

## **Building capacity in science radio journalism in South Africa**

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In general, science reporting in all media forms in South Africa has been meager. Some improvement has recently been evident with the media hype around Mark Shuttleworth's trip as the first African in Space (in the time leading up to the event, during April 2002 and thereafter). The vast resources available for the Shuttleworth media campaign ensured that virtually all South Africans were exposed to information about this important event. However, in the face of limited resources, other approaches are necessary. To reach, engage, educate and influence rural and in many instances, peri-urban communities in South Africa about educational issues, the medium of radio has proved to be an extremely powerful tool. This communication medium has to date, not been adequately exploited due to the lack of capacity in science radio journalism in the country. In response to this, the Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology (DACST) instituted mechanisms to address this skills deficit.

During 2001 the South African Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology (DACST) in collaboration with the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS), initiated a unique three-year programme to support South African journalists and science professionals to undertake internships in science radio journalism at the AAAS. During the internship, fellows with a journalism background would learn how to research, write and produce science stories to the highest industry standards, while those from the science community would learn how to effectively communicate with the media. In addition to "classroom based learning" and carrying out their own assignments in science journalism, fellows also have the opportunity of visiting other centers of science journalism in the Washington D.C. area and meeting with experts. In other words, fellows undergo intensive and rigorous training, building a broad base of both content knowledge and experience.

This paper examines the history and initiation of the project, the implementation challenges faced by DACST, and the lessons learnt in undertaking such as capacity building venture. Some of the successes of the programme are examined and recommendations are made for not only improving the outcomes for this project, but for increasing science radio journalism more broadly as a means of enhancing the public understanding of science and technology in South Africa.