



Social Analysis Systems² OM

Concepts and Tools for
Collaborative Research and Social Action

<http://www.sas-pm.com/>

Name of this technique: The Social Ladder

Author(s) and correct citation: Jacques M. Chevalier, 'SAS² 1.0: The Social Ladder,' in *Social Analysis Systems² 1.0*, <http://www.sas-pm.com/>.

Acknowledgements: *The Social Ladder* is a SAS² adaptation of a technique used in the field of participatory research (see in particular FAO in *Readings and links*).

What is the goal of The Social Ladder?

The Social Ladder helps you analyze the vertical relationships that exist among the parties involved in a core problem or action. The analysis also includes the advantages and disadvantages of holding higher or lower positions, and the attitudes or behavior that each party adopts to maintain these positions.

What are the guiding principles of The Social Ladder?

- The parties who are involved in a core problem or action may be at the top, the middle or the bottom of the social ladder. These positions reflect each party's access to resources such as wealth, authority, legitimacy, social relationships (including group membership), the ability to use force, information (knowledge and skills), and the means to communicate.
- Parties may adopt attitudes or behavior to maintain a higher or lower position and may obtain both advantages and disadvantages from doing so.

Here's how to use The Social Ladder

1. Identify a **core problem or action** where you need to use *The Social Ladder*. Define the problem or action as clearly as possible, and clarify the purpose of your analysis.

2. Make a list of the **key parties** involved in your core problem or action (see *Stakeholder Identification*). Note that you may include yourself and those who are doing the analysis in your list. You may define the representatives of a group as a stakeholder different from those they represent. Also you may include the community of all stakeholders in your list, as a group with its own profile.
3. Ask the parties to think of two ways each of them holds a **higher position**, compared to other parties. Describe each higher position using a few words, and record the descriptions on two cards. Higher positions must involve greater access to resources, such as wealth, authority, legitimacy, social relationships (including group membership), the ability to use force, information (knowledge and skills), and the means to communicate. These must be resources that can be applied to the core problem or action identified in Step 1.

4. Ask the parties to think of **two things**:

- What is it that they do to maintain the higher positions they hold?
- What *disadvantages* come with these positions?

Record the results on the cards that represent the corresponding positions.

5. Ask the parties to think of two ways each of them holds a **lower position**, compared to other parties. Describe each higher position using a few words, and record the descriptions on two cards.

6. Ask the parties to think of **two things**:

- What is it that they do to maintain the lower positions they hold?
- What *advantages* come with these positions?

Record the results on the cards that represent the corresponding positions.

7. Invite the parties to share what they wrote on their four cards (if they wish). Discuss one set of cards (higher or lower positions) first, and then the other set of cards in a second

round of discussions. Encourage participants to listen carefully to others without expressing judgment.

If there are too many participants and not enough time to do two rounds of discussions, ask each participant to form a group with other participants who have similar cards. Then, ask each group to create their own profile and present it to other groups.

8. To obtain a **general profile** of all the parties as a group:
 - Collect the cards and divide them into higher positions and lower positions.
 - Create a pile for each set of cards that express the **same idea** (such as ‘I am an expert in my field’ and ‘I have a university degree’).
 - Rank the piles based on how many cards each pile has. The number of cards in each pile reflects the number of parties who share similar positions.
 - Identify the things that **many parties do to** maintain their higher and lower positions.
 - Identify the **disadvantages** that stakeholders often describe as being part of holding a higher position. Do the same with the **advantages** they often describe as being part of holding a lower position.

Making this process work for you

For simpler versions

- Ask each party to identify only one higher position and one lower position.
- Do not do a general profile of all the parties (Step 8).

For more advanced versions

- During the exercise, discuss and record the views that participants express.
- Write a description for each stakeholder profile.

- Ask each party to rate itself for the 4 or 5 vertical relationships that parties mention the most often. Use *The Wheel* to record the ratings for each party.
- Create a table by recording the names of all the parties in the top row and a list of their vertical relationships in the first column (such as ‘poorer’ and ‘wealthier’). Record the score (such as 1 to 5) that each party receives for each relationship, and then analyze the results using *Social Domain*.

Readings and links

FAO Field Tools, Uppers and Lower,

http://www.fao.org/Participation/ft_more.jsp?ID=860