

# ROOT CAUSES TREE ACTIVITY

**Objective:** to understand the concept of a “root cause” and start looking at solving problems on a deeper level.

**Introduction:** Sometimes when we look at a problem, we forget about the deeper problems –the issues that cause your issue. To find those root causes, we think of a problem like a tree.

*Draw a tree on flipchart paper, using a sample issue to demonstrate. As you explain the roots and leaves, ask people to share additional causes and effects.*

- **The visible problem is the TRUNK** (ex. Domestic violence). This is the part of the problem you easily see.
- **The causes of that problem are the ROOTS** (ex. Family history of violence, feeling powerless, history of being violated/oppressed/disrespected). You find these by asking: *WHY* does this problem happen? You can go even deeper by finding the roots of the roots (ex. *WHY* do some people feel powerless?).
- **The effects, or symptoms, of the problem are the LEAVES.** These are what grows if the problem continues. (Ex. People victimized, cycle of violence continues, deaths).

Do an example together: As a group, pick a problem and find its roots and leaves.

*If your group doesn't understand the tree yet, sometimes it's helpful to use the example of having a cold to get the point across.*

- *What are the reasons you get a cold (the roots)? Germs, not washing hands, not dressing warmly enough, etc.*
- *What are your symptoms if you have a cold (the leaves)? Coughing, sneezing, fever, etc.*

Try it by yourselves: Pairs can try the Root Causes Tree on their own with their own topics/issues.

Ask folks to consider:

- **What happens if you try to solve the problem by cutting off the leaves?** (the tree just keeps growing, and the tree grows back)
- **What happens if you try to solve the problem by cutting off the roots?** (the whole tree dies!).

This is why it's important to try to solve a problem at the root level.

***How could you change your project to tackle the root causes of your issue?***