

SciDev.Net Africa *Newsletter*

This is the first newsletter of the African Science and Development Network (SciDev.Net Africa) and is an outcome of a workshop on **Science Communication for Sustainable Development** held in Entebbe in October 2002 (see below). Some 50 participants, mostly from East Africa, decided that a regular newsletter keeping each other informed of science communication activities in the region could help to maintain momentum after the workshop. We look forward to hearing your reactions, and welcome proposals for the next newsletter, to be published in May 2003 (see page 4 for details on how to submit articles or other material).

Science communication for sustainable development

A workshop on science communication for sustainable development was organised by SciDev.Net in Entebbe, Uganda from 29 September to 3 October 2002.

A consensus statement issued at the end of the meeting reached the following conclusions about the problems and opportunities currently facing science communication in the region:

Obstacles to overcome

- Low awareness by scientists of the importance of communicating their research to the public;
- Low interest of media editors and other 'gatekeepers' in science-related stories, leading to poor demand for science stories by such individuals;
- Inadequate infrastructure and basic working tools (for example, Internet connectivity) for science communicators;
- Insufficient resources committed to science communication;
- Lack of suitable professional training and personal development opportunities for science communicators; and
- Poor remuneration for science journalists.

Institutional responsibilities

- We urge governments to introduce comprehensive

policies and strategies on science communication into their national planning and resource allocation, and to strengthen such policies and strategies where these already exist;

- We urge all scientific bodies, including research institutions and scientific academies, actively to support science communication, and to enhance the communication of their research to the public;
- We encourage science communicators to develop their professional skills and capacities;



Participants at the Entebbe workshop

- We urge international aid agencies to consider introducing support for activities in this field, and increasing such support where it already exists;
- We encourage the creation of national and regional networks to promote science communication, and the cross-fertilisation of ideas and experience between members of such networks, for example through the use of SciDev.Net and its regional arm, SciDev.Net Africa;
- We encourage institutions of higher education in Africa, in particular schools of mass

communication where these exist, to introduce courses on science communication;

- We urge media editors and other 'gatekeepers' to raise the priority given to science-related stories in their coverage; and
- We urge the New Economic Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) to include support for science communication in its programmes.

Tasks for communicators

- Organise professional science communication associations (for example, associations of science writers or information officers) on a national basis;
- Compile a regional database of science communicators;
- Compile a short introductory booklet for those who want to be science communicators;
- Develop ways to recognise and reward best practice in science communication, for example through annual science-writing or science-communication prizes;
- Investigate ways to reduce the cost of access to electronic information about science;
- Explore ways to develop and support internships and other practical ways of building bridges between scientists and science communicators.

A full report on the workshop, which was supported by IDRC, the British Council, the African Technology Policy Studies (ATPS) network, and UNESCO, is available at www.scidev.net/entebbe/report.pdf. Please e-mail info@scidev.net if you would like to be sent a printed copy.

Regional news

Network launched in West and Central Africa

SciDev.Net's Entebbe workshop in October 2002 was the catalyst for the establishment of the West and Central African Science Communication Network, WCA-SCNet.

The coincidence of the announcement of the sequencing of the malaria genome with the workshop provided an immediate demonstration of the role, public perception, future prospects and challenges of science communication in Africa. Very few news outlets reported on the event*, and as yet the breakthrough has had little impact on policy.

The inadequacy of the media coverage of this event goes to the heart of one of the objectives of WCA-SCNet: to identify good science, get it into the policy decision-making process and raise the profile of science discourse among policy makers. So far, the body has members from Ghana, Cameroon, Senegal and Nigeria, with the Fantsuam Foundation hosting the secretariat.

We are all aware that membership must be representative of civil society in the sub-region in order to generate a critical mass that can initiate, promote and sustain public awareness of relevant scientific issues, and ensure that these are used to inform policy decisions.

It may sound like a long shot, but we believe that we have taken the first steps.

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*See SciDev.Net editorial: www.scidev.net/archives/editorial/comment36.html

Malaria and the media: advocating health policy and practice in East Africa

Every 30 seconds a child dies of malaria. In the poorest 20 per cent of the world's population malaria takes many more lives than HIV/AIDS. Why then do we hardly notice malaria stories and programmes in the media?



This situation is now being addressed by a new network of print and broadcast journalists in East Africa committed to improving the quantity and quality of reporting and programming around malaria. The initiative – funded by the Gates Malaria Partnership (GMP) and the Commonwealth Media Development Fund – was kick-started by a five-day workshop in Tanga, Tanzania in late October 2002.

The course focused on developing innovative and strategic ways to inform and educate the public about malaria. This included advocacy and entertainment strategies, as well as programming options. A number of key experts, researchers and policy advisers from Tanzania were on hand to provide accurate and relevant malaria information.

The workshop was attended by 40 journalists from the public and private sectors of the print and electronic media in Tanzania, Malawi, Kenya and Uganda. GMP also provided grants to assist three participants to attend the 3rd Multilateral Initiative on Malaria Pan-African Conference held in Tanzania in November 2002.

A number of other initiatives have since been set in motion. An award for excellence in health reporting is being established in collaboration with the Commonwealth Broadcasting Association and the Commonwealth Print Union, with the first two years focusing on malaria journalism. Discussions have also been held with the Tanzanian School of Journalism (now part of the University of Dar es Salaam) to develop a Diploma in health communication. This is part of a move towards the recognition of health journalism as a specialist field and the establishment of permanent health desks at media houses.

Future plans include science communication training for malaria scientists and researchers, as well as greater integration of mass media initiatives across all GMP programmes. Stronger partnerships and effective communication between scientists and the media are necessary if we are to gain any ground in the fight against malaria.

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Environmental journalist training focuses on Lake Victoria

The most serious environmental challenges facing Lake Victoria and the Great Lakes region are changes in fishing patterns and eutrophication, with a decline in fish populations.

The media can play a vital role in raising public awareness of these issues, and reversing environmental degradation.

To this end, a regional training programme in environmental journalism and communication has been set up. The programme is hosted



Lake Victoria, Uganda

and coordinated by Makerere University's Department of Mass Communication.

Other stakeholders include: School of Journalism at the University of Nairobi in Kenya; School of Journalism and Communication at the National University of Rwanda; St Augustine University in Tanzania; and the Press House in Burundi.

The first intake of 20 students on the postgraduate diploma in environmental journalism come from Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda, Burundi and Uganda. One-week courses are also available.

Contact: **Goretti Nassanga** | nassanga@masscom.mak.ac.ug

A World Federation of Science Journalists was launched in November to help science writers from across the globe improve their professional skills, with a special focus on the needs of young journalists. For further information contact Véronique Morin at upswing@ca.inter.net.

Workshop on use of ICTs in HIV/AIDS communication

More than 80 applications have been received for a training workshop that is being organised by SciDev.Net, in collaboration with UNESCO, on the use of information and communication technologies to improve reporting on the science of HIV/AIDS.

The workshop is taking place at the University of Makerere in Kampala, Uganda, from 7 to 11 April 2003, and is aimed at women who are – or would like to be – directly or indirectly engaged in communicating HIV/AIDS information to the public through print, radio or electronic means.

It will focus on how to identify, research and report on the latest scientific developments, and will provide practical tuition in both basic and advanced Internet skills – including searching for reliable information and resources, and networking with special interest groups – as well as basic journalism skills. The workshop will also involve discussions on the challenges of reporting about HIV/AIDS in Africa, and the role of African people in the research and development of new vaccines and drugs.

Applications for the workshop have now closed. However, given the strong demand for participation in this event, plans are being discussed for repeating it at another location in sub-Saharan Africa. To be informed of future workshops, please contact: info@scidev.net

A developing-world view of science literacy

In December, a two-day workshop in Cape Town, South Africa, found that new definitions of science literacy are needed to ensure that public communication of science and technology addresses the real needs of people and societies in the developing world.

The workshop "Achieving public understanding of research in developing countries" was part of the 7th conference of the International Network on Public Communication of Science and Technology. It brought together more than 50 individuals from 16 countries and six continents.

Our discussions focused on whether our vision of what makes a good public understanding programme in developed countries had any relevance in the developing world. While the developed world has the luxury of detached interest in reliable knowledge about the natural world, public understanding in the developing world must focus on knowledge upon which one can act immediately.

We concluded that research – including open and honest appraisal of the knowledge embodied by indigenous systems – offers tools of great value to the developing world, and that it is vital to convey the excitement of such research, especially to children. After all, recruiting the next generation of scientists is as critical, perhaps more critical, to the culture of the developing world than to the developed world.

A more detailed report is available at www.scidev.net/lewenstein

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About SciDev.Net

Who are we?

The **Science and Development Network (SciDev.Net)** is a free-access, Internet-based network devoted to reporting on and discussing those aspects of modern science and technology that are relevant to the social and economic needs of developing countries.

SciDev.Net is based on the premise that those who stand to benefit most from modern science and technology are also those who have least access to information about it, leaving them ill-equipped to take part in discussions about issues that profoundly affect their lives.

Our goal is to provide a focal point for both authoritative information and informed debate on relevant science and technology issues. By doing so, we seek to empower individuals and communities in developing countries, increasing their ability to ensure the effective contribution of science and technology to development.

SciDev.Net's activities:

We operate a free-access news and policy-oriented website, www.scidev.net, that includes 'dossiers' of policy briefs, opinion articles and background information on key science-related issues

We build regional networks of individuals and institutions committed to improved science and technology communication

We organise workshops and other meetings aimed at capacity building in this field

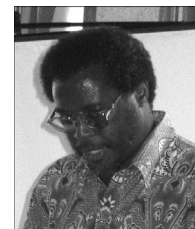
We have a core team in London, with advisers and freelance contributors located around the world. We are developing regional networks to help our work on the ground, and will be launching SciDev.Net Latin America in May. The networks will be key in organising events, such as the workshop on using ICTs to report on HIV/AIDS in Uganda in April (see page 3).

SciDev.Net Africa

The **African Science and Development Network (SciDev.Net Africa)**, the first regional network of SciDev.Net, was launched in October 2002 in Entebbe, Uganda.

The network aims to enhance communication between the media, scientists, policy researchers and decision-makers – and to promote intra-continental dialogue – on science-related issues, to increase awareness of the contribution of science and technology to the region's development needs, and to raise the skills of science communicators in the area. The network will also help SciDev.Net to increase the regional content of its website, and to disseminate material locally through non-electronic means.

The network's activities will be guided by an advisory panel, with members from a range of countries in the region. Alex Tindimubona (right), executive director of NURRU, Uganda, will chair the panel.



Alex Tindimubona

SciDev.Net Africa is initially being coordinated by Tom Hewitt who is based in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. Please contact Tom if you would like further information (tom.hewitt@scidev.net).

Free weekly e-mail alert

We invite you to register with us so that:

- You can receive a weekly e-mail alert with summaries of our latest content
- Your views and interests can play an active part in shaping our future
- We can keep SciDev.Net free by showing funders that you find the site useful

www.scidev.net/register

Newsletter submissions

Would you like to publicise a science communication activity? Or report on an event in your area?

If you would like to submit material for inclusion in the next issue of the SciDev.Net Africa newsletter – to be published in May 2003 – please contact Tom Hewitt with a brief description of the topic you would like to write about. You can also contact Tom to obtain further copies of this newsletter | tom.hewitt@scidev.net

SciDev.Net's newsfeed

If you run a website, you may be interested in featuring SciDev.Net's newsfeed – automatically updated with our latest headlines (see www.twas.org). Contact Sharon Worrell for further details | sharon.worrell@scidev.net

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