



# The problem tree 1 h 30 min

UNDERSTANDING FORB IN CONTEXT

ANALYSE  
GROUP EXERCISE

## About the exercise

### TARGET AUDIENCE

Any.

### PURPOSE

To help participants develop analytical skills, using the problem tree tool to analyse the root causes of a freedom of religion or belief (FORB) problem and its consequences.

### DESCRIPTION

This exercise introduces the problem tree tool. Groups work together to apply it to a specific FORB violation in their local context, as a first step towards creating positive change. Requires a basic understanding of FORB among participants.



## Instructions

### RESOURCES

- Flipchart sheets and marker pens.

### ADVANCE PREPARATION

- Prepare a sample problem tree to demonstrate with, using a simple problem that is relevant to the context and easy to understand for your target audience. This will help to avoid confusion between the problem, its root causes and consequences.
- This exercise will be easier to facilitate if you read up on the state of FORB in the local context in advance so that you can help the participants to define a specific problem they want to tackle. You can find guidance on accessing information on FORB in your country at [www.forb-learning.org/learn/country-information](http://www.forb-learning.org/learn/country-information).

### HOW TO INTRODUCE THE EXERCISE 5 MIN

Introduce the model, drawing the tree trunk, roots, and branches and explaining the following:

- The trunk of the tree is the problem. We need to think about what specific problem we want to work on.
- The roots of the tree are the root causes of the problem. Why is this problem happening?
- The branches of the tree are the consequences of the problem. What are the consequences of this problem for the people affected by it?
- The leaves of the tree represent all the people affected by those consequences.

**HOW TO RUN THE EXERCISE** 1 H 15 MIN

- **PLENARY DISCUSSION** (15 MIN)

Together with the participants, analyse a simple problem (real or imagined) that is relevant to your context and easy to understand using the problem tree model, e.g., the price of fuel is increasing every week or frequent blackouts. This problem does not need to be related to FORB, the purpose is to explain the model.

- **GROUPWORK** (40 MIN)

Divide participants into groups of 5-8.

- Ask each group to identify a problem related to FORB that impacts upon their local context. Encourage them to be as specific as possible in defining the problem. Point out that the more specific the problem they identify is, the more useful their analysis will be!
 

For example, instead of defining the problem as ‘discrimination’ they might choose ‘Police discriminate by refusing to document crimes reported by members of minority X’ or ‘Community X can’t get permission to build a place of worship’. Instead of identifying intolerance as the problem they could choose ‘Minority children are being bullied at the local school’, or ‘Local religious or political leaders or local media are using hate speech’, or ‘Street harassment of minority women in religious dress’. Allow 10 minutes for this before moving on.
- Ask each group to draw a tree, beginning with the trunk and writing the problem they chose in it. Then, analyse the root causes of the problem, drawing the tree’s roots and writing causes among them. Finally identify the consequences of the problem, drawing the branches of the tree and writing the consequences among them. Encourage the groups to explore social, economic, and political root causes including attitudes, behaviours and rules/laws/policies. Allow 20 minutes for this before moving on.
- Ask groups to move on and discuss the following questions:
  - What are the most serious consequences?
    - o Which root causes will be easier to address/more difficult to address? Why?
    - o Identify one specific action they as individuals/their organisations could take to address the problem.

(If participants work for the same civil society organisation, adapt the last two questions as follows: Discuss which of the root causes and effects of the problem your organisation currently works with. Which root causes would it be strategic to work with in future?)

- **PRESENTATIONS TO PLENARY** (20 MIN)

Ask each group to present their problem tree and their reflections on the discussion questions (5 min/group).

**HOW TO CONCLUDE THE EXERCISE** 10 MIN

Congratulate the participants on all their ideas and thank them for their hard work. Invite brief reflections from participants on the process.



**ALTERNATIVE METHODOLOGY**

If time allows, ask each group to draw a second tree beside their problem tree, this time showing their 'vision of success'. What will the situation look like when the problem is resolved (trunk) – what factors will contribute to the problem being resolved (roots) and what will the consequences (benefits/risks) for those affected be (branches)?

**Source**

Adapted from Lisa VeneKlasen and Valerie Miller (2002) A New Weave of Power, People and Politics: the action guide for advocacy and citizen participation.