SOLIDARIDAD
TOOLKIT

Solidaridad network
making our PROMIS a reality

Contents

1. Introducing the Solidaridad Toolkit!

This toolkit is a complementary guide for the series of booklets titled "Guidelines to Programme Cycle Management in the Solidaridad Network".
The booklets introduce all steps of the Solidaridad programme cycle and include guidelines and practical tips for every step. Throughout the booklets you find examples of proven as well as innovative methods and tools that can be used for planning, fundraising, monitoring and evaluation of programmes and projects.

This toolkit provides you with practical information and tips & tricks of the most relevant tools by answering the following questions:

- When to use this tool?
- What is the tool all about? What is the main objective of this tool?
- How to use this tool? (Key steps, timeframe, materials needed)

The toolkit is designed for all staff in the Solidaridad network, to instruct, introduce and hopefully to inspire you to improve programme and project management.

Tool	**Referred to in booklet:**	**Can also be used for:**
Problem Tree Analysis	Programme development & Fundraising, 2.2 Sector analysis	Project formulation
Force Field Analysis	Programme development & Fundraising, 2.3 Value Chain analysis	Project formulation
Relationship Diagram	Programme development & Fundraising, 2.3 Value Chain analysis	Project formulation
SWOT analysis	Programme development & Fundraising, 2.3 Value Chain analysis	Evaluations
Role play example: Market Barometer	Project formulation	Project formulation, Evaluations
Storytelling	Implementation & monitoring, 3.1 Methods of data collection	Evaluation
Timeline Exercise	Evaluation	Evaluation
Focus Group Discussion	Implementation & monitoring, 3.1 Methods of data collection	Programme development, project formulation, Evaluations
Surveys	Implementation & monitoring, 3.1 Methods of data collection	Baselines during programme development and project formulation, Evaluations

Table 1 Tools overview

2. Methods and Tools for Analysis and Planning

2.1 Problem Tree Analysis

What is a Problem Tree Analysis?

Problem analysis is a brainstorm technique to identify main problems and to establish their causes and effects. A very common way to do this is to build a so-called Problem Tree. A Problem Tree is an exercise used to analyze the root causes of a problem and to identify its primary consequences. This helps to target your efforts more accurately.

The Problem Tree produces a visual representation, in which the key problem under discussion resembles the trunk of a tree, the effects of the problem become the branches and the causes of the problem become the roots. This tool is well known and can lead to productive discussion about the root causes of problems. It is widely used when designing development projects of all types.

Key objective

By the end of the analysis you will be able to:

- Use the Problem Tree to explore root causes and impact(s) of any identified problem.
- Identify causes of the appointed problem (for example: lack of skills about fertilizers leads to low quality coffee produce).
- Identify the negative impact of the problem (low prices for produce due to low quality).

One you have a better understanding of the causes and effects of the problem, you can start to further explore driving and restraining forces that may be impacting the problem (Force Field Analysis, see paragraph 2.2.).

When and why to use this tool?

A Problem Tree Analysis is useful when you would like to identify the major problems and constraints associated with the topic you would like to address in a project or programme. With this tool you can depict the underlying logic for a results focused project (or programme). It is therefore mainly used in the analysis or formulation phase of projects or programmes.

Why use this tool?

- The problem can be broken down into manageable and definable chunks;
- This enables a clearer prioritization of factors and helps focus objectives;
- There is more understanding of the problem and its often intersected and even contradictory causes. This is often the first step in finding win-win solutions;
- It identifies the fundamental issues and arguments, and can help establish who and what the actors and processes are at each stage;
- It can help establish whether further information, evidence or resources are needed to make a strong case, or build a convincing solution;
- Present issues (rather than seeming, future or past issues) are dealt with and identified.

How to use this tool?

The Problem Tree is ideally developed as a participatory group activity.
In general 6 to 8 people seems to be a good group size.

Key steps

Step 1 Identify the focal problem

Brainstorm on problems and identify a focal problem for the tree. Write it on a card or "a sticky note".

Do's and don'ts when formulating problems

- No big balloons or big vague concepts, e.g. no ownership.
- No absent solutions (danger: you block alternatives), e.g. we have a lack of money for training in sustainable agriculture practices. Instead, the problem is → there are no sustainable agriculture practices.
- No interpretation, e.g. the government is lazy. Instead say: the government does not enforce policies on sustainable land use.
- Explain abbreviations and jargon.
- Be precise, e.g. there is no paved road from Chittoor to Mahabubnagar.

Step 2 Brainstorm about the causes and effects of the focal problem

During this step you brainstorm about the causes and effects of the focal problem. Which aspects trigger this problem? What are the effects of the problem and therefore the impact on the project? Write down all the identified causes and effects on sticky notes or cards.

Step 3 Cluster and place in order

Once the causes and effects are identified the group starts to cluster all the causes and places them below the problem. Think about how the causes are interconnected and whether you identified all the causes of the problem. Place them in order to show the linkages between the causes. Repeat this exercise for the effects but put them above the focal problem. Now you created a visual representation of the root causes and the primary effects of the focal problem.

Step 4 Review and discuss the tree

Review the problem tree and verify its validity and completeness. Enable a general discussion on the tree analysis and add any further points that the participants would like to make. The heart of the exercise is the discussion and dialogue that is generated when elements are arranged and re-arranged, often forming sub-dividing roots and branches.

Below you find a simplified Problem Tree for the example about the palm oil producers in the Guacatulu region.

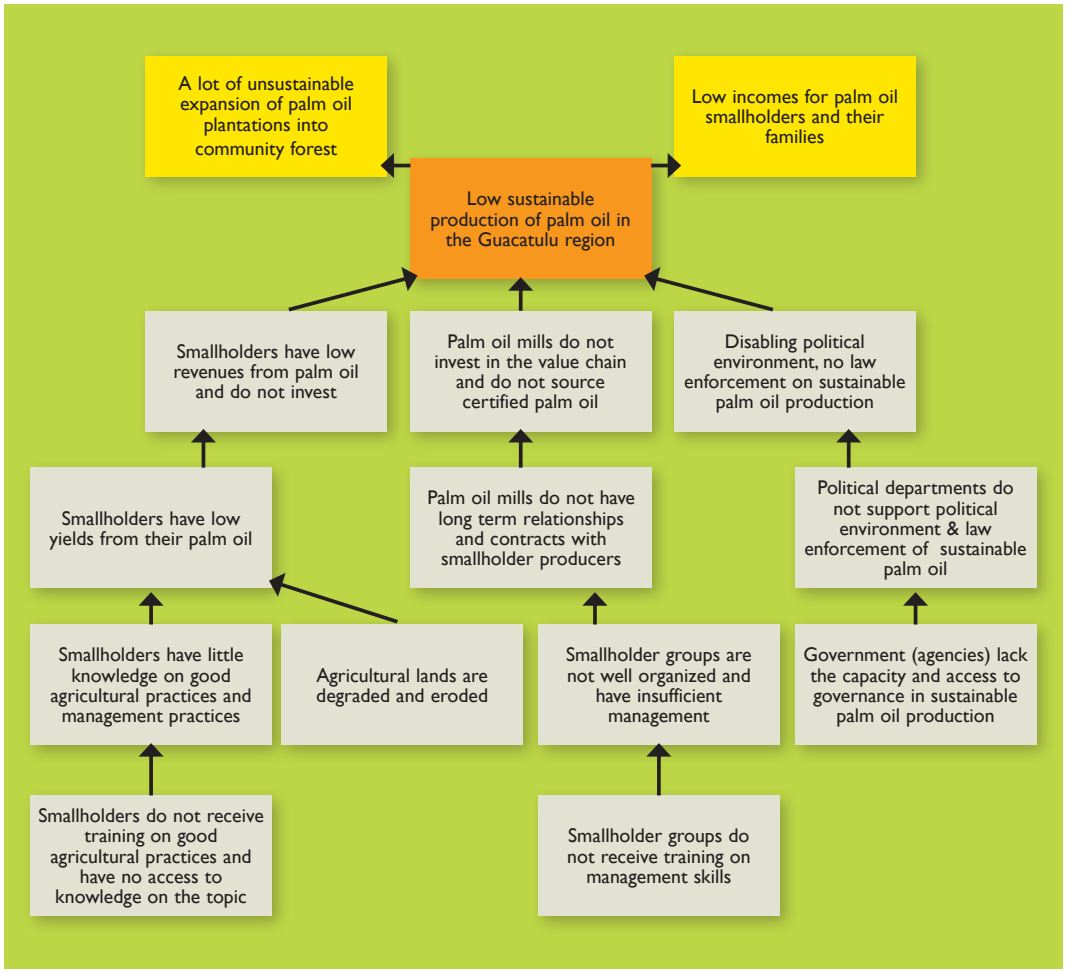


Figure 2.1 A Simplified example Problem Tree of palm oil producers in the Guacatulu region

Turn a Problem Tree in an Objective Tree

The Problem Tree can be converted into an Objective Tree (also called a Solution Tree). If you want to do this, keep the tree's shape, but turn all the negatives (problems) into positives (solutions). At the end of the exercise you should find that your tree is showing you the solutions to your problem, and the positive effects that will follow if you can achieve it. In this way, root causes and consequences are turned into root solutions, and key project or influencing entry points are quickly established.

Below you find a simplified Objective Tree for the example about the palm oil producers in the Guacatulu region.

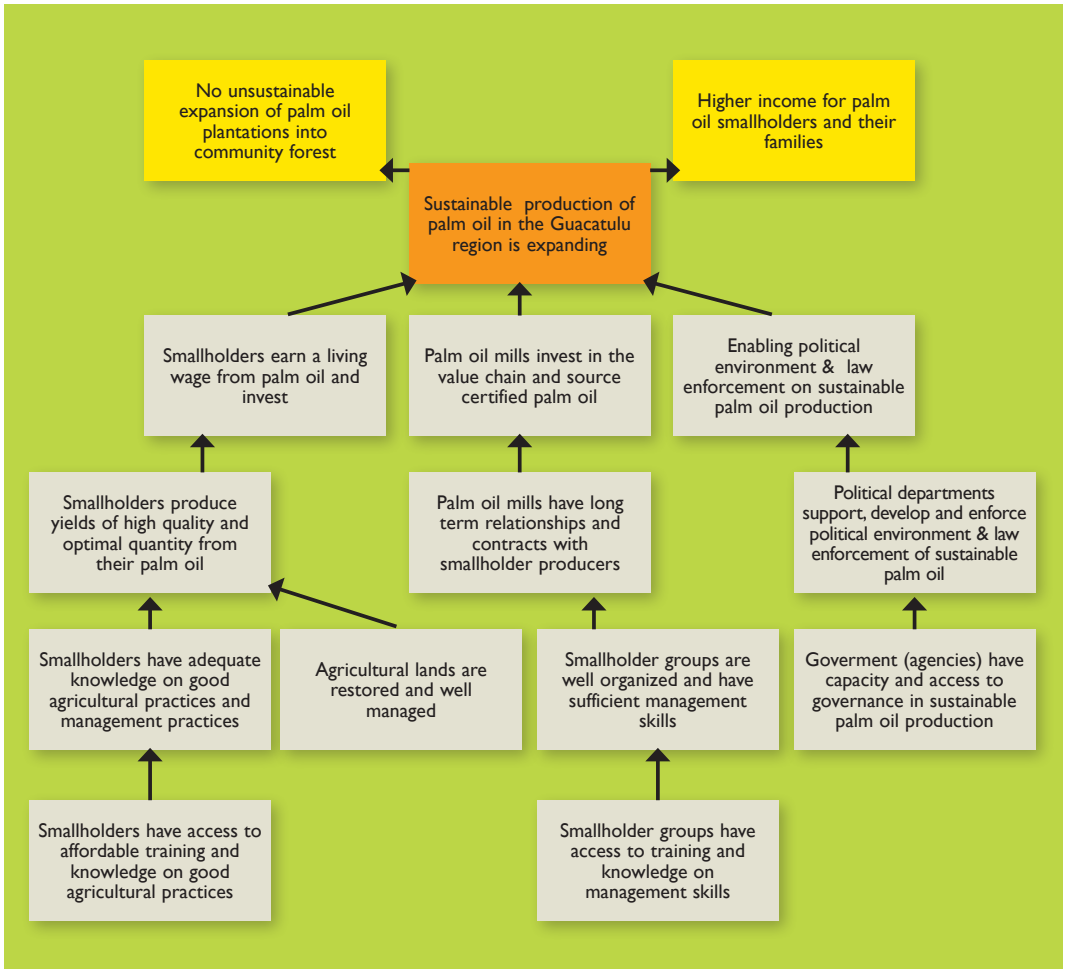


Figure 2.1 B Simplified example Objective Tree of palm oil producers in the Guacatulu region

In the course of doing the problem and solution trees, you may realize that there are gaps in your knowledge that need further research. That's fine – it's another benefit of using these kinds of tools.

Facilitation tips & tricks

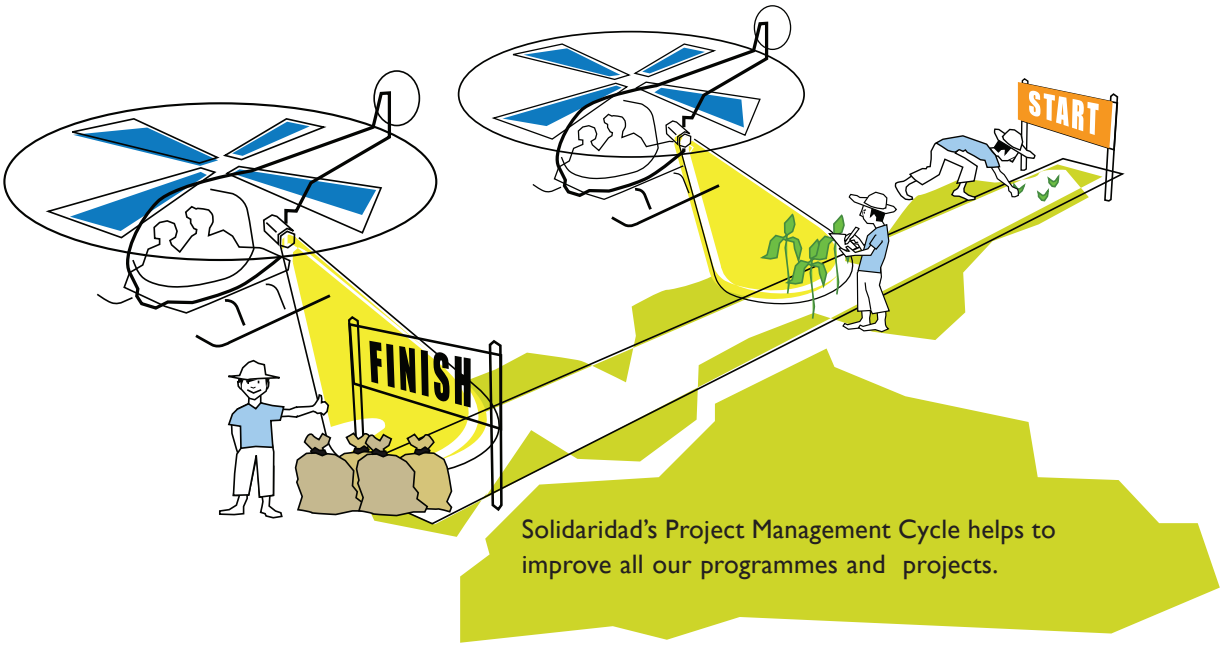
- There is often confusion between a cause and an effect. Take care during facilitation to ensure the two are distinguished.
- Take time to allow people to explain their feelings and reasoning, and record related ideas and points that come up on separate flip chart paper under titles such as solutions, concerns and decisions.
- The quality of output will be determined by who is involved in the analysis. Therefore the in volvement of key stakeholder representatives with appropriate knowledge and skills is critical.
- The process is as important as the product and should be seen as a learning experience and an opportunity for different views and interests to be expressed.
- The problem tree should be a valid but simple representation of the current negative situation. It cannot (and should not) contain or explain the complexities of every identifiable cause-effect relationship.

Timeframe

2 /3 hours

Resources

- Flipchart paper and pens
- Sticky notes
- Blank cards



2.2 Force Field Analysis

What is a Force Field Analysis?

Force Field Analysis was developed by Kurt Lewin (1951) and is widely used to inform decision making, particularly in planning and implementing change management programmes. It is a powerful method for Solidaridad Network in gaining a comprehensive overview of the different forces acting on a potential sector issue, and for assessing their source and strength.

When to use this tool?

A Force Field Analysis is useful when you would like to analyze the forces for and against a situation and to analyze the reasoning behind these different forces. For example, in the project of the smallholders in the Guacatulu province, the project aims to bring about a change to increase sustainable palm oil production in the region, with the Force Field Analysis you can analyze what the driving forces are to bring about this change and which forces are restraining the desired change.

The outcome of the analysis can be used for two purposes:

1. To decide whether to go ahead with the project or programme;
2. And to increase your chances of success, by strengthening the forces supporting change and weakening those against it.

Force Field Analysis is a natural follow-up tool from a Problem Tree Analysis. A useful next step from Force Field Analysis is a Stakeholder Analysis in which the specific stakeholders for and against a change are identified, together with their power, influence and interests.

How to use this tool?

Force Field Analysis is best carried out in a small group of about six to eight people. The first step is to agree the area of change to be discussed. This can for instance be formulated as a desired sustainable sector change or policy regulation. It's important to identify as many of the factors that will influence this desired change as you can. Where appropriate, consult other people, such as team members or experts from the sector. Throughout the process rich discussion, debate and dialogue should emerge. This is an important part of the exercise and discussing key issues should therefore be allowed time.

Key steps

Step 1 Preparation

To carry out a Force Field Analysis, use a blank sheet of paper or whiteboard. Then describe your plan or proposal for sector change in a box in the middle of the paper.

Step 2 List the driving and restraining forces

List the forces for change (the driving forces) in a column on the left-hand side, and the forces against change (restraining forces) in a column on the right-hand side.

As you do this, consider the following questions:

- What benefit(s) will the change deliver?
- Who supports the change? Who is against it? Why?
- How easy will it be to make the change? Do you have enough time and resources to make it work?
- What costs are involved?
- What other (business) processes will be affected by the change?
- What are the risks?

Step 3 Score the forces

Next, assign a score to each force, from, say, 1 (weak) to 5 (strong), and then add up the scores for each column (for and against). This provides a quick preview whether there is a big difference in weakness or strength between the restraining- and driving forces.

Another option for a visual representation of the influence that each force has is to draw arrows around them. You can draw bigger arrows for the forces that will have a greater influence on the change, and smaller arrows for forces that will have less of an influence.

Below you see a very simplified example of a Force Field Analysis figure for the palm oil smallholders in the Guacatulu province.

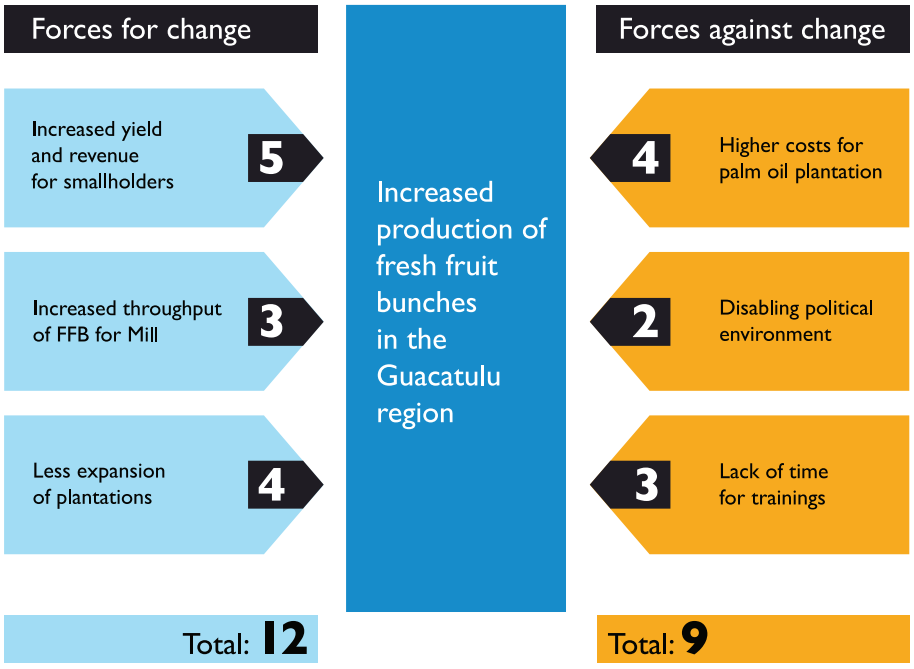


Figure 2.2 Simplified example Force Field Analysis of palm oil producers in the Guacatulu region

Step 4 Reflect on the restraining forces and the driving forces

Once you identified and analyzed the different forces, you should think of possible changes that you could make to your initial project plan to address the negative forces and make use of the positive forces as good as possible.

Tips

- Don't underestimate how much work a Force Field Analysis can involve. The figure above is a simple example, but in reality there will be many factors that you'll need to consider for complex decisions and changes.
- Bear in mind that while Force Field Analysis helps you understand the impact of different factors on your decision or change, it can be quite subjective because it is based on personal points of view. If you're making an important decision, use it alongside other tools.

2.3 Relationship Diagram

What is a Relationship Diagram?

Relationship Diagrams are used as a simple participatory tool to provide a visual 'map' of the relationships between stakeholders. The diagram shows all possible logical relations between different actors or stakeholder groups.

Stakeholders are all those groups or individuals who influence or are influenced by the project or programme. They can either be directly involved stakeholders (primary stakeholders), such as local implementing partners, farmer groups, project staff, and donors, or so called secondary stakeholders that have an interest, influence, or be involved in the project in an indirect way. For example, secondary stakeholders can be government staff, experts and advisers related to a project, as well as community leaders associated with the beneficiaries of a project.

Key objectives

To provide a visual representation of the relationships between stakeholders and thereby gaining better understanding of the influence and power of the different stakeholders and the relationships between them.

When to use this tool?

Relationship Diagrams are useful when you would like to:

- Gain insight in which formal/informal actors are active in a sector that you want to work in and what kind of roles they perform.
- Gain insight in the relationships between them (power relations, decision-making patterns).

It is especially useful when working in a facilitated group, as it allows group members the opportunity to discuss their individual understandings of the relationships between stakeholders, and come to a common understanding.

How to use this tool?

This section explains the different steps that need to be taken to do a stakeholder analysis with the help of a Relationship Diagram.

Key Steps

Step 1 List all stakeholders

Identify key actors and organizations involved in the sector or value chain you want to trigger changes and record them on a list.

Step 2 Draw circles

Draw circles for each of the different stakeholders or stakeholder groups on a flip over or cut out circles (it might be useful to use different colors for different stakeholders) and place them all on a big piece of paper or stick them on the wall. Different size circles should indicate their relative size or their relative importance. Draw the diagram first in pencil, so you can adjust the size or arrangement of circles until the representation is accurate.

Step 3 Identify relationships

Start defining the relationships between the different stakeholders by placing lines between stakeholders that have a relationship. You can define the intensity and sort of relationship by using arrows and varying with the thickness of the lines.

You can also choose to discuss the importance of each stakeholder's role within the sector or value chain and write a number from 1 to 6 to define whether a relationship can be described as (1) control (2) mutual collaboration (3) mutual dependency (4) exchange of information (5) producer – client (6) employer – employee.

Generating a rich discussion within your group is important. Secondary sources, group interviews or key informants can be used to validate information.

Below you find a simplified Relationship Diagram for the example about the palm oil producers in the Guacatulu region.

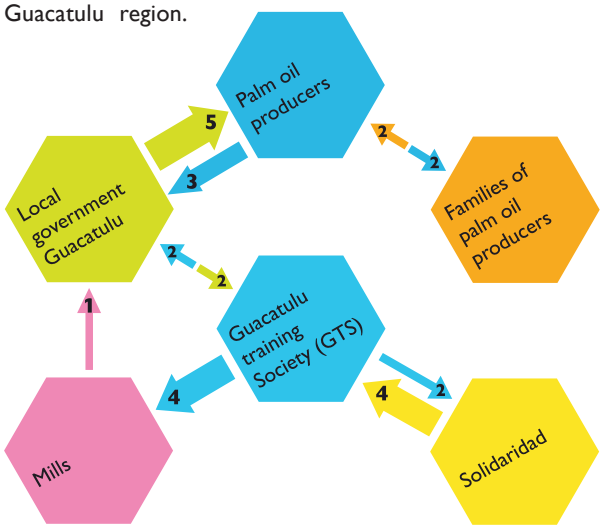


Figure 2.3 Simplified example of a Relationship Diagram of palm oil producers in the Guacatulu region

Draw key conclusions

Draw conclusions about the different relationships. What conclusions can be drawn about decision-making processes for the cotton industry in Nepal? Which stakeholders have the most influence in the sustainable palm oil sector in Guacatulu? What are the most important relationships in the cocoa sector in Ghana?
Tip: Mark the key conclusions in a corner of the chart or on a separate sheet.

Identify the main implications for the future

Following from the key conclusions discuss implications for the future by answering questions like:

- Who are the key stakeholders to influence?
- Which stakeholders do we have the most/least contact with?
- Which stakeholders might we have to make special efforts to ensure engagement?
- What changes are possible in decision-making?

Timeframe

The timeframe depends on the size and complexity of the context or sector. To conduct a single Relationship Diagram could be done in one working session (3 hours) but for a more elaborated stakeholder analysis you probably need more time (3-6 weeks).

Materials needed

Paper, different types of colored paper, pencils, scissors.

2.4 SWOT analysis

What is a SWOT analysis?

SWOT analysis is a commonly used matrix tool that helps you to make a critical self- assessment as input for strategic planning. SWOT stands for S = Strengths, W = Weaknesses, O = Opportunities and T = Threats. The SWOT analysis is a qualitative tool that is best used in a participatory way.

Albert S. Humphrey originated the strategy tool in the 1960s. What makes SWOT particularly powerful is that, with a little thought, it can help you uncover opportunities that you are well placed to exploit. And by understanding the weaknesses of your strategy, you can manage and eliminate threats that would otherwise catch you unexpectedly.

When to use this tool?

When you like to get a better understanding of the **S**trengths and **W**eaknesses of your programme or project strategy and when you like to identify both the **O**pportunities open to you and the **T**hreats you face to trigger change in a supply chain or sector. The analysis can be applied to different levels. You can either assess the strategic position of an organization and/or team or analyze the strengths, weaknesses and opportunities and threats for a project, programme or strategy.

How to use this tool?

SWOT analysis can be used to kick off strategy formulation (for example a value chain analysis) or be the outcome of a strategy formulation process. When carrying out your SWOT analysis, be realistic and thorough. Apply it at the right level, with the right capable and informed people and complement it with other organizational analysis tools where appropriate.

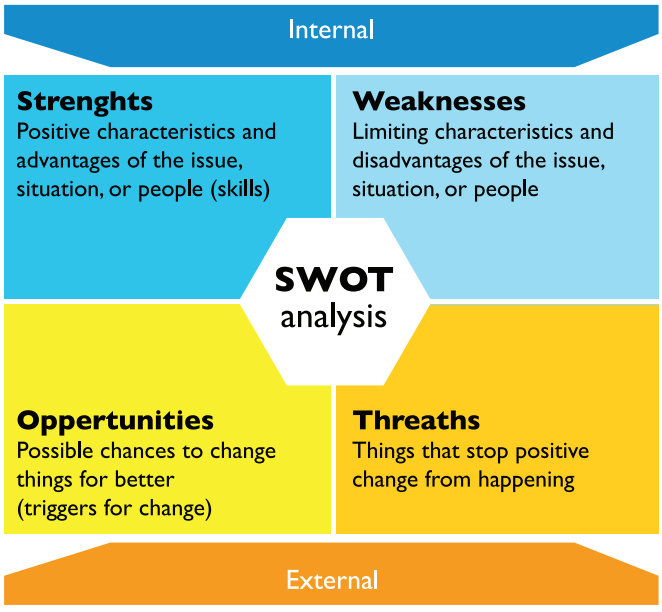


Figure 2.4 SWOT-analysis

Key steps

Step 1 Establish that your working group has the necessary components to successfully conduct a SWOT analysis (see necessary capabilities below).

Step 2 If you are a small group, draw a matrix of four squares as in the example above, and do the whole exercise together. Label the fields as Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats. If you are a large group, divide into four small groups and each take a flipchart and fill in one box, then discuss your results together.

Step 3 Discuss how to use the information gathered from the SWOT to inform your next steps.

Necessary capabilities

Because of the collaborative nature of this tool, your working group will need certain capabilities to succeed:

- Trust: The questions that SWOT will bring up, particularly in the Weaknesses and Threats categories may be uncomfortable. Your working group must be at a point in its working relationship where weaknesses and potential threats can be faced openly and objectively.
- Ability and willingness to implement change.
- Diversity: The team conducting the SWOT analysis should be representative for your entire programme or project.
- Time: Taking time to do a thorough SWOT assessment will help your group move forward in developing a well thought-out strategy.

Facilitation tips & tricks

When facilitating a SWOT analysis make sure to be rigorous in the way you apply it. Only accept precise verifiable statements. Ruthlessly shorten long lists of factors and prioritize them, so that you spend time thinking about the most significant factors. Furthermore make sure that the identified opportunities are carried through to later stages in the strategy formation process. When identifying the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats think of questions as listed below to assess each category:

Strengths

- What do we do exceptionally well?
- What advantages do we have?
- What valuable assets and recourses do we have?

Weaknesses

- What could we do better?
- What necessary expertise/manpower do we miss?
- Where are we vulnerable?

Opportunities

- What could be potential drivers or triggers for change?
- What are potential opportunities for sustainable growth?
- What are important (future) trends or dynamics in this sector? What are the dynamics in terms of its overall effectiveness, for example its competitiveness or productivity?

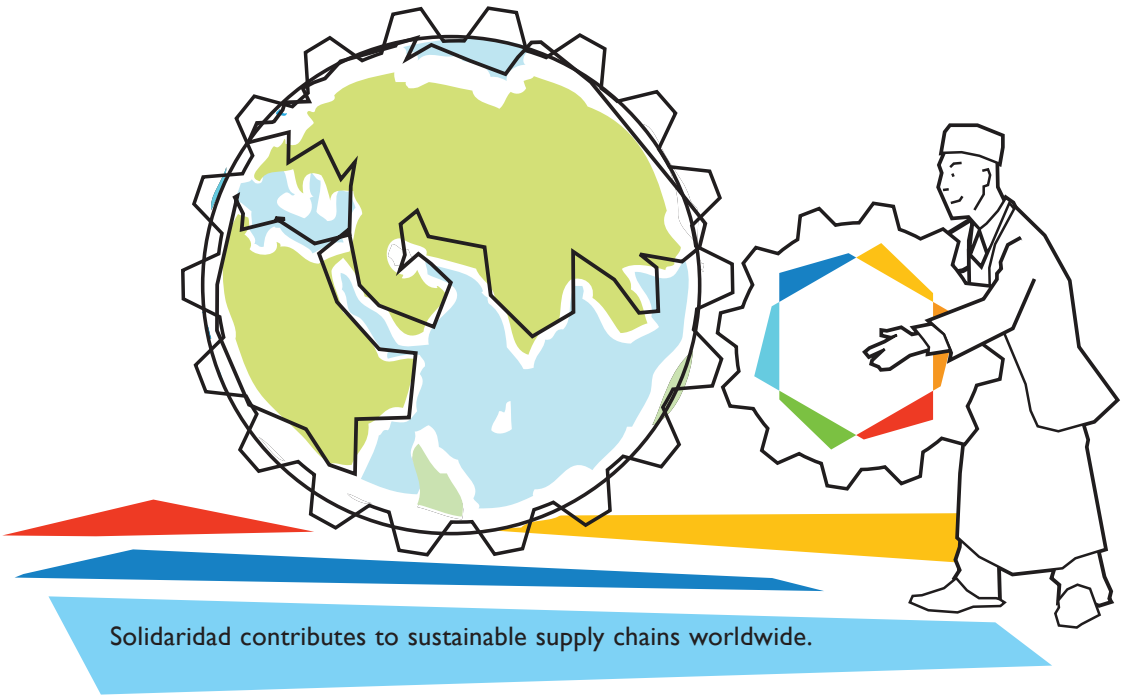
Threats

- What obstacles do you face?
- What are the constraints and the underlying causes of these constraints?
- Is changing technology placing a constraint on your programme (potentially)?
- Could any of your weaknesses seriously threaten your programme or project?

In the course of this analysis you may determine that certain aspects fall into more than one category; for example, a shift in government regulation for quality standards might be both a threat and an opportunity. If this is the case, place them in both squares and formulate a strategy to eliminate the threat of the shift in government regulation and uncover the opportunity of the shift in regulation.

Materials needed

Sheets of papers, pencils and erasers.



Solidaridad contributes to sustainable supply chains worldwide.

2.5 Role play example: Market Barometer

What is a Market Barometer?

A Market Barometer[1] is an example of a role-play. It is an interactive and dynamic tool, which allows participants to develop and present innovative activities for the promotion of sustainable sector development. Participants simulate the sale and purchase of ideas (activities) through role-playing in an improvised market in order to earn as much money as possible. The next sections will describe the tool and the basics about role-playing.

Key objectives

- To allow participants to collect, through game, as many quality ideas as possible for activities that promote sustainable sector development for their specific region and/or commodity.
- To enable participants to recognise successful sustainable sector ideas which, to a great extent, depends upon persuasion skills, information levels and motivation to initiate actions.

When to use this tool?

The Market Barometer is useful to spark brainstorming sessions where new ideas (activities) are created and developed for your project or programme concerning sustainable sector development.

Furthermore, the aspect of role playing helps to explore how other people are likely to respond to different approaches; and you can get a feel for the approaches that are likely to work, and for those that might be counter-productive. It helps to see problems or situations from different perspectives and thus get a better understanding of the target group.

The tool can be used for different levels from (management of) farmer groups, local NGOs to your project or programme team. It depends on which level and for what you like to generate new ideas and/or activities. The involvement of a combination of different stakeholders works very well because this way they can learn about each other's perspectives on sustainable sector development.

How to use this tool?

Key steps

Step 1 Assign buyers and sellers

Participants are divided in several groups with two tasks: to sell a product and to buy a product. Within each group, members agree whether to buy or sell a product.

The group selling a product have the following tasks:

- To create one or more activities (not limited) aimed at promotion for sustainable sector development.
- To create ways and strategies to promote activities in order to sell them as effectively as possible.
- To assign value to each product (activity), which is not greater than … (set maximum figure in local currency).

1 Source: STC Norway Toolkit for Participatory Research with Children and Young people (2008)

The group purchasing products have the following tasks:

- To create good negotiating strategies.
- To set up criteria for assessing the value of a product.
- To define the reasons for buying certain products and for what amount.

Step 2 Sell and buy with role-play

The sale and purchasing of ideas is realised in a 30-45 minute period during which sellers and buyers wear costumes and decorate their place of sale in a way to attract buyers. Everyone starts playing their role and works the marketplace (see tips & tricks for role-playing below).

Tips & Tricks for Role-Playing

- Set up a role-playing scenario in enough detail for it to feel "real." Make sure that everyone is clear about the role they play, and what you want to achieve by the end of the session.
- Once you've set the scene, identify the various fictional characters involved in the scenario.
- Once you've identified these roles, allocate them to the people involved in your role play exercise; they should use their imagination to put themselves inside the minds of the people that they're representing. This involves trying to understand the characters' perspectives, goals, motivations, and feelings when they enter the situation.
- Some people feel threatened or nervous when asked to role-play, because it involves acting. This can make them feel silly, or that they've been put on the spot. To make role-playing less threatening, start with a demonstration. Hand two "actors" a prepared script, give them a few minutes to prepare, and have them act out the role-play in front of the rest of the group. This approach is more likely to succeed if you choose two outgoing people, or if you're one of the actors in the demonstration.

Step 3 Analyse the products and discussion

After using the Market Barometer tool participants analyse which "products" were high sellers and why. In a plenary discussion participants talk about which activities attracted the greatest interest and for what reasons.

Timeframe

60 minutes to create, buy and sell products, plus at least 30 minutes for reflection and analysis of the findings of the exercise.

Materials Needed

Sheets of coloured paper, masking tape, pens, crayons for creation of posters and market displays.
Participants should be encouraged to make use of all resources available in the workshop room, including furniture, for creation of their market stalls.

3. Methods and tools for monitoring & evaluation

3.1 Storytelling

What is Storytelling?

Storytelling is a technique used for (participatory) monitoring and evaluation. Essentially, the process involves the collection of significant change (SC) stories coming from the field level, and the systematic selection of the most important of these by panels of selected stakeholders and/or staff.
Stories are a very valuable for several reasons: they encourage everyone, whatever their experience, to participate. They are likely to be remembered as a whole. And, they can help keep discussions based on what is concrete rather than what is abstract. Therefore Storytelling is an ancient and cross-cultural process of making sense of the world in which we live. In evaluations, stories are an ideal way for people to make sense of all the different results of a programme. They also help understanding of the values of those who participate in programmes and/or benefit from them (see Dart and Davies, 2003[2]).

Collecting significant change stories are part of the 'Most Significant Change' method developed by Dart and Davies (2003). More information on this can be found in this article: *Dart, J. and Davies, R. (2003) A Dialogical, Story-Based Evaluation Tool: The Most Significant Change Technique. American Journal of Evaluation, 24(2), 137-155.*

Key objectives

The key objective is to understand change, include opinions of a larger number of people and provide a simple means of making sense. For the work of Solidaridad this will result in:

- Reflect on perceptive changes: helping workers, farmers and their families in different contexts to reflect on their own personal stories of most significant change resulting from their involvement in sustainable sector development.
- In-depth analysis about the foreseen and unforeseen changes: facilitate discussions (dialogue) and analysis of the values expressed by workers, farmers and their families with regards to the main benefits of the projects, as well as any unexpected results (negative or positive).
- Learn and improve: helping farmer groups, local NGO's and other actors involved in sustainable sector development to build upon the analysis that they have shared with each other to improve their projects.

When to use this tool?

When conventional monitoring and evaluation tools may not provide sufficient data to make sense of programme impacts and foster learning. The types of programmes that are not adequately catered for by orthodox approaches and can gain considerable value from Storytelling include programmes that are:

- Complex and produce diverse and emergent outcomes
- Large with numerous organizational layers
- Focused on social change
- Participatory in ethos

2 Dart, J. and Davies, R. (2003) A Dialogical, Story-Based Evaluation Tool: The Most Significant Change Technique. American Journal of Evaluation, 24(2), 137-155.

Storytelling is suited to monitoring that focuses on learning rather than just accountability. It is also an appropriate tool when you are interested in the effect of the intervention on people's lives and keen to include the words of non-professionals.

How to use this tool?

The Stories are collected from those most directly involved, such as participants and field staff. The stories are collected by asking a simple question like: 'During the last month, in your opinion, what was the most significant change that took place for participants in the program?'

Below you find the key steps of the Storytelling technique process:

Key steps

Step 1 Think about significant stories

Workers and/or farmers are individually given sheets of paper, pencils and crayons or paints and paint-brush. They are asked to think about stories / examples which illustrate the most significant changes (either positive/successes or negative/challenges) that have occurred as a result of participation in the – sustainable sector development – project.

Step 2 Prepare the most significant story for presentation

Each person should think about and decide on the most significant change story that they would like to share. They could draw a picture to illustrate the change that has taken place (and could record key details of what, where, who, how on a separate piece of paper). Or, they could write a poem, a story or a letter.

Step 3 Share stories

In small groups (when there is only a small group dividing up in a smaller group is not necessary) each person presents and explains their picture/ story of significant change. They are encouraged to share a brief description of what happened, where, when, who was involved (enough detail so the story can be confirmed); as well as a brief explanation as to why they chose this story, why it is most significant to them.

Step 4 Record the stories

Notes from the sharing of stories should be recorded (by the facilitators) on an accompanying sheet of paper/flip chart. The age, gender and background of the person should be recorded, but all names should be changed to maintain confidentiality.

Step 5 Discuss about, and reflect on the stories

After the individual storytelling, the different stories are discussed within the small groups where everyone should be facilitated to explore similar and/or different experiences, as well as analysis of the values and results expressed by the different key stakeholders regarding their participation in a project.

Step 6 Select the most significant changes

When stories are then shared with a wider group – for example at network meetings at district or local level – stakeholders in each group can be helped to discuss and choose 1-3 stories from their group which best illustrate the most significant changes they feel have been achieved through their participation initiatives which they would like to share.

Step 7 Apply learned lessons about the most significant changes

The identified most significant changes could be used for monitoring & evaluation reporting. Moreover they can be analyzed on their working components, and used as input for further planning.

Timeframe

This tool can be used during evaluations and as part of the monitoring system, for instance. Stories can be collected every 3-6 months with farmers, workers and other key stakeholders, both individually and collectively. The actual process of helping farmers and their families to reflect on and create their stories of most significant change is likely to take 1-2 hours.

Materials Needed

Sheets of paper, pencils and erasers, crayons or paint.

3.2 Timeline Exercise

What is a Timeline Exercise?

The Timeline Exercise is a tool to identify key milestones ('achievements') and challenges faced over time throughout a project by stakeholders (during their involvement in the project). The Timeline Exercise is relatively easy to understand and execute.

When to use this tool?

You can use this tool to understand the evolution of a project and/or programme and record important events over time from the perspective of the stakeholders.

The interactive process encourages reflection, generates ideas, and stimulates discussion. Plus it helps teams to organize their thoughts and history and therefore encourages them to be selective and focus on important events.

How to use this tool?

The Timeline Exercise can be done in small groups in a workshop setting. Plan in advance how you will record, analyze and use the data.

Key steps

Step 1 Select project(s)
Choose a project(s) that is familiar with the participants.

Step 2 Make groups
Divide the participants into groups of about four persons, each with representative(s) of that group's projects (when the group is small, another option is to ask everyone to write down the most important events and changes for them personally).

Step 3 Execute the exercise
Ask each group to draw a historical timeline, recording the important events in the lifetime of the project. Note key milestones and their dates. They can use words, symbols, pictures, or best of all, a mixture of the three. Below you see the Timeline Exercise steps. You can hand these out to each group or project the steps on a screen

Timeline Exercise steps →

I. Draw a vertical line on a large sheet of flipchart paper (or a few pieces of flipchart stuck together). This 'timeline' represents the lifeline of the project they are/were involved with.
II. At the top of the line write the approximate date (month/ year) when the project or their involvement in the project started.
III. Think about and discuss significant achievements gained through the project, as well as significant challenges faced.
IV. Document (visually or in writing) key events / achievements that have occurred over a time period (along the timeline).
V. Document, in another colour pen, (visually or in writing) key challenges that the project faced at different points in time during time line.

Step 4 Present the timeline

Each group should choose someone to present the timeline. Instruct the presenters to be concise. Each group present their results. The facilitator should reassure that the opinions and thoughts of all participants are incorporated with questions like, 'do you miss events in this timeline?' 'Why do you think they are not mentioned?' For the data to be usable, it is very important to capture the story either using a tape recorder or taking notes.

Step 5 Discuss key findings and ideas

Facilitate discussion on key findings and ideas about what elements should be adjusted and could be improved over the next period of time (for example, the next 6 months).

Below you find a simplified timeline for the example about the palm oil producers in the Guacatulu region.

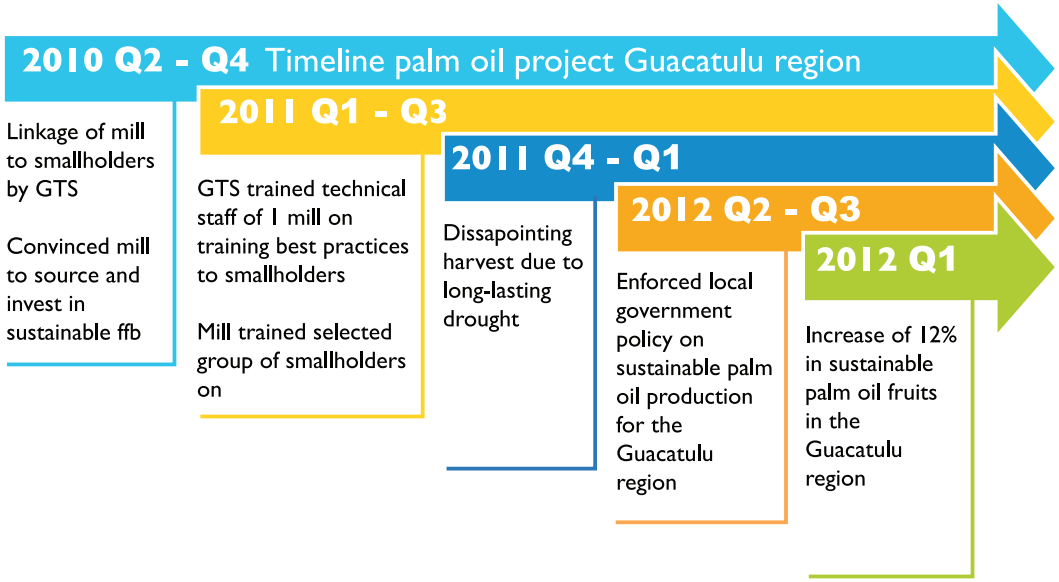


Figure 3.2 Simplified example of Timeline Exercise for palm oil producers in the Guatalucu region.

Timeframe

The exercise will take around 60 minutes in total (three small groups):

- 5 minutes to explain the tool.
- 20 minutes for the groups to prepare the historical timelines.
- 5 minutes per team for presentations.
- 20 minutes for discussion at the end.

Materials needed

Flip chart paper, thick markers, different colour pens, tape for pinning up the drawing.

A well thought-through strategy is key for a successful project.

3.3 Focus Group Discussion

What is a Focus Group Discussion?

A Focus Group Discussion is a qualitative research method in which a group of people is asked about their perceptions, opinions, beliefs, and attitudes towards a topic or idea.

Questions are asked in an interactive group setting where participants are free to talk with other group members. It provides insight in a range of ideas and opinions and the variation that exists in a particular group in terms of beliefs and practices. A Focus Group Discussion should be focused, does not cover a large range of issues, but explores a few topics in greater detail. Focus groups are particularly useful for reflecting the social realities of a stakeholder group!

Key objectives

- Identify and explore subjects of interest of a group of people (could be either the main target group of a project like smallholders, but the group could also consist out of local government officials depending on the topic researched).
- Find solutions to a problem or answers to a question.
- Include ideas of all members of a group.
- Facilitate the possibility for people to share their opinions and experiences.

When to use this tool?

Focus Group Discussions are a very powerful tool to assess qualitative questions and thus to:

- understand *why* people change
- interpret and understand quantitative information

It is a good way to gather together people from similar backgrounds or experiences to discuss a specific topic of interest and gain more insight into different opinions among different parties involved in a change process.

Focus groups can be done as part of a needs assessment, but also to initiate discussion or to evaluate an activity at the end of the day. Furthermore focus groups can be used to explore the meanings of survey findings that cannot be explained statistically.

How to use this tool?

Invite a small group of people for instance farmers, NGO's or company representatives etc. (6 to max 12) with specialist knowledge or interest in a particular area to discuss the specific topics in detail. The group usually shares common characteristics, such as age, gender, profession, region, sector involved, religion or something else related to the topic of interest.

Topics

Because one focus group can in general only discuss about five questions max. a well-thought-through selection of subjects should be made in advance. Make sure that the topics are based on e.g. objectives or results of a project, programme, or an assessment, evaluation or research question.

Key Steps

1. Decide on the purpose: information gathering or analysis.
2. Prepare four or five questions.
3. Schedule one to two hours.
4. Invite a maximum of 12 participants in one Focus Group Discussion.
5. Make sure that there is equality and trust between group participants (if needed, invite men and women separately; think of differences in age, class, religion or ethnicity).
6. Arrange a comfortable place, where interruptions will be limited.
7. Begin with introductions to ensure all individuals present know each other. Agree on some ground rules for the discussion. For example: everyone has a right to speak, no one has the right answer, please don't interrupt etc.
8. Introduce the purpose of the meeting and the method used.
9. Facilitate the discussion (see the section on facilitation).
10. Ask participants to summarize what they see as the most important views/ perspectives expressed by them individually and/or as a group during these discussions. Enable further clarifications/ illustrations of key viewpoints.
11. End the session by explaining the next steps in the research/evaluation process and seek their co-operation to be part of further research/ dialogue opportunities in the future.

Recording and Transcription

The best way to make maximum use of information in a Focus Group Discussion is to record the session and then transcribe it. This because it is difficult to keep track of what people say in a lively discussion. It should be noted that transcribing Focus Group Discussions is very time consuming. It can be decided to limit transcription to information relevant to the set topics. This way it will be easier to combine and compare results of different Focus Group Discussions.

Facilitation

The crucial element of Focus Group Discussions is the facilitation. A focus group should be led by a skilled facilitator and supported by an observer/note-taker.
The Facilitator leads the discussion and keeps it on or around the original topic.

Facilitator guidelines

- Be well prepared on the purpose and the topics to be discussed.
- Involve all participants in the discussion.
- Be non-judgmental and open.
- Be a good listener; do not interpret answers of participants.
- Ensure discussion is open and flexible for the group, but make sure the discussion doesn't drift of from the topic.
- Become more specific in your questions when you get deeper into the topic.
- Avoid yes/no questions, because these won't encourage participants to express their own ideas and views on a topic.
- Rephrase your question if an answer given is not an answer to the question asked.
- Use pauses; these give time for participants to think and add to what's already said.
- Use probes; asking questions to get clarification on answers given (could you explain further? can you give an example? I don't understand what you meant by? Etc.)

The Observer takes notes and assists the facilitator in identifying certain processes or interesting statements from the group.

Observer guidelines

- It is important to write down who says what, in order to see a line in the views/opinions of the different participants in the discussion (see recording and transcription above).
- Ensures all topics are fully covered.
- The observer supports the facilitator if necessary (involving everyone and covering all topics).

Timeframe

The Focus Group Discussion itself should take 1,5 to 2 hours. The time for preparation and analysis of the results depends on the topic and knowledge of the facilitator.

Materials needed

Notebook and pen, recorder (optional), flipcharts and markers (optional).

3.4 Surveys

What is a Survey?

A Survey is a systematic collection of information from a defined population, usually by means of interviews or questionnaires.

Surveys are a common method of gathering data for project or programme M&E.
If a Survey is conducted well, information about a selected group of people can say something about the whole target group or even population. The Surveys held within the Solidaridad network usually use a questionnaire. A questionnaire is a data collection instrument containing a set of questions organized in a systematic way.

When to use this tool?

Surveys can be used to collect quantitative and sometimes qualitative information on specific questions from a large number of respondents before, during, or after a project.

The booklet Implementation & Monitoring, paragraph 3.1. describes two kinds of Surveys. A mini-Survey, which is very useful to use during field visits to validate information or gather information. And a so-called, outsource Survey to assess the impact of your programme, to proof changes and justify investments. For objective and reliable results it is best to source the last one out to an (consultant) agency.

In this light, Surveys are especially useful to:

- Providing baseline data against which the performance of the strategy, programme, or project can be compared.
- Comparing different groups at a given point in time.
- Comparing changes over time in the same group.
- Comparing actual conditions with the targets established in a programme or project design.
- Describing conditions in a particular community or group.
- Providing a key input to a formal evaluation of the impact of a programme or project.

How to use this tool?

How to apply a Survey depends on the nature of the Survey. Below we describe the common distinctions in Surveys, sampling methods (how to select your target group), tips for developing questionnaires and basic requirements for interview techniques.

Distinction in surveys

A first distinction can be made between structured and semi-structured surveys.

Structured surveys use a standardized approach to asking fixed (closed-ended) questions that limit respondents' answers to a predefined set of answers, such as yes/no, true/false, or multiple choices, e.g. "Did you receive the training on micro-organisms?" While pre-coded questions can be efficient in time and useful for statistical analysis, they must be carefully designed to ensure that questions are understood by all respondents and are not misleading. Designing a questionnaire may seem common sense, but it involves a refinement that requires experience.

Semi-structured surveys use open-ended questions that are not limited to defined answers but allow respondents to answer and express opinions at length. E.g. "How useful was the training on micro-organisms to reduce costs on fertilizers for your crop?" Semi-structured surveys allow more flexibility in response, but take more skill and cost in administering. Therefore interviewers must be experienced in probing and obtaining information.

Another important distinction for surveys can be made based on the timing and function of the survey:

A descriptive survey seeks to obtain representative data about a target group at a single point of time, without making comparisons between groups (such as a needs assessment).

A comparative survey seeks to compare the results between groups, either the same population at two points in time (e.g. baseline-endline design), or two distinct groups at the same point in time (e.g. farmer group' not touched by the interventions).

Sampling techniques

Since it is generally impossible to study an entire population (every individual in a country, all farmer groups, every geographic area, etc.), you will probably rely on sampling techniques to acquire a section of the population to conduct a survey. It is important that the group selected is representative of the population that you would like to research, and not biased in a systematic manner. For example, a group comprised of the wealthiest soy sector workers in a given area probably would not accurately reflect the opinions of the entire workforce of the soy sector in that area.

Sampling methods are classified as either *probability* or *nonprobability*. In probability samples, each member of the population has a known non-zero probability of being selected. Probability methods include random sampling, systematic sampling, and stratified sampling.

In nonprobability sampling, members are selected from the population in some non-random manner. These include convenience sampling, judgment sampling, quota sampling, and snowball sampling.

Below we discuss random sampling, stratified sampling and snowball sampling since we believe that these sampling methods are often used and suitable techniques for conducting surveys within our work field.

Random sampling

Random sampling is the purest form of probability sampling. Random sampling is the basic sampling technique where we select a group of subjects (a sample) for study from a larger group (a population). Each individual is chosen entirely by chance and each member of the population has an equal chance of being included in the sample. Every possible sample of a given size has the same chance of selection. [3]

3 Definition taken from Valerie J. Easton and John H. McColl's Statistics Glossary v1.1

Stratified sampling

A stratified sample is a mini-reproduction of the population. Before sampling, the population is divided into characteristics of importance for the research. For example, by gender, social class, education level, religion, etc. Then the population is randomly sampled within each category or stratum. If 28% of the population is college-educated, then 28% of the sample is randomly selected from the college-educated population.

Some reasons for using stratified sampling over simple random sampling are:

- The cost per observation in the survey may be reduced;
- Estimates of the population parameters may be wanted for each sub-population;
- Increased accuracy at given cost.

Snowball sampling

Snowball sampling is a special nonprobability method used when the desired sample characteristic is rare. It may be extremely difficult or unaffordable to locate respondents. A snowball sample is named this way because one picks up the sample along the way, similar to a snowball accumulating snow. A snowball sample is achieved by asking a respondent to suggest someone else who might be willing or appropriate for the study. Snowball samples are particularly useful in hard-to-track populations; such as migrating pastoralists or when particular views are important to be part of the gathered data, for instance people in favor or against solving a particular issue.

While this technique can dramatically lower search costs, it can come at the expense of introducing bias because the technique itself lessens the likelihood that the sample will represent a good representation of the population.

If you like to learn more about sampling techniques and how to apply these to your surveys you can always seek advice from the PME experts within the Solidaridad Network.

Developing questionnaires and formulating questions

The quality of the information you will receive from a questionnaire is directly related to the care with which you design it.

Explanation about survey to respondent

Begin the questionnaire by clearly explaining its purpose, and ensuring the respondent of the confidentiality of their responses or not (depending on the type of survey) and communicate whether the respondent will receive the outcomes of the survey and if so, when and how. Include an identification section to gather information on the respondent (e.g. name, function, age, gender, location, e-mail address, etc.).

Formulation of questions

Then formulate questions in a logical sequence. Likert scales are often used in questionnaires and surveys. Here the respondent is asked to assess a positive statement expressing an opinion, and to record their level of agreement with that statement. Four-point scales such as "strongly agree; agree; disagree; strongly disagree" oblige the respondent to take a side. A five- point scale adds "neutral" in between "agree" and "disagree". In both cases, the results can be analyzed and presented quantitatively. In addition it is always important to provide a "don't know" option, to avoid forcing a respondent to give an opinion they don't really have.

Always check the clarity of your questions by piloting the questionnaire with a few typical respondents, and ask them to give you feedback on the questionnaire in general, how long it took to complete, and especially on anything that is not 100% clear. A good pre-test always results in changes being made to the questionnaire: wording, sequence, length, etc. Thank the respondents for answering the questions at the end of the questionnaire.

The questionnaire should be designed to be a quick and effortless exercise for the respondent. How your questions are formulated will be absolutely critical to the quality of the data collected. Here are some tips on formulating questions:

- First of all, check every question to make sure it is not a double or multiple question(s). If so, split it into two questions.
- Check all questions for clarity, word them as simply as possible. The ideal length is not more than 20 words.
- Make sure that questions cannot have more than one meaning to respondents.
- Avoid jargon.
- Avoid negative or complicated formulations.
- Avoid inexact words such as "generally", "usually", "often", "rarely", "typical" – they may stimulate information that is unreliable.
- Most importantly, be on the lookout anything resembling a leading question – one that subtly, or not so subtly, suggests the answer.
- Arrange questions in a logical sequence, to the extent possible with the easier ones first.
- Take care that the order of the earlier questions does not influence the answers to later questions.
- Make the questionnaire visually attractive, with clear sub-headings, spaces, etc.
- Mark each page with a header and page number. Be sure to take the time to pilot the questionnaire.
- If you fail to pre-test the questionnaire properly, your entire evaluation may be compromised.

Interviewer characteristics

Surveys can be either conducted digital (e.g. by e-mail), online (e.g. with SurveyMonkey) or by an interviewer (e.g. phone interview or face-to-face). Below you find a list of the desired characteristics of the interviewer, in case of a phone interview or face-to-face interview.

The ideal interviewers:

- Are close in age to the respondents
- Have good communication skills in the local languages
- Are comfortable and knowledgeable about the topics surveyed
- Will respect the dignity of respondents and confidentiality required by the survey
- Will represent your organization well in the field

Timeframe

Developing, testing, and analyzing the results of a survey can take days of work, depending on the complexity of the evaluation and the length of the questionnaire.

Materials needed

Questionnaires can be in the form of hard copies, with the respondents returning paper versions, or electronic versions to be returned by email, or web surveys to be completed online.

Advantages & disadvantages

Surveys are useful tools but can be complex and resource-intensive in practice. Before deciding if you are going to conduct a survey, think about some of the advantages and disadvantages:

- Can be distributed to a large number of people.
- Written questionnaires are much less expensive than interviews.
- Data analysis of fixed-choice questions is easy.
- Written questionnaires obviously are not a suitable tool for people with low levels of literacy. In this case, a questionnaire can be answered orally (interview method).
- You will also need time to analyze and use all the information collected.
- The people selected may be easy to get to or willing to co-operate but not necessarily representative of the population.
- The method may produce superficial information. Interviewees may give the answers they think you want to hear.
- A large-scale survey is often difficult to supervise because of staff costs and distances to be covered.

Colofon

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