

Jacqueline Frank's innovative media training is making a difference across 16 countries, reports **AUDREY WABWIRE**

PHOTOGRAPHY | JONATHAN KALAN



Production of a world-famous television series is glamorous and the grueling hours build fortitude.

Working with tight deadlines, celebrities and intricate logistical arrangements requires stamina, creativity and spine. As a true New Yorker, Jacqueline Frank has always been a go-getter, so working on the show was not a challenge for her. After years of working as an assistant producer in the Emmy award-winning *Law and Order* TV drama series, Jacqueline felt the need to re-orient her career. Her experience in planning TV has brought her to a project that demands careful strategizing, still mindful of the audience.

Frank is now Project Manager of the Media Capacity Development section of the Africa Adaptation Program, a project of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). The AAP works with high level decision makers across 20 countries in Africa to create better resilience to climate change and other issues that affect the general well-being of the focal areas. This partnership involves various sectors of

Giving Climate Change Reporting in Africa a Human Face

OUTREACH:

A member of the AAP Project chats with Senegalese youths.

government, working with specialists in meteorology and other environment-protection units.

The AAP works in partnership with UNIDO, UNICEF and WFP, with funds from the Japanese Government.

The Media Capacity Development section headed by Jacqueline is charged with building the capacities of journalists of AAP countries with skills in climate change reporting.

"A lot has been done in training of

media professionals, but climate change remains a complex topic, a new area with a lot to teach and impart. There is usually a resistance when training journalists because there have been so many trainings for journalists over the years. But journalists have received information on climate change with lots of enthusiasm, due to the acknowledged complexity of the issue," she says.

Jacqueline heads a team that has a busy schedule monitoring media to see how

climate change is being reported in Africa and about Africa, identifying journalists who can be champions of the climate change cause, and training them. They also work to introduce trained journalists to contacts in their respective countries who are working in climate change. This is all in a bid to create links with all parties who are already working on the same topic.

Although the AAP works with high-level policymakers, the Fourth Estate still plays a major part in defining the direction the policymaking will take. If the general public is in the know on matters that may affect them, they push their leaders to make better decisions. This is the approach that the media development element of the AAP has taken – training journalists how to understand climate change and identify its impact even when it is hidden in issues such as poor governance or poor planning.

One of her major achievements is her role in organizing the historic climate change caravan in November and December 2011.

Caravan

Creativity was certainly not left behind when Jacqueline moved from TV production to media development. She recently worked with young environmentalists from the African Youth Initiative in Climate Change to organize the overland caravan from Nairobi to Durban.

"A young environmentalist, Winnie Asiti, approached me one day and told me she wanted a group of young people to travel by road to South Africa in the run-up to COP 17 in 2011," Jacqueline explained.

Working with a tight budget, most project heads would have not given second thought to such a wild idea, and from a young idealist. Jackie saw an opportunity to further the climate change media development cause, and enable a platform for the use of social media and blogs to tell human interest stories of climate change, from the perspective of young journalists.

"We jumped on this idea. We ran a competition inviting young journalists from the region to take part in this caravan. We sponsored the winners, who were from Kenya, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Cameroun and Senegal, to be part of the trip and encouraged them to report on what they saw on the road," she points out.

Climate change is best known for its jargon. The general public has been quick to stow it away as a problem of the scientists who understand it better. Many people have chosen to ignore it and hope they never have to deal with it head-on, which is shocking since the effects of climate change affect all human beings in all regions. It is



Q & A:
Members of Media Capacity Development conduct interviews in Rwanda

not easy to get human interest stories on climate change.

Journalists have also been victim to the problems of overuse of jargon in reporting, since there has been little training on what the terms used actually mean for the local citizens. The journalists end up producing reports that are better-suited for scientists rather than layman members of the public who suffer the brunt of climate change by the billion. Reproducing a scientific report takes less time, and the journalist does not have to deal with tedious interviews with scientists who may not necessarily be able to give a human face to climate change! Due to this, many audiences just flip through climate change stories and move on to stories which are simpler to understand and relate to at a glance.

By sponsoring young journalists to travel over 4,000km with environmentalists, Jacqueline felt confident that they would develop different angles in reporting about climate change. The journalists, all aged under 30, joined over 150 young people from all over the world in this historic road trip from the east to south of the continent.

Planning

The AAP consulted an environmental editor who mentored the journalists on how to make the best out of the trip. He was charged with providing editorial oversight to the young journalists. Jacqueline felt the journalists should make the most of the COP meeting and planned

for various training sessions for the team with development experts and news agencies such as InterPress Service, IPS, Internews and the Climate Change Media Partnership (CCMP).

Five young journalists were selected from Kenya, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Cameroun and Senegal. They were trained in innovative ways of reporting on climate change by seasoned environmental journalists and off they went.

During the trip, the journalists were charged with reporting on the human face of climate change. They had to explain how people in the villages understood climate change, how governance and poor planning were often confused with climate change and how climate change set various events that may seem unrelated into motion.

The caravan travelled by converted trucks over rough terrain as the activists and journalists camped in the countryside. The activists attracted villagers by holding energetic music concerts with local artistes. People were drawn from their farms to enjoy the awareness creation music which educated them on what climate change meant to their daily living. This was especially effective since the concept of climate change has long been an abstract idea among rural communities.

The locals who gathered were interviewed by the journalists sponsored by AAP. They spoke about food insecurity and the rising cost of living, the various

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human interest climate change stories. After listening to the music and speaking to the environmentalists, these communities confirmed that they had experienced difficulties with changing climatic conditions – they just had not related it with the scientific jargon on the news. These views were confirmed at the final climate change mega-concert hosted by retired Archbishop Desmond Tutu in Durban before COP 17 began.

All sentiments were captured on the AAP magazine and social media pages, as well as media outlets represented by the five journalists. Jacqueline is passionate that journalists adequately cover climate change for the people affected, with the hope that this may eventually have an influence on policymaking. This is how development in adaptation will take place.

The AAP Media Development Unit also fired up climate change reporting during COP 17 by sponsoring four high-level journalists to the event.

Fascinating

It is fascinating how Jacqueline works effortlessly in planning and execution in her project.

“I like being a boss. I like the challenge of managing a team and working with them to achieve goals,” she explains.

After making her switch from TV, Jacqueline studied for a Masters in International Affairs which prepared her for work in the various possibilities in the development world.



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LAUNCH:

Jacqueline Frank AAP Project Director Ian Rector (left) and Charles Dickson, AAP Communications at project inception Training of Trainers in Nairobi

“I did some media development work in Baghdad, Iraq, where security was an issue. I did not travel much, but when I did, we had lots of security. In the field, I was introduced as part of the team but not as the head because it would create resistance,” she says.

Any negative information had to be provided with caution due to the volatile environment. Working in such a variety of environments has helped Jacqueline master cultural dynamics which play an important role in any development initiative.

She joined her current project well

aware that it would be key to unpacking climate change, since the concept is still quite new on the continent, and even more so to rural audiences who may be worst-hit by the depredations of adverse climates.

Challenge

When the chance to join AAP arose, Jacqueline was elated.

“The budget for the whole project seemed little, but it was a challenge I believed I would overcome,” Jacqueline says.

Nairobi is a commercial hub, well situated as a support office to the main AAP office in Dakar. Jacqueline and her team created clusters of countries to enable them to work efficiently with the minimal resources available. Standardized workshops also saved time in planning.

So far, over 400 journalists have been trained on climate change reporting by the AAP media development project. This has seen the increased coverage of climate change across media in Africa.

This topic now enjoys a presence in full-page stories and inserts in the dailies of up to 16 pages at a time. This is a massive success since, not so long ago, climate change was heaped with science stories, with no one bothering to explain difficult terms or give hope by discussing adaptation plans.

Since resources are limited, the clustering method helped identify the most influential and interested journalist in the topic in each member country. This journalist is the contact point for the AAP Media Development team and helps in organizing trainings. Many senior journalists



IN THE FIELD:

Jacqueline In Bangladesh on a Knight Fellowship.



have also undergone Training of Trainer (ToT) courses, where they are equipped with skills to teach climate change reporting styles to other senior journalists, who, in turn, spread these skills to other journalists that they work with.

Under Jacqueline's guidance, this project has managed to convince several universities to include a course on climate change for journalism students.

This will go a long way in ensuring sustainability in reporting about climate change, even when the project wraps up. For now, there is no plan to extend media training by AAP for journalists, but the impact they have caused will last a long time.

Looking ahead

As the end of the project draws closer, the Media Capacity Development section of the AAP boasts success in achievements in creative training and engagement of young and senior journalists in a topic that was once largely ignored by most members of the Fourth Estate in Africa.

Networks between journalists NGOs in agriculture, environmental preservation and

WELL DONE:

Jacqueline presents an AAP Project workshop participant with a certificate in Lesotho.

climate change experts in government have been created. Precedence has been set on what kind of stories need to be told to create awareness and to influence policy makers. This is not a topic that will be ignored any longer.

Although the work is not complete, Jacqueline Frank's work has influenced many of us as we read better quality climate change stories in Africa, from African journalists. After this mighty success, what will Jacqueline do?

"I love working in Kenya and hope I could stay on. But I miss New York and my friends and the places and it would be great to go back there as well. A hybrid of the two would be best for me!" she enthuses.

Jacqueline's current focus is on a proper wrap of her project first, though she hopes to go further in media development work, an area she is clearly excelling in and making a difference.

As governments come and go, many short-term programs are initiated to deal with problems related to climate change. However, climate change cannot be overcome with quick treatment. It is a worldwide and long-term challenge that requires joint efforts from all sectors in the economy to alleviate the

trouble it presents. The democratic system of government allows for short-term leadership, which creates better environments for growth in politics and industry. However, climate change requires long-term projections from policymakers who can follow their decisions through.

This is also tedious and expensive and can be easily overlooked by new governments that come in with new ideas, sometimes averting focus on climate change. Development of sustainable trainings such as the ones carried out by the AAP for journalists is a sure way of keeping track of progress in climate change matters.

This way, the population is constantly reminded of the problem at hand in a language that they easily understand. Climate change is not a problem of the scientists, it is everyone's problem and it is here to stay. ■



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