

Historical Timeline

I. Description:

The Historical Timeline is a group exercise that chronologically lists people's recollection of key events and changes in the history of their community.

II. Purpose:

The Historical Timeline reveals trends and leads to discussions about people's past activities and changes in the community and possibly the broader societal context. The types of events recorded on the timeline will depend upon the interests of the participants, and thus this tool can give insight into people's preferences and priorities. The Historical Timeline facilitates people's learning from the past, as well as recognition of and appreciation for their accomplishments (e.g., livelihoods, coping mechanisms, etc.), and resourceful asset use (e.g., existing knowledge, relationships, land, etc.). For climate resilience purposes, facilitated discussion about environmental and climate changes and their effects on the community can draw attention to positive and negative trends and lessons learned over time.

III. Project Cycle Application:

1 - Assessment Phase	Can be used to reveal trends and identify individual as well as group perceptions of important events Can help to establish rapport with a new group or community
2 - Planning Phase	Can be used to focus people's attention on past successes to generate a sense of possibility that contributes to more active and creative planning Can give insight to avoid repeating past mistakes
3 - Implementation & Monitoring Phase	Can be used to help address implementation challenges by shifting focus to historical examples of success (i.e. cooperation, coping, problem solving) Can be used by participants to compare plans to actions for highlighting and affirming recent progress; prior timelines can be displayed in meeting places and updated as progress is made.
4 - Evaluation Phase	Can be used to help participants compare where their community was at pre-project versus post-project; can be used to identify key decisions and actions within a newly completed program.
5 - Reporting Phase	Can be used as a chronological record of people's points of participation (i.e. decision-making, leadership, collaboration, etc.) to give visibility to the community-led and community-driven process.

IV. Facilitation Steps:

Step 1: Preparation The timeline may be drawn on the ground, but to enable future reflection and use it should be drawn on paper. Materials include paper and markers. Post-it notes or index cards may be used to capture people's stories of events in writing or symbols. Otherwise, you can write the events (or symbols for events) directly on the timeline paper.

Step 2: Introduction The exercise may take up to one hour. Introduce the Historical Timeline by explaining it is a fun exercise intended to reveal the history of their community or group. Remind them that all present are invited to join in and share.

Step 3: Exercise Instructions

1st Draw a line on the ground, chalkboard or paper; or tape together a line of papers along a wall.

2nd Ask people to begin by thinking about significant events that have occurred in their community.

Begin by asking those who have lived there the longest to share events they remember happening

across their lifetime. As needed, prompt with an explanation that events should be shared experiences in their community, and related to whatever they feel have been most important. As needed, prompt with questions about specific events related to culture, politics, disasters, climate, health/epidemics, community development/changes, celebrations, etc.

- 3rd Give people a minute to think individually, then ask people to share an event verbally as a story and, if able and time allows, to write or draw a symbol of it on a post-it to put on the timeline.
- 4th Facilitate one-by-one people's sharing of events. Encourage brief storytelling, as well as triangulation of events via plenary debates and story embellishment.
- 5th As each event is shared, solicit people's suggestion of where the event belongs on their timeline. Have the storyteller or volunteer place the event card on the timeline in a date range location. As the timeline expands, the group may agree to changes in the order and time periods.

Step 4: Debrief & Learning (*Look, Think, Plan*) After the timeline is complete, encourage a round of applause for everyone's participation and contributions. Then facilitate the identification of learning points with questions such as:

- What does our timeline tell us? Do we see any trends or repetition?
- What important changes, positive or negative, occurred over time?
- How did the exercise make you feel? What are you most proud of? What challenges did you overcome and how?
- What historical events do we think can help us/teach us how to be/react/work together today?

V. Useful Hints:

- Remember the **purpose** of the exercise is lift up important lessons in the life of a community, **not** to create a timeline of absolute accuracy; don't insist on "actual" dates, but rather encourage people to think about periods in time, generations, or other community-specific labels.
- **Play and interaction can help people overcome barriers** of social hierarchy or language. The Historical Timeline is great at creating space for older people within the community to share their knowledge and experiences, and thus be and feel both active and valued.

VI. Pairing Pathways:

The Historical Timeline is useful when paired with:

- Mapping exercises, such as Transect Walks and Asset Maps, to show how the community differs physically and socially in the past and now, to identify the causes and effects of such changes and what can be done moving forward to leverage positive changes and mitigate or prevent negative changes
- Dreaming & visioning exercises that build upon the positive appreciation of past successes, setting the stage for expansion upon what people know and have seen work.
- Planning exercises that can be used to bridge the gap between the historical events and the future dreams.

VII. Sources

Volunteer Service Overseas (VSO). *Participatory Approaches: A facilitator's guide Tools, Part III Toolkit*. 2009

http://www.cropwildrelatives.org/fileadmin/templates/cropwildrelatives.org/upload/In_situ_Manual/VSO_Facilitator_Guide_to_Participatory_Approaches_Tools.pdf