

Info Note



BioInnovate Africa Communications Training

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Key Messages

- **BioInnovate Africa conducted a communications training** that equipped 23 participants with the skills to effectively communicate bioinnovation achievements and outcomes
- **The training addressed key gaps** identified in a survey, focusing on practical communication skills, media engagement, and digital storytelling strategies
- **Participants learned how to simplify complex scientific concepts**, develop relatable and visually compelling stories, utilise digital platforms, and collaborate effectively with journalists to amplify the visibility of their projects
- **Barriers to effective communication**, such as limited involvement in project activities and lack of resources, were identified, and strategies were discussed to overcome these challenges
- **Key recommendations include** ongoing peer learning, mentorship, and regular updates through digital platforms to sustain momentum and maximise the impact of science communication across BioInnovate Africa supported projects

Background

BioInnovate Africa is a regional science and innovation-driven initiative established in 2010 with support from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida). It is implemented by the International Centre of Insect Physiology and Ecology (*icipe*), and operates in eight eastern African countries of Burundi, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda, South Sudan, and Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). BioInnovate Africa supports scientists, researchers, and innovators from universities, research institutes, and firms in eastern Africa to co-develop and commercialise biobased products and services, thereby building sustainable

bioeconomies and diversifying sources of growth for the region's population.

Communication is vital for the advancement of innovation and science-based initiatives. It enables clear demonstration of impact, strengthens partnerships, and fosters meaningful stakeholder engagement. In recognition of this, BioInnovate Africa organised a communications training to enhance the capacity of its project implementing partners organisations to effectively communicate scientific innovations and outcomes to diverse audience.

Why Communications Training?

A survey conducted in November 2024 among the BioInnovate Africa project implementing partner organisations regarding communication needs revealed the following key gaps and areas for improvement:

- A need for more practical and hands-on sessions to simulate actual communication scenarios
- A need for closer engagement with mainstream media professionals to understand newsroom dynamics and build media relationships
- A need for enhanced digital communication skills, especially in storytelling and social media strategy

In response, BioInnovate Africa conducted a three-day communications training from **31 March to 2 April 2025**, designed to address the mentioned needs. The training theme '**Iron Sharpens Iron**' emphasized mutual learning and growth through shared experiences, peer feedback, and collaborative engagement.

Communications Training Location and Participants

The training was held at *icipe*'s Thomas Odhiambo Campus (ITOC) in Mbita Point, Western Kenya, located on the shores of Lake Victoria, providing an ideal environment for focused learning, collaboration, and reflection.

A total of 23 participants (15 of whom were women) attended the training. They comprised communications officers and project team members from BioInnovate Africa supported innovation collaboration projects involving universities,

research institutes, and firms that translate biologically based research outputs into products and services to address societal challenges and stimulate a sustainable bioeconomy in eastern Africa. The participants' nationalities included Burundi, D.R. Congo, Rwanda, Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, South Sudan, and Uganda. The training sharpened participants' fundamental skills to effectively communicate bioinnovations and enhance documentation and visibility of projects achievements and outcomes.



The participants of the BioInnovate Africa communications training held at *icipe*'s Thomas Odhiambo Campus (iTOC) in Mbita Point, Western Kenya, on 31 March – 2 April 2025.

Communications Training Methodology and Highlights

The communications training utilised targeted presentations on best practices, case studies, and visual illustrations to encourage peer-to-peer learning through discussions, group exercises, feedback and reflection sessions.

The sessions covered practical and engaging topics such as effectively communicating complex scientific concepts, crafting compelling blogs on bioinnovations, strategies for positive interaction with journalists, effective use of digital platforms, a fieldwork exercise to refine photography skills, team building exercises, and recording a podcast on communicating impact.

The sessions were facilitated by both internal *icipe* communications staff and external experts in communications training and digital content creation, and featured:

- Simplifying complex science for diverse audiences
- Storytelling techniques for digital platforms, especially blog writing
- Gender-responsive communication approaches
- Entrepreneurial branding and communication for innovations
- Digital and social media strategy for research communication
- Photography and videography for visual storytelling
- Public speaking skills and mainstream media engagement

Barriers to Effective Project Communication

Some common barriers highlighted by the participants at the training, which hinder effective communication of project outcomes and innovations include:

- **Limited involvement in project activities:** communications personnel are often not fully integrated into core project activities, making it difficult for them to grasp the technical details, progress, and impact of the innovations they are expected to communicate
- **Gaps in internal communication within projects:** in some cases, communication personnel within the same project are not well connected or coordinated, leading to inconsistent messaging and missed opportunities for collaborative visibility
- **Difficulty accessing project leaders/innovators:** engaging with project leaders and technical experts is often challenging due to limited availability or lack of responsiveness, making timely documentation and storytelling difficult
- **Reluctance to share innovations publicly:** some researchers are hesitant to share information about their innovations, often due to concerns about intellectual property theft or misrepresentation, limiting opportunities to highlight project achievements and impact
- **Limited budget for communications:** majority of the projects allocate minimal resources for communication efforts, affecting the quality and scope of outputs such as videos, photography, media outreach, and social media engagement
- **Lack of capacity building for communications personnel:** limited opportunities for training or mentorship to help communications staff strengthen their skills in science communication, storytelling, and digital content creation

Lessons Learned from the Training

From the communications training, the key lessons learned can be summarised as follows:

- **A basic understanding of a project's scientific or technical aspects** is essential for crafting accurate and engaging stories, which can be strengthened through close collaboration with scientists
- **Good storytelling techniques help to simplify complex scientific jargon** into relatable language that resonates with non-expert audiences including policymakers and the general public
- **Instead of waiting for scientists to share stories, communications officers found that** proactively gathering content through interviews, project meetings, and field visits is more effective
- **Many researchers are initially hesitant to share their work**, but training highlighted the value of building trust, demonstrating the benefits of communication, and addressing intellectual property concerns
- **Collaboration among communicators through** peer learning, knowledge sharing, and cross-project support enrich stories and broader reach
- **Effective communication requires continuous learning**, practice, and adapting to audience feedback to improve over time

Conclusion and Recommendations

This communications training was an initial step in amplifying the visibility and impact of BioInnovate Africa-supported bioinnovations. By enhancing participants' skills in documenting project-based stories, photography, engaging with mainstream media, and digital literacy, the training equipped them to become more strategic and impactful communicators.

The following are key training recommendations:

- Promote continuous communication learning by organising periodic refresher trainings and mentorship sessions
- Track the progress of training outcomes through regular quarterly outputs from participants, supported by feedback loops. A formed WhatsApp group to facilitate ongoing peer support and updates
- Strengthen project visibility by encouraging teams to publish regularly on their respective organisational and BioInnovate Africa websites and social media platforms

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