



**WORKING WITH
COFFEE
PROMOTERS**

A methodology to get
better results

Solidaridad

Solidaridad

WORKING WITH COFFEE PROMOTERS **“A methodology to get better results”**

Carlos Hernando Isaza Ramirez
Author

Carrie Hibbard
Translation and proofreading

Mauricio Galvis Fernández
Design and layout

Jaime Pazos
Illustrations

ISBN: 978-90-70526-30-6
2014



Creative Commons License
Attribution+NonCommercial+NoDerivatives 3.0 Unported
http://www.creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/deed.es_ES

www.solidaridadnetwork.org

CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION	4
2	OBJECTIVES	5
3	LET'S START WITH SOME DEFINITIONS	6
4	PROFILE OF THE COFFEE PROMOTER	9
	Required skills and traits	9
	Characteristics of the coffee farm the promoter lives on (as owner or employee)	10
5	PRINCIPLES FOR WORKING WITH COFFEE PROMOTERS	11
6	WHAT SHOULD BE THE ROLE OF THE TECHNICIAN OR FACILITATOR?	15
7	STEPS FOR TRAINING PROMOTERS	17
8	STRUCTURE OF THE TRAINING SESSIONS	20

1

INTRODUCTION

As a development organization, Solidaridad Foundation is convinced that dignified and sustainable commerce is the best tool to combat structural poverty; a secure income is the basis for a dignified existence. Solidaridad works with sustainable production chains, from the earliest stages of production all the way up to the final consumer, in order for producers in developing countries to improve their professional business management skills.

The first step for coffee producers to be successful with their crops is for their farm to produce a good quality product and to maintain good productivity levels. In order to achieve this, they must implement opportune and adequate cultivation practices that will ensure good growing conditions for the plants on their farms.

Despite the abundance of academic research and recommendations made for sustainable production of coffee crops, however, we find on many occasions that the level of adoption of these suggestions in the actual fields is low.

Experiences show that producers are often reluctant to adopt new crop management practices, and even more if this advice comes from outside agents.

For some producers it's easier to believe what their neighbor says or does and in the techniques that have worked for other producers on their farms. For this reason, the **COFFEE PROMOTERS** project seeks to leverage the knowledge and skills of the producers themselves, so that with the support of institutions and technical assistants we may carry out training activities that will have a greater impact on the adoption of technologies and practices that aim to achieve the sustainability of producers and their farms.

Solidaridad Foundation understands that when producers see cultivation practices on neighboring farms that generate good results, with better production and lower costs, they tend to adopt them more quickly and easily. We are also aware of the need to fortify the producers' ability to solve the problems they face, and that one of the most successful strategies of showing the effectiveness of certain agricultural techniques is by demonstrating them.

This document provides guidelines for working with Coffee Promoters, which are applied in the fieldwork and are the first step towards creating a methodology that will generate better results.

2

OBJECTIVES

- ▶ To clarify some conceptual and methodological aspects that will guide fieldwork with Coffee Promoters.
- ▶ To produce a document that unifies criteria and links the work of the institutions participating in the project with the people involved.
- ▶ To document the experience so that it may serve as a resource and starting point for similar projects yet to be executed.



3

LET'S START WITH SOME DEFINITIONS

The **COFFEE PROMOTERS** are coffee growers or members of the farmer's family, who live on a coffee plantation and earn their livelihood from cultivating coffee. An indispensable condition to be a Coffee Promoter is a willingness to be trained, to implement actions to improve their farms, and to share their knowledge with the coffee-growing families living in their rural division or neighboring region.

Willing to be trained

Willing to implement actions to improve their farm

Willing to share their knowledge

Willing to effectively involve their family members



What types of activities can Coffee Promoters do?



- Showcase implementation of **Good Agricultural Practices** and **continuous improvement** programs on their farms.
- Demonstrate their achievements and implementation activities to groups of producers visiting their farm.
- Visit other farms to teach producers how to perform certain crop management activities.
- Be an active member in the coffee growing communities, applying their attitude and skills to promote change and foster a culture of improvement among other producers.
- Support organizational processes and utilize group methodologies to share their knowledge with producers in the region.
- Participate in training activities held by institutions that work to develop coffee production in the region (Coffee Grower Committees and Coffee Grower Cooperatives, among others).

Some advantages of working with Coffee Promoters

- Their farms are case examples of positive results, serving as motivation to replicate many crop management practices on other farms.
- They intimately know the reality of coffee farming families within their rural district or region: the conditions, characteristics, people, leaders, issues, strengths, etc.
- Their involvement in the production process can create alliances with the technical assistants, allowing for a greater impact and credibility in the training programs.
- They are adept at learning new skills and applying cultural crop management practices, which is very convenient for demonstrating such methods during training sessions.

- They are active members of the coffee-growing communities and so these human resources can be taken advantage of to encourage self-management.
- They can suggest refinements and adaptations to the proposed methodologies for improvement, like the Good Agricultural Practices recommended by institutions.
- They produce a ripple effect of the work technicians do by reaching out to a greater number of producers.
- They give credibility to the program within their region, as long as the appropriate promoters were selected.
- They speak the same language as coffee-growing families in the region.
- Their permanence in the regions guarantees continuity of the programs and that the knowledge and lessons learned will be maintained with producers in their region.



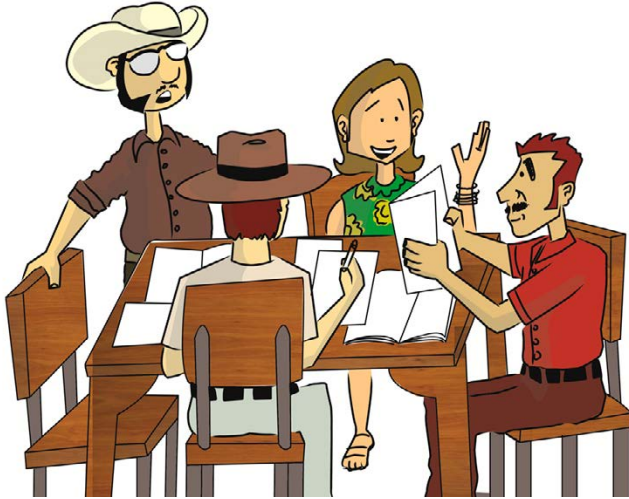
What paradigms do we hope to change?

When developing community work projects, preconceptions are generated and assumptions are made on aspects that will be part of the work methodology. Below we clarify how our proposed methodology will break away from the usual paradigms:

- 1 The methodology does not require forming rigid groups, with a predetermined structure, process, and periodicity for work. The groups that are formed to work on improvements are created differently, in accordance with the interests of the participants and the needs of each producer.
- 2 Each promoter is not permanently responsible for a specific group of producers. Depending on the skills of each promoter and the needs of the groups of producers, the promoters will interact with various workgroups.
- 3 The bulk of the work should be experiential and hands-on, leading to implementation activities on the farms of the promoters and producers.
- 4 The teaching tools are easy for the promoter to use.
- 5 The project should be executed on farms that have the proper environmental conditions for coffee cultivation.

4

PROFILE OF THE COFFEE PROMOTER



- Is perceived as an agent of change on his farm and a facilitator of change on the farms of other producers.
- Enjoys working with others and sharing his knowledge and experiences.
- Is a producer or family member of a producer and lives on a coffee farm.
- Performs daily tasks related to crop management.
- Is able to travel around the rural district or region (not mandatory).
- Has credibility and knowledge of coffee crop management.
- Has leadership qualities such as: respect for other people, charisma, creativity, and openness to change.
- Has a positive attitude towards his community and wants the best for everyone.

REQUIRED SKILLS AND TRAITS

- Literate. At least 90% of the promoters of the group should be able to read and write, and those who can't should have someone within their household who can.
- Basic mathematics skills for figures and accounts.
- Communication skills: persuasive speaker and able to listen.

- Knowledge and experience in crop management.
- Ability to perform the crop management practices.
- Attitude and ability to effectively engage his immediate family members in farm improvement activities.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE COFFEE FARM THE PROMOTER LIVES ON (AS OWNER OR EMPLOYEE)

- Exemplifies Good Agricultural Practices. All or some of these practices can be seen on the farm.
- Has a planning model or will implement a planning process that applies the methodology of continuous improvement.
- Is visited by other producers to demonstrate successful experiences.

What are the benefits of being a Coffee Promoter?

Invited to participate in scheduled training activities.

Receives technical support to implement Good Agricultural Practices programs and continuous improvement systems for producing coffee on his farm.

Has the possibility of financing some implementation activities on his farm.



It is important to understand that the philosophy of the project is to enhance the potential of the Coffee Promoters, helping them to be successful on their farm and consequently be able to demonstrate to others how to achieve positive results. This support provided, through training and consulting, is the form of payment. The program does not wish for the promoters to change their lifestyle and way of making a living in order to become employees of the institutions participating in the project, as they will end up neglecting their own farm in the process; on the contrary, the idea is to help them use their experience, knowledge, and farm to create a sustainable activity. In this regard, the promoters will not receive a salary.

5

PRINCIPLES FOR WORKING WITH COFFEE PROMOTERS

The process doesn't start from scratch

Consultation is the first part of facilitation

A question is the best answer

The producers are responsible for analyzing their

Being right is of little use if you don't have a good relationship

A small difference makes all the difference

Every action produces a gain



The process doesn't start from scratch

Education never occurs “in a vacuum”, nor can teaching be equated to “filling up a bottle.” Learning involves linking new knowledge with what you already know. More than the sum of ideas, learning is the transformation and enrichment of prior knowledge, thanks to the new information acquired. In the process, the facilitator should encourage building new knowledge based on the experience of the producer and compounded with the learning activities promoted in a training session.

Consultation is the first part of facilitation

Consensus building is one of the most important elements of the facilitation provided with this methodology. This agreement may be explicit (e.g. a joint decision or contract) or implicit (e.g. when a suggestion or offer is accepted). The facilitator must constantly encourage the promoters to establish concerted plans for improvement actions that will be implemented on the farms. The plans and actions should not be imposed by the facilitator. When no consensus has been reached on the expectations of the parties, on the activities that will be carried out, and on the roles of the facilitator and promoters, the group runs a great, and unnecessary, risk of later having to make changes in the “rules of the game”.

A question is the best answer

The main tool the facilitator wields is interrogation. The facilitator's success does not depend on having the right answers, but in knowing how to ask appropriate questions. A properly formulated question can lead to the timely modification of perceptions, feelings, and individual and group behaviors.

A good facilitator always asks himself what kind of activity could help the coffee promoters and producers resolve their own concerns. In other words, you have to do the opposite of conventional practice: don't try to give away an answer right away, but instead suggest exercises and ask the participants questions that will help them find their own answers.

The producers are responsible for analyzing their problems and finding solutions

It is not up to the facilitator to say what problems exist on the farms and how to correct them. The facilitator, using appropriate methodologies, group dynamics, and questions that prompt reflection, guides the group in making their own analysis in accordance with their reality and productive context. The facilitator also encourages methods that assist the producer in finding solutions to his problems and the means to implement improvement actions, since we realize that the producers have the capacity and resources to undertake such actions.

Being right is of little use if you don't have a good relationship

The appropriate tools and a positive attitude about the interaction should help the facilitator and Coffee Promoters quickly establish an atmosphere of trust, empathy, and credibility. Good relationships are the basis of all processes of change that are durable, sustainable, and positive.

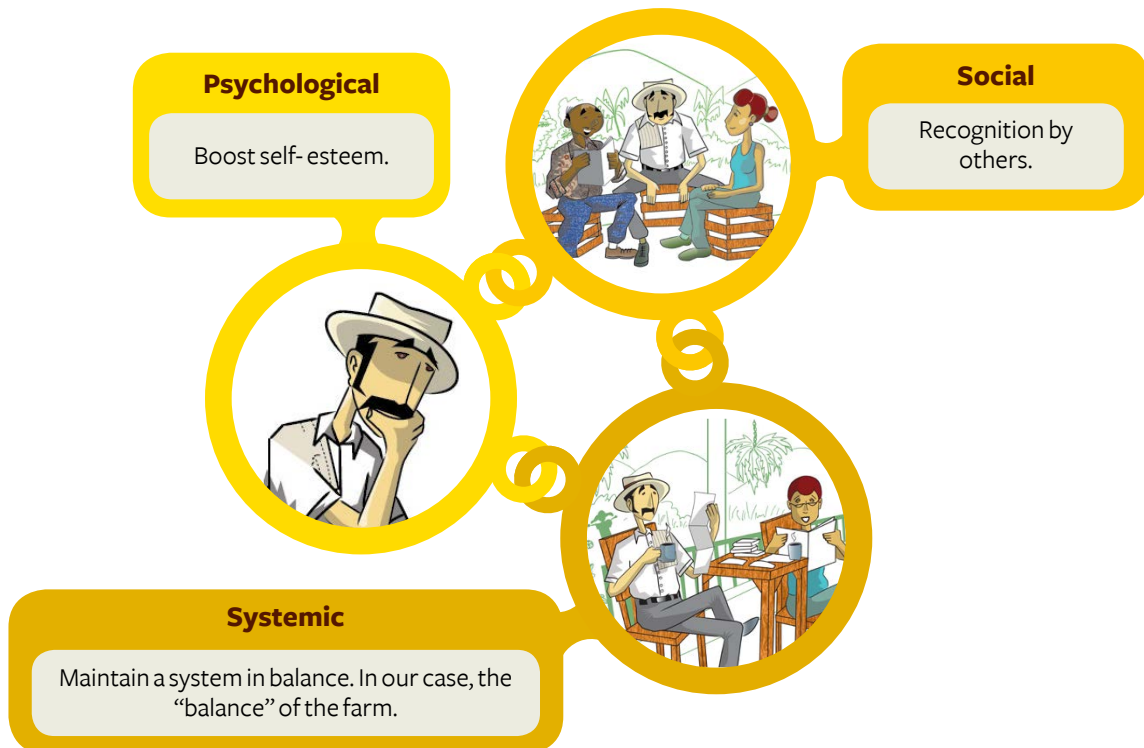
For example, when a facilitator visits a farm and immediately observes major problems and notices that many things are not being done properly, if he starts the communication process by thinking that he has the “revealed truth” and questions what the producer is doing, it can generate resistance and make the producer upset. This kind of criticism is not only useless, because it puts the other person on the defensive and usually makes him try to justify his behavior, but also dangerous because it hurts the pride, insults his sense of prioritization, and can arouse resentment.

Alternatively, the process could be orientated as follows:

- The activities the facilitator proposes help the producer come to realize that his method of crop management is producing ever-greater economic losses. This self-discovery makes him more willing and eager to learn and implement improvement actions.
- Once the producer understands that his participation in the project will allow him to learn new knowledge that is applicable in his work, and furthermore he realizes that he will then be able to help others improve their own practices, his willingness and ability to learn improves and his motivation to implement improvement actions increases.

Every action produces a gain

All human behavior generates results that can be taken for gains, at least for the person who performs them; if this were not the case, the person would not continue behaving this way. Each conduct is a strategy, whether conscious or not, to achieve the satisfaction of a need on one or more of three levels:



For example, a producer who keeps his old crops because he dares not renovate them may do so for the following potential gains:

Psychological: a sense of security that the old trees will provide sustenance, even if the production is low. With old trees there is less risk.

Social: prove to his neighbors or fellow farmers in the rural district that it is better to keep the old trees than start a renewal program that is very risky for the amount of money needed.

Systemic: there is no risk of losing the new resources invested in improving his farm if things don't go as planned.

The facilitator should always ask himself what gains might even the most negative behaviors provide for the promoters and producers with whom he works, in order to become aware of new options and behaviors that may provide the same, or perhaps better, gains.

A small difference makes all the difference

If a facilitator begins his work thinking that he has to do something brilliant, dramatic, or extraordinary, the change will not be very positive because he is tacitly affirming that the way of doing things so far has been wrong and that a significant change is needed to obtain results. Usually this strategy ends up creating a resistance to change.

In the proposed methodology for working with **COFFEE PROMOTERS**, a small change can yield big results, just as a small landslide can cause a huge avalanche that wipes out everything in its path and changes the face of the earth.

Small changes that yield positive results predispose participants to try out new and greater changes, since the first, small step was not overly threatening nor risky. Just like a farmer, the facilitator sows seed by seed, knowing that sooner or later he will reap the fruits of his efforts. In addition, any seemingly “insignificant” change sparks hope and expectations among those who are participating in the process. Contrary to popular belief, the solutions to most big problems begin with very small steps.

The project begins with early improvement actions (e.g. programs to control losses in harvest and post-harvest) and short and medium term actions. As we said earlier, seeing the changes, however small, unfold rapidly is what drives people to continue and remain in the improvement process.

WHAT SHOULD BE THE ROLE OF THE TECHNICIAN OR FACILITATOR?

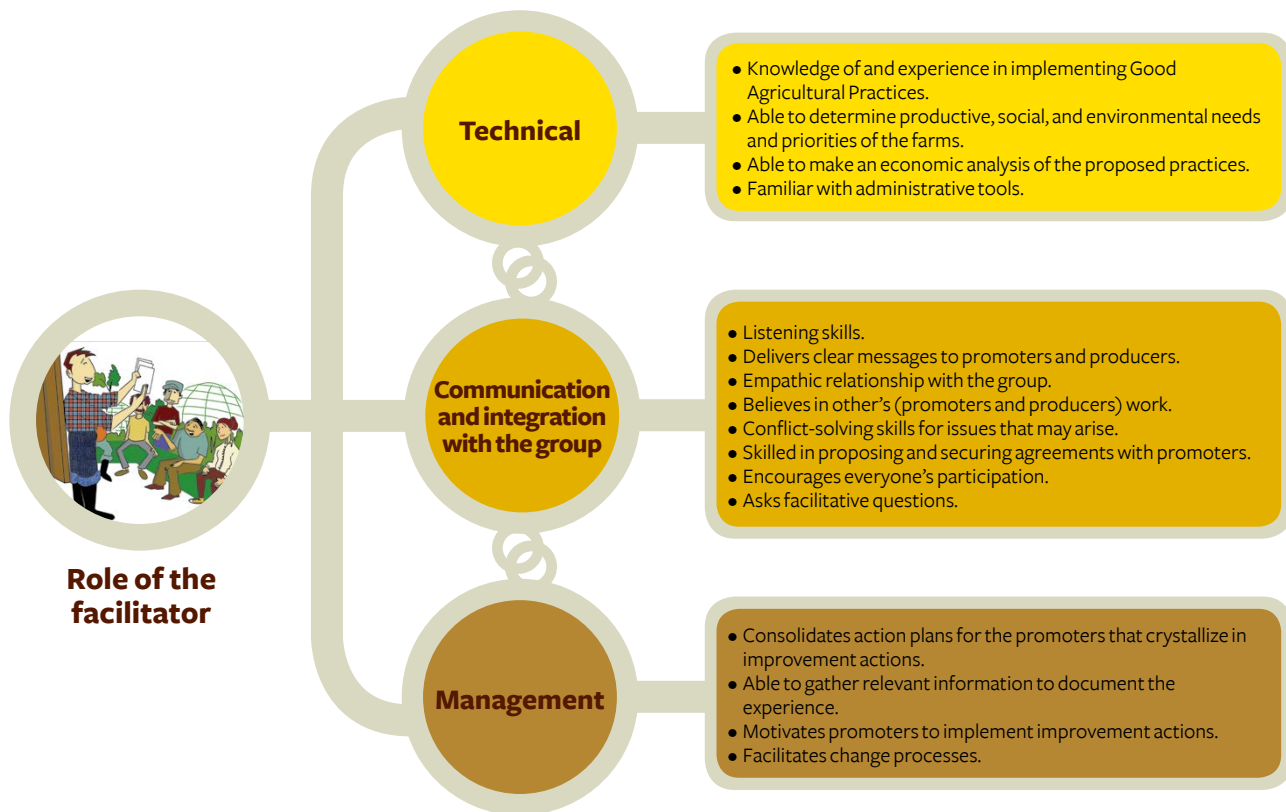
The facilitator is the Technical Assistant (TA) or professional responsible for the process of guiding and providing technical support to the Coffee Promoters and producers participating in the project.

This person should know how to manage group dynamics, have communication skills, and be able to propose methodologies that stimulate the participation and leadership of Coffee Promoters. The facilitator “makes things happen”.

Facilitation is understood as a process that makes a given task or activity possible or easier. In this project, facilitation focuses on improvement activities that the Coffee Promoter and producers can implement on their farms to make them more productive and sustainable.

A good facilitator is dynamic, motivating, and creative. He likes to listen more than he talks. He is punctual, spontaneous, has a positive attitude, builds the group’s confidence, believes in the methodology, and creates an atmosphere in which the participants respect each other and feel free to express their ideas and opinions.





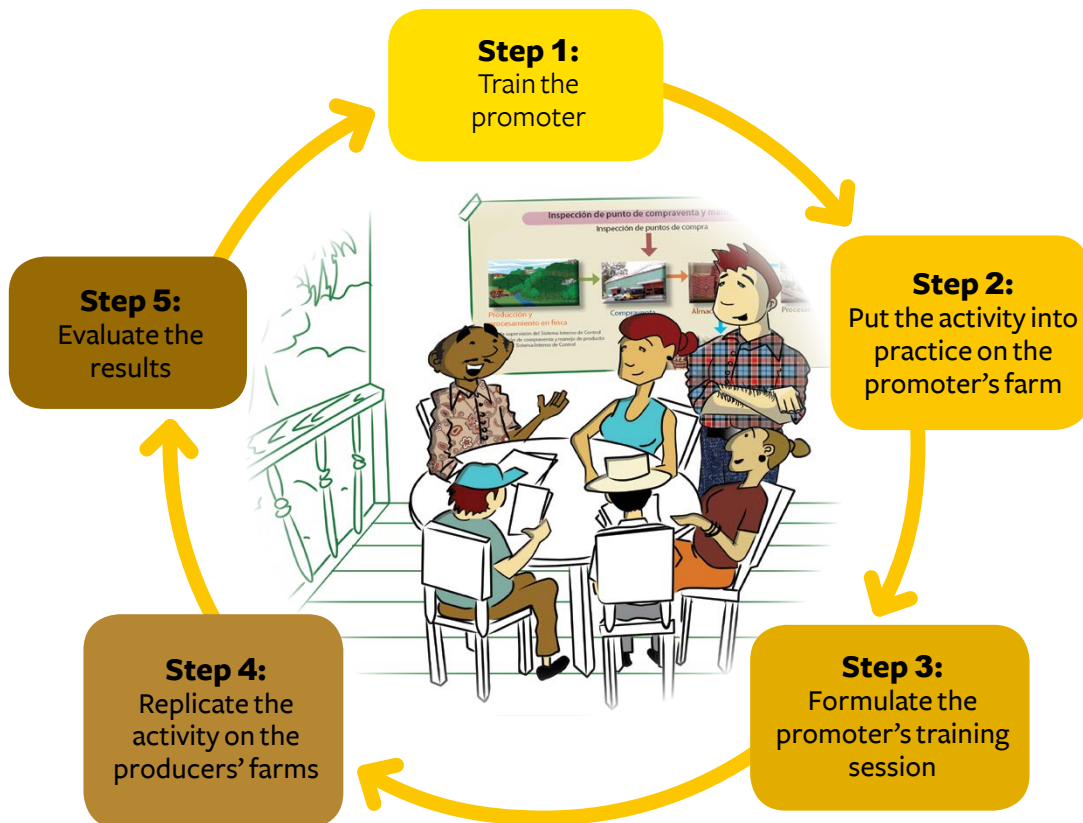
In their daily work, the facilitators should:

- Use simple language with keywords that are understandable and meaningful for the farmer.
- Encourage the Coffee Promoter to establish clear objectives for his work.
- Maintain and boost the coffee producers' and promoters' self-esteem.
- Come to agreement on agendas and action plans with the coffee producers and promoters.
- Ask appropriate questions that stimulate the producers to analyze their situation and propose practical solutions.
- Build awareness within the group of producers and promoters of the productive, environmental, and social problems in the region.
- Support producers in their evaluation and monitoring of activities implemented on farms.
- Incentivize the participation of the promoters.
- Publicly acknowledge the achievements made by the participants in the process, in order to bolster the group's motivation and self-esteem.
- Verify that the coffee promoters understand the topics for improvement and facilitate their transfer of knowledge and experience.
- Show the benefits of the process to the group.
- Create a permanent atmosphere of dialogue, respect, and collective construction.

7

STEPS FOR TRAINING PROMOTERS

The following flow chart describes the suggested steps in this proposed methodology to train the coffee producers by first strengthening the group of promoters.



Step 1: Train the Coffee Promoter

Conduct a baseline study:

Once the group of Coffee Promoters has been formed, conduct a baseline study to examine productive, social, environmental, and economic aspects of their farms. This preliminary diagnostic allows you to identify the strengths of each promoter. In practice, you may find producers who manage certain activities of the production process very well but are weak in others. Based on this initial assessment, the producers can be grouped together according to the topics noted as their strengths, and likewise their weaknesses will be identified.

Train promoters on the farm of a lead promoter:

Training the Coffee Promoters is the point of departure for an effective implementation of the system of continuous improvement on the producers' farms. The training topics address various components in order to ensure sustainability: production, environment, workplace safety and welfare, quality, and business management.

The training focuses on a specific issue that needs improvement and selects a farm promoter who is successfully managing this issue on his own farm to lead the training session and serve as a good case example.

This lead promoter, with the aid of the facilitator, plans the training session and gives it to the group of promoters.

Step 2: Put the activity into practice on the promoter's farm

After the training session, the Coffee Promoters propose activities that they will implement on each of their farms to replicate what they learned on the model farm. They will be guided by the promoter of the topic and the facilitator. The promoter, with the assistance of the technical facilitator, must afterwards monitor and evaluate the activities implemented on the promoter's farm.

The facilitator should observe which actions were implemented successfully and which promoters are most skilled and motivated to handle each topic. These promoters will be responsible for developing the corresponding training activity with the group of producers.

Step 3: Formulate the promoter's training session

The group of promoters who are the most motivated about a specific topic and have achieved the best performance implementing the improvement activity on their farms plan the training session that will be used to replicate their success on the farms of other producers.

The facilitator helps the coffee promoter design teaching aids and trains him in basic communication skills and group management techniques. The facilitator will then accompany the producer during his replication session to provide support and ongoing feedback to the promoter in order to improve his effectiveness in creating a multiplier effect.

Step 4: Replicate the activity on the producers' farms

The Coffee Promoter is in charge of carrying out the replication activity with a group of producers. He selects a few farms and invites a small group of producers to meet there, using group methodology to conduct a demonstration on the selected topic. The activity concludes by developing an action plan to replicate what was learned on each of the trained producers' farms.

The project compensates the promoter for his contribution of knowledge and time that he has shared with other producers by supporting him financially or with some inputs needed to implement the improvements on his farm.

Step 5: Evaluate the results

In order to identify the strengths and weaknesses of each Coffee Promoter and assess the project's success, the evaluation must account for the **results, process, and impact**, as follows:

Results: What were the results of implementing the improvement activities on the farm?

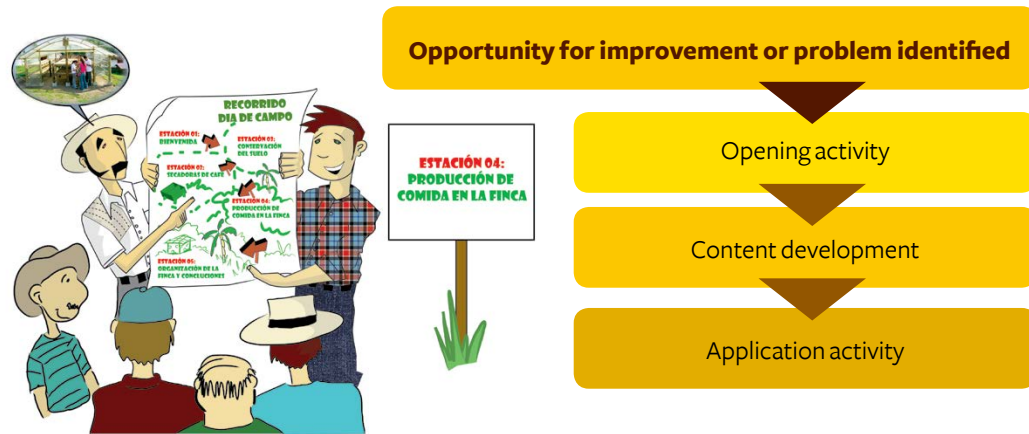
The promoters and institutions involved in the project cooperate in establishing SMART indicators that will serve as a benchmark.

Process: How effective were the improvement activities and methodology applied?

This question should also consider to what degree the methodology and project meet the needs and expectations of the participants.

Impact: What can the participants achieve on their own farms by implementing this continuous improvement system in the long term?

STRUCTURE OF THE TRAINING SESSIONS



The following model is suggested for application of a training session with pre-defined objectives. It consists of various stages and activities in a sequence that seeks to integrate improvement activities on the farms of the promoters and participating producers.

Opportunity for improvement or problem identified

The starting point is to work on issues that the group of participants has identified as a problem or opportunity for improvement. A useful tool for this is the baseline study conducted in Step 1.

Our recommendation is to use the producers' previous experience and the group's existing knowledge and skills to guide the technical content of the training session. Restrict the content to priority needs, rather than trying to address all of the crop production issues in a single course. Additionally, limit the training topics to those that can result in rapid and easily recognizable improvements in crop management. Remember that small successes motivate the producer to become more involved in the processes of learning and action and, in the long term, inspire greater participation.

Opening activity

The introductory activity can be a memory of a significant life event or experience that allows the group to:

- Develop awareness of the importance of the subject at hand.
- Go into more detail about the problem and recognize the need to resolve it by implementing improvement actions.

- Put the issue into perspective to encourage the group to go into depth in seeking solutions to the problem.

A process of reflection and analysis in the group should stem from recalling an experience or significant moment in their lives. The activity leader, facilitator, or Coffee Promoter, as may be the case, is responsible for creating an atmosphere that fosters group participation.

Some activities that can be performed during this first phase are:

- Start with a group icebreaker activity that is dynamic, entertaining, and culturally appropriate.
- Design and develop experiential exercises and group games that will allow the participants to personally go through the experiences necessary to later deduce a theory that will provide them with new options.
- Present a case study for the group to analyze.
- Visit a farm plot where the problem can be observed, for the group to evaluate and conduct an analysis of the situation.
- Present statistical information or reports of losses as a result of the problem in a region or on a specific farm.
- Facilitate a discussion of the experience for the group to share their perceptions, beliefs, and feelings.
- Ask questions that provoke reflection and an analysis of the experience.
- Exemplify a positive attitude towards the diversity of experiences and viewpoints and an openness to learn from other people and situations.
- Reach conclusions that motivate the group to acquire new knowledge and discover novel ways to solve their problems.

Content development

This stage engages the group of participants in learning new concepts. The activities performed allow both the Coffee Promoters and producers to delve further into their study of the selected topic. The learning process implies the active participation of the group.

The development of the training content aims to:

- Enable the acquisition and definition of relevant information and new knowledge that permit the participants to better understand the subject matter.
- Facilitate the creation of a vision in which personal experiences, life lessons, and recent discoveries are integrated to develop the participant's learning.
- Develop the skills and abilities necessary to implement improvement alternatives, for example learning how to properly calibrate a coffee pulping machine.

Some activities that can be performed during this phase are:

- Arrange practical activities, such as demonstrations of methods and results or visits to farms where the participants can observe different farming practices and acquire new knowledge.

- Carefully select the information that will be shared with the group and present it in a sequential and articulate manner.
- Facilitate discussion activities for the participants to relate their previous knowledge of the subject with the new information provided.
- Use a variety of methods and materials to stimulate the producers' learning, engage them in activities that stimulate their senses, and employ auditory, visual, and kinesthetic learning styles (for example, concept maps, drawings, poems, plays, or musical compositions) so that they may come to conclusions on the issue or improvement activity that they intend to apply on their farms.

Application activity

In this stage, the participants are provided with the opportunity to do a trial run or practice what they have learned. Skills that are not translated into actions tend to not become assimilated into a person's daily life; therefore, one could argue that these skills are not truly learned.

Moreover, what is not regularly practiced tends to be forgotten; constant practice is what gives us the ability to do something. It's important for the facilitator or promoter to supervise the participant performing an initial practice in order to provide feedback and ensure that improvement activities or new practices are fully understood. This supervised practice also allows the producer to correct any mistakes, master the procedure, and have sufficient confidence to later perform it alone on the farm.

The application seeks to:

- Perform a preliminary trial that applies what was learned and puts into practice the required skills, in order to evaluate, at an individual and collective level, the results and make modifications as necessary.
- Allow for the test run to be applied to the reality of the farm.

Some activities that can be performed during this phase are:

- Facilitate a guided practice to verify that the producers understand the content and can properly apply the new skills and abilities.
- Acknowledge the group progress and their positive results. Commending the participants for their successes and achievements helps boost confidence and self-esteem.
- Facilitate a comparison and contrast of the participants' results.
- Perform self-assessments and group evaluations.
- Ask participants to draft action plans describing the activities they will implement on their farms.
- Facilitate monitoring activities to follow-up on the activities implemented on the farms.



WORKING WITH **COFFEE**
PROMOTERS

A methodology to get better
results

Solidaridad

CHANGE THAT MATTERS

www.solidaridadnetwork.org