

# RIBBON TREE OF RIGHTS

## Creative Action Toolkit Guide



**creative action**  
I N S T I T U T E

## INTRODUCTION

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Ribbon Tree of Rights is a participatory public art ritual to express individual and collective affirmation and commitment to the rights and power of girls and women. For cultural and social transformation to occur, there must be a critical mass of individuals committed to the vision of a gender-equitable society. The main function of a public ceremony is for girls, families and community members to understand the need and purpose of girls' and women's empowerment and to unite in their commitment to heal and create change.

The Ribbon Tree of Rights ceremony is a symbolic action to justify, heal, educate, persuade and celebrate the contribution of girls and women to an alternative future that works for all. There are 1.1 billion girls today who represent a powerful force for shaping a sustainable world that includes and benefits everyone.

Women and girls are full of talent, bravery, resilience, vision and creativity. Unfortunately, their dreams and potential are often obstructed by discrimination, violence and lack of equal opportunities. Girls are more persecuted and are more likely to be subjected to violence, disease and poverty than any other group on the planet. We hope our Creative Action Toolkit serves to provide a space for collective healing, art-making, public ceremony and social action to lift up our girls and women and visually weave our shared commitments to end gender-based violence and discrimination.

*Note:* This creative action can be adapted and applied to other issues or topic areas. The toolkit is inspired by the global Climate Ribbon project. If you would like to apply this action to engage the community about the issue of climate change, please see further instructions at: <http://theclimateribbon.org/>

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## GOALS FOR USE OF THIS TOOLKIT

- Create an opportunity for the community to understand the importance of girls' and women's rights for the improvement of society as a whole
- Facilitate a deeper personal connection and commitment to the girls' and women's rights movement
- Engage the press through a powerful visual to promote the issue widely

## MATERIALS YOU WILL NEED

- **Ribbons** - Consider recycling old ribbons or using scraps of fabric cut into strips. We recommend ribbons two feet in length, but feel free to be creative with other sizes and shapes. Make sure the ribbon is wide enough to write on!
- **Pens** - Thin markers or basic pens are recommended. You can get more creative and add glitter or other creative supplies, such as colored markers, leaves and pressed flowers.
- **Table, clipboards or desks** to write on.
- **A tree or rope(s) to display ribbons.** You can either designate a living tree in your community or use a clothesline/rope to hang the ribbons on, as in the photo examples from the Climate Ribbon project below. It can be on exhibit for a day, a week or better yet, find a place where it can be on display permanently so that schools, clubs, organizations and the community can continue to add ribbons over time.



*Photo: The Climate Ribbon project*





*Photo: The Climate Ribbon project*



*Photo: The Climate Ribbon project*

## STEPS

### 1. Determine the location and setting for the social action.

- The public ritual can take place as a facilitated activity within an already existing prayer service at a church, temple or mosque, at a group meeting, conference, community event or other social gathering. It can also be a stand-alone social action event.
- Choose a place where the visual display can be seen by many people. Possibilities include:
  - A special tree in the community where ribbons can be tied into the branches
  - A fence or gate
  - Rope or clothesline strung between posts or trees, or along the top of a house or building
  - A sculpture consisting of a tall pole with rope fanning out like a tree
  - A tree shaped sculpture made out of cardboard
  - Use the trunks of trees to make a web and hang ribbons from the string (see photo below).
  - Other ideas? Get creative!
- Make sure to get permission and any permits necessary to use the location and/or tree!



*Photo: Isabel Carrio,  
Art installation in the forest of Xolsacmalja, Guatemala*

## **2. Gather your materials.**

- Purchase materials or consider requesting support and donations from local community members or businesses.
- Will you need a microphone or sound system?
- Do you need chairs for the event?
- Will you serve food or offer childcare?

## **3. Determine who should be present for the public ceremony.**

- Make a list of who you want to participate in the social action, such as parents, teachers, community leaders, chiefs, local authorities, clubs, businesses, etc.
- Send out invites – you can make flyers or posters to pass out or hang around town, go door to door, call people by phone, send text announcements, put it on social media or a local radio station – whatever works best in your community.
- Depending on the context and who is present, you can open the event with a traditional prayer or blessing and invite a community elder, chief or local authority to begin the event in a ceremonial way.

## **4. *Optional:* Facilitate the Problem Tree/Solution Tree workshop before or after the public ceremony.**

- Lead workshops in school classrooms, girls' clubs or community centers using the Problem Tree/Solution Tree (see Appendix A for instructions) or a similar activity to raise awareness and critical analysis about the issues of gender injustice. This will serve to deepen the meaning and commitment that individuals make in the public ceremony and identify concrete and strategic community actions to address gender-based violence and discrimination.
- These workshops can take place in an ongoing way to continue adding ribbons to the tree or public display.

## **5. Design the public action.**

- Determine the duration of the event and create an event itinerary.
- Have a strong opening and closing.
- Incorporate additional artistic components into the action:
  - Invite girls to read poetry, sing, dance or perform a theater skit about the issue.
  - Request that girl and women leaders share testimonies about overcoming adversity or their inspiring visions for society.
  - Bring in local musicians to support the event with music, drumming and dancing!
- Provide a guided mediation and or time for the community to discuss the topic in pairs.
- Once you determine the flow, identify the facilitator(s) and volunteers who will lead and support the action. If there is more than one, determine who will guide what part. Volunteers will be needed to hand out ribbons and supplies.



## 6. Facilitate the Tree of Rights ribbon ceremony

**Opening talk - Sample script** (*adapt this with your own words and to fit the particular context you are in*)

“Welcome to the Ribbon Tree of Rights – with this ceremony we want to honor all the ways that girls and women contribute to the creation and nurturing of life in our community.

Today we are participating in a creative social action or public ceremony, called Ribbon Tree of Rights, to make our communities stronger and healthier by believing in and investing in our girls.

We know that women and girls hold a very important and also a vulnerable position in our society.

Women nurture the health and resilience of the community – they often run the household, raise the children and take care of our sick and elderly. They are the social glue that holds a community together. We have learned from research that girls are also the population most likely to face issues of violence and discrimination than any other group in the world.

1 in 3 women and girls across the world experience violence in some form. This negatively affects the health and well-being of everyone in our community. It creates unhappiness and a lack of safety in the home, on our streets and in our schools and workplaces, it creates trauma, fear and disconnection in our minds and bodies and we are all less able to respond effectively to the needs of the moment. We all lose out when we don’t hear the unique perspectives and wisdom of women and girls.

All around the world, people are realizing that that investing in girls is key to ending poverty - research has shown that by investing in girls, you lift up the entire community.

Education keeps hunger away. A mothers’ education improves children’s nutrition. Education for girls is vital to eliminate malnutrition which is the underlying cause of more than a third of global child deaths.

Educated women are less likely to die in childbirth: If all mothers completed primary education, maternal deaths would be reduced by two-thirds.

Educating girls can save millions of lives: If all women had a secondary education, child deaths would be cut in half, saving 3 million lives.

For these reasons and many more, international development agencies have prioritized the investment in girls’ rights and education as the key solution for ending poverty and disease.

We join the world by lifting up the contributions of our girls and women right here in our community!

Let's protect the lives of our current and future generations by committing to ending violence against women and girls and standing up for their rights!"

### **Silent reflection and pair share**

- **Silent Reflection:** "Please take a moment to reflect on this question: **"Girls and women strengthen our community by..."** We'll take a silent moment to think about this, and then we'll share with each other."
- Have the question written up on big paper. Provide a few silent moments for people to close their eyes and reflect. You can play meditative music or have soft drumming in the background.
- **Pair share:** "Please turn to someone sitting next to you and share your thoughts. You'll have a few minutes each."
- Facilitate the timing by letting people know when to switch. If you don't have time for a pair share, you can go straight from silent reflection to ribbon writing.

### **Write contributions and commitments**

- Pass out two ribbons to each person. You can also have them placed already on their seat or hand them out to everyone as they arrive.
- Ask the group to think of a short phrase to describe **how girls can light up the world** and write that on one of their ribbons.
- On the second ribbon, have them write one commitment to declare **how they will personally support the rights of young women and girls**.
- While the participants write, you can play soft music or have a drum play a heartbeat rhythm in the background.

*Note:* As a variation, you can have a ribbon-making table at an event where volunteers hand out ribbons and pose the question, rather than have a facilitated meditation or pair share as outlined in the sample script above.



## Tie Ribbons to Tree

### *Sample Script:*

“Please come up one at a time to tie your ribbon to the Tree of Rights and share what you have written out loud. After you speak – we will all respond with “We hear you.”

When you add your ribbon, your ribbon becomes a leaf, or branch, or root of the Tree of Rights. Remember that ***it takes strong roots to weather the storm***. Strong and educated girls and women are the roots we need to weather the storms ahead.

May these ribbons be our roots to the Earth and to each other and may the strength of our girls and women help us to weather any storm.”

### **Close the event in a powerful way**

- After all participants add their ribbon, ask them take some time to read through the many other ribbons on the Tree of Rights.
- There are many ways to close the event: you can have drumming and dancing, a shared meal, and/or inspiring words to reflect on the power of the community to create a better world.

## **SCALE IMPACT AND BUILD THE MOVEMENT**

- Be sure to take photos and video to share widely through social media.
- Invite other communities and schools to host similar local actions throughout the country, the region, the continent and the globe!
- Invite the press, such as newspaper, radio or TV to come out and cover this visually beautiful event.
- Provide ongoing workshops and opportunities for the community to continue adding ribbons to the tree.
- Create a social action plan for girls’ and women’s rights, based on the commitments made and Problem Tree/Solution Tree analysis. Get local authorities and decision-makers to contribute their ideas and commit to the plan!
- Get concrete – **MAKE a PLEDGE!** Ask all participants in your workshops and community events to sign a written pledge to take 1-2 **CONCRETE ACTIONS** toward your goal. Make sure to write the pledge in a way that is relevant for your particular community, is realistic and can be measured for impact or success! For example, if you want the community to take action to prevent gender-based violence, you could ask them to pledge to the following:
  1. In the next 3 months, I will work to change the perception of 10 boys or men that gender-based violence is not only a concern for women but for the whole family and community.

2. I will convince 5 stakeholders at local and/or national levels to identify with this issue and begin to advocate publicly to stop gender-based violence.
3. Write your own! Be specific so they have a goal to work toward and you can follow up. This pledge could be more specific regarding a specific form of gender-based violence such as early childhood marriages or FGM – or perhaps it can be a measurable action to prevent climate change.

Please share your photos, videos, testimonies, pledges and action stories with us at Creative Action Institute! We would love to disseminate your story to the world.

## Appendix A

### Problem Tree/Solution Tree

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**ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION** A large drawing of a “Problem Tree” is used to analyze the root causes and effects of a specific problem in order to identify strategic interventions. The problem is written in the middle of the trunk. Participants brainstorm and write all of the underlying causes in the roots of the tree, and all of the negative impacts in the branches. A “Solution Tree” is then used to identify how to transform the problem by reversing the root causes and effects into positive conditions and outcomes.

**PURPOSE** To visually analyze the root causes and effect of a problem in order to identify possible solutions and strategic interventions.

**INTENDED OUTCOMES** Ability to identify the roots causes of an issue and transform them into solutions

**SKILLS DEVELOPED** Strategic analysis; identifying points of intervention; project planning

**TOTAL TIME** 1 hour, 30 minutes

**NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS** No limit

**MATERIALS** Large drawings of two trees on two pieces of butcher paper; markers; post-it notes (optional); big paper for each small group

**SETTING** Breakout spaces for working groups

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#### INTRODUCTORY FRAME

Achieving systemic change requires us to take action and have a strategy. What is strategy? It is basically an effective plan for *how* to achieve our goals and future visions. One way to determine strategic actions is to identify root causes of a problem and imagine how you might transform them. We are going to explore this with a visual analysis tool called the Problem Tree/Solution Tree.

## PROCESS

- A problem tree is used to explore all of the identified causes and effects of a problem. Place on the wall a drawing of a large tree with the title “Problem Tree” at the top of the page. Write a problem that is relevant to the group in the middle of the trunk. Be as specific as possible. For example, instead of writing “uneducated girls” you can specify “Girls don’t go to primary school in X community.”
- Ask the group to consider all of the underlying causes of this problem. Collectively brainstorm and write their answers directly onto the roots of the tree. Write them as negative statements, such as “Unsafe to walk to school” and “Traditional beliefs don’t value girls.”
- Once you have identified the causes, brainstorm all of the negative impacts or effects of this problem on the community and environment and write them in the branches. They might include “Early childhood marriages,” “Women can’t read or write,” or “Women don’t participate in decision-making about climate change.”
- Now place the second drawing of the tree next to the first one and write the title “Solution Tree” at the top.
- Rewrite the problem as a solution in the trunk. Write it as if it had already been resolved. For example, “All girls go to primary school in X community.”
- Reverse all of the negative statements that form the roots of the problem tree into positive ones. For example, “Girls are walked to school by community elder,” “Community values girls’ education.”
- Reverse all of the impacts into positive ones in the branches, becoming the longer term outcomes of your strategic interventions or campaigns. This might be “Women go to college and bring back important skills to community” “Women are leaders in creating climate resilience” “Girls are no longer sold into early marriage.”
- Now divide into small groups and distribute one of the root solutions from the Solution Tree to each group. Their task is to brainstorm all the strategic actions that can be taken to accomplish that solution.
- From the brainstormed list that each small group provides, you can determine your action plan transform this issue from a Problem to a Solution!

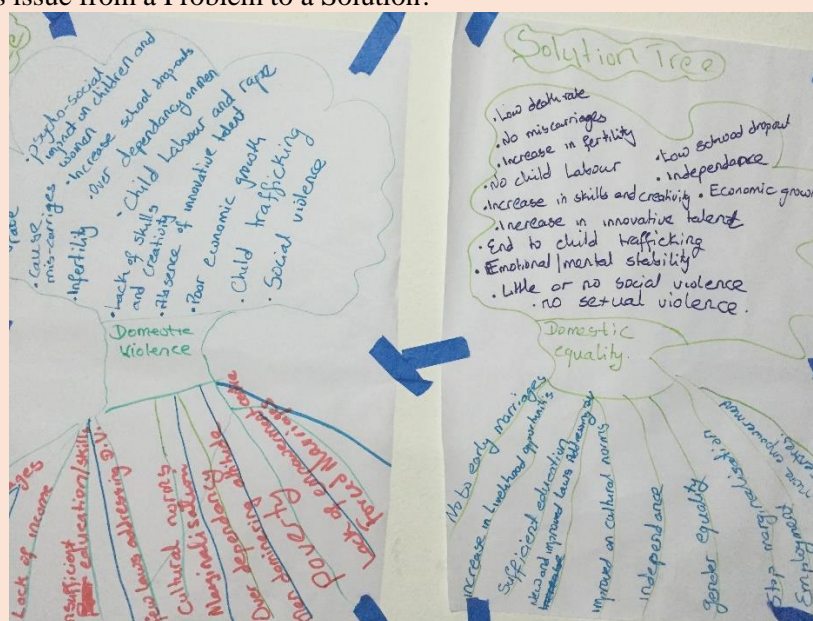


Photo: Cameroon Creative Leadership training – domestic violence



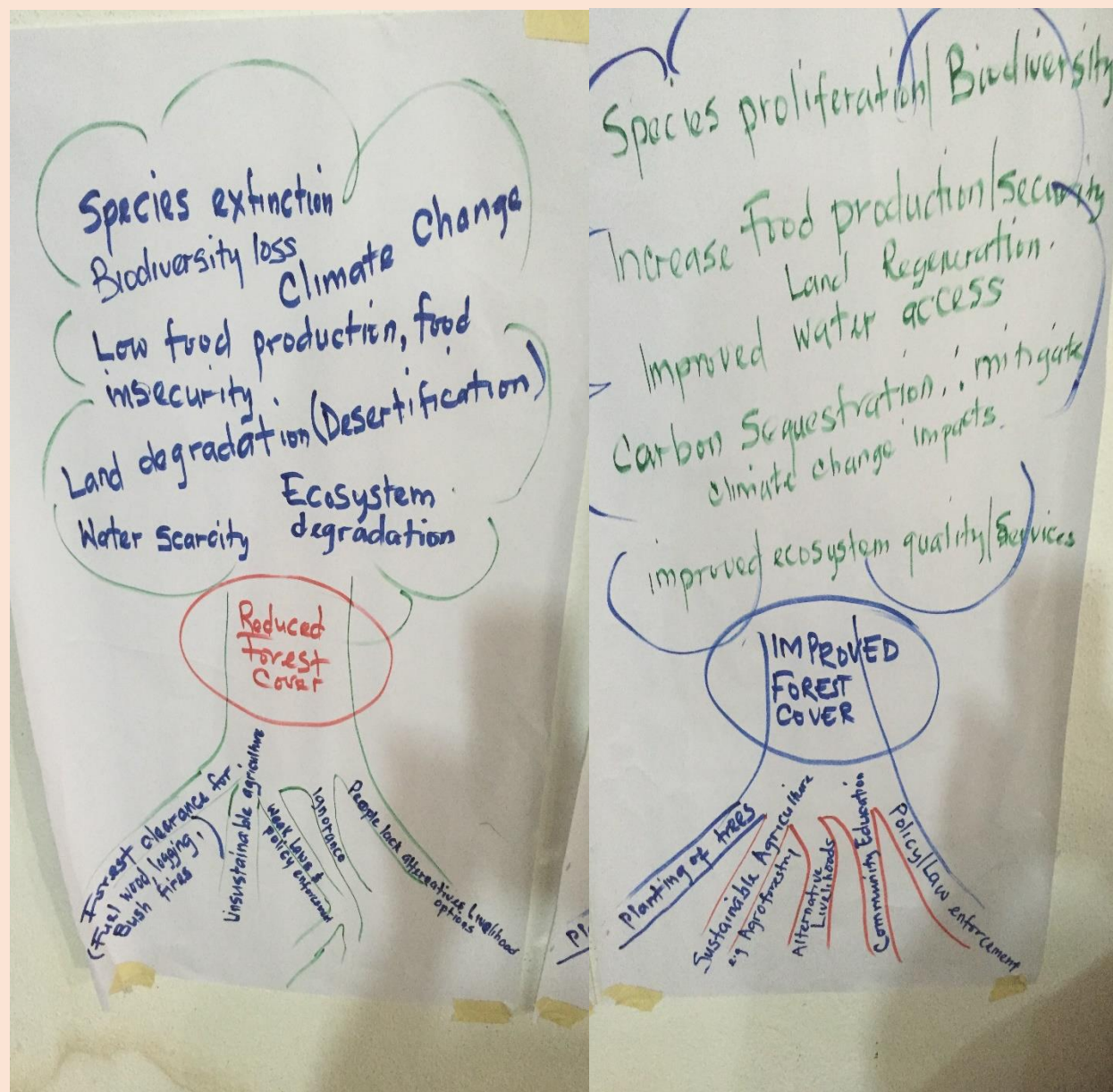


Photo: Problem Tree/Solution Tree from Cameroon Creative Leadership Training –reduced forest cover