

proforest



Mentoring Sustainability Practitioners

A Proforest guide to developing capacity for supporting responsible production of agricultural and forest commodities

Acknowledgements

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- Cameroon Forest Certification Initiative
- Client Earth
- Rainforest Alliance
- Resource Trust Network

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About Proforest

Proforest is a unique non-profit group that supports companies, governments, civil society and other organisations to develop practical approaches to responsible production and sourcing that can help transform commodity sectors.



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Introduction

Global demand for forest and agricultural commodities – such as soy, sugar, palm oil, rubber, beef and timber – is expanding. If managed well, commodity production can meet this growing demand and contribute to sustainable long-term development, but if poorly implemented it can cause environmental and social problems ranging from deforestation to human rights abuses.

There is a growing global focus on the sustainable production of agricultural and forest commodities. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) highlight the importance of integrating economic, environmental and social factors. And legislation, voluntary sustainability standards and company commitments all have an increasing focus on environmental and social issues.

A variety of policies and initiatives exist which aim to safeguard the benefits and minimise risks through the use of responsible sourcing and production practices. Engagement and interest in such practices is growing strongly but their implementation on the ground to internationally credible standards is often hindered by a shortage of competent and experienced local practitioners.

This shortage of capacity is found in companies, government, NGOs, local communities, consultants and auditors. This leads to poor implementation or to a culture of using ‘flying experts’ who come in but leave again reducing positive impact and any sense of local ownership and undermining progress to long-term sustainability of forest management and agricultural production. A critical mass of local expertise is urgently needed to address this challenge.

For well over a decade, Proforest has been developing the capacity of sustainability practitioners from around the world. A key lesson learned from this experience has been the crucial need to go beyond classroom-based training courses (even those with a short field component) to providing the **mentored practical experience** needed to build real proficiency. The challenge to gaining this type of experience is a formidable one, but it is possible to provide such opportunities. This guide sets out Proforest’s experience of doing this, drawing on the learning and lessons from the [Africa Practitioners’ Network](#) as well as our work elsewhere.

The guide documents an approach to mentoring sustainability practitioners, elaborates the key elements of the mentoring programme, and references relevant supporting tools and guidance documents.

Who is the guide for?

As well as supporting those **responsible for the planning and delivery of a mentoring programme for sustainability practitioners**, the guide may also be a useful reference for other key actors within the mentoring process including **mentors** and **mentees**. Some general principles and practical approaches may also be of wider interest to those involved in mentoring, whether to develop auditing and assessment capacity or otherwise.

We continue to develop our mentoring approach and would welcome feedback from users of this guide. Please email us at: info@proforest.net.

Resources

Proforest has developed a number of resources that could be useful to other organisations seeking to plan and implement mentoring programme. They include examples of participation agreements, and feedback forms, as well as checklists and templates for planning field activities.

Resources are referenced throughout the guide with the icon shown here. Further details can be found on [page 35](#). All resources can be downloaded at www.proforest.net/mentoring



About the Africa Practitioners Network

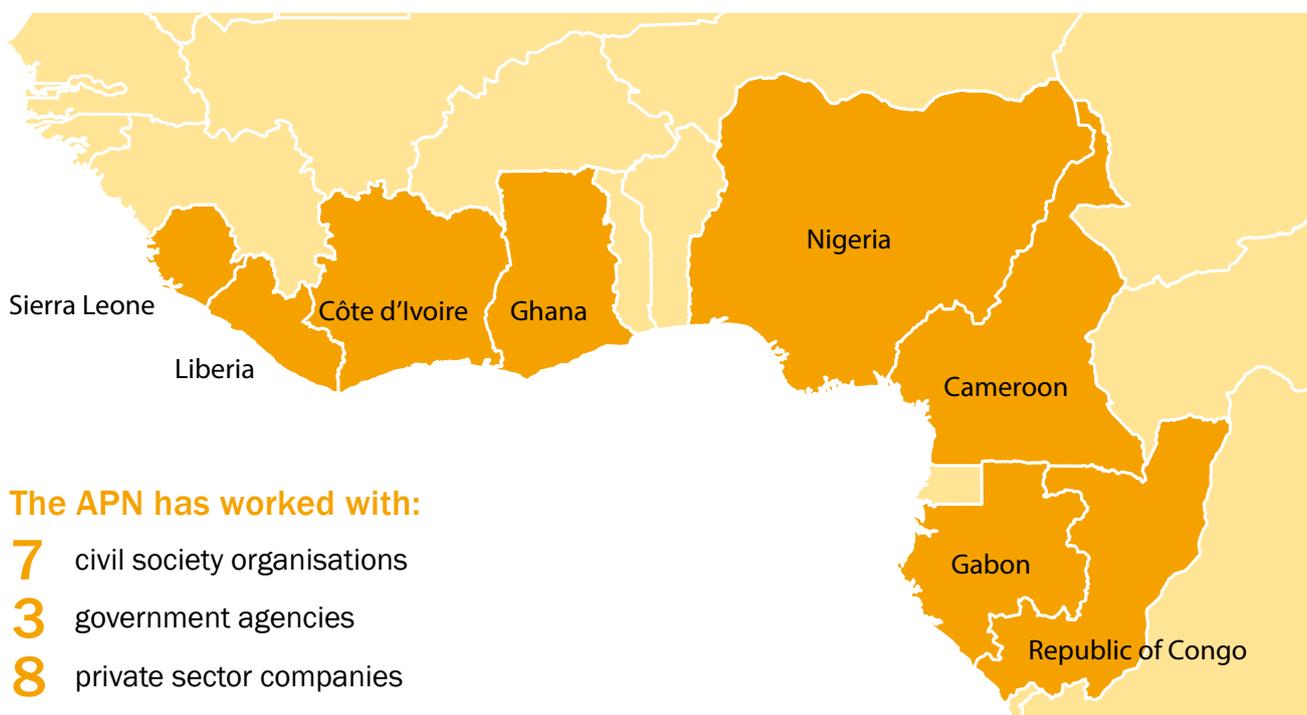
Since 2014, Proforest has been working with partners to address this issue in West and Central Africa through the Africa Practitioners Network (APN). The APN uses an approach to supporting local capacity development which is developed and delivered in collaboration with partners; has practical field training and long-term mentoring at its core; and is effective locally and credible internationally. The irreducible core of the APN approach is building competence and practical experience by providing opportunities for trainees to undertake technical work with experienced experts – or mentors – who can provide guidance and feedback on building skills. The APN focuses on building the capacity of individual practitioners and implementing organisations as well as the next generation of mentors and trainers.



Highlights from the Africa Practitioners Network

8 countries have engaged with APN: Sierra Leone, Côte D'Ivoire, Ghana, Cameroon, Nigeria, Liberia, Gabon and Republic of Congo.

4 sustainability standards and schemes are covered by the programme: FSC, RSPO, VPA/FLEGT and HCV.



The APN has worked with:

- 7** civil society organisations
- 3** government agencies
- 8** private sector companies

60 practitioners have participated in mentored practical field training.

How APN alumni use their training

Former participants of the APN mentoring scheme use their training in a wide variety of roles that support responsible practices – from working as auditors for certification bodies, to managing the sustainability practices of production companies and from conducting HCV assessments to verifying forest governance and legality.

280 practitioners have participated in classroom-based formal training.

Supporting civil society capacity

The APN mentoring scheme has supported FLEGT (Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade) legal assurance systems in Ghana, Liberia and Cameroon by providing technical field training for civil society actors who are responsible for verifying legal compliance but who lack the requisite technical capacity.

1 What is a mentoring programme for sustainability practitioners?

Implementing sustainability commitments in the context of forestry and agricultural production requires competent technical experts who can undertake or monitor activities ranging from community consultation and the accurate assessment of Free Prior Informed Consent (FPIC) to tracking legal timber or from verifying legal compliance with labour regulations to High Conservation Value (HCV) assessments and certification audits. Gaining the skills and experience to undertake and/or monitor such activities competently and consistently is not easy. Classroom-based training courses are very important, but alone they are not sufficient. Even more crucial to building competence is practical experience overseen and guided by an expert mentor who already has the skills and experience and is willing to pass them on.

“Even more crucial to building competence is practical experience overseen and guided by an expert mentor who already has the skills and experience and is willing to pass them on”

A sustainability practitioner mentoring programme is a systematic approach to providing this practical experience under the guidance of an expert. Trainees carry out activities while overseen by an experienced mentor who can correct mistakes, comment on technique, provide tips and insights based on their own experience and thereby build the confidence and expertise of the trainee. Such a structured mentoring approach leads to enhanced skills and competence of the trainee. It requires a significant investment of time and strong commitment from the mentee and mentor as well as access to experienced experts, tools and guidance and opportunities to practice.

The importance of mentoring is well-established. Many professional bodies such as accreditation organisations typically require trainee practitioners to undertake a minimum number of days of work while observed and mentored by an experienced professional before they qualify. Some organisations within the agricultural and forest commodity sectors, particularly large international companies, already have this type of programme – formal or informal – for their own employees.

However, in many places where agricultural and forest commodities are produced, sustainability practitioners often work in isolation or in organisations which lack the institutional capacity or internal expertise to provide mentoring and support. In many of these regions, particularly where sustainability commitments are only emerging, there are very few opportunities to gain practical experience. A mentoring programme can fill these gaps.

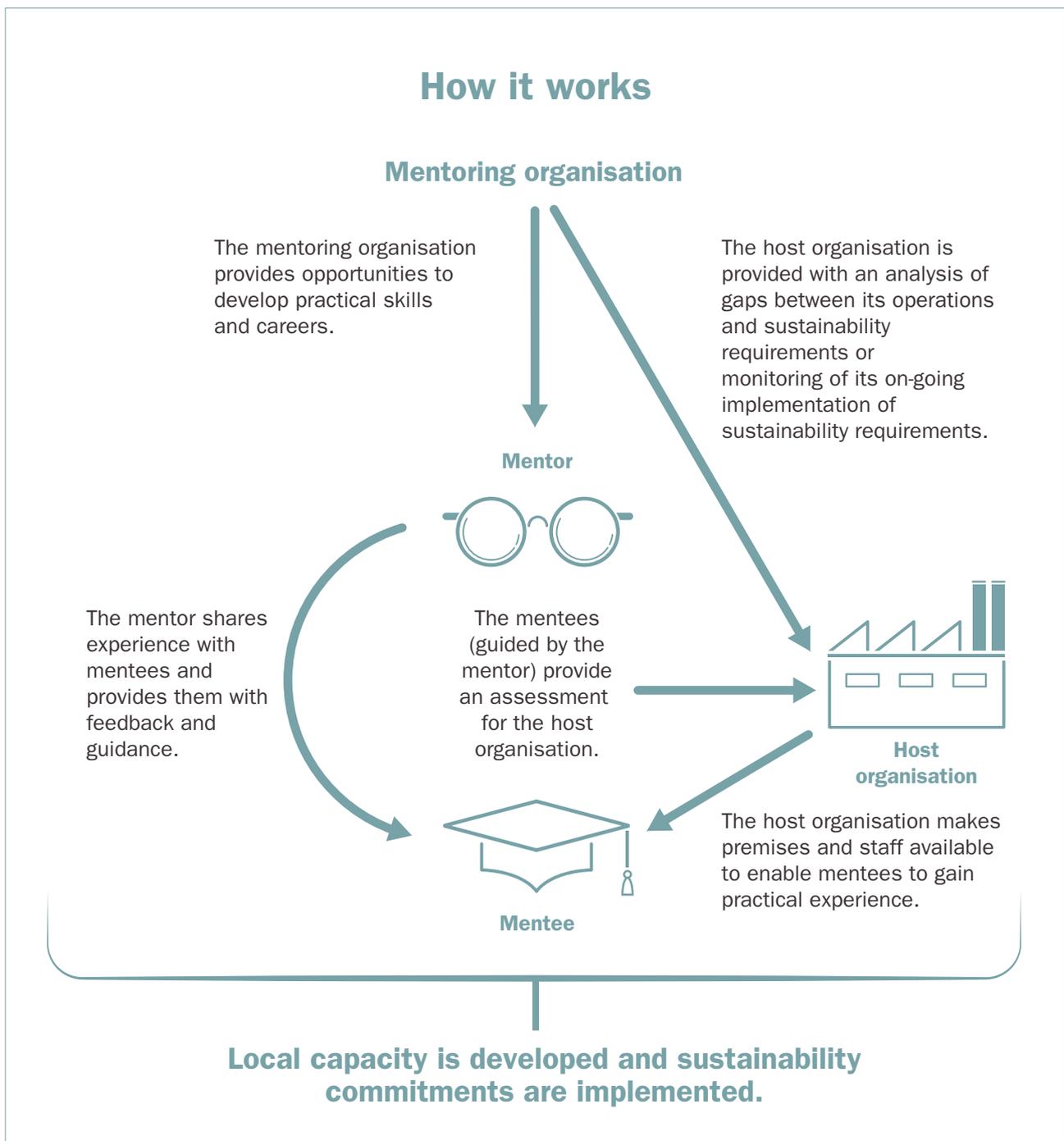
There are two ways in which practitioners can gain mentored practical experience.

1. Real assignments: the practitioner joins a team on a ‘live’ assignment with the team leader acting as mentor. This can be very effective but limits the number of practitioners that can be trained as it is dependent on the availability of assignments, and no more than one (or perhaps two) trainees can accompany a team leader.

2. Mock assignments with host organisations. A team of trainee practitioners, overseen by a mentor, carry out an assignment such as a mock assessment, HCV planning or consultation in a host organisation. This provides an opportunity to build local capacity rapidly – as many trainees can be mentored simultaneously – and can be used in areas where there are limited opportunities to gain experience, for example where sustainability requirements are new to a region or sector.

1.1 Key actors

Using this model, in addition to the organisation managing the mentoring programme (from here on described as the mentoring organisation), there are three main actors involved: **mentees, mentors and host organisations**. The mentoring organisation may also find it effective and efficient to work in partnership with existing training providers to integrate their training packages into the new mentoring programme (see Section 3.1).





Mentees

Who are they: Mentees are individuals or organisations looking to gain practical experience in order to enhance their skills and competence in one or more technical aspects of sustainability practice. For the APN, they can include independent auditors, production company staff, government sector agency employees, community members or NGO practitioners.

What is their role? Mentees are the central figures of the mentoring exercise. When they work as a team (of mentees) on a mock assessment, they critically comment and support one another's learning under a mentor's expert guidance. Mentees can also function as part of real or live assessments where, in addition to actively observing the process, they are assigned limited responsibility under the guidance of the mentor. Essentially, mentees have the role of learning the ropes of undertaking technical work through actively observing, partaking in activities, commenting and seeking clarification on process and receiving and reflecting on feedback and helpful guidance by the lead/mentor.

What are the basic requirements? In most instances, mentees need to have completed and passed a formal training course that covers the information and concepts relevant to the on-job training (OJT). It also requires available time and – very importantly – commitment from the mentee to completing a minimum number of assessments (as required by the qualification they seek), each one lasting several days.

How do mentees benefit? Above all, mentees benefit from developing their competence under the guidance of an experienced expert including rare and valuable feedback, leading to significantly enhanced skills and competence. In addition, mentoring can provide access to useful tools and guidance documents. Lasting benefits include the relationships established with mentors (and other mentees), making it possible to realise unique networking possibilities. The reputation of mentees may be enhanced when the mentoring programme publicly recognises/confirms the hours or days of experience they have gained through the programme. On a practical level, mentees may receive a nominal subsistence allowance (to cater for feeding and incidentals during the field exercise) and those who join paid consultancy assignments receive an additional nominal rate for their efforts in contributing to outputs.

What are their responsibilities? Mentees have a responsibility to actively participate and take responsibility for their own learning under expert guidance. They are involved in all learning activities and in the case of sustainability assessments, from preparation through stakeholder consultations to presenting and reporting findings. Mentees should demonstrate utmost professionalism and ethical conduct, especially in the treatment of proprietary information of the host organisation or client company.



Mentors



The credibility of the mentoring programme depends on the quality of the mentor.

Who are they? Mentors are expert and experienced social and environmental practitioners who are highly knowledgeable and competent in the implementation or monitoring of one or more sustainability standards, initiatives or processes such as, in the APN, auditing, HCV or community consultation.

How to find them: There are three main ways to identify mentors:

1. Use qualified and experienced staff of the mentoring organisation or partners as mentors.
2. Advertise and request expressions of interest to become a mentor.
3. Identify suitable candidates within partner organisations and headhunt them!

What is their role? The role of mentors is to share their experience, expertise and skills through providing active guidance to mentees looking to enhance their knowledge and competence in one or more technical aspects of sustainability practice. It is also important that mentors can communicate clearly any weaknesses and can judge accurately and consistently when mentees are competent to begin working on their own.

What are the basic requirements? Mentors should meet a set of clearly-established minimum requirements, as outlined in the document on *recruiting and motivating mentors*. In summary, a mentor should be suitably qualified and at minimum possessing a degree in natural resources management or related subject, with many years of practical experience and a track record of high quality work. It is also very useful if they already have mentoring experience. Mentoring requires available time, commitment to the mentee, and suitable personal qualities including a warm, approachable and confidence-inspiring personality. Mentors must be able to highlight things which are done well, and provide constructive criticism to support improvement.

What benefits do they get? In addition to the satisfaction from giving back by sharing knowledge and expertise as well as nurturing the next generation of sustainability practitioners, mentors usually receive a motivation allowance, based on their experience. Alternatively, they may contribute without the need for an allowance as part of a partnership with the organisation leading the mentoring programme.

What are their responsibilities? Mentors are expected to manage the group of mentees during the entire practical experience process as well as providing guidance and technical support to them. A crucial aspect of mentoring is to review and critique reports and so they must be committed to doing this in a timely manner. They also are required to oversee an output for the host organisation.



Box 1: Challenges

Not all practitioners who are active are competent. Where expertise is lacking, local practitioners sometimes begin to work in areas where they lack competence but their work is accepted because there is no alternative and no quality control. In addition, many experienced and competent practitioners may lack the patience and empathy required to effectively mentor other practitioners. Therefore, recruitment should involve references from trusted sources that confirm the quality of a person's work and their aptitude for mentoring.



Host organisations

Host organisations play a significant role in the effective delivery of OJT. In return, they benefit from the services undertaken by the mentee-mentor team.

Who are they? Any organisation able to make its facilities and staff available for mentoring practitioners can be a host, whether a company, government agency or NGO. Examples of organisations that can usefully host mentoring for sustainability practitioners in the APN include:

- Production companies, large producers, smallholder cooperatives or communities.
- Government agencies such as forestry and wildlife departments managing a national park or forest reserve.
- Sector agencies leading implementation of policy/sustainability initiatives such as FLEGT/VPA or REDD+.
- NGOs involved in the implementation of a sustainability initiatives, for example WWF's Global Forest and Trade Network.

How to find them: In the case of production companies, they can be found and accessed through trade associations/umbrella organisations or their participation in sustainability-related initiatives including certification support programmes. Other host organisations can be identified through professional networks or during discussions about competence needs and gaps.

What is their role? The host organisation provides the environment for the delivery of the mentoring exercise and, in the case of a production company, makes its production facilities including mills and supply base accessible for the OJT and serves as the subject of compliance assessments. In addition, companies support the logistics arrangements, provide staff to serve as field guides and actively participate during the assessment process as respondents.

What are the basic requirements? Commitment to responsible production practices and the availability of the facilities necessary to conduct the field training. For instance, an RSPO auditing-in-practice training will require that the company has a mill, while this is not necessary for a HCV assessment training or even an assessment of a forest management enterprise (without a processing facility).

What benefits do they get? There are a number of benefits for organisations hosting mentoring activities, from building partnerships with sustainability organisations, to supporting the next generation of practitioners. For many, the mock assignment undertaken on their premises – whether an audit or a stakeholder consultation – will fulfil a requirement within the organisation. In the context of an audit or assessment, the key benefit is that companies are provided with a report, written by the mentees, but overseen by the mentor, which will enable them to understand the gaps in their operations relative to a given sustainability standard. For some companies, this serves as their first step towards achieving certifiable status while for others who may already be certified, this provides an opportunity to prepare for an upcoming surveillance audit or re-assessment.



What are their responsibilities? It is extremely important that the host organisation takes preparation very seriously, particularly if it is a production company making its facilities available for a mock assessment to be conducted. A representative should be designated to help with planning assessment activities. (See Box 13).

Box 2: Experience from the APN



The mentee's experience

Anthony Prah, freelance auditor

My first experience with APN was classroom-based FSC Lead Auditor training and subsequently I have taken part in two on-site experiential audits. In the first audit, we were mainly observing. But in the second we were assigned roles in all areas and were assessed based on our performance within those roles. This is the best approach as it helps us to build our own capacities and competences. My experience from other approaches to training auditors is that trainees are only assigned the role of observer in a very limited capacity and not exposed to all aspects of an audit, such as reporting. Other auditors are expected to train you, but they often don't have any experience in training. **With APN, you work with an experienced mentor who supports and pushes you to achieve more.** You are assigned roles in all areas, from opening meeting to closing meeting and before long you have been transformed more or less into a lead auditor. The scheme has really helped me personally to build my capacity and skills.



Box 3: Experience from the APN

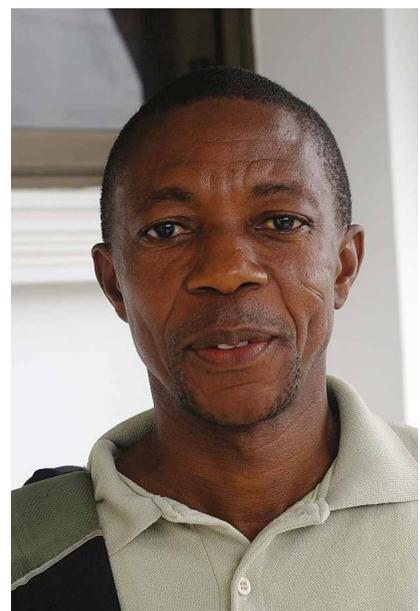


The mentor's experience

Joseph William Osei

Director of Resource Trust Network and mentor for the Africa Practitioners Network

As a mentor, I'm motivated by hearing participants say that the programme has helped them. In my view capacity building is the engine to deliver sustainability services locally. And the Africa Practitioners Network's approach is aligned to my vision of how best to do this: by first providing classroom-based training and then supporting trainees to learn by doing. Before the trainees go into the field, as well as covering technical skills we also cover interview techniques and ethical conduct. This is very important for building trust with the host organisations. When people's competence and capacity is developed they can deliver results and you know they will make a change on the ground. That, in itself, is a great motivation.



2 Designing the programme

Developing capacity is a long-term commitment, often requiring considerable resources over a prolonged period. Furthermore, it may be quite a long time before there are clear results, so it is very important to design the programme well from the beginning. This section looks at some of the most important steps in the design phase.

2.1 Define clear objectives for the programme

Sustainability is a very large field encompassing diverse social and environmental issues and many different skills. The issues to be addressed and particularly the skills to be developed are context-specific and vary over time in each country. Different countries may be at varying stages of engaging with sustainability requirements with the result that there may be variable capacity across regions to deal with some of the most important issues. The first step, therefore, of developing a mentoring programme is to analyse the sustainability commitments and capacity gaps to be addressed, before pinpointing what classroom-based and practical training exists or is needed, as well as any required tools. The capacity gap analysis should normally be informed by a systematic capacity assessment exercise and may also draw on organisational knowledge of the skills and experience required to implement sustainability commitments, as well as knowledge of stakeholder capacity, needs and interests.

Box 4: Experience from the APN



The design of a new classroom-based and mentored capacity-building programme to address identified needs and stakeholder interests

Under the EU FLEGT VPA, NGOs in partner countries may have the opportunity or, depending on the country, be required to monitor the implementation of the Legality Assurance System in general and legality verification in particular. Proforest, through the Africa Practitioners Network (APN), identified interested NGOs in Cameroon, Liberia and Ghana. However, these NGOs had not previously undertaken such legality verification in practice, so they lacked the necessary experience and skills to objectively assess compliance. The APN developed a programme to deliver practical skills in legality verification for the civil society organisations for such monitoring, following the conduct of context-specific needs assessment in selected FLEGT/VPA partner countries.

Trainees from civil society organisations in Ghana (Forest Watch Ghana and members of the Legal Working Group), Cameroon and Liberia (NGO coalition and the civil society independent forest monitoring teams) active in the FLEGT/VPA process, undertook classroom-based training to cover the theoretical knowledge needed to conduct an assessment of performance against established legal requirements.

Trainees were then accompanied by a mentor as they carried out a practical assessment of a timber company's operations against the requirements of the Timber Legality Standard. This included assessment of forest administration, field operations and the supply chain, including transport, processing and export requirements.

2.2 Identify mentees

Once the objectives of the mentoring programme have been clarified and the existence of a pool of potential mentees confirmed, recruitment of mentees can proceed. Selection requirements, benefits they can expect from mentoring, as well as their responsibilities are described on [page 10](#).

2.3 Identify mentors

The credibility and effectiveness of a mentoring programme depends above all on the quality of the mentors. Experienced and competent experts are required as mentors for each competence area in which the programme is supporting practitioner development. Such experts could be from the organisation leading the mentoring programme, hired experts or from partner organisations. Where there are very few potential mentors in a region, it may be necessary to begin by bringing in expertise from other places.

Mentoring is time-consuming and it is important to consider how to encourage competent individuals to act as mentors. They may be motivated by the desire to build capacity of experts that their organization may then work with or employ, or because they are committed to supporting the development of local expertise. However, for busy professionals it is also important to ensure that they are adequately paid and are not expected to provide their expertise for free or at lower rates of pay than they earn for other activities.

These and other related questions discussed on [page 11](#).



2.4 Identify opportunities for mentoring

The next factor to consider is the opportunities that are likely to be available for the practical mentoring or on-the-job training (OJT). As discussed above, there are two main options:

1. In a 'live' scenario, where the mentees join in the delivery of commissioned work for a client by a team of experts. For this to be feasible, there needs to be a) commissioned work available; b) a team leader who is able and willing to mentor; and c) a client happy to include trainee(s) in the team. On-the-job training in live situations are typically provided by organisations (training or implementation) commissioned to deliver technical work for a client. It could be the mentoring organisation or a partner who carries out similar work.

2. Through a mock assignment using the facilities of a host organisation. Hosted mentoring can be extremely valuable as it results in a greater number of practitioners becoming more competent more quickly than would be the case if waiting for live opportunities. It also has the advantage of making it possible for the mentoring programme to plan ahead as dates can be agreed in advance.

For mock exercises to work, the host organisation needs to find the exercise useful and in return provide the mentoring programme with access to people, documents and facilities. It is also essential that everyone involved treats the exercise as if it were real (see page 12).

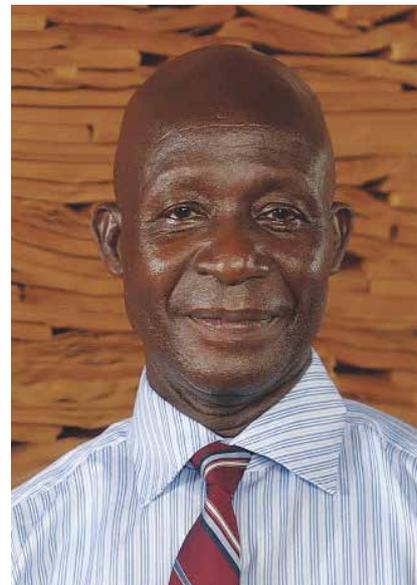
Box 5: Experience from the APN



The host organisation's experience

**Emmanuel Alhassan, Human Resource Manager,
Mondial Veneer Global**

We had problems selling our veneer to the UK without certification and became committed to achieving FSC certification. We initially engaged Proforest to carry out a baseline assessment of our operations against the full FSC standard. A key revelation from this was the need to embark on a stepwise approach through, first, becoming FSC Controlled Wood certified. We joined the Africa Practitioners Network and committed to make our production facilities available to support the training of emerging practitioners. The programme has worked well for us as through the FSC controlled wood mock assessment, we understood where we fell short in meeting the requirements of the standard. We are now working on closing the gaps. MVG will play our part to support sustainability and we are very happy to support building the skills of the next generation of natural resource managers.



The role of the host organisation is a clear example of the importance of building effective relationships across the wider sustainability and production sector. Qualities of a suitable host organisation may include the following:

1. Having a good understanding of the aims and objectives of the mentoring programme.
2. Being motivated to improve sustainability practices and an appreciation of the value of baseline data to support this.
3. Being able to be assessed against a set of requirements for which the mentoring programme is developing capacity.
4. Being able to be assessed against a sustainability standard for which the mentoring programme is developing capacity.

2.5 Assess existing classroom-based training and competence programmes

While the central element of the mentoring programme is the practical on-the-job training and related activities, an experience programme needs to be effectively linked to a portfolio of carefully designed and developed classroom-based¹ training courses which provide practitioners with the underlying information and theoretical framework and in-depth understanding needed to support the practical learning.

Sometimes, a ready pool of persons who have had relevant classroom-based training may already exist. In such situations, there is clearly no need for additional classroom-based training.

Where this is not the case, to ensure the availability of suitable mentees, it is important to examine the local or regional training landscape to identify the range of available classroom-based training courses and then consider the following options:

- If suitable courses are identified, aim to partner with the relevant training partners (see [Section 3.1](#)).
- If there are existing generic courses available but they are not suited for context-specific delivery, it is advisable to adapt these courses and create opportunities to deliver them directly or with partners.
- If there are no existing classroom-based courses, then new ones will need to be designed and developed by clarifying what is important, defining what the problem is and going on to design and develop a capacity-building package, ideally in collaboration/partnership with others.

¹The term 'classroom-based' is being used to distinguish courses that mainly take place in the classroom from experiential, field-based learning. However, it is to be noted that many classroom-based courses will include a short field exercise to enhance learning outcomes.

2.6 Define the mentoring framework

When the above steps have been carefully considered and addressed, the next thing is to develop a systematic mentoring framework. In doing this, it is important to think through, for each competency area, what is the approach for not only facilitating rapid but effective uptake of important learning by the mentees but also effective transfer of knowledge and skills by the mentor.

A mentoring framework that supports building the skills, competence and confidence of practitioners to undertake technical work under the guidance of an experienced expert, crucially requires an approach to learning that involves:

- The mentee **watching** closely as the mentor shows how it is done.
- The mentee **commenting** on what the mentor has done.
- The mentee subsequently **doing** the activity and the mentor watching.
- The mentor providing **feedback** on what the mentee has done.

Proforest has developed the **Watch Comment Do Feedback (WCDF) Framework** to provide a structured approach to learning that allows for the increasing autonomy and responsibility of mentees during the learning process. It is a useful resource to both mentors and mentees and clarifies the roles and expectations of both actors in the learning process.

Box 6: The Watch Comment Do Feedback (WCDF) Framework	
	<p>Activity Depends on the skills and competences to be developed. For each activity or learning event, the WCDF approach is applied to maximise learning.</p>
	<p>WATCH Typically, watching means the mentor showing how it is done while the mentee watches closely. Where there are multiple mentees, and depending on the learning stage, it could also mean mentees watching each other perform an activity.</p>
	<p>COMMENT Mentees comment on what the mentor has done. This includes seeking clarification through questions, confirming the learning captured or even sharing views on what went well, etc.</p>
	<p>DO After watching and commenting on what the mentor has done, mentees in turn carry out similar activities while the mentor watches closely.</p>
	<p>FEEDBACK The mentor provides feedback to the mentee on performance, detailing what has gone well, what not so well and suggestions for improvement. Feedback is both spontaneous and structured.</p>

2.7 Planning the steps to becoming trained and experienced

The framework above can be used to design mentoring according to particular skills that need to be developed. It is important to decide for each skill or set of skills what training is needed; what practical OJT is needed; the duration of OJT (whether one visit lasting a day or multiple visits lasting several days per visit); what mentoring skills or expertise are needed; and how to deliver the OJT (real or hosted). Essentially, it is important to determine the phases of development towards enhanced competence. In practice, this is linked to the learning phases established in a learning framework. The WCDF framework used for the APN mentoring programme is built on the assumption that the level of performance or competence attained is related to the quality and duration of structured mentored practice. As such, it provides for a flexible three-phased approach to attaining credible practitioner competence.

2.8 Consider how to sustain the mentoring programme

Capacity development is typically a long-term process. When designing the programme, consideration should be given to how the programme can be sustained in the longer term through **funding** for the operation of the programme and **institutionalisation** of capacity-development roles in the mentoring programme.



Identify funding options

Assuming start-up funding/in kind commitments have been secured, they should be used in part to build interest in and support from others. For a sustainability mentoring programme, potential sources of funding or in kind support include:

- International development assistance donors/foundations whose objectives are relevant to the mentoring programme, such as deforestation, climate change and livelihoods.
- Companies that host mentees because they need the services of experienced practitioners mentored by the programme.
- Supply chain companies that are reliant on competent local practitioners to support implementation of better production practices in their responsible sourcing commitments.
- Sustainability schemes whose effectiveness and credibility depends on competent assessments.
- Government agencies whose mandates include sustainable natural resource management or related education.
- Not-for-profit organisations whose objectives include capacity development to support natural resource management. These may provide in kind resources through e.g. course development, communication or the alignment of their competency programme with the mentoring programme.
- Multilateral organisations supporting natural resource management through technical and/or financial assistance.
- The coordinating organisation or the mentoring organisation itself may provide start-up resources to mobilise partners and funds, training materials, communications and other support.

Institutionalise capacity development roles

It is not only individuals, but also organisations that play a key role in implementing sustainable practices, whether environmental or social NGOs, community organisations, consultants or even producer companies and local government. Yet in many cases, organisations lack institutional understanding and capacity to play their role effectively. Strengthening the technical capacity of local organisations to support implementation and training is crucially important to achieve scale and sustainability. For instance, an increasing number of production companies need to be supported in more countries to implement sustainable practices. Competent and experienced organisations are also well placed to provide training for an increasing number of emerging practitioners, thereby widening access to training and capacity building. In order to achieve mentoring programme outcomes at scale and with permanence it is important to build the capacity of the next generation of trainers and mentors. For this reason, training-the-trainers (TtT) and mentoring-the-mentors (MtM) can be useful approaches.

For the APN, the aim is to establish a growing pool of trainers and mentors (comprising individuals and organisations) in the various sustainability initiatives – HCV, RSPO, FSC, FLEGT legality schemes – that can be available to provide training and mentoring to an increasing number of practitioners. Supporting the emergence of the next generation of mentors and trainers is crucial to achieving sustainability.

3 Preparation

Once the design of the planned programme has been agreed, the next step is preparation. In practice, this is often an ongoing process, which continues iteratively with design and delivery as new skills, new types of practitioner or new mentoring locations are added. Preparation covers the following, among other tasks.

3.1 Identify partners and confirm their role

Partnerships are central to a mentoring programme because of their potential to increase the effectiveness of delivery and improve efficiency as well as enhance credibility (see Box 7). For each partnership it is important to understand and clarify both your own expectations and the needs and motivations of the potential partner in order to develop engagement strategies and working relationships that will be effective. Two important types of partnership are technical partners and logistical partners.

Technical partnerships: Technical partners are organisations which contribute expertise to the overall programme. They are often organisations with particular skills such as auditing, consultation or environmental and social assessments, or organisations that provide training.

For example, as noted earlier where there are already organisations providing the classroom-based training needed as the basis for the practical OJT, it is often very effective to form a partnership to link these existing courses to the mentoring programme. Another example can be found in the context of mentoring auditors, where partnerships with organisations or initiatives that conduct assessments as part of delivering certification support programmes are important. For the APN, this included WWF's Global Forest and Trade Network programme and independent certification bodies such as Rainforest Alliance Certification.



Box 7: The importance of partnerships

Partnerships are often integral to the design of an effective mentoring programme for a range of reasons.

- For mentoring to be effective at producing competent practitioners, mentees need to have a solid understanding of the subject as typically gained through classroom-based training. Where such courses are run, or would best be run, by another, credible organisation it is likely to be most effective and efficient for the organisation creating the mentoring programme to partner with the classroom-based training provider to create an integrated training package.
- In many of the places where implementing sustainability commitments by producers is a recent phenomenon, and where there are relatively few professionals with the skills and experience to act as mentors, a mentoring programme is likely to want to engage and work in partnership with mentors from different organisations or even 'flying experts'.
- Where host organisations are part of the mentoring programme, their early and ongoing involvement in the design, delivery and evaluation of the mentoring programme is important if the mentoring is to meet mentee needs and also be useful for the host organisation.
- A regional mentoring programme may be the most efficient and effective design as it allows common practical experience and classroom-based training needs to be met using pooled resources. Typically, a single organisation may not have presence in each participating country so partner organisations may be part of the organisational structure of the programme, as with the Africa Practitioners Network.
- As a mentoring programme develops a pool of alumni, it can be advantageous for alumni to combine their skills in partnerships to provide services.

Credibility of a mentoring programme is enhanced through collaboration with training organisations that are recognised leaders in their field and host organisations/companies that are committed to sustainability.

Logistical partnerships: Logistical partnerships are generally with host organisations that provide opportunities for OJT. These are often production companies, but other organisations working with producers such as trade associations or cooperatives may be important partners in creating opportunities for mentored training.

For the APN the most important logistical partners are production companies and consulting companies whose staff have participated in the mentoring and whose facilities may be made available for presentations, reporting, facilitation, etc. Other important partners include the Ghana Timber Millers Organisation (GTMO) and the Kumasi Wood Cluster (KWC) in Ghana; the Liberia Timber Association (LTA); or even sectoral programmes such as Cameroon's PSFE-2 (Forest Environment Sector Programme) programme.

3.2 Consider how to provide support to partners across different locations

Where the mentoring programme has a regional scale/focus, it is important to think through the approach for delivery, particularly when the mentoring organisation is not domiciled in the countries in question. This would include consideration of who to work with, how to reach the key actors including training sites. Working through and with partners is particularly crucial in such situations. The level of backstopping to be provided to the partner will depend on capacity but it is extremely important to have measures in place to ensure quality delivery without compromising on standards. A practical approach is for the mentoring organisation to be actively involved in planning and preparation and observe at least a couple of initial deliveries.

3.3 Identifying and preparing key actors

Careful identification and preparation of each of the key actors (mentees, mentor and host organisation) is necessary to ensure effectiveness of OJT exercises. Mentees should fulfil a set of minimum requirements including classroom-based training and a minimum level of experience to qualify to undertake the practical OJT. Mentors and host organisations should meet clear criteria to ensure the training is effective.

Securing the commitment from mentors, mentees, host organisations and partners is critical to ensuring all understand their responsibilities and the expectations of others. MOUs and participation agreements (**Box 8**) that clearly establish a shared goal and mutually beneficial objectives are valuable for documenting and formalising the relationship with mentees, mentors, host organisations and technical delivery partners.



3.4 Build awareness of the mentoring programme

Creating the demand for the mentoring programme and awareness of its value among mentees and potential users of mentee services requires clear communication of its scope and objectives to key stakeholders including organisations that would wish to develop the capacity of their staff and/or partners. Such communication should also include making a case for the credibility, effectiveness and authority of the mentoring approach drawn from long-standing expertise and experiences of mentoring organisations (and partners).

Box 8: Working in partnership – practical guidance on participation agreements

For all involved and particularly for mentees, OJT requires a substantial investment of time and energy and a high standard of professional conduct. It is worthwhile to clearly establish the scope of the OJT in a Participation Agreement to be signed by both mentee and the mentoring organisation. The agreement should confirm that mentees:

- Meet the basic requirement for the OJT, which in most instances is to have **completed** and **passed** an established formal training course that covers the information and concepts relevant to the mentoring.
- Understand and accept that the OJT will involve travel and working conditions that differ from their normal daily routine. For the APN, OJT typically includes travel to remote locations for several days and working for extended hours in the day to carry out field assessments.
- Commit to completing a minimum number of assessments (as required by the qualification they seek), each one lasting several days.
- Understand and agree to non-disclosure and confidentiality requirements covering how proprietary information from host organisations is to be handled.



Box 9: Experience from the APN



Adewale Adeleke

**Policy and Sustainable Development Specialist, USAID West Africa
Biodiversity and Climate Change programme**

I am fortunate to have been one of the first African natural resource management practitioners to gain international exposure to sustainability policy and practice. I see mentoring as an ideal opportunity to give back to emerging practitioners through sharing the knowledge and experience I have gained over 25 years of working in forest resources management. I do not expect any remuneration. The reward for me is the satisfaction in seeing the growth of skilled and competent sustainability practitioners here in Africa.



4 Delivery

Skills required for effective implementation and monitoring of sustainability initiatives include but are not limited to making presentations, reviewing documents, undertaking field inspections, interviewing and consulting stakeholders and reporting findings. Such skills can be developed or strengthened through live or mock scenarios. Different types of skills require different OJT but all can be based on the Watch Comment Do Feedback (WCDF) framework developed by Proforest. (See Box 10).

4.1 Delivering on-job training using the WCDF framework

The WCDF framework provides a common structure for mentoring sustainability practitioners but needs to be adapted depending on the skills being learned and the context and frequency of the OJT. For some skills and practitioners, it might be adequate to have just one OJT while other skills will require multiple experiences to master. The WCDF framework should therefore be adapted to suit the skills being developed.

Typically, where multiple OJT sessions are planned, the roles of mentors and mentees evolve through each of the OJT sessions. Generally, mentors have a declining involvement in the learning process, increasingly taking an observing/oversight role, while mentees assume greater responsibility for conducting and leading activities over time. These roles and their evolution through successive OJT exercises is described in an illustration of the WCDF in the table on [page 26](#).

The WCDF model serves as the framework that defines responsibilities for learning activities carried out by both mentor and mentees during the course of the OJT session. The framework applies from preparation through to report-writing, and includes, in the case of assessments, important elements such as opening/closing meetings, document review, staff interviews, stakeholder consultations and site inspections.

The key to combining effective mentoring with the delivery of high quality services to clients lies in preparation and familiarity with appropriate tools and guidance documents. It is extremely important, therefore, for the key actors and particularly mentees to be familiar with such tools and guidance material including checklists, templates and manuals (as appropriate).



Box 10: Using the WCDF framework for an assessment exercise

Activity	Description	OJT 1	OJT 2	OJT 3
Stakeholder consultations and inspection of key sites	Community consultations	Mentor leads one and assigns responsibility for rest. Mentor observes mentees in turns. Feedback at DTM.	Roles shared amongst mentees. Mentor provides feedback.	A mentee is nominated to coordinate the set of activities. Mentor observes team carefully, makes detailed notes and provides critical feedback on their performance.
	Staff and worker interviews	Mentor leads one and assigns responsibility for rest. Mentor observes mentees in turns. Feedback at DTM.	Roles shared amongst mentees. Mentor provides feedback.	
	Other stakeholder interviews	Mentor leads one and assigns responsibility for rest. Mentor observes mentees in turns. Feedback at DTM.	Roles shared amongst mentees. Mentor provides feedback.	
Opening/closing meeting	Preparation of meeting notes	Mentees prepare draft notes and finalise using feedback from mentor.	Mentees prepare draft notes and finalise using feedback from mentor.	A mentee is nominated to coordinate the set of activities. Mentor observes team carefully, makes detailed notes and provides critical feedback on their performance.
	Introduction to meeting and review of objectives, scope and general observations (for closing meeting)	Mentor assigns role to a mentee. Others make critical notes. Mentor feeds back.	Mentor assigns role to a mentee. Others make critical notes. Mentor feeds back.	
	Presentation of findings at closing meeting	Mentor assigns roles to mentees. Mentees take critical notes of each others' presentations. Mentor feeds back.	Mentor assigns roles to mentees. Mentees take critical notes of each other's presentation. Mentor feeds back.	
	Responses to questions and next steps.	Mentor leads on this but frequently asks mentees to make additional input.	Mentor assigns role to mentees. Others make critical notes. Mentor feeds back.	
Analysis and reporting	Preparation of draft report	Mentees prepare report. Mentor provides critical comments.	Mentees: mentor provides critical comments.	A mentee is nominated to coordinate the set of activities. Mentor observes team carefully, makes detailed notes and provides critical feedback on their performance.
	Responses to client comments on draft report	Mentees respond to client comments. Mentor reviews revised report and provides critical comments.	Mentees: mentor reviews revised report and makes critical comments.	
	Finalisation of draft report	Mentees finalise draft report. Mentor reviews and passes as complete and accurate.	Mentees finalise draft report. Mentor reviews and passes as complete and accurate.	

4.2 Mentor feedback to mentees

All aspects of the WCDF framework are critical for learning but feedback is particularly important. Throughout the process, mentors provide spontaneous and structured individual and group feedback to the mentees to stimulate reflection about what is being learned (including both content and process).

It is very important that mentors consciously ensure that they provide a balance of positive feedback on strengths and things done well, with constructive criticism that highlights remaining issues and weaknesses. Focusing only on areas which need improvement can undermine confidence, while failing to highlight and discuss weaknesses limits opportunities for improvement.

Box 11: Mentor feedback and evaluation of mentee progress

Central to mentoring is the creation of a challenging but supportive learning environment underpinned by the communication of constructive feedback from mentors to mentees, using a combination of spontaneous and structured approaches. Feedback is typically ongoing during and after an OJT exercise, as described in the WCDF framework. This includes the Daily Team Meetings (DTM) and, at the end of a mentoring exercise, an overall assessment of progress to the mentee. This final assessment looks at progress towards planned learning outcomes in terms of both their ability to apply their technical knowledge and write useful reports as well as their soft skills such as their ability to relate and work well with team members and the client. It may also usefully include their approach to learning.



Spontaneous feedback

Spontaneous feedback or 'feedback in motion/transit' is provided by the mentor intermittently throughout the learning process. Often, this happens during the time between completion of one activity and start of the next. The opportunity to provide this kind of feedback can often be seized when the team is in transit, either walking or driving from one location to another. In the APN, mentees report that they find this intermittent feedback extremely useful and encouraging due to its timing.

Structured feedback

Spontaneous feedback is helpful in many ways, but cannot be a substitute for structured systematic feedback usually delivered in accordance with pre-determined evaluation criteria. This is typically done verbally during daily review sessions (on-site) and in writing following the completion of all learning activities. Structured feedback is particularly important for overcoming underlying weaknesses or problems in a mentee.

Structured verbal feedback should be provided on a regular basis during the learning process. Typically, it is provided by the mentor to the mentee at the end of each day's work, sharing reflections on what has gone well and what not so well in a systematic manner.

Structured written feedback is typically provided off-site following the completion of all learning activities. The mentor prepares consolidated feedback for each mentee that includes an evaluation of key activities and other aspects including mentees' interpersonal skills and professional conduct.



Box 12: Daily team meetings

Daily Team Meetings (DTM) by the assessment team including the mentor and mentees are very important. They serve as occasions to reflect on the day's activities and for the mentor to share his observations with the team and provide feedback to the group as well as individual mentees. Mentees discuss what went well and what not so well and the mentor provides feedback and guidance. Areas to be improved are highlighted so they can be addressed in the subsequent days. Such areas could include interview techniques, approaches to consulting stakeholders including communities or how to review documents for completeness and accuracy. It is important for the mentor to document the DTM including all key points covered, as evidence to be consolidated and summarised in the overall feedback at the end of the process.

4.3 Planning the logistics

Planning and preparing for the OJT requires considerable effort by the host organisation, mentor, mentee and particularly the mentoring programme manager. Some important details to be considered include dates, transportation, accommodation, health and safety, etc.

- 1. Plan early.** Typically, the assessment team comprises a total of four persons including the mentor and three mentees. Planning should begin several weeks ahead of the planned OJT session, in agreed-on dates that are convenient for all key actors, particularly the host organisation.
- 2. Include standby team members.** Even when planning starts early enough and suitable dates have been agreed, circumstances beyond the control of a key actor (mentor or mentee) could preclude their involvement in a planned OJT session, often at relatively short notice. It is therefore reasonable to have a fall-back plan that involves keeping a mentor as well as a couple of mentees on standby to step in, where possible.
- 3. Discuss host organisation preparation and role.** To make the exercise effective, it is important that the host organisation makes personnel, documents and field sites available exactly as they would for a live assignment. It is very important to clarify this in advance. An example of the preparation needed for an auditing OJT is provided in **Box 13**.
- 4. Discuss all logistics with the host organisation.** It is imperative to discuss logistics with the host organisation in advance to know what they can conveniently provide in terms of field vehicles, accommodation and meals. Planning should take account of the resource constraints of the host organisation to enable adequate preparation to be made in all circumstances.
- 5. Ensure preparations align with the itinerary.** When making arrangements for hotel accommodation (in the event the host organisation is unable to provide this), it is important to pay careful attention to the audit plan. For instance, it is not unusual for a company's administrative and processing locations to be sited in an area considerably far away from both its field operations and the key stakeholders that need to be consulted, including communities, government officials and NGOs. The audit plan should detail the field itinerary of the assessment team including specific duration of stay in each location.



Box 13: Typical role of host organisation during an auditing OJT

Audit activity	What host organisation should prepare
Preparation of audit plan	Company representative (CR) works with team to finalise audit plan.
Opening meeting	CR ensures all meeting participants are present at meeting.
Document review	CR facilitates easy access to all documents to be reviewed.
Staff interviews	CR schedules meetings with all staff to be interviewed.
Stakeholder consultations	CR schedules meetings with all stakeholders to be consulted and arranges for a guide to accompany team at all times.
Site visits	CR appoints a guide to accompany team to pre-determined sites and ensures access to field workers.
Closing meeting	CR ensures all meeting participants are present at meeting.
Analysis and reporting	CR facilitates review of draft report by team.

Health and safety

Practical experience, whether in real or mock assessment exercises, exposes mentors and mentees to the same risks as any work or visit to a production or processing facility. Therefore, a mentoring programme should follow good practice in health and safety as appropriate for the locations where practical exercises are undertaken.

The mentoring programme manager should draw on the practices of their institution, or partners, and prepare a checklist or guidance to inform the host organisation, mentors and mentees of what is required for all aspects of health and safety such as protective clothing, emergency treatment procedures or evacuation protocols. Though some host organisations can provide personal protective equipment (PPE), medical facilities and emergency evacuation, others cannot so it is important to confirm what is available and plan accordingly. Backup equipment should be brought unless the mentoring programme manager has full confidence in PPE availability.



5 Monitoring, learning and impact

Whereas feedback from mentor to mentee is central to developing mentee competence (**Section 4.2**), feedback from all actors in the mentoring programme, systematically reviewed by the programme manager, maximises the learning experience and ultimately the effectiveness of the mentoring programme itself.

“We are not beginners forever, but we never stop learning.”
Sandra Scofield

Feedback as a tool for monitoring

The mentoring programme manager should systematically review feedback from all actors. Good practice may include review of:

- Mentor feedback to mentees, including sampling of written and verbal structured feedback.
- Mentor feedback on the host companies, any partners, as well as the support received from the mentoring programme manager/information resources.
- Mentee feedback on mentors as well as the mentoring process and how the experience was organised.
- Host company feedback on mentees, the mentor as well as the process of organising the experience.

Feedback should stimulate reflection about how effectively competencies are being developed, on the mentoring process, the strengths and weaknesses of mentors and on organisational aspects.



5.1 Mentor performance

Experienced, motivated mentors are critical for the achievement of quality of learning outcomes by mentees. A mentoring programme manager should use mentor, mentee and host feedback as well as, where possible, direct observation to determine if a mentor is performing adequately and if there are concerns to be addressed. Periodic assessment of mentor performance should then be used to:

- Inform the mentoring programme how the mentor performance capabilities might be strengthened further.
- Provide all mentors with feedback that can encourage good practices and help them identify and eliminate what works less well.
- Consider if any modifications are needed to enhance the management and guidance provided to all mentors.

5.2 Partnership review

A mentoring programme will involve partnerships with host organisations and often also training partners, as in the case of the APN. It should not be assumed that partnerships once formed will go on to perform optimally and fully meet partner expectations. Periodic review to allow for reflection on their functioning should be undertaken as agreed by partners, typically annually or when the formal partnership agreement ends or is due for renewal. The review may involve a dialogue between the partners to explore common or differing views on:

- Key achievements of the partnership (top 3–5 outcomes).
- Added value of the partnership (impact, innovation, efficiency, etc).
- The effectiveness of the partnership process (decision making, communication, responsibilities, etc).
- Operational systems (signed agreements, financial controls, monitoring procedures, etc).

Box 14: Experience from the APN: demand for mentee services



When the APN was established, one clear aim was to build local capacity and expertise by providing opportunities for experiential, mentored learning. One of the most significant measures so far of the effectiveness of the programme is the interest that the APN has sparked in other organisations in providing auditing services using alumni from the mentoring programme. At least 18 APN alumni are now working as auditors with certification bodies (including Rainforest Alliance, Soil Association, TÜV Rheinland and Control Union) and as sustainability managers with private sector companies.

5.3 Evaluating the effectiveness of mentoring

Whether the mentoring process as a whole is delivering outcomes as expected (or even contributing to unexpected outcomes – see Box 14) it should be evaluated periodically to answer questions such as:

- Are former mentees using what they learned as a mentee to undertake work that they previously did not do, whether through providing services to others or internally in their organisation? If so, how? How many? Where? Which sectors? Are any applications of learning different to what was expected?
- Are former mentees now serving as mentors to others? If so, how many, where, in which sectors? Are any former mentors providing mentoring to audiences that are different from those that were expected?
- Are mentored institutions now offering training or other services in the field in which they were mentored that they previously did not? If so, which institutions, to how many pupils/clients, where? Are any institutions providing services or taking on roles that were not expected, such as operating in other countries or gaining influence over company or government practices?
- Considering answers to the above, has mentoring in some sectors/countries been more successful than in others and if so why might this be?
- Considering the outcomes, which are the most successful mentoring strategies?



Mentoring is but one factor determining the success of an individual or institution. Therefore, any evaluation of mentoring effectiveness needs to recognise the main additional factors influencing outcomes, not least the classroom-based training and supportiveness or otherwise of a mentee's employer.

An evaluation will inform learning – for instance whether the design of the programme is optimal and whether our assumptions about mentees applying their learning and experiences is holding true over time – as well as underpinning the programme's accountability to stakeholders including funders.

When to conduct an evaluation? When evaluating outcomes, it is important to consider that they may materialise some months after the mentoring has taken place. Therefore, periodic evaluation may best be scheduled every 2–5 years, depending on how long it takes for a sufficiently large/informative body of mentees to be developed and given time to put into practice what they learned.

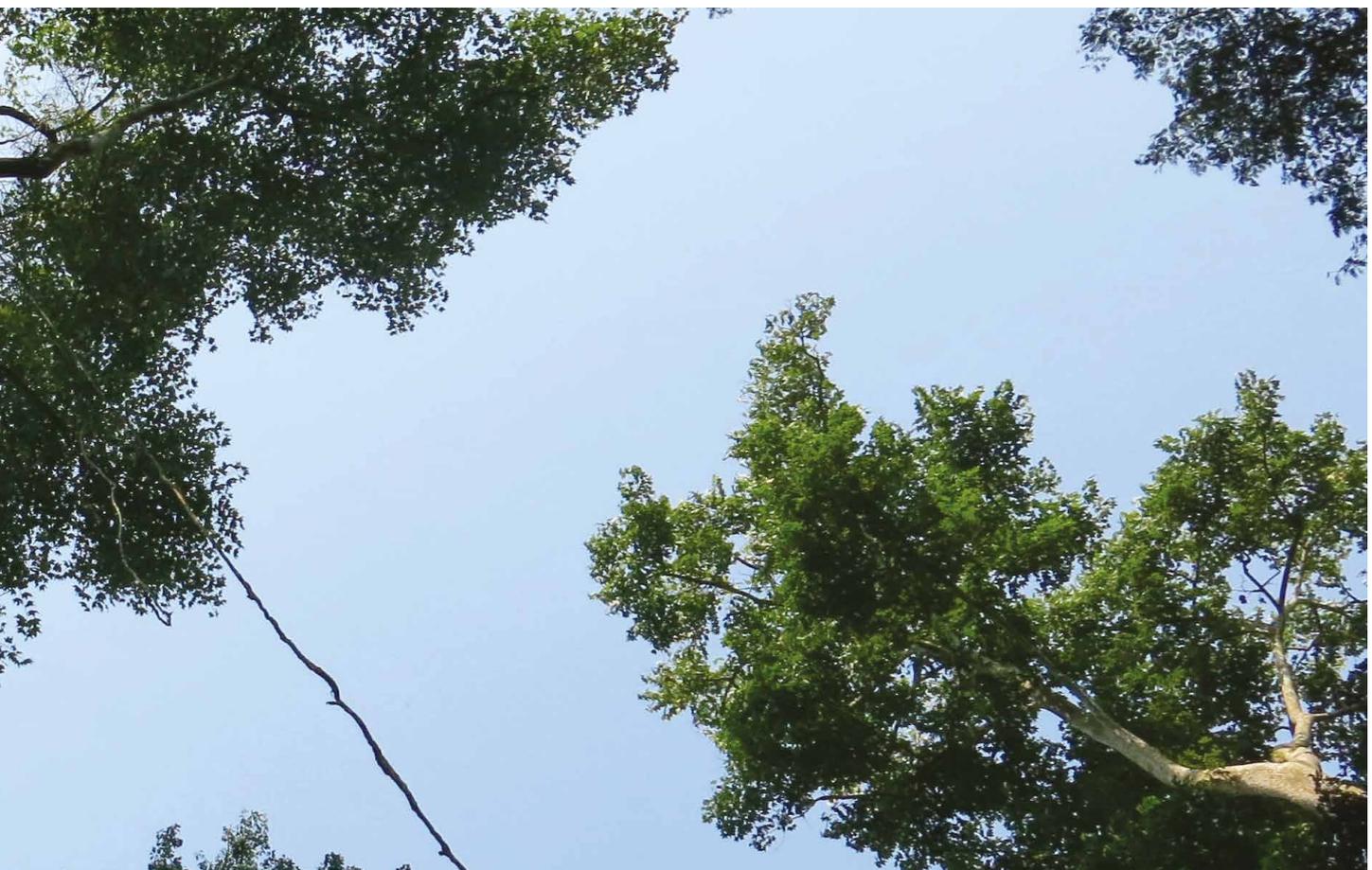
To inform the evaluation, and provide evidence for adjusting the programme during its early stages of establishment, it is typically very useful to undertake regular monitoring of both outputs (numbers mentored, in which sector, etc) and outcomes/potential outcomes (initial use of learning by a mentee, expression of interest from an institution in developing its capabilities, etc).



6 Resources

Below is a list of the resources referenced throughout the guide. All documents can be downloaded at www.proforest.net/mentoring.

Page number	Resource name (click to download)
10	Participation agreement – mentees
11	Agreement for services for mentor
12	Participation agreement – host
24	Participation agreement – mentees Agreement for services for mentors Participation agreement – host
25	Technical tools
30	Audit plan
30	Health and safety checklist
31	Feedback forms



The page features an abstract graphic design. It consists of several thin, light teal lines that curve across the page, creating a sense of movement and depth. A prominent grey triangle is positioned on the right side, pointing towards the center. The overall aesthetic is clean and modern.

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