### **M5-T2-H2-Objective Tree**

### Objective trees focus on identifying problems together and reversing the negative statements into positive objectives

* Helps to plan projects
* Helps to understand complex problems by looking at multiple causes
* Identifies other problems that may need to be tackled as well outside of the project
* Provides an outline of the project plan, the activities, goals and outcomes.

### **Step 1. Settle on the core problem[[1]](#footnote-0)**

The first step in developing the problem tree is to identify the problem that the project seeks to overcome. It may be worth debating what the core problem is with stakeholder representatives. Ideally projects should have a specific problem (eg. saving water inside the home) that they seek to overcome if change is to occur. A vague or broad problem (eg. saving water) will have too many causes for an effective and meaningful project to be developed.

The core problem is written down in the middle of the paper, or on a sticky-note that is placed in the middle of a wall. Things to help define the core problem include lessons from previous projects, the stakeholder analysis, and other research. If there seems to be more than one core problem, it may be best to develop a problem tree for each one.

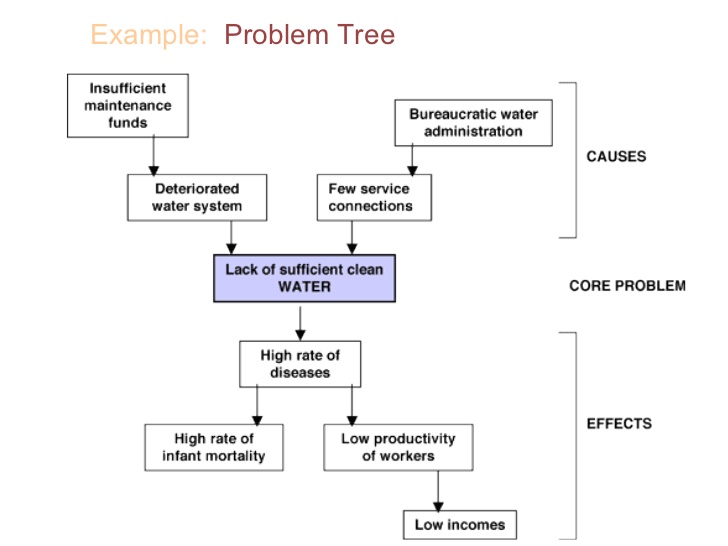
### **Step 2. Identify the causes and effects**

Once the core problem has been identified, participants should consider what the direct causes and effects of the problem are. Each cause statement needs to be written in negative terms. There are a couple of ways to undertake this. Participants can either collectively brainstorm all the negative statements about the problem at hand, and a facilitator writes each negative statement down on a piece of paper. The statements would then be placed on a wall, for the participants to analyse and reorder. Alternatively, participants could work through the cause and effect on a sequential basis, starting from the core problem. The immediate causes to the problem are placed in a line below that of the core problem. The immediate effect is placed above the problem. Any further or subsequent effects are placed above the line of immediate effects.

Participants need to continue to repeat the process on further horizontal lines until they are no longer able to identify any further underlying causes.

It is important to review the sequence of cause and effects to make sure that they are clear and make logical sense (eg. does this lead to that, or is there a missing step, and is this the effect of that happening). It is important to ensure that there is agreement among the participants. If there is more than one cause to an effect, you can place these side by side.

Once the order or placement of all the cause and effect relationships is agreed, they can be linked with vertical lines. Horizontal lines can be used to join related causes or effects. The result is a problem tree which outlines the cause and effect relationship between the different levels.



### **Step 3. Develop a solution tree**

A solution (also called objectives) tree is developed by reversing the negative statements that form the problem tree into positive ones. For example, a cause (problem tree) such as “lack of knowledge” would become a means such as “increased knowledge”. The objectives tree demonstrates the means-end relationship between objectives.

It is advisable to go through the solution tree and check to see if all the statements are clear, and if there are any missing steps between a means and an end. If so, you may need to revise both the problem and solution trees by adding more statements.

### **Step 4. Select the preferred intervention**

The final step is to select a preferred strategy for the intervention. This step is designed to allow the project design team to select and focus an intervention on a preferred strategy. The solution tree may present a number of separate or linked interventions to solve a problem. Depending on project funding, time, and relevance, a planned intervention may not be able to tackle all the causes. However, it if all the causes cannot be overcome by a project, or complementary projects, it is important to identify if any of the branches are more influential than others in solving a problem.

For example, if existing regulations are found to be a dominant factor, but this is not tackled by the project, this would need to be taken into account in the evaluation of the intervention.

Once you have selected your preferred line of intervention, the core problem/solution is your immediate objective or outcome. The branches below are the activities that you need to undertake, and the branches above become the longer term outcomes.

1. Explanation cited from Evaluation Toolbox: http://evaluationtoolbox.net.au/index.php?option=com\_content&view=article&id=28&Itemid=134 [↑](#footnote-ref-0)