

(Draft) Analyzing & Prioritizing Issues

Choosing priority issues from among many urgent problems is not an easy task. It is a multi-step process involving analysis and negotiation within a group. Analysis is central to advocacy planning from beginning to end. The poor choices that arise from inadequate analysis can be costly and, in politics, sometimes dangerous.

Analysis is about asking why. Probing for hidden truths is a habit, an attitude and a skill. It is vital to political awareness and informed citizenship. But sometimes asking why- why- why is not acceptable, or may be politically risky.

Another challenge in analysis for advocacy planning is that there are many different causes of problems. The causes can be interconnected and even contradictory. A systematic approach to analysis helps to structure the probing. It is also helpful to be aware of the lens through which you are looking. For example, if you look at the cultural factors that shape a problem, you will see something different than if you look at economic factors. And if you look at economic factors, your understanding of economics will shape what you see. One person may say that people are poor because wages are too low and workers are unorganized. Another person may say that people are poor because of a lack of education and training.

Prioritization and analysis are connected. To make choices, a group needs clear criteria for ranking problems in order of importance. The group will probably debate both the criteria

and the analysis since people see things differently and have different interests, even when they share a common problem. Choosing priorities involves looking not only at the causes and impact of problems, but also analyzing solutions. You need to decide which strategy is feasible for your group and which offers the most political gain. In social justice advocacy, problems related to exclusion are a priority.

This chapter provides six tools for problem analysis and prioritization. These tools can help people to:

- understand the interrelated root causes of a problem
- adopt common criteria for choosing priority issues
- define and prioritize aspects of the problem (*issues*) that will be the focus of advocacy
- identify the additional information they need on the political and policy dimensions before finalizing your strategy

For groups already engaged in advocacy on a specific issue, these tools can help refine strategies and get broader constituency involvement. For organizations embarking on advocacy, they help identify priority issues while building awareness and participation. The tools are divided into three groups as follows:

1. Analysis for Prioritizing Problems

Both of these exercises are particularly helpful for analysis with constituency groups, but can be modified for priority-setting in organizations. These link priority-setting to criteria related to exclusion and need.

- *Priority Group Analysis*
- *Problem Identification and Prioritization*

2. Many Causes, Many Solutions

These tools help to define the specific causes and issues that make up a broad problem.

Mapping the causes, consequences and solutions of a problem can be a good way to begin analysis because it involves brainstorming and produces a comprehensive map of a problem. This is the first exercise in this group, while the other two look at root causes.

The consequences part helps identify who is hurt by the problem and how. The analysis will remind advocates that policy change alone will not fully address the issue. The tools are:

- *Causes, Consequences & Solutions*
- *The Problem Tree Analysis*
- *Simple Structural Analysis*

3. Comparing and Choosing an Issue

This exercise compares different issues by using criteria related to the potential impact of advocacy.

- *Checklist for Choosing an Issue*

Although all the exercises are complementary, you can choose which ones best suit your

group's planning needs. At a minimum, we recommend you use the *Causes, Consequence & Solutions* exercise and combine it with one of the priorities exercises. If you have more time, add one of the root cause exercises.

Facilitator's Note

The more participatory the analysis can be, the greater the buy-in and motivation will be for doing advocacy.

Participatory problem analysis and priority setting:

- involves negotiation and debate
- is an educational and consciousness raising experience
- increases citizenship skills and information

This kind of analysis is especially valuable for citizen learning because it helps people to challenge the official or common explanations for why things happen.

Problem analysis is not just looking at causes. Exploring all the possible solutions helps you choose your direction in a more informed way. Identifying consequences and solutions shows that comprehensive strategies are crucial for long-term success.

Purpose

To analyze the different needs and potential of a marginalized group within a community. This exercise should be applied to the problems currently being addressed by the program or organization.

Process

(Time: 1-2 hours)

1. Divide participants into groups of ten or less. Give each group newsprint and markers.
2. Ask participants to draw one large circle on the newsprint with a smaller circle inside it. The large circle represents the whole community. The small circle is the marginalized group that you chose to prioritize.
3. Ask participants to write in the larger circle all the problems being addressed by the program that affect the entire community. Use symbols to represent these problems if the participants are non-literate.
4. Next ask participants to write problems which affect the priority group in the inner circle. Some of these problems will be the same as in the larger circle and some may be different.

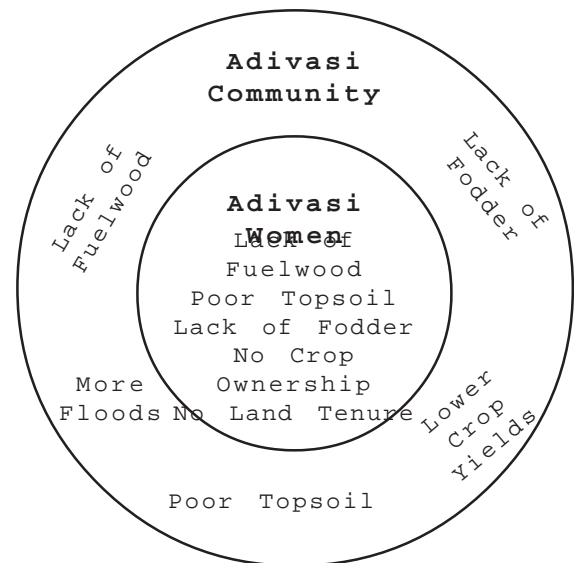
Discussion

Together, analyze the circles and problems. Here are some possible questions to help guide the discussion:

- How do the problems in the two circles differ? How are they the same?
- What solutions will give priority to the needs of the marginalized group?
- What can the marginalized group contribute (i.e., knowledge, people, other resources)?

Example

SARTHI, an NGO based in Rajasthan India, has been helping Adivasi* women organize themselves around rehabilitation and management of common lands. The largest circle represents the problems that affect the Adivasi community. Because the SARTHI program focuses on the rehabilitation of grazing lands, problems related to the lack of vegetative matter are listed. Some of the program-related problems affecting the women (the priority group) are the same as those facing the whole community. Others mainly affect the women.



[*A lower caste tribal community in India]

From *A Manual for Socio-Economic and Gender Analysis: Responding to the Development Challenge*, by Barbara Thomas-Slayter, Rachel Polestico, Andrea Lee Esser, Octavia Taylor and Elvina Mutua (1995), p.97

Purpose

This exercise helps to:

- identify and rank priority problems in a group using a simple set of criteria;
- gain historical perspective on the problems;
- assess the impact of each problem from the points of view of those involved.

Process

(Time: 1-2 hours)

This exercise can be used as part of a participatory assessment for a community program, within an organization or in a workshop with representatives of different groups. There are two ways to do the exercise. Which you choose depends on where you are in the problem definition process.

1. Determine major problems

1a. If you have not yet done a problem definition activity, begin by presenting a list of sectors on flipchart. Choose the sectors from those that are related to your organization's work. Go through the list, asking participants to name the main problems in each sector. Help participants understand the difference between the core problems and the symptoms of these problems. For example, disadvantages faced by girls may be a symptom of economic hardships that force parents to choose which children to send to school.

1b. Brainstorm a list of problems that are on the agenda of the groups involved or draw from problems already identified in a participatory way.

2. Write each problem on a separate card. If the problem is one that occurs in relation to several sectors, use a different colored card for each sector.
3. Develop criteria with the group for categorizing each of the problems as "Most Serious," "Serious" and "Less Serious." The criteria could include number of people affected, severity of consequences, frequency, etc. Write the list of criteria on flipchart paper.
4. Referring to these criteria, ask the participants to sort the problem cards into the three categories. If there are several sectors, keep the cards for each sector separate. Write codes (MS for Most Serious, S for Serious, LS for Less Serious) on the back of each card. Then shuffle the cards for each sector.
5. Decide together on the time period over which you will measure change – whether, for example, it is two years, five years or ten years. Ask participants to think about whether, during this time period, each problem has gotten *Worse*, stayed the *Same* or gotten *Better*. Sort the cards into these three groups. Write codes on the back of each card according to the change category (W for Worse, S for Same, and B for Better).

6. Make a matrix. Label the rows: “Getting Worse,” “Staying the Same” and “Getting Better.” Label the columns: “Most Serious,” “Serious” and “Less Serious.” If you have organized the cards by sector, make a separate matrix for each sector. Then place each cards into the correct cell of the matrix.

| | Most Serious | Serious | Less Serious |
|------------------|--|---|---|
| Getting Worse | <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; margin-bottom: 5px;">Malnutrition</div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">Domestic Violence</div> | | <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; width: fit-content; margin: auto;">Lack of Transportation</div> |
| Staying the Same | <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; width: fit-content; margin: auto;">Corruption</div> | <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; width: fit-content; margin: auto;">Market too far away</div> | <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; width: fit-content; margin: auto;">No Training Opportunities</div> |
| Getting Better | <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; width: fit-content; margin: auto;">Employment Opportunities</div> | | |

Discussion

- Why are certain problems getting worse?
- Why are some problems improving?
- What role does government play in this?
- What other powerful actors have influenced the changes?
- What role have citizens and organizations played in the changes?
- Are the most serious problems getting better or worse?
- What can citizens and government do to change this?

Follow-up

The problems in the Getting Worse/Most Serious box are often the best place to concentrate your advocacy. Following their identification, they need to be analyzed further in order to select the most compelling issue that will serve as the focus of your advocacy work.

Adapted from *From the Roots Up: Strengthening Organizational Capacity Through Guided Self-Assessment*, Peter Gubbels and Catheryn Koss, World Neighbors, Oklahoma, 1999.

Purpose

This framework helps analyze problems by making the links between causes, effects and solutions. It encourages discussion of a wide range of solutions and emphasizes the need for social and political, as well as policy, strategies.

Process

This analysis is best handled in small groups that allow each individual to contribute. If your group is working on several problems, divide the groups up by the problems that interest them. (Time: 1-2 hours)

1. For each problem, make a chart with three columns. The headings of the columns are: “Causes,” “Consequences” and “Solutions.”
2. Begin by identifying the causes of the problem. Write each cause in the first column of the chart.
3. Repeat the process for consequences, and then solutions. Sometimes there are not clear cause-effect relationships between causes and consequences. So the cause, consequences and solutions do not have to be linked or related horizontally. That can be part of the follow-up analysis.

The consequences column shows how problems affect people’s lives. This helps in identifying constituencies. It also helps later on in choosing the targets and messages for outreach.

Discussion

- Are the causes listed the *main* causes of the problem?
- What are the social attitudes and power dynamics that contribute to causing this problem?
- How do the causes and problems affect people’s lives? Who is affected, and how?
- What are the main solutions proposed? Do any of them address changing social attitudes?

Tips

- Before beginning the analysis, go through the process in plenary with a different problem to show how the framework works.
- Before starting, explain how causes and consequences are different – a consequence is the result of a problem, while a cause helps create the problem.
- This framework can be extended by adding a fourth column which shows who is responsible for each solution and – if there are scarce resources – which are the priorities for them to focus on. If the advocacy will involve government, an international donor agency, the private sector, or somebody else, the fourth column can be used to link solutions with different decisionmaking arenas and institutions.
- During discussion, always look for the main causes. For example, sometimes groups focus on low funding as a cause when, in fact, it is not the primary cause.

Example

The matrix below is an example of how a Ugandan NGO working on debt relief and budgets applied this tool to a big problem – corruption. The second matrix shows how, after selecting the more focused issue of poor primary healthcare as it relates to corruption, the group applied the framework to that issue. The group originally listed low motivation of healthworkers and said that healthworkers were lazy. After discussion, they understood that healthworkers work long hours in poor conditions with little pay, and that these factors contribute to the healthcare issue as well.

| PROBLEM: Corruption | | |
|--|--|---|
| CAUSES | CONSEQUENCES | SOLUTIONS |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Widespread poverty -Greed -Profit-centered priorities -Competition -Lack of transparency -Desire for power and domination -Lack of checks and balances -Lack of effective laws and regulations to punish -Desire to manipulate the system -Breakdown of moral values -Peer pressure -Inappropriate inherited systems | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Increased poverty and marginalization of the poor, the powerless, and minorities -Loss of confidence in the system by the people/ growing indifference -Unsustainable debt burden -Poor social services -Breakdown of moral values -Growth of powerful -Donor dependence -Emergence of dictatorship -Wasteful spending on white elephants | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Increased transparency and accountability -Increased community participation in decisionmaking at all levels -Civic education for family and community -Stiff punishment for offenders -Political consciousness -Increased media involvement -NGO advocacy |

| PROBLEM : Poor and Inadequate Prim ary Healthcare | | |
|---|---|---|
| CAUSES | CONSEQUENCES | SOLUTIONS |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Understaffed clinics -Low m otivation of health w orkers (lw wages, som e poorly trained) -Too few facilities; badly located -Poor health policy and planning -Inadequat funds for healthcare given needs of population (e.g., AIDS prevention abne is costly) -Unregulated drug use -War -Governm ent has other priorities and poor who need healthcare m ost don t m ake dem ands | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -High m ortality rate (infant/m aternal rate highest) -Poor child developm ent -High prevalence of infectious diseases -Inadequate healthcare -Effect on productivity (GNP) -Low quality of life of poor -Drug abuse -Comuption by healthw orkers -M ost vulnerable people who need healthcare m ost are m ost abused | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Form ulate clear, rational health policy em phasizing prim ary and preventative -M onitor health expenditure -Increase pay and qualifications of basic healthcare providers -Punish em bezzlers -Educate people about their right to healthcare -Encourage denouncem ent of bribe/extortion -Strengthen national drug authority -Increase health budget |

Follow-up

The next set of exercises focus more in-depth on the root causes. Conducting these exercises after *Causes, Consequences & Solutions* helps challenge simplistic explanations of problems.

Purpose

This exercise is used to analyze the root causes of a problem and to identify the primary consequences. The tree provides a visual structure for the analysis.

Process

This activity is best handled in small groups of five to seven participants so that each person in the group has an opportunity to participate. If time makes this impossible, a large group can be divided into two groups, with the first group working on causes and the second group examining consequences.

If you are working on more than one problem, assign each group a different problem. Take one problem and go through the process once together before dividing into groups. (Time: 1-2 hours)

1. Explain the problem tree. Point out the different parts of the tree and what each represents:
 - Roots = *Root Causes* of the Problem
 - Trunk = the *Problem*
 - Branches = *Consequences* of the Problem
2. Ask a participant to draw a tree on flipchart paper. Write the problem on the trunk of the tree. Ask all participants to list the causes of the problem. If possible, let each participant who suggests a cause write it on a card and tape it to the roots of the problem tree. If this is too time-consuming, the facilitator can write what the participants say on the tree. Encourage people to explore social, economic and political causes including attitudes, behavior, ignorance and other factors.
3. Repeat the same process with the consequences.

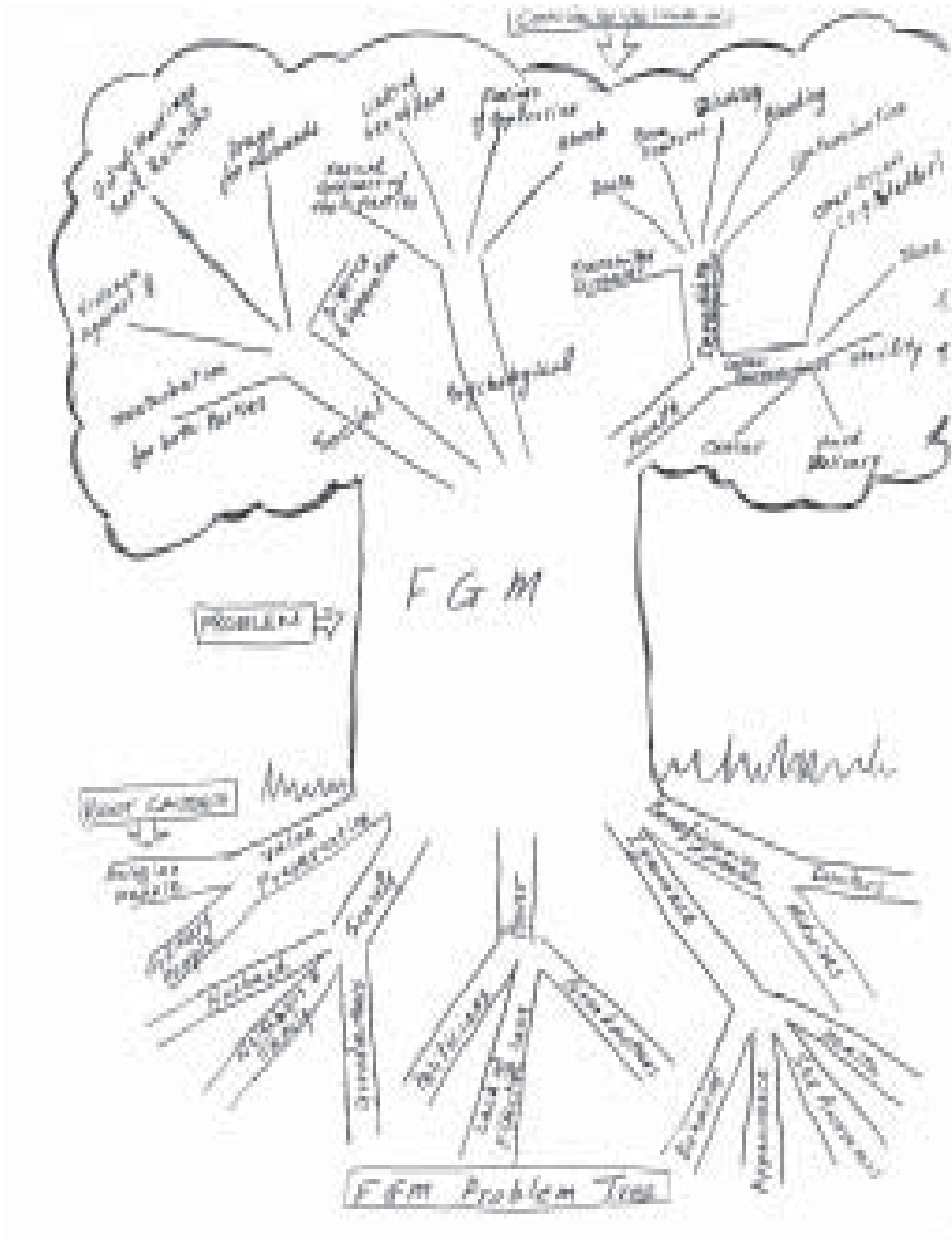
Discussion

First ask questions about the problem itself, the follow up with questions about the solutions.

- What are the most serious consequences?
- Which causes will be easier to address? More difficult to address? Why?
- Which causes and consequences can the government help address? Where can international agencies help? What can citizens do?

Example

The example on the next page of a problem tree is from an Egyptian coalition advocating for the elimination of the practice of female genital mutilation under the auspices of the National FGM Task Force.



The tree was documented by the Task Force's advocacy advisor, Nader Tadros.

Purpose

This exercise probes more deeply into the systemic causes of a problem. It does so by looking at economic, political and socio-cultural factors. This type of analysis shows how the political system may contribute to a problem and can potentially contribute to its solutions. It also shows how people's attitudes and beliefs can perpetuate a problem despite policy change. The exercise is a form of structural analysis that examines inequality and power dynamics. (In Chapter 8, the *Structural Analysis* exercise looked at the broad political landscape and not a concrete problem.)

Process

(Time: 1-2 hours)

1. Brainstorm as a group to define each of the economic, political, and socio-cultural dimensions that affect the problem. If necessary, help the group to pull together their suggestions into a clearer definition. Adapt these descriptions and distribute them as a handout. (See Chapter 8, for more in-depth description.)

Economic Dimension: This refers to the opportunities for work and for basic survival. Economics is about structures of ownership, wealth, production and resource distribution. The economic level also refers to socio-economic class – where an individual or group stands on the ladder from poverty to wealth. In addition, this dimension involves the economic context of a country at a particular moment – job and income opportunities, wages, and the economic policy of the government.

Political Dimension: This refers to the rules and procedures that organize economic, social and cultural life. For example, minimum wage is a rule that affects earnings of workers. The political level refers to decisionmaking and rights. Politics determines who makes laws and policies, how laws are enforced and what budgets are spent on. Politics is not only about government. It refers to all organizations that have power, including structures in the private sector and internationally.

Socio-Cultural Dimension: The socio-cultural level refers to the values, beliefs and attitudes of a society. It also refers to what society believes about itself, the values that are publicly promoted, and the structures which promote them, such as schools, churches, and media. For example, many societies believe that unmarried women are tragic while unmarried men are free and fortunate. Whether this is true is irrelevant — it is what people believe. In many ways, socio-cultural aspects are the most difficult of the three levels to change. For example, the law may be changed to give women more rights, but people may still see women as inferior.

2. If the group has more than 10 people, divide into small groups. Each group chooses a facilitator and a note taker. Ask each group to look at the economic, political and socio-cultural roots of their problem.
3. In many cases, categories of analysis overlap. Some causes may be both socio-cultural and political, for example. Give groups a colored marker to highlight the causes that overlap.

Discussion

After the small groups have presented their analysis and answered questions, use the matrix to explore priorities and possible solutions.

- Which causes overlap? For example, how do policies reinforce social beliefs?
- Is one dimension (economic, political, socio-cultural) a stronger factor than the others?
- Which causes, if addressed, would make the most difference on the problem? (The other, less crucial, causes are often called “contributing factors.”)
- If more funding were available, would that solve the problem? Why or why not?

Example

The following example is from a group of Ghanaian women’s NGOs. They analyzed the disproportionate female level of illiteracy resulting from the high drop-out rate of young girls.

| PROBLEM: Illiteracy and high drop out rate among girls and young women. | | |
|---|--|---|
| ECONOMIC CAUSES | POLITICAL CAUSES | SOCIO-CULTURAL CAUSES |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - School fees doubled under the Structural Adjustment Program of the World Bank / International Monetary Fund; no money for fees and materials. - Families have more children than they can manage financially & favor boys because girls' education is considered a waste due to marriage. - Girls' labor is necessary to supplement the family income for basic survival & to do all the domestic tasks (fetching water and firewood, cooking, cleaning, washing clothes, kitchen, gardens, etc.) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Education not compulsory; not a government priority for poor people. Education of girls not a state concern. - No programs for sex education or contraception; under law, pregnant girl must leave school. - In negotiations with the International Monetary Fund/ World Bank, the government chose to cut subsidies from education and health programs for the poor instead of military & infrastructure projects that favor more powerful interests. (This practice is no longer allowed by IMF/WB) - Too few women in public decisionmaking which contributes to neglect of children's and girls' rights. - Parent-Teacher Associations not well organized; not gender aware. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tradition, values, women's roles as wives and mothers - for which, it is believed, schooling is unnecessary; among the lower classes, people believe schooling makes women troublesome. - Early marriages not frowned upon (interrupt schooling). - Larger families (among the poor) are more prestigious - too many kids to school. - Boy children are more valuable than girl children because girls are married off while boys uphold the family legacy, so it is wasteful to spend on girls. - Pregnancy among young women not discouraged. |

Adapted from Hope, A. and Timmel, S., *Training for Transformation*, Book III, IT Publications, London, revised version 1995, p.45.

From Problems to Issues: Comparing Impacts & Solutions

Choosing an issue involves several steps. Many of the steps are outlined in this and the previous chapter. They include:

- breaking down a problem by analyzing root causes
- identifying multiple solutions to start building a strategy that has many elements
- defining what makes something a priority
- comparing different solutions for their potential impact.

Choosing your issue is one of the most difficult tasks, especially for coalitions involving groups with different interests and agendas. As one Ghanaian activist pointed out, “Poverty

is so overwhelming, how are we supposed to focus on one issue... it’s all an emergency.” This is a common feeling — but battles are fought one issue at a time. The issue you start with can build momentum for the next issue you choose.

An organization should choose the issues whose solutions will best further their values, credibility, opportunities and impact — and, of course, their mission and vision. The *Checklist for Choosing an Issue*¹ can be adapted to suit your context. Some of the criteria cannot be answered fully without more planning, but can guide your information-gathering, and be repeated after some of the analysis in the next chapter.

Slicing a problem into single issues...

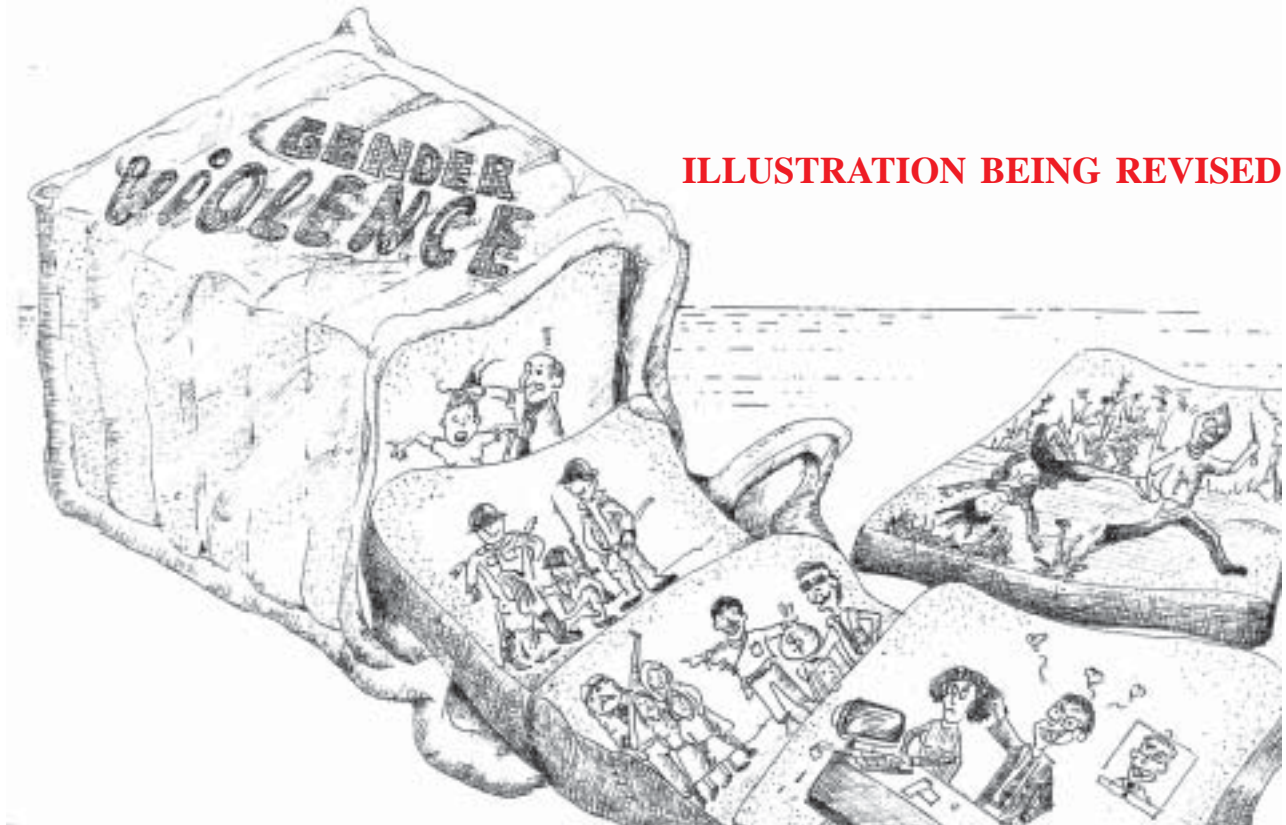


ILLUSTRATION BEING REVISED

Purpose

- To define the group's criteria for choosing an issue.
- To apply criteria in the selection of an issue.
- To get experience using the checklist so that it can be used again later in the planning.

Process

(Time: 2-3 hours)

1. Discuss and adapt the criteria on the checklist (see pages ###): Make sure that everyone in the group has the same understanding of each criterion. Take one criterion at a time, discuss its meaning for the group, and decide whether it is important. At the end, distribute the definitions on page ### as a handout and make the changes that the group has agreed upon.
2. Make sure that all participants understand the issues you are comparing. Quickly review your analysis of causes, consequences and solutions before applying the checklist. In most cases, the criteria that deal with how the strategy is carried out may be premature at this stage of planning.
3. Using the chart on page ###, go through each of the criteria for each issue. Make an X if the issue fits the criteria. After making Xs for each issue, see which issue has the most Xs. Rank your issues #1, #2 or #3 based on how well they meet the criteria, #1 being the highest ranking.

Facilitator's Tips

Before beginning this exercise, the group should have completed a root cause analysis, and at least one analysis of solutions. The more a group has discussed solutions, the easier this task will be.

Advise groups that the criteria will likely stimulate a lot of discussion and debate about potential solutions. Be sure to make a note of suggestions about how a strategy must be designed in order to meet the criteria.

Criteria for ranking issues

The solution of an issue should:

Result in a Real Improvement in People's Lives

Some of the important changes that advocacy achieves may not be clearly visible. Seeing and feeling a concrete change is usually the best motivation for people to continue to participate politically. Visible changes also give an advocacy organization credibility for future action. A real improvement in people's day-to-day lives is a sign of citizen victory. Examples include better housing, a women's police station to handle domestic disputes, additional teachers and books for schools, more and better paying jobs and the establishment of citizen-teacher councils to oversee budgetary decisions on local schools. Examples of changes that are not immediately visible in people's lives include constitutional reform, a new NGO law and more awareness about discrimination. For less visible changes, you will need media strategies to explain how these changes can make a real difference.

(continued)

Give People a Sense of Their Own Power

Will the solution involve ordinary citizens, particularly those affected by the problem, in the advocacy effort? People need to know that they are key to the organizing effort – that it is not just experts, lawyers or NGO staff running the show. Giving people a sense of their own power demands careful constituency-building through participatory planning and analysis, town meetings, rallies, letter writing, lobbying, etc.

Be Widely Felt

The numbers of people who care or are hurt by an issue is a good justification for choosing it. Numbers affected will be an important source of power for your strategy. Politicians and decisionmakers can more easily dismiss an issue when it is only felt by a small number of people.

Be Deeply Felt

To get involved, people must feel strongly about the need for a solution. Anger, frustration and other emotions are motivators for action.

Build Lasting Organization & Alliances

The issue should lend itself to networking and organization-building. It should present opportunities to strengthen citizens' groups and build linkages across groups. These create a good basis for future action.

Provide Opportunities for Women & Other Marginalized People to be Involved in Politics

A “good” issue presents opportunities for people with less public and political exposure and access to decisionmaking to practice citizenship and leadership.

Develop New Leaders

An issue which provides opportunities for new leaders to emerge as spokespeople, coordinators, and planners builds citizen participation. Technical and complicated issues often do not lend themselves easily to the development of new leaders.

Promote Awareness of & Respect for Rights *(see box next page)*

Is the issue already understood as a right? Can advocacy expand what is understood as a right? Much social justice advocacy is about gaining acceptance that inclusion and fairness are fundamental to human dignity. It is about the *right* of *every* person to have a voice in the decisions affecting them, to equal access to education and to job opportunities, etc. These rights are not always recognized and may be difficult to enforce. Some people may not know certain rights exist.

Have a Clear Political & Policy Solution

If the best way to address an issue is through service delivery — such as in an emergency where people need food and water above all — it is usually not a good advocacy issue. Similarly, if consciousness-raising is the best way to address your issue, it is not a good choice. The solution to your issue must have a clear link with policy and with public or economic decisionmaking.

Have a Clear Target & Timeframe

An advocacy target is the pivotal decisionmaker who can respond to your demands. Personalizing decisionmaking helps make an abstract “system” seem more accessible to change by ordinary citizens. Also, if you are working with citizens who are newly active, a definite timeframe helps, as do benchmarks that allow people to celebrate small steps of progress. (See Chapter 15 for more discussion of targets.)

(continued)

Link Local Concerns to Global Issues

“Politics are local,” but increasingly many of the causes and solutions to issues involve global decisions. These include, for example, factories moving from place to place which causes unemployment, and international development and trade policy. Linking local concerns to global organizing can be politically powerful, but can also be challenging for organizers to manage multi-level coordination and communication.

Provide Opportunities to Raise Funds

You cannot do much without money. Funds can come from international donors as well as from local supporters. Local support is important because international funding can sometimes discredit local political organizing. If your issue provides opportunities to get money from local citizens, industry or others, it shows that there is local support.

Enable You to Further Your Vision and Mission

You should not take up an issue that takes you outside your scope of work and your basic values. Advocacy efforts place strain on organizations, so it is especially important that it contribute to its mission and vision. This may seem like a straightforward criterion, but it is easy to be wooed by an exciting issue and available funds.

Be Winnable

Success is the best motivation for sustaining citizen participation. Failure can be discouraging to citizens. But victory should not be defined only in terms of policy gains. Advocacy, whether successful in the realm of policy or not, can succeed in building organizations and mobilizing public opinion. Make sure that victories are broadly defined and set in modest, step-by-step terms. Then people can celebrate their achievements along the way.

*Adapted from *Organizing for Social Change: A Manual for Activists in the 1990s*, K. Bobo, J. Kendall, S. Max, Midwest Academy, Seven Locks Press, California, 1991.*

Advocacy and Rights

Some rights are more widely accepted and recognized than others. Human rights that are already defined in a variety of instruments such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, etc. can serve as a powerful advocacy tool. In some cases, if the issue involves a violation of an existing civil or political right, framing the solution in the context of human rights can be useful for demanding government accountability in cases where the government has ratified or committed to respecting these conventions and the rights they protect.

In other cases, there may be an international agreement but no mechanism for enforcing it with governments, like the platforms that were produced at the Beijing 4th World Conference on Women, the UN Conference on Environment and Development in Rio, etc. Often, merely linking your strategy to an international agreement that your government has signed, regardless of whether there are mechanisms for legal enforcement, gives a strategy more clout.

Advocacy on human rights issues can also be used to expand the limits of existing rights and make the rights system more responsive to people’s needs. This kind of advocacy work is what led to the acceptance of domestic violence as a violation of human rights and the state’s responsibility for protecting victims of domestic violence. (See Chapter 12 for more discussion on using human rights instruments for advocacy.)

Checklist

| CRITERIA | ISSUE #1 | ISSUE #2 |
|--|----------|----------|
| Result in a real improvement in people's lives | | |
| Give people a sense of their own power | | |
| Be widely felt | | |
| Be deeply felt | | |
| Build lasting organization and alliances | | |
| Provide opportunities for women and other marginalized people to be involved in politics | | |
| Develop new leaders | | |
| Promote awareness of and respect for rights | | |
| Have a clear political and policy solution | | |
| Have a clear target and timeframe | | |
| Link local concerns to global issues | | |
| Provide opportunities to raise funds | | |
| Enable you to further your vision and mission | | |
| Be winnable | | |

Adapted from *Organizing for Social Change: A Manual for Activists in the 1990s*, K. Bobo, J. Kendall, S. Max, Midwest Academy, Seven Locks Press, CA, 1991.