

Journalists and educators ponder how to report science, technology and innovation for Africa's development

Abuja, Nigeria. 18 October 2011 (ECA) - Western African journalists and educators gathered in Abuja to discuss ways of better reporting science, technology and innovation at a regional workshop jointly organized by the United Nations, Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Scientific, Technical and Research Commission (STRC) of the African Union Commission.

The two-day workshop, held from 17 to 18 October 2011 on the ECOWAS premises in Abuja focused on promoting science journalism as part of Sustainable Development.

The workshop brought together forty (40) participants, including heads of key media training institutions, decision-makers, scientists and journalists from Benin, Burkina-Faso, Cote-d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea Conakry, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, UNESCO, ECOWAS and ECA.

The event was a result of the four co-sponsors' realization of the growing need to enhance public awareness of the importance of science and technology in everyday life and public policy-making, especially against the background of new and emerging science and technology options in areas which impinge directly upon people's lives.

In his opening remarks, Mr Joseph Ngu, director of the UNESCO office in Nigeria, noted that "*Science journalists are the reinforcing driver of the process of making science and technology information accessible for the development of Africa*".

He added that the work of science journalists on science and technology does not "*get the attention of captains of industries and the general public until the science journalists pick them up and start simplifying them in general publications*".

He called on journalists to stimulate public interest and debate on areas where science and technology can really impact on the social and economic well-being of the society. Citing several examples, he said that UNESCO would remain committed to supporting effective implementation of the workshop outcomes.

For his part, Mr Thierry Amoussougbo, regional advisor for ECA, noted that there was a big gap between the knowledge of the scientific community and the public understanding of science, including the priority which policymakers ought to attach to science, technology and innovation. He explained that better communication between scientists and non-scientists could help bridge the existing gap between the two worlds.

He added that the journalistic community was better placed to analyze and present the science from economic, sociological, political, ethical and legal perspectives, adding that the workshop offered a timely opportunity to promote quality science journalism on STI in West Africa.

The representative of the African Union Commission, Dr Kyari Mohammed, called on journalists and educators to collaborate in using traditional and new media in cultivating knowledgeable societies.

Dr Kouakou Roland, head of the Division of Science and Technology of the ECOWAS Commission, pointed to the centrality of STI in the development goals of the region. He said ECOWAS heartily welcomed the idea of strengthening science journalism in the sub-region by, among other things, establishing an enabling policy environment for it to flourish.

The workshop was also aimed at providing insight into the fundamental roles and responsibilities of science journalism for African development, determining priority thematic areas and ways to further continuous training and development of science journalists as well as consolidating and strengthening scientific reporting to improve the quality of the scientific news reaching the public.

The participants adopted several recommendations, including launching the Network of ECOWAS Science Journalists (NESJ) to more effectively promote science journalism in the sub-region. The participants further called for the creation of national associations of science journalists to better work with the African Federation of Science Journalists (AFSJ) and the World Federation of Science Journalists (WFSJ).

The workshop was one of several such workshops being planned for other parts of Africa.

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