

## WHAT IS IT?

Problem tree analysis is a methodology that is commonly used in participatory action research, which views research participants as experts and involves them in all phases of the research process.

Problem tree analysis uses the analogy of a tree to help break down a problem into smaller pieces. The model is based on the concept of a mind map and can help to draw relationships between the core problem, root causes and the effects of the problem. Based on the factors displayed, solutions and objectives to the problem can then be identified.

The concept of the problem tree can also be altered to build an opportunity tree to focus on what is working well.

**Problem tree analysis may also be referred to as situational analysis or problem analysis**



## HOW TO USE IT

A problem tree can be developed using a small focus group. Using a small group can also help to foster a sense of shared purpose, understanding and action on the problem. Post-it notes can be used and placed on the drawing of the tree to help organise the visual. Guiding questions can help move the participants through the process.

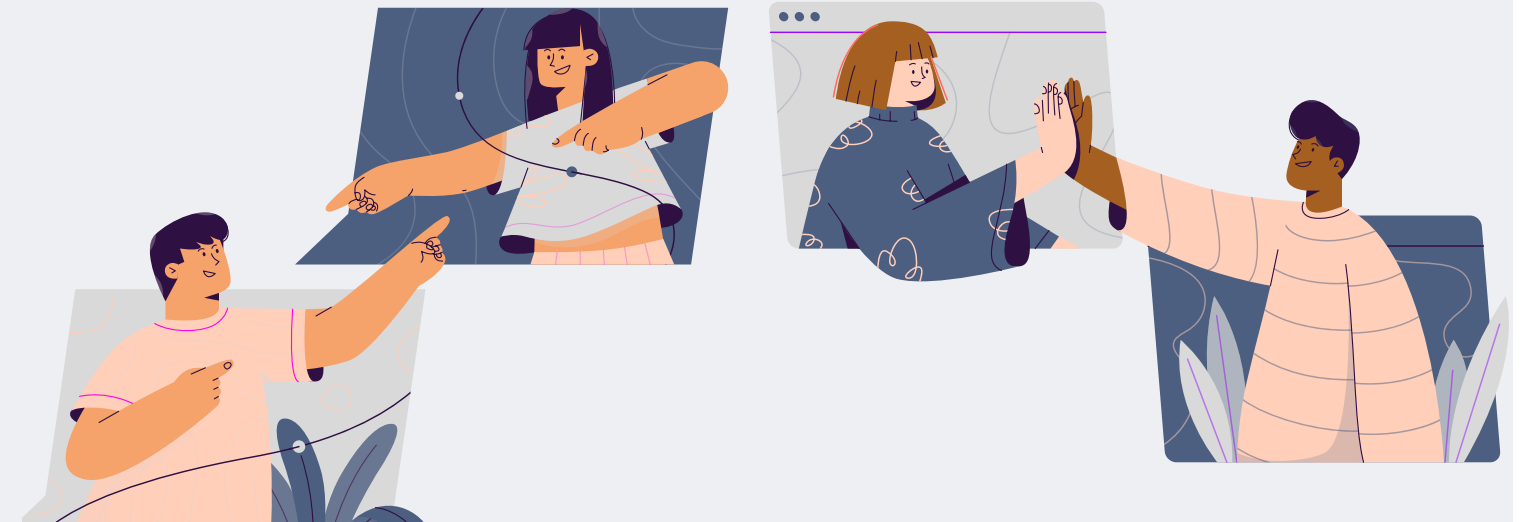
### 1. Identify the problem

A problem is identified and agreed upon by the participants. It is okay if the problem is broad as the following steps will help to narrow the focus.

The identified problem will be placed at the centre of the tree and it becomes the trunk.

### 2. Discuss causes

The group will then move on to discuss the factors or causes for why and/or how the problem is occurring. These causes will be listed underneath the tree trunk to become the tree's roots.



### 3. Identify consequences

The remaining step is to reflect on and discuss the outcomes or consequences of the problem. These factors are listed above the tree trunk and become the branches. Arrows can be used to help draw the cause-effect relationship.



The image above is an example of a problem tree using post-it notes. The image of a tree was drawn on a large piece of paper and participants can easily add their ideas using the post-it notes. This image was retrieved from: <https://mspguide.org/2022/03/18/problem-tree/>

**The discussion and ideas shared when creating the problem tree are the ultimate purpose of this methodology. It is important that time is given for people to reflect, and to explain their feelings and reasoning.**



# WHEN TO USE PROBLEM TREE ANALYSIS:

- Problem tree analysis can be helpful in the planning process as it can help establish gaps, important influences, or where further resources or evidence is needed.
- This methodology can be used within a focus group discussion and can be used in addition to other data collection methodologies.
- Problem tree analysis can be conducted multiple times in ongoing projects. Or they can be completed by two different groups for the same problem. This approach might reveal different perceptions regarding a problem based on different social, political, and/or cultural contexts.
- Next steps following the problem tree might be: the objective tree, force field analysis or opportunity tree

## Advantages and disadvantages to using a problem tree analysis

Advantages	Disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It can be helpful to bring a community's awareness to a problem, its causes and the impact on their lives.</li> <li>• It can be used to help advocate for support of an intervention, program, policy change, etc.</li> <li>• Doesn't require expensive resources or technology.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Time and space is required to bring everyone together.</li> <li>• It can be challenging at first to articulate the problem, and similarly to understand all of its consequences and causes.</li> <li>• The richness of the qualitative data generated is highly dependent on the facilitator's skills or ability to moderate the process effectively</li> </ul>

## EXAMPLES



- A research team that aimed to identify and address challenges in MDA programming in Nigeria used problem tree analysis to engage with community members to identify successes and challenges of the program. This approach helped to promote equity in MDA programming.
- Problem tree analysis was used by Katharina Conradin (2007) to evaluate the sanitation problem in Khuvsgul Area, Northern Mongolia. Community members were asked to reflect on problems, causes, and effects of the current sanitation system in their area.

## References & Resources

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