



# Guide to Facilitating Stakeholder Workshops

## I. INTRODUCTION

- *Definition and Use*

A stakeholder workshop is a structured, facilitated discussion with selected value chain participants who are responsible for critical market functions, service provision and the legal, regulatory and policy environment. The workshop, which should be conducted after the value chain analysis has been completed, is used to 1) verify the findings of a value chain analysis, 2) to identify opportunities and constraints to increased competitiveness and begin to prioritize them, 3) facilitate the development of a stakeholders' vision of a more competitive industry, and 4) begin to identify action needed to realize this vision. The effectiveness of these workshops is directly linked to the degree to which private sector participants perceive themselves as driving and owning the agenda for change.

The end goal of the stakeholder workshop is: i) to bring together the participants from the value chain who have incentives to drive investments in upgrading, and ii) to develop an **action plan** with stakeholders to move the industry to higher levels of competitiveness through some combination of increased efficiencies, differentiation strategies and taking advantage of new markets and demand.

This guide is intended to assist value chain facilitators in the organization and facilitation of stakeholder workshops. It is organized into the following sections: preparing for the workshop; facilitating the workshop; potential problems and challenges; logistics; and guiding principles.

## II. PREPARING FOR THE WORKSHOP

- *Selecting the Participants*

This is one of the most important aspects of preparing for the workshop. Remember that the purpose of the workshop is to develop an action plan. The value chain may have thousands or even hundreds of thousands of participants. Clearly, all can not attend the workshop.

The facilitator should focus on those stakeholders (value chain participants, service providers and government representatives) who are identified during the value chain analysis as have the incentives, skills and commitment to drive upgrading investments as well as those participants critical to the success of any upgrading strategy. This latter group may be comprised of value chain participants, government officials, policymakers and/or representatives of international buyers. If international stakeholders are unable to participate in the workshop, they may be willing to be interviewed and even videoed so that their views and concerns can be communicated to national stakeholders during the workshop.

Since stakeholders must take ownership of the competitiveness strategy process for it to be sustainable, they must see for themselves the incentives or potential incentives to bring about change in the industry in response to the identified opportunities and constraints.

Donor representatives may be invited, but their role—that of sponsors who wish to learn from the other workshop participants and to identify actions along with them—should be clearly understood. If participants are used to expecting donors to fund everything, their presence is likely to distort the direction of the discussion.

Invite officials from government ministries that must be informed of donor interventions and those who are in a position to improve the business enabling environment.

Unless the wrong subsector was selected, MSE representatives will be included among those with the incentives and ability to be involved in the upgrading process. These may include leaders of organizations, small wholesale and retail shops, etc. The mix will differ and be determined by the upgrading opportunities.

Often there is value to inviting members of the press. This helps create an environment of transparency as well as providing a way of rewarding participants by featuring their activities.

The ideal workshop size ranges from 15 to 30 stakeholders. Participants should be knowledgeable, articulate, credible actors in the industry, and fluent in the language used to facilitate the workshop. Although there is a desire to get the ‘right’ people, facilitate with the mindset that the people who are present are the right people. The goal is to build momentum with whoever is present.

- *Preparing the Presentation*

The facilitator team should ensure that all logistics are in place (see more information in logistics). Make sure that adequate materials are on hand, such as flipcharts, markers, masking tape, colored card or paper (A4 or letter-sized), etc.

The second facilitator or an assistant should take notes during the workshop, summarizing discussions and trying to capture important phrases and statements made by participants without interrupting the flow of the discussion. If feasible, take comprehensive notes on a laptop computer so that summaries can be printed and distributed to participants during subsequent sessions or at the end of the workshop. Notes should include every detail of the action plan: who will do what and when, etc.

Flip charts are helpful in making information and ideas visible to all participants during the course of the workshop, and for ensuring that the facilitator has correctly understood the point being made. Thus, it is critical to have ample wall space to post visual references. This information should be transcribed into the notes that are distributed to the participants.

The use of wall space as a visual reference tool cannot be understated. There is an enormous amount of new information: value chains, new terminology, competing country information, opportunities and constraints, etc. The more this information can be posted on the wall, the more the participants will be able to focus to what is being presented. Further, during breakouts or breaks between sessions, participants can refer to these visuals in their discussions.

### **III. FACILITATING THE WORKSHOP**

Stakeholder workshops are most effective when they combine a mix of plenary and group work. They generally take the following format:

- A. Introduction of participants and explanation of the purpose and format of the workshop
- B. Presentation of the value chain with general information including the value chain map

- C. Discussion of what a more competitive industry would look like
- D. Presentation of the major findings of the value chain analysis, including constraints and opportunities identified during the analysis
- E. Discussion to verify and prioritize opportunities and constraints
- F. Participatory identification of action needed to achieve this vision of a more competitive industry
- G. Agreement on next steps

As participants arrive, the facilitator greets guests and makes small talk but avoids the topic of the workshop. At this time the facilitators have a chance to quickly assess the communication styles of the participants. Based upon their assessment, they can place nametags around the table. It has been suggested that dominant communication styles be placed near the facilitator and more reticent participants be seated where eye contact can be easily established. When participants happen to know each other, they should be separated. If there is more than one participant representing a function or actor, they should be separated as well.

### **A. Introduction of participants and explanation of the purpose and format of the workshop**

**Session style:** Plenary

**Materials needed:** Nametags

**Time:** TBD

#### **Steps of the session:**

- Welcome the group and introduce self and explain ground rules.

Once all participants are seated, the facilitator welcomes the group, introduces him/herself and gives a brief explanation of the purpose of the workshop, and what it is not. Be clear in the beginning as to the purpose of the workshop so that this can be referred back to when people stray in terms of topic or intent. It is important to emphasize that it is the participants' industry—their livelihoods—that are being discussed, and that this workshop is an opportunity for them to voice their opinions and collectively shape the future direction of the industry. The facilitator should explain that the expected outcome of the workshop is a vision for a more competitive industry and an action plan with specific next steps to work towards achieving that vision.

The facilitator should then outline the ground rules. Emphasize that one person speaks at a time and that notes are being taken to ensure that all comments are noted. Assure that no specific names will be used in the final report. During the discussions, keep the questions on a practical level and avoid jargon (like “BDS”). Emphasize that all points of view are important to the discussion. The facilitator should explain his/her role as moderator and time keeper; ultimately, this is the participants' workshop, not the facilitator's.

- Ask all participants to briefly identify themselves and give their expectations from the workshop.

The facilitator can accomplish two things with self introduction: (1) building commitment and (2) understanding connections. Two methods of conducting self introductions are included here as examples.

**Building Commitment:** Participants can introduce themselves and state their expectations from the workshop and their commitment to the workshop (i.e. what they will give). This can be measured in a number of ways (a 1-5 scale, a statement of commitment to change, etc.) Expectations without commitments can lead to entitlement.

Understanding connections: In a value chain, it is important for attendees to see how they are connected to others. One method is to have people draw a picture on a single sheet of paper of their function in the value chain, listing their suppliers on the left of the picture and their buyers on the right. They can also list their firm's strongest trait at the bottom. Participants can then present this picture and express their expectations/commitments. Later, these pictures can be placed on the wall next to a representation of the value chain.

- Explain the process and the objectives of the workshop.
- *Process*: Vetting the constraints and opportunities that have the greatest impact on the competitiveness of the industry
- *Objectives*: Identifying an action plan that would allow the industry to move forward.

### **B. Presentation of the value chain with general information including the map**

**Session style:** Plenary

**Materials needed:** Presentation (PowerPoint or overhead)

**Time:** TBD

#### **Steps of the session:**

- Present the results of the value chain analysis and take questions. Present the map and ask whether they agree on it.

Prepare a brief overview of the industry and its actors (some workshop participants may not be familiar with all of the functions in the chain). Avoid the temptation to prove the depth of your knowledge of the industry through a long and overly detailed presentation of the value chain analysis.

The presentation should include information on global competition to have the participants think around "Us vs. Them", emphasizing that it is not the firms in the room they are competing against, but the firms in the same industry in other countries.

### **C. Discussion of what a more competitive industry would look like**

**Session style:** Facilitated discussions

**Materials needed:** Flipcharts and markers

**Time:** TBD

#### **Steps of the session:**

- Start discussion around what the participants' industry would look like if it were more competitive.

Facilitate the discussion keeping in mind the three criteria to achieve competitiveness: efficiency, product differentiation and taking advantage of new demand or markets. This is one of the most important sessions of the workshop, the goal of which is to have the stakeholders create a vision of a more competitive industry. The results of this session will feed into subsequent sessions during which constraints and opportunities will be discussed. Guiding questions include:

- “What are the characteristics of success in this industry—globally and nationally?”
- “How can this industry more efficiently compete in global/local markets?”
- “Does it have to be more efficient?”
- “Does it have to differentiate itself in branding, marketing, quality or price?”

Group the points of discussion around the competitiveness criteria. Write these on flipcharts and hang them on the wall where they can easily be seen during the rest of the workshop.

#### **D. Presentation of the major findings of the value chain analysis, including constraints and opportunities identified during the analysis**

**Session style:** Plenary

**Materials needed:** Presentation (PowerPoint or overhead)

**Time:** TBD

##### **Steps of the session:**

- Present the constraints to and opportunities for industry competitiveness identified during the analysis.

The aim is to make the participants think about each constraint and opportunity from an industry point of view rather than focusing on individual firm constraints and opportunities.

Group opportunities and constraints, where possible, to avoid repetition. Constraints generally fall into one or more of the following categories: weak connections to end markets, a business enabling environment that is not responsive to industry needs, inefficiencies in vertical or horizontal linkages between firms, and poor quality or a lack of critical support services.

The presentation of the findings from the value chain analysis can be prefaced with the question: “What is keeping you and other firms from earning more income from this industry?”

#### **E. Discussion to verify and prioritize opportunities and constraints**

**Session style:** Group discussions

**Materials needed:** Flipcharts, markers, masking tape, colored card/paper (A4 or letter-sized). Write each constraint and opportunity from the analysis on colored card/paper and hang them on the wall.

**Time:** TBD

##### **Steps of the session:**

In the previous session the facilitator team presented the list of constraints and opportunities identified during the analysis. Now, it is the participants’ turn to vet these and select a subset among these constraints and opportunities.

- Divide the participants into smaller groups.

Groups should include representatives of a mix of functions.

- Remind them about the characteristics of the more competitive industry that the participants envisioned in Session C.

- Ask the groups to develop a shortlist of constraints and opportunities that have the greatest impact on achieving this vision of the industry.

Once again, the discussion should be on the industry's constraints and opportunities and not on their impact on individual businesses.

The facilitator can either (1) ask the groups to select a total of 4-5 constraints and opportunities that have the greatest impact on industry competitiveness, or (2) ask the groups to divide the constraints and opportunities into three categories: most important, important and least important.

Before the group discussions start, the facilitator can provide guiding questions for the selection process:

“Of all the constraints to increased incomes, which are the most important and need to be fixed first?”

“What will happen if we solve this constraint? What will the impact be on the overall performance of the industry?”

“How does this constraint affect the industry as a whole?”

“Why is this a problem now? What has changed?”

“Have there been attempts made in the past to address this problem? Why did they fail?”

- Allow the groups to report back with their shortlists and facilitate discussion among them.

Begin by identifying and noting similarities. For each listed constraint and opportunity, revisit the guiding questions above and link them back to the “vision” of the industry.

Principles in prioritizing the constraints and opportunities include:

- Giving precedence to opportunities and constraints that have a high degree of impact on competitiveness
- Giving preference to issues that can be addressed by the participants in the short-term
- Develop one combined final subset of constraints and opportunities.

Through discussion aim to achieve consensus on a set of 5-6 constraints and opportunities. Write each constraint or opportunity on a separate flip chart and hang them on the wall.

### **F. Participatory identification of action needed to achieve this vision of a more competitive industry**

**Session style:** Group discussions

**Materials needed:** Flipcharts of prioritized constraints and opportunities from Session E, markers.

**Time:** TBD

#### **Steps of the session:**

The session will enable the participants to draft an action plan addressing the constraint and opportunities prioritized in the previous session. There are different ways of facilitating the discussion. This guideline provides two approaches for further consideration:

*Approach 1: Groups working on one selected constraint or opportunity*

- For each of the prioritized constraints and opportunities, ask which of the participants has the ability to drive change? (“Who can make it work?”) Write the participants’ names on the relevant flipchart.
- Ask the groups to draft an action plan to overcome the constraint or take advantage of the opportunity.

*Approach 2: Groups working on all shortlisted constraints and opportunities*

- Divide the participants into smaller groups of 5-6 participants, making sure that each group includes fair representation from different functions.
- Ask the groups to draft an action plan to overcome each of the constraints and take advantage of each of the opportunities.

Using either approach, the groups should discuss and arrive at a plan identifying:

- What needs to be done in order to overcome the constraint or take advantage of the opportunity?
  - Who is going to do it?
  - When it is going to be done?
- Allow the groups to report back.

The facilitator should guide the discussion of the plans and synergize them to develop one single action plan. Guiding questions include: “Will this action plan help you to achieve your vision of a more competitive industry?” The facilitator should pay attention to balancing short- and long-term activities. Developing an industry competitiveness vision is a long-term process; however, stakeholders will not hold to the plan unless they see successful results in the short-term.

**G. Agreement on next steps**

**Session style:** Plenary/facilitated discussion

**Materials needed:** Flipcharts and markers

**Time:** TBD

**Steps of the session:**

- Draft the action plan together with the participants and distribute it at the end of the workshop.

Make sure that each activity has a deadline attached to it. This is especially important for short-term activities.

- Decide on the immediate next steps, including the next meeting date.

Holding the next meeting 30-45 days after the initial workshop is generally ideal.

- Revisit the participants’ expectations from the beginning of the workshop.

**IV. QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION**

1. What if some of the stakeholders do not agree with the findings of the analysis?

Suggestions: Capture the essence of the disagreement, write it down, post it on the wall and move on. Let participants know that you act with limited information (bounded rationality). Sometimes it may be appropriate to establish obtaining more information as an action step. Sometimes the facilitator can say, “Ok.” The people in the group may have an emotional attachment to a perception that does not hinder change. You can honor the perception and still make changes.

2. What if they have difficulty in seeing the big picture and do only focus on their individual problems?

Suggestions: Focus on macro-measures. Focus on the competition. Go back to the vision of competitiveness.

3. What if stakeholders think they have no problems that need resolving?

Suggestions: Ask them if their families have everything they need, e.g. education, health, etc.? Is everyone content with their “quality of life”? Alternatively, if the reticence to admit problems relates to the presence of an outsider, depersonalize the issue: refer to the facts of the trends in global markets. Even if they are competitive now, how can they remain so?

4. What if one person is dominant and everyone else just agrees with whatever he says?

Suggestions: Become a traffic controller that calls on people as they express a non-verbal interest to speak. If this behavior persists, chat with the person on the side or simply state that you would like to hear from more people.

5. How do we encourage the participation of stakeholders who have incentives to drive upgrading investments? What if they are too busy to attend?

Suggestions: Build one-on-one commitments from each of these people to you personally. Ask about their strategic growth plans and show how this process fits right into their plans. Encourage them to at least make available a high ranking person with authority to attend.

6. Where does the government fit in the workshop?

Suggestions: It is important that the participants do not begin speaking to the government representatives as though this meeting were to be about the government. Participants will often shift the burden of responsibility from what they can do to “If only the government would....” Thus, the facilitator may need to intervene, stating that the enabling environment is one element, and that these issues will be addressed at that time.

7. What if the discussions move into a tension between the different levels of stakeholders, e.g., farmers and exporters or government? How do we overcome the tension?

Suggestions: The facilitator should have the emotional fortitude to “hold the conflict” and not to attempt to resolve it. If it is not a critical tension, it can be defined and parked to the side to be reviewed at some later time. If it is a critical point, there are a couple of tools: 1) Attempt to guide both sides to move from assumptions to hard facts. Drop extreme language (always, never) by showing if that is always/never the case. 2) Attempt to summarize a statement held in facts with non-extreme language that both sides can agree upon, or at least hit on the perceived differences. An action item can be listed to get more facts to help resolve the dispute



## V. LOGISTICS

- *Logistics and Administrative Tasks*

Task include:

- Inviting stakeholders to participate
- Establishing operating norms (starting and ending times, expectations and rules, per diem and other compensation policies)
- Preparing and sending information and materials to participants
- Organizing logistics (location, equipment, catering, travel arrangements, etc.)
- Preparing for facilitation
- Distributing per diems or reimbursing travel costs

Advance preparation is essential. Budget limitations often make it difficult to hold a workshop a month after the analysis is complete because it will involve additional travel for the facilitators—though in countries where bureaucratic protocol is valued, facilitators may need to announce the workshop a month in advance. It is important to send out invitations to participants as early as possible. Stakeholders identified early in the analysis who should clearly be included in the workshop should be invited to participate and be sent materials explaining the workshop, objectives, norms, etc. Consequently, one of the first steps in conducting the analysis is to identify a venue, date and time for the workshop. The facilitators may also make use of public media to announce the workshop even before invitations are sent out.

- *Establishing Operating Norms*

These norms—including starting and ending times, expectations and rules, per diem and other compensation policies—need to be established before any invitations are sent out, and they should be included in the invitations. Establishing norms and compensation policies will reduce potential conflicts of expectations later. Often these norms are established with the participation of the donor or client funding the workshop.

- *Preparing and Sending Information and Materials to Participants*

Once the invitation list has been drawn up, the public announcement of the workshop made and norms established, the facilitators or support team can prepare and send information and materials to participants. Invitations should come from and use the letterhead and reputation of the organization funding the workshop. This may be a donor, a financial institution, a government agency or a private firm. In some countries it is very important that the appropriate government ministry be included as a sponsor of the workshop. Sensitivities to local culture and protocol are essential to consider.

- *Organizing Logistics*

Stakeholder workshops can last anywhere from 1 to 3 days depending on the complexity of the value chain, and the number, commitment and availability of the stakeholders; 1 day is generally the minimum. It is important to select a location that is easy to find, minimizes distraction, provides a neutral environment and facilitates group discussion (i.e. good visibility, etc.). Divide the workshop into discrete sessions, each of which should not exceed two hours without a break. While there are many reasons for the facilitator to arrange for a local organization to handle logistics, the facilitator should never cede control over the process. The facilitator should make sure that everything needed for a successful workshop is in place early enough for any identified problems to be fixed. Successful logistics go a long

way in ensuring that participants can focus on the workshop content, not on how they will get back home. Logistics include setting up and making sure that someone will take down materials, transcribe whatever notes need to be written up, return equipment, etc.

- *Preparing for Facilitation*

Ideally, either two facilitators or one facilitator and an assistant should be available to lead the stakeholder workshop. Facilitators should have an in-depth knowledge of the value chain and the role of each of the workshop participants, be skilled at listening to others in group situations, and be able to keep participants on topic while maintaining an open and positive atmosphere. Workshop facilitation is most effective when the facilitators have coordinated their roles and activities before the workshop begins. Facilitators should know the participants from the analysis and be aware in advance of sensitivities. There is value in seating participants so that they do not separate themselves by function. This is especially important during group work and meals so that participants from different functions get to know the other participants and service providers in the chain.

- *Distributing Per Diems or Reimbursing Travel Costs*

Someone other than facilitator should determine each participant's per diem or travel costs before or during the workshop and prepare a disbursement sheet listing each participant's name and organizational affiliation. Explain the disbursement procedure at the beginning of the workshop, including whether payment will be made at the beginning or at the end of the workshop.

## VI. SUMMARY OF GUIDING PRINCIPLES

1. **Keep it short and simple.** Participant time is valuable. Focus on activities that stakeholders have an incentive to overcome whether or not there is an external subsidy. Workshops should never exceed two days, 1 or 1.5 days are better.
2. **Emphasize short-term activities.** Successful execution creates incentives for participants to come together to work on constraints with longer-term solutions.
3. **Plan for sustainability.** Make it clear that the process you are initiating will only work when stakeholders take ownership of it. Make sure you focus on those activities that stakeholders will quickly to take ownership of. The emergence of the Kenya Flower association began as an informal group of stakeholders brought together by a USAID funded project.
4. **Pick your participants carefully.** Focus on those stakeholders who have or could have incentives to drive solutions. If there are not clear incentives to drive upgrading your participants will not be able to take ownership of the process. If per diems are the only incentive for stakeholders to come you will not get the buy-in and commitment to upgrading you need.
5. **Prepare well.** Spend more time on selecting the right participants, convincing them of the merits of participating and of course on the identification of opportunities and constraints in the value chain analysis. Well prepared workshops are much more likely to bring stakeholders back than poor ones.

In Ghana shared financial constraints by members of the Vegetable Producers' and Exporters' Association of Ghana (VEPEG) and a recognition by banks that export agriculture presented a potential opportunity created sufficient incentives for several commercial banks to attend a workshop with VEPEG members and compete with each other to develop loan products attractive to producers. The result was financial innovation and solutions to mitigate lender risk offered by producer/exporters by having export receipts deposited directly with the lending institution.

6. **Reward champions.** Reinforce the behavior of stakeholders coming together to develop plans by arranging press coverage, project and public recognition. Use the opportunity for the press to follow-up on action plan results as an incentive for stakeholders to implement their action plans in a timely manner. Local stakeholders are generally responsive to local feedback. ACDI/VOCA's GMED project in India provides frequent press releases to the media who then follow-up to see what stakeholders are actually doing.
7. **Move seamlessly from planning to action.** Make sure your action plans include who will do what, when and who will follow-up. Where project resources are available follow up quickly with technical assistance. Lack of follow-through especially early on will lead to stakeholder disillusionment.
8. **Look for incentives in business transactions.** Find individuals for whom new business services have commercial value. Emphasize new business relationships as an indicator of success. Nothing motivates as quickly as opportunities with relatively quick returns. Action for Enterprise, a U.S. PVO that has been conducting stakeholder workshops using subsector and value chain approaches, helps stakeholders identify services that they can offer for a fee or as a way to expand their market as a way of prioritizing solutions that stakeholders will implement quickly.
9. **Find the balance between quick and catalytic.** The development of a shared community or industry vision is an important part of the process but is often best built upon short-term results. Private sector ownership of a strategy to build industry competitiveness is a process with many steps: the first ones are often small and must be successful.
10. **Don't feel pressured to resolve conflicts.** It is more important to help participants understand the conflicts, as the stated conflict is rarely the real issue. Instead of trying to resolve the conflict, hold to the goal of clarifying the perceptions from assumptions down to facts.
11. **Address the underlying issues.** In public, people will ask a question that is one step away from the real question. It is best to address the real question in order to get real commitment.
12. **Equifinality.** It is critical for the facilitator to refrain from preconceived notions of the 'right' process. Always keep in mind the end destination: increased collaboration and specific action plans. However you get there is fine. Rules are instructions that have yet to be invalidated by experience.
13. **Be genuine.** Although some stakeholders will try to push the facilitator into an expert role, it is important to not accept it. If you do, conflict will be seen as a question for the "expert" to answer rather than as various perceptions that need to be understood by the participants. This skill of dialogue will be the most valuable tool the facilitator can leave with the participants.