## 2. Needs Assessment and Stakeholder Analysis

Needs assessments provide insight into communities' real and perceived needs. They also provide insight into the infrastructure and institutions (including the ONS) that may be required to support or participate in some aspects of the project. By obtaining this insight before the project starts, the design can potentially accommodate any imposed constraints or limitations.

### Assessment vs. Design

**Assessment: problem, cause, and consequence identification**

**Assessment work** explores the of problems and opportunities and looks for synergistic relationships.

**Project design** explores the **depth** of causal relationships using identified problems and target groups.

**Design: analysis**

This is a process in diagnostics. There are two directions in diagnostics: breadth and depth. Assessment helps to identify the problem, its causes and consequences as it explores the breadth of a problem. In contrast to this, design explores the depth of the causal relationships explaining the problem, to identify a wider set of interventions.

The combination of these two elements provides a diagnosis describing the operating environment. This refers to the collective set of elements in the proposed project's setting and context that can affect the success of the project. Many of these elements draw from the EOA and should be used as a starting point, provided the information from the EOA is still current.

Components of the project setting include:

- People (demographics): population numbers, ages, gender, density, rural versus urban distribution
- Physical environment: natural environment, agro-ecological zones, climate, natural resources, major crops, livestock, constraints on food production, susceptibility to natural disasters
- Infrastructure: roads, schools, government facilities, health care facilities, schools, community centers, water and sanitation projects that are relevant to potential projects
- Human resources: education level, size/composition of the labor pool
- Beliefs and practices: cultural, religious, social, political
- Economics: wealth, distribution of economic classes, sources of income, employment potential
- Red Cross partners, relationships and levels of interest: with the ONS, the Federation, other PNSs
- External institutions and policies: government, donors, NGOs, PVOs
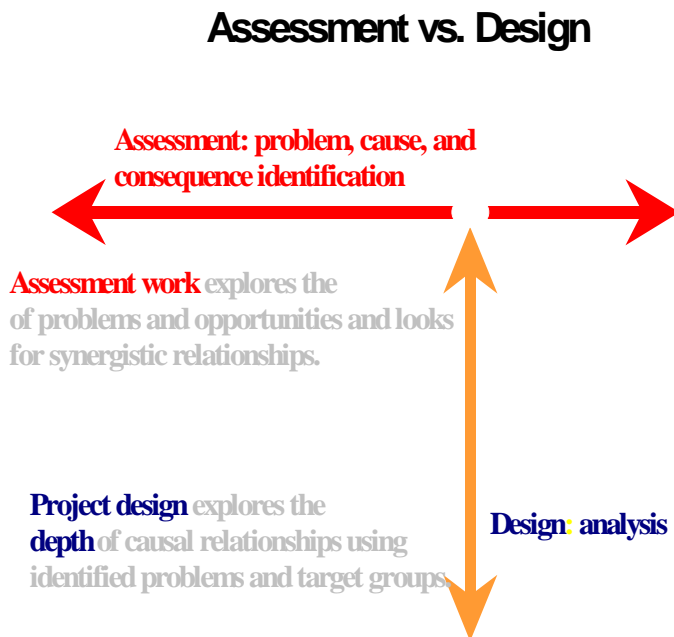
**Community Needs Assessment: Understanding the Problem**

A needs assessment is carried out to gain an understanding of the real and perceived needs of the proposed project beneficiary communities. Communities themselves may have strong opinions about the principal problems they are facing and their desired interventions, but these perceived needs may not be consistent with needs as determined by more objective standards. Bridging this gap is one of the most challenging aspects of participatory program design.

The needs of communities can be classified in at least three different ways, all important in project design:

- Felt Needs: Perception of needs within a community

- Normative Needs: External and international standards for desirable or acceptable conditions. Needs as determined by experts or professionals or policies defining what conditions are desirable or acceptable

- Relative Needs: The level of need in the proposed project area compared to other communities, for example, as measured against national standards. Typically, relative needs are assessed when a project is being identified at concept stage. By the time you are designing a project, you should have good information on how the target area compares with the rest of the country or region in terms of needs

> *Example - Child Survival Project*
>
> **The community may report that what they need is a fully equipped health center with surgical facilities to deal with emergency cases [felt need]. The design team may determine during the needs assessment that there are very few medical emergencies requiring a full health center (relative need). Transport can be organized to take people to the nearest facility. However, infants are dying due to untreated or inappropriately treated cases of diarrhea (normative need). This could be effectively treated at home, if mothers had more knowledge and access to oral rehydration salts.**

Simply by asking the community to state its needs or perceived problems can raise community expectations of a possible solution. If ARC decides in the example above to develop a community health education program, while assisting with very limited upgrading of the existing health facility, the community may feel that ARC has not been responsive to their needs. It is extremely important during the planning process to come to a common understanding of both the fundamental problems to be solved and the best all-around solutions.

The different components of the overall needs assessment require different methods of data collection. For example, felt needs can often be best assessed through Participatory/Rapid Rural Assessment (P/RRA). In contrast to this, normative needs are often determined through the collection of quantitative data and reference to various standards (water quality, infant mortality rates, etc), including those maintained by the government and other agencies. These methods for assessing different types of needs are complementary, and should be used together: neither method of collecting information is sufficient in isolation.

**Stakeholder Analysis**

Any person, group, or organization that can place a claim on an organization's attention, resources, or outputs is considered a stakeholder. The entire range of stakeholders for any given project can be fairly broad and oftentimes it is difficult to completely identify the group. Stakeholder analysis is often limited to beneficiaries, donors, and partners (such as the

ONS), and too often we stop there. Other stakeholders that may also need to be considered include other potential partners: government ministries, community and any other groups and individuals working with the ONS and, sometimes, all the PNSs operating in the country. Stakeholders may also change over the course of implementing the project, but this first stakeholder analysis should be a snapshot of what exists at that time. While the levels of involvement of stakeholders may vary

> **Stakeholder Analysis:**
> *Analyzes the characteristics, roles, and responsibilities of individuals and institutions expected to contribute to or benefit from a project*
>
> □ **List different types of stakeholders for a given project**
> □ **What do you need to know from them?**
> □ **How will you find this out?**

considerably, the failure to anticipate legitimate expectations among some – the Ministry of Health, for example, where a health project is planned – can doom the project to failure. If working in a new environment, be sure to consult with local colleagues, ONS staff, and others to identify the cast of stakeholders.

The basic steps in a stakeholder analysis are:

- Identifying stakeholders, their relative importance, and their stake in the ARC project(s)
- Determining each stakeholder's criteria for judging ARC's performance, and the extent to which the relevant ARC project component meets those criteria
- Determining the ways in which the stakeholder can influence and make an impact on the ARC component.

> *Stakeholder Analysis*
> *Analyzes the characteristics, roles, and responsibilities of individuals and institutions expected to contribute to or benefit from a project*
> □ **Stakeholder analysis is done throughout the needs assessment**
> □ **Stakeholder tools in EOA and Strategic Planning materials may be useful**
> □ **Need for triangulation**
> □ **In general, identify various stakeholder and determine their impressions of:**
>   ■ **Priority problem(s)**
>   ■ **Potential solutions**
>   ■ **Opinion of ARC and NS in facilitating response**
>   ■ **Ideas on sustainability, partners, what's worked, what has not worked in the past, etc.**

*This is the beginning of a negotiation between needs and resources, and this leads to greater precision in refining the project design..*

## 3. Problem Analysis

After a good assessment has been conducted, problem analysis is used to analyze and interpret the information. The better a problem is understood, the better the project can be designed to address it, and the greater the beneficiaries can be assisted.

There are several ways of conducting problem analysis. Before proceeding with the methods of analysis, it is important to define terms precisely as they are used in project design:

> **What is Problem Analysis?**
>
> **A systematic process used to determine causes and consequences of a problem and to link them in a cause-effect relationship.**

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*ARC definitions important for Project Design*

**Problem**: A specific negative situation related to the human condition. **NOTE: This is not the absence of a solution. In this context, high mortality is a problem, lack of money for medicine is not.**

**Cause**: **Underlying factor(s) that exist in the household, community, organization, or otherwise in the external environment that have brought about the problem. Thus drought or inadequate medical service delivery could both be causes of high mortality.**

**Consequence**: **Social, environmental, political or economic conditions, usually negative, that result from the problem. Thus, drought could be causing high mortality resulting in increased rural to urban migration.**

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**Identification of the Problem**

With a complete needs assessment we often find that the beneficiary community has many problems. Many of the problems are interrelated. (However, it is critical to remember that each problem has its own unique cause and effect paradigm.) The needs assessment shows us the breadth of the situation in a target area, but the problem analysis provides us with a tool to go more deeply into the underlying causes and effects of specific problems.

No organization can do all things for all people at the same time. It is therefore important to prioritize which problem the project will address first. Projects that try to work on a wide range of issues are often ineffective. Resources may be spread too thin and the analysis and problem solving which underlie the project may be superficial and fail to hit root causes. Remember that a good needs assessment can lead to the development of different projects that address a range of problems. Just because a starting point is a first priority does not mean that other problems will not be addressed. To determine which problem to target, we often triangulate the most frequently cited problems. Consensus on priority problems emerges when stakeholder assessments converge.

*NB: Development projects typically address causes of problems, while emergency and relief activities deal with the consequences of problems, such as floods forcing relocation.*

There are several steps to undertake within Problem Analysis, including:
1. Writing the Problem Statement
2. Determining Problems, Causes, and Consequences and framing it in a Problem Tree

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3. Prioritizing & selecting  the causes and consequences to be addressed
4. Using Problem Analysis Tools to identify leverage points (i.e. those areas where you are likely to have the most impact)
5. Identifying the potential interventions and tying everything together into a logic statement, the Project Hypothesis

## Problem Statements

Once the problem to address has been selected, it must be framed correctly. A proper problem statement should contain the "Who," "What," and "Where" of the problem.  This is important because causes of a problem can vary from one geographic area to another and from one target group to another. Consider the following example:

| Poor Problem Statement | *"Some poor people in parts of Slavistan do not have enough money to provide good health care for their children, who suffer from diseases for which there are available immunizations."* |
|---|---|

This problem statement does not tell us who is affected or where they are located, and it states the problem as the absence of a solution (lack of money) rather than as the presence of a problem (high disease rates among children). It fails all the criteria that a problem statement should meet (i.e., Who, What, Where).

A better way to phrase it might be:

| Better Problem Statement | *"High measles rates are found in children <5 in urban Slavistan"* |
|---|---|

## Development of Problem Trees

Although the basic concepts of problem analysis are easily understood, there can be different levels and types of causes.  These include causes arising from a community's knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs, causes arising from community/individual behavior, and from conditions.  The relationships of these causal levels with each other, with the problem, and with the consequences are illustrated in the following figure.

**Causes, the problem, and consequences**
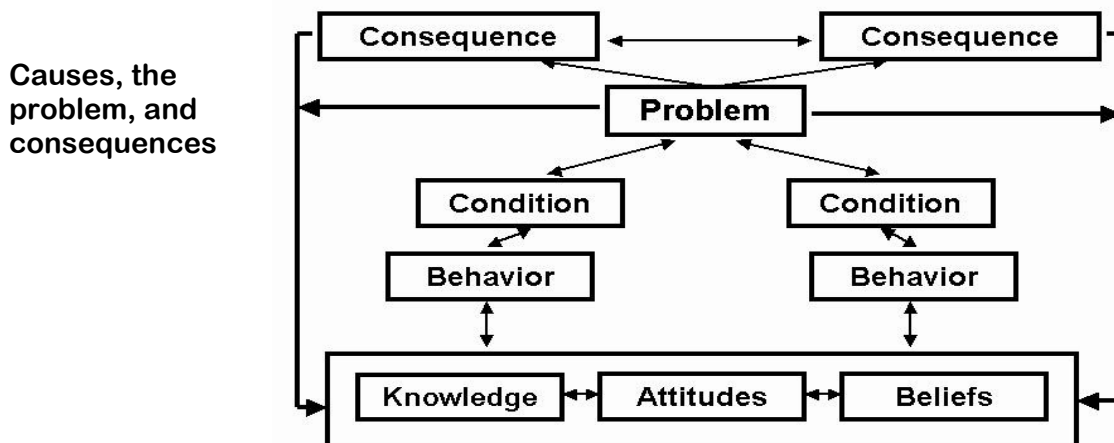
In this figure, in its simplest form, the word **cause** can be substituted for the word **condition.** This diagram illustrates the overall flow from lower level causes up through different causal layers to the problem itself and through to the consequences. Note that this is a feedback system. The consequences can change or reinforce existing knowledge, attitude, and beliefs thereby providing a mechanism either for OR against change. In any given situation some layers of causes may be absent or less significant.
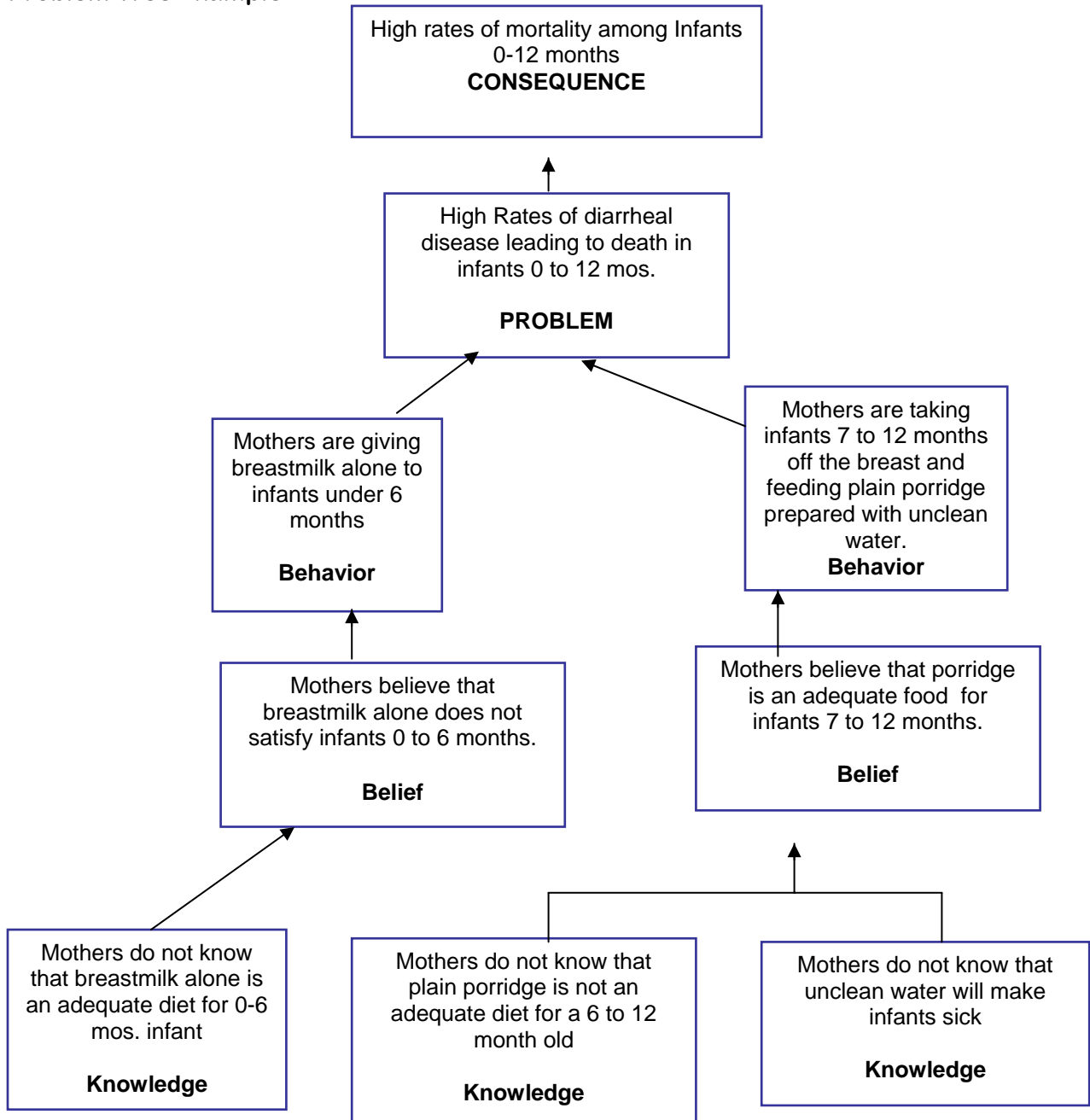
Once the problem is understand in terms of layers, it becomes clearer that certain project interventions can try to break this cycle by addressing the problem through the elimination or reduction of one or more causal streams. The following examples (in table and graphic form) show a set of cause and effect linkages arising out of a problem analysis. In this case, two separate behaviors are contributing to the problem; this means that separate activities and interventions may be needed to deal with the whole problem. This is a common situation. problems rarely have one cause. Choosing where to begin this analysis may be based on available resources, the openness of the community points, and how quickly results are estimated to take.

**Cause and Effect Relationships: Infant Mortality**

| ANALYSIS OF PROBLEM | LEVEL |
|---|---|
| High rates of mortality among infants 0-12 mos.<br>WHY? | CONSEQUENCE |
| Diarrheal disease rates are very high among infants 0-12 mos; many die from diarrhea<br>WHY? | PROBLEM |
| Mothers are giving breastmilk substitutes to infants under 6 months<br>Mothers are taking infants 7 – 12 mos. off the breast and feeding plain porridge prepared with unclean water<br>WHY? | BEHAVIORS |
| Mothers believe that breastmilk alone does not satisfy infants 0-6 mos.<br>Mothers believe that porridge is an adequate food for infants 7 – 12 mos.<br>Grandmothers insist on following traditional practices<br>WHY? | BELIEFS |
| Mothers do not know that unclean water will make infants sick<br>Mothers do not know that plain porridge is not an adequate diet<br>Mothers do not know that an infant does not need other foods besides breastmilk up to 6 mos.<br>Mothers do not know that an infant benefits from breastmilk up to two years. | KNOWLEDGE |

One way to think about the logical steps in identifying causes of a problem is to ask the question "why?" after each level. In answering that question – and there may be more than one answer – you will be moving down the logical structure toward causes. When arriving the lowest point at which you feel the program can contribute toward reducing or eliminating the cause, you are ready to begin the steps in designing a project. In the example above, you may decide to tackle the issue of breastfeeding and weaning behavior by looking at how you can influence women's beliefs about infant nutrition. The "why?" method works well with community groups because the logic is easy to understand, and it moves everyone toward looking for deeper causes of the problem.

**Problem Tree Example**

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                    ┌─────────────────────────────────────┐
                    │  High rates of mortality among Infants│
                    │            0-12 months                │
                    │          CONSEQUENCE                  │
                    └─────────────────────────────────────┘
                                    ▲
                    ┌─────────────────────────────────────┐
                    │     High Rates of diarrheal           │
                    │   disease leading to death in         │
                    │      infants 0 to 12 mos.             │
                    │                                       │
                    │            PROBLEM                    │
                    └─────────────────────────────────────┘
```

High rates of mortality among Infants 0-12 months
**CONSEQUENCE**

High Rates of diarrheal disease leading to death in infants 0 to 12 mos.
**PROBLEM**

Mothers are giving breastmilk alone to infants under 6 months
**Behavior**

Mothers are taking infants 7 to 12 months off the breast and feeding plain porridge prepared with unclean water.
**Behavior**

Mothers believe that breastmilk alone does not satisfy infants 0 to 6 months.
**Belief**

Mothers believe that porridge is an adequate food for infants 7 to 12 months.
**Belief**

Mothers do not know that breastmilk alone is an adequate diet for 0-6 mos. infant
**Knowledge**

Mothers do not know that plain porridge is not an adequate diet for a 6 to 12 month old
**Knowledge**

Mothers do not know that unclean water will make infants sick
**Knowledge**

The problem tree helps to visualize the problem in an integrated way and helps to define intervention strategies. This type of visual, demonstrating the problem, causes, and consequences, often prompts more questions and discussions about whether or not relevant causes have been identified.

When analyzing a problem tree and attempting to interpret it, there are several questions that the analyst should ask:

- *Is each cause-effect link logical?*

- *Can causes be identified at each level in the problem analysis hierarchy? Ask "why?"*

- *What is the relative contribution of each causal stream to the problem? Can good interventions be identified to target the causes that seem most significant?*

- *Do some factors appear as causes in more than one causal stream? Can we potentially achieve a bigger impact more efficiently by addressing those repetitive causes?*

The way in which the findings of a diagnosis and needs assessment can be more easily organized into a set of cause and effect relationships, especially when these are complex, is by constructing a **problem tree**. The causes of the problem are the roots of the tree, the problem itself is the trunk of the tree, and the consequences of the problem are the branches and leaves of the tree. Some problem trees, expanded to their full array, present a daunting challenge. Concentrating on one or two causal streams and partnering with others to address other causal streams will simplify project design. Ultimately, the selection of interventions will depend not only on the problem tree and its identified causes (needs) but also on ARC's and other stakeholders' interests, capacities, and resources.

**A Note on Causes and Consequences in Emergency and Development Projects**

Some project designs focus on the causes of a problem, while others target the consequences. In general, emergency relief projects target the consequences of problems such as floods, earthquakes, droughts, and other disasters, by providing immediate assistance with food, shelter, medical needs, or water and sanitation. In contrast to this, development projects in the same areas may look at the same communities and, recognizing their vulnerability to these disasters, try either to improve communities' coping ability and preparedness for the next event or to address the economic or other circumstances that cause communities to live in disaster-prone areas. Other development projects might be directed to other problems by defining and implementing interventions that target their underlying causes; for example health, water and sanitation, agricultural development, or economic development projects.

**Selecting Causes of the Problem to Address in Your Project**

The basis for defining specific interventions to fix your stated problem is the selection of causes or causal streams from the problem tree. Just as the problems to address had to be prioritized, causes or causal streams must also be prioritized. Each design team should try to establish criteria based on the ARC filters of needs, resources, capacities, and interests. Two of the primary criteria for doing this are:

*Which causal streams are more responsible for a larger part of the problem--those whose reduction or elimination will contribute more to reducing the overall problem?*

*Which causes were explicitly identified in any parts of the needs analysis?*
These include issues related to felt, normative, or relative needs. If causes related to felt needs are selected, this will help to increase beneficiary involvement and project buy-in.

*Which causes do we have capacities to address?*