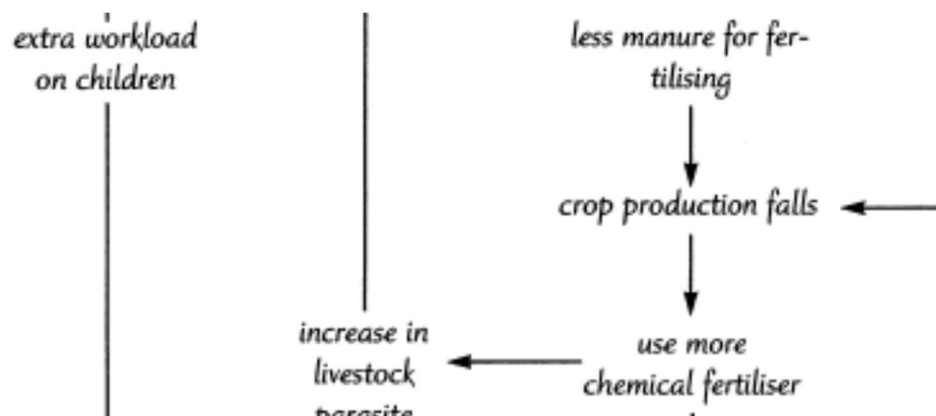


Flow chart



To help make sense of different processes or complex systems - to explore cause, effect and inter-connections.

Flow charts can be used to explore the relationships between events - following the process as each event causes another event to occur and so on. They are particularly helpful to identify negative cycles and actions which can break them. Flow charts can be used to analyse issues such as conflict, deforestation, drought, girls' education and road building.

Steps in the process

1. To begin constructing a flow chart, place a card representing the central theme in the middle of a large, empty area.
2. Participants can then start to identify the causes and effects of this phenomenon, making a card for each suggestion using words or symbols and placing it in relation to the central theme. These might be of different colours to capture different categories or types of event. It is essential to use moveable cards, as flow charts 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.
3. Encourage the participants to consider the effects of each effect (and if relevant the causes of each cause) so that the flow chart starts to expand. Each time a new card is laid, attempts are made to link it to any others that are already there and gradually concentrations of cards are likely to occur around certain key cards.

4. At some point the group will have to decide to end the exercise, stepping back to review the overall picture and discuss where action or intervention might be most effective.

Developing literacy and numeracy skills

Flow charts usually require a considerable amount of writing and so are usually more appropriate for groups which have good literacy skills. The charts 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 flow chart itself, participants can develop literacy skills by writing sentences relating to the flow chart, for example focusing on problems and solutions.

Most such charts will offer many options for numeracy work, for example in calculating costs and working out strategies for maximising profit in a process diagram.

Suggestions for use

- A flow chart can be used to explore the **impact of a natural disaster or of conflict**. In addition to exploring causes, the diagram could show the possible future effects as well as the effects of things which have already happened. See Reflect Mother Manual, p. 162-163.
- A flow chart can be used to analyse the **causes and effects of different traditional cultural practices**. By laying these out clearly in a collective process participants can agree effective ways of changing certain deeply embedded but harmful cultural practices.

Related tools

- **Process diagrams** show different stages involved in a process. It can be elaborated to include many details such as roles, time or costs involved at each stage. A process diagram might be constructed to analyse the steps involved in accessing a certain government scheme or entitlement, making a legal claim or producing something.

- **Systems diagrams** can be used to explore the interdependence of different elements within a system. It 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 organisation works.

References

- Reflect Mother Manual, ActionAid International, 1996, pp. 162.
- Reflect Communication and Power, ActionAid International, 2003, p. 1008.