

# Biotechnology Communication

## Proceedings of the Spokespersons' Communication Training

Botanical Beach Hotel, Entebbe, Uganda



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**Coverpage picture:** Participants in the training: Extreme left, P. Luganda a veteran science journalist, and second from extreme right, Dr. M. Karembu a communication specialist from ISAAA-Nairobi were among the resource persons.

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## **Acronym**

EPA	US Environmental Protection Agency
FAQ	Frequently Asked Questions
GM	Genetically Modified
ISAAA	International Service for the Acquisition of Agri-biotech Applications
PBS	Program for Biosafety Systems
R&D	Research and Development
UNCST	Uganda National Council for Science and Technology

## **Background**

While some people are "born communicators", others can be made. Scientists often have little training or experience in communication yet need to serve as spokespersons because of their knowledge and expertise. The key to successful communication is effective planning. Even those with extensive communication experience may improve their efforts through better planning. This helps to avoid last minute and poorly conceived communication efforts. As this saying goes:

*"...funding [research] efforts generously while neglecting communication is false economics. And putting communication towards the bottom of every "to do" list is a way to guarantee that there is never enough time to communicate effectively. Instead, communication must be part of [achieving research outcomes] rather than sugar-coating them."* (Adapted from 'Attacking a problem with the facts', C. Chess, EPA Journal).

This workshop was organized by Program for Biosafety Systems (PBS) a USAID funded project and Uganda National Council on Science and Technology (UNCST) to contribute towards addressing the above challenge. The purpose of this training was to enhance the communication of science and technology by researchers to the media and other stakeholders.

### **Objectives**

- Equip participants with skills to design, execute and evaluate a comprehensive communications strategy that is tailored to the specific needs of your organization,
- Learn new strategies for communicating your organization's position to the press, policymakers, and other key audiences;
- Sharpen communications skills, from media relations to message development; and
- Provide strategies for making informed choices on how to best use limited communications resources.

### **Expected outcomes**

1. A critical mass of "spokespersons" skilled in effective communication to help demystify biotech and catalyze development of facilitative policies and legislation
2. Clear and concise messages on how to handle contentious issues on biotech among the general public
3. Informed science-based debates to guide decision making and acceptance
4. Adoption, commercialization and trade in biotech crops

## Opening Session

Dr. Theresa Sengooba the Regional Coordinator, PBS, chaired the opening. In her remarks she welcomed participants to the workshop and gave a brief on the workshop objectives and expected outcomes. Introduction of participants were made by name and the institutions they represented.

Dr. Maxwell Otim, the Deputy Executive Secretary of UNCST in his official remarks defined communication as the activity of conveying information. He said that we as people who deal in biotech need to be much better equipped with communication skills since our subject matter is not ordinary. He intimated that he does not believe scientists are poor communicators as is always said. He noted that they are good communicators save for the fact that their communication skills are tailored to address fellow scientists and that's why they make excellent presentations in scientific conferences and workshops as well as producing scientific publications. He noted that by only addressing fellow scientists, we often time preach to the converted and confine ourselves to polemics when dealing with the general public. This he reiterated further underscored the need for us to equip ourselves with the "language" that everybody understands and appreciates.

He stated that the public is now demanding more and more to take part in science debates challenging the traditional view that science is crafted around immutable facts passed from an authority to the general public who should take the without debate. He noted that science info is therefore being subjected to democratic processes. Scientists are now faced with greater communication challenges than ever before because the public is more well informed since that they have other sources of info like the cyber space and other multimedia channels. We need to enhance the interaction between S&T and society in order to engage the public in dialogue.

He stated that the role of UNCST is to facilitate and regulate research and development in Uganda including biotech and biosafety issues. Public understanding of science and technology and its strategic role n national development is still very low in the country and biotech is still a new frontier of science and tech which is bound to and has been misunderstood by the public bringing issues of socio-economic, ethical and regulatory concerns. UNCST has made considerable efforts in increasing public understanding of S&T and its relevance to our day-to-day activities and livelihoods by organizing events such as the National Science Week. As far as issues of biotech and biosafety communication are concerned, the UNCST as the competent authority is at the centre and for any research in biotech, it clears; it retains the rights of communicating the policy and regulatory aspects while the researcher is limited to communicating technical arrears. One of the constraints of communicating issues of S&T in Uganda is that there is lack of science journalists, therefore he encouraged young professional who graduate in science disciplines to seek career in science journalism and urged all of us to advocate for a stronger and more vibrant scientific communication industry in Uganda.

He concluded by wishing participants a productive training workshop.

## Presentations Sessions

Presentations were made according to the workshop Program (Annex 1).

### Highlights of the Presentations:

#### Talking About R & D “Pipeline” Projects *by Margaret Karembu*

Key points to keep in mind:

1. Know what your audience care about - tailor communication strategy to what they want to know, not what they need to know! (*GM Banana Case study*)
2. Identify key audience (stakeholders) – *different information needs*

**Define scope** - the scope of our research is...breeding for??

**Describe focus** - the focus of our research is..(GM Banana?)

**Prepare audience** - Keep in mind that research is.....  
- A phased approach with some certainties and uncertainties

Understand Potential “Watch-outs” - **Overclaims**

#### Talking About the Phases

Phase Avg. Duration Avg. Probability of Success	Key message to describe products in this Phase
Phase 4 12-36 months 90 Percent	We expect to commercialize this product in 200X, but we're currently going through the regulatory process and we still have milestones to hit.
Phase 3 12-24 months 75 Percent	Working to develop the necessary regulatory data to take this product to the next step Excited about our research findings to date, but we still have years ahead of us
Phase 2 12-24 months 50 Percent	Promising but still have more research to complete Working through the development process, but excited about these early results
Phase 1 12-24 months 25 Percent	Our early work is promising but we still have years of research ahead of us, we're pleased that this project has moved out of the discovery phase
Discovery 24-48 months 5 Percent	One platform we're exploring is..... One concept we are looking at is..... An area our researchers are exploring includes.....

## Pipeline Communication Strategy

Build “evergreen” tools for internal groups, leverage across internal and external audiences

### Communication Tools:

- Pipeline Presentation (of GM Banana)
- Communications Plan
- Q & A Document (FAQ)
- Fact Sheets
- Resource Guide (Web Resources, etc)
- Pipeline Brochure
- Poster

## Key Elements

### APP model

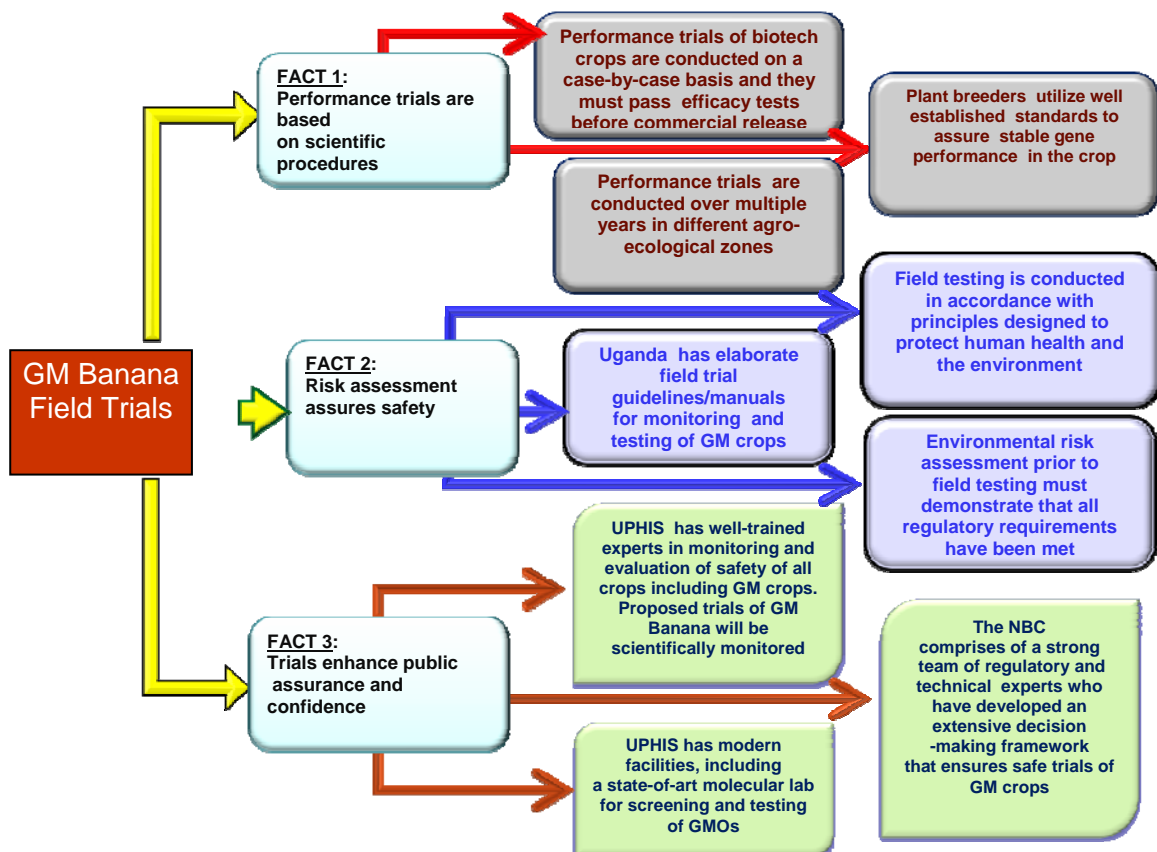
- **Anticipate** (List all possible questions on GM Banana)
- **Prepare** (Messenger, messenger, means)
- **Practice, Practice, Practice** (Mock Interviews)

## Rule of 3-Principle

### Everything in threes

- 3 key messages
- Each key message repeated 3 times
- Each key message supported by 3 supporting facts

### Example of GM Banana messages



## Key Watch-Outs

Understand local restrictions related to product development:

### GM Banana:

- Status of legislation
- Beware of predicting the commercial launch date
- Don't fall into trap of promoting product too early
- Use phrases like "Latest technical data on the product ...."
- Avoid engaging activists as they want to make you lose credibility
- Avoid defending a Third Party

## Risk Communication in Biotechnology *by Margaret Karembu*

- Ultimate objective is to clarify misconceptions and promote clear understanding of the real issues in biotechnology

**Risk Communication helps in developing messages that are:**

- Believable
- Convincing
- Clear and concise
- Positive

*Source: Dr. V. Covello, Center for Risk Communication*

## Group Work

On day-two participants were split into two groups; as researchers and regulators to have hands-on experience in message development. The group presentations are provided as Annex 2.



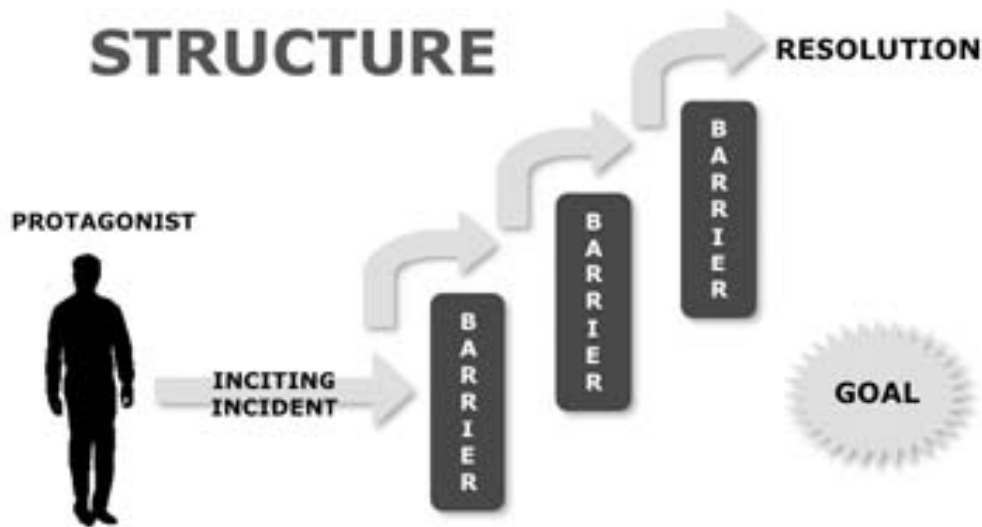
**Group work by Researchers**



**Group work by Regulators**

## Story Telling by Andrew Kiggundu (Ref:Andy Goodman, Communication consultant)

### Structure of a story



The protagonist drives the action in a story

### Stories that work...

- Small enough to be digested and re-transmitted
- Sufficiently clear and
- Compelling to illuminate larger issues

### Building the story

- Start with a common assumption
- Begin where the audience already understands
- Introduce a point of conflict
- Stories become interesting when the players are thrust into a crisis, a scenario where one side wants something and another side stands in the way
- Cast the story with clearly identifiable heroes
- People relate with people, personalise both sides of the conflict.
- Include a memorable fact
- Facts act like beads of a necklace held together by a string. They represent landmarks in the story that people will remember
- Point the way to a happy ending
- After the conflict situation, identify the hero's objective and explain how it was attained

# Developing Effective Media Relations and handling the Media

by Patrick Luganda

## Tips on the Interview

- Prepare 3-4 messages that you want to get across and practice saying them. They should be short, clear and free of jargon.
- If you are doing a telephone interview, keep a document with your key messages and facts nearby so you can refer to it.
- If you are doing a live interview on radio/TV ask the journalists what the first question will be. They don't have to tell you but if they do you will be more relaxed and a better interviewee.
- Ask print journalists to read back the quotations they plan to use. They may say no, but you should ask anyway.
- If you don't want a journalist to name you, you can request to make your comments "off the record", meaning that you can inform journalists without fear of being quoted by them. But this may make you an unreliable source in the eyes of some journalists. As a spokesperson, this should rarely arise for your case.

## Way forward

As a way forward, participants identified the following as priority areas to enhance science communication:

Communicators	Identified Needs/Challenges
Regulators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Simplifying messages</li><li>• Innovative Methods of communication</li><li>• Improved relationship with media</li></ul>
Researchers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Identify communication expert/ public relations</li><li>• Lack of communication policy esp. on research findings</li><li>• Inadequate knowledge about audience's info needs</li></ul>
Media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Limited science reporters and specialized desks</li><li>• Reliable information sources</li><li>• Limited informed/ trained media</li></ul>
Consumers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Having simplified IEC</li><li>• Limited networking between consumer organizations/ organization politics</li><li>• Limited outreach and sustaining it</li></ul>

It was recommended that scientists need to have follow-up training in Media relations.

Participants took off time to evaluate the workshop (Annex 3). The workshop was adjourned at 12.30 pm. List of participants is attached as Annex 4)

## Annex 1: Program

### Day One: Tuesday, Sept 25

8:30– 9:00 am	<b>Registration</b>	Barbara Zawedde-M.
9:00– 9:30 am	Welcome remarks and Introductions Statement from UNCST	Theresa Sengooba Maxwell Otim
9:30– 11.00am	<b>Key Elements in Communicating: R&amp;D Pipeline projects (e.g. the GM banana)</b>	Margaret Karembu
11.00-11:30 am	<b>Break</b>	
11.30–12:30 pm	<b>Stakeholders' Communication Needs-</b> Information requirements for the different target audiences	Theresa Sengooba
12:30– 1:30 pm	<b>Lunch</b>	
1.30-3.30 pm	<b>Risk Communication-</b> includes identifying potential risks, developing messages and determining what systems and tools are needed to minimize attacks from the opposition.	Margaret Karembu
3.30-4.00 pm	<b>Break</b>	
4.00-5.00 pm	<b>Identifying participants' Communication needs</b>	Participants

### Day Two: Wednesday, Sept 26

9.00-10.00 am	<b>Outreach to Policymakers-</b> strategies for running effective meetings with policymakers and crafting messages that will resonate with this audience.  <b>Strategies of Dealing with Activism –</b> strategies of handling anti-biotech activists	Margaret Karembu
10.00-10.30 am	<b>Break</b>	
10.30-12.30 am	<b>Group Work with a presentation (Margaret to design) – Day to day communication</b>	Participants
12.30- 1.30 pm	<b>Lunch</b>	
1.30-3.30 pm	<b>Group Work with a presentation (Margaret to design) – Risk communication</b>	Participants
3.30-4.00 pm	<b>Break</b>	
4.00-5.00 pm	<b>Part I Storytelling as a communication tool -</b> aimed at helping you craft and deliver high impact stories to aid in effective communication.  <b>Part II Improving presentation skills –</b> outlines the skills on how best to deliver a PowerPoint presentation.	Andrew Kiggundu

**Day Three: Thursday, Sept 27**

<b>9.00-10.00 am</b>	<b>Developing Effective Media Relations and handling the Media – Presentation</b> <i>Split participants into 2 groups:</i>	<b>Patrick Luganda</b>
<b>10.00-10.30 am</b>	<b>Break</b>	
<b>10.30-11.30 pm</b>	<b>1. Strengthen media interview skills:</b> On-camera role playing as you practice delivering the messages you've crafted to the media and Preview videography <b>2. Storytelling:</b> Crafting and delivering high impact stories and group work presentation	<b>Patrick Luganda</b>  <b>Andrew Kiggundu</b> <b>Henry Kimera</b>
<b>11.30-1.00 pm</b>	<b>Groups interchange</b>	
<b>1.00-2.00 pm</b>	<b>Lunch</b>	
<b>2.00-3.00 pm</b>	<b>Creating a Communicating Organization-</b> tools to assess track and guide your communications efforts.	<b>Henry Kimera</b>
<b>3.00-3.30 pm</b>	<b>Way forward</b> - designed to help implement ideas and recommendations from the training, to improve your communication strategies, and in your day-to-day work.	<b>Theresa Sengooba</b>
<b>3.30-4.00 pm</b>	<b>Break and departure</b>	

## **Annex 2 Group work Presentations**

**Group 1:** Message development by Regulators  
**Target Audience**

- Policy makers

### **Major Concern**

- Loss of local germplasm

### **3 Messages**

1. Conservation
2. Increase productivity
3. Utilization

### **Rule of 3-Principle**

1. Government has an operational policy to conserve local germplasm.
  - Availability of national gene bank
  - Qualified research scientists
  - Vibrant farming community
2. Modern biotechnology contributes to better understanding and utilization of existing germplasm
  - Better food and nutrition
  - Improved health - discovery of new drugs
  - Conservation technologies
3. Modern biotechnology significantly increases agricultural productivity
  - Food security
  - Income and poverty alleviation
  - Improved resources utilization.

## Group 2: Message development by Researchers

### Target Audience

- Consumers

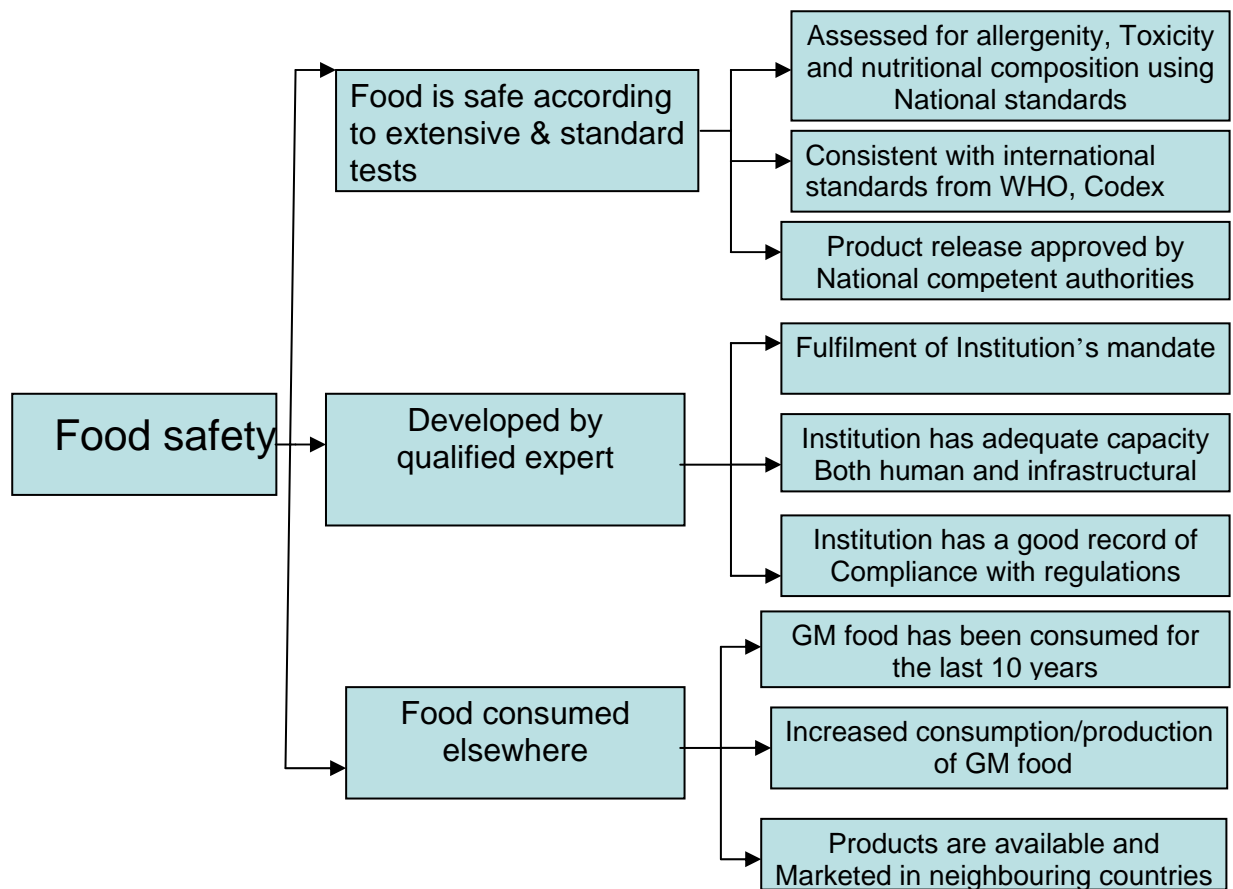
### Major Concern

- Food safety Issues

### 3 Messages

1. Toxicity
2. Allergenicity
3. Nutritional composition

### Rule of 3-Principle



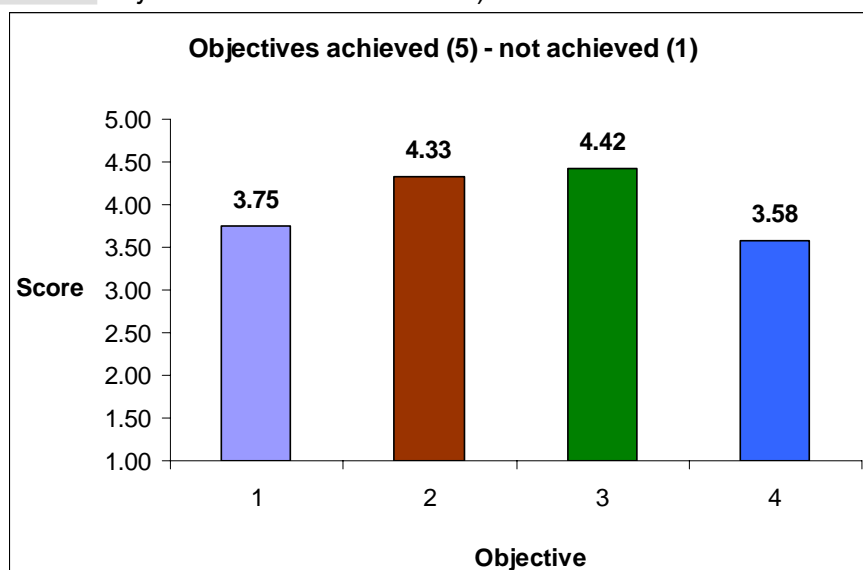
## Annex 3

### Evaluation Report

On the final day of the roundtable, an evaluation form was handed out to those present, and completed by a representative sample of 12 participants out of 18. The results are summarized below.

<b>A. General</b>	<p>In general, how would you rate the meeting?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Excellent – 33% (4)</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>Good – 67% (8)</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Average</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Fair</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Poor</p>	<p>On balance, would you say that the meeting's objectives were achieved?</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>Yes – 100% (12)</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Partially</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> No</p>
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**B. Objectives** The objectives of the Workshop are listed below. The scale ranges from 1 (*the objective has not been achieved*), to 5 (*the objective has been achieved*).



1. Equip participants with skills to design, execute and evaluate a comprehensive communications strategy that is tailored to the specific needs of your organization,
2. Learn new strategies for communicating your organization's position to the press, policymakers, and other key audiences;
3. Sharpen communications skills, from media relations to message development; and
4. Provide strategies for making informed choices on how to best use limited communications resources.

### **C. Presentations and Content**

#### **3 most useful session**

- Risk Communication (5)
- Storytelling as a communication tool (5)
- Developing Effective Media Relations and handling the Media (6)

3 least useful session

- Creating a Communicating Organization (2)
- None (10)

**D.**  
**Strengths and weaknesses**

**Strengths**

- Participatory and sharing live experiences (7)
- Competent resource persons (3)

**Weaknesses**

- Training was Pro-biotech
- Training time was short
- Time management (4)

**E.** What additional topics?  
**Additional topics**

- Further training on how to handle the press (4)
- Power-point presentation (3)
- Training in simplified science writing (2)

**F.** Please use the space below to write down any additional comments or suggestions you might have.  
**Comments**

- Need advanced training in communication for scientists (6)
- Make a booklet of the training materials

## Annex 4 List of Participants

No	Name	Designation & Organization	Contact Address
1	Emmanuel Iyamulemye Niyibigira	Senior Agricultural Officer – MAAIF	P.O. Box 102, Entebbe; 077-2-926614 <a href="mailto:eniyibigira@yahoo.com">eniyibigira@yahoo.com</a>
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14	Patrick Luganda	Editor Chief- Farmers Voice, Seeta-Mukono	C/o P. O. Box. 6213/ Box. 110 Old Namilyango Road, Seeta 075-2-814134 <a href="mailto:Patrick_luganda@yahoo.com">Patrick_luganda@yahoo.com</a>
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