Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency

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Facilitators Guide

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Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency (MSB)
Dr Mo Hamza

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Coordination and Operations departement

Contact Person: Marielle Pettersson

Layout: Advant Produktionsbyrå AB
Printing: DanagårdLiTHO

Order No: MSB605 - May 2013
ISBN: 978-91-7383-380-6

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Flooding in Maun, Botswana. *Photo: NDMO*

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Acknowledgments

Acknowledgments

This guide is an adaptation of a more specific Facilitators' Guide that was developed for the Disaster Preparedness and Prevention Initiative Project in South Eastern Europe (DPPI-SEE). The development of the earlier and original guide owes a great deal of gratitude to a number of key individuals. I would like to acknowledge the work of the following individuals who I had the privilege to work with in producing some of the material used on this guide from previous projects and assignments. Sumit Mishra for the work on the DRR and HFA Workshop we jointly developed with Joanne Burke, Terry Jeggle and Geraldine Becchi at CADRI. Ian Davis and David Wilkinson, formerly of Cranfield University for the work on the Training of Trainers Course on the Cranfield Disaster Management Centre's Summer School. Stephen Webster and Shivani Khanna on the Recovery Module design for UNDP/BCPR and their material developed for MSB's Revinge Course. And last but not least, my colleagues at MSB and DPPI whose valuable comments and feedback were indispensable, namely Michael Meier, Maja Herstad, Marielle Pettersson, Petre Vlad, Cvetka Krajic, Katja Banovec, Igor Milic, Damir Cemerin and Trajko Todorcevski.

Preface and Purpose of the Guide

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This guide is designed to help you (the course organiser) to plan and conduct the course. It is not meant to be Training of Trainers Manual, although it covers the basics and essentials in good training practice. The guide includes information on how a course is designed, how to organise a course, how to adapt the material, and tips that will help make your course a success.

This guide does not cover designing training material. There is a separate guide that covers this subject and should be read and used in conjunction with this Facilitators' Guide. This guide assumes that training material had already been designed and ready to use, and focuses more on the practical aspects of organising and running a course and facilitations and organisation skills and tips required to do so.

Depending on your own level of experience in organising and conducting courses, you may want to refer to sections of this guide but not read through its entirety at one time.

Please feel free to use these guidelines as you see fit. It can either be read in a linear way from cover to cover, or separate sessions depending on the task you are given and what you are looking for. Courses planning and delivery follow a logical sequence of a set of activities. However, some of which are iterative and cyclical as will be clear from this guide. For example, aims and objectives might need to be later revised in light of participants' profile along with methods; adjustments made at a later stage have implication on earlier planned ones. This is the reason this guide isn't written or presented in a linear fashion but more like a menu of sections where you don't have to read them in sequence.

1. Course Basic Elements

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1.1 Blocks

A course is usually made up of blocks. A block is half a day. In other words, one block before lunch and another after lunch on each day. This is a general structure and blocks can be organised around thematic or subject areas. The details in each block vary depending on the purpose and learning objectives. Each of the Blocks should have a section with notes for the facilitators on how to conduct the session. Participants DO NOT get this material. It's important that you refer to and read literature on which the block was based. Without that, it will be hard to make sense or interpret the material in presentations and handouts.

Read the Session Overview at the beginning of each block, which will give you a good idea of everything you will need to do to prepare for the session. It will also help you to become familiar with the slides, exercises and presentation materials. Presentation slides for blocks need to be adapted to local context.

1.2 Slides/PowerPoint Presentations

Nowadays presentations are usually in PowerPoint format for ease of access and delivery. In case of no access to multi-media equipment (computers, projectors, or even power) presentations could easily be turned into points for delivery by lower tech means such as flip chart paper. Facilitators need to anticipate and prepare for any eventuality.

Slides and presentations are to be used creatively. It's better in the design process to provide slides as a resource rather than a set. Facilitators need to use their good judgment and assessment of the group to prioritise which slides to use and which ones to leave out or run through quickly.

1.3 Exercises

Exercises require advance adaptation and preparation and may require obtaining data/information or doing web searches. If such data or context is not available at the time of running the exercises, it may be difficult to go ahead with the exercises.

As most MSB courses are practical courses, facilitators are advised to pay a lot of attention to exercises. The balance in time needs to lean more towards allowing time for exercises for the groups to think and discuss. More important, facilitators need to prepare well for exercises in terms of understanding, case examples during briefing, etc. It's also crucial that facilitators do not set the exercise and leave the participants to their own devises. Facilitators need to move between the groups, checking their progress, answering questions, providing guidance, etc.

1.4 Facilitators Notes

Facilitators Notes usually include a step-by-step guide on how to run and deliver each exercise and presentation. You might want to adapt these instructions to match your own needs and style. Facilitators also need to read and examine the hand-outs during their preparation for presentations in order to make appropriate reference to the material contained in the hand-out, draw participants attention to it, quote from hand-outs and use examples, case studies and references mentioned in the hand-outs.

1.5 Hand-outs and Reading Material

Training material sometimes contain a separate folder entitled Reading Material. These should be prepared for each participant and distributed at the start of the course, to avoid giving out hand-outs through the sessions. Within the context of conducting specific sessions, facilitators should call participants' attention to the handouts. There could also be a set of material included as further reading and references, sometimes in hard copies and most of the time uploaded on CDs or flash drives. These are meant to provide participants with elaborate literature if they wish to read and further their knowledge in a certain area.

Facilitators need to have a group meeting before the course starts to check in with each other on their interpretation and understanding of the exercise and formulate a common approach they adhere to throughout the course. Conflicting messages confuse all groups. It's also important that facilitators spend enough time every evening with the groups, checking the group's understanding of the daily assignment, providing resources and guidance. Facilitators then need to check in with each other on groups' progress and compare notes for further guidance and feedback in the following days. Coherence is very important to the running of this particular exercise.

2. Course Preparation

2. Course Preparation

Courses require a significant amount of preparation. It is crucial that course organisers and facilitators familiarise themselves with the material they designed or are expected to deliver and have adequate time to adapt the content to the specific audience. The following is a list of steps and principles all course organisers need to go through.

2.1 Establish Course Needs and Context

There are four main critical steps you need to go through in the stage of preparation:

Clarify

- The purpose, need for and outcomes for the course – what are the expectations.
- Who will be the sponsoring organisation and if any approvals will be required.
- The course planning process. A small working group or a committee approach is recommended to promote ownership and to ensure that the design meets the needs of the target audience.

Decide

- How much advance time is required to organise the course; when in doubt, always overestimate how much lead time is required.
- How you will promote the course and make it attractive to attend.
- If there should be follow-up after the course and how it will be undertaken.
- If you need support to document the course process, content, outcomes etc.

Identify

- Participants' profile. This will ensure that appropriate individuals attend the course and facilitators can adapt the content and design. Pay attention to age and gender differences, levels of education and experience, and what you are seeking to achieve with the group: influence, raise awareness, orient or sensitise, generate support or engagement.
- Personnel requirements and criteria, roles and responsibilities.
- The venue, equipment requirements and sources, formal opening, etc.
- The required budget, funding source and methods of payment

Set

- A deadline for receiving responses for attendance

2.2 Organise Course Sessions, Material and Presentations

- Review each of the blocks in detail, including facilitator outline, power points, exercises and handouts.
- Decide what needs adapting and changing and what should not be changed.
- Decide if there will be a need for translation of materials or translation services during the course.
- Check venue options and suitability (location, room size, layout, for plenary and space for break out working groups, acoustics, external distractions, safety). Try to find a venue with good natural lighting. This has huge influence on group dynamics, especially large groups and most of all on the learning experience
- Identify equipment requirements. A suggested list is as follows:
  - Laptop computers
  - LCD (multimedia) projector
  - Easels
  - Flipcharts, paper and markers
  - Writing paper and pens for participants
  - Tape (masking/cellophane), Blue Tack and/or pins (for hanging flip charts)

  - Cards or post-its notes for the exercises.
  - Name Cards
- Review or assign supplementary reading/documentation to the facilitators.
- Prepare/photocopy handouts and activity sheets.
- Make a list of materials for the Participant Material Package for photocopying: This package should include the following:
  1. Course Agenda
  2. Course Description
  3. Hand-outs for each respective block
  4. Slides (hand-out format) for each respective block – not more than 2-3 slides per page
  5. Glossary of Terms

2.3 The Role of the Facilitator

What is a facilitator?

A facilitator is someone who is present to assist a group reach its objectives; the group, not the trainer, may determine the objectives.

The facilitator's role[1]

When adopting the role of a facilitator, the trainer needs to:

- Ensure the more verbose do not take over, and encourage contributions, particularly from those who may be less self-confident.
- Devise non-aggressive, friendly ways to deal with difficult participants. For example with those that are:
  - Over talkative,
  - Argumentative,
  - Refusing to engage with the course proceedings,
  - Frequently absent from the classes due to interruptions from their offices or due to a lack of motivation to learn.

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1 Adapted from Tutor-delivered training by Steve Truelove. In The Handbook of Training and Development – 2nd Edition (ed.: Steve Truelove). Blackwell Business, Oxford, 1995.

- Control conflict by stepping in if necessary to help participants learn how to deal with conflict positively or help them find areas of agreement; or by analysing what has caused the conflict so that participants can take a more objective, and therefore, less emotional view.
- From time to time, get the participants to summarise what has been discussed; perhaps pose a question or make a suggestion to take the discussion forward.
- Assist 'weaker' participants by rephrasing their arguments for them so that these do not get lost just because they are not forcefully put across.
- Ensure individuals receive positive feedback from the group:
  - Perhaps by acknowledging contributions that the group ignores, or
  - By seeking positive contributions from others if a negative evaluation is given.
- Provide feedback to the group as a whole as to its performance.
- Provide the information and resources for the group to function effectively.
- Staying quiet is often the facilitators most powerful tool, silence allows people the space to contribute.
- Ensure that the discussion is brought to a close when the topic had achieved its intended learning outcomes or at the end of the allotted time.
- Ensure that the whole group attains common goals, and derives its greatest satisfaction from having done this together.
- Make provision for participants who are late arrivals, or who are absent from sessions due to sickness etc. Devise ways to update them on what they will have missed.

2.4 Preparing for a Training Course

A. Questions

What

- What is the subject I have been asked to present on/lead/arrange?

Why

- Why have they asked me to do it?
- What is the purpose of the session or the training course?
  - To communicate information and knowledge.
  - To make a proposition.
  - To test existing knowledge.
  - To practice skills.
- To inspire and motivate.
- The first thing to get clear in your mind is the objectives of the entire course or one session.

When

- What time of day will my session(s) take place? After lunch is known as the graveyard slot; you should therefore consider making it more active than, say, a morning session.
- How long have I got?

How

- How am I going to present my subject?
- Straight talk
- Talk with overheads
- Talk with PowerPoint presentation
- Talk with video
- Give the participants a period in which to discuss aspects of the subject, e.g. by using a case study.
- Combination of any of these.
- Am I going to allow questions during the session?
- Always leave time at the end for questions and discussion.

Where

- Where is the presentation due to take place?
- How do the windows open/air conditioning work? If using PowerPoint or video, how do we darken the room?
- What equipment have they got, e.g. video, computer, projector, overhead projector, etc.?
- Decide on seating arrangements
- Are there likely to be any distractions, e.g. loud air-conditioning; things happening outside the window, etc.
- Can I be heard at the back of the room?

Who

- The audience.
- Who are they? How senior/junior are they?
- How many will be present?
- What is the extent of their existing knowledge of the subject I am going to present?
- What will be of interest to them?
- What will their attitudes, preconceptions or expectations?
- Is there a gender balance within the group?
- Could you foresee or expect any kind of dynamics or potential resistant due to group composition?
- What can you glean overall from the participants list and profile without making too many assumptions?

B. Preparation Checklist

1. Has a detailed budget been prepared?
2. Has finance been secured to run the course?
3. Has a venue been selected?
4. Is the course to be residential or not?
5. How long is the course to last?
6. Will the seating layout be in formal rows, around a table on in small table groupings?

7. Have training rooms been selected?
8. When to hold the course to maximise its effectiveness?
9. Have participants been selected?
10. Have participants been informed of the course arrangements with detailed 'joining and leaving instructions'?
11. Have trainers and resource persons been selected?
12. Have they attended Training of Trainers (ToT) Courses?
13. Is such Training of Trainers Courses (ToT) available?
14. Who trains the Trainers?
15. Have facilitators been selected?
16. Has a programme been devised?
17. Are there any cross cutting issues in training that need to feature and are prioritised (gender, environment, etc.) and are they fully integrated into the programme?
18. Have teaching aids been selected, and have been updated from the last time they were used?
19. Have training materials been hired or purchased (projectors, flip charts, stationary, etc.)?
20. Has provision been made for all participants to gain access to Internet services?
21. Has consideration been given to how the course will open and close? Will there be value in using VIP's to open the course and present certificates etc.?
22. Have certificates been prepared and signed by appropriate persons?
23. Have arrangements been made for a group photograph?
24. Have discussions been held with the venue manager concerning catering arrangements?

Presentation. Francistown ToT, Botswana. *Photo: NDMO*

2.5 Important Consideration

2.5.1 Audience

Any course needs to be relevant to those attending. This means adapting the sessions to the priorities, needs and realities of the audience, country, region and matching these requirements with the expected outcomes for the course.

If you are targeting a specific group in this course gather as much information in advance as possible on their membership, function, current priorities, and their needs related to working effectively.

From past experience, we know that participants usually represent a wide range of different backgrounds, specialties, job titles, and experiences. Therefore, it is essential that you prepare the course in a way that makes it useful to a diverse group of learners and sets an appropriate level of complexity for the participants, i.e., not too elemental or too complicated. It is also important to be able to draw the participants into the sessions by way of referring to their experiences.

You should receive a list of participants with job titles. There may be some new additions and drop-offs to the list. In addition to the list, you should have a binder of participants' CVs. We encourage you to review the CVs to broaden your understanding of participants' backgrounds and then adapt your sessions to the participants' and use of examples, if possible to bring in participants' experiences.

During the course pay close attention to group dynamics, signs of enthusiasm or disengagement, what works and what does not, and adapt accordingly and on the spot.

In general, follow the principles of adult education. Plan sessions that capture the stages of adult learning, i.e., start out with a stimulus presentation or exercise, follow with an opportunity to apply/analyse the new ideas in light of the participants' own situation and develop an application (e.g. develop a plan for what to do to implement the new ideas/approaches after the course or during the rest of the workshop, anticipating barriers and impediments).

2.5.2 Organisers' Preparation

The course organisers need to be familiar with the context of the country/organisation/group or the region. You need to understand the level of engagement and commitment to the subject area the course covers, the capacity gap it's meant to address or the problem it attempts to solve.

Familiarise yourself with the basic design of the course and with the information in this guide. This can help you identify the relevant adaptation requirements, e.g. terminology, examples, maps, graphs, case studies, slides in order to tailor it to the audience/national context.

2.5.3 Adaptation

Rehearse and practice the presentations as well as work through the exercises in advance to become familiar with how to set them up and conduct them. Identify any changes that will be required.

Decide how and who will undertake the adaptation work, by when. Facilitators and organisers need to define the process for revising the materials and reviewing the changes. All the materials in a course need to complement each other, and not duplicate. The final package of material needs to be reviewed by one person.

The following is generic guidance and good practice in preparing and delivering course material:

a. Adapting and preparing sessions

Once you have received the course material use the following guidelines to prepare for your session review the Training Material and identify any areas in the Block Outline, Slides, Exercises or Hand-outs that have possible errors, missing information, etc. Course material is usually prepared to act as a template and should be adapted to your training style and replaced with latest information where relevant. Ensure that you have/requested for all visual aids, materials and other equipment that you will need for the sessions. Review your sessions with any co-facilitator you might be working with. Be well versed with the overall agenda of the course and draw linkages with the other sessions. Keep a set of icebreakers handy to break the monotony of a long session.

b. Recognise and appeal to different learning styles

Adult learners have various learning styles: auditory, visual, and kinaesthetic. Try to accommodate these styles in the following ways:

- Use visual aids. These may be transparencies, a PowerPoint presentation, flipcharts, or handouts.
- Visual aids should support the presentation, not replace the need to take notes.
- When using a **flipchart**, write large enough so that all the people in the room can see your notes.
- When using **PowerPoint or transparencies**:

  - Use keywords and graphics
  - Avoid simply reading the overhead or slides. You may choose to provide handouts of your presentation at the beginning of the presentation and elaborate from your slides/visuals.
  - Don't block the screen.
  - Turn the projector off or otherwise block the light when not using it.
  - Use a laser pointer instead of standing at the screen.
  - Use the remote control slide advancer to be able to move about the room.

Adult learners need the opportunity to apply concepts. Design your sessions so that there is a clearly designated period for participants to work on applying what they are learning. This may involve them critiquing what they are currently doing, developing a change strategy, or setting up a support network that includes other participants and other resources you might suggest. Ensure that participants have a chance to identify what they should do with their "insights," after the session.

c. Presenting effectively

Session Introduction

- Introduce yourself and your co-facilitator, if any.
- Present the session title, objectives and duration of the session and describe the overall plan.
- Relate the session to the overall course design and explain why it is placed where it is in the agenda.
- Relate the session to previous sessions, when possible.
- Establish/emphasise learning norms that you feel are essential to the session. This may include respect for diversity of opinion and confidentiality, active participation and revolving leadership, ask questions at any time or only at the end of the session.

Strong Opening

Get participant's attention from the first moment. In your opening try to arouse curiosity, clarify the purpose of your session and connect the participants to the topic. There are many different ways to do this. Consider asking a question, sharing a personal story, displaying an eye-catching visual, making a provocative statement, or sharing a provoking statistic.

Session Delivery

- Cover key points of the session slowly and re-emphasise them.
- Address 'What is in it for you'. Clarifying why the information presented during the session is important for the practitioner and how they may use it in their work.
- Encourage participants to share their experiences and examples making the session interactive.
- Enhance the session with your personal experience and interesting anecdotes and encourage the participants to share examples.
- Check your time use to maintain a tempo/cadence that will help you execute your session completely.
- Limit the time you are talking to make space for interaction and exercises.

Exercises (when applicable)

- Conduct group learning activities where possible.
- Explain the purpose, objective, duration and instructions for the exercise clearly.
- Ensure you have all the material for the exercises – exercise sheets, related reading, stationery, etc.
- Encourage participants to document their findings on a flip chart, transparency, PowerPoint slide etc. for presentation at the end of the exercise.
- Ensure that the exercise is debriefed and any participant questions are answered during the session. Detailed questions may be addressed in between sessions or after workshop hours.

Avoid presentation killers

- Awkward beginning or weak close.
- Minimal eye contact or facial expression.
- No humour.
- Vague objectives and limited preparation.
- Poor visual aids.
- No audience involvement.
- Reading handouts.
- No movement.
- Turning your back to the audience.
- Lack of example.

Review and closing

- Review the session objectives and make sure they were fully covered during the session.
- Re-emphasize key points made and issues raised during the session.
- Invite and answer questions regarding the session.

2.6 Course Planning Checklist

Work through this checklist when planning a Training Course so as to be clear concerning some of the basic issues, and assess your priority concerns as the facilitator.

1. What Terms of Reference have been provided by authorities to guide Facilitators preparing for the training Course?
2. What is the Course Aim? *(One only)*
3. What are the Course Learning Outcomes? *(A series of steps to achieve the aim)*
4. What Training Needs emerged from the Training Needs and Resource Assessment – TNRA *(set them in order of priority, seek to confine the list to not more than the five most important topics)*
5. Course Content *(think about which Knowledge, Skills and Attitudes that need to be developed through the course)*

- Knowledge is learnt through study, discussion and interaction;
- Skills are learnt through practice;
- Attitudes are learnt finding and developing new thinking frames.

6. Who are your Target Participants? *(Whom do you want to reach? Are you sure they are the primary focus?)*

7. What is the Training Strategy?

Think carefully about how you hope to achieve your aim and learning outcomes, to fulfil the needs of your projected participants? But before you do this consider a number of questions concerning how people learn:

- We learn better if we ***want*** to learn.
- We learn better through ***experience.***
- We learn better through ***practice.***
- We learn better through ***participating*** in the learning.
- We learn better through ***summary and evaluation.***
- How will these factors affect the Training Strategy?

8. What are your priorities as Course Facilitator? Look back over what you wrote in the topics above and attempt to initiate some personal priorities by marking items:

H = High Priority
M = Medium Priority
L = Low Priority

From this analysis it will be possible to summarise the best use of your time during the course. Summarise your priorities below:

- High Priority Training Needs
- High Priority Learning Outcomes
- High Priority Target Participants
- High Priority Issues in Developing a Training Strategy

9. What are your resources?

What people, time, buildings, money, equipment, do you have which you can use in the forthcoming course?

List your assets that can support the workshop:

- People to assist in running the course
  - Names:
  - What assets can they bring?
- Buildings to house the Training Course
- Money
- Equipment

10. What are your plans?
    - What did the TNRA reveal that needs to form the key elements of the course
    - Style of Training
    - Location
    - Optional or Compulsory
    - Duration
    - Access to computer terminals for all participants
    - Full or Part time
    - Procedures for the Selection of Participants
11. What is the cost of the Training Course?
    - Participant Costs
12. Travel costs: average cost X number of participants
    - Costs of Facilitators/ Resource Persons
    - Number of training staff X number of hours X average salaries or fees
    - Travel costs: total tickets or average X number of training staff
    - Material Costs
      1. Manuals or printed hand-outs
      2. Visual aids: rental cost or purchase prices as required
      3. Location rental
    - Accommodation rental and meals
    - Organisation Costs
    - Secretarial and Administrative Support Costs

- Travel costs
- Total Cost Estimate:

13. Who will run the Training Course?

- Proposed Facilitator(s)
- Proposed Organiser(s)
- Proposed Resource Person *(list names and areas of expertise in relation to the themes to be covered in the course)*

14. What is the Timetable?
15. Timetable Check List

- Make a decision as to whether or not to hold a workshop
- Prepare Costing (as item 11 above)
- Detailed Planning
  - Funding Source
  - Facilitators
  - Dates
  - Venue
  - Focus
  - Timetable of workshop

16. How will the workshop be followed up?

- Short-term evaluation methodology
- Long-term appraisal of Course using Knowledge and Attitudes and Practices Study (KAPS) gained in the training course.[2]
- Long-term review of developments in agency/organisational staff development programme.

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2 See for example: WHO (2008), Guide to Developing Knowledge Attitude and Practice Surveys UNOCHA (2010), School Sanitation and Hygiene: Knowledge, Attitude and Practice (KAP) Study, Handicap International (2009), Knowledge, Attitude and Practice for Risk Education: How to Implement KAP Surveys

2.7 Monitoring Groups

Facilitators can monitor group progress or better let the group monitor itself. This allows for far more ownership of the course and the group taking responsibility for its own learning and development. A rotating group of participants could be selected to monitor one day of the course each. This group could meet at the end of their allocated day to discuss their observations. At the beginning of the following day they could present to the course participants as a whole their comments on the previous day, recommendations for the future days and news items. This presentation should be brief (20 minutes maximum) and may cover some of the following issues:

- Key lessons from the day
- Points of agreement or disagreement
- Points that link with earlier material
- Matters needing further clarification
- Good examples from the field
- Good (or bad) jokes from yesterdays presentations
- Any quotable quotes
- Any changes the group need to make to the rest of the programme
- Any news items with reference to the course subject area

These reviews can achieve several important results:

- They help course facilitators to grasp the ‘pulse’ of the group.
- Are they happy?
- Are they learning?
- Are the messages being received?
- They encourage participant participation and ‘ownership’ of the course.
- They assist in consolidating vital lessons.

Workshop in Tutume, Botswana. *Photo: NDMO*

2.8 Effective Communication Skills

Good communication skills are essential when training adults. There is an abundance of resources available to provide helpful information on how to communicate most effectively with participants. These tools help develop training messages, provide facilitation tips, and offer ways to improve presentation skills for personal growth as a trainer.

The following are generic effective communication guidelines that run through the whole course and are not limited to one type of training method or another. There are three important things a facilitator can do to help create an effective learning atmosphere for course participants.

Support the group of participants by building an atmosphere of trust and modelling a positive attitude.

One of the most important tasks of a good facilitator is to build an atmosphere of trust. An accepting and non-threatening atmosphere encourages the expression of ideas, questions, beliefs, and attitudes by all participants. Below are some ways to build trust among the group.

- **Assure that confidentiality will be maintained**. Establish a group rule on the first day that everyone's confidentiality must and will be protected so that people can talk freely without fear that their comments will be shared outside the course.
- **Provide constructive and supportive feedback**. Let participants know when they've contributed something useful and interesting to the group. For example, you might say, "That's a very good example of the concept we are discussing."
- **Model a positive attitude**. Participants will probably get tired as the course progresses and need some encouragement. Call upon the person appointed as the energiser and maintain your own positive attitude. Address any difficult moments during the course with honesty and constructive comments. For example, "This topic brings up difficult feelings for many; by exploring our own feelings, we can better help our clients to do the same."

1. **Ensure that the entire course content is covered**.

It is important to stay on schedule and help participants see how each session follows logically from the one before.

- If participants deviate from the topic, offer to address their comments during a break.
- Write additional topics identified by participants on flip chart paper as a reminder of topics to cover if there is time remaining at the end of the session. Keep this list visible to participants throughout the workshop.
- Each session's lesson plan includes key summary points. Referring to these key points, and reviewing them at the end of a session, will help you know if you have covered all of the main content of your lesson plan.

2. Model effective facilitation skills.

Try to remember these basic facilitation strategies throughout the course:

- Ask open-ended questions. For example, you might say, “What did you learn from the role play?” instead of “Did you learn how to ______________ during the role play?”
- Listen carefully to the communication and for any feelings that may accompany it.
- Rephrase participants’ communications accurately for clarity, when necessary, and without judgment.
- Respect every participant’s feelings, perspectives, and contributions.
- Adhere to the time schedule.
- Focus on developing skills, not just knowledge.
- Make the learning process active.
- Make the course material clear by speaking slowly and using language that is understood by all participants.

2.9 Leadership in Group Discussions

A group discussion is a method that may be used by a facilitator to create a learning situation where attitudes and opinions/arguments are sought and examined. There are three key features about the process:

- The participative environment encourages the sharing of experiences and the introduction and development of ideas.
- The fact that all participants are actively involved in thinking, listening and speaking leads to better learning and fuller understanding.
- For adults, particularly experienced adults ‘social learning’ is one of the most powerful modes of learning.

Purposes

The purposes of a group discussion may be one or more of the following:

- To help develop knowledge and understanding about a subject.
- To learn how to solve problems and make decisions.
- To develop interpersonal skills.
- To develop attitudes and beliefs.
- To make learning an active process.
- To develop relationships and promote group dynamics.

Environment

- People should sit fairly close to one another, preferably in a circle; if not, a square.

Getting started

- Introductory talk or presentation.
- Film or video.
- Case study or written handout.
- One of the best ways to 'seed' a discussion is to start with an open question that requires a value judgment for an answer. For example "What did you think have…" or "Having watched, done, observed… what did that mean to you?"

Objectives

Having set the outcomes for the session, the trainer should ask:

- How will I make sure that the objectives are achieved?
- What will I do if the participants are unable to see the points I had in mind?
- What if there is an adverse reaction to the topic or someone gets upset?

Dangers

- Generating friction between the participants.
- Leading to some participants being frozen out.
- But remember each danger is also a learning opportunity!

Control

Close control

- Trainer may
  - Lead the discussion by asking questions to which the group members reply.
  - Decide who will contribute by naming those who will respond.
  - Suppress uninvited contributions or people speaking out of turn.
  - Evaluate contributions and may pass judgment in terms of "That's right", "That's wrong".
- Style may be used when there is a specific subject and limited time.
- Success depends to a large extent
  - On the group's willingness to accept it
  - The level of expertise of the leader compared to the group.
- Will lead to conflict or non-participation if the group resents the leader's approach.

Medium control

- Trainer may
  - Initiate discussion but permits and encourages the group to talk to each other directly, rather than through the 'chair'.
  - Leave it to the group to evaluate contributions.
  - Intervene from time to time to expand on points, which have arisen, or bring the discussion 'back on track'.
- To encourage this approach, the leader
  - May sit amongst the group to reduce his role;
  - May keep silent for long periods;
  - Does not interfere, if it is going well.

Low control

- Trainer may.
  - Withdraw from the discussion completely, or
  - Sit at the back and observe
  - Speak only if invited to by the group
  - When invited to speak may turn the question back to the group, or give a number of different opinions to give the group something to work on.
- Group not used to this approach my find it uncomfortable to start with.

2.10 Ground Rules in Training Courses

Ground rules are useful in Training since they establish a common set of agreed values that can form the basis of the way the groups will relate to each other. Thus, at the outset of a course are ground rules in place, as agreed by participants? For example, the following have been used in past courses:

- An agreement over confidentiality, in not repeating what is heard about organisations outside the course.
- Each individual being free to express their own views, not necessarily stating the position of their organisation on a given issue.
- Punctuality and a commitment to undertake all assignments.
- Avoiding interrupting another speaker.
- Each contributor seeking to ration their contributions to group discussions to a maximum of two interventions per session, to enable all to have an opportunity to express their views.
- No diminishing of the views of other participants, rather a commitment to build up each other.
- No rank to be ‘pulled’ in the class, all participants and facilitators and resource persons being on first name terms and treated on an equal basis, irrespective of their official rank or status.

2.11 Reviewing a Training Event

The following checklist[3] can be used after the delivery of a training event for your own self-assessment and review. If you have a trusted colleague or a close friend, ask them to sit in and complete it as well. Or, if you are very daring, ask the audience to complete it!

Note: Not all the questions may be relevant on each occasion.

1. Was the material appropriate to the group?
2. Did the main points come out?
3. Was there too much or too little material?
4. Was the attention and interest of the group secured?
5. Were communication aids used to the best possible effect?
6. Were the audience encouraged to participate?
7. Were any phrases/mannerisms, e.g. 'Er', 'Mm', 'OK' (or whatever) used excessively?
8. Did everyone appear to hear and understand what was being said?
   - If yes, how do you know?
   - If not, why not?
9. Was the time used to best effect?
   - If not, why not?
10. What were the objectives:
    - Were they achived
    - If not, why not?

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3 Adapted from Tutor-delivered training by Steve Truelove. In The Handbook of Training and Development - 2nd Edition (ed: Steve Truelove). Blackwell Business, Oxford, 1995.

Training within the West Africa Disaster Management Capacity Building project. *Photo:MSB*

2.12 Gender Aspects of Training

Facilitators of any training course need to be aware of different methods and examples for making a session gender sensitive and accessible to all participants.

Facilitators need to think about:

- *Avoiding* hierarchical/discriminating obstacles, which inhibit asking questions/learning and making sure female participants are heard.
- *Making* ground rules in the beginning of the training, which emphasises mutual respect and awareness of diversity within the crowd (for example: the usual such as “no phones on” but also; we are here to learn, everyone can ask questions, show patience and don’t interrupt when someone else is talking, etc.).

- *Using* methods for making everyone heard: such as emphasising as a facilitator that you are interested in hearing someone's opinion or that you will make a "round of comments" so everyone gets to make their point. If women or men want to provide their feedback in writing instead of speaking out in the crowd, this should be provided for.
- *Paying attention to and providing* guidance on dealing with different tactics for putting people down during the training (when a person makes someone feel invisible, ridiculous, that all they do is wrong, etc.). See page 97 in MSB Gender Equality Handbook. Use short exercise to illustrate how common this is and how unaware we usually are regarding this (for example through showing a video clip for discussion and experience sharing).
- *Employing* both female and male trainers and facilitators. To avoid stereotyping, swap men and women between the technical areas that they are culturally referred to.
- *Aiming* for a gender-balanced crowd in the main session, but also in group work, exercises, etc.
- *Providing* for group work sessions separated by sex, if needed.
- *Appointing*, in advance, a facilitator and rapporteur for each group when conducting group work. Make sure these are gender balanced and that they vary, i.e. some women are facilitators and some are rapporteurs.
- *Using* different sources and examples for illustrating main components of the topic:
  - Research with a gender perspective – whose story is being told/is there, an interest behind? History/herstory.
  - Discussing images we use, examples that do not reinforce stereotypes etc.) .
- *Using* gender sensitive language in the training:[4]
- Utilise both "her" and "him" when giving examples.
- Avoid gendered terms such as policeman (*alternative phrasing:*

4 Bear in mind that if the training is undertaken in another language, additional gender aspects may be present, for example in French where the nouns are either masculine or feminine themselves and hence already gendered, for example "le docteur" (masc.).

police officer), cleaning lady (*cleaner*), mankind (*humans*), or phrases like *"boys will be boys"*.

- Avoid also gender blind terminology, for example "population" and "people" (*alternative phrasing: women, girls, boys and men*), in order to underline who we are addressing. Do not reinforce stereotypes by making unnecessary or tokenising references, for example in expressions such as *"vulnerable women"*.

Example of a gender aware training methodology[5]

- *Vary* your training methods to meet various needs and learning techniques.
- *Use* examples to which both women and men can relate.
- *Develop* methods for anonymous tests or other examination forms (also applicable for evaluation forms, etc.). For evaluations, include specific questions on for example if the participants perceived that the facilitator encouraged both women and men to participate.
- *Reflect* on who you, as a trainer, are in relation to the participants.
- *Be alert to* the existing power relations between the participants and bring out the subject if/when inequalities are identified.
- *Give* more space to female participants (who often represent the group that talks less).

Content: Gender and diversity in Disaster Risk Reduction

- *Illustrate* the different effects of disaster risks on different population groups (and how we usually forget this) and how the poorer segments in society are usually hit harder; how women, girls and marginalised groups (such as disabled) often are disproportionately affected. Use concrete examples, for example tsunami 2005, Haiti earthquake 2010, flooding West-Africa 2009 etc. Separation and hierarchy between the sexes are part of the explanation of why hazards hit men and women, girls and boys differently. It leads to men as a group having more resources and power compared to women as a group, which in turn affects vulnerability and capacity to hazards.

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5 Bengtsson & Nilsson "Genus i undervisningen" (translated and revised by Marie Nilsson)

- *Discuss* risk taking behaviour from a gendered point of view; discuss how and why men tend to take higher risk (masculinity norms) and which effects this can have on their families.
- *Discuss* from a vulnerability perspective how all phases of disaster management affect women, girls, boys and men; use existing tools such as the Red Cross' Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment (VCA).
- *Address* the need of having gender balance in all DRR activities and explain thoroughly why. Exemplify by cases where women can participate only if there are other women involved. Having both women and men among staff increases your chances of communicating successfully with and reaching the whole population.

Underline the need for collecting data in a sex-and age disaggregated manner in all DRR activities, in order to identify who (women, girls, boys and/or men) should be addressed.

2.13 Energisers List

Courses are usually intense and go on until late in the day. Energisers (short games) help participants regain energy in the morning or afternoon sessions when the participants get notably tired. Energisers are important to break monotony, create a light and energetic atmosphere in the room especially after the "lunch break". The following are merely suggestions and by no means a comprehensive list. There are endless ideas and lists of energisers. The most important point in choosing energisers is appropriateness for the group culturally and gender wise. Check this before hand and make informed decisions on which energisers to use. If you hand over the responsibility of energisers to participants, which is a good idea, you would make sure that cultural aspects are observed. However, it's still important to check in first with the individual or group who will lead the energiser before they undertake it to be on the safe side.
The following are just a few examples of "energisers".

- Forming lines: Participants divide in groups and have to form a line without talking, upon instructions from the leader (e.g. tallest first, longest hair, birth month, etc.)

- Singing and dancing: (e.g. a Swedish traditional dance, *lång-dans*, where you hold hands and run in a line while singing across the facilities). Or choose a traditional song and dance from the region or the country.
- Tuc tuc: the participants team up in pairs. One is in the back making the one in the front move by tapping the back, turn right through tapping right shoulder, left for left shoulder and using the horn by patting the Tuc tucs head (the other one shouts).
- The rocket: Participants stand in a circle and clap their hands slowly, increasing the pace and using feet to stamp as well – eventually screaming and holding their hands up as the rocket launches.
- The sinking ship: one person is the leader shouting to the participants that the ship is sinking and that x (changes each time) people can fit in each life boat. Participants have to hold hands in circles, including the number that the leader shouts. Some people may end out without a lifeboat.

Sweden and Botswana partnership for disaster management 2012–2013

This facilitator's guide has been revised from the first produced guide for the Disaster Preparedness and Prevention Initiative Project in South Eastern Europe.

The guide was distributed to participants in the workshop for risk and vulnerability assessments which was implemented by the National Disaster Management Office (NDMO) in Botswana and the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency (MSB) in 2013.

The NDMO and the MSB took part in a joint project in 2012–2013 with the purpose to strengthen the capacity for Disaster Risk Management in Botswana through a partner-driven cooperation with the overall objective to enhance the protection of life, environment, property and development gains, reduce disruptions to societal functionality and enhance trust in societal institutions.

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Order No. MSB605 - May 2013   ISBN 978-91-7383-380-6