

PROBLEM TREE

Scale Toolkit



The contents and templates included in this toolkit were developed in collaboration with [Better Purpose](#).

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WHAT IS IT?



Photo: Hippocampus



A tool to define and understand your problem.

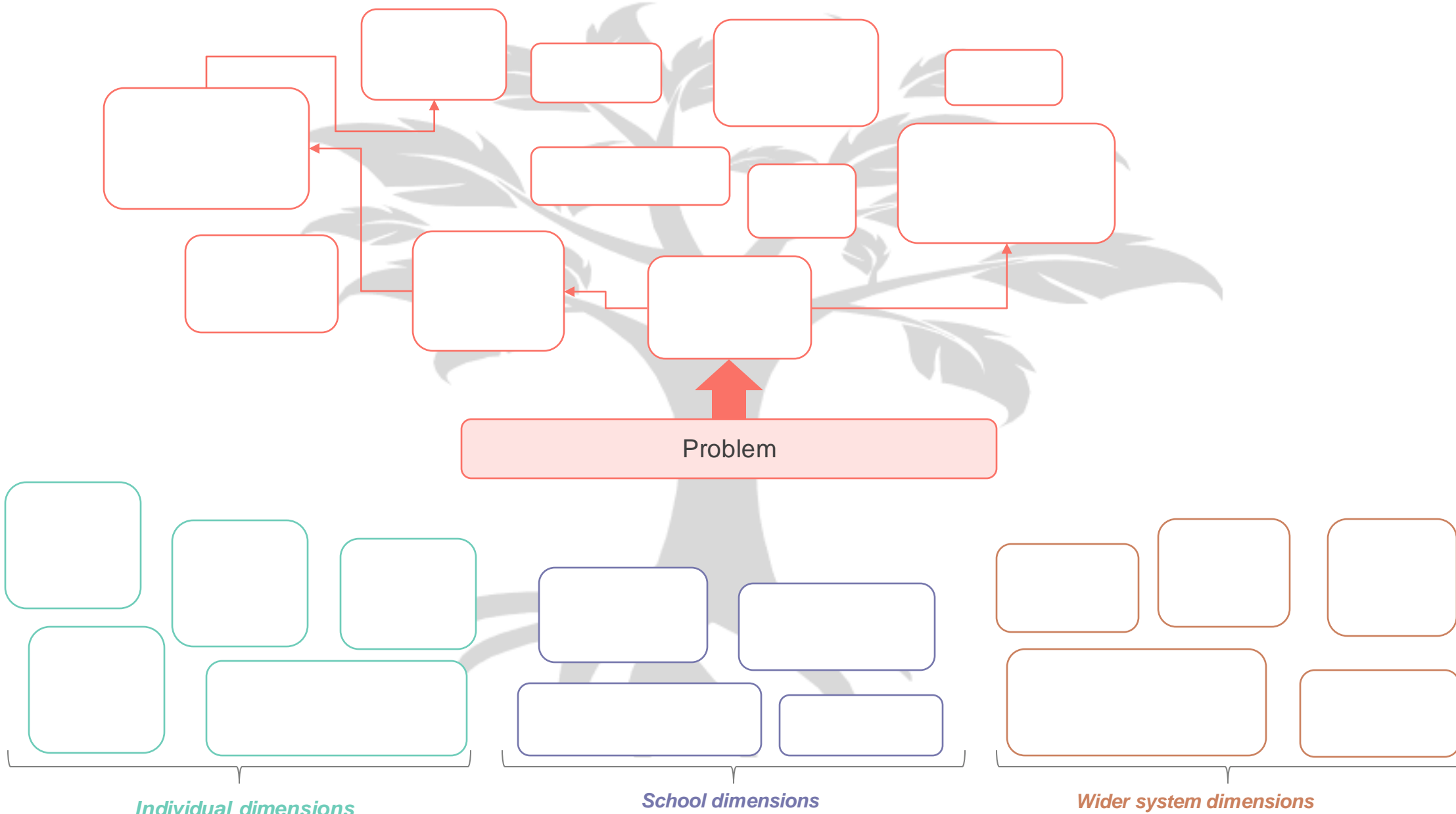
Your first step is to clearly define the problem you are tackling. Without understanding the problem, we cannot begin to solve it.

A problem tree is a visual tool where you draw a tree, with the trunk as your main problem, roots as underlying causes, and branches as effects or symptoms of the problem.

Starting your project with a problem tree helps you lay a strong foundation for your work.

- A problem tree helps your team see the real issue (“root”) and tells it apart from what it looks like on the surface (“leaves”). This is important because it helps you understand the problem fully. That way, any solutions you create actually solve the real issue, not just what it appears to be.
- When you draw out the problem and its causes, it helps everyone on your team understand it the same way. This makes it easier to work together, talk about the issue, and aim for the same goal.
- A problem tree also shows how different parts of the problem are connected. This helps you figure out not only where to step in but also what other things might happen when you do.
- A good problem tree can help you explain the problem to people outside your team, like partners or people who might fund your work. It quickly shows them how complex the issue is.





HOW TO DEVELOP THE PROBLEM TREE

Step 1: Find Your Main Problem (“What is the problem?”)

The first step is identifying the main problem or issue that your organization is focusing on. This should be an issue that is

- 1) broad enough to understand the general aim of your work, and
- 2) specific enough that you can link it to your activities and distinguish your organization's focus from other similar organizations’.

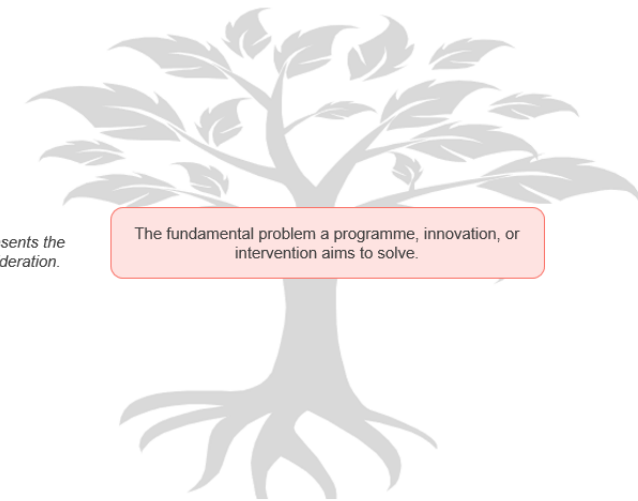
Your problem should be succinct – a sentence or two maximum.

WHAT FUNDAMENTAL PROBLEM DOES THE PROGRAM AIM TO SOLVE?

Problem

The trunk of the tree represents the main problem under consideration.

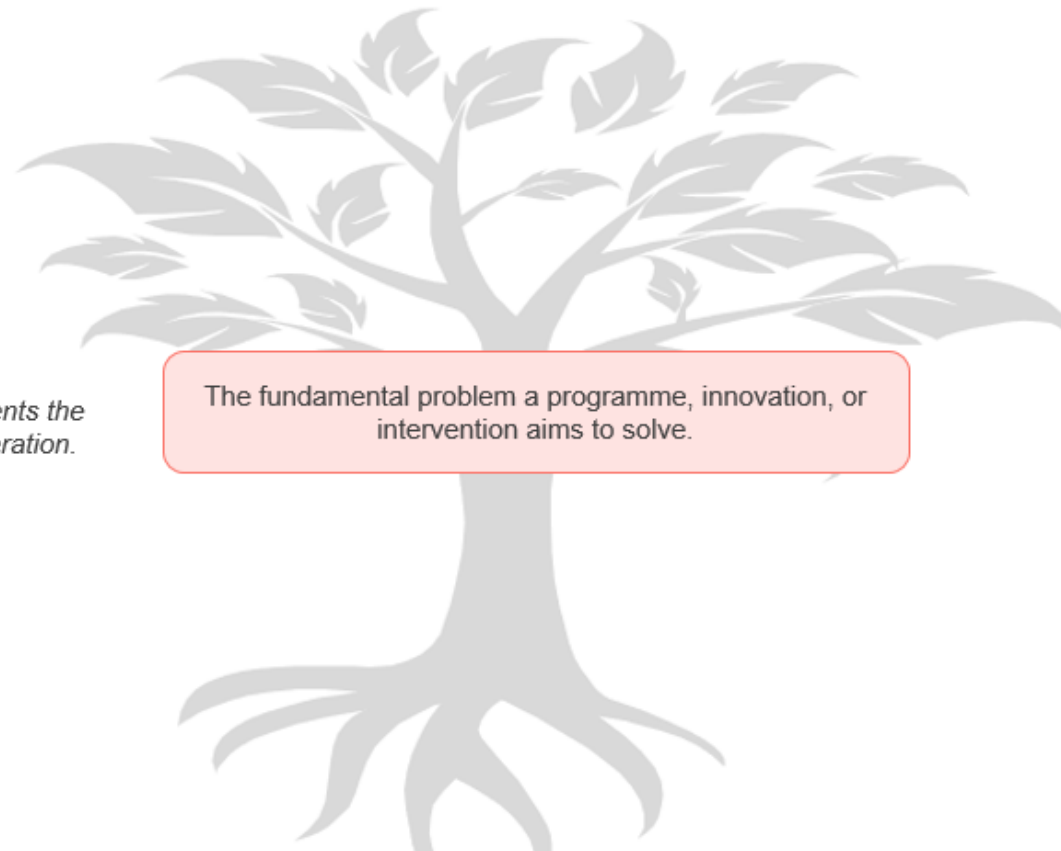
The fundamental problem a programme, innovation, or intervention aims to solve.



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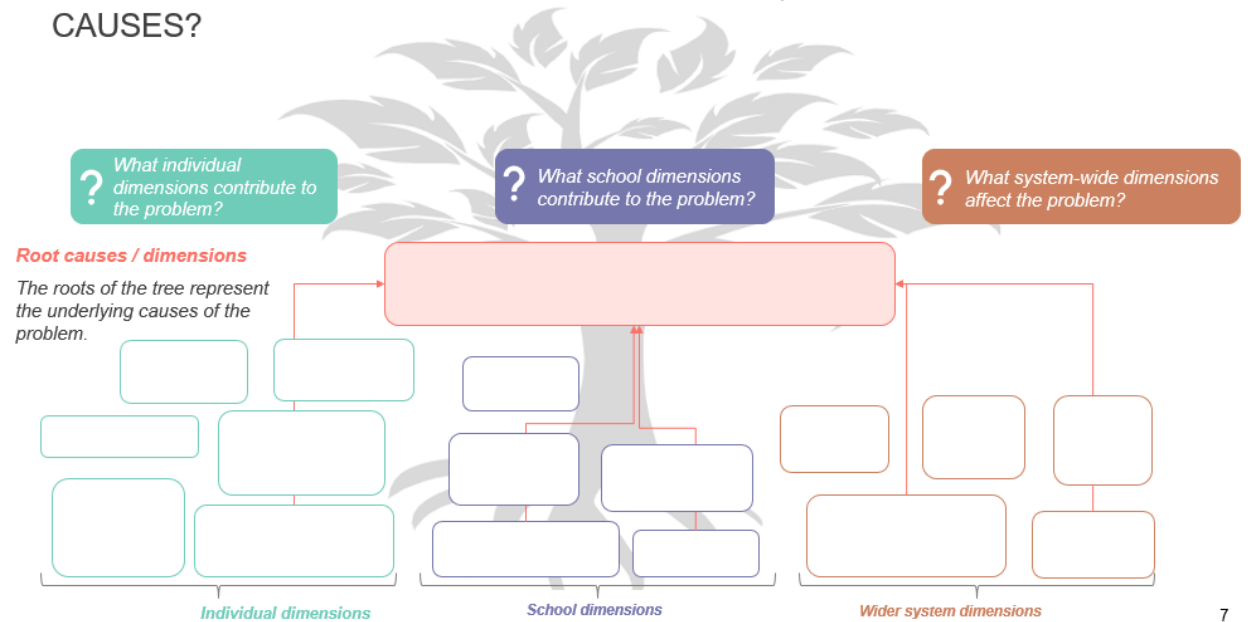


The fundamental problem a programme, innovation, or intervention aims to solve.

Step 2: Discover the Causes (“Why is it happening?”)

- After you've identified the main problem, it's time to explore its underlying “root” causes. These are the root problems that lead to the main issue you're addressing.
- It can be useful to put the root causes into larger categories, which we can think of as "buckets". This helps us visualize the problem more clearly and understand how the different root causes are connected. For example, in the the diagram above, there are 3 "buckets": individual dimensions, school dimensions and wider system dimensions.

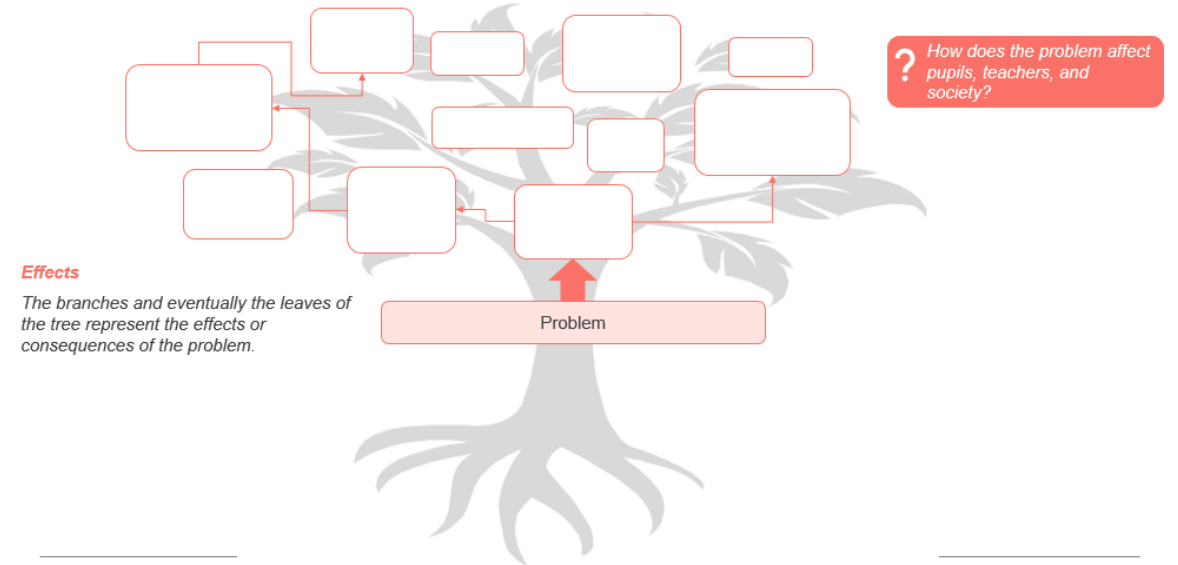
ONCE THE PROBLEM HAS BEEN DETERMINED, WHAT ARE THE ROOT CAUSES?



Step 3: Identify the Effects (“What happens because of this problem?”)

- The final step in building your problem tree is to identify the effects or consequences of the main problem. These are the negative outcomes that arise because of the problem. These effects become the branches of your tree, spreading out from the trunk at the top of your paper or whiteboard.
- Similar to identifying the “roots”, you may want to group these effects into broader categories, or "buckets". Categories such as "Academic Outcomes", "Health Outcomes", "Economic Outcomes", and "Social Outcomes" can help you pinpoint the different areas the problem touches.

WHAT ARE THE CONSEQUENCES OR EFFECTS OF THE PROBLEM?



HOW TO BUILD IT

Problem tree for Gyan Shala

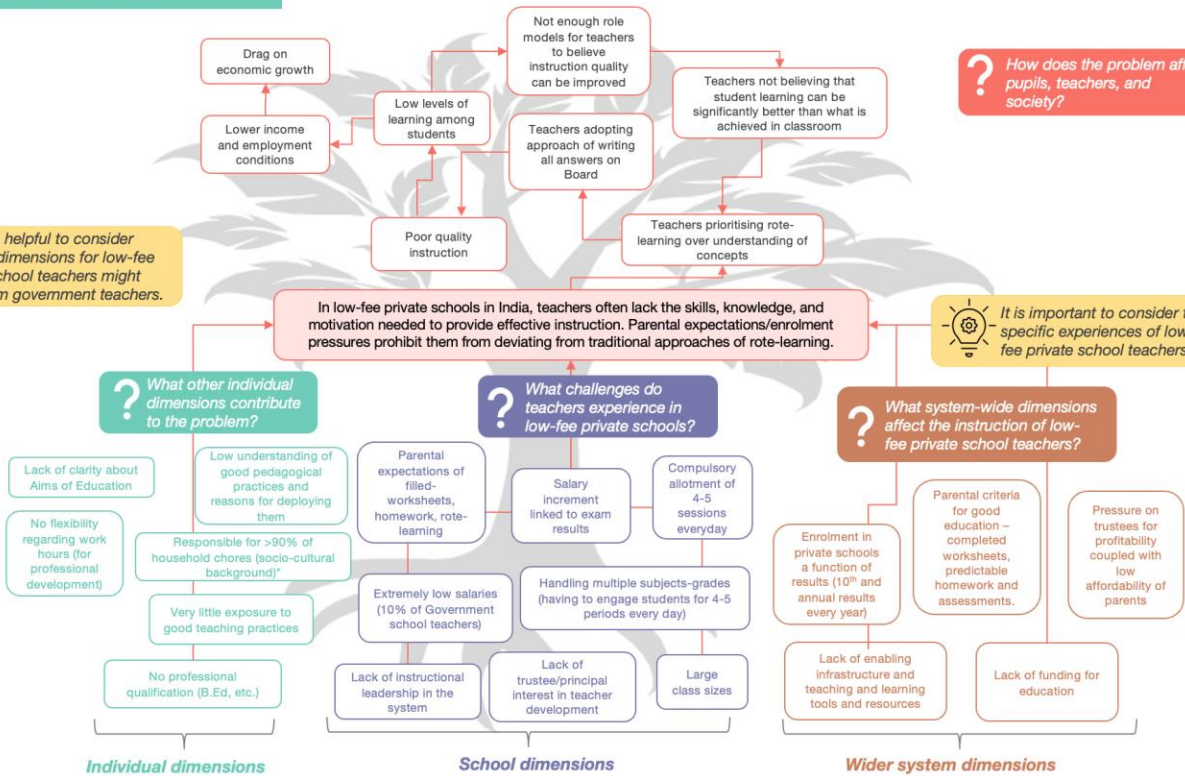
→ The arrows represent direct relationships



? How does the problem affect pupils, teachers, and society?

It may be helpful to consider how the dimensions for low-fee private school teachers might differ from government teachers.

It is important to consider the specific experiences of low-fee private school teachers.



The tree can help you see the connections between different issues and the core problem you're trying to solve. This exercise can help your team gain a deeper understanding of the problem and start thinking about possible solutions for your Theory of Change.

An example of Gyan Shala's Problem Tree may help visualise what the final product could look like!

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