<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the tool</th>
<th>Problem tree / hierarchy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Categories</td>
<td>Situation Analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aim of the tool</td>
<td>To analyse problems, i.e. identifying the cause of the problems and their effects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When to use it?</td>
<td>Use the tool when designing a project, at the beginning of the planning process, and to identify the core issues and their root problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How difficult is it to use it?</td>
<td>Easy – moderate – for experienced users/facilitators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tool for thought or tool for action?</td>
<td>Tool for thought and tool for action</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Benefits**

- If the tool is used in a participatory way, it can help you to address the real needs of the beneficiaries.
- The tool can help you to break the problem down into manageable and definable chunks and enables you to have a clearer idea on the prioritization of issues and objectives.
- It can help you to get a better understanding of the problems, which are often interconnected and even contradictory causes. This is often the first step in finding win-win solutions.
- It can help you identify constituent issues and arguments; it can also help you to establish who the political actors are and what the processes are at each stage.
- It can help you establish whether additional information, evidence or resources are needed to make a strong case, or build a convincing solution.
- It helps you to identify and deal with current issues, rather than dwell on apparent, future or past issues.
- The process of analysis can often help build a shared sense of understanding, purpose and action.

**Issues to be aware of**

- You cannot always directly translate problems into objectives.
- This tool is used in conjunction with other project planning tools, objectives tree and strategy analysis (they often follow the problem tree analysis).

**Description of the tool**

The problem tree highlights the relations and hierarchy among all identified problems. Each problem is preceded by the problem(s) which cause(s) it, and followed by the problem it causes itself, see Figure 1.
Examples of problem trees

Figure 1: Problem tree

- Low productivity
- Poor health
- Nutritional disorder of children under five
  - Low birth weight
  - Inadequate food intake
  - Poor health
  - Inadequate care
- Inadequate food intake
- High work load women
- Inadequate health services
- Gender imbalance

Figure 2: Problem hierarchy

- Increased deforestation
  - Increased logging of branches for firewood
    - Easier access to forests
  - Increased price of firewood
  - Increased demand for land
  - Agricultural encroachment into forests
    - Department of Forests unable to enforce park boundaries
      - Decreased agricultural production

Figure 3: Problem analysis linked to situation analysis:

- Health care costs increase
  - More young patients with diabetes
  - High blood pressure & heart problems
  - Food-induced forms of cancer increase

Core problem: Overweight among young people

- Not sufficient physical exercise
- Diets contain too much fat & sugar
- Computer games & internet
- Lack of sport facilities
- Fast-food restaurants more popular
- Commercial influence
- Ready-made meals
### Steps involved in using the tool
- **Brainstorm on the problems:** Write down the problems: one problem per card (frame the problem in a negative way, e.g., low yields). All participants should take turns to say what they think the perceived problems are. Try to be very specific when describing the problems.
- **Put the card with the core problem (or ‘starter problem’) at the top of the model** (see Figure 1). The core problem is the one with most of the underlying problems and the one with the serious effect(s).
- **Identify direct causes of the starter problem.** Place these underneath the starter problem.
- **Check whether the direct causes independently lead to the starter problem.**
- **Identify direct effects of the starter problem.** Place these above the starter problem.
- **Check whether the direct effects independently result from the starter problem.**
- **Identify underlying causes of the ‘direct causes’, starting from left.**
- **Check whether these causes are also independent.**

### Source or further readings
- [http://www.msppractice.org/tool/problem-tree](http://www.msppractice.org/tool/problem-tree)