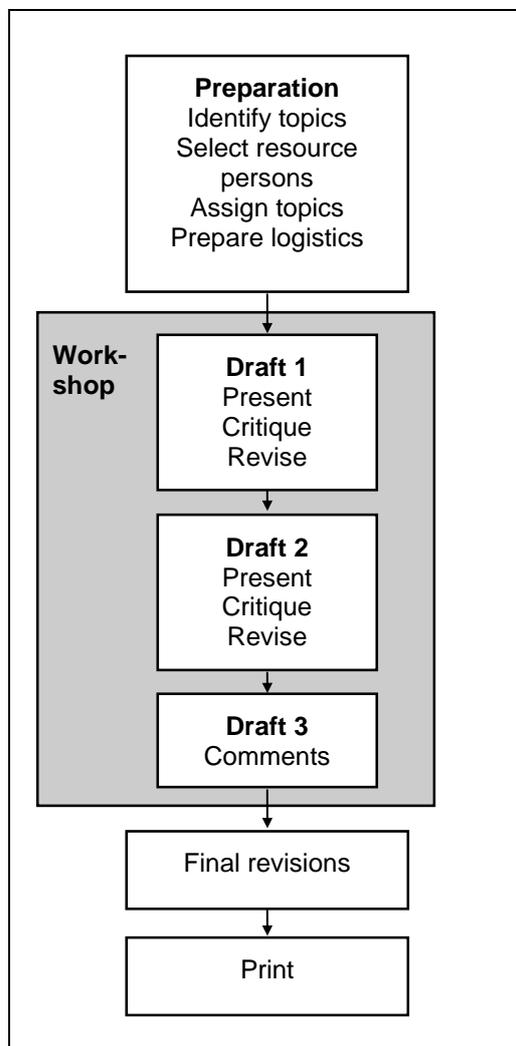


Producing information materials through participatory workshops

Paul Mundy, PhD

Producing information materials can take a great amount of time — one has to write the drafts, edit the text, prepare illustrations and lay out the publication. The resulting prototype is then reviewed by specialists in the subject matter before final revisions are made. This can be a long and tedious process.

Workshops can speed up and improve the production of printed materials. The aim is to develop the materials, revise and put them into final form as quickly as possible, taking full advantage of the expertise of the various workshop participants.



Workshop process

Before the workshop, a steering committee lists potential topics and invites resource persons to develop first drafts on each topic, using guidelines provided. These participants bring the drafts and various reference materials with them to the workshop.

During the workshop itself, each participant presents his or her draft paper, using overhead transparencies of each page. Copies of each draft are also given to all other participants, who critique the draft and suggest revisions.

After the presentation, an editor helps the author revise and edit the draft. An artist draws illustrations to accompany the text. The edited draft and artwork are then desktop-published to produce a second draft. Meanwhile, other participants also present papers they have prepared. Each, in turn, works with the team of editors and artists to revise and illustrate the materials.

Each participant then presents his or her revised draft to the group a second time, also using transparencies. Again, the audience critiques it and suggests revisions. After the presentation, the editor and artist again help revise it and develop a third draft.

Towards the end of the workshop, the third draft is made available to participants for final comments and revisions. The final version can be completed, printed and distributed soon after the workshop.

The workshop process was pioneered at the International Institute of Rural Reconstruction in the Philippines. To date, about 20 workshops have been used to produce information materials on various topics relating to agriculture, the environment and health.

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Workshop advantages

Workshop participants may include scientists, researchers, government personnel, teachers, NGO staff, extension agents, farmers and other local people. The diversity of skills, organizations and backgrounds of participants is key to ensuring that numerous ideas are represented in the materials produced. Members of the intended audience (e.g., teachers, farmers and extension personnel) can help pretest the text and illustrations during the workshop.

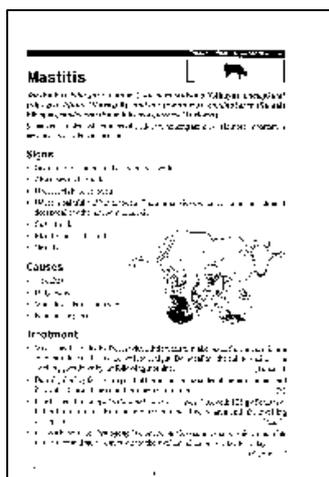
The workshop process is very different from the scientific conferences familiar to many participants. It is an extremely flexible process. The repeated presentations, critiquing and revision of drafts allow for papers to be reviewed and revised substantially, new topics to be developed during the workshop and topics to be combined, dropped or split into parts.

Early in the workshop, the participants brainstorm ideas for new topics (other than those already prepared) that should be part of the publication. These new topics are assigned to knowledgeable participants for development and presentation during the workshop.

The workshop allows inputs from all participants to be incorporated, taking advantage of the diverse experience and expertise of all present. It allows ideas to be validated by a range of experts in the field. The concentration of resource persons, editors, artists and desktop-publishing resources at one time and place enables materials to be produced far more quickly than is typical for similar publications. And the sharing of experiences among participants allows the development of networks that continue to be fruitful long after the end of the workshop itself.

The publication

The publication resulting from the workshop can be loose-leaf, a set of pocket-sized booklets, or a bound book. The format and design can be set beforehand — or decided by the participants during the workshop itself.



The broad theme is divided into smaller topics, each of which is based on a manuscript prepared by a workshop participant. Examples include 'storing seeds' (in a booklet on agroforestry), 'wounds and burns' (in a book on traditional veterinary medicine in Kenya), and 'growing cardamom' (one of a series of extension leaflets on upland agriculture in Vietnam).

Each topic contains line drawings to illustrate key points. These are drawn during the workshop itself, and participants are asked to check the drawings for accuracy and ease of understanding.

The publication contains only relevant and practical information. It is not a vehicle for lengthy literature reviews or for presentation of unnecessarily detailed data. Whenever possible, it provides technological options that show more than one way of doing the same thing.

Selected workshops and resulting publications, 1994–96

- Agriculture in the tidal swamps of Indonesia (1996)
- Ethnoveterinary medicine in Kenya (1996)
- Agriculture and natural resource management in the uplands of northern Vietnam (3 workshops, 1995–1996)
- Low external-input rice production in the Philippines (1995)
- Ethnoveterinary medicine in Asia (1995)
- Upland resource management in SE Asia (1994)
- Recording and use of indigenous knowledge in development (1994)
- Agroforestry in Ghana (1994)
- Biodiversity of the Western Ghats, India (1994)
- Family planning in Ethiopia (1994)