to think beyond the box in order to explore new ideas.
- **Flexibility:** He pointed out that the workshop would follow a dynamic timetable to ensure that the needs of all participants were met.
- **Informality:** all participants were encouraged to interact freely and remain active.
- **Ownership:** Dr Jackson observed that although the workshop was organized by Tropical Biology Association and Makerere University, it belonged to the participants and they were expected to contribute actively to the training.
- **Transparency:** participants were asked to be open and raise any issues they may have during the workshop and ensure a fulfilling training.

Giving the overview of the workshop, Dr Rosie Trevelyan (the Director of the Tropical Biology Association) reiterated that the training would be practically oriented with full participation of the trainees. She added that participants will receive individual feedback on draft funding proposals and other work in progress during the workshop.

## 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 securing funds successfully. Many of the barriers were tackled during the workshop through talks and practicals.

The day's exercise saw delegates review funding proposals, and in the process, learn key features that make proposals successful. Mr Otim, a guest speaker presented a Ugandan fundraising case that highlighted the importance of defining targets in fundraising, team-building in project development, preparing project action plans, and sustainability of projects beyond the funding period.

### 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 how to go about responding to a funding call or announcement. 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 kind and levels of details required for different components of a research proposal. Emphases were made

on ensuring the proposal idea 'threads through' in the proposal narrative. Specific sections of focus were the introductions (how to write project background, problem statement and justification) and objectives (how to develop appropriate project objectives). Additional discussions were held on writing project methods with participants being encouraged to think of how the data they collect will be analysed. Participants also received top tips in writing skills.

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 5.5 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 importantly, to ensure that no one feels left out and that each one gets the support they deserve.

***“This four day workshop will generate very big follow up result. It is actually a specialist workshop.” (Workshop participant)***

## **Workshop assessment**

17 out of the 18 participants returned their workshop assessment. Participants' overall rating of the workshop was 1.3 while the teaching was rated 1.2 on a scale from 1 (excellent) to 5 (very poor). A majority of the participants (82%) said that the workshop offered about the right balance between talks and practicals/discussions. 94% of participants indicated that they were "very likely" to apply the lessons learnt in their work afterwards.

Participants felt that their knowledge and skills in writing funding proposals improved: they rated their knowledge and skills in fundraising before the workshop as 2.9 and after the workshop as 1.1 on a scale of 1 = a lot; 2 = a moderate amount; 3 = a little and 4 =not at all. All participants indicated their willingness to participate in follow up training on i) scientific writing and publishing and ii) project design and implementation.

Participants	Workshop score	Teaching score	Correct balance between talks & practicals	I am 'very likely' to apply what I learned
17	1.3	1.2	82%	94%

While, the participants felt the workshop venue was good and provided “good environment including accommodation” they did not support the decision by the hotel to shift meeting hall, twice, during the workshop period.

Beyond following through with their individual targets, a good number of 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:

***“Thank you for giving us the chance to progress in our scientific career”***

***“The workshop came just in time when I needed it; It was such a well selected course for the group of participants.”***

***“An inspiration workshop and straight to the point; Opening the minds of people towards conservation.”***

***“I am grateful to have been a part of this and wish I could be considered for the next one***

***“It was participatory; Topics were properly selected and delivered.”***

***“It was well organised combining theory and practical.”***

***“Thank you very much for giving us this rare opportunity. I am sure our impact will influence conservation in our nation & [the] world”***

## **Closing of the workshop**

The closing remarks were delivered by Associate Prof. Gerald Eilu (Director-Administration, School of Graduate Studies Makerere University) representing Prof. Lillian Tibatemwa-Ekirikubinza (Deputy Vice Chancellor, Academic Affairs, Makerere University), who was scheduled to close the workshop but could not make it due to other commitments. In his speech, Dr Eilu thanked the participants for being loyal to the workshop course. He asked participants to take home what they learned and apply in their work adding that he is proud that the project has finally kicked off and that those behind it are very keen to ensure the trainees continue to benefit long after the workshop.

The workshop closed with Dr Eilu 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

<b>22-Jun 2010</b>	<b>Getting your work funded</b>
09:00	<b>Welcome and introductions</b> (JE)
09:15	<b>Overview</b> of the training and expectations from the participants (RT)
	<b>Fund Raising - people's experiences so far</b>
09:30	Discussion and feedback by participants (AK)
10:15	<b>Talk:</b> How to go about fundraising for your project (CM)
11:00	<i>Coffee break</i>
11:20	<b>Talk:</b> How to go about fundraising for your project, <i>cont'd</i> (RT)
12:00	<b>From theory to practice:</b> Practical on funding proposals (RT)
13:00	<i>Lunch</i>
14:30	<b>Case Study:</b> example of a funded conservation project in Uganda (OT)
15:30	<i>Tea break</i>
16:00	<b>Feedback on practical [funding proposals]</b>
16:45	<b>Proposal session:</b> Assessing participants work (all)
17:15	<i>Day close</i>
17:30	<i>project meeting – mentorship, budgets and implementation</i>
<b>23-Jun 2010</b>	<b>Proposal writing skills</b>
08:30	<b>Case study:</b> example of a scientific funded project in Uganda (GE)
09:15	<b>Talk:</b> Writing a scientific proposal (JE)
10:00	<i>Coffee break</i>
10:30	<b>Practical:</b> How to go about responding to a funding call/announcement (CM) <i>(Working groups)</i>
12:30	Feedback from practical-responding to funding call (CM)
13:00	<i>Lunch</i>
14:15	Feedback from practical-responding to funding call, <i>cont'd</i> (CM) Comments on responding to funding calls
15:30	<i>Tea break</i>
16:00	<b>Talk:</b> Top tips on writing skills (RT)
16:35	<b>Proposal session:</b> Working on own proposals (all)
17:30	<i>Day close</i>

**24-Jun 2010      Presentation skills**

- 08:45      **Talk:** presenting budgets (AK)
- 09:30      **Talk & discussion:** De-coding the application form (RT)
- 10:30      *Coffee break*
- 11:00      **Talk:** Logframes (CM)
- 12:00      **Questions and answer session**
- 13:00      *Lunch*
- 14:00      **Proposal session:** working on own work (all)
- 15:30      *Tea break*
- 16:00      **Discussion:** building a successful fundraising profile
- 17:00      *Day close*

**25-Jun 2010      The way forward: setting targets and the follow up support**

- 09:00      **Talk & discussion:** Where to get the money (AK & JE/GE)
- 10:00      **Practical and feedback:** making an impact (RT)
- 11:00      *Tea break*
- 11:30      **Proposal session:** working on own work (all)
- 13:00      *Lunch*
- 14:00      **Proposal session** cont'd: working on own work
- 15:00      **Putting it into practice:** lessons learned & personal targets for the next year
- 15:30      **Feedback:** lessons learned & personal targets for the next year
- 16:30      *Tea break* and workshop assessment.
- 17:00      **Closing remarks, presentation of certificates/group photo.**

**Teachers and resource people**

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|----------------------------|---|
| Ass Prof. Gerald Eilu (GE) | Ag Director-Administration, School of Graduate Studies, Makerere University |
| Dr Jackson Efitre (JE)     | Lecturer, Makerere University   |
| Dr Rosie Trevelyan (RT)    | Director, Tropical Biology Association                                      |
| Mr Anthony Kuria (AK)      | Project Manager, Tropical Biology Association                               |
| Mr Otim Thomas             | World Wildlife Fund-Uganda  |
| Dr Charles Masembe (CM)    | Lecturer, Makerere University   |