

## REPORT

Activity:

**TRAINING IN WILDLIFE FILMMAKING**

Venue:

**THE WILDLIFE FILM ACADEMY (WFA), CAPE TOWN, SOUTH AFRICA**

By:

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To:

**INTERNATIONAL TROPICAL TIMBER ORGANIZATIONS (ITTO)**

Reference:

**ITTO FELLOWSHIP MS. VIVIAN AKWELEY NORLEY NUHU**

**030/06A**

### SPONSORS



*Accra, September 2007*

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## **ABSTRACT**

Out of the varied methods of creating awareness on renewable natural resources conservation to the general public, motion picture either as celluloid film or video often makes the most impact on the viewer.

Thus, the ITTO Fellowship Award for this short training in wildlife filmmaking at the Wildlife Film Academy in Cape Town, South Africa has in deed improved my understanding and equipped me with more knowledge and skills that will serve ITTO's aim of promoting better understanding of forestry issues through developing and telecasting of local forestry and wildlife footages. In addition, the Award opened doors of support from the Forestry Commission of Ghana and the Global Communication for Conservation Inc for additional practical internship after the training. Thus, local productions to be made in due course will go a long way in educating Ghanaians on their dwindling forest and wildlife so that together with Forestry Commission and ITTO positive attitudes towards forests and wildlife resource utilisation and eventual sustainability despite increasing human population could be achieved.

I thank everyone involved in making this opportunity possible

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

*“The conservationist’s most important task, if we are to save the earth, is to educate”* - Sir Peter Scott, Founder of World Wildlife Fund for Nature (WWF).

The above quote and an inner urge to promote conservation of our forest and wildlife wealth among the Ghanaian public through communication, awareness and public education has always appealed to me. I am satisfied that for two decades I have been fortunate to do this through the use of various approaches including audiovisuals such as slides, videos and films. Often these have left lasting impressions with far fetching results for my subjects. Unfortunately, the high costs involved in producing our own education materials locally, have resulted in the use of materials from abroad, mostly western societies. Subsequently, most Ghanaians including those with interests in conservation hardly associate with those products and what they see. Furthermore, the few if ever produced locally are documentaries of very limited lifespan use yet with more external influence. Believing that in this era of information and communication technology (ICT), it should be possible to produce environmental footages of wildlife, forestry and their interaction of great broadcast quality much cheaper for local use. this is the reason why I greatly value the opportunity granted me by the International Tropical Timber Organizations (ITTO) and other sponsors to train in wildlife filmmaking as the unfolding of my dream into reality. Although the focus was on wildlife, it will benefit other sectors of the biophysical environment such as forestry and associated activities.

## **2.0. THE TRAINING**

### **2.1 Centre**

The month long training was organized by the Wildlife Film Academy (WFA) located in Cape Town, South Africa from February 28<sup>th</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup> March 2007. Practical film shooting took place in Botswana from 11<sup>th</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup> March 2007.

### **2.2. Sponsors**

With an ITTO Fellowship of US\$7,800, it was possible to seek additional funding from other sources. These were the Global Communications for Conservation Inc in the US and my employers, the Forestry Commission in Ghana. I am most grateful to all of them as the additional funds enabled me to stay on for two extra months of internship with one of the most renowned professional production houses, Homebrew Films also in Cape Town, SA.

### **2.3. The Course**

I arrived in Cape Town mid day of Monday 26<sup>th</sup> February 2007 and checked into Kimberly Hotel on Roeland Street for the duration of the course. On Wednesday, 28<sup>th</sup> February 2007 at precisely 9.00am the course in wildlife film making began with self introductions and expectations, and the handing in of the course materials.

There were seven of us as students; four women and three men. Course participants came from South Africa (3 including a woman), Britain (2 women), Spain (a man) and Ghana (myself, a woman). There was also a British young lady intern. Classes took place on week days from 9.00am to 5.00pm. The first eight such days were devoted to lectures delivered by not less than eleven professionals from various disciplines within the film industry. The last hour before

closing was spent watching a wildlife documentary for better insight into approach, content design/style, etc. Hot lunch was provided each afternoon.



**Backyard of WFA located on the slopes of beautiful Table Mt in Cape Town**



**Vivian entering the WFA front porch**



***Watching wildlife videos for, an exposure to inspiration***



*Attentively listening to Director of Photography, Tim*



*Students on location shoot*

The course was divided into three parts (the details of which are in Annex 1 of this report), namely:-

- i. Pre-Production and Lectures, which was undertaken at the Academy
- ii. Production and Location shoot and
- iii. Post-Production, after which an internship was undertaken (Annex 2)



*Panning*

## **2.4 Graduation**

- i. 30<sup>th</sup> March, 2007 was our last day at the Academy.
- ii. The Course Manager and the Coordinator went over our expectations, which were completed on the first day at the Academy with us. This was followed by presentation of our respective videos to an invited audience including the panel that heard our pitch before the location shoot.
- iii. We discussed feedbacks submitted to the Academy at each stage of the course.
- iv. We shared views on the way forward for each with advice from those lectures and management staff present.
- v. With all these done, each was given a Certificate of Completion of Course in Wildlife Filmmaking plus a copy of video produced and the original footage.

### 3.0 LESSONS LEARNED

Though the course duration was short, it gave me much insight and understanding of what it takes to produce good environmental films. Key lessons including skills are:

- i. Organizing a good story to tell
- ii. Communicating a story to the right audience
- iii. Selection of the right crew (in this case must have passion for conservation of the natural environment, have technical knowledge and innovative, especially for producing quality results)
- iv. Combining patience with expertise (i.e., waiting for the right occasion in the field since these cannot easily be made up)
- v. Sponsorship for production and telecasting
- vi. Because the course offered each participant the opportunity to decide which areas of filmmaking to belong, I opted for “research, editing and overall production” and that would be just about right. However, editing calls for having additional training, the appropriate equipment and regular practice.

### 4.0 INTERNSHIP

Although the ITTO Fellowship Award does not cover this aspect, this brief is inserted in appreciation since the Award became a spring board for seeking additional funding from the Global Communication for Conservation Inc. Thus for six after the training I had the opportunity of gaining practical experience with Homebrew Films in Cape Town. As a professional production house involved in wildlife educational series for the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) and KyNet among others, the internship was very useful.



*Part of the Homebrew team*

## **5.0 BENEFITS OF TRAINING TO THE FORESTRY COMMISSION, GHANA**

- i. Sharing of skills with other colleagues and personnel at the two Divisions of the Commission
- ii. Should be able to direct and inform management on types of education films that can appeal to Ghanaians
- iii. To enhance environmental education and awareness of the Ghanaian populace through film making on the issues of the biophysical environment
- iv. Using film to add value to legislation and education on illegal access to and trade in wildlife and forest resources
- v. To promote cost cutting or have more value added for little money spent to produce films locally
- vi. To partner local TV stations in the production and broadcast of films (e.g. news, movies and documentaries) of interest to the Commissions in disseminating the right information

## **6.0 IMPACTS ON ITTO ACTIVITIES**

The benefits to the ITTO are numerous through the complementary work of the Divisions at the Commission such that we are “acting locally” yet impacting on the work of the ITTO at the macro-level. Thus,

- i. education programmes on sustainable use of natural resources through filming greatly benefits the total environment including forestry,
- ii. the collaboration and the extension of skills to those working specifically on forestry is indirectly promoting the aims of the ITTO locally,
- iii. appropriating and responsible reporting on the Commission’s activities through filmmaking is important, and
- iv. using filmmaking to expose illegal activities of interest to the Commission.
- v. promoting cost cutting or have more value added for little money spent to produce films locally
- vi. partnering local TV stations in the production and broadcast of films (e.g. news, movies, education series on environment and documentaries) of interest to the Commissions in disseminating the right information.

## **7.0 THE WAY FORWARD**

I am more enthused than ever before to want to produce local environmental films, which will awaken our people and promote their desire in doing all that they can to make Ghana more productive through sustainable use of her natural resources. These are some opinions

- i. Though I would not advocate for the set-up of video production unit, I recommend that the Forestry Commission regularly commit some funds for such productions (including the purchase of the basic film making materials).
- ii. Committing some funds to the internal production of films will mean that there will be the building of internal capacity, and developing resource persons to complement other

production teams that do not originate from within the Commission but in the interest of the Commission. It will mean that they will do exactly what the Commission wants in order to avoid loss of money and time.

- iii. The Commission should also support a weekly telecast of locally produced environmental films on our national television network as a way of educating Ghanaians and projecting its corporate image.

## **8.0 ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

I am deeply grateful to God for granting me this opportunity to fulfil one of my aspirations in life and for my organisation. I am indebted more so, to people like Messrs. Geoffrey Pleydell, one time PR Consultant to FC London Office, Alhassan Attah, Executive Director, TIDD and B. Y. Ofori-Frimpong, ex-Executive Director, Wildlife Division, and Dr. B. K. Delali Dovie, a one time colleague at the Ghana Wildlife Society, and Wits University in South Africa who shared my dream, urged me on and greatly supported my application for ITTO funding and or locating the WFA.

I am equally gratefully to the ITTO and my employer, Forestry Commission for sponsoring my training. I am very thankful to the Ghanaian delegates to ITTO who supported my application and saw to the award of the Fellowship.

Words are not enough to acknowledge Global Communications for Conservation Inc. based in the USA, especially, Laura and Patricia for having such confidence in me and partly supporting my training and entire internship period of two months after WFA. The training and internship has just opened the door and all I can hope for is a complete fulfilment of the dream we share by making available to Ghanaians, their own televised regular environmental series that would meet international standards. There are many others who contributed to the success of my training and here I will like to mention, Lameez Birch, the Course Manager then at WFA in particular for her many assistance to me and also all the lecturers and personnel and student colleagues who made the month long training feasible and memorable.

I am most indebted to the entire Homebrew staff led by the Managing Director, Mr. Jaco Loubser for seeing me as one of them and giving me all the assistance I needed despite the very busy schedule each of them had. I am really looking forward to some form of partnership with them soon. Outside the WFA and Homebrew Films I made acquaintances with some persons, whose friendship impacted me greatly and I wish to mention them here, though they may not see this report. They are Malcolm Opal of Cape Town Information Centre, Beulah Van Schalkwyk of Cape Town Natural History Museum, Jasmine and Maggie Mahase of Johannesburg.

Finally but not the least, to my church members back in Accra and the Anglican Communion I worshipped with in Southern Africa, close friends and family both home and abroad for praying for me and looking after my interest, I say thank you.

## ANNEXES

### Annex 1: Details of Course Outline

#### **Part 1 Pre-Production and Lectures**

Topics covered under this part were as follows:

Ø Introduction, orientation and inspiration:

- i. The entire wildlife film industry worldwide with particular reference to Africa and the current situation was examined.
- ii. What constitutes a wildlife film and how that is different from other films was visited.
- iii. The roles wildlife films play in awareness creation, education and entertainment as well as available formats and what will sell and what will not were examined.

Ø The Market - Commissioning Editors, Broadcasters and Distributors:

- i. Who are they and what are their roles within the industry?
- ii. What opportunities and challenges are there for new entrants to wildlife filmmaking?

Ø Budgeting and Funding:

Filmmaking in general is expensive and more so in wildlife filmmaking, which demands more time out in the field with many uncertainties. We thus had to look at what to budget for and how and where to source for funding.

Ø Networks and Wildlife Film Festivals:

The importance and benefits that participation can bring to student's development after the course as a wildlife filmmaker was examined. Incidentally, the management of the WFA also organizes the annual 'Wild Talk Africa' the only Film festival on the continent.

Ø Conceptualising, research and Pitching:

Looked at what is required and how one's dream or idea, difficult scientific linkages and or knowledge can be made real and enjoyable.

Ø Camera technology, High Definition, Shot composition and Lighting:

This was undertaken at Magus Visual, a leading camera and filming equipment rental agency in Cape Town.

- i. Here we had the opportunity at having very practical exposure to cameras and their functions.
- ii. Lectures on sound, light and shot composition were rendered at the Academy

Ø Sounds, Sequencing and introduction to Shooting:

- i. This was towards the use of speech, ambient sound and music.
- ii. Sequencing referred to the planning and putting together of footages taken not necessarily at a go, but from various areas and or time to tell the story as desired.

Ø Practical on camera handling and composition:

- i. This took place at the nearby De Waal Park for students to have a feel of the camera and be able to decide which of the three types available will suit their use during the field trip.

- ii. Prior to leaving for Botswana, students had to pitch to a panel on their intended 5 minute video, so as to confirm their understanding of what has so far been taught. The pitching required that the student had a synopsis for the topic chosen and researched into. The 1 - page synopsis below was presented and followed in coming up with my 5-minute video, titled '**OKAVANGO**' - *the delta without water*.

**Ghana Day:** The 50<sup>th</sup> Independence Anniversary of Ghana was celebrated with sharing of the Ghana's world prized Golden tree chocolate with staff at the Hotel and colleagues and lectures of WFA.

### **Students during a lecture period**

#### **Late afternoon video watching session at the Academy**

#### **STORY PITCHED FOR FILMING**

Title: **OKAVANGO** - the delta without water

Duration: 5 minutes

Theme: The Okavango Delta gives life and wealth - keep it wet!

Intention: To create awareness and call for concern among local communities, decision makers and nature lovers worldwide in saving it from pre-mature death through damming and or piping upstream.

#### The Story:

The story begins with a shot of the Okavango River meandering into the dry Kalahari of northwestern Botswana as a single river; after flowing over 1000kms from the Angolan Mountains through Namibia, carrying over 10,000 cubic metres of water and fine sand, it begins to settle in the flat lowland basin of nearly 15,000sq kms diving itself into many smaller islands where some of the water sinks down and forms into a delta with no exit.

This film focuses the viewers attention on what might be lost to all mankind, not only the Tswanas (nationals of Botswana) if plans of building dams or weirs for piping water or generating hydropower. Water is vital to the life of all creatures not just mankind. With no alternative water sources available, the survival of others including wildlife and the many local people whose life depend on this delta should not be sacrificed.

This wetland paradise, unique and unparalleled throughout the world first transforms a dry sandy desert into a vibrant oasis with salt pans, grassy plains, reed beds and savannah woodland with predominant camel thorn trees. These in turn become homes, and offer food to many diverse animal species from as small as insects, frogs, reptiles, birds including the largest flying bird, the kori bustard and mammals ranging from small rodents like the desert rat, to gemsbok, lechwe, elephants, giraffe whose survival is very dependant on regular supply of water.

The water in the delta gives wealth in as much as the socio-economic lives of thousands of the local people living around depends on it for survival. Sitting in their dug-out canoes or mokoro, indigenous people fish for tilapia or carry tourists who are out watching birds or other wild animals accompanied by park rangers or guides.

Should the EIA underway for the construction of a dam for hydropower generation or a weir for piping away some volumes of the water at Pola Falls, Namibia be approved by the joint Committee and actual construction takes place, then nearly 1.5 billion cubic metres of water and silt needed to keep the Okavango recharged would be lost annually. Added to this reduction,

evapo-transpiration will affect the lives of plants; animals may have less food and shelter and many may die.

Botswana may have diamonds and cattle, but these also require water, a lot of it. What will happen to the 100,000 people depending on the delta directly or indirectly for their socio-economic survival? Not everyone can be employed by the government or in the mining industry. The eco-lodge investors may move elsewhere having made good money already; but how about the many tourists and the younger generations who have heard so much about this wonderful wetland paradise that only Africa possess? Would they be willing to accept a dustbowl in place of today's Okavango Delta?

If the nations that share the water of the Okavango River will for the good of nature and all mankind and above all their African pride, ensure water never ceases to flow into the Okavango delta, then there is hope.

Comments:

Though water was considered to be a difficult subject, especially during the time of dryness, it was feasible, which encouraged my moving on. In addition, the use of supplementary footage would be allowed.

## **Part 2 Production and Location Shoot**

This section was the actual field practical meant to expose the student to acquire the footages needed to make the story pitched become a reality.

- i. On Sunday, 11<sup>th</sup> March 2007, students together with Ms. Lianne Sledge, General Manager of NHU Africa as well as camera technician and WFA Course Coordinator, and Mr. Tim Chevallier, a seasoned filmmaker and Director of Photography flew to Maun in Northern Botswana.
- ii. Each student had a camera with spare batteries and two mini DV tapes for shooting of appropriate footages that will become the basis of the 5-minute video. We had two vehicles with a couple of tripods between us.
- iii. The very first day was more of practice from sunrise to sunset and we had very exciting moments. On the first day, while separated from the others but with Tim, we nearly encountered a herd of elephants coming to drink but for the prompting of our Lodge Manager who doubled as driver cum tracker.
- iv. By the end of the fourth day, each student had substantial amount of footage, which we previewed so as to ascertain what materials to source from each other and elsewhere.
- v. Our last night at the lodge would remain with some of us for long time. We were taken through a traditional ritual of servicing food, which included washing of hands, bowing to serve and eating local food with fingers. This was followed by cultural drumming and dancing, which I could not help but get involved.
- vi. At the end of the trip, we had to return to South Africa. We had to leave at dawn and we could not contain the dust from the front vehicle so had no choice but to protect our faces
- vii. Despite a tyre bust on our vehicle, we were able to make it just in time to Maun Airport and said goodbye to our hosts.

### **Part 3 Post-Production**

This section took place mostly at the Academy and involved editing of the footages taken during the location shoot.

- i. After two full days of tutorage, each student was assigned to an editing suite, which comprised of a complete Apple Mac professional desktop computer with Final Cut Pro 5 software.
- ii. We shared among us Sony edit deck for the transfer and digitizing of the footages from the mini DV tapes on to the computer.
- iii. With guidance from the experts, the editing of the digitized footages was carried out and sequenced to make up the 5-minute video pitched of broadcast quality. After that we chose from available audio cds, the right music, which was added to the edited video clip.
- iv. We then audio-taped the voice over script developed using a camera. This was also transferred to the computer, digitized and added on.
- v. At the end, any graphics required were added on and needed text such as title, credits and so on were put place. With all these done, the video is ready for a final sound mix. So each video was copied on to an external drive using the Quick Timer and sent to a professional sound studio for the final sound mix., for which our individual presence was paramount as nothing else could be done except duplicating of copies of the final DVD.
- vi. One of our colleagues, Asanda invited the entire class to his home for final shoot of his project and socializing. After the shoot within his community, we interacted with his grandmother, a one-time liberation fighter and her daughters, one of whom is his mother.
- vii. The practical editing for the final 5-minute broadcast DVD took six days. After that the students were taken to visit a facility house, Media Film Service based in Waterfront, the port area of Cape Town. The facility provides rental services for all kinds of cameras, video, grips, lighting and editing. There was a lot of interaction with the various departments of the Facility and the heads were very happy in answering student questions.

#### **Annex 2: Internship**

Initially, I was to have my internship at the Wildlife Film Academy but inspired by what I gained from two of my lecturers, I sought for and obtained after an interview with Mr. Jaco Loubser, the MD of Homebrew Films also based in Cape Town, the nod to do my internship with them.

I was to start immediately after the course but I had accepted an invitation to spend Easter with my pen-pal of forty years and the daughter in Gaborone, Botswana and four days with a lady from Johannesburg I met during breakfast at Kimberley Hotel. So I began my internship at Homebrew Films on precisely April 16, 2007.

On the first day, the management of the company had a meeting with me to ascertain my aspiration. They went through with me a set of questions, to guide me in preparing a position paper on the status of wildlife filming in Ghana. I was provided a desk with an Apple Mac PC, which had internet facility to enable me source for information easily. I had access to telephone and all including fax. I was also introduced to all the staff, whose cooperation was required. Indeed I was treated as a member of staff.

Homebrew Films was set up in 1989 and is a television production house specialising in the natural environment, lifestyle, youth, fashion and cooking programmes television. For nearly three years, it has been producing a weekly environmental show, “GROEN” and “GROENJIE” for KykNET, and short documentaries and insets for major broadcasters (50/50, Focus, SABC Education). M-Net, SABC2, SABC Africa, e-tv in South Africa and Discovery Channel Europe are some of their broadcast clients. During my six weeks I had the opportunity of interacting with almost all the staff either on location and or studio set shoot or recording voice over and at the editing suites. Thus I came into contact with two major presenters for Groen. I watched some of their productions and others, all to gain more insight. I was always encouraged to research, and directed to sources of information including agencies like Wildlife Conservation Society of South Africa (WESSA), IZIKO South Africa (Natural History) Museum, Worlds of Birds, all in Cape Town and Robin Island. I was also assisted to contact GBC, as my preferred television broadcaster for pushing my plans.

They also initiated a move to begin a search for possible sponsors, which I am still pursuing. When my digital camera became faulty, the company hired a small video camera for me and encouraged me to tour much of Cape Town. There wasn't enough time to fully edit but I have enough footage and when I have the editing facility I am comfortable with, I hope to come out with at least two episodes, namely “From Mountains to the Ocean:- Conservation at work” and “This Place I called my home”. They may not be of broadcast quality but good enough for a starter like me.

Mid week before my return, a staff lunch was organised in my honour, ten of us as some were out in the field.



*Vivian sitting between Jaco Loubser and Marike William, MD, co-owners, Producers and Directors of Homebrew Films. Dave and Alan, Groen presenters on poster in the right corner*