



TOOLBOX



Problem Tree / Objective Tree

Aim

Problem/Objective tree is a method to analyze the problems that an organization or a community faces and to set up objectives to respond to these problems. It can be used as the first step to prepare a *logical framework*.

You can also use this exercise to explain to staff members how to identify / analyze problems and set up objectives.

Participants

Ten to fifteen representatives of the community / organization facing the problems. They are together in a large room sitting in front of a large board.

Material

You need a number of pieces of paper, cards or preferably sticky notes (*post-its*) on which to write individual problem statements, which can then be stuck on a large board.

A. The Problem Tree

Step 1

Explain to participants that the aim of the first step is to openly brainstorm problems, which they consider to be a priority in their community/organisation.

1. If some of the participants are illiterate, form several small teams and appoint in each team a "secretary" able to write for those who cannot.
2. Distribute to participants sticky notes and pencils.
3. Invite participants to discuss and write on sticky notes priority problems affecting their community / organisation.
4. Then put the sticky notes on the board

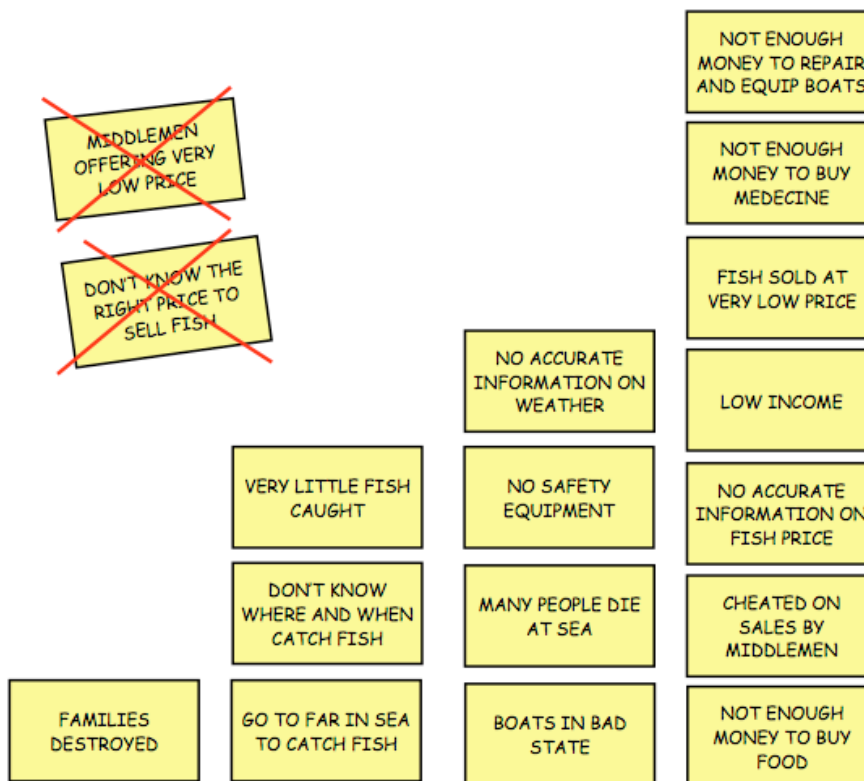
Example : the case of traditional fisherman in rural India



Step 3

Explain to participants that now we should sort the notes by category.

1. Ask them to help you put in the same column the notes that have something in common. You can also delete redundant notes.
2. You should get a result similar to the example below:

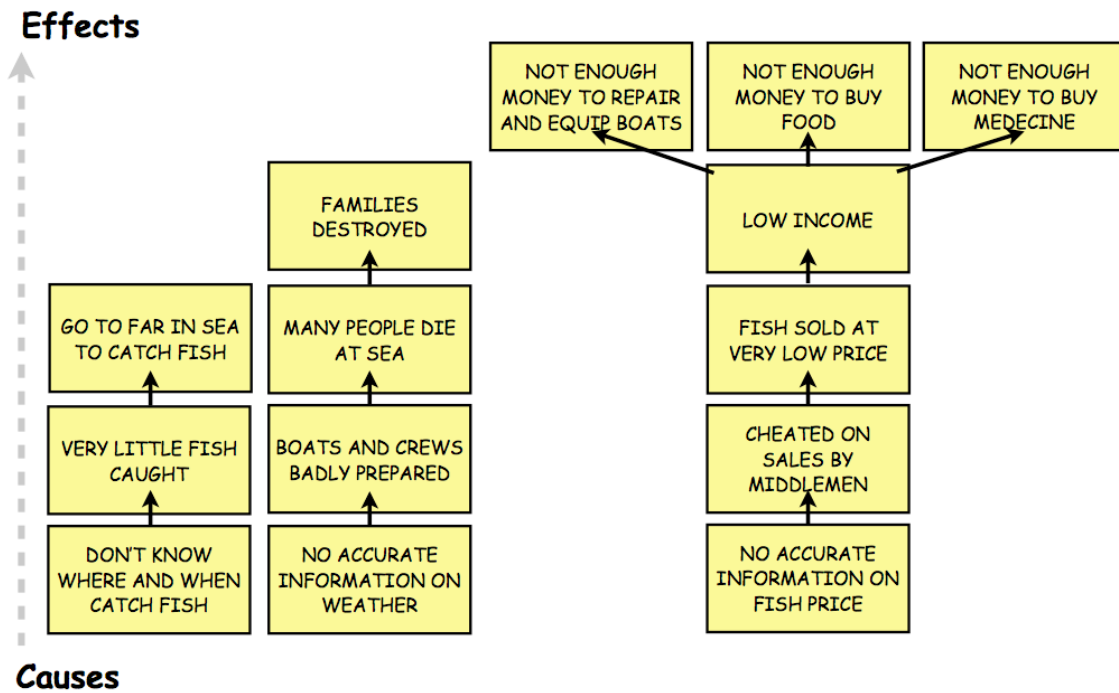


If you cannot put some notes in any category, just leave them aside.

Step 4

Invite participants to help you rank the notes in each column according to a logic cause-effect.

- Notes, which appear as causes, should be put below those which appear as effects.
- See example below:



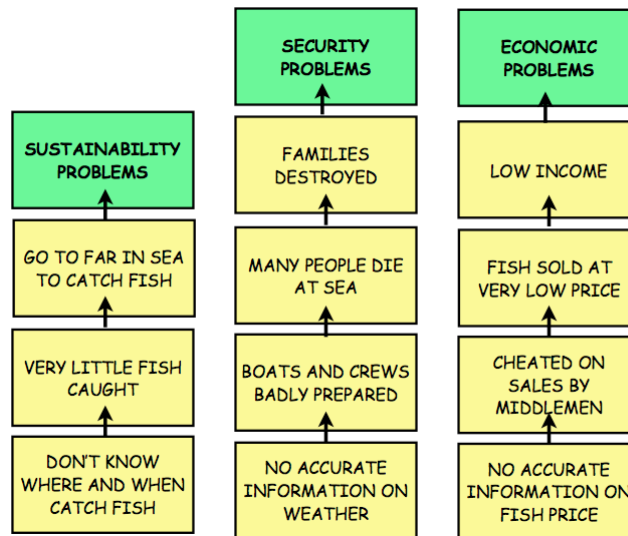
- The notes, which are not linked by a cause effect relationship, are put at the same level.
- Draw arrows to show the cause-effect relationship.

Step 5

Mettre un titre à chaque colonne

- Read the notes placed in each column and ask participants to find a title corresponding to all of them, their common factor. Write the title on a different colour sticky note and put that note at the top of the column .
- See example on the next page. Three titles have been given:
 - ➔ Column 1 - "*Sustainability problems*" (it is necessary to go further and less fish is caught)
 - ➔ Column 2 - "*Security problems*"(no accurate information on weather, many people die at sea). Note that two notes have been replaced by a new one ("Boats and crews badly prepared") summarising them.

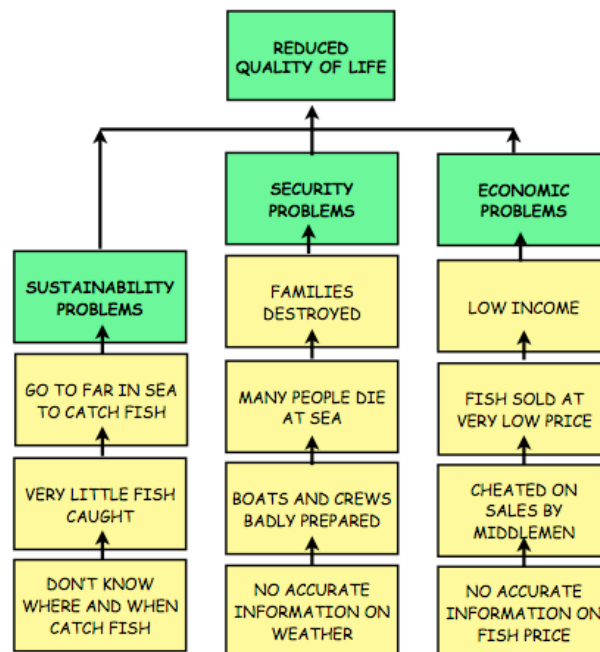
- ➔ Column 3 - "Economic problems" (everything is about price and income). The three top notes have been deleted because they are well summarised by "Economic problems".



Step 6

Find a common factor between several columns

- Ask participants if they can find a common factor to several columns, guide them in finding a solution.
- See the example below : the common factor between the 3 columns is that due to the three types of problems, more and more people are leaving the village. The village is dying...

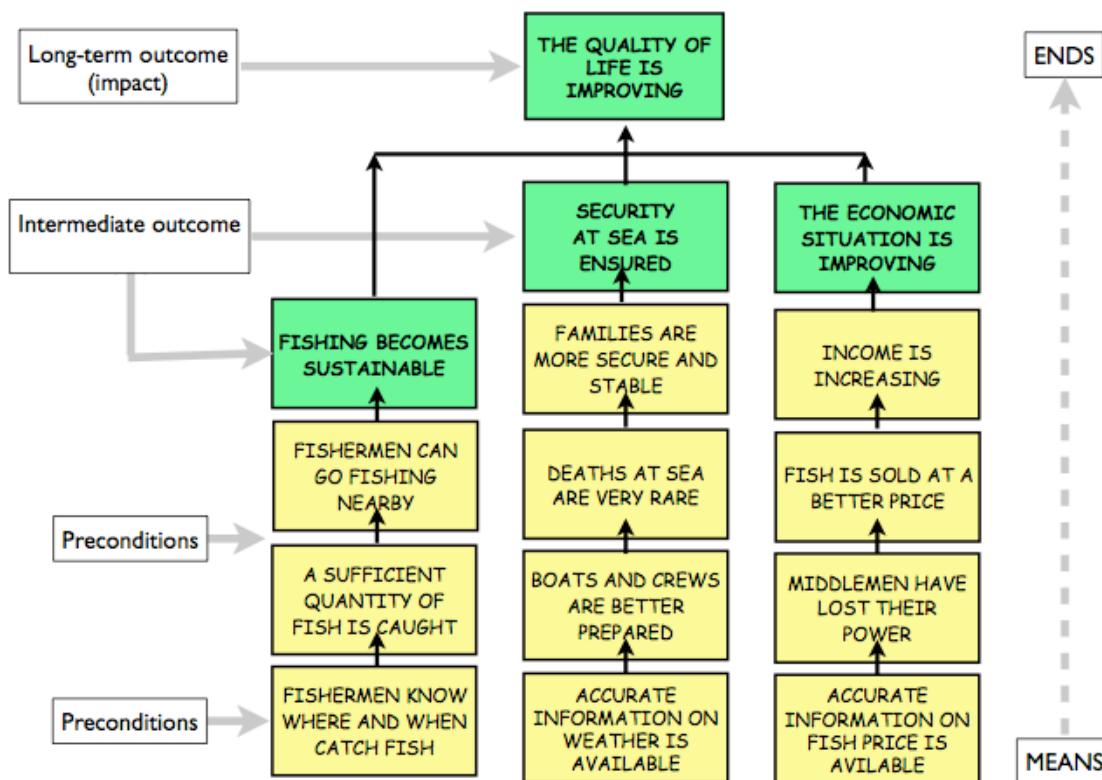


B. The Objective Tree

Explain to participants that the *problem tree* describes the **initial negative situation** of the community/organization.

Now, we need to identify the **goal situation** that we have to achieve if we want to solve the identified problems. The process is the following:

1. The *negative situations* described by the problem tree must be converted into *positive situations*, which become the objectives.
2. Starting by the bottom of the problem tree, you need to help participants review every sticky note and write an new one with a positive formulation : "Fishermen don't know where and when catch fish" becomes "Fishermen know where and when catch fish" ; "No accurate information on weather" becomes "Accurate information on weather is available" and so on. Look at the example below.
3. Check with participants the logical order of the objectives : those which are placed lower on the tree must be *means* leading to *ends* placed higher. The *cause-effect* logic of the problem tree is replaced by the *means-ends* logic of the objective tree.



Note: at bottom line of the tree are the *means*, at the top the *ends*. The statement at the summit of the tree ("The quality of life is improving") is the long-term outcome or impact. Below (in green) are the intermediate outcome and lower are the preconditions.

C. Theory of change

What is your *theory of change*?

Theory of Change is a way of thinking about how the outcomes of your activities lead ultimately to your desired social impact. In the example of the fishermen, it is interesting to note that all the means are related to information. Developing better information means in the field of weather forecast, fish location and fish price seems to be the strategy indicated by the reflection on problems and objectives. The theory of change is a formulation of the strategy.

For example,

- *If traditional fishermen can get accurate information on the weather forecast, **then** their danger at sea will be reduced.*
- *If traditional fishermen can get accurate information on when and where catch fish, **then** their fishing productivity will be increased.*
- *If traditional fisher men can get accurate information on the evolution of fish price, **then** they will not be cheated by middlemen and their income will increase.*

The basic format of any theory of change can be expressed as:

- To make desirable CHANGE happen, Condition1, Condition2, Condition(n) must be met, or
- If Condition1, Condition2, Condition(n) are met, then, the desirable CHANGE will happen.

So, it's always something like **IF-CONDITIONS-THEN-CHANGE**

More examples of IF-CONDITIONS-THEN-CHANGE:

- If low-income, marginalized teenagers have first-hand experience running a business, they will be more successful in their careers
- If poor women in Africa have microbicial contraceptives they control, AIDS will spread less
- If customers' water usage is metered and they have to pay for it, they will use less water
- If people buy organic yogurt instead of non-organic yogurt that may be full of pesticides, their health will improve
- If jobs are created in low-income areas, personal well-being will increase and the quality of life in those neighborhoods will increase.

Notice that in each example the ultimate social impact is expressed as a change, an increase or a decrease.

Problem tree, objective tree and theory of change can also be applied in the field of training/learning.