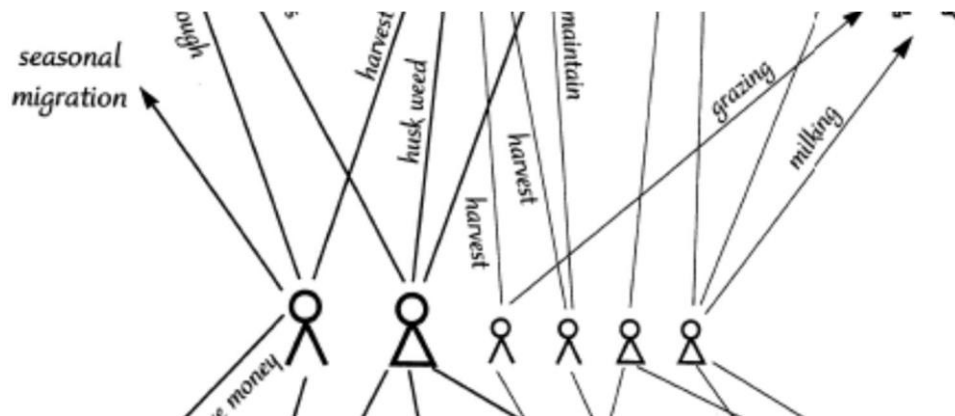


Systems Diagram



To help make sense of a system, exploring the interdependence of different elements within it.

A systems diagram may be used to demystify how a specific government system such as social security works; how a household economy functions or how a small business or organization works.

Steps in the Process

1. To begin constructing a systems diagram, place cards representing each member of the family or organization in the middle of a large, empty area.
2. Participants can then start to identify the different roles of each member, creating cards for each of the activities that are carried out by the different members.
3. Interconnections will soon start to emerge as, for example, one member of a family might be responsible for harvesting the maize, whilst another member is responsible for selling it at market.
4. It is essential to use moveable cards, as systems diagrams can get very complex with new connections identified during the process, leading to radical restructuring. Threads of different colours can be used to make links with different meanings between cards.
5. Each time a new card is laid, see if it can be linked to any others that are already there.
6. The aim is to map out roles, activities and outcomes within a given system, using the same technique of movable cards and links.
7. Once the diagram is complete, questions can be asked about how to improve the system, where it is failing and what actions would most effectively change it and key points of leverage often become clearer.

Developing Literacy and Numeracy Skills

Systems diagrams all usually require a considerable amount of writing and so are usually more appropriate for groups which have good literacy skills. The diagrams are ideal to support writing practice but not very suitable for the initial teaching of basic literacy. As well as writing the cards for the diagram itself, participants can develop literacy skills by writing sentences relating to the diagram, for example focusing on problems and solutions.

Suggestions for Use

- A household economy systems diagram can be used to explore how the different individuals contribute to the survival of a family. Each member of the family is represented by a simple picture and different features of the family's economy (such as growing crops, providing care, collecting firewood, etc.) are then represented around them with arrows drawn to show who does what. This reveals the interdependence of the family and can be used to discuss changes in workloads, for example. See Reflect Mother Manual, p. 164-165.
- A systems diagram can be used to help communities to map out their access and entitlements to different government schemes. This can help to demystify government bureaucracy and to expose examples of corruption or mismanagement.

Related Tools

- Flow diagrams can be used to explore the relationship between and event, such as a flood or conflict, and its various causes and consequences. This can help participants to identify ways in which to break the cycle of effects at different stages.
- Process diagrams show the different stages involved in a process. A process diagram might be constructed to analyze the steps involved in accessing a certain government scheme or entitlement, making a legal claim or producing something. It can be elaborated to include many details such as roles, time or costs involved at each stage.

References

- Reflect Mother Manual, ActionAid International, 1996, pp. 164.
- Reflect Communication and Power, ActionAid International, 2003, p. 1008.