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The Need for an African Science News Service

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

ASNS	Africa Science News Service
AfricaSTI	Africa Science Technology and Innovation News
KEMRI	Kenya Medical Research Institute
SMC	Science Media Centre
TWAS	The academy of sciences for the developing world
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

PREAMBLE

At present, it is considerably more difficult for African science journalists to obtain information about research being carried out within universities and other institutions on their own continent than about research in the developed world.

As a result, African newspapers and other media tend to carry lengthy descriptions of research in the United States and Europe – often provided by wire services and used without any effort to mould it to local circumstances. But they carry relatively little about the achievements of African researchers on their own continent.

One possible initiative to help address this problem would be to create a science information service for African universities and research institutions, to distribute press releases and other materials on their behalf to the media both in Africa and world-wide to increase scope and quality of media coverage of African science. Such a news service could also play a role in introducing journalists to relevant experts and pro-actively provide information on topical issues, as well as track major stories involving African scientists and create press releases around these. With this in mind, this report aims to:

- Identify whether there is a basic need for a science information service for Africa;
- Share findings with interested stakeholders and prospective funders;
- Provide a basis for prospective follow-up activity.

Specifically, this report explores the idea of setting up an African science news service that would receive press releases from African research institutions and distribute them to the African (and international) media.

SUMMARY

We sought the views of more than 35 journalists and representatives of 30 scientific institutions either based in Africa or working from Europe but involved with African organisations. The survey was conducted over a six-week period in January and February 2011. Respondees were selected based on advice received from the UK National Commission for UNESCO Working Group for Improving Access to Scientific Information in Developing Countries, SciDev.Net (the Science and Development Network), member associations of the World Federation of Science Journalists, and contacts of the report's authors from previous professional activities. This was not intended to be an exhaustive survey, but to discover the views of a representative selection of media and scientific institutions working in Africa.

Journalists were asked about the challenges they face in reporting on science in Africa, and how an African science news service might improve their access to stories about African scientific research. Scientists were asked about their current dealings with the media and how such a news service might help them to extend their communication with the media.

The responses of both groups, in writing and through telephone and face-to-face interviews, reveal their enthusiasm for the development of an African news service as a way to help overcome many of the challenges that each of them face. However, many obstacles must be addressed, such as attitudinal and institutional barriers, if an effective African science news service is to be implemented on a wide scale across the continent. The findings of this report support the need to further explore the feasibility of a continent-wide science information service by undertaking a more detailed scoping study, including a survey of user needs and a trial project.

1. What barriers do journalists face in trying to report on scientific research in Africa?

Almost 70 per cent of the journalists who responded to the survey expressed frustration at trying to identify and reach scientists to explain their research findings in detail and comment on their significance, and in trying to obtain news and information about research.

Some cited poor communication from research institutions as a major barrier, saying, for example, that as journalists they face a "lack of access to science stories as they unfold", especially "fresh, local stories", and that "some institutions never send out any research news while they must have hundreds of stories, including even hard news stories".

Lack of media awareness at scientific institutions and geographical distance are also identified as barriers, particularly where journalists do not have the funds to travel to visit scientists. For example, one respondent noted that "press officers are important, but some organisations are media savvy, some are not. Some institutions are located too far away from the media cluster."

Other journalists reported that they or their colleagues lack skills and expertise in science reporting, including handling academic information sources. One wrote: "Journalists often don't know how/where to source science stories and how to find 'the story' in an academic publication", while another complained about the "lack of information on local research in plain language".

2. How do journalists get their stories now?

The journalists surveyed had a range of strategies for finding stories, including the use of electronic media. The main sources of the latter included key websites such as internet 'aggregator' sites (for example, Science Daily and Live Science), international and other African media for story leads, and press releases from research bodies, development agencies and governments.

About one-third listed the international news services EurekAlert!, AlphaGalileo and SciDev.Net. Also mentioned were the importance of institutional press officers, and personal contact with scientists and doctors.

While this appears an impressive array of sources, many journalists highlighted various shortcomings of current sources, often including lack of relevance to local audiences. When asked what was needed in order to improve and expand science coverage in their media outlet, there were several requests for better access to locally relevant sources and information.

Examples included requests for:

- more accessible and media-friendly packaging of research findings and results;
- more stories from Africa that are relevant to Africa;
- a better news network within the local scientific community;
- a mechanism by which local science stories can be concentrated into one place.

Furthermore, journalists questioned the agendas behind research that they see reported in the international media. As Diana Coates, director of Organisation Systems Development, wrote: "As far as international media is concerned, most internationally funded research (which is usually supported because it fits international aid agendas) is led by non-African researchers/employees of non-African science organisations. They have their own channels of getting to the international media. It does not strengthen either African science or African researchers or African journalists."

3. Would journalists in Africa sign up to an African science news service?

All the journalists who responded to the survey welcomed the idea of an African science news service, whose creation could potentially help to address many of these issues. It would be "a wonderful tool for science journalists in Africa to be informed and to build science stories", wrote one. "It will be good to get African-wide science-based releases. It will keep you abreast of developments on the continent," responded another.

Journalists gave various reasons why an African science news service could be useful, including the fact that it would help to "bypass protocol and bureaucracy" to access information.

As one journalist put it: "In Nigeria, and most countries in Africa, researchers publish their findings mainly to get promoted inside their institutions — it does not matter to them that journalists can't access these publications. So, if there is an avenue for us to access Africa-based research findings, it will go a long way in enhancing and encouraging science journalism on the continent."

The provision of a science news service could also meet the demand for "a continuous flow of news from research organisations throughout the life cycle of research — from when new projects are initiated until it is published. We need to stay abreast of scientific developments as they happen — not after they are already big news."

An African science news service could also help to overcome the difficulty of time constraints and competition with other types of story that journalists face in the newsroom. One commented: "I would certainly welcome such a source of science-based news stories because I don't have time to find all my own stories, and I am primarily not a science journalist. It is only part of my responsibilities."

Another echoed the sentiment: "I do prefer my own [stories] but as I have difficulty finding the time to dedicate to these, I could definitely use some science-based news releases!"

Scientific journals could take advantage of a news service to raise wider awareness about the papers they are publishing, and explain their contents in a less technical fashion. One journalist wrote: "I have a hard time accessing publications since I am not part of an organisation that can give me free access."

Another indicated that some journalists "would have trouble understanding and interpreting, say, a paper about a complex vaccine study, or one describing the discovery and preclinical studies of a new class of drugs".

Another incentive for establishing a science news service would be as a response to a tendency for some media organisations in Africa to request payment from non-government organisations and other organisations to cover the cost of transport for journalists to attend news briefings. A web platform that provides press releases and contact information to journalists, thus avoiding the need to travel to press conferences, might be a way to overcome this issue, according to Susanna Thorp of the UK's WRENmedia, which conducts media training in Africa on agricultural reporting.

4. Would scientific institutions make use of an African science news service?

Representatives of 30 scientific organisations in Africa took part in the survey, and their responses have been grouped according to whether they are primarily research-based institutions (13), funding organisations (6) or policy and communications-centred organisations (11).

Most of the research organisations (9 out of 11 who responded to this question) said they would consider using an African science news service to issue press releases to expand their reach. Engela Duvenage of Stellenbosch University wrote: "We want to be relevant within the African and international context."

Currently, media contact for the research organisations that took part in this survey is primarily with local journalists, although organisations operating on a regional level — such as UNESCO — tend to interact with media organisations across a region, as well as internationally.

According to Juliette Mutheu, formerly communications officer for the Kenya Medical Research Institute (KEMRI), an African science news service would have additional benefits, not only for journalists, but also for "press officers in other African countries, to keep them up to date with science publications from the continent, and [it could] help them in terms of how their press releases are written".

5. Challenges in implementing an African science news service

Despite the enthusiasm expressed for an African science news service, its widespread implementation could be hindered by a number of obstacles currently faced by many scientific institutions, including negative attitudes, institutional barriers, and scant resources and opportunities for training personnel to provide press releases.

According to Julia Wilson, programme officer from the UK pressure group Sense About Science, who has recently run workshops for scientists in South Africa, the lack of press officers and "distrust among the research community about the media and misconceptions about how the media works" are key issues in many science institutions in Africa.

The scientific organisations that took part in this survey perhaps have more resources than others in Africa, given their apparent level of public-relations activities and media policies. About half the respondents representing scientific institutions said that they received media enquiries, with frequencies ranging from three or four times a year to twice a month. Three institutions said that they received enquiries only "very rarely". In contrast, four institutions, including South Africa's Medical Research Council and Human Sciences Research Council, sometimes experienced a stream of enquiries, many times a day, following the release of a report.

Such institutions are a minority in Africa, according to Daniel Schaffer, communications officer for TWAS (the academy of sciences for the developing world). Although the capacity for science communications in Africa is growing, it is limited by "the small number of outlets that are available to distribute information and the low level of expertise for communications that currently exists in most scientific institutions". This is a situation that varies considerably across the continent. He notes: "In South Africa it is quite good, in Rwanda it has improved substantially."

The lack of full-time, dedicated communications staff is a major drawback. Schaffer comments: "I may be biased, but I think those few organisations in Africa that have public information officers do the best job of distributing information about their activities, whether it's the New Alexandria Library or South Africa's Academy of Science. The organisations where scientists try to do double duty as researchers and communicators don't nearly fare as well."

Many of the scientific organisations in the survey agreed that there needed to be more opportunities and training for scientists to communicate with the media, as well as "the creation of press officers at research institutions to advise researchers on how to get stories to the media, and to provide a link with journalists".

Tendani Tsedu of the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research, South Africa, wrote: "We do need an African science-based news service to push the agenda of science, but on the other side we need to train our scientists and researchers on how to communicate better, and what are the advantages of communicating through the media. It won't help to have the news service and still no news coming through from those doing the actual work."

The danger, therefore, is that efforts to create an African science news service could flounder for lack of contributions from many of the institutions that it is intended to support. The ability of institutions to contribute to a news service would depend on the presence of dedicated staff to prepare the necessary materials and undertake a public relations role, and understand how the media works. Without significant investment in communications, many African institutions may not be able to make use of an African science news service. Furthermore, an African science news service would need extensive marketing to research institutions and journalists on the African continent.

An alternative to a regional or pan-African news service to distribute press releases might be the idea of a network of in-country Science Media Centres, similar to the one's that already exist, for example, in Australia, Canada, Japan, New Zealand and the UK. The UK's SMC was the first to be established, with the aim of ensuring that "when a major science story breaks, we can quickly offer news desks a list of scientists available to comment, a summary of the main scientific points involved and details of which press officers or web sites to go to for further information". All the aforementioned SMC's are independent organisations. They provide regular briefings for journalists on scientific topics and actively encourage the scientific community to communicate with the media. Other countries are now also establishing Science Media Centres, including the USA. A caveat to the possibility of in-country science media centres in Africa is the funding required. A more realistic option in Africa may be to establish regional centres that each serve several countries.

6. Attitudes and institutional barriers

Our survey also showed that the attitudes of scientists would need to improve for many institutions to contribute to an African science news service and provide scientists willing to be approached by the media.

According to one journalist: "It is easier to get a quote from scientists in Europe or the US on a story I'm doing here in Nigeria, than getting a Nigerian or African scientist to comment. The African scientists will want to know first how you got his or her cell phone number, what publication you work for, and why must it be him/her that must comment on the issue. Then they take years to get back to you, even after answering all his/her questions."

It was common, according to Annie Hoban of Panos London, to find that "researchers are unavailable, don't communicate in plain language and are arrogant. Researchers think journalists misreport, misrepresent and sensationalise. This amounts to mutual lack of confidence, trust and understanding."

Scientific organisations responding to the survey also highlighted the need for "scientists to understand better how the media works and to improve their interactions with the media", as well as "to be more open and understand that the media is not the enemy".

The situation is improving, however, notes Julia Wilson. Following workshops with postdoctoral scientists in South Africa, she has received several requests from South African universities for media workshops for their researchers, and from research centres asking for advice on how to improve their connections with the media.

In many organisations, scientists are required to gain permission before speaking to the media, particularly on sensitive issues or organisational policy, which could potentially be a barrier for journalists with little time to wait for access to be granted.

While most of the 13 research organisations who responded to the survey stated that they actively encourage scientists to speak to the media, six added that scientists were first expected to gain authorisation to do so from senior officials. As Samuel Mikenga wrote, scientists at the CTA (Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation) are only allowed to talk about their field of specialisation, not on controversial matters, which are always referred to the director.

But some organisations seem to be increasing their flexibility on the matter. James Wodera of KEMRI explained that until recently only the director of KEMRI was permitted to talk to the press, but that he now delegates to others. "Increasingly the director has been sanctioning senior scientists and researchers to directly engage the media without requiring his clearance."

An African science news service could potentially play a significant role in helping to bridge the communication gap between scientists and the media, in order to overcome obstacles such as reluctance of researchers to talk to journalists, bureaucracy, and lack of understanding about how the media work.

7. Improvements needed in the media

The availability of an African science news service might help African science journalists to increase their coverage of African science, but further issues must also be addressed to fully realise this goal. For example, journalists will need to go beyond the press release to develop a story, interviewing both the scientists behind the research reported in their press release and independent experts whose contact details are not provided.

There is a danger too that setting up an African science news service might put too much expectation on science institutions. As Paul Karaimu of the International Livestock Research Institute cautioned: "Proactive science journalism in all areas of scientific endeavour, from conservation to astrophysics, could find interesting stories/research programmes to cover. Currently the burden of responsibility is placed on the science community to contact the media about their work, with the high probability that their press release will not be selected for publication."

Ruth Wanjala, communications officer at KEMRI, has frequently found, for example, that "journalists basically copy and paste the press releases we give. They do not take time to arrange interviews or think critically about the stories we give them."

Of course, there are many reasons for this reliance on press releases, including time pressure and lack of training for journalists.

Yet despite such experiences, scientific organisations in Africa, including funding agencies, were generally positive about their dealings with the media, especially after the two sides have been able to get to know each other. Thabiso Nkone of South Africa's National Research Foundation wrote of journalists that once "you more or less know their comfort level with highly technical information, getting coverage becomes a little bit better".

Personal contact is key to maximising the opportunity for science coverage by the media. The majority of scientific organisations responding to the survey emphasised the importance of personal contact with journalists, either by telephone or face-to-face.

An increase in the number of stories about science in Africa coming from African institutions, and reported by the African media, could even prompt African editors and publishers to give greater attention to science.

An official at the Kenyan Ministry of Science and Technology noted: "Newspapers are in business. They provide the news that will make their papers sell, so in this case political news is the selling point. Just like in the UK, the tabloid news and paparazzi make papers sell best. There is a golden opportunity for a strong programme to be developed to address this matter with funding from the relevant development partners."

In some countries at least, the media environment is already becoming more favourable, according to a Kenyan journalist. "Science journalism in Kenya is growing due to increased interest by the audience, and media houses are responding predictably by creating science desks. However, political reporting still dominates, and [science] takes a distant third position, after politics and business reporting."

If the media climate continues to warm to idea of featuring more science, then the time could be right to explore the setting up of an African science news service. However, many of the above mentioned obstacles would need to be overcome for this to succeed. For example, there would need to be more investment in dedicated, trained, staff at scientific institutions to act as press officers, and a change of attitude among many scientists, to facilitate the provision of news about scientific developments to the media. At the same time, there needs to be an increase in the numbers of journalists who are confident enough to go beyond the press release, make contact with scientists, and persuade their editors to give more prominence to science reporting. Many organisations, including UNESCO, the World Federation of Science Journalists and the Science and Development Network strive to encourage more and better quality science reporting in Africa through training and networking activities. And finally, extensive marketing would need to take place in order to promote awareness and use of an African science news service by both the research community and the media.

8. Lessons from Europe

The challenges facing African organisations are familiar, according to Peter Green, director of the AlphaGalileo Foundation, which is based in the UK but provides an international science news service. "There are similar problems across Europe," he said in an interview that was separate to the survey.

Green is interested in encouraging contributions from African institutions to the AlphaGalileo news service, and is familiar with the types of obstacles highlighted in our survey. He explained that some institutions in Norway and Ireland, for example, have yet to take full advantage of AlphaGalileo, even with the existence of press offices.

Persuading European organisations to use a science news service is a marketing exercise that can be accomplished through the existence of local partners, said Green. Ideally, this should be an academy of sciences, a government body or a research funding organisation with local credibility and contacts. He explained that a local partner can drive the recruitment of institutions and champion the benefits of having access to journalists around the world who are signed up to receive press releases.

In Europe too, he said, there is a need for more training "for scientists, for the media and for press officers to encourage better use of the media", and to take advantage of the "added value" that a news service can provide.

AlphaGalileo has developed its web platform to enable journalists to access press releases by geographical region as well as by topic. At the same time, Green is keen to encourage African journalists to sign up to the service, which is free to the media. The current level of use by journalists in Africa is "very low", he said.

However, as one journalist emphasised, it is important that the African media is also an active partner in the setting up of an African news service. "I'm frankly a bit worried that a new news service will be another project set up for African journalists by a Western organisation. I'd strongly encourage that [African journalists] actively participate (or better lead) attempts to organise access to better scientific information."

9. Cost and practical issues in introducing an African science news service

Establishing a well-functioning news service that meets the needs of its users and represents science across Africa will require substantial financial investment. This is especially the case given the many scientific institutions that currently lack press officers.

In the case of universities, for example, it means convincing university rectors and vice-chancellors, among others, of the benefits of establishing a press office. "It's like chicken and egg until it dawns on them. We can't get invited to university meetings. And press officers have to be valued and able to go into the vice-chancellor's office," he said.

Institutions would also need access to the funds required to pay for a subscription if an African science news service were to operate on the type of subscription-based business model adopted by AlphaGalileo and EurekAlert!

Other questions that need resolving include the languages that such a news service should cater for, and the cost of translation services. Furthermore, the level of media interest across a region would need to be ascertained to know whether the users would be predominantly local journalists wanting to know about local stories, or journalists wanting news across their region.

"I've no idea if, for example, the Kenyan news media is interested in what's going on in South Africa. Whereas the UK and US media like to know about South African research," said Green.

Policy and advocacy organisations and international agencies were also positive about the idea of using an African science news service. But any scientific organisation would first need to assess whether the news service had a business plan that suited their needs, and whether it "demonstrated effectiveness in each of the media channels that are now available", according to Diana Coates, who warned that "the days of the spray-gun approach are over".

Samuel Mikenga recommended giving consideration to whether the African science news service should also take on the role of being an 'information' or 'knowledge' service, and whether this role would be limited to African sources, or only intended for African audiences, whatever the origin.

Given the potential for a broader information service, he recommended other products besides press releases, such as digitised publications, science facts, success stories, online videos and podcasts.

10. Potential media partners

Two media representatives expressed an interest in acting as potential partners in developing an African science news service, following their own efforts in this direction.

Simon Gear of the South Africa-based media group Primedia wrote: "I am currently in the process of setting up a science-based news agency, which will feed information into a website (at first). We would be very interested in working together on any project that achieved the distribution of science stories into South African media."

Janice Limson, a researcher at Rhodes University in Grahamstown, South Africa, and the driving force behind the online science magazine [Science in Africa](#), said: "Science in Africa magazine has an established ten-year track record in science reporting, with archives covering this extended period. The magazine could benefit at this stage from merging with other groups in order to achieve its wider mandate. We are very much open to any discussions."

Other potential partners include the new online Africa Science Technology and Innovation News (AfricaSTI), based in Nigeria, and the newspaper ScienceAfrica, and the African Science News Service (ASNS), both based in Kenya.

CONCLUSIONS

There is strong support for the idea of setting up an African science news. Most importantly, this support comes from within Africa, where the media have little access to the scientific research that is taking place locally. Journalists who took part in the survey expressed frustration at many of the current challenges they face in reporting about African research, including the lack of access to scientists and timely information about new developments. A science news service could improve the situation by providing a platform for distributing press releases and other materials to the media. Likewise, scientific institutions largely welcomed the idea of an African science news service, particularly as a way to expand their reach to media outlets across Africa as well as in their own country.

However, in order for an African science news service to succeed, there needs to be a greater effort and investment in overcoming many obstacles. Those highlighted in our survey include the lack of trained and dedicated press officers at scientific institutions, and a frequent mistrust of the media among scientists. Bureaucracy often prevents scientists from responding to interview requests quickly enough for journalists to meet their deadlines. Respondents also noted that for journalists to make good use of an African science news service, there needs to be better training for journalists so that they can go 'beyond the press release' to develop science stories and feel confident in talking to scientists. And there needs to be more opportunities for journalists and scientists to meet, to break down the communication barriers they currently face.

It is noteworthy too that some of the obstacles highlighted in our survey are not unique to Africa. For example, many European institutions could also invest more financially in science communication, as noted by the science news service AlphaGalileo, which works particularly to encourage European institutions to subscribe to its services. Institutions have to weigh up the costs of subscribing to AlphaGalileo, or the US-led service *EurekAlert!*, versus distributing their own press releases directly to the media.

APPENDIX 1: Summaries of responses from science organisations

Primarily research active organisations

- Antoinette Kotze, director, Research & Scientific Services, National Zoological Gardens, South Africa
- Engela Duvenage, media officer, Faculty of Science, Stellenbosch University
- James Wodera, communications officer, Kenya Medical Research Institute (KEMRI), Kenya
- Julian Jacobs and Sarah Bok, Medical Research Council, South Africa
- Juliet Mutheu, formerly of KEMRI
- Michele Hofmeyr, scientist, South Africa National Parks
- Paul Karaimu, corporate communications officer, International Livestock Research Institute, Kenya
- Pedzi Gozo, director, marketing and communications, South African National Biodiversity Institute
- Penny Haworth, communications manager, South African Institute for Aquatic Biodiversity
- Ruth Wanjala, communications officer, KEMRI
- Tendani Tsedu, media and communication, Council for Scientific and Industrial Research, South Africa
- Winston Wachanga, information resources administrator, African Economic Research Consortium

Research funding agencies

- Daniel Schaffer, public information officer, TWAS
- Eric Mwangi, principal research officer, Department of Research and Development, CAAST-Net, Ministry of Science and Technology, Kenya
- Ina van der Linde, media liaison, Human Sciences Research Council, South Africa
- Stephen Karimi, chief science secretary, Kenya National Council for Science and Technology
- Thabiso Nkone, marketing and communications manager, National Research Foundation, South Africa
- Tommy Makhode, Department of Science and Technology, South Africa

Science policy / advocacy/ communications organisations

- Andrew Kanyegirire, communications manager, New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), South Africa
- Charles Dhewa, Knowledge Transfer Africa, Zimbabwe
- Diana Coates, director, Organisation Systems Development, South Africa
- Hezekiel Dlamini, advisor in communication and information, East Africa, UNESCO, Kenya
- Jaco du Toit, communication and information advisor, UNESCO regional office, Namibia
- Julia Wilson, Sense About Science, UK
- Michel Kenmoe, National Programme Specialist, UNESCO, Gabon
- Muza Gondwe, African Science Heroes (formerly of the Wellcome Trust, Malawi)
- Patsy Scholtz, communications manager, Academy of Science of South Africa
- Rokia Touré Ba, national programme specialist, UNESCO, Mali
- Samuel Mikenga, programme coordinator, media, Technical Centre for Agriculture and Rural Co-operation (CTA), the Netherlands.

Question 1

How often do journalists make contact to find out about research at your organisation, or to ask for advice or a comment?

The frequency with which journalists make contact with primary research organisations varies enormously, ranging from “very rarely” to daily enquiries. The responses fell into three groups:

- 1) Three of the 13 organisations surveyed said that approaches from the media occurred only “very rarely”.
- 2) Approximately half of the research organisations surveyed (6 out of 13) experienced occasional media enquiries, ranging from 3 or 4 times per year to twice a month.
- 3) Four of the 13 organisations, including South Africa's Medical Research Council, said they received frequent enquiries, ranging from 3 or 4 times a week to daily.

Government ministries and research funding agencies experienced a similar range, varying from “very rarely” to a “stream” of enquiries. Policy organisations and agencies such as UNESCO experienced occasional media contact, varying from “scarcely” to 6 times a month.

It's important to note, however, that the responding organisations were perhaps the most likely to have media contact — they already had a media strategy and personnel devoted to the task, whereas others contacted by us did not respond, and perhaps had less capacity and commitment towards communicating with the media.

Individual responses:

- Very rarely
- In a month we get about 4-5 requests for information on our work – this includes studies, reports and positions on various economic and social issues.
- Very rarely
- Twice a month
- Rarely, +/- 6 times a year.
- On average 10 times per week
- Yes, but most are associated with Sci.Dev.Net, Research Africa or correspondents for Nature and Science who write about science in Africa. News about TWAS in Africa is largely channelled through international media organizations and then picked up by the local press. That is what happened with our recent announcement of Romain Murenzi as the new TWAS executive director. Part of this may be unique to Africa but part is also due to the way TWAS functions. We don't have the resources to marshal a broad media campaign. As a result, we rely on outlets with a broad reach or electronic media outlets that aggregate the news.
- Very rarely – only when a Minister or Senior Government Official is opening a Scientific Conference.
- About 10 times a year
- I get enquiries three to four times a week, on average, but if there is a new report being released, requests stream in, up to 30 enquiries over a period of 2-3 days.
- At least once a month
- Yes...communication with the media is one of our routine duties of this department. This department is the liaison between journalists, the management and the scientists/researchers, hence attending to calls and inquiries from journalists is routine.

- Daily, I get media queries via telephone calls, cellular calls, emails, facebook queries – daily and through our switchboard.
- Sporadic, and is dependent on events occurring like World Malaria Day or on publications for which we have sent out press releases for or new articles in the international media. When press releases are issued I say we get about 10 journalists following up.
- Scarcely – when it relates to research but quite often when it relates to international events such as world days.
- We have a lot of scientists in the KNP, but we hardly receive any inquiry from journalists for scientific research, I cannot remember of any at this stage if ever there has been one but I doubt it.
- Very rarely. Most of the time it is us going to them with a story.
- ASSAf gets contacted by specialist media from M&G, Beeld, Burger, Business Day and SciDev.Net on a regular basis. (Twice/ three times a month.) Interest from Sunday press is less and sporadic. With regard to broadcast media, ASSAf found that contact is largely prompted by ASSAf.
- Yes
- On a monthly basis.
- 3 to 4 times a year.
- Not so common
- At least twice a month
- About 6 times a month
- Yes
- Very often (every day)
- They hardly ever contact us, it is primarily us who contact them
- Sometimes its daily, the average is at least 3 times a week.
- Yes

Question 2

Do they tend to be local / Africa regional / international journalists?

For research organisations and funding agencies, most media contact was from local journalists, with some organisations also reporting contact with African regional media as well as international (non-African) media, depending on the nature of the story. For policy and international agencies such as UNESCO, there appeared to be a greater trend towards contact with journalists in several countries in a region.

Individual responses:

- Local
- For the most part they are Africa regional journalists
- Local
- Mainly local and Africa region.
- Africa regional
- Local, with splashes of Africa region in between. Also, it depends on the type of research stories currently circulating.
- They tend to be mainly local journalists with isolated cases of Regional and international journalists.
- Mostly Africa region journalists

- Mainly local, but in the case of research with an international impact, for example AIDS Surveys, we are approached by international journalists, but seldom from Africa, to my regret.
- Local journalists (from 5 cluster countries)
- We attend to all types of journalists- local, regional and international. It all depends with the type of stories one is working on. However, a majority of inquiries come from local and regional media, unless something of an Internal magnitude has occurred say like the SARS or Ebola outbreak. It's also important to note that a number of International journalists arrange for press tours to identified projects or programmes within the institute and this is quite common.
- Mostly local reporters – often new reporters and occasionally I get international queries.
- Because press releases are sent to local and African media the follow-up is from African media.
- For research matter: Africa regional journalists; and for events: local journalists
- We host journalists from all over the world but generally their stories would be about things like poaching, elephant management and things like that.
- Local journalists.
- Mainly local, although international contact depends on Academy's interaction with specific countries.
- Local journalists mostly, through some are looking for information to publish in international publications. We also meet with local journalists during events at or organized by ILRI. International journalists often also call in response to press releases as well to get more information on specific research areas addressed in these releases.
- Local
- Across the range, although most often local.
- Tend to be local or sometimes Africa regional
- A mixture of all three
- Mostly from developing countries, particularly Africa
- Mainly local
- Local
- Of those who contact us we have had a mix. Foreign correspondents from outside the African continent contact us as well as local journalists
- Local and international , regional its mainly at international events
- Mostly African regional followed by local then once in a while international journalists

Question 3

How often do you or your colleagues meet journalists face-to-face?

Meetings between scientists and journalists were rare or infrequent for many scientific organisations, but this appeared to be due more to the availability of email and telephone contact than a lack of contact altogether, at least for those organisations surveyed. Several noted that meetings with journalists were precipitated by specific events that they organised, such as press briefings, workshops and launches. For policy organisations and international agencies such as UNESCO, there was a wide range, from as little as 3 times a year to 3 times a month.

Individual responses:

- My department is actually comprised of journalists and our project includes training journalists so I would say we meet often but usually more for capacity building purposes than just information requests on their behalf.
- On average we have one major face-to-face interview per month

- Rarely
- Once a month
- +/- 3 times a year
- Email and telephonic interaction most generally, because of the relationships that have been formed with numerous journalists over the past few years. Face-to-face generally only when a new journalist comes to campus for the first time.
- I never meet them? They have no interest in me so why should I waste my time to look for them?
- About once every 3 months
- Seldom, contact is usually by phone
- At least every fortnight
- Often, may be three to four times in two weeks. It all depends on the nature of the stories. It is our policy that an officer from this office must be present at any interview being conducted. We try to abide by this requirement as much as we can. However, we do not have a scheduled face-to-face meeting plan with the journalists.
- I meet with reporters on a weekly basis – every Tuesday afternoon and closer to an event such as a conference almost daily.
- I'd say for me as a press officer very rarely. In the Science Cafes we met them at least once a month. For the scientists in a year unless a press release is issued this would be not at all. And even when a press release is issued the average times the scientists meet with journalists would be once.
- Irregularly. Most of the time, the Office Director is the main contact with journalists.
- Generally we meet with journalist almost every week but definitely not for scientific stories.
- Very rarely
- Only at launches, congresses, conferences, etc.
- Not very often. Mostly during ILRI events or when they visit the campus for interviews with scientists.
- At or after major interventions – every quarter
- Not often, it is usually via a phone call or email correspondence.
- Not so common, mainly when we have workshop or activities of this kind
- Once a month
- During special events and meetings: about 3 times a month
- Rare
- Everyday
- We try to meet them at least once a quarter. This is difficult as there are very few journalists that cover science.
- The preference is face to face
- Usually once in two months, and also during our regular dissemination workshop we organize press briefings and press kits.

Question 4

How would you describe the outcome of your dealings with journalists?

Research organisations were split between those who felt that their dealings with journalists led to a “very positive” outcome in terms of press coverage, to those for whom the result was less satisfactory. Others indicated that journalists made little extra effort beyond reproducing the contents of a press release. Research funding organisations were generally positive about the outcome of their

interactions with journalists. Responses appeared to be more mixed from policy and international agencies.

Individual responses:

- For the most part our dealings are one-dimensional whereby we work to respond to requests rather than proactively approach journalists. We are working to change this.
- Very positive if they understand what the value of the research is for the public
- We have become a source of information and have cultivated good relationships with journalists.
- Actually, I've been quite happy with the response. We seem to be able generate wide coverage on events we choose to publicize -- whether it's the announcement of the Academy's new executive director or news coverage of the TWAS conference in South Africa, which took place in 2009. For the latter event, we worked closely with Sci.Dev.Net
- I'm not pushing stories to them. They ask for comments, usually on policy issues.
- Generally, after being contacted by a journalist for information or to follow up a release that has been sent out, our institution receives the necessary coverage. So the effort is rewarded. Journalists have found our office to be professional, and those with which we have a long relationship know that they can press on our number for a quick answer or response on queries, or for an expert opinion.
- I hardly ever have any links with Journalists.
- The outcome is usually: articles published and/or broadcast coverage on UNESCO events and activities
- Very positive, but one has to be able to provide them with a news story.
- Cooperation opportunities are identified in terms of training needs, UNESCO guidelines.
- Most senior reporters know me and know my capabilities; new reporters has to get to know me and often do not really know what the MRC does. They are often referred to me via their editors. A quick read of the situation often leads me to dictate how the MRC can be reported on. I often help reporters with leads and angles.
- Minimal. I.e. even though press release are issued or we interact with them at Science Cafe's media coverage of science is still quite low and inaccurate. More needs to be done to improve this.
- Exchange with journalists has contributed to (1) better coverage of some subjects by and (2) advance some issues as important (form of agenda-setting) or bring new issues to public attention.
- They always publish our stories, but again the stories have nothing to do with research.
- Most of them in Malawi want you to provide them transport and often an allowance as they say they are travelling away from the office! In certain instances it makes sense but their office should provide that. They usually seem to want you to do the work for them. They want a press release particularly if it is on a science related issue. You will find major segments of the press release in the published article. More times, than most they have published the story. Most of the time, there will be a few errors but the principal information is correct. They don't fact check or come back to you if they have any queries. Rarely do they follow up.
- Excluding broadcast media, most interactions with specialist media result in copy.
- Positive, but not consistent in terms of effectiveness
- If you email/fax them a press release it wont get anyone attention. You need to either organize press conferences through the Ministry of Information or actively engage a journalist to come and do the story – and of course then give them the press release.
- Not many journalists have a background in science so they tend to ask a lot of questions, check facts, etc. In some cases, space constraints lead to shortened articles, or carelessly shortened copy.

- Rather poor because most of the times not very much understood as we want
- Journalists basically copy paste the press releases we give. They do not take time to arrange interviews or think critically about the stories we give them.
- We get our stories put in the various media outlets. However, at times we do not get the press coverage even if they attend. We are trying to build capacity such that the staff can comfortably interact with journalists and know how to write for journalists; and what to say/do and what not to, when interacting with journalists
- Mostly positive. There is a need for science stories but not much information comes forward.
- Once you get to know a journalist and you more or less know their comfort level with highly technical information getting coverage becomes a little bit better.
- Fruitful and beneficial

Question 5

What — in your opinion — makes the difference between a science story that hits the headlines versus those that are not used?

There is no summary of responses to this question as it was, in the end, deemed not directly relevant to the focus of this report.

Individual responses:

- I think the ones that really hit the headlines are the stories that are topical, not abstract, relevant and new in terms of providing some new/fresh information
- Human testimonials and write ups that contain the basic elements of a story, i.e. beginning, middle, end, complication, resolution, etc. have worked for us. again we don't do science per say but even when we have releases pertaining to say ARV or FDC, or malaria, we tend to do a human interest story just to rally understanding and justify its relevance to all readers/listeners.
- How charismatic and known the animal species is
- One that hits headlines becomes a source of reference and is quoted widely. Those not used don't receive much attention.
- If I were responsible for a science organisation's research uptake strategy and activities, I would work with scientists from the organisation to be very focussed on which readership they want to influence, and which headlines they want to 'hit'. The reputation for integrity of the media outlet(s) chosen would be of utmost importance. In many cases an 'intermediary' would be avoided in favour of direct contact with the journalist of choice.
- Whether people can associate with the topic of a story, if it has a quirky angle to it, if it's about specific animals or health matters. Also, if a press release is provided with all the necessary information, in understandable language so that the science is already translated to the journalist. I have found journalists to be generally very "lazy" in their search for new story ideas. If you feed it to them in terms of an already palatable press release, written as if already a news article, half of their job is already done and they are quite willing to follow up with some quotes of their own. Also, the use of the human angle/local angle in presenting a specific science story, also makes it possible that popular media pick up on a story. For instance, we recently had a top geology student in SA. In itself, it's not that strong a story that he won an award, but the fact that he is a good surfer (because people do not always associate brains with surfing) ensured that he received newspaper and television coverage.
- Science stories in newspapers are hidden in the middle pages. It is just a struggle for a non scientist to identify and read them.

- Science is promoted by private companies who market their products- fertilizers, pesticides, pharmaceuticals, ICT products and services etc.
- In my opinion the headline science story usually reveals something new and of interest to the public, or relates to the context of a given population. The ones that are not used tend to be too abstract for lay audience.
- I've found advocacy for policy changes seldom works, unless there is a controversial opinion article from a reputed researcher. What works at the HSRC for general news is strong news angles based on research findings.
- Science still does not "talk" to the everyday citizen; it is important to demystify terminology in science to open up the subjects to citizen's interest.
- It must topical, national in approach and interesting enough to be used by most media (broadcast or print). Normally, a start of a new clinical could have potential to be a lead story, however, if this clinical trial was developed by South African scientists and being used in a trial simultaneously here and abroad with the potential to effectively save millions of lives – then it definitely will in my opinion make the headlines.
- A science story that hits the headlines would have to be relevant in the local context, or have the backing of government officials or is quoted by the minister.
- Considering that most of the time this is not the case, the story is likely to be seen as very important – probably a breakthrough in comparison to others.
- Non-Scientific stories turn to have a greater appeal over a broader audience and there sell the newspapers.
- In Malawi it has to involve a Minister or important official announcing or official launching something. Large amounts of money or controversy. It needs to be related to HIV and AIDS, tuberculosis or malaria.
- Excluding broadcast media, the Academy has a particular problem in 'selling' itself. Subjects that the Academy deals with are mostly of an academic nature and not science in itself. Uptake is therefore mostly by specialist media.
- Subjects on topical issues, such as education, and science policy continue to be draw cards.
- Controversial issues get headlines – in the biodiversity arena wildlife crime over animals is headline news, wildlife crime over the cycad crisis gets no coverage at all.
- The story needs to be topical and deal with an issue that captures the public imagination. Too much scientific jargon or a topic that is largely irrelevant or conceptually too complex or abstract for the general population, is unlikely to be used.
- In my opinion science story hits headlines when it is directly linked to what people meet every day and when it is easy to understand. This means that journalists have to understand very well the phenomenon and be more focused
- In this country, it depends on the newspaper's editors, editorial policy and what else is going on that is newsworthy within the country (usually politics).
- For hitting the headlines, the topic is usually political or with some human face such as including financial angles. At times it depends on how it is written: the more jargon, the less it is likely to hit the headlines, let alone be reported at all. Usually, however, science stories may not make it to the headlines if they do not have a human element or evoke emotion.
- The story must have a human face and must easily demonstrate the application of science. Science stories that show innovation which will help someone like a blind person or any community member.
- The human angle. If you are able to relate the science to the daily lives of people and how it would assist them chances of coverage improve.
- I think the one that hits the deadline, has some significance in terms of how it can change socio-economic conditions of people or it's a big discovery. I also think we need to target certain media

with regards certain science stories. The approach should be different depending on the target audience.

Question 6

What do you find to be the most effective way to get a science story to the media?

Eight of the 13 research organisations reported the benefit of issuing press releases to the media, particularly as this meant reaching journalists over a wider geographical area, but 5 of these also indicated the importance of personal contact with journalists, either through telephone calls or meetings. An additional 3 advocated direct contact, including launches and events. Likewise, research funding agencies noted that a combination of press release and direct personal follow-up with journalists was the most effective route to achieving press coverage. In addition, being selective about when to contact the media is better than routinely bombarding the media with releases. One UNESCO office reported that one of the most effective ways to get a science story into the media was to selectively involve journalists who specialised in science reporting and could therefore understand more of the subject in question. A UK-based organisation emphasised the importance of both press releases and “good relationships” with journalists which meant that they were able to give advanced notice to individual reporters before sending them the press release.

Individual responses:

- A press release and contacting individual people and telling them about the research
- Human interest and co-authoring with journalists.
- We rely heavily on EurekAlert!, Galileo and other media clearing houses. We also have our own mailing lists. I think the best thing we do is pick our shots. It's not the easiest thing in the world to do. But if you remain disciplined and only try to make news when you have news to make, it serves the long-term interests of both your organization and the larger world of science journalism.
- Personal contacts with journalists.
- Feed them with the necessary fact, in a concisely written press release that can be used as is if necessary. Provide the necessary photographs, and ensure that the experts per story are more than willing to give of their time to chat to the journalists. Choose your topics wisely, and do not inundate journalists with too many stories in too short a timeframe. I email my contacts the relevant stories, following up in some instances with a further telephone call. I do not believe in “harassing” the journalist by constantly following up when they are going to run a story. If it is strong enough, they will use it. I never use press conferences, and just once in a while specifically organised media events.
- Through farmers/clients – field days – not newspapers.
- Radio is a major media effective media - since most of the population (>60%) in Kenya is rural based – and they do not have great access to TVs, internet etc. due to lack of electricity. We have no Scientific programmes on TV can you support us (our ministry) to develop one?
- Before publishing it, local scientists must be invited to give their reviews or perspectives.
- News conferences, but only if there it is news breaking, for example the 4-yearly TIMMS study (comparing maths results with other countries). Media releases still work well, but again, only if it is newsworthy, and the better if it is connected with a current event, for example the matric results.
- Relate science to issues in the community.

- If scientists learnt to step down the jargon and simplified their information in order to be understood by the journalist, then his/her story is likely to receive attention by the media house.
- We have good relationships with science reporters and so this always helps. Press releases need to be short, clear, interesting, jargon free and with a hook, something to make it newsworthy, easy to use quotes, photo opportunities We often give our journalist friends a heads up before releasing a story and then make a number of follow up calls after a release. Scientists need to be available and willing to answer journalist questions.
- I often email and meet with reporters. I always inform them ahead of time and I know when their deadlines are, be it print or broadcast (radio/TV) media. Knowing this helps in pitching a story and getting in the paper or on radio or even TV.
- This is a tricky question because at the start I worked a lot around press releases but even this is proving somewhat useful but not very successful. Press briefings and conference appear to work much better in terms of getting stories out into the media but then again these are limited to country level, Press releases have a wider spread, depends on who your target is. Is it local, regional or international media? The other thing is working closely with the media... finding out what they are currently interested in covering and working along those lines if you can. And like previous working in sync with ministers and getting their backing in a story can equal press coverage.
- Though the techniques is criticised by some scientists, I think that appropriate framing combine with good media relation can improve the probability of having a science story on the media.
- Identify journalists who deal with science stories and target them.
- Building a relationship with the media houses so that they know you have a good story and likewise being available when they need someone to comment. They are short of news in Malawi so are likely to publish a story but you have to make it easy for them – transport, allowance, press release and access to the scientists.
- Academy of Science of South Africa (ASSAf) targets specific media and informs key journalists beforehand of opportunities for stories. The key media are allowed early access to content of reports and studies.
- Press releases tend to work well and responding to journalists requests is also effective.
- Launches and events
- Send a press release but also in the accompanying email, explain very briefly the “So what” factor.
- a) Involve journalists as participants in activities make them more sensitive and understand the key issues; b) having specialized journalists in science so they know what is said and can be more focused; c) have special reviews for public information about sciences results.
- Write it out as a press release and send it out to specific science journalists.
- You need a cadre of well trained journalists who can appreciate science or agriculture and be comfortable to report/communicate it. You need some media contacts with media and establish yourself as an authoritative source of information and knowledge.
- Press release / briefing, workshops/seminars
- Inviting them to our labs or to a project so that they experience and sometimes take part in researching or understanding how our researchers work. This has worked for us because there is nothing better that hands-on experience and face to face talk. The problem is most journalists don't have time to do this.
- There is nothing better than calling a journalist and pitching a story so that by the time they receive the release they are expecting it.
- Electronic media, online publications and radio.
- Through press releases accompanied by media briefing.

Question 7

Have you ever issued press releases via a news service, for example AlphaGalileo or EurekAlert!?

The majority of the research organisations surveyed (8 out of 13) had not used a news service for issuing press releases, but relied on sending their press releases directly to journalists. Of the remaining 5, 3 specified sending press releases to either EurekAlert! or AlphaGalileo, while reported using a different news agency called SAPA (South African Press Association). Similarly, only 2 out of 6 funding agencies made use of news services for distributing press releases. Of the 8 policy and international agencies who responded to this question, most (7 out of 8) have not used a news service for issuing press releases. One explained that it does not feel the need as it has its own media list. Another reported a different strategy, which was to send stories to SciDev.Net, which then serves as a news source for the African media. Another also highlighted SAPA and the African Press organisation.

Individual responses:

- No, never
- We have not used these before, but we have pushed our content through Scidev.net and also through African press organisation.
- No
- Not yet
- I'd say six times a year.
- Have considered it, but we have budget constraints.
- Only when there are major scientific events – conferences, workshops by government ministries or event organised by bodies like WHO, FAO.
- No
- No, I use my own media list.
- No
- No, all our releases are in-house.
- We do not as we have a large number of contacts in the media.
- No – never had as yet. But I know how their service works and have been a signed member since the science communication conference in London, 2009.
- We work closely with our funder the Wellcome Trust and the press officer there issues our press release to EurekaAlert! and I think also AlphaGalileo.
- Never
- No
- No
- No
- Yes. From EurekAlert!
- No
- SAPA (South African Press Association), yes
- No
- Yes
- No, not those mentioned, but I always issue press releases to SAPA, African Press organisation, and other electronic press release distributors, etc
- No
- AlphaGalileo
- No

- No
- No

Question 8

Would you consider using an African science-based news service to issue press releases — aimed at the African media, as well as international media?

The majority of research organisations that responded to this question (9 out of 11) said yes, they would consider using an African science-based news service to issue press releases. The advantage was reaching a wider media. An African news service could also serve a wider purpose of informing the media — and press officers — more broadly about developments in science. All 6 of the funding agencies surveyed supported the idea of using an African science news service, with caveats, such as the difficulty of implementation, the need for staff to produce press releases for such a news service, and the importance of being able to measure the outcome.

The policy and advocacy organisations and international agencies were also positive about the idea of using an African science news agency.

Individual responses:

- Yes. There is need for more services such as this.
- If we were to have an appropriate story that fits such an audience, definitely!
- Yes
- Of course!
- Would you recommend that scientific organisations make use of an Africa-wide science news service?
- I think they would, if they have staff with the expertise to do so.
- It would depend on the news services' business plan and demonstrated effectiveness in each of the media channels that are now available. The days of the 'spray-gun' approach are over.
- Of course. As a university we want to be relevant within the African and international context.
- Idea is good but implementation would be a nightmare. Popularization of Science in Africa is the first step – MoHEST – IRD programme any funds.
- Yes, depending on cost
- Yes, I will, but on condition that it can be measurable, meaning that one has to be able to monitor whether it has been used and who has used it.
- Yes
- Not my department to decide...
- Yes – would recommend this to other scientific organisations
- I definitely will. I have quite a few African collaborations going with the MRC and a whole lot of conferences – which would make sense.
- Most definitely YES! I would love to see such an existence as it allows not only the media but also press officers in other African countries to keep up to date with science publications from the continent and can help them in terms of how their press releases are written, available information out there and a wider target of audience. If managed well it becomes a reliable source of information for African Media which is what is lacking.
- Yes definitely

- Definitely yes
- Not really as I have never considered our stories going outside of Malawi but my experience with media in Malawi is that sending them a press release is not good enough you need to actively engage them.
- Yes
- YES
- Absolutely
- Yes
- Yes
- Yes
- Yes, for African. However for international, some more work needs to be done by this new entity, to convince people that they are the “go-to”, instead of well established news service outlets littered all over the developed world.
- Yes
- Yes
- Definitely
- Yes
- Yes, we are currently in the process of developing a media strategy to enable us to come up with an effective way of engaging.

Question 9

What needs to be done in order to improve media coverage of African scientific research by local media or international media?

Many of the organisations surveyed — research centres, funding agencies and policy and international organisations — called for more training and capacity building for journalists, editors and scientists. In addition, respondents called for more opportunities for scientists and the media to meet, the employment of press officers at research institutions, more media outlets for science reporting, access to international media outlets, and a change of attitude among scientists.

Individual responses:

- A combination of things needs to be done: constantly re-skilling the existing pool of science journos on the continent; getting researchers to understand how the media works so that they can better sell their work to the media; create opportunities for the media, scientists and the beneficiaries of research (the people) to engage with each other more specifically on the things that can bring them together.
- Regular follow ups say once a month with a contact person at the research facility
- Scientific research should be demystified with the media involved in every stage of research rather than thinking about the media when you need a public relations stunt.
- Scientific organizations like TWAS can only do so much on their own. The answer to your questions lies in places well beyond TWAS's influence: the overall climate for news and information, the number of outlets there are to distribute the news, the level of interest the public has in science news, etc. As I mentioned in my opening comment, things seem to be improving in Africa but the continent still lags behind the progress that has been made, say, in Asia and South America.
- It depends, there is such a diverse range of scientific research being done in Africa. Some it of local public interest, some is of national interest. As far as international media is concerned, most

internationally funded research (which is usually supported because it fits international aid agendas) is led by non-African researchers/employees of non-African science organisations. They have their own channels of getting to the international media. It has its own problems – it does not strengthen either African science or African researchers or African journalists.

- More outlets willing to run respectable science stories, and not pseudoscientific topics. Making it easier to get your stories to international outlets, e.g. through a suggested African science news feed. Ensuring that the stories that are out there are interesting, worthwhile to know and based on exceptional science.
- Programmes to popularize Science in Africa Radio programmes – field days
- Local media must be encouraged to participate, but many local journalists are not trained in science journalism and hence don't have skills to interpret research results and sometimes don't even understand the research terminology.
- Improved knowledge of the available media, plus contact numbers, for example, a research project we did in Kenya, it would be helpful to know what media outlets are available, the names of science reporters and news editors, plus phone, mobile and e-mail detail.
- Better access and exposure of ongoing scientific work in African universities and research institutions.
- Workshops to get scientists talking about their interaction with the media and learning more about how the media works. More supportive networks and press offices to give advice and link the research community with the media. Encouraging researchers to stand up for science so they feel a responsibility for public discussions about science.
- Well, not just training for reporters but for editors. I do feel a high powered training workshops on how important science and innovation is for Africa – should perhaps be part of the education of all national editors forum meetings. This (you) body could facilitate such a meeting.
- For start is frequent training extended to science journalists with local exposure to research institutions and researchers: scientists training on working with the media; network of Press Officers/Communications officers in research institutions around Africa.
- From media organisation perspective: reinforce the capacity of journalists to cover scientific subjects (it is not obvious). From research organisation perspective: establish a public relation entity to liaise with media organisation. From researcher perspective: improve its capacity to link the outcome of its research with social realities and issues when dealing with journalists.
- Expose more and more journalists to scientific research
- The usual...training and capacity for journalists to research and write science stories, accessible scientists who can communicate effectively. More time provided to journalists to research and write their science stories. Have expert science journalists or have scientists write columns in the paper. Editors who see the importance of science and the need to take time to get a science story right. Feeding the journalists the information – a means to be able to get the science press releases to the relevant people in the paper. In Malawi, there is no module or course for journalists on science journalism – capacity and training can start at the tertiary level.
- In the African environment the profile of science in general is not very high. This poses a huge challenge for both science agencies and the media with regard to science awareness.
- Build the skills levels of journalists to enable them better cover science stories. Also having a media link person in science/research organizations who works with the media also goes a long way in improving coverage of media.
- Educated journalists and interested
- We need trained science journalists with an open mind, that can link a science story to something topical in the region and/or flesh out the "so what" factor.
- African journalists consider that science is not so easy to explain. No effort is done on scientists' side also to make easier the contacts. Scientific research teams have to elaborate communication plan and get more journalists involved in workshops and meetings they organize throughout the

continent. Public information review and specialized journalists in sciences can also foster these issues.

- More interaction between professional science journalists; science communicators and scientists who are open to communication and engagement. These three groups have to build a mutually beneficial relationship that is based on trust, professionalism and respect.
- Capacity building in science communications of scientists, researchers and media professionals. Each of these parties has to understand their roles and those of others in availability of research. There is need to form a community of practice, I form of a group of the willing, to share best practices in communications, reporting, information sources, etc. The news editors should also be included in this community of practice.
- Need for deliberate efforts to train African scientists on science communication
- Our scientists and researchers need to be open more and understand that the media is not the enemy and we need to engage with them more often for them to understand each other.
- Training of local journalists, as there is training on finance and economic journalism the need to be training on science journalism. Researchers need to be trained on how to interact with the media and the value of such an interaction. They also need to learn to simplify their findings.
- I think there's a need to have stories that are relevant to communities and how these new scientific inventions w2ill improve their lives.
- There is need to build capacity of the media staff to enable them report on technical subjects. Likewise there is also need to train the researchers and scientific to learn how to engage the media and come up with 'non-academic oriented' extracts that can attract the media.

Question 10

What is your organisation's media policy — are your scientists encouraged to speak directly to the media, or do you expect media contact to be authorised by a senior figure?

Of the 13 research organisations, the majority stated that they actively encourage scientists to speak to the media. However, 6 of these organisations also added that scientists were first expected to gain authorisation from senior officials. The remaining 6 organisations commented that their scientists were free to speak to the media but were also expected, in most cases, to at least inform their communications office of the contact.

There was a similar picture for the funding agencies, policy organisations and UNESCO representatives, with a requirement for authorisation in most cases, but also a distinction in that scientists were generally permitted to speak to the media about their own specialist subject, but on more sensitive matters they had to refer to senior figures instead.

Individual responses:

- We do encourage our researchers to speak directly to the media.
- We have a communication policy and a business and development unit responsible for marketing and press releases. Scientists are encouraged to also make their own contact.
- We don't have permanent scientists yet but would definitely encourage them to speak to the media often enough in order to build relationships and trust.
- Our scientists are welcome to deal directly with the media. Some of them, who are more media savvy, have over the years cultivated their own pool of contacts while others appear on local talk

shows without any interference from the side of the media office. Because the job is so large in scope, we applaud any initiative from our scientists' side in setting up their own coverage. I do, however, appreciate it if people just keep me informed about said dealings.

- Never in life – As a Scientist in the Government any information must be approved officially by Permanent Secretary (PS) or other CEO's of relevant organisations.
- UNESCO's scientists do speak directly to media when such communications concern their programme/project activities. But in a country where UNESCO has no office, authorization must be obtained from the UN Resident Coordinator (who usually is head of UNDP in that country)
- Our researchers are encouraged to speak the media directly, based on their own research findings and expertise.
- N/A
- The policy is that it is only the CEO/Director KEMRI who is permitted to talk to the press. He however can delegate this to any other person he wishes. This therefore means that all interviews must be cleared by his office upon being advice by this department. Increasingly, the director has been sanctioning senior scientists and researchers to directly engage the media without requiring his clearance.
- Scientists may not speak directly to members of the media until it has been cleared by me or the MRC President. It is customary that no-one (note even Unit Directors) speak around government policy other than the MRC President. Scientists, however, do speak or respond to media enquiries almost all the time – with the media office of the MRC's knowledge.
- Media contact has to be authorized by a senior figure.
- Authorization is required.
- Our scientists do not speak to the media unless they have been requested by Public Relations Department to do so as specialists on specific subjects.
- No media policy. People speak freely.
- It depends whether the journalist is interested in a science paper (as published in the South African Journal of Science) or something pertaining to the Academy.

ASSAf does not prohibit journalists to contact ASSAf Members themselves. On editorials published in the SAJS, journalists usually contact, and are encouraged, to operate via ASSAf's Communication Manager. As a courtesy telephone numbers are not supplied to the media unless cleared with Members. In some cases enquiries are referred to the Editor-in-Chief. The latter is informed by ASSAf to expect an enquiry from the media. On Academy matters, the policy is to clear any media requests with the Executive Officer and in some cases seek advice on which ASSAf Member, Council Member or the EO or other specialist to address questions.

In media events they are free to talk to scientists but when looking for a story/information on specific issues from scientists within ILRI, we often ask that the communication department is made aware of these to best make use of the event and to help the scientists communicate if needed.

Scientists are managed by senior managers who are also scientists – senior managers are official spokespeople, but they can and do give permission to more junior scientists to comment to media on their specific work.

Scientists are encouraged to speak directly to the media about their area of research but advocacy/ strongly worded opinion around sensitive or political issues is not encouraged and/or requires executive approval before being released.

Press releases written by press officers about specific areas of research must be checked with the experts and corporate information included for the editor, before being released.

The scientists working for UNESCO can't directly speak to media. They have to be authorized by a senior figure, mainly the Director of the Bureau at field office level.

- We have an external relations office and all scientists are encouraged to involve this office when speaking to the media. Journalists on the other hand also contact the scientists through this office.
- We build capacity of staff in media relations, such that they are able to handle the media-staff interaction space. They are however only allowed to talk about their fields of specialisation, not on controversial matters, which are always referred to the Director, who is the chief spokesperson of the organisation.
- All communication with press must be authorized
- Scientists are encouraged to speak directly to the media if they are 100% sure about the topic and the reason of the interview. As Communications, we just need to be informed that a certain interview took place or will take place. Other scientists prefer that communications approve the interviews before they agree to do them.
- Our researcher are encouraged to speak about their research find once these have been cleared with their senior and all relevant legal issues have been dealt with.
- First point of call is me and then the relevant specialist
- We don't have a defined media policy but we are in the process of developing one to be part of our communications strategy for 2011-2016. However, the current practice is that, our researchers can contact and give their views to the media on their own private capacity but for one to give the opinion of AERC as an organization, one has to get authorization from executive director.

Please add any other comment that you would like to make

- We would like to be kept posted on this study/survey and we look forward to seeing the report.
- Science should also be communicated through vernacular languages if we are to democratize scientific knowledge
- Newspapers are in business. They provide the news that will make their papers sell – so in this case – political news are the selling point – just like in UK – the tabloid news and paparazzi – make papers sell best (I lived in UK 4 years). There is a golden opportunity for a strong programme to be developed to address this matter with funding from the relevant development partners. I would like to play a significant role in developing such a project – any contacts? Currently I am involved in several EU-FP7 funded projects and one of the activity we have in each of these project is the “Communication and Dissemination Platform” where we attempt to circulate our projects' achievements to as many stakeholders as possible. I actively participate in writing a variety of articles and columns in these Project Newsletters for wide dissemination among African scientists.
- Perhaps this has been done, but I was thinking that maybe a similar questionnaire targeting science journalist, scientists, and parliamentary research staff would be useful to conduct as well. The ASIS would impact them as well.
- Just curious as to where SciDev.Net fits in? Local science journals also need to do more to disseminate to the public, papers they publish. I worked with Naked Scientists in Africa and the hardest thing was finding a wide variety of science articles from Africa. A majority of the studies were on HIV and AIDS - health. How does one find credible scientific research from Africa in other science areas like physics, chemistry, geology, engineering etc.
- Our media needs to be encouraged to take ownership of science as a common factor in the daily lives of all our people. The media can help make science part of everyday lives through

demystifying basic scientific concepts and showing that these are within the ordinary person's grasp and can help inform their daily lives.

- Properly trained journalists and media practitioners should be able to take a "science" story and work effectively with the information to make it accessible to the general public.
- Too often reporting or the choice of articles to publish/ broadcast is from a Eurocentric/ western/ developed world perspective which concentrates on the bottom line. Editors need to be trained to recognise the 'Wow!' or 'So what!' factor in a story and give it prominence. If the media (at all levels of operation) adds value to science stories, the public will learn to recognise their value (and the bottom line will not be affected). People are naturally curious and excited about new things – reporters/ editors can trade on this natural curiosity and help excite a nation that is hungry for knowledge and to contribute what they know.
- Integrating cultural values into our media reporting as well as into scientific research will help to recognise and give value to pre-knowledge/ indigenous knowledge (informally gathered) about issues vested in people who are marginalised from the debates surrounding scientific endeavour and socio-economic progress/ gain.
- You should decide whether to call it 'information' or 'knowledge' service, or both. You should also decide whether this knowledge and information is limited to African sources, or only intended for Africa audiences, whatever the origin. This network should have strong linkages with WFSJ and other media bodies reporting on/communicating science. CTA's role is sharing agricultural information to improve rural livelihoods. This organisation should have strong linkages with such organisations, and benefit not only from their social capital and contacts, but also their rich experience in availing science knowledge to key beneficiaries. You should think through how this journalists-researchers interaction will trickle down and benefit farmers or influence favourable policies that benefit farmers and other needy groups. This will fundamentally change your approach. Since it is an information service, I hope you are looking at more than press releases; to digitized publications, science facts, success stories, online videos and podcasts, etc. Apart from the questionnaire, you may need a 'think-tank' – a smaller group to map out way forward OR, it can be an electronic discussion if funds do not permit.
- Apart from inadequate skills in science communication, scientists possible are not aware of the avenues available for communication.
- I think it is about time that science reporting and science journalists are taken seriously. We do need an African science-based news service to push the agenda of science but also on the other side we need to train our scientists and researchers on how to communicate better and what are the advantages of communicating through the media. It won't help to have the news service and still no news is coming through from those doing the actual work.