Using games in our work - A few of many possible examples:

**Dissemination of key messages across age groups:** People receive key messages through a variety of mediums. In the Red Cross we are very accustomed to door to door campaigns, community meetings, radio broadcasts, posters, brochures etc. However, in all of these scenarios it is very easy for the information receiver to disengage. People can close their door, daydream during a meeting, change the radio channel and throw away posters and brochures. Games however, by their very nature, require people to remain engaged. They allow for people to receive messages in a fun and competitive way that cannot be matched by other forms of information dissemination.

Example: Malaria is endemic in a community and, in order to help reduce the number of malaria cases the Red Cross wants to encourage communities to clear brush and remove standing water from their community. One way to approach this is through a game where community members compete directly with mosquitoes. One team of players is in charge of trying to clear these key breeding ground areas while another team of community members, the mosquitoes, are in charge of trying to bite and infect humans in order to lay more eggs and hatch more mosquitoes. This could be played as a tabletop game with adults or as a giant game of tag with school children. While people are competing to win the game, everyone will remember the importance of clearing brush and removing standing water when they return home.

A game like this was successfully designed and played by the Red Cross Climate Centre in Kenya, The Phillippines and at two United Nations Conferences.

**Enhancing discussion of complex concepts:** Games allow us to experience complex systems. They can simplify challenges in reality by magnifying and focusing on key obstacles to progress and eliminating the extra background noise. People playing the game are able to go through multiple rounds, mimicking the passage of time at high speeds, to experience long term impacts of decisions made in the present. Players can experience the varied outcomes of taking different decisions. This can help to instigate meaningful and more in depth discussion about actual decisions to be taken in real life.

Example: An NGO working in a community wants to introduce the concept of smallholder insurance for crops, based on rainfall. When the rains are too little, the insurance company will issue a payout before the crops fail to prevent a heightened risk from leading into a disaster. This is a community that has no experience with insurance or for that matter even banking. If approached in a community meeting, members would be skeptical of the motivations of the facilitator and with very little education, they would not be able to understand the complex math involved around paying into an insurance policy and receiving payouts during some trigger situations. However, using a game, people can experiment with the varying outcomes from taking insurance and not taking insurance. Playing the game over many rounds, representing many seasons, will help community members to understand whether or not taking insurance is a wise decision.

A game like this was successfully designed and used by Oxfam in Ethiopia.

**Advocacy for behavior change:** Similar to the second example above, asking players to inhabit the complex systems of another group of people can help to change decision making patterns in the present.

Example: In a river basin, communities in an upstream area are deforesting at high rates causing increasingly intense flooding in downstream communities. When the deforestation is considered in real time over the course of months and years, the impact of the deforestation is not obvious and the projected impacts over the next five to ten years is even more abstract.

Using a game to examine this issue a facilitator can highlight specifically the relationship between the relative density of trees and the relative amount of flooding. Communities can be invited to split between two imaginary villages, one that is cutting trees and one that is affected by flooding. As many rounds are played, each representing another year, a facilitator can, in a matter of a few minutes, show the abstract impacts of deforestation in a very practical way. This can lead into a fruitful discussion about real life decisions and consequences.

A game like this was successfully designed and played in Nicuragua in a partnership between Care, Cordaid and the Red Cross.

**Leveling hierarchical boundaries in a community:**

Consider for a moment a typical focus group discussion. There are often a few dominant voices that lead and skew the discussion toward their own views. However using a game can help to break down this power dynamic, or the power dynamic between a community and a donor, in order to have a more open and honest conversation.

Example: There is a densely populated Urban community at high risk of fire outbreaks. The Red Cross is meeting with community members in order to discuss possible points of action to reduce the risk of fires. There are a couple of dominant voices in the group however and they would typically skew the conversation toward their views, creating barriers for others to bring their ideas forward. A facilitator can use a game here to split the focus group into competing teams. Each team must rapidly generate as many ideas as possible to reduce the risk of fires in their community. They can then rapidly choose 8 of their top priority actions to implement first. Each team competes with the others to complete as many of these actions as possible in a short amount of time. The team to complete the most wins. From there the facilitator is able to launch into a discussion about all of the generated ideas and their feasibility in the community.

This game mechanic could be used in: a VCA, project planning, regular monitoring of a projects strengths and weaknesses and even in a formal evaluation of the outcomes and impacts after a project’s conclusion.

A game like this was successfully designed and played by the American Red Cross in Namibia and Uganda.