

Final Project Report

Workshop title:

**Enhancing Grant Writing and Scientific Communication Skills Amongst
Female Early-Career Researchers (ECRs) at the University of Buea**

Workshop acronym:

FEMPOWER

Location:

Faculty of Science Boardroom; University of Buea

Date:

November, 2024

Submitted to:

* The Biochemical Society

Submitted by:

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Report for the FEMPOWER Workshop

Introduction: The workshop was organized by the **Molecular and Cell Biology Laboratory** (MCBL) at the University in Buea, Cameroon, and the **Tropical Disease Diagnostics, Interventions, Vaccines, and Therapeutics Initiative** (TroDDIVaT Initiative) with sponsorship from the **Biochemical Society** and the **Company of Biologists**. Additional logistics support was provided by **Inqaba Biotec**, (which provided additional writing material and cords for the badges) and **Core Consulting** (which provides research-related consultancy services to graduate students and research fellows). The venue was the Faculty of Science Board Room, University of Buea, Cameroon, and the workshop ran for 3 days (November 13th-15th, 2024). The main goal of the workshop was to enhance the grant writing and scientific communication skills of female early-career researchers: MSc students conducting their research, PhD students, and Postdocs in the health and life sciences research fields. Highly experienced researchers from the University of Buea and other institutions facilitated the training sessions.

The training objectives were as follows:

1. To equip female ECRs with theoretical and hands-on skills in grant writing and scientific communication
2. To inspire action and encourage networking among the female ECR workshop participants.

When the application form was opened online, 82 applications were received, with applicants from Cameroon, Nigeria, Ghana, South Africa, India, and Ethiopia. Following the screening process, 46 participants were selected based on responses in the application form: 35 to attend on-site and 11 to attend virtually. Regarding the career stage, 9 postdocs, 22 PhD students, and 15 MSc research students were selected. Participants mainly came from the life sciences and health sciences, with an additional two from the fields of journalism and physics.

Following the official launch of the workshop by the Dean of the Faculty of Science, University of Buea (Prof. Roland N. Ndip), the first two days of the workshop focused on grant writing. Lecture sessions, practical sessions, and networking sessions were held to help participants put the lectures into practice. For one of the practical sessions, the facilitator used a grant call from the African Research Network for Neglected Tropical Diseases (ARNTD) to drill the participants. The last day was focused on scientific communication, and participants were taught using lectures and practical sessions, with the practical sessions focused on data visualization with different tools,

including Microsoft Excel and Canva. Participants' attendance on days 1, 2, and 3 were 33, 40, and 40, respectively.

Outcomes and Potential Impacts: The workshop was designed to respond to the grant writing and scientific communication needs of female ECRs at the University of Buea engaged in bioscience-related research. The sessions were facilitated by 8 experienced researchers of both genders, 5 of them being females who were selected to serve as models and mentors. The impact on the training as received from the feedback could be classified as follows:

1. **Mentality and perspective change about the grant writing process:** At the end of the training, most participants indicated that they were more confident about submitting grant applications. Some participants indicated that the experiences shared by one of the facilitators, a PhD student who is an awardee of the Commonwealth Split-site Scholarship and a winner of the ARNTD grant of USD 30,000, were a big motivation for them to explore potentials and get more engaged in grant writing.
2. **Knowledge and hands-on skill acquisition:** Participants gained both theoretical and practical skills that will go a long way to enhance their grant writing and scientific communication activities. Some participants indicated that through the training session on scientific communication, they would be able to improve journal manuscripts, conference abstracts, and posters they were working on at the time of the conference. Two participants (Postdoc and PhD student awaiting defense), through the contact built at the workshop, made use of the poster design lessons and post-workshop consultancy from Core Consulting to prepare their posters, which they presented at the Cameroon Bioscience Society (CBS) Annual Conference held in Douala, Cameroon from November 28-30, 2024.
3. **Creation of research and mentorship networks:** The sessions were opportunities for the ECRs to network among themselves, across disciplines, and institutions. In addition, some junior ECRs also used the opportunity to network with senior ECRs who agreed to serve as mentors. These networks will go a long way to enhance the career development of the different participants.

Recommendations from Participants: Despite expressing satisfaction with the program, participants mainly requested more training exploring further grant writing, mainly of a practical nature, running for a longer period with one-on-one training.



Practical session on grant writing by Ntang Emmaculate (ARNTD Grant awardee)



Lecture session on grant writing by Prof. Achidi (Coordinator in the Dep't of Biochemistry)



Group photo by participants on Day 3 of training