

## Timeline



### Tool factsheet

#### IMPLEMENTING THE COMMON FRAMEWORK ON CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT (CD) FOR AGRICULTURAL INNOVATION SYSTEMS (AIS)

This factsheet is part of a series outlining tools and approaches to promote capacity development projects for agricultural innovation systems (AIS). The tools described in these pages are designed with a view to the practical implementation of the principles of the Common Framework of the Tropical Agriculture Platform (TAP), a G20 initiative. They have been applied in the Capacity Development for Agricultural Innovation Systems (CDAIS) project, funded by the EU and jointly implemented by Agrinatura and FAO in collaboration with national partners in Angola, Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Guatemala, Honduras, Laos and Rwanda.

Strong partnerships between multiple and diverse stakeholders are essential to promote agricultural innovation. Effective capacity development planning requires a sound understanding of how these partnerships are formed and how they unfold. The participation-oriented timeline tool discloses the history of a partnership by putting its pivotal moments in chronological order.

By arranging past events sequentially, stakeholders can discern and reflect on the innovation process, discuss the patterns that are made visible by the chain, and share their thoughts on key challenges and breakthroughs. The result is a storyline on which the participants can agree, as if to say: "Yes, this is how it happened, and these are the most important moments".

### Purpose of the tool

The timeline tool is generally put to use when stakeholders embark upon the self-assessment phase of their innovation partnership. The tool divulges different points of view and displays them next to each other. Stakeholders are asked to recall moments they feel were significant for the partnership, from its beginning to the present. These moments can refer equally to positive or negative events, to breakthroughs or to challenges.

As the timeline is a participatory exercise, innovation facilitators play an important role, and are responsible for, among other things, ensuring that stakeholders stay focused on the evolution of the partnership, rather than on technical breakthroughs and setbacks.



## How to use the tool

The timeline tool has been used in the context of the CDAIS project in several countries where it has proved its worth at expanding people's understanding of innovation partnerships. Thanks to the successful experience of its use and the material that has been written about it, we can offer some practical pointers to anyone intending to apply this instrument.

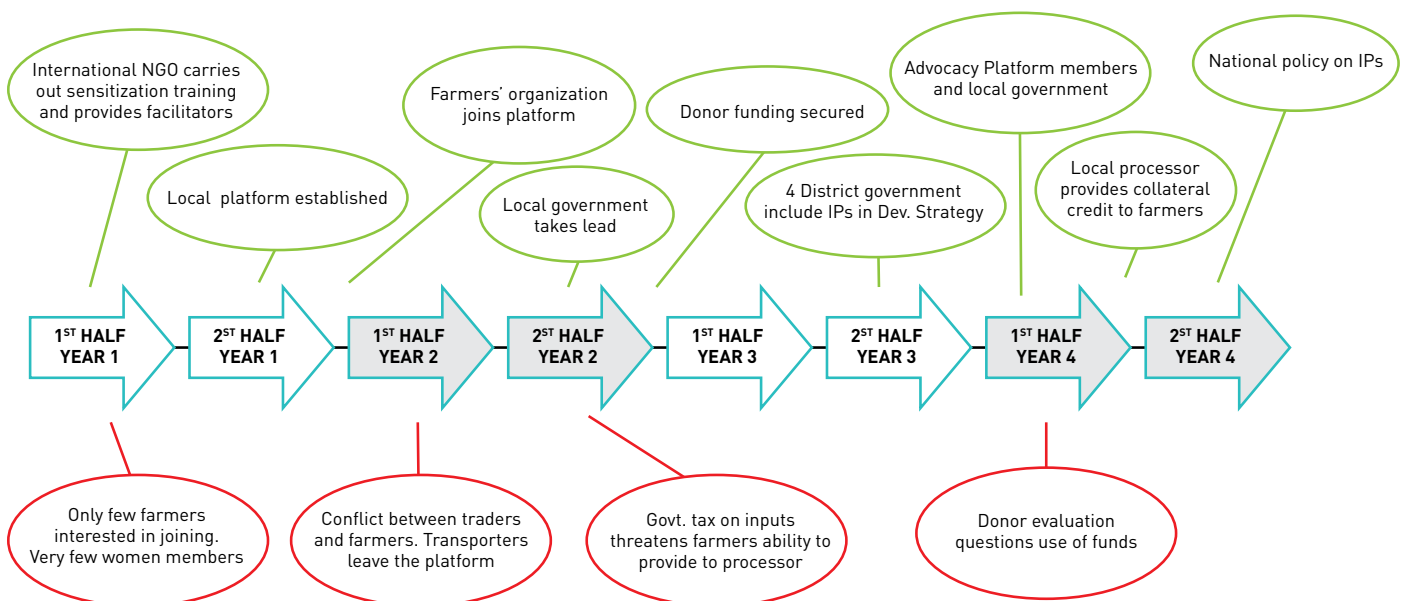
At the start of a timeline session, the following material should be available: flipchart paper; masking tape; black, green and red marker pens.

### The next steps are as follows:

- Attach two to three sheets of flipchart paper horizontally to the wall;
- Draw a horizontal line in BLACK in the middle of sheets and divide it into time periods: start with when the innovation partnership began and end in the current year. The unit for measuring time will depend on when the partnership started: if it is a new initiative, it can be divided into months; if it has been in place for some years, it might be divided into quarters;
- Write breakthroughs and positive events above the timeline in correspondence to the date of occurrence. Draw a GREEN circle around the text. Such events are likely to have improved collaboration/communication in the partnership (e.g. the setting up of regular meetings between farmers and processors);
- Write challenges/setbacks below the timeline. Draw a RED circle around the text. These challenges mostly relate to events that damaged collaboration and communication in the partnership;
- Explain the events or opportunities that led to the breakthroughs and write them in GREEN next to the breakthrough;
- Do the same for the challenges and write the events or threats in RED next to the challenges.



### Example of a timeline as part of a capacity assessment workshop



## How to interpret results

Once the last comment has been posted on the timeline, the whole group (facilitators included) review the result. The objective is to reach a common understanding of what has been written down so far.

Interpreting a timeline correctly requires skilled facilitators. Their job will be to guide stakeholders through the phases outlined below and to synthesize results.

### General impression

Facilitators ask participants to give their first impression of the timeline. The group should recognize patterns: for instance, certain periods may draw mostly negative comments, others mostly positive. Breakthroughs usually occur after difficult periods.

### Reading the statements

Statements are read in chronological order. Facilitators make sure that all statements are well understood. In case of a large number of participants, there might be clusters of similar comments. These can be condensed.

### Points for further discussion

Once the reading is done, facilitators ask stakeholders to express their feelings about the future of the partnership. The resulting comments can be written on a flip chart and discussed afterwards.

**No comment or statement should ever be removed.** It does not matter if its validity is contested. Every point of view must be registered.

## Interviews

The timeline offers an overview of how the partnership has unfolded. However, as the statements are inevitably brief, they might leave out some important information. To uncover missing details and fill in the gaps in the story, facilitators can engage stakeholders in a round of interviews.

There is no specific format for the interviews. Stakeholders can expand on previous statements, volunteer new information about their involvement in the partnership, or talk about past events and future endeavors in their network.

## How to create a timeline narrative

### Draft narrative story

Stakeholders and facilitators might want to look more deeply into the events on the timeline. One way to do so is to compose a "draft narrative story", and consolidate the resulting knowledge into the timeline report, which is published afterwards. The 'draft narrative' is essentially a timeline treated like a movie-script, in which 'scenes' represent the most important periods in the history of the partnership. Normally, the whole history can be condensed into four to six scenes, recognizable from the clustering of statements in the timeline.

To highlight the contents of a scene, it is helpful to give it a newspaper-like headline. Each scene should have:

#### A starting point

from which the partnerships will move forward - hopefully in a positive way;

#### A major development,

caused either by outside forces or by occurrences within the partnership;

#### A description of interventions

effected by stakeholders that made a difference for the partnership;

#### A conclusion

showing how the partnership has evolved since it began.



For more information on the different CNA Tools and Approaches, see [www.tapipedia.org](http://www.tapipedia.org) and the *Trainer's Manual: Facilitating Capacity Needs Assessment, STc*.

For more information on the Timeline method, see <http://linkconsult.nl/files/Timeline-Guide-for-Facilitators.pdf>



## Feedback session

After the 'draft narrative' is completed, stakeholders give feedback. It is important that they recognize their own stories in the document. As stated before, different opinions must be incorporated and appreciated.

## Timeline report

The draft narrative and the comments received during the feedback session provide the basis for the timeline report. This is a longer version of the draft narrative story. As for the draft narrative story itself, it succinctly illustrates the history of the partnership scene by scene, to each of which a newspaper headline is attributed. The reports are generally used for further analysis.

## For further information

### **Tropical Agriculture Platform (TAP):**

<http://www.fao.org/in-action/tropical-agriculture-platform/en>

Email: [Tropagplatform@fao.org](mailto:Tropagplatform@fao.org)

**TAPipedia:** <http://tapipedia.org>

Email: [info@tapipedia.org](mailto:info@tapipedia.org)

### **Capacity Development for Agricultural Innovation**

**Systems Project (CDAIS):** <http://cdais.net>

Email: [info@cdais.net](mailto:info@cdais.net)

## Common Framework products:



*Conceptual  
Background*



*Guidance Note on  
Operationalization*



*Synthesis  
Document*

*The implementation of the TAP Action Plan is supported by the EU-funded project  
Capacity Development for Agricultural Innovation Systems (CDAIS).*

*The Common Framework documents are also available in French and Spanish  
on the Common Framework pages of TAPipedia.*



**Food and Agriculture  
Organization of the  
United Nations**



This document has been produced with the financial assistance of the European Union.

The views expressed herein can in no way be taken to reflect the official opinion of the European Union.