

Session 6: Facilitating Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration (11:15–12:45)

Objective:

Focus on the facilitator's role in bridging diverse stakeholder groups and sectors for collaborative agroforestry initiatives. Participants will learn strategies for building trust among different stakeholder types, techniques for effective communication across knowledge cultures (farmers, scientists, policymakers), and how to guide a multi-stakeholder group towards shared understanding and joint action. By the end of this session, advisors should be equipped to initiate or support collaborations that go beyond individual farms – such as innovation platforms, public-private partnerships, or community projects – and ensure these collaborations are inclusive and goal-oriented.

Set the stage by acknowledging that agroforestry, to scale up, often requires collaboration not just within a homogenous group (like just farmers) but **across sectors**. For example, a successful agroforestry program might involve farmers, a local agricultural cooperative, a forestry department, an academic researcher, an NGO, and also a local business (like a tree nursery or a buyer of agroforestry products). Each comes with different perspectives and terminologies. The facilitator acts as a “*bridge*” or “*translator*” among these worlds.

Building Trust and Shared Understanding:

Trust is the currency of collaboration. Discuss ways to build trust among stakeholders:

- **Transparency:** Encourage open sharing of objectives and concerns early on. For instance, have each stakeholder articulate what they hope to gain from the collaboration and any potential worries. Seeing this openly can prevent suspicion (like a farmer thinking “*what’s the researcher’s agenda?*”). As facilitator, summarize these interests to ensure everyone hears and acknowledges them.
- **Equal Footing:** Structure interactions so that no one stakeholder category dominates. This might mean deliberately alternating who speaks, or mixing people in breakout teams so that, say, a farmer, a researcher, and a policymaker must work together on a task (instead of all farmers clumping together). It could also involve physical meeting location choices – meeting sometimes on farms (so researchers/policymakers step into farmers’ environment) and sometimes in offices or neutral venues. Symbolic gestures like using first names (not titles) and informal dress code can flatten hierarchies if appropriate.
- **Language Levelling:** Encourage use of plain language. As facilitator, when technical terms arise, do quick checking (“*Does everyone know what ‘allometric equation’ means? If not, let’s explain – it’s basically a way to estimate tree biomass.*”). Likewise, make sure local terms or acronyms get explained to outsiders. Act as an interpreter both ways (scientist to farmer and farmer to scientist). Over time, this cross-learning builds mutual respect.
- **Find Quick Wins:** Early in a collaboration, identify a small success that stakeholders can achieve together. Maybe an easy pilot project or a joint field visit that everyone finds valuable. Achieving something jointly, even modest, increases trust and shows the value of collaboration. It generates positive momentum (“*hey, we did this together!*”). A facilitator might propose such a quick-win project to the group to get the ball rolling.
- **Formalizing Commitment:** With multi-stakeholder groups, sometimes having a formal Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) or charter helps solidify trust. It is essentially a written statement of what was verbally agreed – roles, contributions, and shared goals. Mention that the facilitator might draft this or help the group draft it for review, ensuring all parties feel ownership. The process of creating a collaborative agreement can surface and resolve misalignments early.



Stakeholder Mapping and Roles

Introduce the idea of stakeholder mapping as a tool to manage multi-stakeholder processes. Show a simple matrix or map dividing stakeholders by category (farmers, researchers, government, private sector, etc.) or by influence/interest. Explain how an advisor can use a map to ensure all relevant players are involved and to tailor engagement strategies. For example, if policy makers are high influence but low current interest, maybe the group needs a strategy to involve them (invite them to field days to spark interest). The facilitator might lead the core group in a mapping exercise at the outset of a project, which clarifies who to communicate with and how. Reference that **FAO Stakeholder Analysis Guidelines** are available for those who want a deep dive into this tool (see toolkit references).

Discuss assigning or rotating roles in multi-stakeholder initiatives: For instance, sometimes a small steering committee is formed from different stakeholder reps to guide the larger group's work – the facilitator might coordinate with them. Each meeting could have a different stakeholder co-host it to share ownership. The key is inclusion in leadership and decision-making.

Example – Regional Agroforestry Platform: Share a case or fictitious example to illustrate multi-stakeholder facilitation:

“In Region X, an Agroforestry Platform was formed with 20 members: farmers, extension advisors, forest service, a university researcher, and an agri-business rep. In early meetings, farmers were quiet while the officials dominated with policy talk. The facilitator noticed this and introduced a rule that for each topic, they have to hear a farmer perspective first, then others. They also organized field trips where researchers and officials visited farms, which helped the latter appreciate farmers' knowledge. Over a year, the platform built enough trust to launch a joint project – establishing a community tree nursery where the agri-business provided seedlings, farmers provided labour, and the forest service expedited permits. The facilitator's guidance in communication and keeping everyone focused on the shared mission (“more trees on farms, benefiting all”) was cited by members as a key success factor.”

This narrative (whether real or composite) gives life to the concepts. If you have a real case (like in AFINET, AF4EU or another project) and can cite it, do so: e.g., mention *“European projects like AFINET have successfully connected diverse agroforestry stakeholders across countries to share knowledge; the principles are similar at local level.”*

Bridging Knowledge Gaps

Another challenge: stakeholders bring different types of knowledge (local experiential vs. scientific data). A facilitator in an innovation network can use techniques to **integrate knowledge**. One such method: **Knowledge Fairs** or **Exchange Visits** – encourage stakeholders to present to each other in their environment (farmers host a demonstration for researchers, and vice versa researchers share trial results in an accessible way). Use a **two-way translation document**: have farmers list key questions they want research to answer, and researchers list what they think farmers should know, then swap and discuss. Emphasize empathy: researchers might not realize a farmer's day-to-day constraints, while farmers might not know a researcher's funding/policy constraints. A facilitator can illuminate these contexts, so each side is more understanding rather than dismissive.

Joint Problem-Solving Techniques

Introduce any special techniques for multi-stakeholder problem solving: for example, **World Café** or **Open Space Technology** events where a broad range of people circulate through discussions, which can be great for big diverse groups to identify solutions collaboratively. Use **scenario planning** exercises where different stakeholders

role-play future scenarios (useful for policy-related discussions). Though these might be beyond the daily toolkit, mention them as options (and include references in toolkit materials if available).



Activity – Collaborative Action Planning (30 min):

To practice multi-stakeholder facilitation planning, divide participants into two groups (or more if many people, but two is fine for depth). Give each group a scenario: *They must plan a one-day workshop that brings together different stakeholders to advance an agroforestry initiative.* For instance, Group 1 gets “*Planning a Regional Agroforestry Innovation Day with farmers, extension advisors, researchers, policymakers to draft an action plan for agroforestry promotion.*” Group 2 gets “*Facilitating a partnership meeting among a farmer cooperative, a timber company, and a conservation NGO to start a silvo-pasture project.*”

Each group appoints a lead facilitator (or works collectively) to outline how they would run that workshop: what activities, in what sequence, to achieve collaboration. Specifically, ask them to address: how will they ensure each type of stakeholder contributes, how will they handle any likely conflicts of interest, and what outcomes they aim for. After 15–20 minutes, have them present their workshop design. Provide feedback and encourage peer input: Are the methods proposed likely to engage everyone? Did they foresee potential stakeholder clashes or power issues and plan accordingly? This exercise forces them to think of real-world application at a larger collaboration level. It’s basically a micro-design session where they apply principles of multi-stakeholder facilitation.

Methods Used: Scenario analysis, group planning exercise, case example discussion. Keep it interactive by inviting their thoughts and experiences throughout. Possibly someone in the room has done multi-actor projects; let them chime in with insight or have a short Q&A if interest arises (“*What if the government representatives never show up to meetings?*” is a pragmatic question, answer with strategies like go to them, or secure an official mandate, etc.).

Conclude Session 6 by emphasizing that agroforestry needs these multi-actor collaborations to reach its full potential, and advisors with facilitation skills are crucial to make them work. Participants should now have a sense of how to initiate and guide such collaborations, turning a group of diverse stakeholders into a **team** working towards a common agroforestry goal. Revisit this in the next session and talk about broader networks and sustaining innovation communities.

Tip for Success: Remind participants that facilitating multi-stakeholder groups can be more time-intensive – relationships need nurturing. Patience is key. Suggest creating informal networking opportunities alongside formal meetings (like tea breaks, lunch seating mixes, WhatsApp groups for casual exchange) – often trust builds in those side interactions which a facilitator can encourage by simply bringing people together in a relaxed way.

Acknowledge power differences openly when appropriate. For example, “*We recognize that the policy makers ultimately control funding, but this platform is for open dialogue where every participant’s knowledge is valued. Let’s keep it that way so the policy decisions will be better informed by practice.*” Sometimes naming the elephant in the room (power, history, etc.) respectfully can diffuse its negative impact.