

Timeline of an Organisation/Project/Partnership

Objectives

- To enable participants to produce a timeline that indicates significant events, achievements, setbacks and changes in the history of the organisation.
- To understand better the specific context of a project/activity or partnership.
- To generate initial findings that will be deepened in subsequent exercises.
- To assess the organisation's capacity to learn and to cope with change.
- To provide a reference point for a later assessment of the impact of important changes on the organisation's development.
- To help bring out assumptions.

Materials

A flipchart or chalk-board that is visible to all participants; small pieces of card or post-its for each event that may easily be attached to and detached from the flip-chart

Time

1–1½ hours

Procedure

Selection of participants

- The longest serving members of the organisation, leaders, administrative staff and field staff should be chosen.
- In the case of a project, activity or partnership assessment, the inclusion of the key partners should be considered. Partners may also establish a timeline in an independent group of their own. The results should then later be compared and discussed.

Steps

1. Present the blank timeline diagram, and explain that a timeline helps outline a historical sequence of events over a period of several or many years.
2. Add the checklist of key events to be recorded to the timeline, and ask participants to include other important types of events in this list.
3. Have participants list key events in their organisation's/project's/partnership's history. Write these events and the year/month when each took place on blank cards.
4. Ask the participants to indicate whether each event can be assessed as "positive", "negative" or "neutral/normal". Positive events are those which improved performance or strengthened the organisation; negative events by contrast are those that set back performance or weakened the organisation.
5. Tape these cards onto the timeline, near the corresponding dates and placing them as follows:
 - Positive events above the horizontal line,
 - Negative events below the horizontal line, and
 - Neutral/normal events along the line.

The criteria for sorting the events into these three categories should be determined by the participants themselves.

Checklist of key events (to be completed by participants)

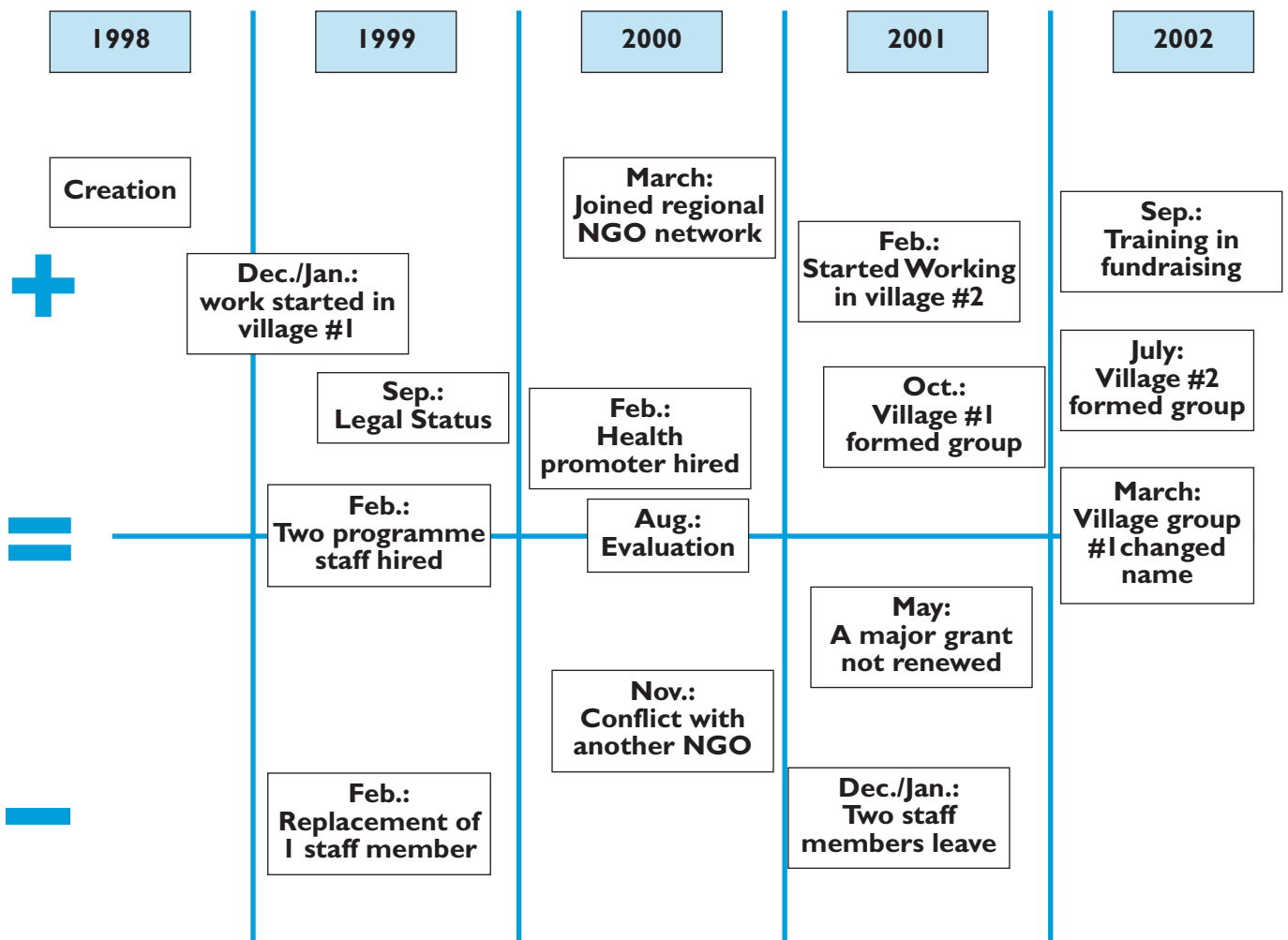
- Creation of the organisation/office, or start of the project/activity/partnership
- Changes in staff and leadership: expatriates or locals
- Funding changes
- Programme evaluations and assessments
- Starting and ending of specific activities or projects
- Programme shifts in terms of strategy or objectives
- Key training courses


- Establishment of links to external groups
- Acquisition of legal status
- Changes to organisational systems and procedures (e.g. accounting, project management, etc.)
- Internal crises
- Political events influencing staff and their work

The questions to be asked depend on what events have been cited. The questions provided here should purely serve as an indicative example. Some key questions for a semi-structured interview with participants could be:

- Who was primarily responsible for creating the organisation/establishing the office?
- What motivated this decision?
- What caused a particular setback to happen?
- How did the organisation expand to reach more groups?
- What brought about a change in the purpose of the organisation?
- Why did a certain leader/important staff member/partner resign?
- How did the organisation succeed in obtaining a major funding grant?
- What did the organisation do with the funding received in year X?
- Are there any critical issues affecting the organisation's performance or viability that arise from analysing the timeline?

Example



 This timeline is a modified version of an original taken from Gubbels, Peter and Catheryn Koss (World Neighbors) (2000): *From the Roots Up. Strengthening Organizational Capacity through Guided Self-Assessment*. Pp. 102–105.