

Aghan Daniel

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Project title: **Supporting African science journalists to cover COP27 from African perspectives**

IDRC project number: **CENTER FILE: 109948-003**

Location of study: Nairobi and Sharm el Sheikh, Egypt

By: Aghan Daniel, Media for Environment, Science, Health and Agriculture (MESHA)

Report type: Final Technical Report

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Date of Project: July 2022 to January 2023

### **Project Objectives and Work**

The overall objective is to support the implementation of the Centre's corporate knowledge sharing plans for climate change by strengthening the capacity of African science journalists to report on COP27 through news and feature articles that are accessible to civil society organizations, the policy community, and the general public.

#### **The specific objectives of the Project:**

- 1.1. Contribute to amplifying African voices regarding COP27, with attention to concerns for gender equality, inclusion, and social justice (MESHA journalists will publish at least 10 stories from COP27);
- 1.2. Strengthen the capacity of African science journalists to cover climate change issues from African perspectives, i.e., linking discussions at COP to African climate change realities;
- 1.3. Support the promotion of partnerships between climate change experts, the media and other stakeholders in telling African climate change stories; and
- 1.4. Strengthen the partnership between the Centre and African science journalists.

### **Executive summary**

With the support we secured from IDRC, 17 journalists attended virtually and in person the COP27 held last November in Sharm el Sheikh. Over 100 stories were published by these journalists from 14 African countries. The journalists continued to network among themselves, sharing useful information on climate change and showing a lot of passion on the subject.

#### **iii) The research problem**

Science journalists, who often write on climate change, are usually deprived of an opportunity to cover major conferences such as the Conference of Parties 27. This means that members of the public miss out on major updates and news which emanate from such big international meetings. To address this

issue, MESHA sought financial support from IDRC to grant a few journalists to cover the COP27 in person and virtually. This way, a large number of audiences would benefit from the reporting by the journalists.

#### **iv) Progress towards milestones**

##### **Activities**

A competitive call for applicants was sent out on July 25 with the deadline for receiving all applications being August 30, 2022.

The applicants were required to write a short motivating essay to justify why they felt they were the best candidates for the grants. They were also asked to send at least 6 links to stories they had done on climate change. After the call was made, we started head hunting for four experienced science journalists representing Anglophone and Francophone Africa to judge the applications.

The judges picked were as follows;

	<b>Name of judge</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>Years of experience</b>	<b>Institution</b>
	Otula Owuor	Kenya	Over 30 years	Director, ScienceAfrica
	Zeynab Wandati	Kenya	Over 10 years	Chief science editor in charge of climate change, Nation Media Group
	Mathew Malata	Malawi	Over 10 years	President of the Association of Environmental Journalists in Malawi.
	Christophe Assogba	Benin	Over 15 years	Senior reporter, SciDev, Benin

The results of the selection were as follows (see the attached list of successful candidates).

Seven participants were supported to physically travel to Sharm el Sheikh in Egypt to attend and report the proceedings COP27 for eight days out of the 15 days that the Conference lasted. Ten other participants attended the meeting virtually from their home countries for 7 days each and each was given data bundles for 7 days each. To ensure the reporting was done, the journalists got letters from their editors assuring them of accepting their articles each day.

##### **Virtual science cafes held**

In preparation for COP27, 3 virtual cafes were held for approximately two hours each with nearly 15 pax attending. Data bundles reimbursement for each person were made.

One editor participated in two of the three science media cafes. The editor trained journalists on how to capture climate change stories in the COP27 and how to effectively capture proceedings of a big conference such as the COP.

*The cafes, each lasting 2 hours were held as follows;*

Tuesday, September 13, 2022 - What is at stake for Africa and the world at COP-27?

**Friday, October 14, 2022** - Social inclusion in climate adaptation and resilience building among pastoral communities in Kenya and on gender mainstreaming Gender mainstreaming in development pathways and climate change adaptation

Friday, October 28, 2022 – Loss and Damage

Given that the judges had understood well the gist of the project, MESHAs decided to adopt them as mentors for the grantees over a period of three months (October 15, 2022 to January 15, 2023).

A contract of engagement was given to each mentors, who were paired with four mentees each. Consideration was made for those speaking French to be aligned to Christophe Assogba.

The mentoring took place from October 15, 2022 to end of January 2023, a period of three months.

### **Achievements**

1. 130 stories published in 14 African countries.
2. Increased number of experts and sources for the journalists on climate change.
3. Increased networking for MESHAs as an association of science journalists based in Africa.
4. Increased visibility about the work of MESHAs among African scientists and journalists.
5. While at the COP27 in Sharm el Sheikh, two participants went out of their way to learn mobile journalism. This proved to be helpful to them because they did and published their stories in both their print and digital platforms in Kenya and Tanzania respectively.
6. There is an active whatsapp group where the 17 journalists regularly post their stories on climate change almost three months after the event. This basically shows that this group of journalists have begun to specialize on climate change.
7. One journalist from Malawi, using her stories published from the COP27, has secured a trip to Canada to participate in the 2023 ifaj Corteva Masterclass to be held in Calgary, Alberta, Canada from 24<sup>th</sup> to 26<sup>th</sup> June as well as attend the IFAJ Congress in Olds, Alberta, from 27<sup>th</sup> June to 3<sup>rd</sup> July, 2023.
8. MESHAs has secured a 3 month funding (USD10,000) to report on climate change through a Dutch funded project called Voices for Just Climate Action (VCA). We cited the grant as our evidence/reference to justify our experience in granting journalists to cover climate change.

The overall approach of the programme is to work with civil society and unusual alliances to build widespread societal support for locally-shaped climate solutions through an inclusive and rights-based approach.

This includes building a broad-based climate alliance at country level, bridging divides (urban rural, gender, youth) that amplifies voices in new unusual ways. In addition, it will influence national and global policies and financial flows (e.g. climate finance, private sector investments) in support of these locally-shaped solutions through a climate justice approach.

The programme intends to see an expanded civic space where civil society voices, in particular those of indigenous and/or marginalized people are heard on climate action.

### **Key recommendations and lessons learnt**

1. The science cafes and the mentorship should begin at least three months in advance.
2. There is need to ensure that the mentees and mentors are given more time together.
3. The science cafes need to consider including more presenters from more countries.
4. On accommodation and flights booking it is important to make early bookings, at least two months before the event.
5. It was very easy to work with the very young journalists who seemed to be more enthusiastic than their older colleagues.

### **Key challenges**

1. One journalist did not live up to the expectations of the organisers and his mentor. He was made to do a few stories after the conference as a way of building his capacity.
2. One journalist fell out with her editor and hence her stories were not published.
3. Finally, one journalist was replaced at the last minute due his inability to access internet in his hometown.

### **Administrative Reflections and Recommendations**

First, as MESHA, we enjoyed working on this project because there was no delay whatsoever from the administrators of the project. Second there was clear instructions and communication from the administrators. Our job was made easier by the timely communication and the support of a listening ear. IDRC basically recognized the dynamic nature of the project because it was basically a travel laden project which experienced dynamic airfares and inconsistent accommodation rates. we urge IDRC to keep up with the professionalism.