

THE WRITESHOP



Do you have lots of scattered information

about your activities?



Is the information recorded in formats that no one is reading?

- Is the information stored in the memory of your staff? What happens when the staff leave the organization?
- Do you need to develop simple extension material and all you have are research reports written in technical jargon that ignores useful indigenous knowledge?
- **Are you coordinating a network of partners who are involved in similar activities; the partners would like to learn from each other. There is lots of information available but putting it together is**

a **big** task.



The information exists mainly in people's heads, but it is needed on paper.

For many of us, there is difficulty in documenting and sharing information about innovative practices, achievements and impact of our work on the people we work with. We can appreciate that:

- No single person knows everything on a subject. Different people can contribute part of the information, and they may have different ideas about the subject.
- The information needs to be checked by several people - other experts, scientists, potential users - before it can be published.

A solution: The writeshop

A "writeshop" is an intensive, participatory workshop that aims to produce some kind of written output. This may be a set of extension brochures, a bound book, set of leaflets, or a training manual. Participants may include scientists, researchers, government personnel, teachers, NGO staff, extension agents, farmers and other local people: anyone who has, in one way or another, been involved in the experiences to be documented. A team of facilitators, editors, layout designers, artists and logistics staff assists these participants.





The writeshop process was pioneered by the International Institute of Rural Reconstruction and has been adapted by several organizations for reflection, learning and documentation. Through this approach, IIRR has produced more than 50 user-friendly manuals, tool kits, field guides, posters, flyers, training modules, etc.

The process

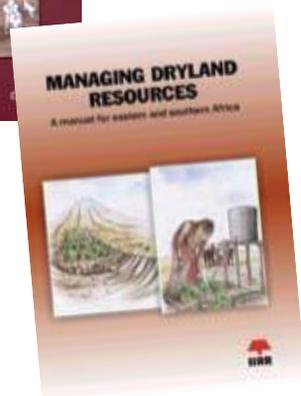
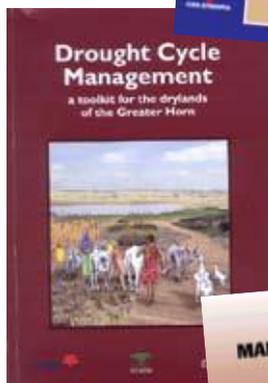
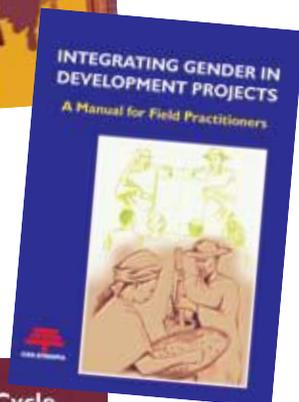
The process may vary depending on the identified need and time available

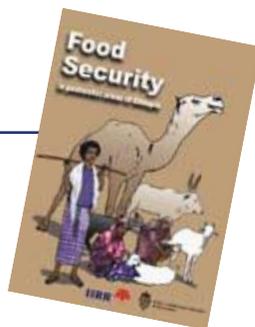
Formation of a steering committee, task force or planning group, some months before the actual writeshop.

Tasks

- develop a guide for the publication
- identify the audience, objectives, subject area,
- list potential topics within the broad subject area
- develop guidelines for authors, and invites “specialists” to write a first draft on a certain topic
- *Consultative meeting.* Held in the region or target country to identify/verify themes, organizations with relevant experience
- *Preparatory workshop.* Held to consolidate the ideas before the workshop

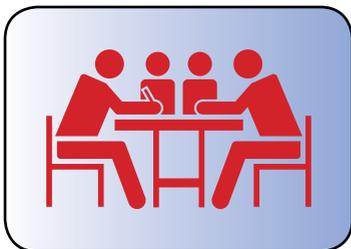
A secretariat follows up on the progress of each participant and logistics for the event.





During the writeshop

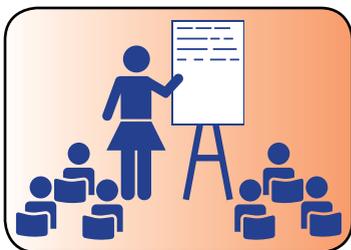
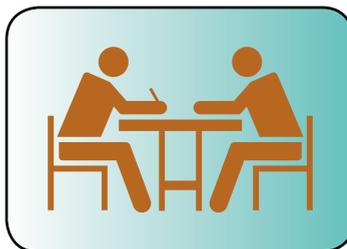
Early in the writeshop, the participants brainstorm ideas for additional topics to be included in the publication.



- so that it fits the end product and is appropriate for the target audience.

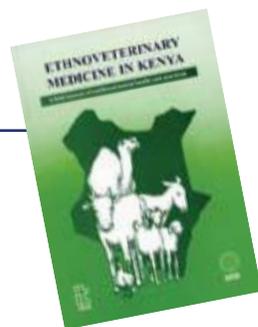
After presentation, each presenter will talk to an editor, who has also been taking notes of the discussion. The editor helps to revise and edit the draft and to ask for illustrations, usually line drawings from one of the artists, to accompany the text.

These new topics are given to knowledgeable participants for development and presentation during the writeshop. During the writeshop itself, each participant presents the first draft of his or her paper. The other participants have a chance to give comments on the draft and suggest revisions.



The facilitator allows as much discussion as possible so that everyone can contribute his or her own knowledge on the topic. The aim is not to criticize the manuscript, but to improve it, add to it - and often to remove unnecessary information

The edited text and the illustrations then go for layout in preparation of the second draft. The revised drafts of each participant are then presented again and the audience can provide comments and suggestions for a second time. After this series of presentations, an editor and artist(s) again help to revise the drafts. Towards the end of the writeshop. It may be possible to make this third draft available to participants for final comments and revisions. The final version, therefore, can be completed, printed and distributed soon after the writeshop.



- Preparation
 - Raise funds
 - Identify topic
 - Select resource persons
 - Assign Topics
- Prepare Logistics

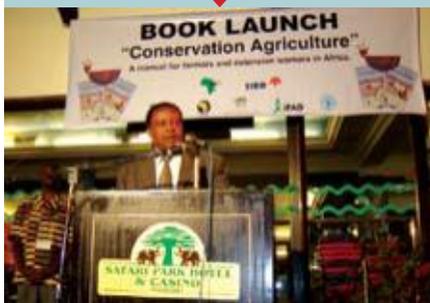
Draft 1
Present → Critique → Revise

Draft 2
Present → Critique → Revise

Draft 3
Comments

Final Revisions / Editing

Printing



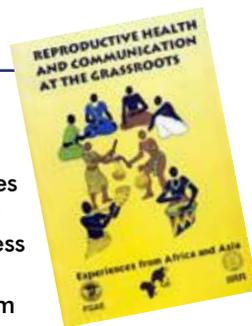
Distribute

Coordination and facilitation

The number of people needed to coordinate and facilitate a writeshop depends on the number of participants and size of manuscripts to be processed. For a small writeshop with 20 participants, one facilitator, an editor, an artist and someone to take care of logistics may be enough. A skilled facilitator is vital however. He or she must be able to guide the participants and manage the discussions.

The facilitator needs to have a good understanding of the subject area and a clear idea of the information required for the final publication. Tact is important: some authors may resent seeing a manuscript over which they have sweated for many hours being torn apart by their fellow participants or the editor.

A skilled editor (or editors) is just as important. The editor works with authors, and guides them in rewriting their drafts. Very often an editor will take over responsibility for rewriting the draft based on information provided by the authors. Tact and ability is vital to organize and structure information for the target audience.



Advantages of the Writeshop

Flexibility. The Writeshop is a flexible process that engages various levels of experts under one roof to produce simple user-friendly materials in a short period of time. The process can be modified and adapted to suit individual situations and produce various products. Writeshops have lasted from 3 days to 12 days in length, tackling from 10 to more than 100 manuscripts, and with between 15 and 80 participants. The method can also be adapted for use at the field level where there may not be any skilled operators or a reliable electricity supply.

Thorough review. The repeated presentations, comments and revision of drafts allow for papers to be reviewed and revised thoroughly.

New ideas generated.

The process also allows for new topics to be developed during the writeshop, and topics to be combined, dropped or split into parts. Participants may write examples or brief stories that illustrate a particular point that can be included in a larger chapter. They can also be asked to gather additional information about techniques or processes, resource organisations or reference materials that might enrich the content of the final product.



Cross cultural experiences shared. Writeshops have been conducted in many languages, and it is possible to conduct a single writeshop in several languages: using interpreters.

Multiple contributions. The process of writing, illustrating, reviewing and revising alone, can be long and dull. Writeshops can speed up and improve this process. Having the resource people, editors, artists and other documentation tools together at the same time and place makes this possible. It also allows for all participants' contributions to be included, 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. Members of the intended audience or readers (e.g., teachers, farmers and extension personnel) can help pre-test the text and illustrations during the writeshop. In essence, each manuscript is reviewed dozens of times by key resource people, all within the same short period of time.

Multiple products. The writeshop is designed to suit the needs of clients. It has helped organizations to simplify scientific papers, produce series of flyers (CTA), produced training modules (UNICEF), helped generate position paper (CIDSE), field guide (FAO), cases compilation (Cordaid, SNV) and several books and manuals for different organizations. Other products such as; CDs, policy briefs, flyers, audio cassettes can be developed once the base material has been put together.

When is a writeshop appropriate?

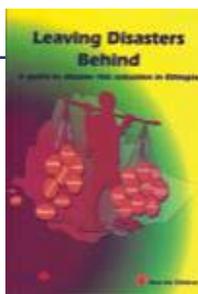
Writeshops are suitable for documenting practical illustrated information, in simple language, where several people with different knowledge, skills and experiences bring in different aspects of the given subject.

The writeshop approach is a very intensive process, making considerable demands on participants and staff. Writeshops can be expensive, especially if it is necessary



to cover food and lodging, airfares and daily allowances. But unlike the usual workshops, participants in the writeshop produce tangible outputs they can go home with. The approach enhances networking and writing skills of everyone involved in the process.

When considering whether to plan a writeshop or use more conventional methods, the benefits of the writeshop approach must be weighed against these limitations.



Users and Adapters of the Writeshop Process	
CTA	Public awareness 13 flyers for promoting agricultural commodities
Cordaid	Drought Cycle Management: Building Resilience to Climate Change
Royal Norwegian Embassy	Food Security in Pastoralist Regions of Ethiopia
UNICEF	training modules
RELMA/ ICRAF	Land use in Ethiopia, Dairy in Tanzania
ITDG	Ethno veterinary Practices in Kenya, other publications
CIDSE	Position paper for AID Effectiveness for Donor Groups
ACT	Conservation Agriculture Manual Posters
Pastoralist Forum Ethiopia	Land use and Land Tenure in Ethiopia (in progress)
Royal Tropical Institute	Chain Empowerment: Linking African Farmers to Markets
Sustainet/GTZ	Sustainable Agriculture Cases in India & Eastern Africa
Farm Africa	M&E Manual for Ethiopia
Organizations that Supported IIRR Publications using the Writeshop Process in Africa	
• IFAD	• FAO
• RELMA/ICRAF	• Ford Foundation
• Cordaid	• Royal Netherlands Embassy
• Oxfam-Novib	• ICCO
• EU	• CTA
• Royal Norwegian Embassy	• GTZ
• DFID	• Bilance

IIRR offers support to organizations to:

• Document best practices in your project or program, to record field based information that is currently not available in print in a user friendly manner • Project or program evaluation, base line survey, gender or equality assessment • Capacity assessment for your partners or staff • Offer training courses in the following areas: Community Managed Disaster Risk Reduction, Participatory Planning Monitoring And Evaluation, Organization Development & Strategic Management, Public Awareness For Strategic Communication, Gender & Organization Development, Training of trainers, NGO leadership and Management, Resource mobilization and many more • Organize or facilitate an international, regional or local meeting, workshop or conference • Many other activities that require external support.

Further information on IIRR and its operations can be obtained from the website www.iirr.org or by contacting: The Regional Director, Africa Regional Center, International Institute of Rural Reconstruction. P. O. Box 66873-00800 Westlands, Nairobi, Kenya. Tel: (+254-20) 444-0991/2610 Fax: (+254-20) 444-8148 E-mail: admin@iirr-africa.org