

Guide to Trend Analysis, a Tiny Tool

Version 1.3

www.ngo-ideas.net

INTRODUCTION

NGO-IDEAS develops tools for communities and NGOs to measure change and understand what contributed to change. Some tools are described in the Impact Toolbox. Other tools for communities to reflect on change around them are collected in “Tiny Tools - An Overview”. They are all handy and relatively easy to apply. One of these Tiny Tools is Trend Analysis. More about NGO-IDEAS and its tools: www.ngo-ideas.net. NGO-IDEAS would appreciate feedback and suggestions for improvements. Please contact Bernward Causemann (bc@causemann.org) or Eberhard Gohl (gohl@impact-plus.de).

Our Vision for Trend Analysis

Communities assess the change that happens around them. Through structured reflection with tools like this, they

- become aware what change happened,
- come to understand what led to this change and how they contributed to it,
- become aware of how they can influence developments, and act on it.

This happens initially with the facilitation from NGOs or other outsiders. This process also provides NGOs or other development organisations with a better understanding of the dynamics and priorities in a community.

A. PURPOSE OF TREND ANALYSIS

With Trend Analysis, community members and the NGO gain a better understanding of positive and negative trends regarding important aspects of social development. Various causes of changes and trends may be described in the discussion. Based on the analysis, the community may set priorities for future development activities.

B. WHEN TO USE TREND ANALYSIS

There are many possible situations when to use Trend Analysis if a community is prepared to reflect on its situation:

- ✓ when there is a need to (re-)consider development efforts in the community,
- ✓ when the development organisation wants to introduce other tools for monitoring change, to open up the community and staff for looking at change,
- ✓ for an evaluation or impact study.

Links and References

Neubert Susanne 2010: Description and Examples of MAPP. Method for Impact Assessment of Programmes and Projects, DIE, Lusaka 2010, www.ngo-ideas.net/MAPP/

One gains insights into detailed development over a certain period of time. Trend Analysis may be used after having drawn a Lifeline as it provides more differentiated and disaggregated results.

C. REQUIREMENTS: THIS IS WHAT I NEED

- ✓ **Participants:** About 15-20, either an existing group or a cross-section of a community. If the group is bigger it will take more time. If the group is smaller, we run the risk that important sections of the community are not present and cannot share their views.
- ✓ **Material:** A flipchart or big paper and markers.
- ✓ **Trust:** The NGO should be familiar with the area and have good relations with the stakeholders. The chosen group should be an entity or a community, e.g. village representatives .
- ✓ **Facilitation skills and attitude:** The staff needs knowledge and skills in facilitation and application of Participatory Rural Appraisal tools; they especially need to be trained in Trend Analysis. They need to have an intention to help the community really understand the change and believe in empowering people.
- ✓ **Time:** One to two hours (depending on the number of criteria to be assessed), for the 7 steps, not counting preparation.
- ✓ **Follow-up:** Trend Analysis may lead to a reconsideration as well as new prioritization of on-going project activities or to the planning of new activities which are expected to strengthen positive trends. Funds may have to be allocated for this if the exercise is not part of an on-going development work.

D. HOW TO DO IT**Step 1 Introduce the tool**

Explain the purpose of the exercise to the group or community members present. It is important that participants understand: The Trend Analysis is used to deepen their understanding and to enable them to improve their situation; they do not participate only to provide the NGO staff with information.

Step 2 Determine a time span

Let the participants determine the time span they want to analyse (usually 5 to 10 years). It may make sense to include some time previous to the beginning of the project into the analysis. The first year is ideally a year most participants remember.

Step 3 Choose criteria and indicators for development

Let people discuss, which are the most important criteria of social development or the quality of life in their community. Then, let the group decide which development criteria they want to analyse. MAPP suggests evaluating the following key dimensions: changes in living standard, access to resources, expansion of knowledge, and participation on rights and power with 2-3 sub-criteria each.

Step 4 Create a chart

Create a chart so that everybody can see it (see example). For this purpose, list the points in time you want to look at in the first line (e.g.: 2005, 2006,...), and list the criteria for development in the first (left) column (e.g. health of children, school enrolment, ...). When using Trend Analysis, it is important to make sure that the ratings can be linked exactly to the specific years.

Let the community discuss and decide on how to rate the performance of their community regarding each criterion for each year. To fill in all of the cells of the graph, use a scale that has five points ranging from "very negative" (●/1 point) to "very positive" (●●●●/ 5 points).

Following completion of this exercise, the overall trends of the community regarding each development criteria over the chosen period of time can be seen in the respective line of the chart.

Step 5 Interpret the results

When the chart is completed, have a discussion on how to interpret the results. Document the different opinions on flipchart or in the minutes. When using big sheets of paper, or a flip chart, the comments or explanations can usually be written under the respective year.

Questions might be:

- What does the chart mean to the people present?
- Why did the participants rate the years the way they did?
- What were major factors causing the result to be very positive or very negative, or to change from positive to negative or vice versa?
- What was the contribution of the development project?

→ It helps to start by asking a community member to summarise what the chart shows.

The discussion in the community generates much information (and reflection) on positive and negative influences as well as on what caused positive and/or negative trends.

Step 6 Participatory development planning

Discuss with the group members:

- What lessons can be drawn from the Trend Analysis?
- What should be done differently next time?
- What action would they like to take?
- What do they want to do in the short term to bring about more change? What do they want to achieve in the mid-/long-term?

→ It helps to ask: How will the trend continue: in a more positive way? In a more negative way? Straight on? What should happen to make it improve?

Finally: Ask for feedback on the methodology: Was the exercise useful? Would they recommend it to others? Could you do this exercise yourselves?

Step 7 Evaluate on the NGO level

After leaving the community, discuss among the NGO staff:

- What lessons do you draw from the exercise?
- What would you do differently next time?
- What immediate action should you take?
- What should change in the mid-term in your work with this community (or other communities)?

E. EXAMPLE

Figure 2: Trend analysis									
	Year								Trend 2001-2008
	2000/2001	2001/2002	2002/2003	2003/2004	2004/2005	2005/2006	2006/2007	2007/2008	
Programme starts 									
Improvement or impoverishment of Living standard									
Agricultural yields	••	••	••••	•••	•••	•••	••••	••• ¹	+
Family incomes	••	••	••	•••	••••	••••	••••	••••	++
Health of children	••••	•••	••••	••••	••••	•••	• ²	••	--
Access to or exclusion from resources									
...to fire wood	•••	•••	•••	•••	•••	•••••	•••••	•••••	++
...to drinking water	•	•	•	•	•	••• ³	•••	•••	++
...to markets	•	•	•	•	•	••••	••••	••••	++
...to fertile lands	••••	•••	•••	•	••	••• ⁴	•••••	•••••	++
Enlargement or diminishing of knowledge									
School enrolment	•	•	•	•	•	•••••	•••••	•••••	++
Knowledge about land use systems	••	••	••	•••••	•••••	•••••	•••••	•••••	++
Participation on or exclusion from rights and power									
Peaceful living with herders	•••	•••	•••	•••	•	•	•	•	--
Avoided migration	•	••	•	••••	••••	••••	••••	••••	++
Legend: ••••• = very positive, •••• = positive, ••• = average, •• = negative, • = very negative									
¹ The yields depend mainly on rainfall and in 2008 the rains were very bad. But because of PORO the yield impacts were less pronounced.									
² Many meningitis cases, many children died.									
³ Through the anti-erosive measures, water could infiltrate much better and the water table rose up again.									
⁴ Stone walls and biological anti-erosion measures (tree planting, hedges etc) improved soil fertility remarkably.									

Source: Neubert Susanne 2010: Description and Examples of MAPP. Method for Impact Assessment of Programmes and Projects, DIE, Lusaka 2010, p. 6.

F. PRACTICAL HINTS

- ✓ If people disagree on how to rate a specific year: We need to help the community to find out the reasons. Then it will most likely be possible to agree on an assessment for the majority. It is helpful to document the different arguments. – But may be developments have been differ-

ent for different groups: Some have benefited from the new road, others live too far away to profit. Or the year was better for men or for women, for fisherfolk or agriculturalists. In that case we can document two separate rankings and note the reasons for the differences. Or we conduct the exercise separately for the groups, e.g. one for fisherfolk, one for agriculturalists.

- ✓ It is quite a challenge to do this exercise with the whole community. But if the participants are selected by the community, this could build trust and ensure a broad representation.
- ✓ Keep the chart, or a photo, as a reference for the next exercise. Note the names of those who participated.
- ✓ In the chart you will notice the column on the very right. This is a rating of the trend.
-- stands for a very negative trend, ± neutral trend, ++ a very positive trend.
This assessment of the trend can preferably be done in the meeting, but it is also possible that staff or evaluators do it afterwards.

G. SOME WORDS OF CAUTION

- ✓ It should be emphasised here that this tool requires a genuinely participatory approach: It should, most of all, help community members understand better the change around them. It is only secondary that it serves the NGO to get more information.
- ✓ Trend Analysis cannot be used as the only instrument to assess change. It needs triangulation with other tools, as a bias can develop (like with all other tools). It can also be systematically combined with other tools, like in MAPP (see reference to Tiny Tools on p.1).
- ✓ The figures that Trend Analysis generates need to be recorded together with the explanations and stories. These explanations are of the same relevance as the figures and should be interpreted together.
- ✓ How often should Trend Analysis be applied? It is not advisable to conduct a Trend Analysis every year in the same group, but can be repeated after a few years.

Verena Brenner in cooperation with Bernward Causemann and Eberhard Gohl / Impact Plus /
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