



Improving lives through sustainable bioinnovations



Communication Strategy

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1. Introduction

BioInnovate Africa (BA) is, so far, the largest regional innovation-driven bioeconomy platform in Africa. It was established in 2010 and comprises over 300 scientists and innovators based in more than 90 organisations in eastern Africa. Bioeconomy refers to the use of scientific knowledge to add economic and social value to biological resources, whether in food production, biowaste conversion, industrial processing or environmental preservation.

The goal of BA is to improve productivity of smallholder farmers and communities in eastern Africa, by making agro/bio processing a more competitive and environmentally sustainable enterprise. Its desired outcome is enhanced capacity of eastern African universities, research organisations and firms, to translate modern biosciences into innovations working collaboratively with smallholder farmers and agro-processing enterprises in the region.

In this regard, BA:

- a.** Enables scientists, industry partners and policy makers to co-create and translate innovative bioscience research ideas, inventions and technologies into practical use for societal benefit.
- b.** Supports scientists and innovators to create sustainable bio-based enterprises.
- c.** Works with institutional leaders, policy and decision makers to strengthen bio-based innovation ecosystems.

BA is supported by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) and implemented as a programme of the International Centre of Insect Physiology and Ecology (*icipe*) in Nairobi, Kenya. Countries that are participating in BA include: Burundi, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda. The African Union Development Agency-New Partnership for Africa's Development (AUDA-NEPAD), councils, commissions and ministries of science, technology and innovation in eastern Africa are key partners of BA.

This communication strategy provides a broad framework that BA will use to systematically share knowledge and information generated within BA with key stakeholders and audiences, including but not limited to, policy makers, researchers, business leaders and entrepreneurs, development partners, consumers and the general public.

The strategy covers the period of July 2019-December 2021.

2. Rationale

Communication is a two-way process that strategically links the right message with the right audience in the right manner. Successful communication adopts an audience-centered approach, which ensures responsive feedback as opposed to the one-way method that does not provide opportunity for dialogue.

In general, public participation in decision making on science and technology is weak in eastern Africa. This weak public involvement in science decision making could be attributed in part to low levels of scientific literacy among the public. This in turn could be ascribed to inadequate communication of science to the public and policy makers. Consequently, policy makers and the public are poorly informed about the returns on investment in science and technology in their communities and countries.

The communication strategy, therefore, focuses on effectively engaging with policy makers, academics and industry partners in eastern Africa, on important biological based ideas, inventions and technologies, which is the domain of BA. Engaging with these stakeholders in BA participating countries of Burundi, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda, will not only improve scientific literacy in these areas, but also increase awareness and participation of target groups in BA activities in the region.

The communication strategy outlines how BA intends to inform various audiences in and outside eastern Africa about opportunities for investing in bioinnovations and engage with them in the process of developing a sustainable bioeconomy in the region. Through this, communities will be empowered to make decisions and choices on essential bioinnovations that enable the region to address its priorities of food security, environmental sustainability and economic growth based on biological resources.

3. Objectives

The objectives of the communication strategy are to:

- a.** Disseminate information about technologies and products developed by BA project implementing partners to appropriate target audiences.
- b.** Share opportunities created by BA, such as calls for proposals, networking events, fellowships and training course with target groups and beneficiaries in and outside the region.
- c.** Publicise events organised by BA, *icipe*, collaborating partners to specific target groups and the general public.
- d.** Provide a platform through the BA website and social media for knowledge exchange within the BA network as well as external stakeholders.

4. Target Audience and Key Messages

BA target audiences are diverse. They include policy makers, academic scientists and researchers, business leaders and entrepreneurs, consumers of BA products and communities, investors and development partners, and the media and general public. These audiences are targeted with specific key messages that is appropriate to them at a given time (Table 1).

Table 1: BA target audiences and key messages

No	Target audience	Key message ¹	Specific persons/organizations targeted
1	Policy makers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. BA ensures countries in Eastern Africa (EA) benefit from the revolutionary advances in biosciences and helps to translate these into goods and services for inclusive growth and sustainable development; b. It is possible to build a vibrant innovation-driven bioeconomy in EA as demonstrated by BA efforts and impact over the years. 	Science, innovation and technology ministries within governments and commissions in the BA countries of implementations
2	Academic scientists & researchers	BA provides opportunities for academia and industry in EA to work together to commercialise bio-based technologies and products.	Current BA partner universities and research and capacity building centers; Other universities and research and capacity building centers that focus on and promote science and biobased innovations in the BA countries of implementations and beyond
3	Business leaders and entrepreneurs	BA provides opportunities for academia and industry in EA to work together to commercialise bio-based technologies and products.	BA project team leaders, BA implementing partners organizations, potential partners and innovators
4	Consumers of BA products and communities	BA provides a healthy alternative for food and feed, and environmentally sustainable solutions.	Farmers, community members (end-users/beneficiaries), general public
5	Investors and development partners	BA offers opportunities for collaborative partnerships in developing competitive bio-based enterprises - businesses of tomorrow.	National, regional and international funding agencies that support bio-based ideas and innovations similar to BA: foundations and private agencies, government bodies and commissions; UN agencies
6	Media and general public	BA creates value for humanity and improves people's lives through sustainable bio-based innovations.	The mass media (media owners, editors, and journalists): TV, radio, print (newspaper and magazine), online pages (web-based and social media); general public
7	Other Internal audiences	BA is organised and implemented with the highest level of professionalism and efficiency to achieve its mission.	BA Programme Advisory Committee, <i>icipe</i> , BA Programme Management Office, etc.

¹ These are broad key messages, which will be packaged in various ways and forms appropriate for a given audience at a particular time.

5. Channels

BA will use both media and non-media communication channels, including the website, television and radio, multi-media, social media, events and publications. The channels will be adopted appropriately to capture the attention of and effectively engage with the target audience. The communication channels are described in more detail as follows:

BA website

Programme and project-related information will be shared on the BA website. Regular updates will be made on the website regarding events, project results, success stories and achievements. The BA website also has a blog section where stories from the partners are shared.

Media: TV and Radio

- a. National media - The involvement with the national radio and TV of the partner countries for the role it plays in creating awareness and interest in innovations. Coverage of BA activities and impact will enable BA to reach key decision makers in eastern Africa. TV and radio will be used only where rates are subsidised or offered for free.
- b. Local media (TV and community radio): These channels target the small holder farmers who are best reached using local community radio especially those that broadcast in the local language. They will be used only where rates are subsidised or offered for free.
- c. In collaboration with the partner organisations, interviews, Q and A sessions and talks will be held in these stations targeting the farmer and other end users of the bio innovations. BA project teams will be responsible for ensuring the documentation and media coverage of the specific project in their respective national and local media.
- d. Print media (newspapers and relevant magazines): Proactive use of media space – writing opinion pieces/sourcing interviews and writing press releases and media advisory on topical issues related to bioinnovations in eastern Africa. BA to also use channels such as SciDevNet, The Organic Farmer, and Bioeconomista where rates are subsidised or offered for free. Print will also be used occasionally to advertise calls for proposals and tender opportunities.

Multi-media

- a. Documentaries to demonstrate impact of BA. The development of the documentaries will use the storytelling approach.
- b. Short informational/learning videos (3 to 5 minutes) for each innovation, testimonials from programme beneficiaries and partners.
- c. Updated gallery on Flickr with photos and videos captured during BA events. Photos will be credited to BA or partner organisations.

Social media (Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube)

These channels will be used to promote information from the website, share photos and videos related to BA activities. The use of social media is not only for internal communication within project teams, but also the wider community to convey human interest/success stories and project milestones achieved.

Publications

- a. Quarterly e-newsletter, to communicate both programme and project activities shared among the partners and other stakeholders to ignite and showcase opportunities for further collaboration and knowledge exchange.
- b. Visibility products: These are brochures, banners, flyers and memorabilia (notebooks, pens, drinkable water bottles, and bags).
- c. Policy briefs – BA will develop policy briefs in close collaboration with national project teams and acquire the right expertise to provide guidance in developing the briefs. BA project teams and BA Programme Management Office will identify specific areas of policy advocacy and interventions. These policy briefs will target decision makers at different levels in the different BA implementing partners countries.

Events

BA will participate in national, regional and international events. These may include:

- a. *icipe* and partner organisation events (seminars, conferences/workshops, exhibitions and demonstrations) organised as part of the annual programme activities.
- b. International seminars, workshops and conferences that are relevant to the work of BA will be used as a platform to showcase BA's achievements.
- c. Local or regional events BA will participate in: These include technology open days, local trade and agricultural fairs to showcase innovations promoted by project partners.
- d. Media tours: Guided visits to project locations and field-based interviews with project partners and the consumers of the bioinnovations.

6. Expected results

The expected outcomes of this communication strategy are:

- a.** Stakeholder appreciation, participation and buy in of the bio-based innovations in the region.
- b.** Enhanced visibility of BA in eastern Africa and beyond.
- c.** Increased awareness of bioeconomy as the sustainable development pathway for the region.

Progress in achieving these outcomes will be measured at regular intervals (monthly, quarterly and annually) using the following key indicators:

- a.** Quantitative indicators: i) No. of participants at BA events, ii) website visitors, iii) Social media followers, iv) media coverage, v) citations of BA publications and stories.
- b.** Qualitative indicators: i) Profile of events in which BA has participated in; and ii) impact stories and policy influences. The qualitative indicators will be measured through active engagement with the target audience, including using individual feedback forms, focus groups, and key messages gleaned from the media.

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