



Problem Tree Analysis: Problems, Causes and Consequences

Overview: This exercise is used to analyze the root causes of a problem and to identify the primary consequences. The tree provides a visual structure for the analysis.

Purpose: In defining a problem, it is important to differentiate between the problem itself, its causes and the consequences. This activity helps a group understand the interrelated root causes of a problem and who is impacted by its consequences and might be interested in a solution. The information “mapped” onto the tree, will help participants develop clarity about what level of problem they want to address and what kinds of strategies will be needed. The analysis will remind people advocates that policy change alone will not fully address the issue.

Material:

- Flip chart, markers, tape
- Paper posted on the wall for a large “tree” drawing that will serve to organize the analysis
- May want cards on which people can write

Time: 1-2 hours

Credit: Adapted from JASS’ New Weave Action Guide

Process:

Facilitator Note: This activity is best handled in small groups so that each person in the group has an opportunity to participate. If time makes this impossible, a large group can be divided into two groups, with the first group working on causes and the second group examining consequences.

If you are working on more than one problem, assign each group a different problem. Take one problem and go through the process once together before dividing into groups.





- Introduce the activity and explain the problem tree. Point out the different parts of the tree and what each represents:
 - Roots = Root Causes of the Problem
 - Trunk = the Problem
 - Branches = Consequences of the Problem
- Ask a participant to draw a large tree on flipchart paper (or you may want to do this upfront). Write the **problem** on which you are working on the trunk of the tree.
- Ask all participants to list the **causes of the problem**. If possible, let each participant who suggests a cause write it on a card and tape it to the roots of the problem tree. If this is too time-consuming, the facilitator can write what the participants say on the tree. Encourage people to explore social, economic and political causes including attitudes, behavior, and other factors.
- Repeat the same process with the consequences.

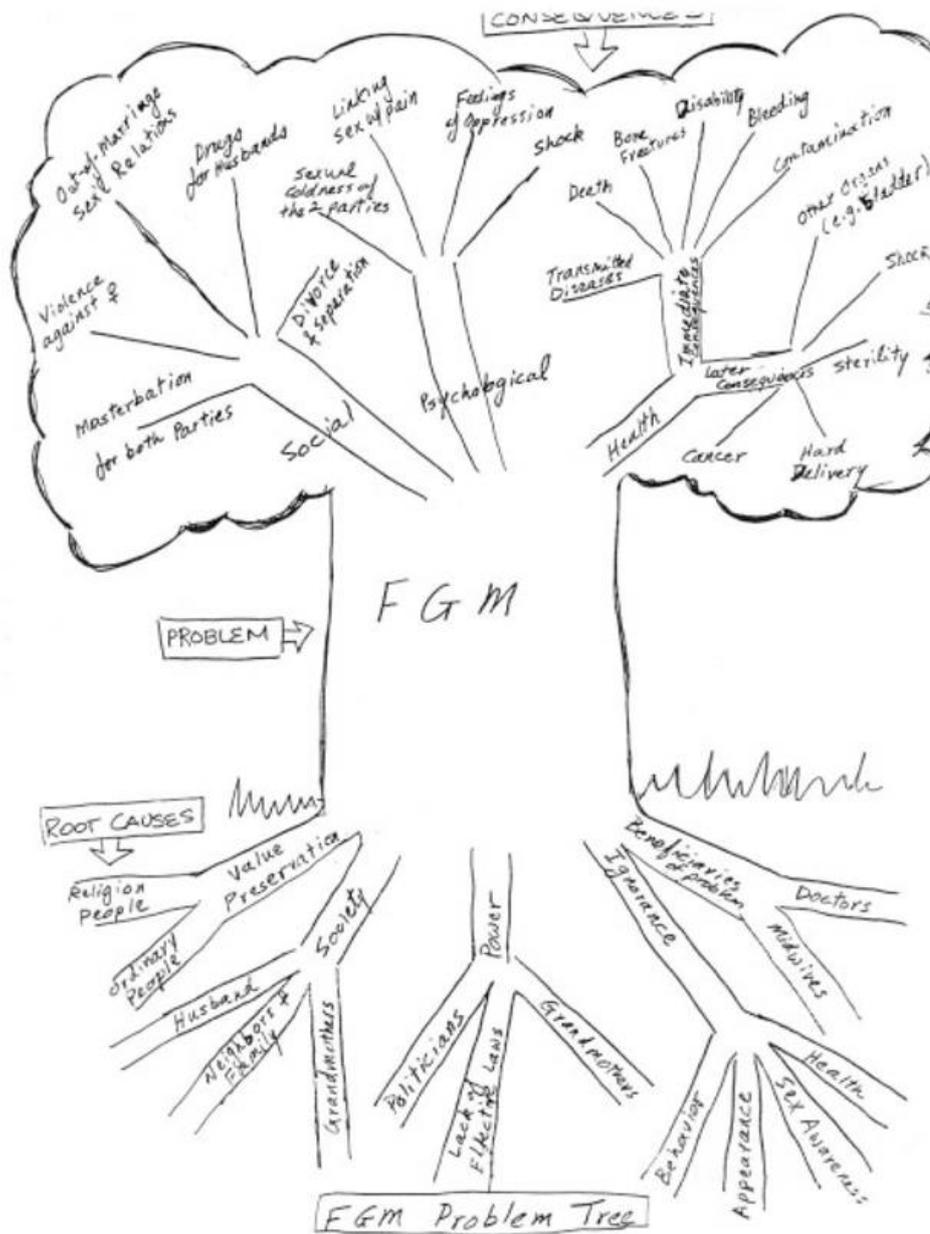
Discussion:

- First ask questions about the problem and causes:
 - Ask: Are the causes listed the main causes?
 - What are the most serious consequences? Why? (circle these on the tree)
 - How do social attitudes contribute to causing the problem? (if so, add these to the causes)
 - What role do powerful institutions or actors play? Government? Military? Corporate interests? Big NGO's? Religious leaders? Etc.
 - Which causes will be easier to address? More difficult to address? Why?
- Now explore solutions. Put up two sheets of flip chart paper: one that says Solutions and one that says Impact.
- Ask the group to list solutions to the problem. And for each one, note what the hoped for impact would be – in other words, how would it eliminate or lessen the causes and/or consequences?
- Step back and look at the tree and the solutions.
 - What does this tell us about the solving this problem? Any insights?
 - What solutions feel the most relevant and impactful?

Example: The example on the next page of a problem tree is from an Egyptian coalition advocating for the elimination of the practice of female genital mutilation (FGM) under the auspices of the National FGM Task Force.

Problem Tree Analysis (cont.)

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The tree was documented by the Task Force's advocacy advisor, Nader Tadros.

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