

A photograph of a colorful, weathered wall with sections of red, yellow, blue, and orange. A dark, curved object, possibly a pipe or part of a building, is visible on the left side.

Building Science Communication Networks

A case study from Latin America and the Caribbean

Luisa Massarani & Yulye Jessica Romo Ramos, SciDev.Net

OUR LEARNING SERIES

About SciDev.Net

SciDev.Net – the Science and Development Network – is committed to putting science at the heart of global development.

Our mission is to help individuals and organisations apply evidence and innovations from science and technology to decision making in order to have a positive impact on equitable and sustainable development and poverty reduction.

The SciDev.Net website [www.scidev.net] is the world's leading source of reliable and authoritative news, views and analysis on information about science and technology for global development.

Our main office is based in London but we have 6 regional news desks based in Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, Latin America & the Caribbean, South-East Asia & Pacific, Middle-East & North Africa and West Africa. Between us we manage a worldwide network of registered users, advisors, consultants and freelance journalists, who drive our activities and vision.

For more information please consult our website: www.scidev.net

For free email updates visit: www.scidev.net/sign-up

Contact Details

For queries about this paper please contact SciDev.Net's Monitoring and Evaluation Coordinator:

Yulye Jessica Romo Ramos

9-11 Richmond Buildings | London | W1D 3HF | UK
+44 (0) 20 7292 9910
ourlearning@scidev.net
www.scidev.net

Join us on Facebook: www.facebook.com/scidevnet

Follow us on Twitter: [@SciDevNet](https://twitter.com/SciDevNet)

First published by SciDev.Net in the UK in 2013

Copyright © SciDev.Net

SciDev.Net material is available to republish on condition that the original author and SciDev.Net are credited.

ISBN 978-1-909528-03-1

Cover design by www.stevendickie.com/design

Photo Credit (Cover): iStockphoto.com / Robert Crum



Putting science at the heart
of global development

OUR LEARNING SERIES

Building Science Communication Networks

A case study from Latin America and the Caribbean

Luisa Massarani & Yulye Jessica Romo Ramos, SciDev.Net

February 2013

Table of Contents

SciDev.Net Latin America gateway	1
Readership figures	1
Registrants	1
Reputation	2
How it all started.....	3
Factors of success and lessons learned	4
Hiring strategies: their importance for profile building, and localising and contextualising science	4
Changing the information flow	5
Editorial Independence.....	5
Partnership building	6
Contextualising Success.....	7

SciDev.Net Latin America gateway

To date SciDev.Net has developed a total of six regional offices, all based in the global South. Of these, the Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) office is one of the most successful and consolidated offices in terms of outputs, visits and registrants. Note that LAC only includes developing or poor countries in the region.

Readership figures

In 2011, readers based in LAC represented 19 per cent of the total visits to the SciDev.Net website – the top regional audience from the global South, followed by South Asia with 15 per cent.

Moreover, LAC visitors to our website have consistently been the top audience from the global South since data has been available (2009). Not surprisingly, the LAC gateway also consistently generates the highest amount of page views when compared to the other regional gateways.

Registrants

LAC registrants¹ come from a vast net of academic and research organisations covering a wide range of topics



and countries throughout the continent. Registrants also include professionals working at both the national policy level (mainly from ministries and councils working in agriculture, education, energy, environment, fisheries, health, human rights, land and rural development, livestock, science & technology, and transport) and the international sphere (from bodies such as the Food and

¹ It refers to readers that register their email address with us in order to receive weekly emails with news announcements and more.

Agricultural Organization of the UN, the UN Environment Programme, the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the World Bank and the Inter-American Bank). In addition, there is a wide range of media sector registrants working on radio, television and print outlets such as *Diario Milenio* (México), *Diario Nuevo Día* (Puerto Rico), *ABC Color* (Paraguay), *Cantv* (Venezuela), *Jornal da Ciência* (Brasil), *Periódico Página Siete* (Bolivia), *Guatlevision* (Guatemala), *Revista Juventud Técnica* (Cuba) – to name a few - as well as international civil society organisations such as the Wildlife Conservation Society and the Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF).

LAC also enjoys the attention of private sector professionals working in companies such as Apple, Microsoft, AT&T, SuperBrix Internacional S.A and Pioneer Hi-Bred International to name a few. LAC registrants have increased 12 per cent on average per year.

Reputation

The information above presented demonstrates the level of trustworthiness that registrants feel for SciDev.Net's LAC content and their sense of its authoritativeness.

This can be best exemplified in Peru, where one of our correspondents covered the promises made by Ollanta Humala on science and technology back when he was a presidential candidate². Once Humala was elected, local media based their expectations on SciDev.Net's article and started to demand concrete action plans. Humala only agreed to talk about his science programme with SciDev.Net, arguing that it was the most important media outlet in the field³. Moreover, during a recent global review⁴, we asked LAC registrants to rate SciDev.Net on: trustworthiness and authoritativeness as a source; relevance to their activities/projects or topics; accuracy and breadth of coverage; and neutrality and objectivity. Over 80 per cent of respondents (out of a total of 300) ranked us positively, meaning that they chose either 'good', 'high' or 'very high' as a response.

It is also important to mention that there are internationally recognised outlets that regularly republish our content, such as *Nature* and *The Guardian* (United Kingdom) – further demonstrating the value and authoritativeness of our material.

² [Perú: poca mención a CyT entre candidatos presidenciales](#) (Porrillo, Z., 7th April 2011)

³ [Peru's new president makes ambitious plans for science](#) (Portillo, Z. 12th July 2011)

⁴ SciDev.Net Global Review 2012 (Romo, 2012). Available at:

<http://www.scidev.net/en/content/our-learning-series/#X6532D43E561E4F1FB6572E2A29FDECE7>

How it all started...



SciDev.Net was founded in 2001 with headquarters in London. In 2003, the Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) regional gateway was created, and a regional coordinator as well as local journalists were hired to help cover science and technology in the region. Today the region benefits from a core team of professionals from five countries (Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Peru and Uruguay) as well as a wide network of journalists based in almost every other country in the region. This has allowed the office to produce an average of 200 original articles each year – at least double the output of other regional offices.

Follow the below link for a “Behind the scenes” video on our work in LAC:

<https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?v=422580974481712>

Factors of success and lessons learned

One of the main factors of success derives from SciDev.Net's efforts in linking science and development, which has a very high significance for regions such as LAC, where there is a wide range of development challenges.

Hiring strategies: their importance for profile building, and localising and contextualising science

We feel that hiring locals rather than international consultants has been a strategy that has made a huge difference. It has facilitated regional ownership, which in turn helped diminish the perception that SciDev.Net-LAC was a foreign organisation. When the gateway was launched in March 2003, the event was planned using extensive networking approaches with regional organisations and stakeholders – which is another advantage of having local staff.



We have successfully created a stable team of committed local journalists. This has helped ensure the quality of work, as well as allowing for flexibility in case of absence or very busy periods. This conscious effort to develop a wide network of journalists throughout the region has also allowed SciDev.Net to effectively give countries a voice, facilitating the

exploration of a wide range of issues in the region as well as their differences and similarities - which we see as localising and contextualising science. The latter is key for research uptake. We feel that local journalists know the contexts much better, and, thus, could be in a better position to provide objective, reliable and unbiased information.

Another important component of our hiring strategy was the enrolment of both senior, mid-career and younger journalists in order to maintain the high quality of our stories. At the same time, we have facilitated training in order to develop the skills of young professionals — building the next regional generation of science journalists.

Changing the information flow

Giving a voice to the region has also enabled SciDev.Net to change the flow of science information: it has



given countries access to science produced regionally, complementing research produced in Europe or the United States, which in turn showcases the research and journalistic capabilities of the region amongst our global readers. SciDev.Net is the only initiative doing this, which is even more important in a context where national science is sometimes 'invisible': the majority of science produced nationally is published in foreign countries and mostly

in English, which is not spoken locally.

In that sense, LAC 'gives science back to the people' by publishing in Spanish - translating stories in English and other languages to cater for our global audience as well. Moreover, significant attention was and is still given to marginalised countries, where national-level response is quicker and most significant.

Editorial Independence

Increasing the level of editorial independence from the London office has also been of paramount importance. For more than five years now, the LAC office has enjoyed complete ownership of editorial responsibilities while maintaining excellent communication with the headquarters. This has increased and further established regional ownership as well as the opportunity to address concerns and topics that are most relevant to LAC.

Partnership building

Another advantage to having a strong local team is being able to use their networking capabilities for partnership development, which has resulted in key relationship building and partnerships with regional organisations and stakeholders that have increased the reach and success of the LAC office.



For example we deliver science journalism training in partnership with other regional organisations, which allows SciDev.Net to share overall costs and efforts. We also combine informal profile raising and marketing activities with learning and passion for science for development.

The reputation the LAC office and gateway enjoys in the region has also contributed to the creation of a deeper relationship with FAPESP ([São Paulo Research Foundation, Brazil](#)), an independent public foundation with the mission to foster research and the scientific and technological development of the State of São Paulo. FAPESP has been one of our main donors since 2012.

The regional partnerships enhance the sense and understanding of shared challenges and values which we have found very important for advancing our mission and work in LAC.

Contextualising Success

It is important to contextualise factors of success in order to identify scalable and replicable strategies that could be applied in other regions as well. In the case of this study, we acknowledge that Latin America and the Caribbean is far from being a homogenous region from an economic, cultural and scientific point of view. It is very diverse, particularly in terms of science and science communication. Countries such as Brazil have a strong scientific community and good experiences in science communication. At the other end of the scale, countries within Central America (as well as elsewhere) have poorly developed science infrastructures and often lack consolidated science communication initiatives. However, diversity is a good thing for both a widespread team like ours with an organisational commitment to giving a voice to different countries. Where there are similarities in the region, for example in terms of language, shared issues and barriers, we find them very useful for partnership building.

Overall we believe LAC is a good example of effective science communication whose key factors of success and lessons learned can be scaled up in other regions and used by other similar organisations.

Our Learning Series

The publications in the SciDev.Net Learning Series derive insights from research projects and analysis regarding science communication. The series is part of SciDev.Net's monitoring and evaluation programme and provides valuable knowledge and lessons regarding the mainstreaming of evidence for policymaking, development programmes and when building a culture of science.

The publications should appeal to anyone with an interest in the use of research, science and technology in development and poverty reduction.



SciDev.Net
9-11 Richmond Buildings | London | W1D 3HF | UK
+44 (0) 20 7292 9910
ourlearning@scidev.net
www.scidev.net