

WORKSHEET - HISTORICAL MAPPING

Historical mapping uses a series of participatory mapping exercises to portray the demographic and natural resources situation of the community at different moments of its history. Usually, three maps are drawn, showing the situation as it existed one generation ago, at the present time, and what is expected after one generation's time in the future. Demographic information can be plotted as household symbols or circles to represent 10 or 100 people.

Purpose

Historical mapping can be extremely helpful to introduce the time dimension in participatory environmental appraisal and/or participatory census exercises. It can provide visual evidence of changes that have occurred and expected trends. In this way it can help identify determinants of environmental degradation and population dynamics and enables participants to consider suitable means of moving towards a desired future.

Steps in using the technique

1. A map of the current demographic and environmental situation is drawn with participants.
2. With the help of elderly community members, the same exercise is repeated to show the situation as it was approximately twenty years ago. The current and past maps are then compared, often with a brainstorming, to collectively identify major changes and their root causes. Based on the list of changes and causes, a prospective map can be drawn by the participants to show their expectations of the situation which will exist in the community in 20-30 years from now, if the current trends are maintained.
3. The future map can be reviewed to explore differences between what is projected and what a desirable future status would be. The discussion can progress to identify potential means for addressing environmental degradation and population dynamics.

Strengths

The technique can be very appropriate to summarize the results of a comprehensive participatory appraisal on environment and population dynamics. It may increase participants' understanding that most positive and negative changes in environments and populations are shaped by historical, man-made actions. It can help to identify mid- or long-term solutions to the population and environment problems affecting the community.

Weaknesses

The exercise is long and complex. Three sessions with the group may be needed to get through the whole sequence of mapping and discussion. Sensitive issues from the past may be raised, including conflicts within the community and between the community and outsiders. The analysis is likely to identify effects and causes which are beyond community control. Discouragement and frustration may develop among participants.