

TIMELINE

Conservation, Livelihoods and Governance Programme Tools for participatory approaches

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A timeline (or trend line) is a graphic method used to show perceived changes or events taking place over time.

What is it useful for?

- Establishing and representing sequences of major events or changes that have occurred in or affected a community over an extended period of time, including changes in natural resource availability and use.
- Learning about community perceptions of change in specific areas or sectors (such as natural resources, climate and weather events, political events, and conflict or cultural changes).
- Understanding and analysing a current problem by looking for its causes in the past, and predicting future events or changes on the basis of past experience.
- Timelines can also be used to construct personal histories of selected community members.
- Informing an understanding of how perspectives and values have changed over time, including those relating to ecosystem services.
- A basis for creating a 'vision for the future', exploring how people envisage things will be or should be in the future.

Suggested steps

Allow approximately **one hour** for this exercise.

- 1) Agree with participants the period which the timeline will consider. Time lines are mainly used to examine a sequence of events over many years, however they can also be used to look at events within particular time periods (such as the preceding decade or 50 years).
- 2) Ask participants to write down or draw on card (or post it notes) all the important events that have occurred within their community. These events can be both within their lifetime or before they were born (unless a specific period is being considered). If all participants write or draw events individually it is easier to ensure that particular individuals do not dominate the activity to the exclusion of others. Major events can include, but are not restricted to, the following:
 - Major disasters and their effects
 - Changes in land use and species (houses, crops, forest cover, wildlife, etc)
 - Changes in land tenure
 - Changes in food security
 - Changes in administration
 - Major social or political events or conflict
- 3) A long line is drawn on a large piece of paper (or on the ground using a stick or a piece of string) and then, as a group, participants arrange all their cards in chronological order along the line. Put together all the cards that indicate the same event. An alternative is simply to

draw a line and participants draw, write, or symbolize specific important events along it, although care must be taken to ensure that all members of the group contribute.

- 4) It is not important to get specific dates for each event, especially in communities where there is less emphasis on calendar dates. When the events are in chronological order, the space between them along the line can be used to indicate the time between events (that is, a short space indicates a short period of time; longer space indicates a longer period of time). If dates are available for specific events, they can help establish when other events occurred. The timeline should concentrate on key events only. It is useful to periodically run through the events to prompt recall and help fill in any gaps.
- 5) Where cards / post-it notes have been used, record the number of cards with the same events on them. This duplication might be an indication of the relative importance attached to the event by local participants.

Figure 1: Timeline from a community in Kashmir, 1940–2000 (World Bank, 2005)

1940	1950	1960	1965	1971	1990	2000
Lower population	Increased population	Road constructed	War	War	More schools, increased literacy	Increased population
Lower household expenditure	Household expenditure increased	Schools constructed, literacy increased	Migration due to war	Migration due to war	Increased population	Landholding size decreased
High agricultural production	Landholding size decreased	Opportunities to access different services opened	Lives of people disturbed	Lives of people disturbed again	Forests decreased	Decreased agricultural activities
More livestock	Agricultural production decreased		Houses damaged	Houses damaged	Warmer climate, less rain and snow	Agricultural production decreased
Thick forests			Infrastructure destroyed	Muhajir came from India held Kashmir	Decreased water resources	Less animal rearing
More wildlife			Vulnerability increased	Vulnerability increased		Less farmyard manure
People's behaviour was good						Unemployment Lower income Poverty

This timeline shows not just one-off events but also gives an indication of how previous periods were perceived and how things have changed over time (for example, in 1940, the perception appears to be that life was easier/better with more livestock, lower expenses, and so on). It also shows some of the perceived impacts of specific events (for example, the war in 1965 led to migration, the destruction of houses and infrastructure, and increased vulnerability).

- 6) Discuss and analyse the timeline. This might be made easier if it is divided into smaller time periods, perhaps by breaking the line where a period elapses during which nothing of importance happened. If there are several different groups, ask each group to present its time line to the others for their reactions and comments. Are there any major differences? Are some events recorded by one group but not another? If so, note these and the reasons for the differences.

Questions to guide discussion and analysis

The following questions can be used to guide the discussion but should be adopted and adapted according to the focus of the exercise.

- What major events have affected this community?
- What are the most important environmental trends? E.g. drought, deforestation, erosion.
- What are the most important economic trends? E.g. jobs, wages, prices, costs of living, crop yields, livestock population.
- What are the most important demographic trends? E.g. birth rates, infant mortality, in-migration, out-migration, increases in female-headed households.
- What other trends are important?
- What are the linkages between the trends?
- How have these events and trends impacted women and men differently?
- What events and trends impact the poor more so than the rich?
- Are there differences by ethnicity, caste, etc.?
- What are current strategies to cope during difficult events? Do different groups of people have different coping strategies? Are they working?
- Have coping strategies changed based on the frequency of events?
- What other impacts have these events or trends had? In the short term and in the longer term?
- What bearing do these historical events and trends have on current issues or debates?
- What events do you expect will occur in the future? When?
- Does this perception of future events affect your plans for the future?
- What is getting better? What is getting worse?
- What features / events (e.g. natural resources, wildlife, customs etc) have changed or disappeared since the time of your parents or grandparents?
- What features / events (e.g. natural resources, wildlife, customs etc) would you like to preserve for your children and grandchildren?

Points to remember:

- ❖ Sensitive issues from the past might be raised. If this happens, the facilitator can move to the next time period and return to the sensitive issue later on. The group should not get stuck in deep discussion over sensitive issues.
- ❖ Local participants should be encouraged to build as much of the diagram as possible without interruption and to suggest anything else that should be recorded.
- ❖ Before using this tool read the accompanying document, *A guide to using tools for participatory approaches*.

For further information

CARE (2009) *Climate Vulnerability and Capacity Analysis Handbook*
<http://www.careclimatechange.org/tools>

World Bank (2005) *Poverty and Social Impact Analysis Sourcebook*
<http://go.worldbank.org/ZGZHJEDBZO>

This tool is based on the *Timeline* in the World Bank (2005) *Poverty and Social Impact Analysis Sourcebook*



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