



## Training in Facilitating Critical Reflection in/of Innovation Processes

DITSL, 27 & 28 June, 2017.



Within the frame of Trans-SEC's conflict prevention and management (CPM) system, a training course on "**Facilitating Critical Reflection in/of Innovation Processes**" took place at the German Institute for Tropical and Subtropical Agriculture (DITSL) on 27th and 28th June, 2017. The training was conducted by Dirk Sprenger for DITSL's Trans-SEC members (project leader, postdoctoral scientist, previous MSc student and two current research associate interns) and RELOAD research group members, including a total of 14 participants.

With DITSL's two research associates currently preparing for fieldwork with Trans-SEC farmer groups in Tanzania- on the topic of critical reflection on and sharing of innovation processes- this training was designed to focus on the Trans-SEC case study experiences to offer tailored coaching for the field team, as well as useful training for the other participants. Through engagement with the pending task and the groups' collective experience with facilitation of innovation processes, we discussed case-specific techniques for facilitating reflection and enhancing „genuine“ participation. The two-day training was framed by a series of pre-prepared questions, which had been put to the trainer by the Trans-SEC field team (see page 2). Moreover, the initial workshop began with sharing a detailed overview of the Trans-SEC field context and forthcoming tasks, which was provided by the research team.

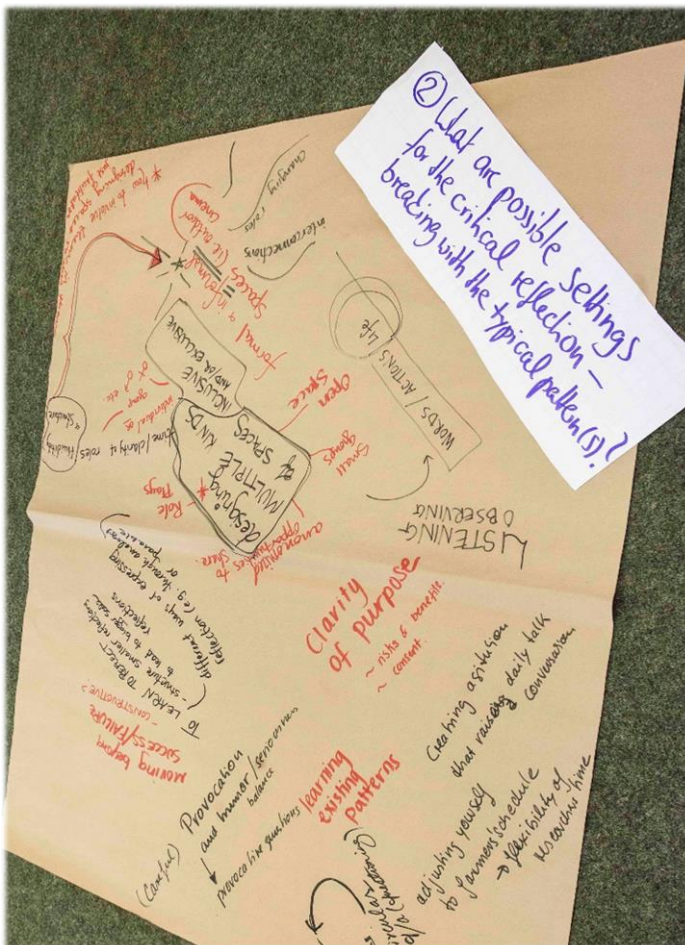


# Trans-SEC

Innovating Strategies to safeguard Food Security using Technology and Knowledge Transfer

Following introductions, we began with a role play to reflect on questions of farmer motivation (intrinsic and extrinsic). The trainer then encouraged personal reflexivity, to consider how the role play articulated projections of our own fears concerning what participants (farmers) may think about us and what might be motivating them.

Three of the core guiding questions were then collectively addressed using the World Café method (photo below). Three tables formed the focus for small group discussions to explore the issues of: enhancing farmer motivation; techniques for sustained engagement, and; creating suitable settings for critical reflection. Valuable ideas emerged such as the importance of “irritating the pattern” of normal research/project relationships; shaping interactive, communicative spaces, and; flexibility on the part of the outside researcher. In the afternoon, more of the guiding questions were addressed through collective discussion.



## Guiding questions

When people polarize to a different opinion and if the issue becomes serious, how are such situations dealt with so that the facilitation/activity can continue in a peaceful manner?

In a situation when people are shy to speak or reflect upon their experiences before the crowd, how can facilitator approach in few different ways so that the people can speak up? How to facilitate group participation with dominant speakers. How to best get input from quieter participants?

Tips on creating an environment where everyone feels at ease to speak?

In a mixed group of different ages, gender and power structures, what type of activities can be carried out so that none in the group feel left out?

Any good techniques to keep people interested in the facilitation/activities?

How to avoid overly positive feedback from participants? How to encourage honest and critical comments? (especially given the monetary donor-recipient relation in Trans-SEC that is implicit)

Relatedly, how to give other people negative feedback without causing offence?

How to encourage people to be reflexive? ...to step back and see the bigger picture and the part oneself has played in it, and to think about (without encouraging regret/blame/guilt) how one could have done something better/different?

How to accurately recall and reflect on an experience/process that has spanned over several years?





The following day began with a Flashlight session to recall and reflect upon what had been learnt on the first day. A key topic for the day emerged through this reflection: the problem of dependence on a translator. The setting of research activities was also highlighted as a key point for further discussion.

In buzz groups (photo above), we then shared past facilitation experiences of tension within groups. We talked about examples of when there had been tension in a group and if appropriate, what we had done as facilitators to address/change the situation. In the full group circle, one example was then shared and used for a role play exercise. In the centre, six participants were given roles based on the actual example: group leaders, group members and facilitator. We then acted out the scenario, with observers sitting in an outer circle (photo below).



A key learning that emerged at this stage was the importance of clearly understanding and communicating the purpose and objectives of a workshop. The maximization of self-determination of participants in such contexts was emphasized as important. Secondly, we discussed the importance of avoiding conflict escalation patterns, through careful use of language (e.g. talking from the self), and reframing and filtering techniques (to avoid repeating personalized blaming language) on the part of the facilitator. The central importance of reflecting on one's own role and mandate, as a facilitator, was also discussed: "do no harm" being the principal rule.

A core guiding question concerning how to avoid blame and fear of blame in the context of critical reflection was triggered. Here, the use of framing experience in terms of needs and roles, rather than



in personal ways, was highlighted. Moreover, looking at processes and actions, rather than “actors” was highlighted as a useful technique. In later, post-workshop discussions, we also continued to discuss this topic in the light of appreciative enquiry techniques (Ghaye et al. 2008: Participatory and appreciative action and reflection (PAAR)).

The final part of the workshop was conducted in full circle, covering techniques for enhancing participation. The use of “talking sticks” and ground rules, and the importance of considering the space and setting of interaction were highlighted. We also focused on how to give feedback, looking at the functionality of feedback and the importance of thinking and talking in terms of roles rather than in terms of individual preferences. Integrating learning and reflection to focus on the future rather than the past was also discussed as a good strategy for moving forward with groups and avoiding negativity.

We concluded the meeting with expressions of gratitude to the trainer and funders for enabling this valuable workshop to take place.

Pamela Ngwenya, 17.07.17.

Photos by Deepak Tolange.