Problem Tree

To explore cause and effect.

A tree can be used to explore cause and effect or problem and solution. The various elements of a tree work together as a simple metaphor:

- The trunk usually symbolizes the situation to be studied;
- The roots represent causes;
- The branches are the consequences.

How to Construct the Tool

1. Using local materials (fallen twigs/tree branches), begin to construct a tree (a tree can also be drawn on large paper if twigs etc. not feasible).
2. The trunk symbolizes the issue or concern being discussed – a card is placed on the trunk with the concern/issue written on it (this helps to keep the discussion focused on the issue/concern).
3. The roots represent e.g. (causes, income, inputs). As each cause, income source or input is raised; it is written on card (once agreed) and placed within the roots. Note that the more importance given to a particular point raised can be identified by placing it on the thicker roots, and vice versa.
4. The branches represent e.g. (effects, expenditure, outputs, and outcomes). Similarly, as each effect/type of expenditure/output is discussed and agreed, it is written on card and placed in the branches (again, the thicker or thinner the branch identifies level of importance placed on the point).
5. Fruits may be added to represent possible solutions, actions or unexpected gains.
6. Saplings can be added beside the large tree to represent ongoing aims, plans, perceived opportunities, desired inputs.

Suggestions for use

- A tree can be used to analyze of household income and expenditure
- A tree can be used to analyze the causes and effects of conflict
- A tree can be used to analyze the causes and effects of HIV and AIDS.
- A family tree can be used to explore family relations and identity, with all current members as branches and the different levels of roots representing the ancestors.

References

- Reflect Mother Manual, ActionAid International, 1996, p. 131-135.
- Communication & Power, ActionAid, 2003, p. 1003