

PEER APPROVED

AuthorAID writing workshop helps improve research publication at the National University of Rwanda (NUR) INASP, 2011

Capacity building within a university can mean a variety of things, including: staff-student ratio; available computers; and the workshops and courses provided. To build a stronger academic environment and support of the higher educational needs of its students, the National University of Rwanda (NUR) has tried to bring everything within scope of the plan. One area of particular interest is in improving the number of published, peer-reviewed articles being produced. In an effort to address this, NUR and AuthorAID ran a writing workshop which has led to a rapid boost in publications.

The National University of Rwanda (NUR), with 7 Faculties, 2 Schools and 11 Centres of Research & Service, is one of the largest in the country. In the past 5 years, the NUR has seen a significant rise in students jumping from 8,000 to 13,000 – enrolling more than 20% of Rwanda’s higher education students. While this says great things for the research culture at the NUR, it also places new demands on the University. To address this, the NUR have developed a capacity building plan.

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A quick idea of where NUR stands as of 2011:

- Staff — student ratio is 1:22 (1:25 is the acceptable standard established by the Inter-University Council for East Africa (IUCEA)).
- Computer — student ratio is 1:9 (IUCEA ‘ideal’ standard is 1:10)
- Enrols roughly 25% of all students in HE in Rwanda and nearly 50% of all students in public HE institutions
- It is the only university in Rwanda that enrolls PhD students. 24% of professors lecturers have a PhD. IUCEA standards suggest 50% is ‘good’, while the national average is 16%

One area of particular interest, however, is the number of PhD holders in-country. This is a key aspect in building research capacity and already a growing area in Rwanda.

“As an academician and a researcher, I [submitted] my first two conference papers in the NUR conference in 2008. My papers were peer-reviewed and received few suggestions to improve some of the areas of presentation of the research paper. I was guided by the Research Commission of NUR to participate in [the] AuthorAID workshop during 2009. [Since then], I have published 6 papers in which one paper got the Best Paper Award among 400 papers.”

Ashraph Sulaiman



Participants at the AuthorAID writing workshop in February, 2009

From 2006-2010 the number of PhD holders has nearly doubled. This has also seen a similar increase in published, peer-reviewed articles with 40 in 2006 to 77 in 2009. However, with over 62,500 HE students in Rwanda, and only 377 lecturers with PhDs, there is still room for growth.

To build upon this rapid increase and encourage more students to enrol in PhDs, NUR plans to develop PhD programs in 6 disciplines and 3 multi-disciplinary themes. It is hoped that by introducing these programmes, it will help to train future lecturers and researchers for Rwandan institutions. The goals for enrolment by 2023 are:

- 4,300 Masters
- 1,520 PhD
- 300 Post Doctoral students

Also by 2023, it is expected that peer-reviewed international publications by NUR staff and postgraduate students will number 2,000. There are a number of steps being taken to achieve these goals, including training workshops geared towards building capacity of the existing staff/student body.

In February 2009, an AuthorAID writing workshop was held at the NUR. The workshop’s overall goal was to improve the ability of authors to communicate their research in a way that meets the standards of peer-reviewed journals.

AuthorAID is a global research community that provides networking, mentoring, resources and training for researchers in developing countries. It helps researchers in developing countries to publish and otherwise communicate their work. AuthorAID also serves as a wider global forum to discuss and disseminate research.

Since the workshop, the participants have combined to produce over:

- 70 published, peer-reviewed papers
- 15 conference presentations

Among the participants there have also been:

- four research grants awarded
- 11 PhD registrations
- 4 PhD currently enrolled
- Several award winning papers

Strong research comes from effective communication – gaining access to the research of others and being able to publish your own findings are essential in building a research culture. The research communication cycle consists of availability, access, use creation and uptake. By building the writing skills of young researchers, AuthorAID helps to improve this cycle, specifically in the areas of creation, uptake and use.

Attracting over 50 participants, the workshop was considered a great success with the vast majority of those attending having since presented a paper at an International Conference or published a paper – if not both. Since the workshop, the participants have combined to produce over 70 published papers (several of which are award winning), conduct over 15 conference presentations and win four research grants. Eleven of the participants have since registered for a PhD and four are currently enrolled.

While there has been success for all participants following the workshop, two, in particular stood out, showing the impact a writing workshop can have on the current staff and students.

"I am very happy and excited to publish more papers in very well reputed journals. I thank the AuthorAID, SIDA SAREC and [the] NUR Research Commission. *Renewable and Sustainable Energy Reviews* published by Elsevier is ranked number 4 among the top 20 journals within 'energy'... I recently published two important papers in that journal and was requested to be a peer reviewer."

Dr. Bonfils Safari

Dr Bonfils Safari was one of the participants in the 2009 AuthorAID workshop. Prior to the workshop, Dr. Safari had published 2 papers in more than 10 years, however, by 2011, he has published 6 papers, including several published in *Renewable and Sustainable Energy Reviews* – the 4th ranked energy journal internationally. Dr. Safari has since become a reviewer for the journal.

Ashraph Sulaiman is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Computer Science and Vice-Dean for Undergraduate Studies in the Faculty of Applied Sciences at the NUR. Since the workshop, Sulaiman has published 10 papers and two chapters in a book. Two of his papers were awarded prizes and he has registered for a PhD in 2011. As of February, 2011, he has had one paper accepted and recently submitted another.

AuthorAID is a programme that helps academics reach both long and short term goals. Finding the right mentor and getting the right feedback can be instrumental in getting a paper off the desk and into a journal. The immediate impact also gives way to longer-term success and capacity building. Writing skills workshops and mentoring opportunities give researchers the skills they need not only to publish their findings, but also to pass them on, creating a strong group of future mentors on the institutional, national and international level.

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AuthorAID helps researchers in developing countries to publish and communicate their work. It also serves as a wider global forum to discuss and disseminate research.

AuthorAID provides support and mentoring.

Key features and benefits of AuthorAID are:

- an e-mail list for discussion and questions where researchers can benefit from advice and insights from members across the globe
- access to a range of documents and presentations on best practice in writing and publication
- world-wide training workshops on scientific writing
- a chance to network with other researchers
- personal mentoring by highly published researchers and professional editors

AUTHORAID WANTS YOU TO GET INVOLVED!

Whether you're an early career researcher in a developing country who could benefit from support and mentoring, an established academic with a strong track record who wants to give something back to the research community, or are just keen to get involved in some stimulating discussions, you can register to join the AuthorAID community.

www.authoraid.info