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Social Analysis Systems²

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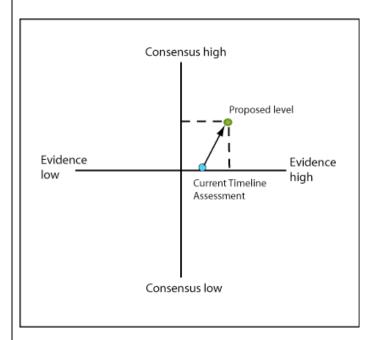|	
Title	**Validation of a *Timeline* assessment by a milk-producers' cooperative in Honduras**
Key Words	*Validation, Timeline*, Community Economic Development, Cooperatives, Honduras
Reference	Suazo, L. and D. Buckles. 2007. Validation of a *Timeline* assessment by a milk-producers' cooperative in Honduras. Social Analysis Systems², Technique Report #8, 6 pp.
Context	The Jamastrán Valley and Highlands of Danlí are farming and ranching areas in the Department of El Paraíso near the border Honduras shares with Nicaragua. Most ranchers raise cattle for two reasons. They sell some male animals for meat while the milk from cows is sold to cheese–makers in the region. Over the years, the owners of livestock have tried to organize themselves to negotiate milk prices, develop regional and export markets for their products, and address technical problems that arise. These attempts to organize have had uneven results. Many of the producers' organizations failed a few years after they got started.
	The Board of Directors of the United Producers Agricultural Cooperative (COAPUL), the largest cooperative in the region, decided to assess the history of these organizations. The purpose of the assessment was to identify the events and actions that had helped or hindered their development. They planned to use this information to write a proposal for new funding. At the request of COAPUL, the lead author of this report used the *Timeline* technique to do the assessment (see SAS² Technique Report # 22). The group also validated the result, as reported here. They felt that it was important to do so before using the information in the project

	proposal.
Purpose	To validate a *Timeline* assessment by a milk producers' cooperative in Honduras.
Process Summary	The *Timeline* and *Validation* assessments were conducted during a half-day meeting with 10 people that knew about the origins and evolution of COAPUL. The meeting was convened by COAPUL's Board of Directors. Participants identified the organizations from which COAPUL had emerged and the key events and actions that led to both success and failure over the years. When the assessment was complete, the group reviewed its plans and how it might use the results of *Timeline*. They then validated the results and discussed whether or not they were "good enough" to meet their needs. Participants agreed to have their information used in this report on the exercise.
Analysis	A key conclusion of the *Timeline* assessment was that having a large and committed membership improves the organization's capacity to negotiate milk prices and attract the investment needed to improve production methods. In the past, producers would sell part of their production on their own and part of it through the cooperative. This made it difficult for organizations to present a united front to buyers. Membership would decline after a few years when it became clear that the cooperative could not offer members better prices for milk than the open market. Participants said that COAPUL's investments in improving the sanitation and storage of milk made it possible to offer a better quality product to cheese-makers in the region. An effective membership drive in 2001, and commitment by members to sell their milk collectively, also enhanced COAPUL's negotiating power. These developments happened thanks to INCADE's technical and financial help and members' technical and administrative skills, acquired in previous organizations.
	Participants validated the *Timeline* result using two criteria (Figure 1):
	1) the extent to which the assessment was based on **evidence**

(sound information and analysis), and
2) the extent to which it achieved **consensus** through collaborative thinking.

The group rated the *Timeline* result at level 6 for evidence (using a scale of 0 to 10 where 0 would show that the evidence was not reliable and 10 would show that the evidence was very sound and in-depth.) This reflected the group's view that the *Timeline* exercise had identified the most important events in the life of various organizations, and that they were still unsure about some of the local and national events that contributed to their development.

Figure 1: Validation of a Timeline Assessment of COAPUL

The group rated the *Timeline* result at level 5 for consensus, also using a scale of 0 to 10. They noted that a 0 would show that there was disagreement within the group or that key actors had not been consulted. A level of 10 would show complete agreement. The level 5 rating for consensus reflected the group's view that many other people that had been part of producer organizations had not been consulted, and that the group did not agree on the main reasons why some of the prior organizations had failed.

Participants concluded that the *Timeline* result was good but not good enough for their purpose. The *Timeline* assessment had helped

	the group understand links among the many different organizations that had existed and the different legal structures and names they had used. However, some confusion remained. They also said that more documentation of the factors that affected membership in the organization would greatly improve their proposal for new funding. Based on these observations, they decided that more information was needed. They also felt that greater consensus was needed to ensure that most members would support the conclusions and implications of the *Timeline* assessment. A level of 7 on both evidence and consensus was considered by the group enough to support plans for use of the *Timeline* results in the funding proposal.
Interpretation	Validation of the results of the *Timeline* assessment showed that more evidence and consensus was needed before they could proceed with plans to use the results in a proposal. More details on the names and dates of registration of related organizations would strengthen claims in the proposal about the long-standing legitimacy of COAPUL. They also noted that more analysis of the factors that affected their evolution would bolster a key argument about the importance of member solidarity, namely that selling milk as individuals rather than collectively had a strong impact on the survival of organizations. Greater consensus around these results would help ensure that younger and newer members of the organization appreciated the struggles of older members and that a sense of belonging among all members would be enhanced.
	Participants decided that the *Timeline* assessment could be improved by interviewing a few older members, collecting more information on trends in membership from secondary sources, and presenting the results at a General Assembly of the membership. They also agreed that this was enough; an even wider search for information and consensus was not needed because plans were already in place to do other assessments that would support COAPUL's strategic planning and proposal writing.
Actions	Participants decided to ask the facilitator of the assessment and lead author of this report to interview more of the older members of producer organizations and to search for details of name changes

	and trends in membership by consulting the archives of the Honduran Institute for Cooperatives (IHDECOOP). Once this information was compiled and integrated into a revised document on the history of the organization, it would be shared with the General Assembly and revised further, as needed, before being used in the project proposal.
Process Observations	This report focuses on the validation process, not the *Timeline* assessment per se. Many of the details on the origins and evolution of the organization are presented elsewhere (see SAS^2 Technique Report #22). Participants felt that the proposed improvements in the *Timeline* assessment would give them the best available evidence and the best possible consensus, considering the time available and proposed use of the result. They also noted that validation of the result made the value of the *Timeline* assessment clear, and gave them new ideas for creating a booklet on the history of the organization.