

VII. Problem analysis

Definition

Problems are states of affairs or facts that cause difficulties and suffering or, at least, discomfort. They are what make a situation unsatisfactory.

A crucial moment in situation analysis is when problems must be taken into account. It is not, however, the only element and not too much time should be spent on it to the detriment of strategy building (what to do to change things). There is a great temptation to dwell on problem analysis because problems are what bothers us. They have also to do with aspects which are to a certain extent known to us and which it is easy to talk about. Nonetheless, exhaustive analysis of problems is impossible because of the extreme complexity of reality. Generally, there will be agreement on defining one or more key problems to serve as a reference point in planning work.

Problem analysis does not automatically lead to solutions

Contrary to what may be too often believed, problem analysis does not always provide solutions.

We tend to think that a solution is simply the pure and simple negation of a problem (problem: children are malnourished => solution: feed them). This tendency can lead us to a stalemate rather than considering more effective solutions.

Problems are subjective

Problems have no "objective" existence. They exist for – and only for those – who perceive them as such.

For example, the fact that young children play in rubbish dumps may not be perceived as a problem by parents (e.g. the case of refuse recycling in Quito), or by the children themselves. It is however unacceptable from a social worker's perspective. A state of affairs therefore only becomes a problem when it is regarded as such.

7.1. First step in problem analysis: pinpointing the main problem

Problem analysis does not simply mean **drawing up an inventory of what is wrong and choosing where to place priority**. It also has a second, fundamental dimension which consists of acquiring greater understanding and ascertaining what is wrong. This time, the basic question is not **“What is wrong?”**. It is more a matter of understanding **“how”** and **“why”** it is wrong in order for a given problem to be a priority.

The question has also to be asked – and this is of capital importance – whether the problem identified is in fact the **“real”** problem. In other words, the question must be asked **whether behind what is believed to be a serious problem, there is not an even more serious problem** not spotted early in the analysis. For example, in a region of the Andes where there are many malnourished children, the main problem was identified as the mothers' inability to prepare balanced meals. Subsequently, it was realised that although this inability might be very real, there was an even more serious problem: fathers were selling highly nutritional vegetables grown by the family to buy consumer goods and mothers had no say in the decision. The mothers therefore found themselves in a situation where they had to prepare food of little nutritional value but which was **“filling”** (pasta, in particular), food that fathers bought with the income from what they had sold. Persisting in thinking that the main problem was the mothers' failure to provide a **“nutritive diet”** would probably have led to deciding to take action to remedy this aspect. However, that would obviously not have resolved anything as it was not the real problem. Even worse, by doing this it would have been implied that the mothers were responsible for malnutrition in their children, which was not the case.

7.2. Second step in problem analysis: confronting points of view

After the first analysis, a second stage should take place in which the points of view of the team and those of beneficiaries and partners are aired. This can give rise to enriching exchange on condition that it is conducted as a genuine **exchange of views**. As already mentioned, this means telling one another how we see things while making a special effort to understand the point of view of the other party. Ensuing discussion is aimed at understanding why there are divergences in perception and not at trying to establish who is right.

It is only once this has been done that it is possible to start seeking consensus, prioritising problems, and possibly highlighting relations of causality.

7.3. Placing a situation in its context

A situation can never be separated from the rest of society, but represents only one “part” of it. It is therefore important to **place the situation in the larger context to which it belongs**. If we are concerned about the rejection of young single mothers in a country, it is not possible to disregard the more general matter of the relationship between men and women in this society. What is more, the same situation may exist elsewhere in the same society and is addressed by other stakeholders. It is also important to take an interest in this aspect without being side-tracked by it. The objective here is not to lose sight of the fact that problems are never isolated and that in order to address them effectively they have to be situated in their broader context.

7.4. Setting a situation in its historical background

As already said, a situation is never without a history, in many cases a long history closely linked with that of those playing an important role in the stakeholders’ landscape, for example interest groups. Generally, there is not a single history but several, indeed as many histories as there are interest groups. Knowing the variety of histories will be so many assets in building a “workable” strategy. In practice, to piece together histories, different groups are asked to explain the present situation, for example on the basis of a simple question such as “Give me your version of the history of this situation, how did it come to that, what were the main stages?”. Each person gives his or her version, thereby opening the way for exchange.

Key questions in problem analysis

- *What are the main problems **from our point of view**?*
 - *What **order of importance** do we give them? Do all members of the team give them the same order of importance? If not, why not? Do these differences hamper our action? If so, what solutions can we find?*
 - ***Who is experiencing the problems** we have identified?*
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- **Do those experiencing the problems perceive them as such?** If not, why not? If so, do they give them the same importance as us? If not, why not?
 - What are the main problems **from the beneficiaries' point of view?** Which group of beneficiaries: children, men, women, parents, etc.
 - Where there is a difference in perception between beneficiaries and ourselves, might this create an obstacle to our support work? If so, how can it be remedied?
 - What are the main problems **from other stakeholders' point of view?** Do they have the same perception as ourselves? If not, why not? (refer to the stakeholder analysis). Can this create problems in collaborating with those who are our partners? If so, how can this be remedied?
 - Have problems been situated in the broader context?
 - What is the history of the situation, how has it come about, what were the major phases?
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Summary:

Taking problems into account is a crucial moment in situation analysis (steps: inventory of problems, acquiring deeper understanding of and familiarity with problems, seeking out the real problem, exchanging views (team, beneficiaries, partners). The situation must also be set in its context and history.

VIII. Stakeholder identification and analysis

Definition

A stakeholder is a person, group or institution likely to play a role in a project or be affected by its actions, for better or worse, directly or indirectly. Among the stakeholders is the **target group**, for example, single mothers. It is within this target group that **beneficiaries** will be defined, i.e. those with whom Terre des hommes will be working directly, for example young mothers living in a poor district of town and facing rejection.

8.1. Inventory of main stakeholders

Before starting on the analysis, an **inventory of the main stakeholders** has to be made, i.e. those who matter most with regard to the project and situation.

Of the stakeholders, attention must be paid:

- to **beneficiaries** in particular;
- then to direct or indirect **partners**, i.e. those with whom Terre des hommes has already developed or will develop relations in the course of action. In most cases this means:
 - Terre des hommes' **local partners**
 - **Other NGO** with which a relation of collaboration exists in the framework of the project
 - **State institutions** (ministries, social services, health structures, prison administration, municipality, etc.) with which the project must collaborate or negotiate
 - **Other players** in the same sector (institutions, NGO, international organisations, etc.)

Below are a number of aspects to be taken into particular account:

1. **Status and importance** of a stakeholder: is the stakeholder essential (a protagonist) or is it a minor stakeholder?
2. The current or expected **degree of co-operation**: decision-making, consultation, information.
3. The main **qualities of our collaboration**: confidence, common interests, etc.

4. The **main obstacles** to our collaboration: lack of partner's legitimacy, poor communication, disagreement, opposition, etc.
5. The **main advantages** to be obtained by the project from this collaboration: sustainability, efficiency, etc.

This information then enables us to better assess the worth of current alliances or to envisage new ones. It may also help in seeking ways out of any conflicts or difficulties we encounter with some stakeholders, or to be armed against them.

8.2. Analysis of main stakeholders

The subsequent analysis of stakeholders can cover a considerable number of aspects: analysis of **decision-making** power, analysis of **resources** accessible to or used by stakeholders, analysis of **relations** between the different stakeholder groups, analysis of **activities** conducted by major families of stakeholders (what people are already doing without our assistance), analysis of **practices** for activities directly concerning the field of intervention of the project.

Analysis of stakes and interests in the field of intervention of the project deserves special attention as they lie at the origins of stakeholders' positions and choices. Indeed, stakeholders' behaviour depends largely on what they have to win or lose in a given situation. Questions to be asked are: what has each party to gain or lose by project action? What is the position of the project in the turmoil of their interests?

PROTAGONISTS			
Stakeholders	Supposed interests	Potential interests	Comments
Other players			
Stakeholders	Supposed interests	Potential interests	Comments

This analysis will make it possible to pinpoint converging or opposing interests and identify **allies and adversaries** among stakeholders.

By **allies** we mean stakeholders whose position or action is positive for our project. They may be partners, where we are collaborating with them, or stakeholders with whom we do not necessarily have contact. A newspaper, for example, may uphold a position similar to our own by means of articles, without us asking it to do so.

By **adversaries**, we mean stakeholders whose position is opposed to ours or who act against our position. Here again, there may or may not be direct contact with these stakeholders. A stakeholder may put obstacles in the way of our action; for example, an authority may forbid us access to an area of operation. In such case, we make contact with this stakeholder. On the other hand, a religious or political group may advocate positions opposed to ours without us necessarily having contact with these stakeholders.

Having identified allies and adversaries, the positions of these stakeholders can be more clearly determined on the basis of the following criteria:

Allies			Adversaries		
Formal	de facto	Potential	Declared	de facto	Potential
Those with whom we have an expressed agreement (even though it may be only verbal).	Those with whom we collaborate or who are going in the same direction as us, but with whom we have not made any agreement.	Those who might become our allies.	Those openly declaring themselves hostile to our action or manner of doing or seeing things.	Those hostile to us without having openly expressed it.	Those who might under certain conditions become adversaries.

- This allows closer analyses which might lead us to discover certain things, such as:
- While we have entered into an agreement with stakeholder X, the partnership is not working. This is a formal but not a de facto ally.
 - Stakeholder Y, with whom we have had no contact, is intervening in a way beneficial for our project. This is a de facto ally even though there is no collaboration on our part.
 - Stakeholder Z is neutral with regard to us but could become an adversary should we adopt a certain position.

Particular attention should be devoted to potential stakeholders. In such cases, we should try to imagine what the interests and stakes are which might make them into allies or adversaries. This can be useful in mobilising a stakeholder in our favour, showing a stakeholder what there is to gain by collaborating with us. For example, a project aiming at re-establishing a family environment for children in care is seeking to have institutions – in which they are housed – closed. Educators are in general opposed to the project as they fear they will lose their jobs. In one of these institutions, the team supported by Terre des hommes has been able to show the educators that it is in their interest to work in an open setting as they will be more effective this way as well as keeping their employment. The institution was partially closed in favour of an open structure.

A stakeholder analysis will be **valuable in defining our objective.** Our project will be all the more relevant – and efficient – if we intervene in lines of operation where we have a **comparative advantage over other partners.** For Terre des hommes, these are the **lines of concentration** selected in the strategic plan and where the Foundation has committed resources for capitalisation efforts.

Key questions in stakeholder analysis:

- *Who are the most important stakeholders (inventory)?*
 - *Analysis of **activities** conducted by major stakeholder families: who does what, where, with what effect for whom, etc. Of these activities, special interest is to be taken in **initiatives** concerning our field of intervention: we will look at what people are doing already without our aid, how they are already coping.*
 - *Analysis of **practices**: how people do what they are or will be doing, particularly in all activities directly concerning the project's field of intervention.*
 - *Analysis of **decision-making power**: are we dealing with stakeholders who have control over their own decisions, or rather who are dependent on other, possibly hidden, instances? Who decides what within the prevailing environment? By which methods?*
 - *Analysis of the **interests and stakes** in the project's field of intervention: what do different parties have to gain or lose by the project's action? How is the project situated in the turmoil of their interests? Who are our allies and who our adversaries?*
 - *Analysis of **resources** accessible to or used by stakeholders: who has or uses which resources to do what?*
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- Analysis of **relations** between different stakeholder groups: co-operation? mutual assistance? exploitation? conflict? Who is allied to whom to do what? Who is opposed to whom and over what?
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Summary:

The stakeholder analysis enables us to intervene in those sectors where we have a comparative advantage over other partners. The inventory of major stakeholders will enable us to better evaluate current alliances and consider new ones. The analysis of interests and stakes will allow identification of allies and adversaries.