

PROBLEM TREE/SOLUTION TREE

(Source: adapted from European Commission, 2004)

AREA(S) OF FOCUS	Strategic analysis; identifying points of intervention; project planning
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.
INTENDED OUTCOMES	Ability to identify the roots causes of an issue in order to identify solutions and strategic action plans
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

INTRODUCTORY FRAME

Achieving systemic change requires 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 “Pollution”, you can specify “Garbage burned in homes”.
- 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 “Lack of recycling systems”.

- 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.
- 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 waste is properly disposed of in _____”.
- Reverse all of the negative statements that form the roots of the problem tree into positive ones. For example, “City recycling systems are established”.
- Reverse all of the impacts into positive ones in the branches, becoming the longer term outcomes of your strategic interventions or campaigns.
- Decide which solutions you can effectively work on together and identify the actions that are needed to get from the problem to the solution.
- Make an action plan for how to achieve your goal.

REFLECTION

- What did we learn about this issue?
- What are some concrete next steps that we can take?