ICE CREAM DIAGRAM

PURPOSE OF ACTIVITY

The purpose of creating an icecream diagram is to explore with stakeholders their aspirations for the future, and their understanding of what may limit achieving those visions. This activity should give you and your coalition an understanding of the major issues facing the community and also their current understanding of potential solutions to the problems they face. See also related activity sheet and discussion guide.

RESOURCES NEEDED

Skills: The process requires moderate facilitation skills
Time: 1-2 hours
Materials: White board or poster paper, sticky notes

HOW TO DO IT

STEP 1

Start with a simple question "how would you like this place to be?" Give people a couple of minutes to write down their aspirations for the system on sticky notes, You can use the concept of the 3L's - Landscape (ecological conditions) , Livelihoods (economic conditions) and Lifestyles (social conditions) to prompt them to think about the different dimensions of the system,

Ask them to formulate 2-3 aspirations per person (one sticky note for each statement). They need to be short and descriptive, such as 'healthy food', 'productive land', or 'clean water'.

STEP 2

Ask people to come up and place them within the 'ice cream' of the diagram, by grouping their sticky note with any others they see are similar. Once they have all finished putting them up, do some further grouping, then a brief summary discussion about them - look how similar they are, lots of shared values, we care about similar things etc. Then draw a cloud around them, this is the 'ice cream'. The message here is that these aspirations form a collective vision for the system of interest.

STEP 3

Draw the 'cone' under the ice-cream and explain how the bottom of the cone is now, and the ice cream at the top is the future. Our challenge is how we move from the current towards those aspirations. The sides of the cone represent some of the big limits or tipping points for the system. Ask people to write down or draw 2-3 things that they don't want for their community. Have people stick those notes on the outside of the cone, and again group them into similar clusters. Have a discussion about some of these potential 'states' of the system, characterise them a bit, what would the system be like if we were out here, could we still achieve aspirations? Why not?

STEP 4

Up until now people have been working on their own, now get them into small groups. Using what is outside the cone to prompt, what is inside the cone? What needs to work within the system, and what kind of conditions are needed to move us towards our aspirations? They should be trying to describe different dimensions of resilience, such as community or landscape connectedness, diverse income forms and landscape types, viable production systems, social cohesion etc. Once they have had a while to discuss this, ask people to write or draw these and put them inside the cone. Again, group any similar ones from the different small groups.

STEP 5

Now do some sorting and organising of the information in and outside the cone. Do any of the inside the cone characteristics/capacities/states relate to the outside conditions? Some of them will be linked and some will be the mirror image of the same issue. Where there is a clear link, they can become dilemmas or issue to address. Positions these 'pairs' of issues close to each other with the desired conditions inside the cone, the undesired conditions outside the cone immediately adjacent. Discuss where the system is now? Inside or outside? There will be some issues that don't have an equivalent on the other side, that is ok. Where they are not, is there something missing or something we have over looked?

You can also discuss how the edge of the cone represents a possible tipping point, beyond which the system starts to behave differently. Can you be specific about the nature of the tipping point, are there known thresholds? If not, can you characterise it in more general terms? How close fo you think the system is to these tipping points? People can discuss this in small groups and give their assessment of how close to tipping points the system is, they can stick a note on the cone with some description or narrative about why they think it is close to the tipping point on some issue.

STEP 6
The discussion should then turn to how to maintain the system in the desired state (ie inside the cone) or how to shift the undesired state (outside the cone) to a desired one? What actions are generally needed to stay inside the cone, or to get the system back inside? What could push you from the inside to the outside? Which are the most important drivers currently?

STEP 7
Summarise and come back up to the vision. Talk about the common shared aspirations. Looking at the current system, there is potential for the system to be a in a number of undesired states, start the discussion on what specific actions might be needed to bring the system back nside the cone.

TIPS

This is a fairly robust process and it usually works well. Identifying issues outside the cone is easier than inside, many people struggle to identify what is required to make the system function or deliver the aspirations they seek, you may need to give examples and assist these conversations.

The discussion is focused at the scale meaningful to the participants, keep in mind that there are scales above and below and they influence the scale you are focusing on here. Try to be clear about what scale you are focusing on from the start.