

## First steps – the value of information:

*Exploring how information can make a difference to people's lives and livelihoods, and what makes a piece of information valuable or useful.*

### WHY?

For organisations working with people who have difficulty accessing basic needs, information may not appear to be a priority, but a rights-based approach to development clearly links people's access to information and capacity to communicate to their ability to identify and capitalise on entitlements and opportunities. In the context of long-term development then, information is clearly a priority for poor and marginalised people. However, it is important that information is not seen as a goal in isolation, but linked to capacity for action and creating change.

### WHEN?

Participants should be encouraged to recognise and analyse the role that relevant information plays in their social and economic lives from early on in any Reflect process. This will form the basis of a perspective which links development to communication and power. However, it is important for this to link to further analysis of the value of our *existing* knowledge, as highlighted in accompanying sheets.

In relation to the Reflect and ICTs project, an analysis of the value of information in relation to people's own lives forms the foundations for deeper investigation into the types of information, sources and formats which are available and needed and should be the first step.

### HOW?

A first step might be to explore the power of information through relevant case studies. Facilitators can share with the group stories of how a piece of timely, relevant information made a difference to someone's livelihood, health, or social life. Some generic examples are provided in the additional information section of this sheet, but efforts should be made to adapt these for the local context, perhaps as an exercise during the facilitator training.

#### Questioning the value of information

To encourage people to share stories of their own experience of the value of information the following types of questions might be asked:

- Have you ever changed your plans because of new information?
- Have you ever increased your earnings/saved time because of a piece of information;
- Have you ever received information which has benefited your health?
- Have you ever used information about your rights to make/ dispute a claim to something?
- Did you ever act on a piece of information, and wished you hadn't?
- Have you ever held back information from someone who needed or requested it?
- Did you ever get a piece of information too late for it to be useful?
- Have you ever heard of a piece of information which saved a life?

### Examining our own experiences of information:

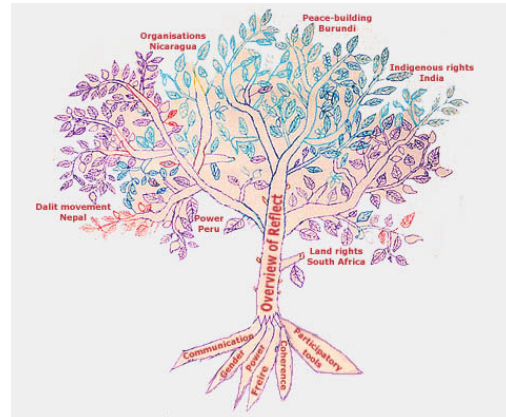
Based on these stories, participants should be encouraged to think about examples from their own experience when a piece of information has made a difference. This might be through general facilitated discussion as a group or in pairs, using questions such as those in the box (right); or similar questions could be used to facilitate an 'information walk'. All participants start on the same side of the room. The facilitator asks a question, such as those in the box, and asks those with an example to cross the space. One or two of those who move could be asked to give examples,

telling the group where they got the information, how they used it and what the outcome was. At some stage in the exercise, participants might want to suggest their own questions.

**Information and power:** During this exercise and following discussion the question of information and power should be explored: do people always give information freely or do they hold on to it? Why is this the case? In what circumstances might people hold onto information and why?

**Information trees:**

The tree might be a useful tool to explore the factors governing the value of any piece of information to people’s lives and livelihoods. A group might construct the graphic together to explore the roots of reliable and relevant information and its fruits, or benefits and outcomes. This could be on a particular subject or area of life, or in general.



**Example of a tree graphic**

**ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:**

Stories showing how information improves people’s lives and livelihoods are abundant. Looking through recent articles and publications on Reflect, I have found several examples of information having a transforming effect.

- In Kigoma, Tanzania, the Mdyankurukuru Reflect circle discussed the problem of recurring cholera at rainy season and found out about the importance of boiling drinking water and using latrines - since when the incidence of the disease has rapidly decreased;
- In Uganda, lack of information about credit facilities, concerns about credit providers and fears of losing the little property they had was leading women to believe that they were better off without credit. Providing women with relevant and reliable information about where and how micro-credit operates has helped for women to increase access and control of credit, acquire productive assets and improve their administrative practice;
- In Burundi rumour and misinformation continues to create a challenge for Reflect groups and contribute to ongoing conflict and insecurity. For example, rumours about prevailing rebel attacks cause people to flee their communities, often unnecessarily. Now Reflect groups meet to discuss any rumours together and establish more reliable information before acting;
- In refugee camps in Tanzania, trustworthy information on the state of affairs in home villages in Burundi, presented on video direct from old neighbours and friends, helps people to make informed decisions on when to return home;
- Basic information for HIV prevention (such as condom use) has saved many lives, but only in combination with efforts to change behaviour, particularly focusing on women’s and girls’ sexual empowerment;
- In Bubel village in Orissa, India, the Reflect group facing the Land Office in a dispute over local housing were able to quote relevant pieces of law relating to their housing rights. The facilitator had obtained pamphlets through exchange meetings with other facilitators. Through action based on this information, the group were able to secure legal rights to the land they live on.