

The 7 Community Tools:

Simple Instruments for Effective Learning of Community Life*

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“The 7 Community Tools” are set of anthropological tools for understanding community life. Most of the tools were originally basic tools commonly used among anthropologists in community studies. They were, however, adapted and simplified to be easily used for community health and development workers. The strengths of these community learning tools are: They are easily employed, very effective, and helpful in making community study as a learning process more enjoyable.

“The 7 community Tools” consist of 7 pieces of tools, each with its own strength in revealing various aspects of community life. The 7 tools, however, work well together to create a comprehensive understanding of community life. The 7 tools are:

1. Geo-Social Mapping
2. Genogram or Genealogical Diagram
3. Community Organizations Chart.
4. Local Health Systems
5. Community Calendar
6. Local History
7. Life Stories

The strengths of these “7 Community Tools” are:

1. They can be used individually or collectively depending on working circumstances.
2. They can be easily incorporated either in everyday community health work or in time-limited community-based project.
3. Knowledge and understanding of various aspects of community life can be learned and shared among workers through standard procedures and formats.
4. They are effective tools to transform tacit knowledge about community life among experienced health worker into explicit knowledge other can learn.

Details of The 7 community Tools

1. Geo-Social Mapping

Geo-Social Mapping differs from conventional community mapping for it combines geographical and social mapping into one. It bases on the notion that mapping of community’s physical outlook is not sufficient for understanding community life, unless we take social functions and social meanings of spaces into account. In this way, what one need to put into community map are not only physical spaces, but also social spaces of the community.

* (For more details, please refer to Komatra Chuengsatiansup et al, *Community Life Approach: Learning Manual That Make Community Work Easy, Effective, and Fun*, Nonthaburi, Thailand: Society and Health Institute, 2002).

All physical spaces are imbued with social memories, symbolic meanings, cultural classification as well as political boundaries. They could be gender-specific spaces, spaces designated for special community activities, liminal or marginal spaces considered off-limit for certain social groups, or sacred spaces for community rituals. These socio-cultural and symbolic aspects of physical spaces are crucial for the understanding of communal life.

Geo-Social Mapping is obtained by transecting through the whole community, observing and recording activities related to physical spaces. As the saying goes: A picture is worth more than a thousand words, it is important for community workers to see the entire community (each and every household, especially those of the poor and disenfranchised at the outskirts of the village, school, community monastery, water well, market, barber shop, grocery, etc.) with their own eyes. Transecting the community and mapping of geo-social details is thus the most rapid and reliable way of collecting community information.

Objectives of Geo-Social Mapping:

- To rapidly familiarize with local world of community life.
- To comprehend the complete picture of the community.
- To identify target groups for community health program, for instance, the poor, the disadvantaged, the sick, and the disabled.

Tips and Techniques for Geo-Social Mapping

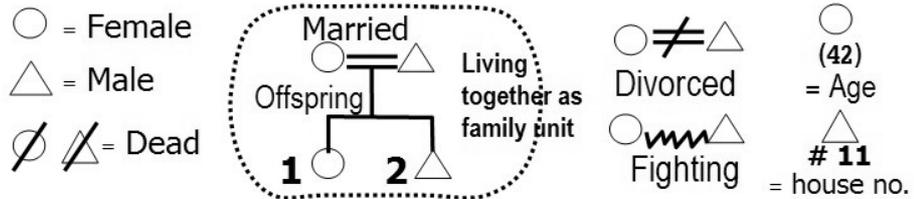
1. Walk around the village. Don't just do the mapping, talk to people.
2. Take a careful look at all the houses with one's own eyes before put them into the map. Notice the socio-economic outlook of each house.
3. Notice the overlaying of social spaces over physical spaces: meeting places for social groups; kin group area; places where women meet, talk, cook, or do their laundry; teenagers' gathering ground; religious or ritualistic space.
4. Geo-Social Mapping is a never-ending process: the more information one gets, the more detailed the map becomes. As one stays longer in the community, the Geo-Social Map becomes increasingly inclusive.
5. Looks can be deceptive: Although it is important to see things with one's own eyes, but bear in mind that community life is more than meet the eyes. Some important information cannot be observed but need interviewing owners, relatives, friends or even others in the community.
6. Put all the information in during the map drawing process. Add descriptions, arrows, and links of related areas. Circumscribe and describe spaces with social function or cultural meaning.

Geo-Social Mapping is therefore not merely the mapping of physical spaces. Rather, it is a tool for organizing community data (physical, social, cultural, political, genealogical, and symbolic) by putting them within the spatial arrangement of geographical mapping.

- To know each families and their wider kin relation, this is the foundation of the family life and community.
- To create good relationship. Knowing family members could create good impression and facilitate building up of rapport.
- Certain family traits or genetic-related diseases can also be identified and better prevented.

Tips and Techniques of Genogram

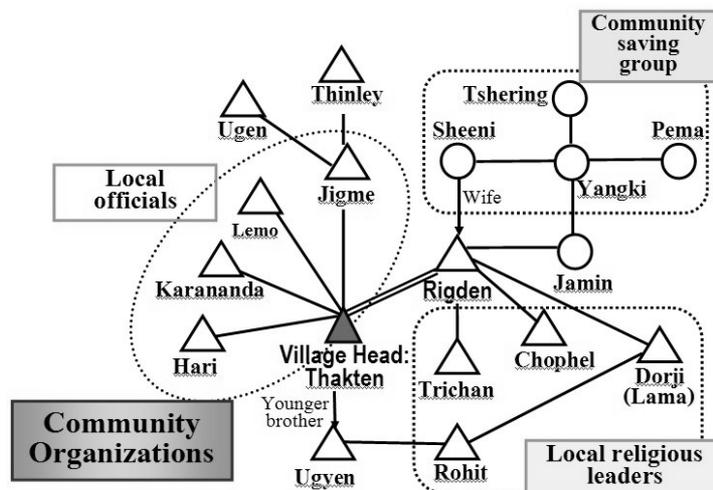
1. Standard symbols must be recognized so that data can be easily shared. Basic symbols include:



2. Identify key informants is important. The elders, local household registrars, and religious leaders often know best about kin information.
3. Not only mapping the kinship structure chart is important, getting to know people in the chart personally is even more important.
4. Note that the poor or the disenfranchised often have limited kinship network, while locally influential figures such as local leaders, village heads, or politicians often have wider network of kins.
5. Be careful about family secrets, minor wives, adopted child, and any other sensitive issues related to sexual partners and family politics.

3. Community Organizations Chart.

Other than kin relations, community life is an assemblage of various social relationship and organizational lives. Community Organizations Chart is a visual representation of community associational life. It employs the commonly used “social network analysis” to reveal and map the connections and organizational structure.



Example of Community Organizational Chart;
Using social network analysis technique.

Community organization structure is a system of social relationship which includes economic, social and political structures. Any relationship in the community

has certain structure and could be mapped to a network. It is important to realize that associational lives in the community are often informal in nature. Instead of looking solely into official or formal group set up by governmental programs, one must also be sensitive to examine informal and indigenous way of associational life particularly in more traditional societies.

Objectives of Community Organization Chart.

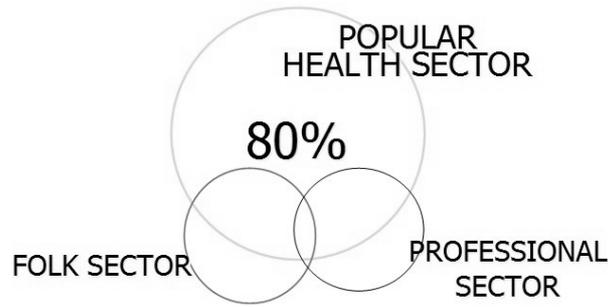
- To understand various sets of intertwining social relationships that make up of community life
- To know status of various actors and the roles they play in community affairs.
- To be more sensitive to power relation and negotiations in the community.

Tips and Techniques for Charting Community Organization.

1. Symbols of individuals are the same as used in Genogram.
2. List important community leaders, actors, and members of local organizations. Draw symbol for each individual by putting them together in group of close social network (cluster). Link those who are related: The closer their relationship, the more lines of link can be added.
3. Kin relations can be indicated using arrows and terms of kin attached according to the direction of arrows.
4. Circumscribe cluster of relation to indicate social group or community organizations.
5. Look into various forms of relationship, including economic, social and political to help understand roles, duties and relationship of power in the community.
6. Organizations in official document can be deceptive. Many official organizations are defunct and have very little meaning in community life.
7. It is essential to study both formal and informal organization structure in dept to learn who play active roles in the community.
8. Take note of “organization in action” which will reveal the actual roles and performance of member of the organizations. Observation is thus crucial here.

4. Community Health Systems

Most communities feature multiple systems of health and medical care, which co-exist and are utilized simultaneously in local health practice, a characteristic known as “Medical pluralism” or pluralistic medical system. How people cope with sickness depends on how the concepts of health, illness and disease are defined. The definitions, in turn, are determined by system of thought and local world view. Arthur Kleinman, a noted medical anthropologist suggested that we conceive pluralistic medical system as an overlapping of three circles, each represents major health sector in the community: popular health sector (the largest, consist of most self care, home remedies by lay persons taking action on their own health and illness); folk sector (consist of various kinds of traditional healers, i.e. herbalists, bone setters, faith healers, spirit mediums, midwives, masseurs, acupuncture, and fortune tellers); and professional sector (modern health care systems, private or public).



Kleinman’s Model of Co-existing Pluralistic Medical Systems (Kleinman A. *Patients and healers in the context of culture*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980)

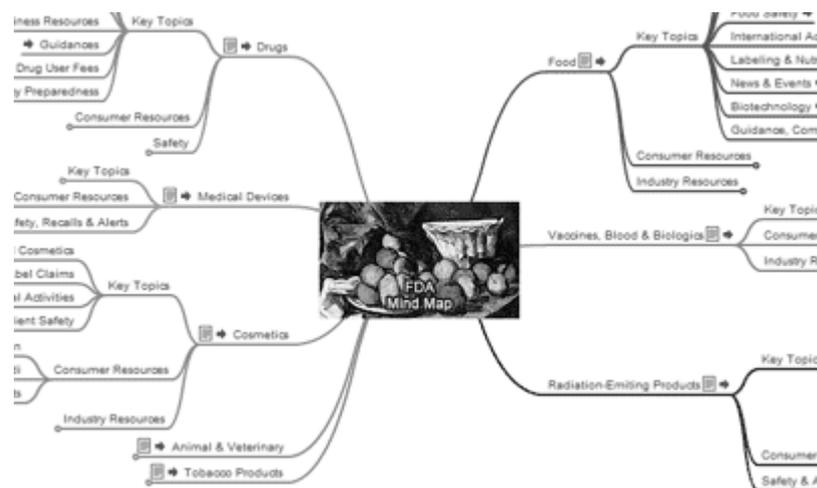
Understanding local health systems is not only crucial for community health development but also important for the understanding of local worldview. Health and well-being is usually conceived of as part of the larger cosmological order of local world. Medical interventions in many indigenous health systems either aim at restoring bodily humoral balance, social harmony, or cosmic equilibrium. Medical systems are therefore conceptual systems as well as system of power relation people need to negotiate in their community life.

Objectives of Mapping Local Health Systems.

- To understand existing systems of health and medical practices in community.
- To map locally available resources for health development and community’s coping with illness.
- To understand local worldview and the ways in which illnesses and diseases are culturally interpreted.

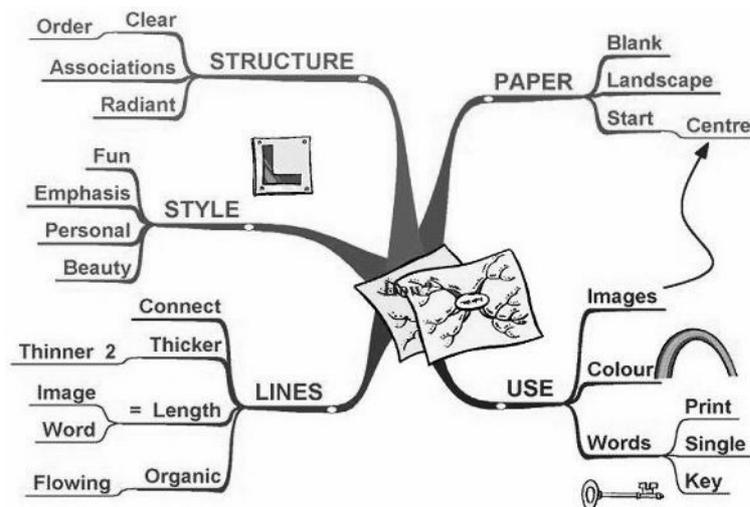
Tip and Techniques for Mapping Local Health Systems.

1. Use Mind Mapping technique to visualize community health system information. Each branch represents major dimension of local health practices which divides into various sub-branches of related topics.



Example of Mind Mapping by FDA

2. The process of Mind Mapping can be easily understood by the following Mind Map:



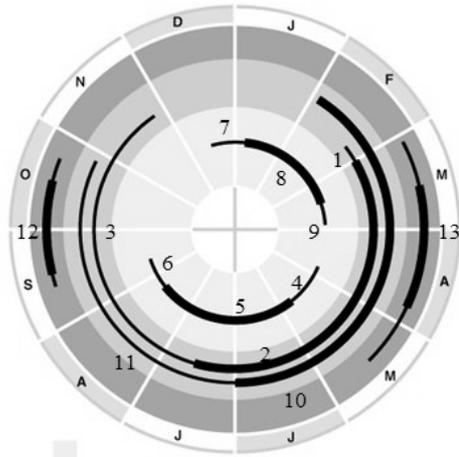
3. Branches can include food systems, medical services, pharmaceutical products, cultural belief, child-rearing, environmental issues, alcohol consumptions, leisure, or any other concepts and practices related to health and well-being.
4. It is suggested that each branch provides as much details as possible, particularly on time, place, resources, and actors so that further planning and action could be considered.
5. Suspend any professional judgment for a moment. Listen and learn how health and illnesses are locally perceived. Then carefully categorize each branch into “positive”, “negative”, and “neutral”, before taking any further action.
6. Keep in mind that pluralistic medical system has always existed not only in developing countries, but every where. The reason is that there is no single medical system so perfect that could effectively cure all illness and provide all the answer to the problem of human suffering (biological, physical, mental, social, cultural, and existential).

By mapping local health systems and cultural practices related to health, community health workers can identify both the problem or risk and the existing potentials in the community.

One could readily see that each tool is related and can be linked to other tools. Local healers and medical resorts can be directly mapped into the Geo-Social Mapping. Genealogical orders of healers are also important to understand their roles in the community. Health organization, healer associations, or patient groups can also be charted as part of **Community Organization Chart**.

5. Community Calendar

Community Calendar is a tool for charting temporal organization of community life. It represents all activities and important events in community in a chronological order. Daily, weekly, monthly or annual events can be put in the diagram.



Mapping economic and cultural events around the year

	Month	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
Economic													
1	Prepare rice field		■										
2	Attend rice field			■	■	■	■	■					
3	Harvesting season								■	■	■	■	
4	Prepare cotton field					■	■						
5	Attending cotton field						■	■	■	■			
6	Harvesting cotton									■	■		
7	Prepare vegetable field	■											■
8	Growing vegetable		■	■	■	■							
9	Making vegetable preservation			■									
10	Attending silk worm				■	■	■						
11	Weaving silk							■	■	■	■	■	
Cultural													
12	October festival										■	■	
13	Spring ceremony ritual			■	■	■							

Community Calendar:
Calendrical circle and tabulation format

Community life is organized around seasonal changes. Community calendar is an instrument to understand how local life is temporally organized into calendrical timeframe. By doing so, one can anticipate events and better plan for in-depth study of the upcoming situation. In the field of health development, risks and diseases could be assessed in relation to seasonal epidemiology and cultural pattern. At least two kinds of calendar must be contemplated: Economic calendar and cultural calendar.

Economic calendar lists all economic activities such as ploughing, attending rice field, harvesting, fishing, cotton picking, weaving, etc. Cultural calendar includes various social and cultural activities: Holidays, festivals, traveling season, home coming, religious events, etc.

Objectives of Community Calendar

- To understand the temporal organization of community life. Activities and events can be arranged and understood in chronological order.
- To be able to anticipate community activities and thus can better plan for participation and intervention.
- In health development, community calendar provides a good groundwork for epidemiological studies and disease prevention and control.

Tips and Techniques for Creating Community Calendar

1. List all local occupations, i.e. farming, weaving, plantation, trading, government officials, etc. Gather information about each occupation around the year and put them in chronological order.

2. Calendar could be arranged in circular or tabular form as the above sample illustrates.
3. Observe and mark seasonal change.
4. Traditional practices such as marriage, ordination, fasting, the coming of age, or burial ceremony often take place in specific time of the year.
5. Time or seasonal changes can also demarcate what are allowed or prohibited: Cock-fighting, for instance, is not allowed during Buddhist Lent.
6. In health terms, certain cultural practices and festive activities can have impact on health behavior. Fasting, celibacy, vegetarian practices during auspicious months, for instance, needs to be understood by health workers.
7. Tabulation of community calendar can be analyzed to see how each activity (economic and cultural) can affect community life and health development.

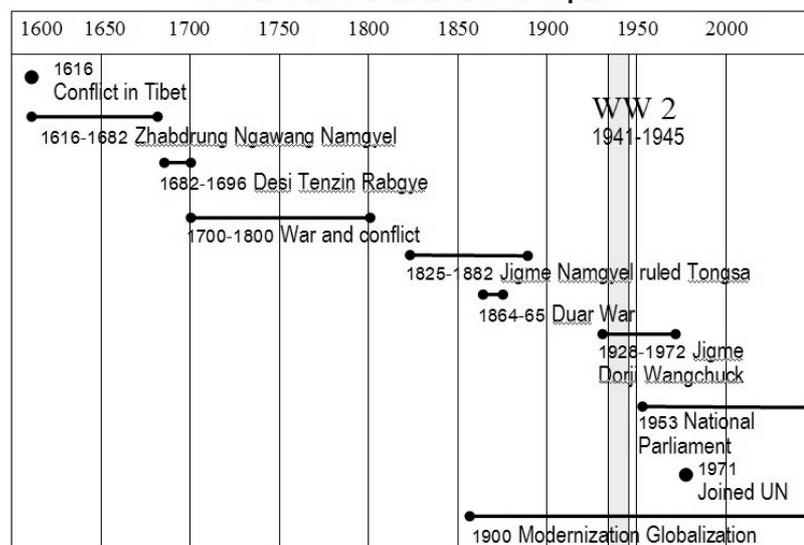
Community calendar is an effective way to understand local activities in their specific time frame. It is useful for planning of research process and community development activities. In epidemiological terms, it is beneficial for investigation of epidemics as well as useful in disease prevention and control.

6. Local History

Community has its own collective experiences. Local history is the study of community's social memories and the meanings they have on community life. Past histories concerning economic changes, social transition, political development can provide useful insight on how community life becomes the way it is. Understanding of such evolution can also reduce bias with regard to community's attitudes that one is not familiar with.

Tracing community history is also extremely useful as educational process for the community itself. Understanding local history reveals structural and social forces affecting local livelihood. It thus builds up historical consciousness and can have the affect of transforming local people from passive subject being acted upon into subject acting upon the world, from passive commons into active citizen.

Bhutan Historical Chart (Example)



Objective of Charting Local History

- To understand temporal dimension of community life in its longitudinal development.
- To deeper understand how the community life becomes the way it is.
- To create local historical consciousness, this can be an empowering process for local community strengthening.

Tips and Technique for Working on Local History

1. An understanding of national or regional historical development is very useful as the context to understand local history.
2. Local history can be interviewed from local elder. Many social memories are connected to places. It is therefore handy to ask the elder about stories related to various places (i.e. temples, ritual ground, big trees, or ancient ruin).
3. Ask about things when they came first in the community: rice mill, electricity, running water, health center, local transportation, telephone, village headmen, development projects, etc. Eliciting stories (What, Where, When, Who, Why, and How) to figure out parties involved and how they evolved.
4. Health, epidemics, and natural disasters are often vivid social memories and can reveal how the community copes with disastrous situation. Ask about past epidemics such as plague, yellow fever, cholera, and recent epidemics such as first case of HIV/AIDS, avian flu, etc. Note as well local terms and folk medical glossary used in describing the out breaks.
5. Learning about local history can be a participatory process. Local leaders and elders can be invited to tell their stories and contemplate on how the community evolves.

Learning about local history can be an empowering process because it reveals social and structural forces affecting local development. For health and community workers, knowing local collective experience and social memories can reduce bias and help them to be more empathy with local people.

7. Life Story

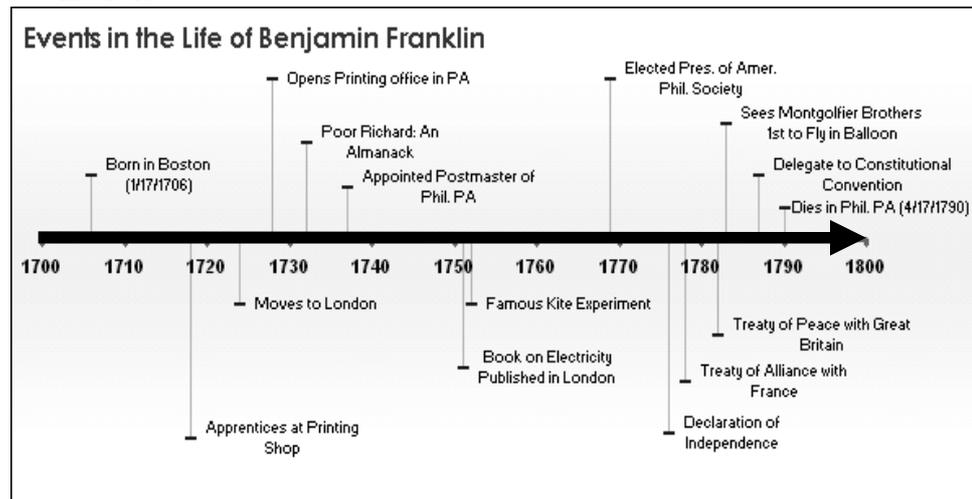
Studying life story is an effective mean to understand lives as lived by local people. It can reveal sets of values highly held by local villagers, spiritual dimensions of local life, existential concerns, as well as humanistic impulse in community life. Looking closely and listening deeply to lived experience of people, to be able to see and share the joy, sorrow, happiness, and hope in people's lives can be a transformative experience. People cease to be "object of inquiry" and become more of the "subject of concern" in our community learning experience.

Objective of Eliciting Life Stories

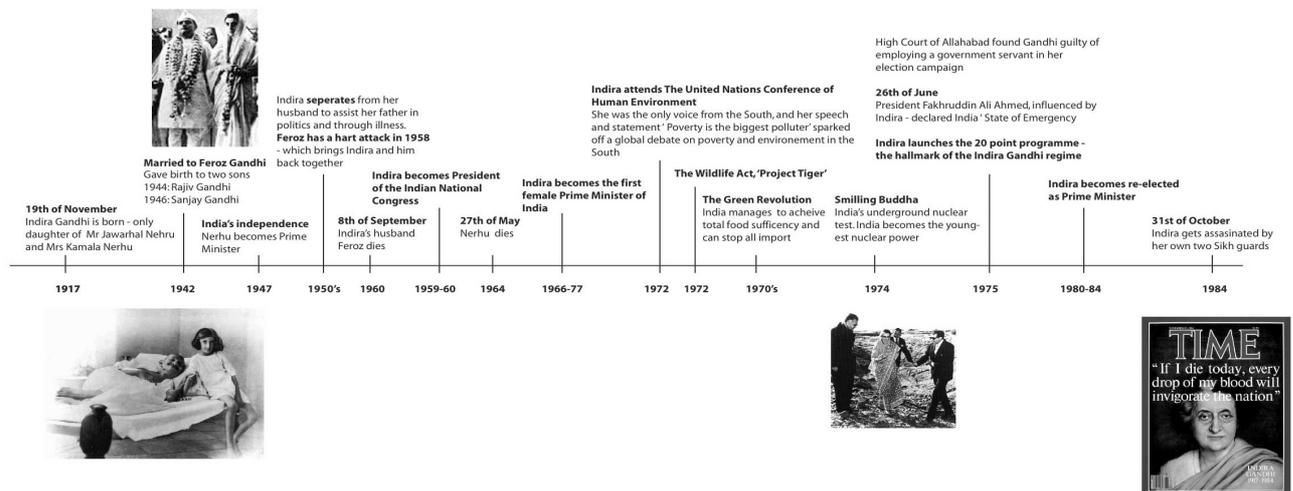
- To understand in depth community life as it is lived by local villagers.
- To understand existential values and to be able to appreciate common humanity amid cultural differences.
- To develop within ourselves increasing humanistic sensibility.

Tips and Techniques for Eliciting Life Stories.

1. Eliciting life story can be sensitive. Bear in mind that good relationship and rapport is needed before any deep probe into life events of informants.
2. Target groups for eliciting life story can vary depending on the purpose of community study. It is advisable to learn about the lives of leaders, elders, ritual functionaries, religious figures, the poor, women, minority group, and the marginalized.
3. Use life timeline technique to quickly jot down life events during the interview.



4. Learn to use open-end questions to elicit stories; close-end questions will only lead to facts, not stories.
5. Observe with all the senses while interviewing.



Conclusion

Community study is an important step in all community development projects. There are many existing tools for community assessment available for community health workers. The **7 community Tools** build up on basic community study tools commonly used among anthropologists. They were systematically put together, simplified, and adapted for the ease of use and rapid result.

One needs to keep in mind that community learning is as much a science as it is an art. Community is not a thing that we can mechanistically study without taken into account

human dimension of community life. The 7 community Tools offer a unique set of tools not only to gather information but also to build a good working relationship through deep understanding of local historical and cultural contextual circumstances. It is also strongly believed that in working with the community, it is not the process of introducing changes to the community, but community workers can also learn and be transformed by the work they conduct in service to the community.

The 7 community Tools are learning tools for mutual changes and transformation of community and community workers.