

Session 2: Group Dynamics and Inclusive Participation (11:00–12:30)

Objective

Explore how groups develop over time and identify strategies to facilitate effectively at each stage of group development. Participants will learn to recognize common group dynamics (from initial politeness to potential conflict) and practice techniques to ensure balanced participation and engagement of all members. By the end of this session, advisors should be able to diagnose what their group may need (e.g. team building vs. conflict mediation) and apply appropriate facilitation interventions to keep the group progressing toward collaboration.

Begin by acknowledging that bringing a group of stakeholders together is not a one-time event but a **process**. Groups evolve as people get to know each other and tackle challenges. Introduce **Tuckman's stages of group development** as a useful framework: *Forming*, *Storming*, *Norming*, *Performing*. Explain each stage in simple terms, contextualized to an agroforestry stakeholder group:

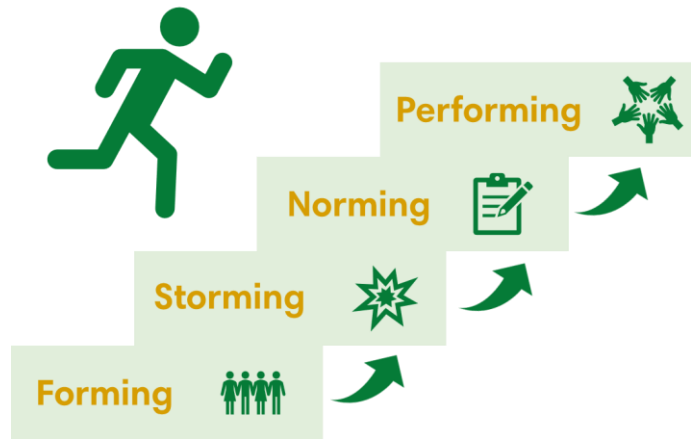


FIGURE 4. Tuckman's stages of group development

- Forming:** The group is just coming together. Members are polite, on their best behaviour, and somewhat anxious or unsure about others. They are figuring out the group's purpose and their own roles. In an agroforestry network's first meeting, for example, a farmer might be thinking "*What is expected of me here? Do these researchers understand my issues?*" The facilitator's job at this stage is to provide structure and clarity: clarify the group's goals or mission, outline how the meetings will run, and create a welcoming atmosphere. It is also a time to help the group begin bonding – light icebreakers or a round of sharing expectations can be very useful. Essentially, the facilitator should **set the stage** for open communication.
- Storming:** After initial niceties, differences in opinion start to emerge. This is a **normal and necessary** stage where conflict may arise as members assert differing perspectives or compete for leadership. In our context, perhaps a researcher's suggestion to use a certain tree species may be met with scepticism by farmers, or two farmers might strongly disagree on an approach. Tensions or clique formation can happen. The facilitator's role in storming is crucial: *remain calm and impartial* and help the group navigate conflict constructively. This can involve reminding everyone of common goals, enforcing ground rules about respectful dialogue, and using conflict resolution techniques (more on those in Day 2) to mediate disputes. It is important to not panic as a facilitator during storming – anticipate it and see it as a sign that the group is honest and engaged. With good facilitation, storming issues can be resolved and lead to deeper trust.
- Norming:** If conflicts are addressed, then the group begins finding its rhythm. Norms (implicit or explicit rules of behaviour) and trust develop. Members start to appreciate each other's strengths and work more cohesively. In an agroforestry group, this might mean farmers and scientists have figured out how to communicate effectively, or members have agreed on how decisions will be made. The facilitator should reinforce positive dynamics now: for example, highlight any agreements reached, praise collaborative behaviour, and perhaps formalize some **group norms** if not done already. This is a good stage to establish or revisit **ground rules** or a group charter. Encourage the group to take ownership of these norms ("let's all ensure we keep to what we agreed"). The facilitator can start stepping back a little more as the group manages itself but should still be attentive to any relapses into conflict or disengagement.

- Performing:** In this stage, the group is functioning at a high level – working towards its objectives effectively and with mutual support. Not all groups reach performing in a short project, but if it's an ongoing network, you'll see members initiating ideas, helping each other, and making significant progress (e.g., jointly developing a new agroforestry practice or influencing policy together). The facilitator at this point becomes more of a **coach and cheerleader**: you ensure the momentum continues, bring in resources or expertise as needed, and celebrate the group's achievements (like successful on-farm trials or a well-received field day). It is also a time to encourage the group to document and share their successes, possibly motivating other groups or forming wider networks.

After explaining these stages, invite reflection: ask if anyone has seen these patterns in groups, they have been part of (doesn't have to be agroforestry – could be a cooperative board, a community committee, a sports club, etc.). Many will recognize the *storming* stage especially (“Oh yes, I was in a group where people argued initially but later it got better”). Emphasize that **as facilitators, understanding group dynamics helps us provide the right support at the right time**. For example, in a new group (Forming), the facilitator might need to be more directive in setting agendas, whereas in Norming/Performing, the facilitator can be more hands-off or focus on coaching individuals. Recognizing the stage helps tailor our approach.

Establishing Group Norms

One practical tool to guide group dynamics is setting **ground rules or group norms** early on. Ideally during Forming (or at the transition to Norming), a facilitator helps the group agree on basic norms for how they will work together. This can be done in the first meeting by brainstorming acceptable behaviours and creating a poster of norms. Common examples include- “*Start meetings on time*”, “*One person speaks at a time*”, “*Critique ideas, not people*”, “*Confidentiality – what's shared in the group stays in the group (when personal)*,” etc.

These norms create a reference point that the group (and facilitator) can fall back on whenever behaviour issues or conflicts emerge. For instance, if side conversations are disrupting the meeting, the facilitator can remind everyone of the agreed norm “no side conversations.” Norms thus **promote positive behaviour and provide a basis for conflict resolution** when needed. They also help new members understand the group's culture quickly. Introduce the idea of a **group mission statement** as well – a short statement of the group's shared purpose (e.g., “*To collaboratively develop sustainable agroforestry practices that enhance livelihoods and ecosystem health in our community*”). Having a clear mission and norms gives the group a sense of identity and cohesion.

If time permits, do a quick **exercise** here: ask participants to draft 3– 5 sample ground rules they would use for an agroforestry stakeholder group. They can do this individually or in pairs for 5 minutes, then share. Write the suggestions on flipchart. Likely to appear are things like respect, listening, time management, equal participation. Affirm good ideas and mention any important ones they missed. Encourage them to keep this list as they might refine and use it in a later activity (creating a facilitation plan on Day 2).

Ensuring Inclusive Participation

Now shift focus to specific techniques to involve all group members in discussions. It is common that in any group, some people tend to dominate while others hold back. As facilitation advisors, one of our tasks is to **level the playing field** so that diverse knowledge (farmers' experiential knowledge, researchers' scientific knowledge, etc.) gets shared. Brainstorm with the class: “*What can we do if we notice only a few voices are carrying the conversation in a meeting?*” After some responses, present a toolkit of tactics:

- **Use Small Groups:** Breaking into pairs or triads for a short discussion can activate quieter participants who might not speak up in front of the whole group. For example, in a meeting of 20 people, instead of a full-group discussion on “what agroforestry practices should we prioritize,” first have people discuss in small groups of three. Then each group can report one idea. This way, more people get a chance to talk in the safety of a small subset, and you will likely hear from individuals who would not raise their hand in a big group.

- **Round-Robin Sharing:** When appropriate, go around the circle and give each person a brief chance to speak. Make it a structured round to answer a specific question (e.g., “In one sentence, what is your biggest concern about agroforestry adoption?”). This ensures everyone’s voice is heard, at least briefly. Be cautious to keep it concise and optional (allow a pass if someone really does not want to speak).



FIGURE 5. Methods to ensure inclusive participation

- **Directed Questions to Quiet Members:** Gently invite input from those who have not spoken: “*I’d love to hear from someone who manages a small farm – Jenna, would you share how this looks from your perspective?*”. Use a friendly tone, not putting them on the spot as a test, but showing that their perspective is valued. Often, a quiet member is relieved and pleased to be asked and will contribute important points once prompted.
- **Anonymous or Written Input:** If the topic is sensitive or the power dynamics are strong (e.g., farmers might not want to contradict a government official openly), use methods like sticky notes or cards. Ask a question and have everyone write an answer or idea. Then collect and read them anonymously. This equalizes input and can surface honest opinions that otherwise stay hidden.
- **Explicitly Address the Imbalance:** The facilitator can, in a respectful way, name what they observe and encourage self-correction by the group. For example, “*I notice we’ve heard mostly from the official/ public representatives so far. It’d be great to also hear what some of the farmers here think about this issue.*” Often, participants will appreciate this intervention. You can also invite the group’s suggestions: “*How can we make sure everyone who wants to contribute gets a chance?*” – This raises collective awareness about inclusion.
- **Use a Talking Object or Timer:** In a smaller workshop setting, a talking stick (only the person holding it speaks) can enforce one-at-a-time sharing. Or set rules like “*no one speaks twice until everyone has spoken once.*” In more formal meetings, this might be too gimmicky, but in training groups it can be effective for practicing equal participation.

As you list these techniques, tie them to agroforestry context when possible. E.g., “*During a field visit planning discussion, you might break into farmers and researchers separately for 10 minutes to list what they each want from the visit, then bring them together to compare notes.*” Mention that the **physical setup** can affect participation: a circle or semi-circle is better than a lecture style for interaction; sometimes rearranging seating during breaks can break up cliques.

Activity – Diagnosing Group Dynamics (30 min)

For practice, divide participants into groups of approximately 5 persons and give each group a short scenario describing an agroforestry stakeholder meeting at a certain stage with certain challenges. For example:

- **Scenario A:** A new agroforestry innovation group (first meeting, people do not know each other, little discussion happening).
- **Scenario B:** A regional network meeting where a heated debate has broken out between two factions about an agroforestry policy recommendation (clear conflict visible).
- **Scenario C:** A community agroforestry group that is been meeting for a year, things are going well but a few members always seem disengaged and rarely contribute.

Ask each group to identify:

(1) What group stage does this scenario represent (Forming, Storming, Norming, or Performing)?

(2) What should the facilitator do in this situation to guide the group?

They should list specific actions or techniques from the ones discussed (or new ideas). After 10 minutes, have each group report back. Facilitate a brief discussion, correcting or adding to their suggestions.

For Scenario A (Forming), likely answers: do introductions, clarify objectives, maybe do an expectation check, break the ice.

For B (Storming/conflict): enforce ground rules, find common ground, maybe break the tension with a break or a structured process, allow each side to voice concerns fully while moderating, etc.

For C (Norming but with quiet members): try tactics to engage everyone (direct questions, small groups, or ask the group if they are satisfied with participation).

Affirm good answers and reinforce the key point: **different stages and dynamics call for different facilitation strategies.**

Methods Used: Interactive presentation with Q&A, brainstorming, scenario-based group exercise. Ensure you are also demonstrating inclusion: during the discussions, be mindful to hear from different participants, not always the ones who raise hand first. Model some of the techniques (like explicitly asking a quieter participant for their view during the debrief).

Conclude Session 2 by summarizing: Effective facilitation requires *reading the room* – knowing your group’s stage and dynamics – and having a toolbox of methods to engage everyone. Emphasize that conflict in groups is not a sign of failure but a natural phase that, if well managed, can lead to stronger collaboration. By establishing clear norms and fostering trust, facilitators can help groups move through storming into productive teamwork. Participants should now feel more confident that they can “diagnose and respond” to what their group needs over time. Transition to lunch by inviting any quick questions or reflections. Perhaps pose a thought question for lunch: *“Think of an example from your work where a group’s stage or dynamics affected the outcome – what could have been done to improve it?”* This primes them for the afternoon where we will get more into tools and planning.

Tip for Success: Pay attention to the dynamics in the training group itself. This session’s topic allows a meta-discussion: if you notice, for example, that a few participants are always the ones answering questions, you can gently point that out as an illustration and then apply one of the inclusion techniques on the spot. *“We’ve heard a lot from the advisors from region X; I’d love to hear someone from region Y share their experience too.”* This shows facilitation in action and helps the participants experience its effect from the learner’s side.