

Session 3: Creative Techniques for Idea Generation (13:30–15:00)

Objective

Equip advisors with practical creativity and brainstorming techniques to generate ideas and innovative solutions within their networks. By the end of this session, participants will have experienced several ideation methods firsthand and learned how to facilitate these methods with farmer and stakeholder groups. They will understand the importance of an open, non-judgmental environment for idea generation (especially in the early “Initial Idea” and “Inspiration” stages of the spiral) and know how to kickstart innovation when a group seems short on fresh ideas.



Presentation - Introduction (10 min)

Start after lunch with a light energizer to reset minds – perhaps a quick fun activity like “*One-Word Story*”: go around the room with each person adding one word to spontaneously create a story about an agroforestry innovation. Keep it to a minute or two of laughter; tie it in by noting how creativity emerges when we build on each other’s contributions without overthinking.

Reiterate that **innovation thrives on new ideas**, and advisors often need to help groups think beyond the obvious. Ask the group: “*Have you ever been in a meeting where you ask for ideas and you get silence or the same old suggestions?*” It is likely many nod agreement. That is where structured creativity techniques help break the mould. Emphasize that these techniques are not about silly games – they are proven methods to help people **think differently** and overcome mental ruts.

Introduce a principle: in brainstorming, *quantity breeds quality*. In the early phase, it is critical to separate **idea generation from evaluation**. Many good ideas die young because someone said “*But that won’t work*” too soon. As facilitators, we create a space where all ideas are welcome first; evaluation comes later. This aligns with the “Inspiration” pattern of the Circle of Coherence – fostering open dialogue and curiosity.

Technique 1

Brainstorm “Rules” and Classic Brainstorm (15 min)

Quickly review the classic brainstorming rules: *defer judgment, aim for lots of ideas, encourage wild ideas, build on others’ ideas, be specific, one conversation at a time*. You can have these on a flipchart. Then facilitate a **brainstorming exercise** with the whole group to model it. Choose a simple, relatable question like: “*How might we encourage more farmers in [participant’s country] to try agroforestry?*” or even more fun, “*What could we do with an empty field besides farming – the crazier the better?*” Give them 5 minutes to shout out ideas as you or a co-facilitator scribble them on a board or sticky notes (fast and free-form). Encourage building: “*Ah, I see X suggested a community picnic area – anyone want to add to that or spin it further?*” After 5 minutes, you might end up with 15–20 ideas of varying sanity. Point out how no one shut down ideas, and how that led to some unexpected suggestions. Note: it can help to enforce a rule that the word “but” is not allowed during the brainstorm – only “and” or nothing at all.

Now mention: classic brainstorming is common, but some people (especially quieter or very analytical folks) struggle in free-for-all. So we have other techniques.

Technique 2

Brainwriting (10 min)

Explain *brainwriting 6-3-5* (if group is small) or a simplified version: Instead of speaking ideas, write them. For example, in a 6-3-5, 6 people write 3 ideas in 5 minutes on paper, then pass the paper to the next person to add more – but since our participant groups at tables might be 4-5, adapt accordingly. Conduct a quick round: each



participant takes a piece of paper, writes *one idea* to improve a given scenario, then passes to their neighbour, who reads it and adds another idea that builds on or is inspired by it. Do 3 passes so each paper has 3 ideas. The total time is maybe 5-7 minutes. Then have a few people share interesting ideas from the paper they end up with. Emphasize how writing can sometimes free up people who hesitate to speak, and seeing someone's idea can trigger a new angle for you.

Technique 3

Random Stimulus (15 min)

Introduce a more playful method: using random prompts to jolt new thinking. This could be *"Random Word"* or *"Object Association."* For example, give each small table a random object (a bunch of props like a spoon, a toy, a plant leaf, etc.) or a random word (pick from a jar of nouns). Then challenge: *"Relate this object/word to agroforestry – what new idea does it inspire?"* As a demo, hold up something like a **brick** and model: *"Brick...hmm bricks make me think of building... how about an idea to build insect hotels out of farm waste to integrate biodiversity? That's a bit off agroforestry, but it could connect – maybe building modular planters with trees...."* The point is the weird association might spark something fresh. Let groups try with their own random stimuli for a few minutes and share the quirkiest idea that came up. This tends to loosen creative inhibitions and can lead to surprising connections.



Discussion (10 min)

After experiencing these techniques, ask participants how they felt and which might work with their stakeholders. Acknowledge cultural differences: some farmers might think these are silly at first – it is important to frame *why* you are doing it (*"to generate fresh solutions to your problem"*). Often, once people see results and have a laugh, they appreciate it. It is acceptable to start with more structured or private methods (like brainwriting) if people are shy, then move to open brainstorm as they warm up.

Mention other creativity tools briefly (just by name, in case they want to explore): mind mapping, SCAMPER (an acronym-based prompt for modifying an idea), role-storming (brainstorming from another person's perspective), etc. The idea is not to overwhelm but to show there is a suite of tools.

Application to Agroforestry (10 min)

Now tie it back to real innovation. Ask: *"When in the innovation process do we need big idea generation?"* Likely at the very beginning (Initial Idea/Inspiration) – like when farmers identify possible innovations to pursue. Later on, creativity can help in problem-solving obstacles (e.g., if in Development stage a technical issue arises, creative thinking can find a workaround). So these techniques aren't just for the fun ideation of new projects; they can be used whenever a team is stuck and needs novel solutions.

Give an example from agroforestry: In the EU Horizon project AF4EU, each country's RAIN (Regional Agroforestry Innovation Network) had meetings to devise solutions to regional challenges. For instance, in Galicia, Spain, one challenge was integrating trees into dairy farms while maintaining yield. A facilitator might use brainstorming to generate ideas from farmers – some realistic, some wild (like "train cows to prune trees!" which might get laughs but lead to a more practical idea of selecting tree varieties that naturally drop lower branches). The key is generating options. Some of those options later became trials in the project. This shows the pipeline from creative idea to actual innovation action.



Mini-Activity (optional if time)

Idea Gallery – If time permits, do a 10-minute gallery walk: post 4 big sheets around the room with 4 different agroforestry problems (for example: “*How to reduce labour in alley cropping,*” “*How to finance a new orchard-pasture system,*” “*How to engage youth in agroforestry,*” “*How to mitigate wildfire risk with agroforestry*” – using contexts from different countries). Divide participants to each sheet (or let them roam) and have them write or stick at least one idea on each. This gets them applying techniques to content-relevant issues. Afterward, quickly review the collected ideas per sheet. This doubles as a way to surface participant knowledge and creative thinking on real topics they care about.

Closing this session

Emphasize that an advisor does not have to be the *source* of all innovation – rather, they are the *facilitator of the group’s creativity*. With these techniques, they can draw out the ideas from farmers and stakeholders. Many agroforestry innovations (like novel crop combinations, new grazing methods) have come from farmer experimentation and informal brainstorming in groups, not from research labs alone. Advisors can catalyse these grassroots ideas. Also point out: creativity builds **engagement** – when people contribute ideas, they feel ownership (a huge boost for later adoption and follow-through).

Tip for Success: Emphasise how each session builds on the previous session. For example, prepare to transition to Session 4 by noting: “*We’ve generated lots of ideas. But a network must also decide, organize, and act on ideas. And along the way, group dynamics come into play – not always positive. Next, we’ll look at how to keep a network **coherent and energized** as it moves forward.*”