

problem and solution trees

Creating Change in Your School or Community

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Problem and Solution Trees: Tools for Creating Change in Your School or Community
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How to Use this Guide

WHO IS THIS GUIDE FOR?

This guide is for individuals and organizations working with young people aged 9-18 in, for example, schools, youth programs, clubs, and community groups—in Canada and around the world. It can also be used by anyone wanting to guide a group to make positive change in their community.

Ages: 9-18+

Grade levels: 4-12+

 Subjects: A range of social science and humanities subject areas, such as social studies, language, geography, environmental education, leadership, Canadian and world studies

WHAT ARE PROBLEM TREES AND SOLUTION TREES?

Problem trees and solution trees are project planning tools, similar to a mind map, used by community organizations to guide groups through analyzing a community problem and developing a shared vision for action.

WHEN SHOULD THEY BE USED?

These tools are an ideal choice for assisting young people in planning actions to solve challenges in their own schools or communities. The tools can help young people analyze problems, develop solutions, and take action as global citizens.

OBJECTIVES

This guide will provide young people with the tools to:

- analyze issues using problem trees
- develop solutions using solution trees
- communicate the essence of projects using project statements
- identify measures of success to evaluate projects did the solutions make an impact?
- learn about change-makers who solved community issues and made a difference
- use problem trees and solution trees to analyze problems in their own schools or communities and identify solutions
- take action and become active global citizens and change-makers in their own communities

MATERIALS NEEDED

- In person: Copies of worksheets 1, 2 and 3; copies of story examples; flip chart paper, markers, and sticky notes
- Online: A computer or tablet, an internet connection, and collaborative mind-mapping or whiteboard software

TIME REQUIRED

- 1.5 hours to explain the activity and test out the tools using one of the stories provided
- 1.5 hours to use the tools to analyze a community problem and develop a project idea
- Additional time to implement and evaluate a project in the school or community

Why Use Problem Trees and Solution Trees?

Problem trees and solution trees have been used frequently by international development organizations as project planning tools to help groups and communities address problems and make positive change.

When planning a project, the first step is to assess and analyze the situation before planning how to respond. A project usually focuses on one or a small number of core problems. To address the effects of a problem, it is important to identify and address its root causes. Projects that skip that step might only address the symptoms and not make a real or lasting difference. Individuals carrying out these projects might end up effectively blaming the victims of the stated problems if causes are not identified, making victims responsible for issues they did not cause.

Imagine, for example, that you have a headache. You could address the headache as a symptom and take medicine to stop the pain. You might even be upset with your body for causing you pain! Or, you could ask yourself why you have the headache. Are you perhaps dehydrated, overtired, or hungry? If so, you might instead respond to the headache by drinking water, taking a nap, or eating a meal before taking medicine. Looking deeper in this way might help you take better care of your body and prevent headaches in the future.

Similarly, addressing the deeper root causes of a problem in your community may help solve the problem now and prevent it from reoccurring in the future. This guide will show you how!

NOTE TO FACILITATORS:

This guide has simplified the specific syntax structures of output, outcome, and impact statements for ease of use with children and youth. To learn more about problem and solution trees as used in international development, see the resources section at the end of this guide.



Step 1: The Problem Tree: Analyzing the Problem

WHAT IS A PROBLEM TREE?

A **problem tree** is a visual tool to help people think together about a problem, its effects, and its causes.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

Like any other tree, the problem tree has three parts: a trunk, roots, and branches. The trunk represents the **core problem**. Like a trunk, you can perceive the problem with your five senses, no matter the season. The roots represent the **causes** of the core problem. Like the roots of a tree, the causes of the core problem are not always easy to see. But if we do not understand the causes, it will be hard to effectively address the problem. The branches represent the **effects** that grow out of the problem in the way that branches grow from the trunk.

HOW DO WE CREATE A PROBLEM TREE?

A problem tree can be developed individually or in groups. We can use worksheet 1 to develop our problem trees individually. Or, if working in a group, we can use worksheet 1 to brainstorm our own ideas before sharing with the group or to record the group's final product.

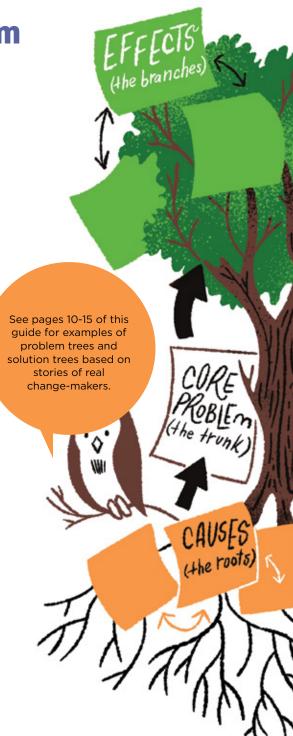
If working in groups in person, we suggest providing the groups with flip chart paper, markers, and sticky notes. Using worksheet 1 as an example, we draw a large tree, writing "causes" by the roots, "problem" by the trunk, and "effects" by the branches. We then brainstorm the core problem, its causes, and its effects on the community, by writing our ideas on sticky notes and placing them on the flip chart paper. We can then cluster the sticky notes, move them around, and add pathways to deeper causes or further effects.

Encourage critical thinking by asking 'Why' each time we add a new cause to the core problem, and place the answer on a connected sticky note.

If working online, we can follow the same method using collaborative mind-mapping or whiteboard software.

WHAT SHOULD WE WATCH FOR?

Defining the problem can be tricky because an effect or a cause might look a lot like the actual problem. What is the core problem **we** want to focus on? After creating a problem tree, we might want to redefine which problem we are going to address, and that is just fine!





Step 2: The Solution Tree: Developing a Solution

WHAT IS A SOLUTION TREE?

The **solution tree** is a visual tool to help people think together about how to address a problem. Once we have created a problem tree showing how we understand the situation, it is time to identify how a project might make a difference. In other words, it is time to turn the problem tree into a solution tree! This is also known as a results or objectives tree.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

For each negative statement, we come up with a positive statement that describes a solution to the problem and the result we hope to achieve. We turn causes into **outputs**—the community actions we will take. We turn problems into **outcomes**—the change our actions will bring about. And we turn effects into **impacts**—the long-term change we want to help create.

Regular Trees	Problem Trees	Solution Trees	Meaning
Branches	Effects	Impact	This is the long-term change we want to help create for people or the planet. It is the WHY of our project.
Trunk	Problem	Outcome	This is the change our actions will lead to. It is the WHAT we want to achieve.
Roots	Causes	Output	This is the community action we will take. It is HOW we will make a difference.

HOW DO WE CREATE A SOLUTION TREE?

Continue using worksheet 1 to create the solution tree, or as an example to draw a solution tree on another piece of flip chart paper. Groups draw a large tree, this time writing "output" by the roots, "outcome" by the trunk, and "impact" by the branches. We start with the trunk, by rewriting the core problem as the outcome. We rewrite the statements as if the problem is solved. For example, "The community's trees are gone" becomes "The community has trees!" Then, we rewrite the causes into outputs, and the effects into positive impacts.

Online, we can use the whiteboard or mind-mapping tool to create a solutions tree next to our problem tree. Participants can use worksheet 1 to brainstorm their own ideas first, or to record the final group or individual product.

HOW DO WE SELECT THE BEST SOLUTION?

When we complete the solution tree, we will have many possible outputs, that lead to the outcome and impact we want to see. At this stage, its important to select which output(s) we can realistically implement with the time, resources, and skills we have. Once we analyze the possible solutions to the problem, we select our best course of action, and start to plan how we will communicate and measure the success of our project.

Step 3: The Project Statement: Communicating Your Solution

WHAT IS A PROJECT STATEMENT?

The project statement is a sentence that clearly connects our outputs and outcomes to the broader impact we are trying to achieve. Like an "elevator speech," this brief project statement helps us describe our project and communicate what we are working toward so we can get more people on board.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

Our project statement flips our solution tree. We share our output, then our outcome, then our impact.



we produce our outputs,

Then...
our outcomes will occur

So that... our impact will come to be.

WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?

A project statement is one sentence. It follows this structure:



For example:

"If I show you how to develop problem trees and solution trees, then you will be able to analyze problems in your community so that you can take action and make a positive difference!"

HOW DO WE CREATE A PROJECT STATEMENT?

Write or say our project statement as one sentence, starting with the output, then the outcome, and finally the impact. We can choose one output, one related outcome, and one related impact. Or, we can summarize our outputs or our impacts. Participants can use worksheet 2 to brainstorm their own ideas first or to record the final group or individual product.

Step 4: Measures of Success: Evaluating Your Work

WHAT IS A MEASURE OF SUCCESS?

Measures of success are ways of measuring our outputs, outcomes, and impacts. They are also called "indicators" because the information we collect provides a clear indication that we have achieved something.

It is not enough to carry out a project and assume it will work! Are we actually doing what we planned? Are we actually helping to create the change we hoped for? Evaluating our success takes planning. Let's think ahead about what evidence we will gather to know whether we made a difference.

HOW DO THEY WORK?

We look at each part of our project statement (output, outcome, and impact). For each, we think about what evidence we will look for to find out if we were successful. This is a mix of thinking about what we can easily count in our work (typically outputs and outcomes) and how that relates to harder-to-measure impacts. Here is an example of the relationship between the solution tree, the project statement, and measures of success:

WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?

A measure of success can start with "I will measure..." and continue with what you will measure. It can include a numerical measure like "number (#) of," "percentage (%) of," or "ratio of." If you are counting numbers or percentages of people, you might count separately by gender, such as men, women, and non-binary participants, or by age, including children, teens, adults, and seniors, because each of these groups may experience the change differently. Or you can count by types or categories of what you are measuring. You can also measure the quality of the output, outcome, or impact, or people's perception of it. That will help you understand the numbers better.

HOW DO WE CREATE MEASURES OF SUCCESS?

For each part of our project statement (output, outcome, and impact), we write "I will measure..." and complete the sentence. We can discuss together how we will know whether we are successful in achieving that output, outcome, or impact, and how we will measure our success. Participants can use worksheet 3 to brainstorm their own ideas first or to record the final group or individual product.

Solution Tree	Project Statement	Measures of Success
Output	If we show you how to develop problem and solution trees	 The number of people we train (by gender and age group) The number of groups we train (by location and type) People's views on the quality of our work
Outcome	then you will be able to analyze problems in your community	The number and type of community problems analyzedOur views on the quality of the analysis
Impact	so that you can take action and make a positive difference!	The number and type of community projects carried out and <i>their</i> measures of success!

Problem and Solution Trees: Practice

This guide includes two stories of real-life change-makers and the impacts they each had on their communities; use these stories as examples to practice creating problem and solution trees.

For each story, you will find a completed problem tree, a solution tree, a project statement, and measures of success, all based on the story, to help you check for understanding. Additional resources on each change-maker are provided at the end of this guide.

After practicing with the examples provided, participants are ready to apply the method to their own community projects!

PRACTICING CREATING PROBLEM TREES AND SOLUTION TREES

- Choose one of the two stories provided. You can
 photocopy the story and provide it to participants to
 read alone or as a group. To extend the activity, consider
 using the resources about the change-maker listed at
 the end of this guide.
- 2. Provide a copy of worksheets 1, 2, and 3 to each participant or group.
- 3. Describe Step 1: The Problem Tree using the instructions provided. Provide participants with a copy of that material if you wish.
- 4. (Optional) Show participants an example of a completed problem tree based on one the other story provided.
- 5. Invite participants to create a problem tree based on the story you read together. They can individually use worksheet 1, work in groups with flip chart paper, or work individually or in groups online with a mind-mapping or whiteboard tool.
- 6. Use our example problem tree for the story to support participants as they work. Once they have completed their problem tree, you can check their understanding using the example.
- 7. Continue with Step 2: Solution Tree (worksheet 1), Step 3: Project Statement (worksheet 2), and Step 4: Measures of Success (worksheet 3), modelling the method and checking for understanding.
- 8. Encourage participants to share their project statement and measures of success with each other.

APPLYING PROBLEM TREES AND SOLUTION TREES IN YOUR OWN COMMUNITY

- 1. Invite individuals or groups to think of a problem facing their community (e.g., group, school, neighbourhood, town or city) that they would like to address.
- 2. Provide a copy of worksheets 1, 2, and 3 to each participant or group.
- 3. Invite participants to analyze that problem using Step 1: The Problem Tree that they used earlier for the story.
- 4. Next, invite participants to develop possible solutions using Step 2: The Solution Tree method.
- 5. Ask participants to circle the output that you will have the time, resources, and skills to achieve.
- 6. Then, ask participants to develop a project statement (Step 3) based on their solution tree.
- 7. Finally, ask participants to identify at least one indicator, or measure of success, for their project (Step 4). Encourage participants, where possible, to come up with measures of success for all outputs, outcomes, and impacts identified.
- 8. And now...it is time to implement the solution! Carry out the project and measure its success!



Wangari Maathai, Kenya: Planting Trees of Peace

Adapted from: Wangari's Trees of Peace: A True Story from Africa by Jeanette Winter.

Wangari Maathai (1940-2011) grew up under the shadow of Mount Kenya in Africa, surrounded by trees. Wangari shines in school, and wins a scholarship to study in America. When she returned six years later, she was upset to see that the trees were gone and that women now had to haul firewood many miles from their homes. The soil was poor and the crops no longer grew. There was not enough clean water to drink, and the birds had disappeared. Developers had cut down trees to make room for cities, and no one had planted new trees to take their places.

She decided to save Kenya from becoming a desert. She started, in 1977, by planting seven trees in honour of community leaders. Then, she created a farm for baby trees, a nursery. Later, she gave women seedlings and told them, "We are planting the seeds of hope." She trained them in forestry and paid them for each seedling that survived. She protested the developers cutting down trees and was arrested. Word travelled, and soon, women were planting trees all over Kenya—and then all over Africa. By 2004, over 30 million trees had been planted, and there were 6,000 nurseries in Kenya. Over 80,000 people had increased their incomes, and Wangari's Green Belt Movement had spread to 30 African countries and beyond. That year, Wangari was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.



1

If Wangari had created a problem tree, what might it have looked like?

EFFECTS

What are the main effects of this problem?

PROBLEM

What is the main issue facing Wangari's community?

CAUSES

What are the root causes of the problem?



What might Wangari's project statement have been?

If we train and pay women to plant trees, **then** the community will have more trees **so that** the environment will be improved!

2

If Wangari had turned her problem tree into a solution tree, what might it have looked like?

IMPACTS

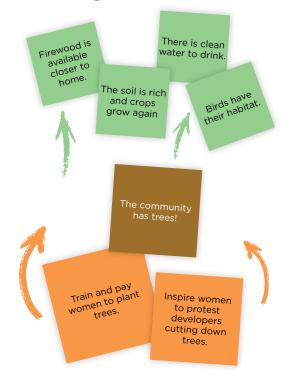
What long-term change occurs?

OUTCOME

What change do the actions lead to?

OUTPUTS

What actions does the community or Wangari take to address the problem?



4

How might she have measured her success?

Solution Tree	Project Statement	Measures of Success
Output	If we train and pay women to plant trees	 The number of women trained (over 80,000) The number of nurseries established (6,000 in Kenya)
Outcome	then the community will have more trees	The number of trees planted (over 30 million!)
Impact	so that the environment will be improved!	The fertility of the soilThe amount of clean drinking waterThe number of birds

Muhammad Yunus, Bangladesh: Lending Money to the People

Summary of Twenty-Two Cents: Muhammad Yunus and the Village Bank by Paula Yoo.

Muhammad Yunus (1940-) grew up in Bangladesh. He witnessed extreme poverty all around him and was determined to eradicate it. He studied economics, hoping to find a way to address poverty. In 1976, he met a young woman named Sufiya who wove bamboo into beautiful stools. She needed just five taka (about twenty-two cents) to buy materials to make more stools to sell to help feed her family, but the banks would not loan her money. The bank discriminated against her, believing that because she was poor and illiterate, she would not repay the loan. Sufiya borrowed from money lenders instead. They charged her interest rates so high that she did not have enough money left over to buy food for her children. Sufiya's situation troubled Muhammad.

Inspired to take action, Muhammad decided to launch his own bank, Grameen Bank, meaning "Village Bank." At Grameen Bank, craftspeople and women like Sufiya borrow very small amounts of money ("micro-loans") at low interest rates. To borrow money, customers form groups of five and participate in training to learn how to manage their money. Once they received their loans, groups were responsible for the success of each member. They met together weekly to help each other and to learn together. 97% of customers have paid back their loans. Poverty rates in Bangladesh have dropped as a result of this program. Inspired by the success of Grameen Bank, similar banks, called "micro-finance organizations," have opened up in over 100 countries. Together, these organizations have loaned more than 15 billion dollars to over 12 million people worldwide, 94% of them women. Muhammad and his bank won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2006.

Note: Muhammad couldn't directly address illiteracy rates, but he had the time, resources, and skills to create the Grameen Bank to help people access loans! 1

If Muhammad had created a problem tree, what might it have looked like?

EFFECTS

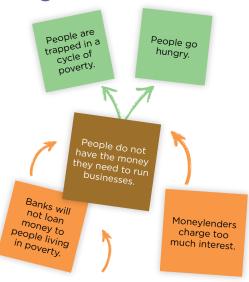
What are the main effects of this problem?

PROBLEM

What is the main issue facing Muhammad's community?

CAUSES

What are the root causes of the problem?



2

If Muhammad had turned his problem tree into a solution tree, what might it have looked like?

IMPACTS

What long-term change occurs?

OUTCOME

What change do the actions lead to?

OUTPUTS

What actions does the community or Muhammad take to address the problem?



3

What might Muhammad's project statement have been?

If you provide micro-loans to people living in poverty, then they will have money to run their businesses, so that they can escape the cycle of poverty.

4

How might he have measured his success?

Solution Tree	Project Statement	Measures of Success
Output	If you provide micro-loans to people living in poverty	 Number of dollars loaned (over \$15 billion) Number of people (men/women) who have received loans (over 12 million)
Outcome	then they will have money to run their businesses	 Number of businesses created, sustained, or grown Number of people employed
Impact	so that they can escape the cycle of poverty.	Rate of povertyRate of hunger

Worksheet 1: Creating a Problem Tree and Turning It into a Solution Tree

STEP 1: Start by analyzing your problem. Write the core problem next to the trunk. To analyze the problem, write its causes next to the roots and its effects next to the branches.

STEP 2: Now it is time to develop a solution. Change your negative statements into positive statements. Change the causes into outputs, the problem into an outcome, and the effect you circled into an impact. Now, circle the output that you will have the **time, resources,** and **skills** to achieve. The problem now becomes the solution and the plan for your project!

EFFECTS

What are the effects of this problem? What do the effects lead to?

PROBLEM

What is the main issue facing the community?

CAUSES

What are the root causes of the problem? What led to it?

Problem Tree Solution Tree



IMPACTS

What long-term change do I want to help create? WHY do I want to do my project?

OUTCOME

What change do I expect my action to lead to? WHAT do I want to achieve?

OUTPUT

What action will I take to address the problem? HOW will I make a difference?

Worksheet 2: Writing a Project Statement NAME:

NAME:

Now it is time to communicate your solution. Look at your solution tree and copy your output, outcome, and impact where indicated below. Now you have a project statement! It tells people in a sentence what your project will do and achieve.

OUTPUT if...

OUTCOME then...

IMPACT so that...

Worksheet 3: Developing Measures of Success

Finally, plan how you will evaluate your project. Copy your project statement from worksheet 2 into the second column below. Now identify at least one way to measure the success of your project. How will you know that your solution made a difference? What will you measure, or what evidence will you use? Come up with ways to measure your output, outcome, and impact.

Project Statement	Measures of Success
If	I will measure
then	I will measure
so that	I will measure
	If then

Resources

LEARN MORE ABOUT PROBLEM AND SOLUTION TREES

- Bisits Bullen, Piroska. How to design a new program. tools4dev. no date. www.tools4dev.org/resources/how-to-design-a-new-program
- Caritas Australia. Problem and Solution Tree. No date. https://www.caritas.org.au/resources/library/problem-and-solution-tree/
- Global Affairs Canada. Results-based Management Tip Sheet 2.2: Syntax Structure of Outcome, Output, and Activity Statements. July 2017. https://www.international.gc.ca/world-monde/assets/pdfs/funding-financement/tip_sheet_2_2-fiche_conseil_2_2-eng.pdf
- Overseas Development Institute. Planning tools: Problem Tree Analysis. 2009. www.odi.org/publications/5258-problem-tree-analysis
- Seeney, Damien, and Martin Pritchard. Problem Tree /
 Solution Tree Analysis. Evaluation Toolbox, 2010.
 http://evaluationtoolbox.net.au/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=28&Itemid=134
- TolaData. Step 1: Identifying the focal issue with 'Problem Tree Analysis' technique. 2019. Video available: <u>www.youtube.com/watch?v=-j-_Y7D35H4</u>
- 2Kroner. Problem Tree Analysis. visEUalisation Project, 2020. Video available: www.youtube.com/watch?v=hpx2m5EN wo





Resources

LEARN MORE ABOUT WANGARI MAATHAI

Picture books:

- Johnson, Jen Cullerton. Seeds of change: Wangari's Gift to the World. New York: Lee and Low Books, 2010. Grades 4-6. Audio-visual versions also available on YouTube.
- Napoli, Donna Jo. Mama Miti: Wangari Maathai and the Trees of Kenya. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010. Ages 4-8. Audio-visual versions
 also available on YouTube
- Nivola, Claire A. *Planting the Trees of Kenya: The Story of Wangari Maathai.* New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008. Ages 5-8. Audio-visual versions also available on YouTube.
- Winter, Jeanette. Wangari's Trees of Peace: A True Story from Africa. Orlando: Harcourt Children's Books, 2008. Grades pre-K-3. Audio-visual versions also available on YouTube.

Memoir:

• Maathai, Wangari. Unbowed: A Memoir. New York: Penguin Random House, 2007. Ages 14+. Teachers' Guide available on publisher's website.

Video:

• "Be a hummingbird—Wangari Maathai," clip from Dirt! The Movie. Directed by Bill Benensen and Gene Rosow, 2009. www.dirtthemovie.org/videos/

Teaching resources:

- Taking Root: The Vision of Wangari Maathai. PBS, 2008. Video modules, handouts, lesson plan available. https://www.pbs.org/independentlens/documentaries/takingroot/ Grades 9-12+.
- Wangari Maathai biographical research (digital biographical sketch activities—not grade specific); Wangari Maathai Activity Package (grades 4-12.) <u>www.teachers.payteachers.com</u>
- More resources here: https://blog.leeandlow.com/2016/04/01/resources-for-teaching-about-wangari-maathai-and-seeds-of-change-2/

LEARN MORE ABOUT MUHAMMAD YUNUS

Books:

- Yoo, Paula. Twenty-Two Cents: Muhammad Yunus and the Village Bank. New York: Lee & Low Books, 2018. Picture book. Grades 3-6. Audio-visual version available on YouTube.
- Yoo, Paula. The Story of Banker of the People Muhammad Yunus. New York: Lee & Low Books, 2019. Chapter book. Grades 4-8.

Memoir:

 Yunus, Muhammad with Alan Jolis, Banker to the Poor: Micro-Lending and the Battle against World Poverty. New York: PublicAffairs, 1999, 2003, 2007.

Videos:

- Muhammad Yunus Banker to the Poor. Infinite Fire Inc, 2014.
 7 min. Available on YouTube.
- Grameen Bank at a Glance. Muhammad Yunus, 2011. 5 min. Available on YouTube.

Teaching resources:

- Teacher's Guide: Twenty-Two Cents: Muhammad Yunus and the Village Bank. New York, Lee & Low Books, 2018.
- Teacher's Guide: The Story of Banker of the People Muhammad Yunus. New York, Lee & Low Books, 2019.
- "Making Inferences, Unit 6, Week 1: Twenty-Two Cents: Muhammad Yunus and the Village Bank," Meaning Making Sample Lessons, Grade 6, p 294-315. Alameda, California: Center for the Collaborative Classroom, 2017. https://www.collaborativeclassroom.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/mm_gr6_train_to_somewhere-1.pdf
- BookRags.com. Banker to the Poor Summary, Lesson Plans, Study Guide, and Study Pack.

