

OL 241 Assignment Two Special Discussion on Problem Definition

Online Learning: OL 241 Writing Your Local Climate Action Plan: <https://csd-i.org/climate-change/climate-change-action-plan-241/>

Center for Sustainable Development: <https://csd-i.org/>

Special Discussion on Problem Definition

Problems, underlying causes, and negative impacts.

When you met with your community to do the Ten-Seed needs assessment, they presented you with a mixture of needs, problems, underlying causes, grievances, and negative impacts. Your job as a facilitator was to encourage them to say everything that was on their mind. Their needs assessment vote prioritized the three or four things that are the most important to them—so this will simplify your job of developing a climate plan.

But first, your job is to be an interpreter. You will need to sort their mixed array of challenges into three things:

1. One or two (two maximum) important problems (that they prioritized)
2. The underlying causes of those problems
3. The long-term negative impacts that the problems cause

Problems for the purposes of this course are the visible and compelling elements of a climate challenge. These are the things that human beings can relate to. For example, crops dying in a drought-stricken field, or fields damaged by floodwaters are visible, compelling problems. You can see these; you can feel the pain and the farmers' suffering. You can relate to them. But if the community listed (for example) climate change-induced drought—realize that this is not a problem—it is a cause of a problem. Look for the visible, compelling problem that droughts cause.

Underlying causes in this course are the components that are the causes of the ultimate problems that your community identified. Droughts (in our example) and a lack of knowledge of potential solutions are good examples of the underlying causes that lead to crops dying in the field. Underlying causes tend to be related to events (drought) or knowledge (lack of knowledge of solutions to climate challenges).

Negative impacts are the long-term negative outcomes of the problem. Flood-damaged fields can reduce a farmer's income and take years to heal, reducing a farmer's ability to lead a prosperous, meaningful, productive life. Negative impacts are long-term outcomes—1 to 3 years away. They are the ultimate reason why we are interested in working in climate action plans. It is terrible to see damaged fields—and you want to fix them right away—but the ultimate goal is to return the farmer to healthy crop production. So your project is going to address the immediate problem (damaged fields) with the long-term goal (positive impact) of: the ability of farm families to lead the productive, meaningful, prosperous lives they desire, and to be able to contribute to the continued development of their community.

Therefore, your job in evaluating the community needs assessment has two main components:

1. Problem/cause/negative impact

- a. Figure out what the visible, compelling problem is (if all that the community comes up with are causes, ask them about what the ultimate problem is or use your observational skills).
- b. Figure out what the underlying cause is for that problem.
- c. Figure out what the long-term impacts are.
- d. Fit them into an outline exactly like the one in Magee Project Example Assignment 1.

2. Learning experience

Keep your problem/cause/impact outline short (two things maximum) and incredibly simple. One goal of the course is to learn how to develop projects—and you need to start off with a simple project to learn the steps. If your community raised 7 or 8 challenges to be addressed—instead of 2 or 3—you can revisit them next year and develop action plans for those challenges also—but only after you have learned how to do it in this course. If you are going to benefit from this course, you need a very, very simple project.