



HISTORICAL TIMELINE

PURPOSE OF ACTIVITY

The purpose of creating a historical timeline is to explore past system dynamics that have contributed to the identity of the current system. Having a solid understanding of a system's history will greatly improve your understanding of why the dilemmas have emerged. The timeline can also shed light on capacities in the system, for example by looking at how people have responded and dealt with crises in the past, and the various capacities available then and now. The outputs will provide context for discussions in Phase 3 and may to some extent provide insights into creating strategies for change in Phase 4. See also related discussion guide.

RESOURCES NEEDED

Required skills: Low. Discussion based process, relatively easy to facilitate

Time: typically less than 1 hour

Materials: chart paper, sticky notes, marker pens, pins, sticky tape to adhere the sheets to a wall, wall space

HOW TO DO IT

STEP 1

There are a few alternative ways in which you can compose your timeline. Either start with individuals jotting down (on individual post-its) 4-5 key events that they think have critically shaped the system from their perspective then ask them to add these to the timeline. This usually leads to a lot of discussion about the sequence of events, and when something really happened. Alternatively, you can work through this as a group discussion, noting key events, filling in gaps and details as the group knowledge builds.

If there is a lot of information, separate social, political, economic, and ecological events onto parallel lines and then draw linkages between them. You could also consider separating different scales of the system, and link the events across them.

Phase 2: Creating a shared understanding of system identity

Module A: Aspirations and sustainability challenges

Work card 12: Understanding historical change

STEP 2

Look at your timeline collectively to identify; 1) Periods of stability and rapid change (you may want to introduce the concept of the adaptive cycle here, see work card 20) , 2) Patterns of change. For example long wave cycles of e.g. drought, or repeated events as annual labor migration , and 3) Events in the history that link past and current dynamics dynamics (for example historical settlement schemes resulting in current land degradation).

STEP 3

Reinforce the point that the current system is the cumulative legacy of past events and decision-making. Get one or two people from the groups to tell the story of the system, how has it evolved. Discuss what recent events that will shape the future, and how current decisions will shape the future.

TIPS

Are you aware of any cultural sensitivity to historical events, in particular for colonized or displaced peoples? You may want avoid doing a time line process too early in the process before you have understood those cultural sensitivities.

Don't try to use the timeline to forecast forward or to develop scenario's, in fact do the opposite, use it to talk about the uncertainty, surprise, unexpected events as the future will most certainly not be like the past.