

◆ Training Editors in Eastern Africa

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For years now, I have been involved in training editors in eastern Africa. My experience began in 1983 when I joined the International Development Research Centre of Canada (IDRC) to run a project called "research results dissemination".

Several science-research institutes in the region had asked IDRC to provide them with someone to handle their publications programs. IDRC decided the better path was to train and help local editors, so I worked with 4 such institutes in Nairobi, helping their editors to form a publications program, enunciate a publications policy, and appoint a staff-publications committee to shape and guide that policy. Each institute had an editor, and I worked with these editors, one to one.

At the same time, IDRC perceived that a number of institutions throughout the region felt the need for editorial training. By 1984, the editors I had been working with and I organized and held a 2-week workshop for editors (and in some cases their bosses) in eastern and southern Africa. People came from about 10 countries. One result, and an

important one, was that everyone wanted to network. IDRC had promoted the idea of an editorial association; the workshop showed how vital it was and how much everyone wanted it. A number of us worked on the idea, drew up a constitution, and got the association legally registered in Kenya; and in 1985, we held the 1st conference of AASE (the African Association of Science Editors) in Nairobi. This time, editors from western Africa attended as well, including a few from French-speaking countries. We had hoped our shiny new association would encompass all of Africa—even perhaps Arabic-speaking northern Africa—but we realized early that we had enough of a job just trying to keep on top of handling the association in English-speaking countries.

AASE held a conference in Botswana in 1986, a hugely successful one in Ethiopia in 1988, Zimbabwe in 1990, Nigeria in 1992, and Kenya again in 1994. In 1997 we will hold the 7th conference again in Ethiopia.

In 1985-86, still as part of the IDRC project, I went to Dar es Salaam in Tanzania and ran an intensive 4-month course for science editors there. Most of the participants were not full-time editors but rather scientists who had been given the responsibility of producing their institutional publications—usually in addition to their research.

I went to Ethiopia in 1987 to work with the Institute of Agricultural Research (IAR), a national organization with research stations sited throughout the country and headquartered in Addis Ababa. IAR wanted me, as an adviser, to organize, staff, train, and equip an information service for the institute, which would be strong on the side of getting out research results. We hired young university graduates; I trained them; and we published a newsletter, annual reports, other reports, and conference proceedings. We held workshops in science writing for young scientists at the institute and helped them prepare their papers for conference presentation and submission to journals.

We formed an AASE chapter in Ethiopia and hosted the 1988 conference I mentioned previously. AASE also held Saturday morning training sessions for editors in other Ethiopian organizations. With funding from IDRC, it also held a workshop on preparing and editing extension materials. This again drew participants from a number of countries, chiefly Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda.

Where are we now with our training of science editors in Africa? AASE is not vigorous and healthy, unfortunately. One problem is that funding is harder to come by these days, and the organization is not yet self-supporting. Another problem—and a big

one—is poor communication. It is still not easy—in fact, it is often frustratingly difficult, not to mention very expensive—to telephone across the African continent. E-mail is soothing communication woes a lot, but not everyone, particularly not many of the national institutions, has the facility.

AASE in Nairobi is beginning to work with CASP (more alphabet soup—this time the Consortium for African Scholarly Publishing) to share resources and expertise. The road toward continent-wide and effective networking has not been smooth—nor is it yet. Nevertheless, there is a growing nucleus of well-trained editors. Several of the editors who started with the IDRC-AASE training have gone on for master's degrees in publishing in the United Kingdom, and one is now working on a PhD in the United States.

Who are these African editors and what do they do? Well, most of them are managing editors in the sense that they manage the publications program of their organization. Likely they write, copyedit, and handle production as well—the editor is the entire program. Most editors here are generalists, not specialists. Whereas in North America, one is expected to specialize as one progresses in a career, here in Africa, the more varied the skills one is able to perform, the more functions one can handle. And the more roles one can play, the more valuable that person is. Most organizations—certainly the national governmental ones and the small nongovernmental organizations (the NGOs)—have neither a big enough publications program nor a big enough budget to have more than 1 person on staff to handle publications, so that person must be able to handle it all.

One facet of writing and editing here that people are always curious about is language. How do editors cope with writers whose 1st language is not English? What about the editors themselves—how are their English skills? The language skills vary from country to country. Let's take the three where I have worked, Kenya, Tanzania, and Ethiopia. In these countries—in fact in all countries in Africa, people grow up learning,

speaking, and using 3, 4, even 5 languages. Virtually everyone does who has been to school, even only elementary school, and who lives in town. It just depends on the country, its education policy, the community, and the home as to which of those languages are used.

In Kenya, school children all learn in English. In many urban homes, especially where the parents are from different ethnic groups, English is the main language as well. Although the spoken accent is definitely different, English is a 1st language for many young Kenyans. In Tanzania, Swahili is the national language, and school children start their education using it. English comes later, but for many the skills are not quite so well honed. The language policy is great for building nationalism and unifying the country but not so good for those who want to edit in English.

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The same holds for Ethiopia. When I was working there, Amharic was the national language. Since the dictator Mengistu fled and his government fell in 1991, Tigrinya and Orominya have also been added. Again, English comes later, learned after elementary school. I could almost see a cut-off point in English skills between older researchers who had begun their education in Emperor Haile Selassie's time—and who were quite fluent—and the younger ones, educated under Mengistu's regime, who were unsure of themselves in English and not able to express themselves easily. The editors I have worked with there are fluent—some elegantly so.

Production facilities and options are

often limited for African editors. Nairobi has over 100 printers, although many of these are small-job printers and some specialize in packaging. A number do book work—excellent book work, excellent color work. Prices tend to be higher than those quoted elsewhere, certainly higher than in Southeast Asia, where many of Nairobi's publishers go for their printing. A lot of this is because paper costs are high, the imported paper is taxed, the locally manufactured paper is poor in quality and poorer in selection, and selection, even of the imported paper, is limited.

Kenya is one of Africa's forerunners in printing and publishing. In many other countries on the continent, the editor has to struggle to find a capable printer. Some organizations even opt for buying a small offset press and doing their own printing. Then there are power failures and power rationing. The editor thinks a deadline is under control; then the printer calls to say the power off at the press. The deadline is missed, after all, in spite of careful planning and best efforts.

On the bright side, computers, page-make-up programs, and laser printers have been a real boon. Gone are the days when the editor had to rely on poor typesetting done on antique equipment in a commercial house. In many ways, the fortunate African editor may leap ahead of a northern counterpart. A donor decides to help out with a high-powered computer, with CD-ROM equipment and database subscriptions, with e-mail capability and service. Immediately the editor is at the forefront of the technology, never having plodded through any of the intermediate technologic steps along the way.

The African editor needs to be resourceful, to keep up with technologic advances, yet be able to handle problems that an editor in the north might never face. One thing for sure, the job is never without its challenges and is never boring. 