Face-to-Face Thematic Workshops: Guiding Principles and Checklist v 20130101

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This document is a result of periodic discussions within the Advisory Services Department of HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation on the subject of thematic Face-to-Face (f2f) workshops. These discussions are aimed at:

- gaining a better understanding of the potential added value of such workshops
- reflecting on experiences with previous Helvetas thematic f2f workshops
- developing a f2f thematic workshop concept which can point to and promote good practices that can be consistently applied

These dialogues are consolidated here, starting with the rationale for thematic f2f workshops, which follows two main threads: *Desired Outcomes*, and; *Essentials of Planning & Implementation*.

Desired Outcomes[1]

Although every workshop has its own goals and areas of emphasis, f2f workshops focused on a specific development topic often include a number of key 'generic' expected outcomes or benefits that should apply most of the time. These can be divided into two broad types: Human/Institutional, and; Programmatic/Technical. They are summarized in the table below. (**NOTE**: This guide is oriented towards f2f workshops *within* an organisation, but the majority of suggestions and tools are also applicable to a multistakeholder workshop)

Desired Human/Institutional Benefits	Desired Programmatic/Technical Benefits
Build committed staff & partners	Common & shared understanding of a topic
Find areas for future collaboration	New insights -> Making changes -> Better results
Jointly explore new ideas	Learn/develop new approaches, tools
Get to know each other/build trust	Combine hands-on & academic knowledge
Network	Reflect on own practices 'from a distance'
	Identify knowledge gaps

Thus, planning and implementation of all workshops should be anchored on *balancing the needs of* direct and indirect *participants* – the latter being those who cannot attend but are interested in the proceedings and/or are engaged in follow-up activities – *with the needs of those responsible for organising the workshop*. Happily, these needs are often complementary and mutually reinforcing.

However, too much emphasis on participant experiences alone runs the risk of missing an opportunity to strengthen institutional competence and learning around programmatic topics, while too much emphasis

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[1] Note: although outcomes are the main emphasis, many workshops will also have associated desired outputs (see following section, 'Essentials of Planning & Implementation' for further reference to outputs).

on the program/technical side runs an equal risk of having the workshop driven too much by content and thereby not creating an appropriate process to benefit from the breadth and depth of experience that the variety of workshop participants bring to the event.

Essentials of Planning & Implementation

Just as the desired outcomes listed above are oriented to the combined goals of: ***supporting networking, collaboration and shared learning*** among participants, and; ***consolidating or improving thematic competencies and practices***, so planning and implementation should be similarly focused on creating the conditions for these two sets of benefits to be realized.

With this in mind, we can create a **checklist** based on a set of principles which should be applied to thematic workshops. They can be divided into three categories:

- ***Framework Principles*** – the basic organising or generic principles which would apply to any workshop
- ***Engagement Principles*** – those oriented to ensuring high levels of participation and ownership on the part of participants
- ***Institutional/Programmatic Principles*** – geared towards maximizing added thematic value

Specific action items are listed under each principle in the checklist. Note that in general action items in the same row are complementary:

Framework Principles		Engagement Principles		Institutional/Programmatic Principles	
Create representative planning team				Develop criteria for participation	
Identify appropriate facilitator		Design a participatory planning process		Determine if partners/resource persons should be engaged	
		Employ existing or create new online space for collaborative planning			
Articulate desired outcomes		Engage participants in defining desired outcomes and how they should link to ongoing work		Identify specific thematic challenges/opportunities to be addressed	
				Specify the learning element	
Specify intended inputs & outputs		Use methodology(ies) that encourage reflection and small group discussion			
Identify language issues and requirements					
Plan a workshop evaluation process				Clearly specify decision- and action-related aspects	
Plan post-workshop activity		Use online space for follow-up and sharing of outputs		Clearly specify decision- and action-related aspects	
		Encourage feed of outputs to other relevant spaces (RSS)			

Timeline of Activities (Phases): Decision → Preparation

Annex 1: Checklists

As indicated by the arrow beside the checklist on the *essentials of planning and implementation*, the workshop organisation process can be divided into several phases. Of course what needs to be done in each phase depends very much on the **context** of the f2f, for example the objective of the event, the number of participants and their background. Also, the available **resources** will determine to a large extent the preparation process and the **outputs and outcomes** of a workshop. It goes without saying that the following checklists should be **adapted to each context**: Some people may follow the checklist step by step, others will only find parts of it useful.

The main phases that can be found in most *Face-to-Face Thematic Workshops* are:
1) Decision Phase
2) Preparation Phase
3) Actual Event and After the Event

1. Decision Phase

In this phase the emphasis is on **defining the basic framework of the event**: objectives, expectations and involved people. The checklist should therefore provide **guidance** for organisers of a *f2f thematic workshop* on important issues to consider. The tasks are listed in **chronological** order and should be checked in such a sequence (although there may be variations).

Besides specifying tasks to be carried out in this phase, the checklist includes a column to note who has to be involved in the decision and what was decided. Especially if the timeframe for taking a decision is short, it could be useful to set clear deadlines for the completion of each task.

Task	Discussion among...	Decision/Agreement	Deadline
Determine who is responsible for the workshop/process (has the lead)			
Determine who is responsible for **administrative work** (contracts, logistics), **i.e. secretariat**			
Identify the **facilitator**(s)			
Determine **objectives** of the f2f including expected outputs & outcomes			
Place of the workshop in an overall process, defining the possible **follow up** after the event			
Think about possible venues considering specific requirements, e.g. appropriate for field trips			
Online space: existing platforms to use or need to design something new?			
Identify **registration procedure, selection criteria for participants,** engagement of **partners**			
Determine whether **resource persons or speakers** should be invited?			
Agree on the **level of formality** of the event, e.g. kind of opening/closing			
Decide if there should be **post workshop activities**			

Note: If the workshop is organised by a **steering group or committee**, it might make sense to add a column to the far right of the checklist to indicate who is responsible for ensuring that each task is completed.

Ideally, a decision is also taken during this phase regarding the **form of reporting** at the f2f event. Depending on your context, you might foresee a **formal, traditional written report** or something more participatory such as **social reporting**. In the decision phase, it is important to weigh both options, also considering the cost implications, the context of the workshop and how the reporting might fit with the further development of your (thematic) area.

Advantages of Social Reporting

Social Reporting is an approach to reporting on f2f workshops which came from a desire to make the reporting on workshops more **participatory, immediate, relevant and accessible**. Rather than outsourcing reporting to a consultant or trying to do it yourself as workshop owner, organising social reporting gives a voice to workshop participants.

Even though all participants of a f2f event can contribute to the reporting exercise, to keep things practical, the bulk of the work is usually left to a group of pre-determined volunteers. As it makes use of **social networking** technologies, the reporting can be done using a variety of complementary tools such as **film, text, photos, audio, power point presentations** - usually made available on one easily accessible platform such as a **blog**.

Especially if your workshop is held in the context of a group of people working in the same thematic area, for example in **Communities of Practice** (COPs), it might make sense to use social reporting to allow all participants to report on the event as they see it. As most of the reporting work is done during the workshop, this is a neat way of capturing arising ideas, thoughts, needs, expectations as well as decisions and indications for potential further steps as they come up (rather than putting a formal back to office report together back at the office where a pile of work has accumulated during the absence of workshop participants). Besides encouraging **interaction**, deeper discussions, **ownership** and **learning** during and after the event, it also opens the f2f to a **wider audience**, i.e. interested people who could not physically be at the event.

Also, social reporting can contribute to **organisational learning** as each time it is done, further people within the organisation acquire or deepen the necessary skills. In most cases social reporting also has a positive cost-benefit relation. Below are some links to examples of social reporting as well as further food for thought:

> [SDC Lessons on Social Reporting](#)

> Examples of a Social Reporting Blog: [SDC DLGN network f2f](#) and the [APC Networking and Learning Forum](#)

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2. Preparation Phase

In this phase once again not all tasks may be relevant for your case. One important element, however, is a clear division of labour, for example between a national program office and the Head Office of an organisation or between administrative/support staff and the workshop owner. If the workshop owner does not facilitate the workshop, coordination between him/her and the facilitator(s) regarding the agenda and even reporting is very important. Depending on the type of workshop, external support might be required to fulfil reporting requirements or social reporting may be more appropriate.

The checklist below can be followed in a **chronological** order. For the tasks on a **grey** background you will find a **template** that you can use (and modify according to your needs) in annex 2. Further **recommendations** are provided in annex 3 on the tasks on a **yellow** background.

Task	Responsible	Deadline	Comments
Prepare a **management list** indicating the division of labour (expected results and deadlines) of those involved in the preparation of the event			
Prepare and send **workshop announcement/invitation email** to participants, including: 1) Workshop Concept 2) Registration Form			
Elaborate **draft agenda** (and initiate discussions on reporting)			
Contract speakers, facilitators, resource persons and other **external support** (if required)			
Prepare **participants' list** according to returned registration forms			
Finalise offer with venue regarding accommodation and meeting rooms			
Prepare a **confirmation/information email** for participants (possibly including personalised **invitation letters**)			
Finalise food plan according to agenda and communicate timing to venue: 1) Welcome drink?; 2) 1st Coffee/tea break; 3) Lunch; 4) 2nd Coffee/tea break; 5) Dinner? Make sure to indicate special meal requirements			
Define content of **moderators kit** (together with facilitator): pin boards, flipcharts, cards, markers, masking tape, photocopies, (video) camera(s), sticky dots, blue tack, etc.			
Liaise with venue regarding **1) technical material**: cables, beamers computers, wireless microphones, booths for interpreters 2) **meeting room requirements**: main meeting room and # of rooms for break out groups ALSO whether internet access is needed in all rooms and whether walls can be used 3) **accommodation**: confirm who is staying overnight for how long, airport transfer, etc.			
Make preparations for the **reporting** on the event			
Prepare **online space**, discussion list or dgroups list and schedule discussions/**timing for sending out information**			
Think about potential involvement of the **media** and implications			

If you decided to go for a traditional **report** of the workshop, make sure you to designate a reporter and discuss your expectations towards the reporting process as well as the final report. If you choose to do social reporting, have a look at the blue box below.

To keep in mind regarding social reporting in the planning phase:

If you decide to go for social reporting on a blog, make sure to :
- **set up the blog/wiki/other site in advance** and **define the settings & structure** according to your needs, i.e. create accounts for all/selected participants; If participants have to register, make sure they do so before the event so you can offer support as required
- if you decide to use **videos**, make sure the equipment is available and you have an online account (e.g, on youtube or bliptv) to which you can upload the videos; same goes for pictures, (eg. flickr, picasa)
- make sure the website **links** up to existing online platforms your participants might be using and agree on a **tag** for the event so everything posted during the f2f can be found easily
- make a **management list** (see general template in Annex 2) and a clear division of labour; for this nominating a coordinator for social reporting can be extremely useful
- ensure that you have enough **resources** (participants and, if necessary, external support) to cover all media (film, pictures, text, etc.) and content you want; defining a **coordinator** for social reporting can is useful
- clarify what sessions or thematic aspects must be covered so that the social reporting support team has a clear idea of the importance of different **content** from the point of view of the workshop owner (to complement the voice of participants)
- plan a **briefing meeting** with a core group of volunteers for social reporting the day before the actual f2f starts. In order to pre-define this core group of 4-10 people depending on the size of the event, you may make a call for volunteers via email a couple of weeks before the event. In this meeting you can clarify the objectives of the social reporting, manage expectations and do the planning of the week to make sure that all sessions are somehow documented/covered.
- in coordination with the facilitator(s), explore the possibility of **allocating time for social reporting in the workshop programme** or at least do not overload the agenda so volunteers have time for preparing and uploading their contributions.
- organise a **room and equipment** (computers, wireless internet, cameras, headphones, speakers, adaptors, etc.) for participants to use for social reporting

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3. Actual Event and After the Event

In most cases it makes sense to have the workshop owner and facilitator(s) arrive at the venue one or two days in advance, in order to have enough time to sort out issues that come up at the last minute and make sure the meeting rooms are adequate, the equipment works (e.g. beamer/projector, microphones, equipment for interpretation, etc.) and the material is ready. The following things may want to be checked on the **day before the workshop**:

Task	Responsible	Remarks
Check whether necessary **equipment** is available and arranged: - beamer/projector and extension cables - laptop - memory sticks/power point presentations ready - internet connection (is wireless available?) - enough pin boards, flipcharts, etc. - moderators kit complete - photo / video camera(s) ready		
Check whether all **arrangements** with venue are confirmed and clear: - welcome drink - coffee/tea break(s) - lunch - confirm timing		
Check that things are clear with everyone involved in the **organisation** whether: - facilitator(s) - speakers/resource persons - interpreters/translators - administrative/support staff - responsible for reporting		

What happens **during** the event cannot be appropriately steered with checklists, although there are several important aspects to have in mind when doing social reporting.

To keep in mind regarding social reporting during the f2f:

During the event the social reporting coordinator and mostly the volunteers will be busy collecting and creating different information objects. The coordinator of the exercise should make sure that:

- **participants are able to post** what they want to (be available to support them)
- **all workshop documents** such as power point presentations, reference documents mentioned, etc. are **added** to the website and tagged correctly
- the space with the **agenda is updated** and each session (panel, group discussions, etc) is linked to the relevant documents and profiles of speakers (if profiles are available)
- **support** is provided to those producing more challenging outputs such as **short films** (for a checklist for video journalists, click here)
- **promote** the platform during the event, i.e. send the link to people who could not participate and organise public viewings of the event during breaks, lunch or in the morning as a wrap up of the previous day

After the f2f event, you might want to do the following:

Task	Responsible	Remarks
Set a date for the After Action Review (or other evaluation process) with the steering group of the event?		
Make sure **payments** are made		
Make sure **reporting** is completed, approved, disseminated		
Carry out defined post-workshop activities		

Regarding reporting, if you decided to produce a traditional written report, it might be useful to organise a de-briefing with the person in charge of writing the report. In the case of social reporting see below.

> **To keep in mind after the f2f regarding social reporting:**
>
> Usually, blogs are used for social reporting, as they display the added content in a chronological order which makes sense in the context of reporting on f2f events. If you use a blog, it might make sense to **re-structure** the content after the event so people who were not at the workshop can also navigate it easily.
>
> Also, the platform should be used by the workshop owner for any **follow up** with participants as well as by all participants for their back to office (and other) **reporting** of the workshop.

Annex 2: Templates

A. Management List

Deadline	Activity/Task/Decision	Person responsible	Comments

Note: Depending on the number of people involved, it might make sense to designate a person who is overall responsible to ensure that all tasks are completed on time.

B. Invitation

Your invitation could include some information on the **concept for the f2f** (why it is important) and a **registration form**.

Regarding the **concept**, depending yet again on your context, you might want to send a short email covering the following points or attach a slightly longer document with more detail:
a) Background (reason for workshop),
b) Objectives
c) Expected outputs/results
d) Date and venue
e) Expected participants
f) Language(s)
g) Organisation: basic information on logistical aspects

A **registration form** might be in one or several **languages** and can be of different lengths. It may be attached as a **document** to the invitation email or the email might include a link to an **online** survey.

The box on the right shows what such an online registration may look like. The tool used is called SurveyMonkey.

The **advantage** of doing the registration online is that all the information is collected in one place and you (or your colleagues from the administrative/support team) do not have to manually compile the registration information.

The **disadvantage** is that you need to create an account with an appropriate online service and that all potential participants need a relatively good internet connection to complete the online registration.

Whether you do an online survey or a traditional one, you will have different information requirements depending on whether you will assist participants in organising visas or you will leave this to the participants. If you might need to **request visa related information** you can use the template below:

Title of the Workshop
Place, Date

*Surname / *Nom de famille*	
*Name / *Prénom*	
Date of birth / *Date de naissance*	
Nationality / *Nationalité*	
Passport No. / *Numéro du passeport*	
Date of expiry / *validité jusqu' au*	
Profession and function / *Profession et fonction*	
Organisation	
Address of organisation / *Adresse de l'organisation*	
City / Country / *Ville / Pays*	

* As written in passport / selon le passeport

Meals (mark with X, *cocher*):

- [ ] I do not have special dietary restrictions /*Je n'ai pas de restrictions alimentaires*

- [ ] I prefer vegetarian food / *Je préfère des répas vegetariens*

- [ ] Other diet, namely / *D'autres restrictions alimentaires à savoir*……………….............……

Your main fields of interest in the workshop (what do you want to learn?) *Quel est votre intérêt pour l'atelier / Ce que vous voulez apprendre pendant l'atelier?*

Your main fields of expertise for the workshop (what can you contribute?) *Ce que vous pouvez contribuer à l'atelier?*

For further information please contact: NAME of THE WORKSHOP OWNER or SECRETARIAT
Si vous avez des questions, veuillez contacter: NOM du responsable de l'atélier ou Secretariat

Please send registration form by e-mail to email address with cc to secretariat/support staff**, DEADLINE**

Depending on the cultural background of your participants, they might be hesitant to provide you with such personal information as requested in the form below. Consequently, it is important to point out why you need this information and that it will be treated confidential.

Another option is to only send a short version of the template above, deleting the rows marked in purple. However, this implies that you will have to add the question "Do you need assistance with getting a visa?" and follow up with those people who need a visa in a second individualised step.

C. Draft Agenda

the agenda will look different depending on the event and the facilitator,. A draft agenda usually includes an indication of **time**: either general (e.g. morning, afternoon) or more specific. Very often draft agendas do not include exact times in order to keep a certain flexibility to adapt the programme according to needs. The description of **activities** remains rather general and can also indicate the objective of a session while the **session type** should give an indication on the size of the group carrying out the activity, i.e. whether it is plenary or in small groups. The next element could also be called **responsible**, indicating who is in charge of a particular session, for example a guest speaker or facilitated by the facilitator. The **material**'s column can be completed with instruments or material that are needed for a particular session, e.g. print outs, beamer, cards, pin board, but depending on the context could also be used to indicate expected interpretation or prior translation needs.

TIME	ACTIVITY	SESSION TYPE	SPEAKER(S)/ FACILITATOR(S)	MATERIAL

Note: this draft agenda may be further adapted according to the needs of a facilitators and organising committee who might want to add further columns for comments or reporting requirements.

D. Participants' List

A participants list may contain a lot of detail or just basic information - this again depends on the context. Below is one example of a very complete registration list including visa related information.

To this list, further columns to capture **arrival and departure times of participants, transfer needs** etc. could be added (or this information could be kept on a separate list).

Annex 3: Further Information & Recommendations

A. Confirmation / Information Email

Again, depending on the context and division of labour, this email might be split into several emails. It could:
1) contain an **official invitation letter*** if participants are expected to organise their own visas and flights, or
2) simply confirm that the information provided by a participant was well received

In any case it will most probably indicate the **further logistical steps to be taken**. An information email usually contains a dossier or **compilation of basic logistical information** (e.g. venue, how to get there, map of town, background documents on the country, projects that will be visited, event).

An information email may also include information on **reporting requirements** and make a call for volunteers for social reporting.

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* Basic Information that must be included in an Invitation Letter (for Visas):

We hereby confirm that *Name of Organisation) in *City/Country) is inviting NAME OF PARTICIPANT, BIRTHDATE, NATIONALITY, PASSPORT NUMBER, CURRENT ADDRESS, FUNCTION *to attend a workshop on TITLE, which will be held from DATE at PLACE.*

The objective of the workshop is ...

Optional*: We confirm that (Name of Organisation) is sponsoring the travel to WORKSHOP COUNTRY and back to HOME COUNTRY and shall cover all expenses (accommodation, subsistence, travelling) during the stay of NAME OF PARTICIPANT*

B. Recommendations for Facilitators regarding Material and Venue

To ensure that the workshop process is as smooth as possible, it is important that the workshop owner or steering committee decide who will be the workshop facilitator(s) early into the planning stage. Also, the facilitator should be consulted regarding the meeting room requirements and the materials that need to be in place in order to facilitate the workshop.

If you are facilitating the workshop yourself or the facilitator does not approach you regarding these issues, don't forget to inquire about:
1) **Meeting Room**:
   o can the furniture be moved?
   o are we allowed to hang things on the wall?
   o are there any impediments to having several small breakout groups working in the same room or do we need more rooms?
   o is it set up for the use of a beamer? can we screen films or is it too bright (particularly important if your doing social reporting)
   o are the acoustics alright or are (wireless) microphones required?
2) **Material**:
   o can the venue provide good quality wireless microphones, beamers, computers, booths for interpreters, etc.
   o can the venue provide a moderators kit and enough flipcharts and pin boards?
   o does the moderators kit include masking tape, blue tack, enough cards, markers, sticky dots, etc.?