REVEAL
Tools to support community transformation

Conflict timeline: revealing how conflict has changed over time

❓ Why use this activity?

Recording how conflict has changed over time is called a conflict timeline. While the timeline itself is useful, the real value lies in the discussion had in developing it. Thinking about how conflict has changed over time helps us to see and understand what has changed, the issues and events that have driven the change, and also the signs that change may happen again. The discussion will help you to understand:

- any events that have influenced the way that people think about their safety and security
- what is most important to people about their safety and security
- the events or issues that make the security situation better or worse
- the signs that suggest that the situation is improving or worsening

> This tool can be used with a group to help reveal and understand a conflict. It can also form part of a conflict analysis. See **Tool C2: Conflict analysis**.

A brief description

A group develops a timeline based on how they feel about their safety and security at the present time, in the past, and how they think they will feel about it in the future. The facilitator uses discussion questions to enable a group to explore what safety and security means to them and what their priorities are. The questions also help to reveal what conflicts or violence are taking place in the community, for how long these have been happening, and how much these tensions are in the open or hidden under the surface.

You will need

- Large pieces of paper
- Pens
- Pebbles, beads or bottle tops

🕐 Timeline

This activity will take 1-2 hours

Sidebar tabs:
- Awareness raising
- Children & youth
- Climate & environment
- Conflict & peacebuilding
- Corruption & governance
- Disaster risk management
- Discrimination & inclusion
- Food & livelihoods
- Gender & sexual violence
- Health & HIV
- Influencing decision-makers
- Migration & trafficking
- Water, sanitation & hygiene

Issues to be aware of

This activity could lead to disagreements between group members over the exact position of the markers. There is no correct answer and the main aim of the activity is to enable discussion to take place. If people disagree then you can try to use this as an opportunity to explore the reason for these different opinions. This could give you an important insight into how different groups of people experience the situation. For example, what may be fine for adult men, may not be for girls or boys or for older people or people with disabilities. If the group is unable to come to an agreement, you could allow more than one marker for each question and develop several versions of the graph, perhaps using different coloured lines or objects. You could also allow different groups to carry out the activity separately (eg young women, older women, young men, and older men), and then compare the graphs to see how experiences differ.

What to do

- Draw the axes of a graph onto a large piece of paper, as shown in the picture below. The vertical axis (the line running from top to bottom) will measure how good or positive the community feel about their safety and security. Label the top of the vertical axis good or positive, and the bottom of it bad or negative. The horizontal axis (the line from left to right) represents time, with the centre of the cross being today.
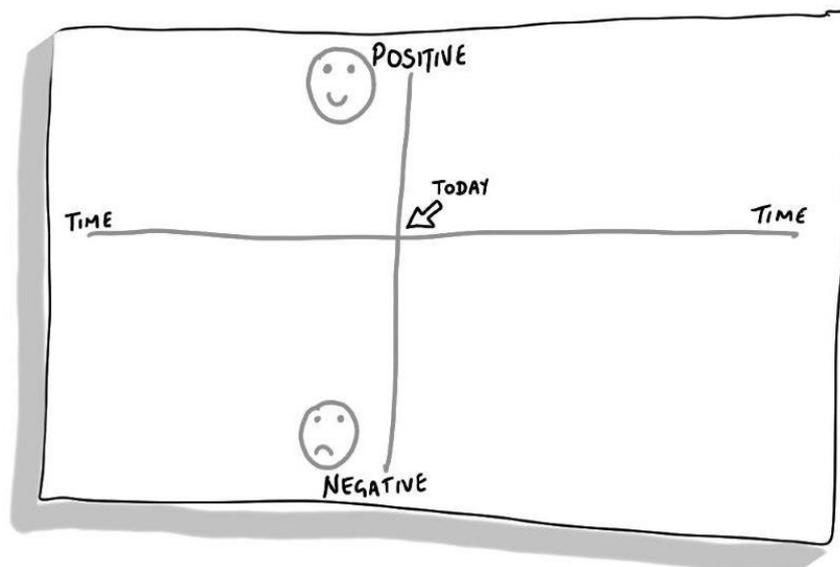
- Ask the group to identify where on the scale of the vertical axis they would place their current situation with respect to their safety and security. If they feel their safety and security is good, they should choose a point towards the top of the axis. If they think it is bad, they should point towards the bottom of it. Allow different people to express where they feel they are on the scale. Encourage discussion. Once everyone is agreed, put a marker (eg a pebble, bead or bottle top) on the appropriate position on the vertical axis.

- Now ask the group to think back a year and ask how the situation was then. Was it better or worse than the present time? Again, allow discussion to take place. Put a marker in this position but to the left of the vertical axis. Keep asking the same question over different periods of time until the changes over time can be seen. For example, you could ask about 2 years ago, 5 years ago, 10 years ago and 20 years ago.

- Ask the group to look ahead and say how they think the situation is likely to change. When looking ahead, there could be different possible futures. Ask them to think through both positive and negative futures.
  - Which is the most likely and why?
  - Which might be most dangerous and why?
Link the markers to form a graph.
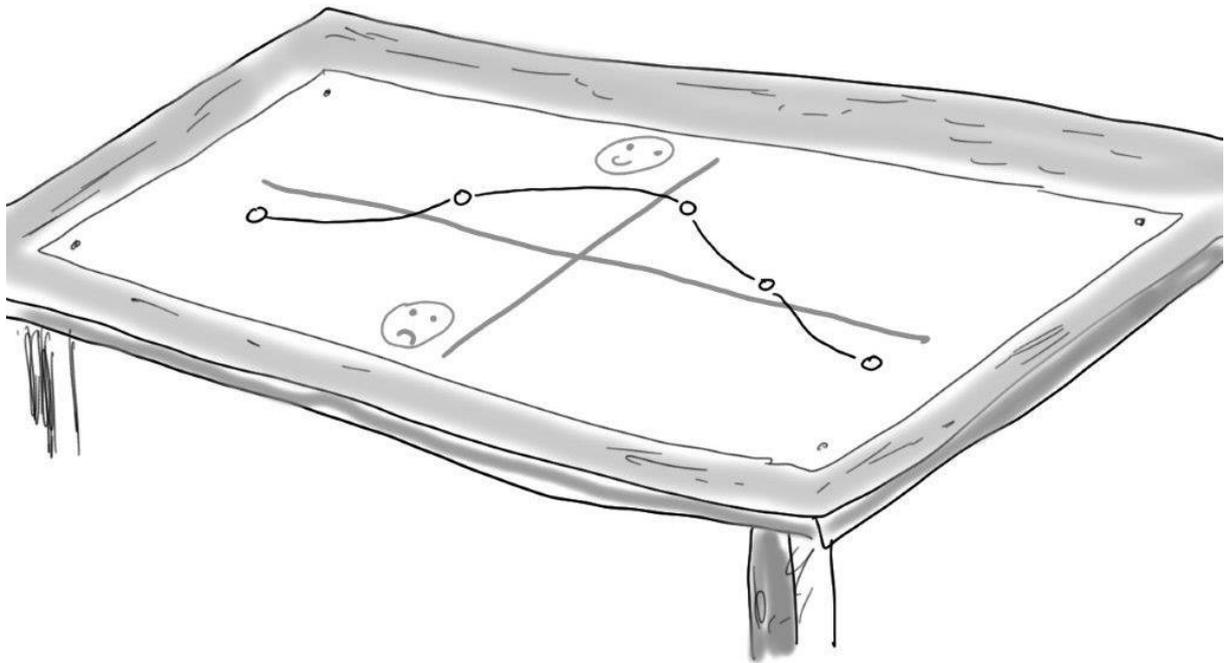
- As you do this activity, try not to focus on what *you* think the key security issues are. Instead let the group define what safety and security means to them and what their priorities are. There may, however, be some elements of safety and security that are more hidden and it might be necessary to probe a little to uncover these additional threats.

- Use the finished graph to discuss how the situation has changed over time. Ask what made the situation better or worse at various times. Look for places where the graph changed, either getting steeper or shallower, or changing direction suddenly. What caused the change at this point? During the discussion use probing questions to understand:
  - The types of conflict or violence that are taking place within households, in the community or with other communities.
  - How long these have been going on.
  - How much these tensions are in the open or how much they are hidden under the surface.

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Awareness raising

Children & youth

Climate & environment

Conflict & peacebuilding

Corruption & governance

Disaster risk management

Discrimination & inclusion

Food & livelihoods

Gender & sexual violence

Health & HIV

Influencing decision-makers

Migration & trafficking

Water, sanitation & hygiene
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- Ask the group how they would recognise whether the situation was getting better or worse. Are there any signs that would make them hopeful? Are there any signs that would make them nervous or fearful? Use this discussion to help the group understand how they might assess potential changes in their safety and security. Ask them how they would normally receive warning of any risks or dangers and what they could do to reduce these risks and make themselves safer.

- Draw the discussion to a close by summarising:
  - what has changed over time
  - why this is
  - what can be done to help things improve rather than get worse

Next steps
This activity will hopefully have helped you and the group to think about why things have got better or worse in relation to safety and security. The group may have identified actions they want to take to encourage positive developments and reduce risks. What are the next steps that can be taken to carry out these actions?

If you have carried out this tool with opposing factions you may have identified places where the situation got better for both factions and worse for both. These points of commonality can suggest where two opposing sides might have shared interests that they can come together over. Are there next steps that the two groups can agree on in taking things forward?

If you have done this activity as part of a conflict analysis, you can use other tools to continue with your analysis. See the box below for a list of related *Reveal* tools.

Finding out more

- Tearfund (2013) Footsteps 92 – *Conflict and peace*
  http://tilz.tearfund.org/en/resources/publications/footsteps/footsteps_91-100/footsteps_92/
- Tearfund (2003) Roots 4 – *Peacebuilding within our communities*
  http://tilz.tearfund.org/en/resources/publications/roots/peace-building_within_our_communities/
- World Vision International (2006) A Shared Future: Local Capacities for Peace in Community Development - http://reliefweb.int/report/world/shared-future-local-capacities-peace-community-development
- Other resources from World Vision International, such as 'Making sense of turbulent contexts' and 'Do no harm' can be found at http://www.wvi.org/peacebuilding

Related tools:
- A1 – Revealing conflict: information for facilitators *[A1: Conflict & peacebuilding-1]*
- A2 – Do people feel safe? *[A2: Conflict & peacebuilding-1]*
- Stakeholder matrix - understanding the people affected by conflict and the relationships between them *[A2: Conflict & peacebuilding-3]*
- A2 – Understanding conflict attitudes, behaviours and context (ABC triangle) *[A1: Conflict & peacebuilding-4]*
- A2 – Conflict map *[A2: Conflict & peacebuilding-5]*
- B – Christ triumphs over conflict *[B: Conflict & peacebuilding-1]*
- B – Love your enemies (Bible study) *[B: Conflict & peacebuilding-2]*
- B – Unity in Christ (Bible study) *[B: Conflict & peacebuilding-3]*
- C2 – Conflict analysis *[C2: Conflict & peacebuilding-1]*
- C2 – Conflict sensitivity assessment *[C2: Conflict & peacebuilding-2]*
- C2 – Planning projects and actions – a conflict sensitivity checklist *[C2: Conflict & peacebuilding-3]*

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