



Understanding Your Climate

developed by Shaun Martin

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Objective: We often discuss climate change as if we already thoroughly understand the historic climate its role in local ecology, culture, and economies. It is difficult to understand change if we do not understand where we are starting from. Through this participatory exercise, participants will use their current knowledge to jointly develop a visualization of the historical annual climatic cycle for their region of interest (usually where they live or work). This activity also helps facilitators and trainers to better understand the climate of a region that they may be unfamiliar with. This will be helpful in facilitating subsequent discussions about local climate change.

Background: This is a fast-paced, fun collaborative exercise where all participants work in a single group. This activity should be conducted at the beginning of a workshop, before formal presentations begin. If participants already know one another very well, it can be used instead of an ice-breaker. The visualization of the climate can remain on the wall for the duration of the workshop to refer back to when necessary.

Time required: About 30 minutes.

What is needed:

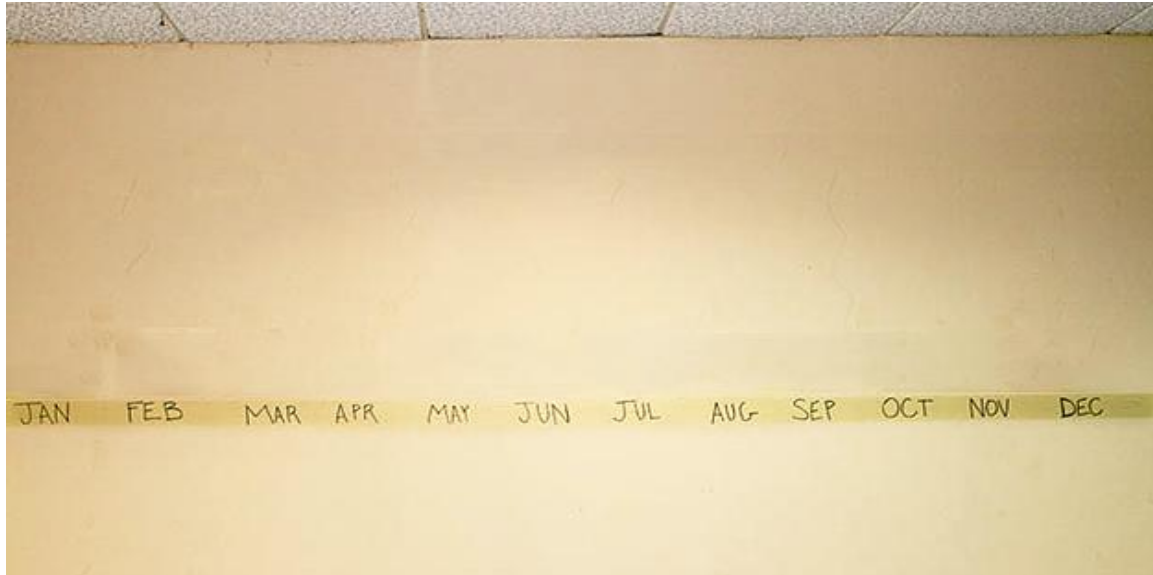
- About 5-6 meters of masking tape about 10 centimeters wide
- Plenty of large colored sticky notes in at least 2-4 colors
- Plenty of thick-tipped Sharpie pens or magic markers
- A clean wall at least 5-6 meters long

Preparation:

This activity requires set up before participants arrive at the meeting venue. Set up takes about 10-15 minutes. Begin by placing the masking tape horizontally along the wall in a single line about 5-6 meters long. If your masking tape is less than 10cm wide, you can place 2 or 3 strips of masking tape on the wall to form a single strip of sufficient width. The tape should be placed at a height where most participants can reach comfortably above it leaving plenty of space below it.

With a black thick-tipped Sharpie or magic marker, write the months of the year evenly spaced across the masking tape, starting with January on the left and ending with December on the right. You may use abbreviations for months like JAN, FEB, DEC, etc.

Your "climate calendar" should look something like this:



Distribute large colored Sticky Notes in all colors you have available and several Sharpies or magic markers at each table.

Explain to the participants the objective of the exercise as described above. Participants will use the colored sticky notes and Sharpies to build a visualization or "climate calendar" based on what they believe their historical (and usually current) climate to be.

Begin selecting a single color Sticky Note and have participants write down seasons and climate-related events using their Sharpies. They may also draw pictures of the seasons and events if they prefer. You can prompt thinking by suggesting a few seasons to start. For example, "When does the rainy season start?" Someone may respond, "In April." Have the participant write or draw a picture of "rainy season" on a Sticky Note and have them place it above "April" on the wall.

Continuing with this example, "When does the rainy season end?" Someone may respond "In June." Have that person write or draw "rainy season" on a Sticky Note and place it above June on the wall. Have another person write or draw "rainy season" and place it above May so that all months of the rainy season are identified as such.

Then ask participants for other seasons of the year. For example, "dry season," "hurricane season," "monsoon," or "cold season." By now participants should be writing the seasons and climate-events on their own. As they place it on the wall, they should verbalize it to the group. If more than one person writes the same season, have them place the second Sticky Note above another month for that season until all months with that season are identified.

Once participants have run out of seasons to identify, review the calendar to make sure all seasons have been identified and everyone agrees on the timing of seasons as represented on the wall. At this point, the climate calendar should look something like this:



In the next step, following the same process above, participants use different colored Sticky Notes to represent various ecological, social and economic processes and events and place them in the appropriate months below the calendar. If you have enough colors of Sticky Notes, choose one color for ecological processes, another for social events and a third for economic activities. If you have only two colors, combine social and economic activities. You may want to start with a single theme or you can do all three simultaneously. You can start the activity by giving various examples of each of the 3 themes.

Ecological

- bird migrations (departures and arrivals)
- fish spawning aggregations
- breeding seasons for various terrestrial species
- flowering and fruiting of important plants

Social

- important festivals and celebrations
- start and conclusion of the academic year
- start of the government fiscal year and budgeting season (particularly for government groups)
- holiday period for workshops

Economic

- planting and harvesting seasons
- tourist season
- logging season
- fishing and hunting seasons

At this point in the activity, one person's ideas lead to many others bringing up new ideas and the calendar can get full very quickly. Let this process happen without interruption. When no one has anything more to add, review the calendar on the wall with the entire group starting with January and moving through the entire year. You might want to make observations as you go along and ask questions to clarify things you might not understand that will be useful in later discussions during the workshop.



As a last step, explain again to your participants what they have created – a calendar that shows links between the climate and ecological, social and economic processes and activities. Our way of life has evolved around the premise of a stationary climate. Explain that climate change means

that the climate-related seasons on the wall above the calendar are shifting. Take one Sticky Note, for example, "rainy season" above April, and move it to another month or remove it from the wall altogether. Ask, "What happens to everything below the calendar if the rainy season shifts so that starts earlier or later or is shorter or disappears altogether?" This is what we will explore in this workshop.

If you are able to keep the calendar on the wall for the rest of the workshop, you can use it to show changes in local climate during presentations on freshwater, marine, or forests, etc.