



Workshop Facilitation Guidelines for Beginners

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Contents

Introduction	2
Facilitation and Eco-farming.....	2
What is facilitation?	2
Why is facilitation important in Eco-farming education?.....	2
What is the role of a facilitator?	2
Three aspects to be considered	3
PROCESS	3
How do I design a workshop?.....	4
1. Observe and research.....	4
2. Brainstorm and connect	5
1. Introduction.....	5
2. Eco-farming Core Values	6
3. Observe and research	7
4. Brainstorm and connect.....	9
5. Design	10
6. Practice	11
8. Reflect and share - Closing the workshop.....	11
3. Design.....	13
4. Practice	13
5. Reflect and Share	13

¹ A volunteer group at FFS-HEPA in 2011

Introduction

The Workshop Facilitation Process is designed as a set of guidelines to assist the Farmer Field School (FFS) course organisers in the successful facilitation of workshop topics. These include the FFS curriculum and public workshops and relate directly to the **Design Process** – a set of guidelines and principles at the core of the Eco-farming curriculum. It is designed to provide all participants with an inspiring learning experience that encourages creative, critical thinking, and empowers the participant's problem solving ability.

Facilitation and Eco-farming

What is facilitation?

Facilitation is a diversity of tools, techniques and skills to help a group of people work well, both in defining a common vision, making decisions, and achieving their goals, and in creating a relational climate where trust prevails and communication is fluid, empathic and honest. It is also useful to solve conflicts, when they arise, in combination with other techniques, like mediation or different types of forums.

Why is facilitation important in Eco-farming education?

The essence of Eco-farming is the observation and learning from nature. In natural systems groups of organisms occupy and fill certain niches, contributing as a whole to eco-system function and resilience. In the same way participants in Eco-farming workshop should combine their diverse experiences and knowledge, contributing to a greater wealth of information.

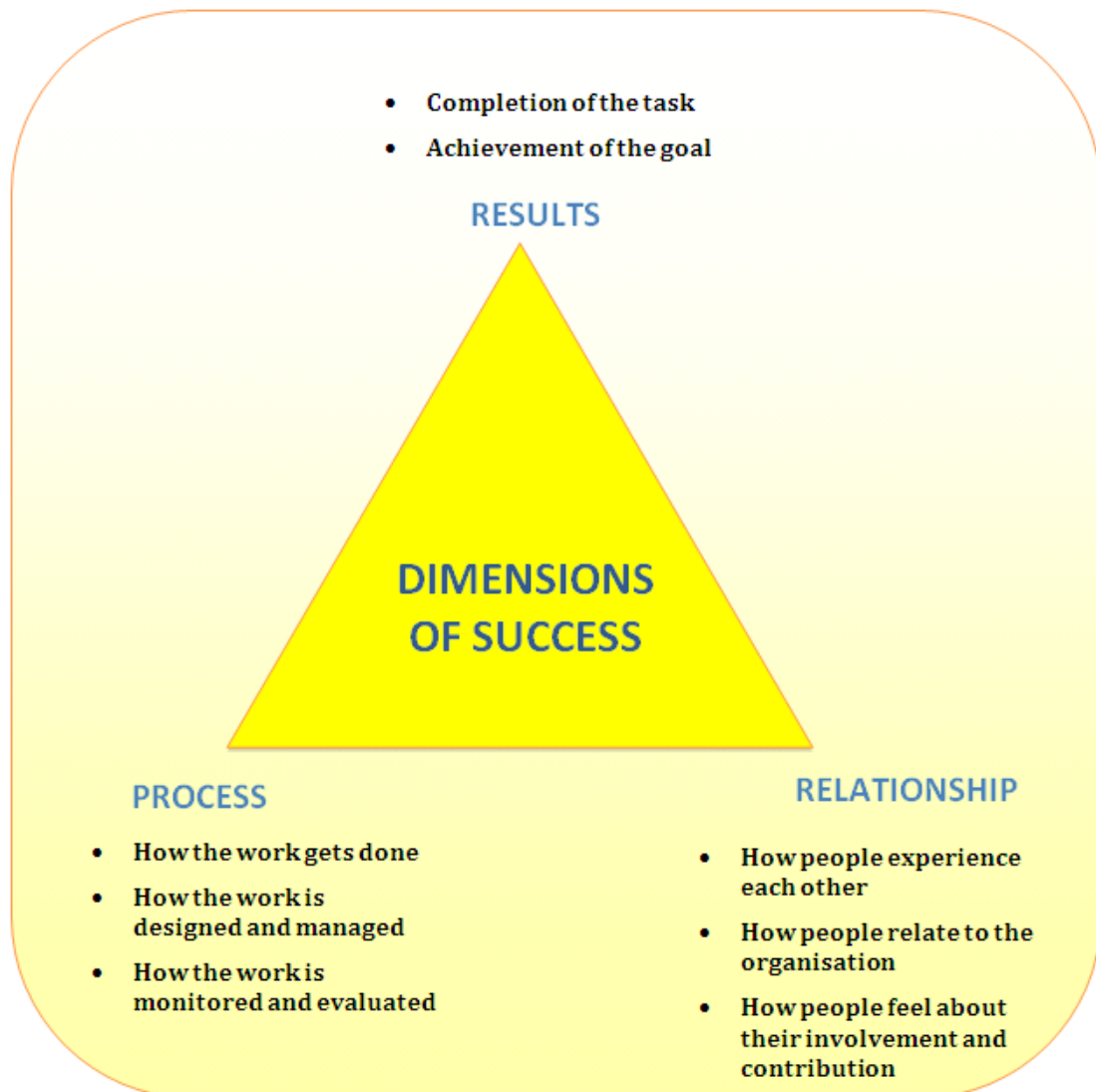
What is the role of a facilitator?

- A facilitator is a guide to a democratic learning process
- A facilitator does not teach as an expert, therefore is open to discussion and debate of the information and techniques presented
- A facilitator is an active member of the learning group
- A facilitator allows all participants to contribute their experiences, knowledge and understanding to meet an agreed and developing set of outcomes

- To create a safe setting in which people can come to trust themselves and each other
- Presenting the goals of the workshop and come to an agreement on them
- Helping the group stay focused on the work at hand
- Working within time constraints, in a manner that does not rush or drag things out
- Helping the group enjoy itself

Three aspects to be considered

Most groups tend to focus their energy on reaching their goals quickly, not paying enough attention to what is going on beneath the surface. Consequently, they often undermine the long-term success of the endeavour. **A good facilitator helps solve these difficulties by balancing the focus across three dimensions: Results, Process, and Relationship.**



The art of communication - Active and deep listening

A workshop is a highly participatory adventure, especially when you are involved in a multicultural group with different styles of communication and different languages. Facilitator should help people **speak** and **listen**. Keep in mind the needs of translation, use techniques to receive feedback about how everything is going and try to read between the lines (pay attention to non-verbal communication).

How do I design a workshop?

The following steps are guidelines to assist you to design a workshop. These steps relate directly to the Eco-farming Design Process.

1. Observe and research

Here are some questions to ask yourself:

Select a workshop topic

- What do the people want to learn about?
- What topics do I know about?
- What am I interested in learning more about?
- Will the topic be beneficial to the participants?
- Is the topic culturally appropriate for the participants?
- Is it appropriate to the environment and on-going activities of the workshop location and/or the origin of the participants?
- Is it achievable and adaptable to the village setting of regional Mekong?
- Does the topic follow Eco-farming Core Values? (see Eco-farming Design Process)

Know your target group

- Who will participate in the workshop?
- Is the content culturally appropriate?
- Will it be understandable by the participants?
- Is it interesting and engaging, and can the participants relate to it?

Research the topic

- Do we need have enough expertise within the group, or do we need to bring in an expert?
- Can it be followed up with on-going action research?
- Will the workshop have tangible outcomes?

Check what resources you have

- What are the possible locations?
- Who can assist you?
- How much time do you need/have?
- Do you need money? How much do you have available?
- What materials do you need? What do you have available to use?

2. Brainstorm and connect

This is where you start to connect your information and research with your methods of facilitation to design your workshop.

The following is a structure with information about techniques, group dynamics, activities and games to help you. These are just guidelines - you may need to change them and add your own ideas to suit your workshop or facilitation style.

Note: The Design Process can be used for many things – you will be following it again during this step.

1. Introduction

Introductions are important to both introduce the workshop topic, and to acquaint its participants with one-another. Participants should be comfortable with the workshop objectives and schedule before beginning.

Focus	Facilitation method
<p><i>Introductions</i></p> <p>Participant introduction (for groups that don't already know each other).</p>	<p>An activity where people introduce themselves to the facilitator and group.</p> <p>The facilitator should do their best to try and remember the participants' names. You can use some tools to help you e.g. name tags.</p>
<p><i>Icebreaker</i></p> <p>Encourage participants to feel comfortable working with each other and contributing their ideas to the workshop process, and builds a collective focus for the task ahead</p>	<p><i>Games & Activities</i></p> <p>For activity ideas see: Facilitation Techniques document</p>
<p><i>Introduce the topic. What are the objectives?</i></p> <p>Why is this workshop topic is being held?</p> <p>What facilitation method you are going to use?</p> <p>What is the scope of the workshop?</p> <p>What are the expectations of you and the participants?</p> <p>What is the timetable for the workshop?, the importance of staying within the schedule.</p>	<p><i>Facilitator talks to participants</i></p> <p>Supporting presentation may be shown.</p> <p>Facilitator discusses the objectives of the workshop, the idea of facilitation, and asks the participants to share their expectations.</p> <p>Introduce the workshop timetable, emphasising the importance of staying on schedule.</p>

2. Eco-farming Core Values

This is about sharing our wisdom of the topic, whether it is traditional, modern, scientific or experimental. This is an exercise where participants are free to express their ideas and

opinions. This also helps the facilitator to assess the level of knowledge and experience of the topic and further understand the expectations of the participants.

Focus	Facilitation method
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge - What is the collective understanding of the topic? • Pattern and principles - What are the Design Principles and how can they help us throughout the workshop topic? • Belief and ethics - What are the belief and ethics associated with the topic? 	<p>Facilitator prompts participants to discuss and contribute their understanding of the topic – brainstorming as a class, or in groups.</p> <p>For activity ideas see: Facilitation Techniques document</p>

3. Observe and research

Observation and research are the key methods of Eco-farming. This step involves the gathering of information necessary from various sources, for example reading books, searching the Internet, talking with elders, observing the object and its environment, and taking measurements. Observation is more than just watching something, it is about observer **interacting** and **experiencing** – touching, tasting, smelling, listening, looking from different perspectives, and perceiving relationships and connections.

Focus	Facilitation method
<p><i>Practise observation and research to:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learn from nature • Learn from other people • Connect with and understand the workshop topic • Practise using the senses • Identify advantages and disadvantages • Identify problems to be solved • Stimulate interest and discussion about the topic • Think about the design principles 	<p>Participants are given time to explore the topic with minimal guidance from the facilitator.</p> <p><i>Ideas:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Question can be used to encourage observations of the topic • The facilitator should encourage the participant to think about the Eco-farming Core Values (see Eco farming Design Process) • Drawing can incite deeper observation • Working in groups will result in discussion and debate about observations
<p><i>Observation and research sharing</i></p> <p><i>Alone we may see a little –but together we can see a lot</i></p>	<p>Participants/groups share their observations.</p> <p><i>Presentation ideas:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group presentation of observation • Open class discussion – participants freely express their observations • Observation mind mapping
<p><i>Observation and research feedback</i></p>	<p><i>Time for questions & comments</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants ask questions • Participants make comments • Facilitators can ask questions to stimulate further thinking and debate • Where possible, the facilitator should choose to use questions rather than comments

4. Brainstorm and connect

Begin to collaborate and organise the information into a form that the group can understand. This is a dynamic process to inspire and evolve their ideas. It is an uncensored activity where participants can freely contribute their ideas without debate. Link ideas and information.

Focus	Facilitation method
<p><i>Participants contribute their ideas</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All participants can share their ideas without criticism • Everything is valid (no idea is wrong) • Everyone keeps an open mind <p>For group dynamic ideas see: Facilitation Techniques document</p>
<p><i>Examples</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitator briefly presents different design examples from the local area and around the world • Participants contribute examples • Explain that there are many technical solutions that achieve similar outcomes.
<p><i>Techniques & technical examples</i></p> <p>A technical demonstration of at least two different examples (if possible)</p>	<p>An expert, the facilitator, or a combination of both may present technical examples.</p> <p><i>Requirements</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At least two techniques should be presented in detail, to provide an opportunity for comparison • All techniques must be accompanied with advantages and disadvantages • Techniques should be achievable or adaptable to the participants home • Influences such as climate, environment, and resource availability should be addressed <p>Note: <i>A technique that works in one area may not work in other. There is never only one right way to do something.</i></p>

5. Design

Design is a creative process where you refine the idea generated during the previous steps. You need to have clear objectives for the design, and create a good plan to meet them.

Focus	Facilitation method
<p><i>Design Activity</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apply knowledge and lessons learned • Stimulate creative, critical thinking • Empower the participants design ability • Allow a free expression of creativity • Boost the participants' confidence in problem solving 	<p>Either in groups or individually, participants will undertake a design activity related to the workshop topic.</p> <p><i>Facilitator recommendations:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage participants to be creative • Activities should be appropriate to the participants <p>For activity ideas see: Facilitation Techniques document</p>
<p><i>Design exercise presentation</i></p> <p><i>The sharing of brilliance</i></p>	<p><i>Participants should:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Present their designs with an explanation of their ideas • Talk about the key design principles related to their design • Question and comment on the designs <p><i>The facilitator should:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask questions to stimulate thinking, and discussion about the designs • Be encouraging of the participants – be positive • Only offer an opinion or suggestion if necessary to the functionality of the design, or to stimulate more creativity from the participants

6. Practice

This is where participants begin to use the techniques and strategies from the design step. Practice is putting a plan into action.

Focus	Facilitation method
<i>Practice techniques and design implementation</i>	<i>Participant have the opportunity to:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Practice existing techniques● Apply lessons learned● Discuss ways to improve these techniques● Try innovative techniques● Implement a selected design from the design exercise (if appropriate)● Put their lessons into practice● Learn-by-doing

8. Reflect and share - Closing the workshop

This is a very important part of every workshop. The group now has the opportunity to review the process that has been undertaken over the course of the workshop - what it means to them on a group and individual level; reflecting on the lesson learned; and discussing ideas of how to further develop their understanding in the topic and the various techniques to record this information for future reference, action research and sharing with others.

Focus	Facilitation method
<p><i>Monitoring, and action research documentation</i></p>	<p><i>Discuss:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The ongoing monitoring process of implemented designs or techniques • The process of recording and learning through action research (see: Action Research Process document) <p><i>Recommendations:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Record the workshop process • Document and photograph the designs • Document the practice and design implementation session • Store report, photographs and documentation in the database²
<p><i>Reviewing the workshop</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflect back on the workshop content, challenges and difficulties, and lessons learned. 	<p><i>Discuss:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What was the workshop process? • What have they learned,? • Were the objectives met? • Were their expectations met? • How can future workshops be improved? <p><i>Technique:</i></p> <p>In some cases a feedback questionnaire might be useful for the facilitator to receive ideas of how to improve the workshop and their facilitation techniques and methodology (See Facilitation Techniques document)</p>

² Or send to the appropriate people who can store the information in the correct location

3. Design

By this time you should have all the information you need to run a workshop. This is the step where you take this information and make it your own. Now it's time to create your workshop plan using the Workshop Planning Template document.

4. Practice

Take action, run your workshop. But remember, enjoy yourself - if it's not fun, it's not sustainable.

5. Reflect and Share

You've finished your workshop - how did it go? Similar to within the workshop, reflect and share is a very important step for the facilitator. Take time to think about the lessons learned; review the feedback you received from the participants; and report on the workshop using the Workshop Reporting Template. Be sure store this document in the correct place - future workshop organisers will find your design and suggestion very useful.

“The human beings knows himself only insofar as he knows the world; he perceives the world only in himself, and himself only in the world. Every new object, clearly seen, opens up a new organ of perception in us.”

—Johann Wolfgang von Goethe
