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WELCOME TO THE ECO LEADERS GUIDE!

Over the next few pages, you'll find **'Chapter 2: Developing an Advocacy Position'** from the Eco Leaders Guide. Use the hyperlinks below to quickly navigate to specific sections, activity guides, worksheets, templates or other resources.

Click here to return to the main Eco Leaders Guide website.

Eco Leaders Guide

WWF's Environmental Education and Youth Advocacy Toolkit for the Mekong Region

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CHAPTER 2

DEVELOPING AN ADVOCACY POSITION

INTRODUCTION

In Chapter 1 you explored a number of seemingly entrenched environmental issues that your country and/or community is facing. You may feel overwhelmed by the scope of the problems and unsure about how to help solve them. Don't stress out, as no one can work on all these issues. What makes most sense is to **focus your energy and passion on the one issue that inspires and motivates you the most**. While the urgency of certain issues is important, the sustainability and staying power of your advocacy work is even more crucial.

Concentrating on one issue that you are passionate about will provide you with the experience, drive and resilience to keep working towards solutions. Everyone has a specific environmental concern that resonates with them deeply. Identifying and dedicating yourself to that issue is essential for long-term commitment and impact.

WHAT YOU WILL GAIN FROM WORKING THROUGH THIS CHAPTER OF THE TOOLKIT

Chapter 2 is all about finding the issue that you connect with most, and then exploring the issue deeply so that you feel capable and confident in your position when engaging with and addressing people of different perspectives, different ages, different economic statuses, and even different positions of power and decision-making roles. By working through the series of systems thinking analysis tools, you and your team will build and strengthen your knowledge base regarding the root cause drivers and dynamic, systemic causal relationships that influence the issue you are working on. The insights you gain from using these tools will empower you to ask the right questions and connect with the appropriate individuals when strategizing and conducting your research on the issue. Creating a well-thought-out research plan is essential for laying a solid groundwork to effectively convey a message that strikes a chord with your specific group of stakeholders.

Prior to delving into your research plan, we will explore some suggested research approaches that you may wish to employ for your research endeavors. These methods include engaging in interviews with important stakeholders, utilizing in-person or online survey questionnaires, conducting focus group sessions, and/or organizing workshops.

Within this chapter, you will find four tools that can be utilized sequentially, leveraging the insights obtained from each tool to inform the next one, culminating in the final tool, before moving on to your research plan using the provided template. Alternatively, you have the flexibility to select only the tools that you find most beneficial before immersing yourself in your research.

TOOLS IN THIS CHAPTER

Choose your issue

TOOL:

- 2.1 Issue Passion and Concern Rating

Diving deeper into your focus issue

TOOL:

- 2.2 Systems Iceberg
- 2.3 PESTLE
- 2.4 Connection Circle

Developing your research plan

TOOL:

- 2.5 Research Plan Template

Chapter 2 Tools & Template Description

- **Issue Passion and Concern Rating:** If you have many issues you're interested in but can't decide where to focus your efforts, the Passion and Concern Rating Tool can help you narrow this down to one. This tool allows you to evaluate your level of passion and concern for various issues across three main topic areas, helping you identify the issue that most inspires you to take action.
- **Systems Iceberg:** Working through the Systems Iceberg model helps you uncover deeper insights into complex issues by analyzing underlying structures and mental models that influence visible events and patterns. Note: The outputs from the Systems Iceberg analysis, especially at the systems level, can be explored more deeply using the PESTLE analysis tool.
- **PESTLE:** A PESTLE analysis helps you gain a comprehensive understanding of the Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Legal, and Environmental contexts influencing your chosen issue, which will help you to develop an effective advocacy strategy. Note: Insights from both the Systems Iceberg and PESTLE analysis will inform the elements that you can use with the Connection Circle tool.
- **Connection Circle:** This is a tool to help you visualize and understand the complex interactions and dependencies among different components within your issue, promoting a more holistic approach to your advocacy efforts.
- **Research Plan Template:** provides you with a structured approach to identifying stakeholders and gathering, organizing, and analyzing information, enhancing your ability to effectively address and develop a base foundation for your future advocacy work.

CASE STUDY

An advocacy group from northern Thailand leveraged data and research to hold the government accountable for neglecting its duty to protect public health. Their research revealed that the safe dust standards of PM 2.5 were frequently exceeded in Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, Lamphun, and Mae Hong Son from January to April each year. As a result, about 1,700 people, including activists, academics from Chiang Mai University, and local residents, filed a lawsuit in the Administrative Court against the Prime Minister and the National Environment Commission. They accused these entities of failing to address the high levels of annual smog density, which they claim is shortening their lives by about five years.

The group demanded the Prime Minister use Section 9 of the 1992 Environmental Quality Promotion and Protection Act when a serious disaster occurs by ordering concerned agencies to tackle the problem. They also demanded that the commission abide by the government's action plan to tackle the dust problem that was announced in 2019.

As a result, the Chiang Mai Administrative Court, in its ruling, mandated the National Environmental Commission to propose **"preventive methods to solve pollution both short and long term"** within the stipulated 90-day period.

Chiang Mai court gives govt 90 days for plan to combat smog

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Haze renders the iconic Doi Suthep mountain completely invisible from Huay Kaew Road in Chiang Mai on April 7, 2023. (Photo: Dave Kendall)

Source: Bangkok Post

Press Release > Air Pollution | Climate & Energy | The issues we work on

Thai Court rules on PRTR implementation to be carried out by Industry Ministry

Greenpeace Southeast Asia
August 29, 2023 • 0 Comments

Source: Greenpeace Southeast Asia

CHOOSING YOUR ISSUE

Choosing an issue to advocate for is a deeply personal decision that often stems from a combination of passion, personal experiences, knowledge, and a desire to create positive change. In this toolkit, we are mostly interested in three key topics: 1) sustainable freshwater ecosystem management; 2) climate change; and 3) renewable energy. There are many issues that connect with each of these three topic areas, some of which are special to one topic, and others that can be interrelated.

Remember that advocacy is a journey, and it's okay to evolve and adapt your focus over time as you learn and grow in your advocacy work. By choosing an issue that aligns with your values and interests, you can make a meaningful impact and contribute to positive change in your community and beyond.

Here are some things you can do to help you choose your advocacy issue:

- **Identify your passions and interests:** To be an effective advocate, you should be passionate about the issues related to the three main topic areas and clear about the changes you seek. This passion fuels your commitment and drives you to achieve your advocacy goals.
    - What environmental issues are you most passionate about? What makes you feel frustrated?

- **Reflect on your personal experiences:** Reflect on your personal experiences, challenges, or injustices you've faced or seen. These personal ties often fuel a compelling advocacy mission.
    - Do you have any personal experiences or connections to a particular environmental problem?

- **Research and educate yourself:** Dive into researching issues you care about. Understand the root causes, current challenges, and possible solutions. This knowledge will guide you in choosing the right focus for your advocacy efforts.
    - Is there sufficient data and research available to support advocacy efforts on this issue?
    - Can you identify credible sources of information and experts in the field?
    - What are the current policies and regulations related to this issue?
    - Are there upcoming policy changes or opportunities for advocacy within the legal framework?

- **Consider the impact and urgency:** Consider how urgent and impactful different causes are. Some issues might need immediate attention and have widespread effects, while others could be less urgent.
    - Are there any emerging environmental issues that need urgent attention?
    - Which environmental problems pose the greatest immediate threat to ecosystems or human health?
    - Which environmental issues are most pressing in your local community?
    - How do these issues affect the health, economy, and well-being of your community members?

- **Assess your skills and resources:** Think about what you're good at, like communicating, organizing, fundraising, researching, or networking. Figure out how you can use these skills to powerfully support the cause you care about.
  - Do you have access to the necessary resources and information to effectively advocate for this issue?

- **Connect with communities and organizations:** Get involved with communities and groups that share your interests. Join events, volunteer, or discussions to learn from those who are already making an impact in advocacy.
  - Are there existing organizations or groups working on this issue that you can collaborate with?
  - Are there potential partners (NGOs, community groups, academic institutions) that can support your advocacy?

- **Listen and learn from others:** Stay open to new ideas and different opinions. Make an effort to talk and learn from people with diverse backgrounds and viewpoints to deepen your understanding of the world around you.

- **Evaluate the feasibility and sustainability of your efforts:** Think about how realistic and sustainable it is to advocate for a specific issue.
  - Check if you have the time, resources, and support necessary to dedicate to long-term advocacy.
  - What mechanisms can you potentially put in place to maintain momentum and support for this issue?

- **Trust your instincts:** Ultimately, go with your gut instincts and pick an advocacy issue that resonates with you. Your passion and commitment are key to powering your efforts and making a meaningful impact.

Use this Passion and Concern Rating tool to gauge how passionate or concerned you are about various issues within the three main topics.

Tool 2.1: Issue Passion and Concern Rating – What Issue Are You Most Passionate And Concerned About?

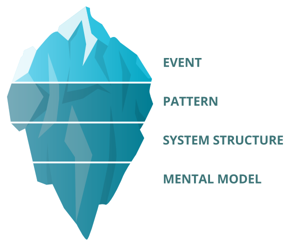
DIVE DEEPER INTO YOUR FOCUS ISSUE

What do you already know about this issue?
Everyone starts with some knowledge about an issue, even if they don't realize how much they know. Start by jotting down your thoughts and ideas on the problem you want to tackle. Consider these questions to guide your thinking:

- What is my issue?
- What are the main drivers and causes of my focus issue?
- What is happening as a result of this issue? What are the effects and impacts?
- What are young people and/or others currently doing to help solve this issue?
- What environmental issues are you most passionate about? What makes you feel frustrated?

Tools to help you to analyze and understand your issue deeper
We have selected a suite of different tools for you and your advocacy team to deepen your understanding of the issue you are addressing. It is preferable to use these tools sequentially to gain a comprehensive insight. Using these tools in isolation may not provide the depth of understanding we aim to achieve.

Tool 2.2: Systems Iceberg



Systems thinking is like zooming out to see the big picture when tackling a problem. Whether you're examining an environmental issue, an ecosystem, a business, or a complex social problem, it's about understanding how different parts of the system interact and affect each other. The Systems Iceberg is a valuable tool for uncovering the deeper causes of the environmental issues you care about. Think of an iceberg: what you see above the surface is just a small part of the larger story hidden underwater. The Systems Iceberg model helps you uncover the hidden forces at play—like underlying patterns and causes—giving you a clearer view of why things are the way they are. By using this approach, you can spot connections and solutions that aren't immediately obvious, making you more effective in tackling these issues.

The basic steps in using the Systems Iceberg tool to analyze an issue are:

1. **Spot the Events**: Start by noticing the obvious events happening around you, like news headlines. These are just the surface level and don't tell the whole story. These are specific moments or facts that stand out and are easily observed.

2. **Find Patterns:** Look for repeated behaviors or trends in these events. Patterns are recurring behaviors or outcomes that suggest a consistency over time. These patterns help you predict what might happen next and give you a better understanding of the issue. By recognizing patterns, you can begin to anticipate future events and gain a deeper understanding of the issue.

3. **Dig into the Structures:** Check out the systems, rules, and norms that create these patterns. This includes things like policies and social norms. Understanding these helps explain why things keep happening in the same way.

4. **Uncover Beliefs:** Go deeper to explore the beliefs, values, and assumptions that shape these structures. These mental models influence how we see and act in the world. To truly solve an issue, we might need to rethink these beliefs.

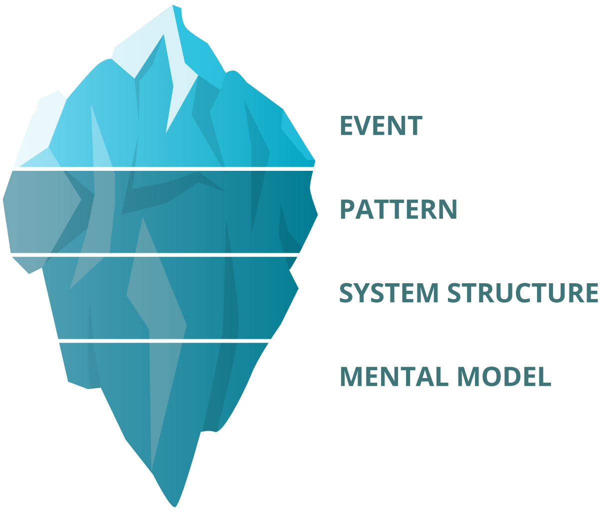
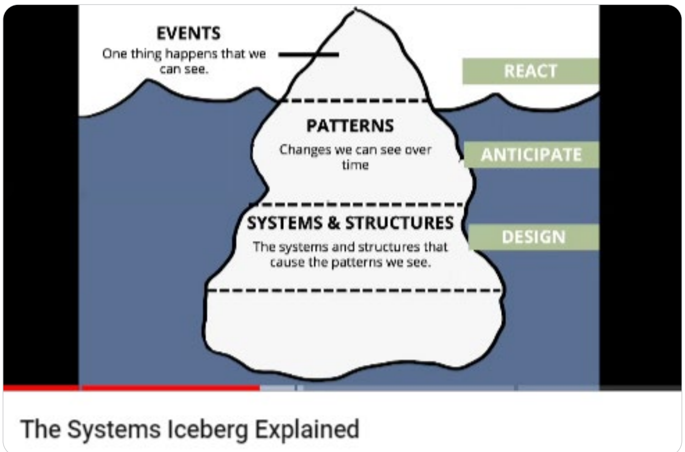


Figure 13. Systems Iceberg

Find the Systems Iceberg Tool Instructions PowerPoint and Iceberg Template [here](#). You can use this tool individually, but it will be more effective if done in small groups of 5-6 people.

ALSO WATCH! To help you understand how to apply the Systems Iceberg to your issue so that you can draw insights to how external factors are linked with the issue, either as a driver, cause, or response, click on the link to the Compass Education video below.

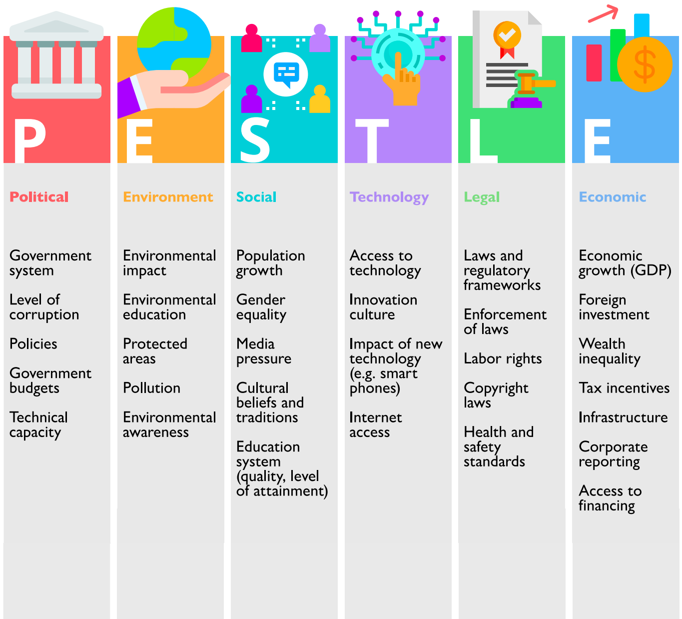


Watch YouTube video here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y6h2_EcOOcM

Tool 2.3: PESTLE - Political, Environment, Social, Technological, Legal and Economic Analysis Tool

A PESTLE Analysis helps you look at what's happening in society that affects your issue. The tool is usually associated with business marketing strategy, but it can be adapted to help you put together a successful environmental advocacy plan. To effectively use the PESTLE Analysis tool, it will be good if you and your team have already gone through Chapter 1 and practiced some of the activities found there on the three thematic topic areas. The PESTLE Analysis tool helps you to identify the Political, Environment, Social, Technological, Legal and Economic factors which have some influence and/or impact on the issue that you want to address.

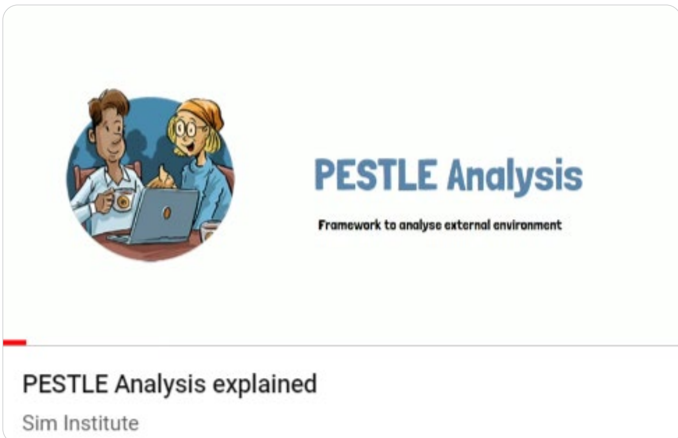
Note: It will be helpful to have used the Systems Iceberg tool before you jump into the PESTLE Analysis, as the iceberg analysis process will stimulate your thinking towards the six aspects of PESTLE, and open up your thinking for using the PESTLE Analysis tool.



You will find the Youth Environmental Advocacy PESTLE Analysis Tool Instructions Worksheet and Template [here](#). You can use this tool individually, but it will be a more effective analysis tool if done in small groups of 4-6 people.

GO TO THIS WEBSITE (https://www.groupmap.com/portfolio/pestle-analysis) to help you understand how to apply the PESTLE Analysis tool to your issue. It can help you draw insights into the underlying factors influencing and impacting the issues that you have chosen to tackle.

ANOTHER OPTION IS TO WATCH THE VIDEO BELOW to also get some additional insights in how to effectively use the PESTLE Analysis tool for environmental issue advocacy planning.



Watch YouTube video here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NaofchxbhXo

Tool 2.4: Systems Connection Circle

A Connection Circle is an easy visual tool that shows how different parts of a story are related. You start with a big circle and label all the parts of the story randomly around the edge. Then you draw lines to connect the related parts. This creates a web of connections, helping you spot key areas where changes can have a big impact. The example below shows a Connection Circle about women's economic empowerment.

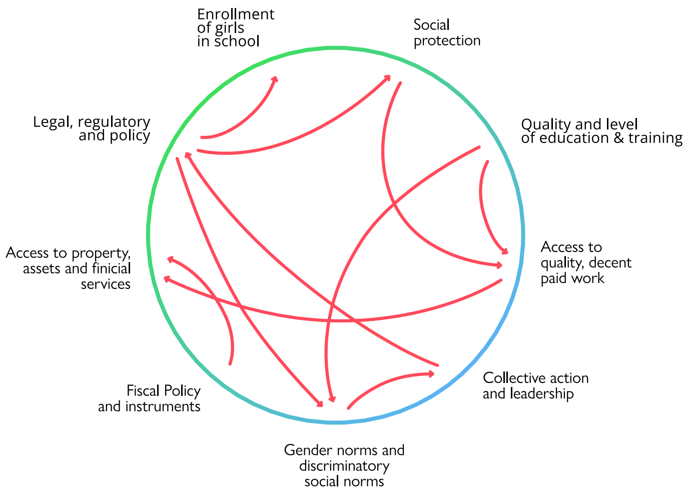


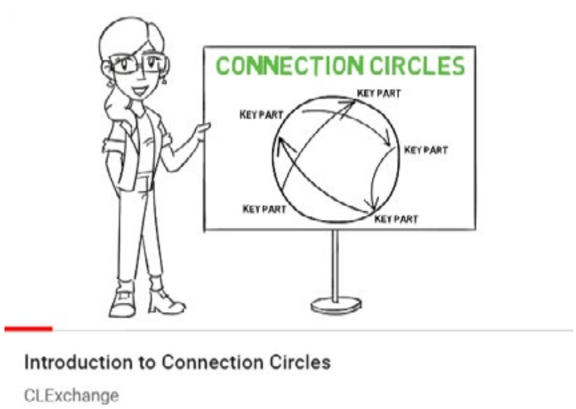
Figure 14. Connection Circle on Women's Economic Empowerment

To most effectively use a systems thinking tool such as the Connection Circle, there are several essential driving questions that you should be asking yourself and your team. Examples include the following:

- What are the key variables or elements in this story and what are the cause and effect relationships between the variables?
- Where are the important connection hubs? Why are they so connected?
- Are there any complete feedback loops present?
- After gaining a big-picture view of the various interconnections between linked elements in the system, what insights can be reached? Do they provide any ideas on interventions that can change the system in a positive way?

WATCH THE VIDEO below to also get some additional insights in how to effectively use the **Connection Circle Systems Analysis tool** for your issue.

You will find the Connection Circle Systems Analysis tool instructions and worksheet template here. You can use this tool individually, but it will be more if you use it in a small group of 4-6 people.



Watch YouTube video here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hUb7SmgDE1Q

DIGGING DEEPER BY RESEARCHING YOUR ISSUE

Research is very important for advocacy work because it helps you really understand the issue you're tackling. Here are some key reasons why research matters for your environmental advocacy:

- **Understanding the Issue**: Research helps advocates gain a deep understanding of the root causes, drivers, and impacts of the issue they are advocating for. This knowledge is essential for developing informed strategies and interventions to address the problem effectively.
- **Identifying Solutions:** Research enables advocates to identify evidence-based solutions and best practices that have been successful in addressing similar issues elsewhere. By analyzing existing research and case studies, advocates can determine which approaches are most likely to be effective in their specific context.
- **Building Credibility:** Conducting thorough research and citing reliable sources enhances the credibility of advocacy efforts. Evidence-based advocacy is more likely to be taken seriously by policymakers, stakeholders, and the public, increasing the likelihood of achieving positive outcomes.
- **Informing Advocacy Strategies:** Research provides insights into the political, social, economic, and cultural factors that influence the issue and shape the policy landscape. This information helps advocates develop strategic advocacy plans tailored to the specific context and target audience.
- **Mobilizing Support:** Research findings can be used to mobilize support from stakeholders, decision-makers, and the public. Compelling data and statistics can highlight the urgency and importance of the issue, garnering attention and support for advocacy efforts.

Key Factors to Consider when Designing Your Advocacy Research Plan and Methods

No matter if you're advocating for social, environmental, health, or other issues, there are some key things to keep in mind to make sure your research is strong, trustworthy, and makes a difference. Here are some important factors to think about:

- **Define Clear Objectives:** Clearly articulate the goals of your advocacy research. What change are you hoping to achieve? Who is your target audience? Understanding your end goal will guide your research design and methodology.
- **Research Design:** Choose a research design that best suits your objectives. This could be qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods research. Each has its strengths and can be chosen based on the type of data you need to collect and the questions you aim to answer.
- **Evidence-Based Approach:** Ensure that your research is evidence-based. This means relying on credible sources of information, using validated data collection tools, and adhering to rigorous research methodologies. The strength of your advocacy largely depends on the reliability of your evidence.
- **Stakeholder Engagement:** Identify and engage with stakeholders who are affected by the issue or who have influence over it. This can include community members, policymakers, experts, and other relevant organizations. Their insights can enrich your research and help tailor your advocacy messages.

- **Ethical Considerations:** Adhere to ethical standards in conducting research, especially when dealing with sensitive topics or vulnerable populations. This includes obtaining informed consent from your respondents, ensuring confidentiality, and minimizing harm.
- **Data Analysis and Interpretation:** Analyze your data systematically and interpret the findings in the context of your advocacy objectives. Be transparent about your methodology and cautious about overstating your conclusions.
- **Communicating Your Findings:** Develop a strategic plan for disseminating your research findings. This should consider the most effective channels and formats for reaching your target audience, whether through policy briefs, social media, presentations, or media outreach.
- **Actionable Recommendations:** Your research should culminate in clear, actionable recommendations. These should be practical, specific, and tailored to the stakeholders you aim to influence.

Advocacy Requires Participatory Research Before You Make a Plan

Participatory research is an approach that actively involves the people or communities being studied as active participants in the research process. Rather than being conducted solely by external researchers, it emphasizes collaboration, partnership, and shared decision-making. This method is recommended for an environmental advocacy team because it engages community members, leveraging their local knowledge and experiences to gather accurate data and develop tailored solutions. It builds trust, empowers the community, and fosters collaboration, making advocacy efforts more credible, practical, and effective. By involving those directly impacted, the advocacy plan becomes more relevant and has a greater chance of achieving sustainable outcomes.

Some important questions about research…

- **Why collect evidence?** Evidence consists of information, data, or findings that back up a specific claim, hypothesis, argument, or conclusion. It forms the basis of research, validating the credibility and dependability of research results. Evidence can take different shapes, such as empirical data, statistical analysis, expert viewpoints, literature reviews, case studies, and theoretical frameworks. Compelling and solid evidence is crucial for gaining support from others for an idea or plan of action.
- **How much evidence do you need for your advocacy research?** The amount of evidence required varies depending on who you're trying to persuade. Government officials may need a significant amount of national data to be convinced, while NGOs or school principals might be swayed by feedback from a small group of students and parents. To determine the right amount and type of evidence, consider seeking advice from successful advocates or directly asking your target audience: "What information would impact your decision-making on this issue?"
- **What kind of evidence is necessary?** Different types of evidence will resonate with different individuals and groups. For example, data and statistics are effective in convincing corporations and government officials, especially when they are tied to outcomes concerning the economy, health, and quality of life. On the other hand, some stakeholders respond better to personal stories that illustrate the human impact of an issue.

Important Note: Before determining the types of evidence needed, consider the stakeholders you will need to persuade and win over to support your advocacy efforts.

SPEAK WITH PEOPLE

Why is it important to speak with others when planning advocacy initiatives?

Engaging and talking with a diverse range of individuals is essential for the effectiveness and success of advocacy work.

Understanding their perspectives, viewpoints, and opinions is key. It is crucial for advocates to actively listen to ideas and engage in meaningful conversations. Whether it's chatting with friends, coworkers, neighbors, elders, service workers, business owners, community leaders, educators, or fellow changemakers, seeking input from a variety of sources is vital. Even if you don't necessarily agree with every viewpoint, staying open and attentive can lead to valuable insights that support your advocacy efforts in the long run.

What if you encounter disinterest when discussing your cause? Perhaps it's all in the approach. Some individuals may not feel connected to the issue or perceive its relevance to them. In such cases, it's essential to reflect on how you present the topic and consider different ways to spark their interest. Remember, every interaction provides valuable information that can inform and strengthen your advocacy work. Engaging with others and being receptive to feedback can lead to new perspectives and strategies for creating meaningful change.

TAP INTO EXISTING RESEARCH AND ONLINE MEDIA

The internet is a valuable resource for accessing research related to your advocacy issue, offering a cost-effective and convenient starting point. By leveraging the internet, you can explore a wealth of information without the need for extensive travel or significant expenses.

When conducting research, seek out a variety of sources such as research papers, reports, surveys, consultation notes, statistical data, policies, personal accounts, blogs, case studies and online media stories and articles. Connect with individuals actively engaged in or connected to the issue you are addressing to discover the types of information that are accessible and where to access them. This collaborative approach can provide valuable insights and help you gather the necessary data to support your advocacy efforts effectively.

Finally, tapping into online media is crucial for gathering current information and evidence when researching an environmental issue for a campaign, as it provides timely access to the latest developments, scientific studies, policy changes, and public opinion. Online platforms offer a vast array of resources, including news articles, research papers, expert analyzes, and social media discussions, which collectively help in understanding the multifaceted nature of the issue. Utilizing these sources ensures that the campaign is informed by the most recent and relevant data, enhancing its credibility and effectiveness in advocating for change and engaging stakeholders.

Check out some of the excellent sources of current and up-to-date information, articles, research, etc. in relation to the Greater Mekong Subregion in the textbox on the following page.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Sources of Information on GMS Topics and Issues

Mekong Eye (mekongeye.com)
Launched in 2015, Mekong Eye is a clearing house of reported environmental stories about the Mekong Region from regional media sources. It also produces original content in collaboration with local journalists from Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, and Viet Nam. These stories are published on mekongeye.com and promoted on social media through @MekongEye on X, Facebook, and Instagram.

Open Development Mekong (ODM) (opendevelopmentmekong.net)
The ODM platform is an online network platform that supports data and digital rights for all citizens across the Mekong Region. Its target audience includes civil society, the private sector, government, academia, and marginalized communities, all of whom use ODM's extensive data repository for research, analysis, and decision-making. The ODM datahub has become a reliable and diverse platform, offering essential data and information on significant national and regional development issues.

A Mekong River Commission (MRC) Reports (mrcmekong.org)
The MRC is an intergovernmental organization for regional dialogue and cooperation in the Lower Mekong River Basin, established in 1995 through the Mekong Agreement between Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Viet Nam. The organization serves as a regional platform for water diplomacy and a knowledge hub of water resources management for the sustainable development of the region.

Greater Mekong Sub-region Program (greatermekong.org)
The GMS Program supports the implementation of high-priority subregional projects in agriculture, energy, environment, health and human resource development, information and communication technology, tourism, transport, transport and trade facilitation, and urban development. The website is a rich source of reports and publications, news, and statistical data.

CONDUCT A SURVEY

Why conduct a survey? What are the benefits?
Surveys, which can be either on paper or online (e.g. Survey Monkey, Google Forms, etc.), are a great way to quickly gather information that reflects the views of the people and groups you want to influence. You can use surveys to learn about attitudes and reactions, understand opinions on various issues, and make your research more credible. Since surveys involve directly asking people questions, they provide firsthand information instead of relying on secondhand sources like written records.

You can use surveys to measure ideas or opinions about community issues related to your initiative. For example, you might want to know how many people see climate change as a threat to their future and what aspects of their personal lives they think are at risk because of it.

A survey helps you understand what a larger population is thinking, feeling, seeing, or experiencing by sampling a smaller group. Since you can't survey everyone in a community, it's crucial to ensure your sample group accurately represents the whole community. This means considering the different identities of the people you want to survey and making sure that all, including vulnerable and marginalized groups, are represented in your sample.

Choose how to collect the information

- Involve members of the local community in the design, planning and carrying out of the survey.
- Choose appropriate data collection methods for the group that you want to survey. Some methods could include selecting and interviewing people randomly in the street or sending out an online Google Forms questionnaire via email or QR code. You can also place surveys in a popular online location such as Dropbox, or ask partner organizations and groups to help you distribute the survey questionnaires.

Tips on choosing your survey questions
It is advisable to use open-ended questions, as opposed to closed (yes / no) questions if you want detailed responses. For example: "What do you think is the reason that people throw their waste in freshwater bodies like rivers?" If you want information that will be easy to analyze, ask closed questions, that only invite a "yes" or "no" response, or have multiple choice answers that the person can choose from.

Below is an example of a closed question: "To what extent do you agree or disagree that corruption is a significant problem in this region? Choose from the following options:
1) Strongly disagree, 2) Disagree, 3) Neither agree nor disagree, 4) Agree, 5) Strongly agree".

- Put the easier questions to answer at the beginning of the survey questionnaire (first or early on).
- Keep the survey as short as you possibly can (it should not take more than 10 minutes to complete) Note: Make a distinction between what you need to know and what you would like to know—which isn't essential.
- Start the survey questionnaire with what you most need to know, then see if you have time for more less important questions.

CHECK IT OUT! To help you with designing your survey questions, check out this Guide to the Design of Questionnaires from the University of Leeds in the UK. This guide is designed for students and novice researchers intending to carry out a questionnaire survey. It provides a compilation of dos and don'ts for good questionnaire design that will, if adopted, make data analysis easier and faster.

Below is a table containing some of the top free online survey tools. Please explore and find the one that best suits your needs and capacity.

Survey Tool	Free Plan	Conversational UI	In-App Feedback	Dedicated Mobile App	AI-Powered
SurveySparrow	√	√	√	√	√
Typeform	√	√	-	-	√
ProProfs	√	√	-	-	-
Jotform	√	-	√	√	√
Google Forms	√	-	-	-	-
QuestionPro	√	√	√	√	√

CONDUCT INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS

An informational interview is a conversation you have in order to gather information, not to get a job. It involves talking directly with people who have deep knowledge or experience in a field, industry, or role that interests you. The goal is to learn and get insights that you can't find online or in books, including firsthand stories and opinions about a specific issue or problem and its effects on different things.

Some benefits of conducting an information interview when researching an issue include:

- **Access to Insider Knowledge:** Individuals who are directly involved in a particular industry, discipline, or specific issue, can provide insights that are not available through secondary research sources. They can share firsthand experiences, trends, challenges, and opportunities related to the issue you want to address.
- **Gathering Interesting Anecdotal Stories and Testimonials:** Interviews are especially useful to gather individual personal stories and testimonials about the issue that you are focused on, and its effects and impacts on something that the person being interviewed observes and/or really cares about.
- **Networking Opportunities:** Informational interviews allow you to build relationships with professionals in your area of interest. These connections can offer support, advice, and potentially lead to further opportunities for cooperation and collaboration in the future.
- **Clarification of Goals and Expectations:** Speaking with someone associated with the issues of interest can help clarify what is required to succeed in addressing and improving the situation around your issue. It can also give you a realistic understanding of different perspectives on how to solve or change something that is connected with your issue of concern as an advocate.

Some tips for preparing for and conducting interviews

- **Define Your Objectives:** Understand why you are seeking an informational interview and what you hope to learn.
- **Research and Prepare:** Research the person you're interviewing and their organization. This preparation will help you ask informed and specific questions.
- **Be Professional:** Introduce yourself, explain why you're reaching out to them specifically, and be clear that you're seeking information, not a job.
- **Prepare Your Questions:** Have a list of questions ready, but be flexible. Your questions should be open-ended to encourage detailed responses. Focus on their experiences, decisions, and any advice they can offer.
- **Be Respectful of Their Time:** Clearly state how much time you're requesting (usually 15-30 minutes) and be willing to accommodate their schedule. Stick to the agreed time during the interview.
- **Create a Conversational Flow:** While it's important to ask your prepared questions, also allow the conversation to flow naturally. Be an active listener and show genuine interest in their responses.
- **Practice Good Etiquette:** Arrive on time if meeting in person or ensure your technology works if meeting virtually. Dress appropriately and thank them for their time at the beginning and end of the interview.
- **Ask for Additional Contacts:** If appropriate, ask if they can recommend anyone else you can speak with. This can help you expand your network and gain more insights.
- **Follow Up:** Send a thank-you note or email within 24 hours of the interview. Express your appreciation for their time and the information they shared. This helps in building a lasting professional relationship.

WATCH THESE VIDEOS!

Here are two short animated video tutorial clips on how to conduct a semi-structured interview. Take the time to watch both before you plan for your in-person interview.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nw9TOjyCWiM

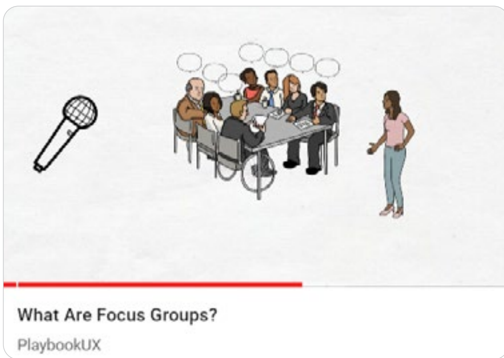
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HUg71M25VK4

CONDUCT A FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) should be used when you want to understand an issue at a deeper level than you can access with a survey questionnaire. They are helpful for adding meaning and understanding to existing knowledge or getting at the "why" and "how" of a topic. Planning and administering a FGD requires careful preparation and a thoughtful approach to engaging participants and eliciting valuable insights.

By following these steps, you can maximize the effectiveness of your FGD and contribute to the success of your research and/or advocacy efforts:

1. **Define Objectives:** Start by clearly defining the purpose of the FGD. Understand what you aim to achieve or learn from the discussion. This step guides the entire planning process, from participant selection to question design
2. **Identify and Recruit Participants:** Select participants who represent the target demographic or stakeholders relevant to your research or advocacy issue. Aim for diversity to capture a wide range of perspectives, but ensure participants have some commonality relevant to the discussion topic. Recruitment can be done through direct invitation, open calls, or through organizations and networks.
3. **Develop a Discussion Guide:** Create a structured guide that outlines the key questions and topics to be covered during the FGD. This guide should include open-ended questions to encourage discussion and allow for probing deeper into participants' thoughts and experiences. The guide should be flexible enough to allow for a natural flow of the conversation.
4. **Choose a Suitable Venue and Time:** Select a venue that is accessible and comfortable for all participants. Consider privacy and confidentiality, especially for sensitive topics. Schedule the FGD at a time convenient for most participants to ensure maximum attendance
5. **Assign Roles for the FGD Team:** A typical FGD team includes a moderator, who facilitates the discussion, and a note-taker or observer, who records the conversation and participant dynamics. Ensure the team is trained on their roles and the objectives of the FGD.
6. **Conduct the FGD:** The moderator should start the session by explaining the purpose of the FGD, the structure of the session, and any confidentiality considerations. Encourage participation from all attendees, manage dominant voices, and probe for deeper insights where necessary. The note-taker should capture key points, quotes, and any non-verbal cues.
7. **Analyze and Report Findings:** After conducting the FGD, analyze the data collected to identify themes, patterns, and insights. Transcribe recordings (if any) and use the discussion guide to structure the analysis. Present the findings in a report that outlines the key outcomes, supporting quotes, and recommendations or next steps.
8. **Follow-Up:** If necessary, follow up with participants to clarify ambiguous points or explore further insights. This step is also an opportunity to thank participants and share how their input will be used, respecting any confidentiality agreements.
9. **Evaluate the FGD Process:** Review the FGD process to identify what worked well and what could be improved. This evaluation can help refine future FGDs or other research activities.



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SLHq8OH66vA

Some tips for conducting a FGD:

- Do not judge people who speak; accept what they say.
- Avoid leading statements and questions; questions should guide the discussion rather than solicit direct answers from each of the participants.
- Avoid dominating the discussion.
- Ask simple questions and only one question at a time.
- There are no right or wrong answers, only differing points of view.
- Record the session at all times.
- Ask all participants to give verbal consent before the session and after initiating the recording, even if they have already given their written consent.
- Two researchers should ideally be present at all times. One of them will serve as the facilitator who will directly interact with the group.

CONDUCT WORKSHOPS TO COLLECT INFORMATION

Workshops are a fantastic way to dive deeply into the topics you're passionate about and want to make a difference in. Think of workshops as super interactive sessions where you get to learn, discuss, and work on a specific topic or project. They're not your average boring lectures, workshops are all about hands-on learning, skill-building, and having fun while you're at it! It's like leveling up your knowledge and abilities in a way that really stays with you.

Facilitating a workshop:
Imagine being the ultimate guide to group learning and sharing—that's what facilitation is all about! It's like being the Most Valuable Player of teamwork, making things simpler and more effective when you're working with a group of interesting people. Whether you're in the planning stages or diving into your advocacy work, having facilitation skills in your toolbox is a game-changer. With facilitation, you can bring together different voices, help people share their perspectives, and find common ground on the path forward.

Hosting a workshop can be a powerful and highly rewarding way to gain valuable information for your advocacy projects. These sessions are all about getting everyone involved, sharing ideas, and creating a buzz of collaboration that can really supercharge your efforts. By getting diverse stakeholders in the mix, workshops become a goldmine of insights, opinions, and data that can take your advocacy work to the next level.

Here's how facilitation of a workshop can aid in this process:

- **Gathering Diverse Perspectives:** Workshops bring together participants from various backgrounds, including community members, experts, activists, and potentially affected individuals. This diversity fosters a rich dialogue and exchange of ideas, ensuring that the advocacy campaign addresses a broad spectrum of concerns and viewpoints.
- **Identifying Key Issues and Concerns:** Through structured activities and discussions, workshops can help pinpoint the most pressing issues and concerns within a community or target group. Facilitators can use techniques such as brainstorming sessions, SWOT Analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats), or Problem Tree Analysis to help participants articulate and prioritize their concerns. These insights can then shape the focus of the advocacy campaign.
- **Building Consensus:** Workshops can facilitate consensus-building among stakeholders on critical issues, goals, and strategies for the advocacy campaign. Facilitators can guide participants through processes such as group discussions, voting, or ranking exercises to achieve a collective understanding and agreement on the campaign's objectives and tactics.
- **Collecting Data and Evidence:** Interactive workshops can also be a venue for collecting qualitative data and anecdotal evidence that supports the advocacy campaign's goals. Storytelling sessions, case studies, and personal testimonies shared during the workshop can provide compelling evidence to back up campaign messages and demands.
- **Generating Solutions and Strategies:** Facilitated workshops can be used to brainstorm and develop innovative solutions and strategies for advocacy. Participants can engage in creative problem-solving exercises, design thinking sessions, or strategy mapping to come up with actionable plans that the campaign can implement.
- **Building Support and Mobilizing Allies:** Workshops can help build a base of support for the advocacy campaign by educating participants about the issue and engaging them in the campaign's development. This inclusive approach can mobilize allies and advocates who are committed to the cause and willing to take action.
- **Skills Development:** Facilitated workshops can also focus on developing the skills and capacities needed for effective advocacy. Sessions on communication strategies, digital activism, legal rights, or campaign planning can empower participants to contribute more effectively to the campaign's success.

Some tips for facilitating effective workshops:

- Identify clear objectives, an agenda and timeline, and share with the people attending the workshop.
- Choose an accessible and appropriate venue and make the space feel comfortable and friendly.
- Start with icebreaker activities that help people to get to know each other, and to relax and feel comfortable in the process and space.
- Avoid being the expert. The facilitator's role is not to teach people, but rather to support people to share their perspectives and ideas, as well as learn from others.
- Incorporate a variety of participatory methods to engage participants actively and encourage sharing and collaboration.
- Ensure that all participants feel welcome and safe to express their opinions and experiences.
- After the workshop, summarize the key outcomes, thank participants for their contributions, and outline next steps to keep them engaged in the advocacy campaign.

Leading a workshop takes thoughtful preparation, a deep grasp of the campaign's objectives, and the knack for inspiring and energizing participants. When done right, workshops become a game-changer, helping you gather crucial information, build support, and ignite the momentum required to fuel impactful advocacy campaigns.

DEVELOPING YOUR RESEARCH PLAN

So, are you now ready to do your research? How to make a start? Drafting a research plan is probably the best choice you can make.

Where to Start?

Tool 2.5: Download a Research Plan Template here
Instructions and an example of a research plan for the topic of "sand dredging in river systems, which is causing massive erosion of river banks" is provided to help you develop your own research plan.

Example:

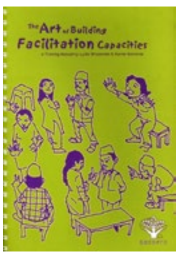
Issue indentified: Sand dredging in river systems causing massive erosion of river banks.

Column A: Key Questions	Column B: Stakeholders	Column C: Research Methods	Column D: Analysis Tools
What are the associated problems caused by river sand dredging?	Environmental scientists, local residents	Interviews, field observations	The Sustainability Compass, Problem Tree, Systems Iceberg, PESTLE
How does river bank erosion impact local communities?	Local community leaders, government officials	Surveys, focus groups	Stakeholder Mapping, System Mapping
What regulations exist regarding sand dredging?	Legal experts, regulatory agencies	Document analysis, expert interviews	Regulatory Framework Analysis
What are potential solutions to mitigate the erosion?	NGOs, environmental engineers	Literature review, case studies	SWOT Analysis

Library for additional resources

Below are some additional online resources that can help you dive deeper with regards to conducting research.

- MRC Data and Information Services: portal.mrcmekong.org/home
- Mekong Water Data Initiatives: mekongwater.org
- The Art of Building Facilitation Capacities – A Training Manual by Lydia Braakman & Karen Edwards: recoftc.org/publications/0000214



2.1

TOOL: ISSUE PASSION AND CONCERN RATING

WHAT ISSUE ARE YOU MOST PASSIONATE ABOUT?

Instructions:

1. Find a quiet and peaceful space, such as under a tree in a public park or next to a river or lake.
2. **Imagine the world you want:** Close your eyes and let your mind unwind. Picture yourself in a future where sustainability is the prevailing value and mindset among governments and societies in the Mekong Region. Consider the four aspects of sustainability: 1) Nature, 2) Economy, 3) Society, and 4) Human Well-being and Happiness. What might you observe in this sustainable Mekong Region? In the table below, **list some descriptive words that capture the essence of this envisioned future.**

Nature	Economy	Society	Human Well-being

3. **List the issues:** Based on the words you have listed, what are some key issues related to the three main topic areas (Freshwater Ecosystems Management, Climate Change and Renewable Energy) that you are interested in working on?
4. Once you have the list of issues, **transfer the different issues into the table** provided on the next page
5. From here, rate the issues: Carefully review and rate each issue based on your level of concern and passion. Consider how strongly you feel about each topic and how urgently you believe it needs to be addressed. Give each issue a score from 1-5 (refer to the rating scale below) and mark ☑ in the appropriate box.

1 = Very low passion and concern (not passionate about it)

2 = Low passion and concern about the issue, but it's not at the forefront of my thinking

3 = Moderate passion and concern about the issue, and want to know more

4 = High passion and concern about this issue and feel like I would like to contribute towards reducing or solving it

5 = Very high passion and concern and feel most passionate to do something to make positive change on the issue

Environmental Issues		Very Low	Low	Moderate	High	Very High
	PASSION					
	CONCERN					
	PASSION					
	CONCERN					
	PASSION					
	CONCERN					
	PASSION					
	CONCERN					
	PASSION					
	CONCERN					

6. **Compare your ratings:** Once you have finished rating all the issues, compare your ratings. Look for the issue that stands out with the highest combined score of concern and passion.
7. **Identify your priority:** The issue with the highest combined rating is the one you feel most strongly about and believe requires immediate attention. This indicates both your urgency to address the situation and your passion for making a difference.

2.2

SYSTEMS ICEBERG

The Systems Iceberg model can be used to understand the underlying causes of a problem or event. It helps focus our attention on areas of high potential for change (leverage). It is typically presented visually, with the visible event, impact or problem above the surface of the water and the underlying patterns and causes at different levels below the surface.

Age Group: 18 years old and above. For younger age groups, you may need a youth facilitator to provide guidance for discussion.

Time Required: 45-60 minutes

Group Size: This activity can be done individually or in small groups of up to 6 people maximum. If there are more people, please consider making additional groups and comparing your analyzes.

Materials:

1. The iceberg introduction video or the Systems Iceberg Explained video. You can also search for more examples online.
1. The iceberg template. You can print the provided template on an A4/A3 paper for small groups, or you can draw a big iceberg on a flipchart paper for larger groups.
2. Pens, pencils or permanent markers.
3. Post-it notes (if available)

How the Systems Iceberg works:

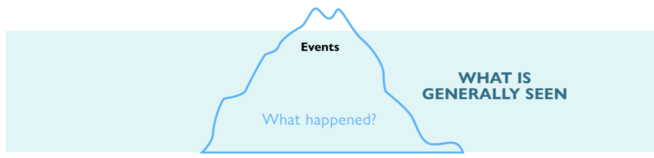
Moving down through the various layers of the iceberg, we find the following levels, starting with the top: Events; Patterns and Trends; Systemic Structures; and Mental Models. As we move down the iceberg we gain a deeper understanding of the underlying systems, and at the same time gain increased leverage for changing the system or its effects.

The layers of the Iceberg Model are:

1. **Events: What are the day to day events or situations that are most prominent or in view?**

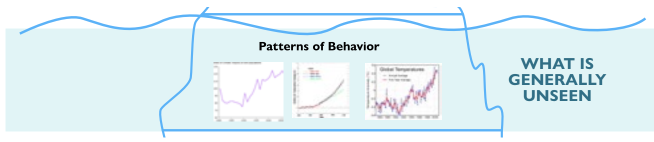
   Events are what we can easily see. What we see above the water is just a small part of the iceberg, but that is where we focus most of our attention.

   What really draw our attention are events! These are HEADLINES in the newspapers, urgent emails with problems to solve, fires to put out, or some new proposal... The issues and factors that grab our attention and call for a response.



2. **Pattern of Behavior: What's been happening? What are the trends? What changes have occurred over time?**

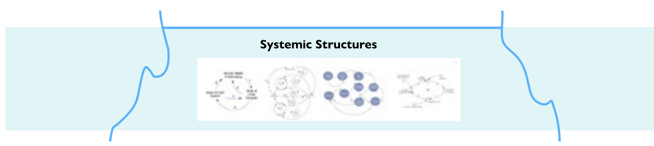
   As we string events together we start to recognize trends and patterns. This provides a deeper level of understanding, which leads to the insight that 'this event has happened repeatedly over time—it has happened before.'



3. **Systems Structure: What systemic structures have contributed to the behavior patterns and trends that we have identified?**

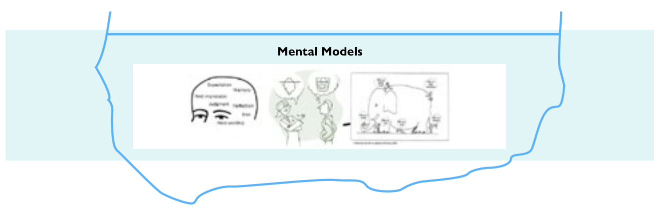
   A structure creates the foundation that supports the trends and patterns—which in turn result in events. These systemic structures are for example: policies, processes and practices.

   Structure is important as it gives us a deeper understanding of the system and can help us to predict systems behavior.



4. **Mental Model: What assumptions, values, and beliefs do people hold about the issue and system in general?**

   Systemic structures, in turn, are frequently held in place by beliefs or "mental models." Beliefs may be undiscussable theories, residing in the minds of leaders, on what constitutes quality, service excellence or customer orientation. These beliefs may also affect interpersonal dynamics–such as approaches toward conflict, leadership or the best way to introduce change.



TOOL: ISSUE ANALYSIS ICEBERG TEMPLATE

Instructions: The basic steps in using the Systems Iceberg to analyze an issue:

1. **Identify the Events:** Start by observing the visible occurrences or "events" related to the issue. These are the specific incidents or data points that are readily apparent and often reported in the media. Events are the "tip of the iceberg" and the most superficial level of understanding.

TOPIC: TRAFFIC JAM

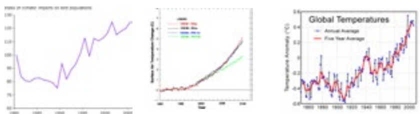
What is generally seen

Events

Traffic / congestion.
Not enough car parking space.

2. **Look for Patterns and Trends:** Next, identify any patterns or trends among the events you've observed. Patterns are recurring behaviors or outcomes that suggest a consistency over time. By recognizing patterns, you can begin to anticipate future events and gain a deeper understanding of the issue.

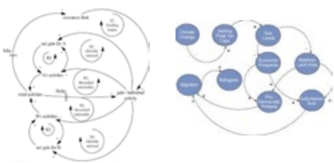
What is generally unseen



Patterns of Behavior

More and more peole use their cars to commute instead of using public transportation or bicycle (# of registered car in the city).
More roads are built for more cars.

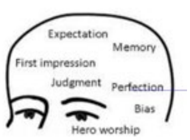
3. **Analyze Underlying Structures:** The structures layer of the iceberg consists of the systems, rules, and norms that shape the patterns and trends observed. This includes policies, feedback loops, and physical infrastructures. Analyzing these structures helps to understand why certain patterns persist and what forces are shaping the behavior of the system.



Systemic Structures

Public Transportation is not available. Roads are designed for cars.
Bike paths are unavailable or bike path policy is unenforced.
Unavailability of shower/changing areas at workplace.
No safe bike lock areas. No bike borrowing program.

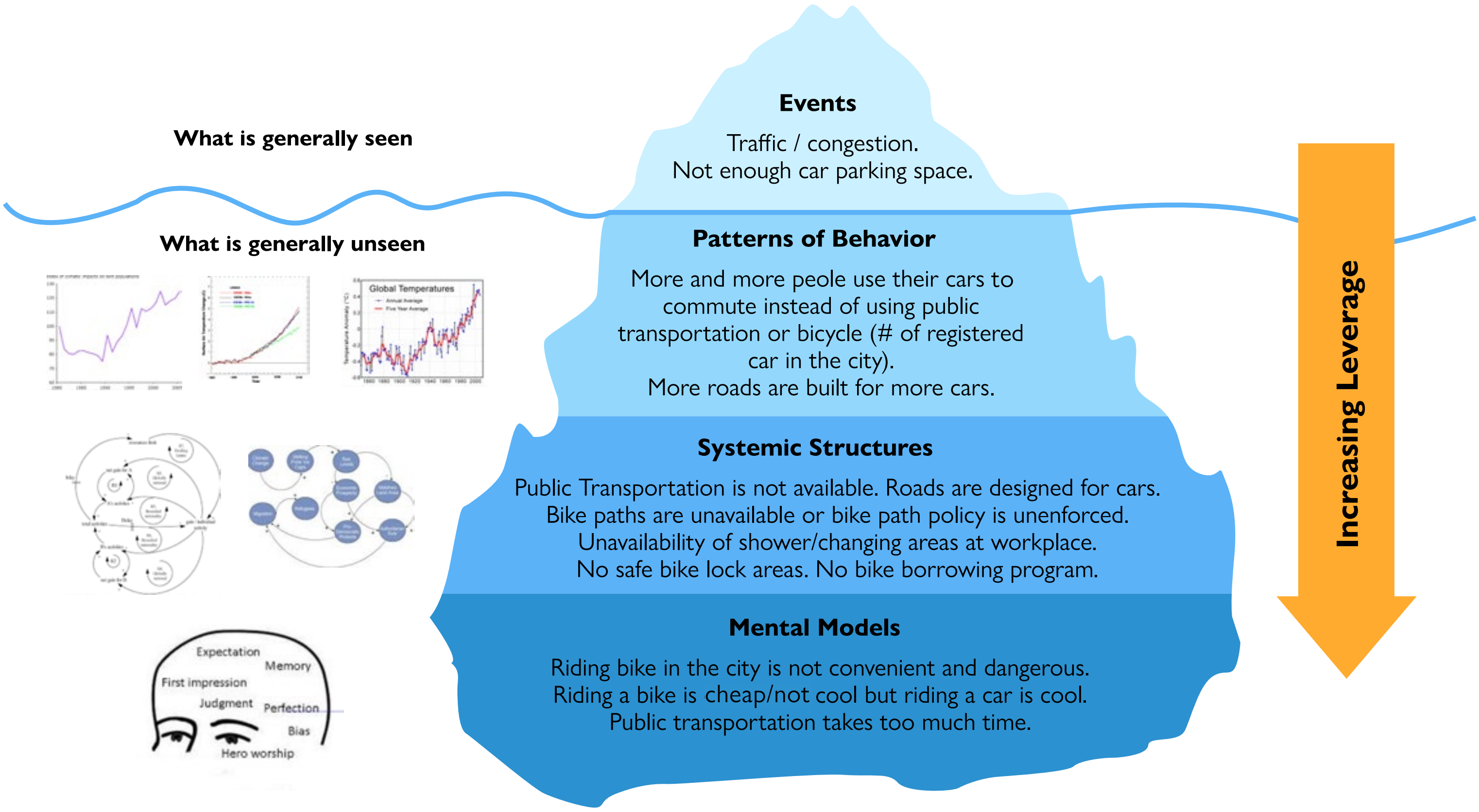
4. **Examine Mental Models:** At the deepest level of the iceberg are mental models: the beliefs, values, assumptions, and cultural norms that inform the structures. Mental models influence how we perceive the world and, consequently, how we design and interact with systems. To truly address an issue, it's important to uncover and possibly challenge these underlying mental models.



Mental Models

Riding bike in the city is not convenient and dangerous.
Riding a bike is cheap/not cool but riding a car is cool.
Public transportation takes too much time.

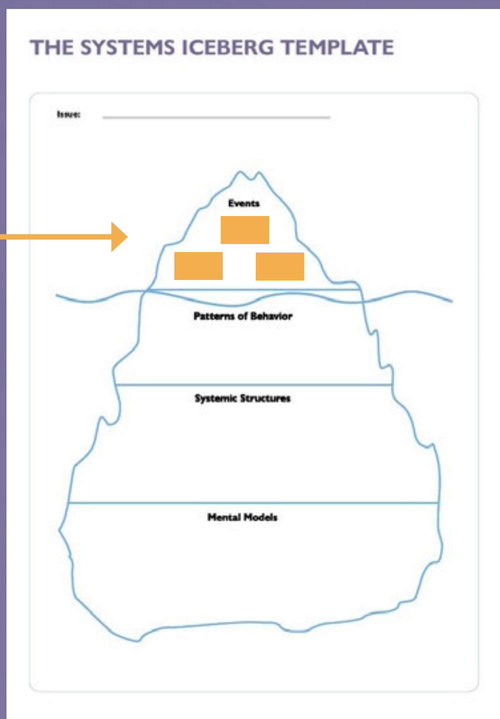
EXAMPLE OF THE ICEBERG MODEL



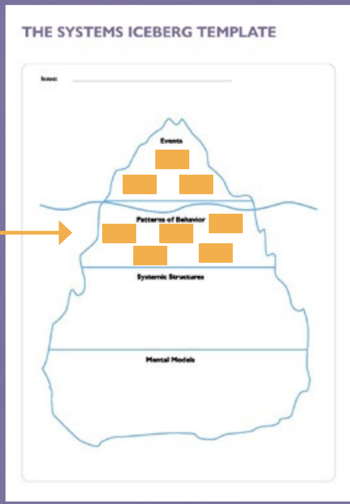
ACTIVITY INSTRUCTIONS

Now it's your turn!

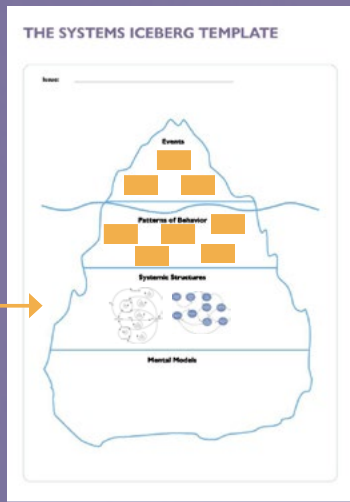
1. Based on your topic of interest, gather a group to look deeper and understand the underlying causes of a problem or event.
   - Place the Iceberg Systems template in the middle of the group
   - Watch the iceberg model explanation video and go through the example provided together.
   - Start the group discussion by looking at the **Events** level, asking yourself a question: *What are the day to day events or situations that we see in relation to our topic of interest?*
   - …Write your answers directly on the template or on post-it notes.



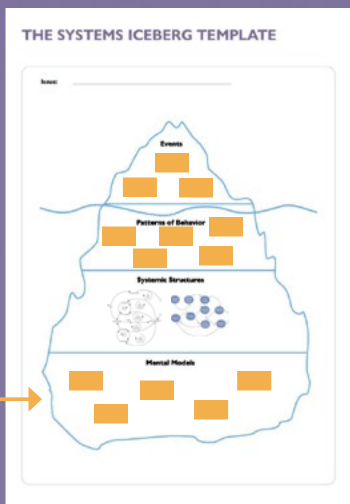
2. Next, look for **Patterns and Trends**: Identify any patterns or trends among the events you've observed. Patterns are recurring behaviors or outcomes that suggest a consistency over time. Ask yourself the questions below and record your answers on the second level of the Iceberg.
   - *What's been happening?*
   - *What are the trends?*
   - *What changes have occurred over time?*



3. Next, look for **Systemic Structures**: What structures have contributed to the behavior patterns and trends that we have identified?
   - *What are the policies, processes and practices that generate these pattern of behaviors?*



4. Then, explore the **assumptions, values, and beliefs** that people hold about this issue and system in general.
   - *What are the mental models and shared values that design the existing systems structures?*



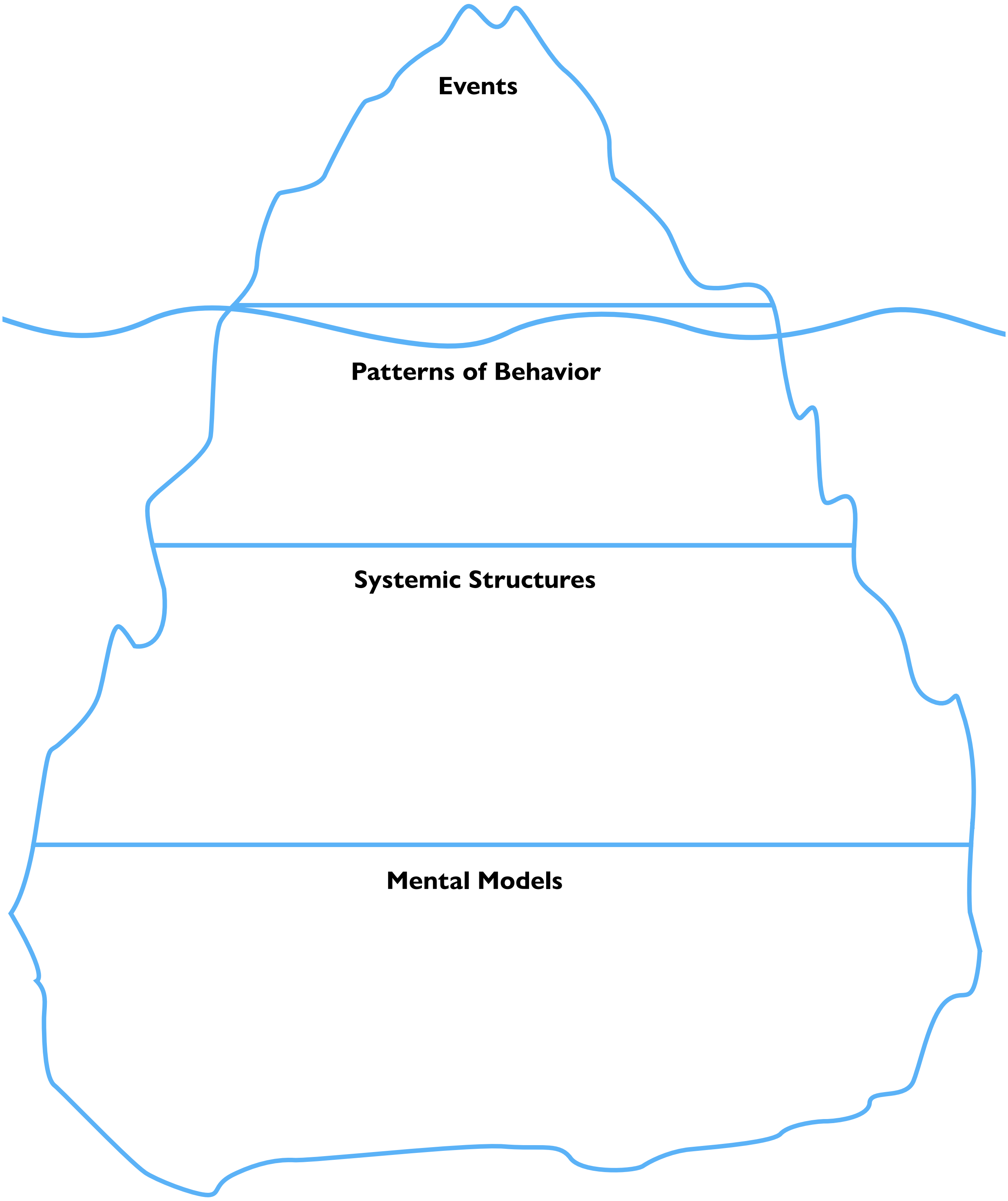
ANALYSIS & DEBRIEF QUESTIONS

When you've completed the Systems Iceberg analysis, try to go through some or all of these questions below...

1. What insights did the Systems Iceberg model analysis reveal about the situation or issue?
2. Did any unexpected factors emerge during the analysis that were not initially apparent?
3. How do the underlying factors identified in the analysis influence the visible situations or patterns?
4. What implications do these insights have for addressing the issue or making decisions moving forward?
5. Are there any gaps in the analysis that need further exploration or investigation?
6. How might stakeholders be affected by addressing the hidden factors identified in the analysis?
7. What strategies could possibly be implemented to address both the visible and hidden aspects of the issue effectively?
8. How can the insights gained from the Iceberg model analysis be communicated and utilized within the organization or team?
9. What lessons have been learned from this analysis that can be applied to future situations or projects?

THE SYSTEMS ICEBERG TEMPLATE

Issue: ______________________________



2.3

TOOL: POLITICAL, ENVIRONMENT, SOCIAL, TECHNOLOGICAL, LEGAL AND ECONOMIC (PESTLE) ANALYSIS TOOL

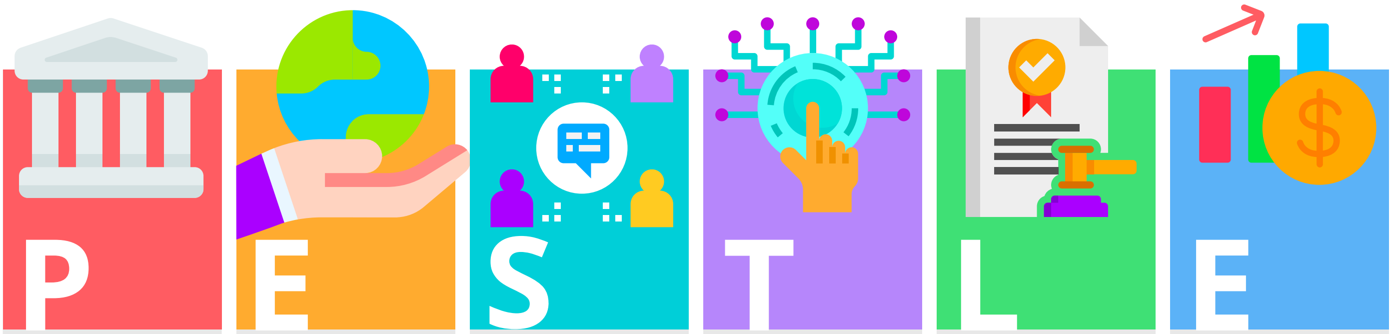
PESTLE analysis encourages you to think about what is happening in wider society that is influencing your issue. This tool has been used in business contexts to analyze the factors that impact an organization's strategies—we can adapt it to use in environmental advocacy projects too.

Age Group: 18 years old and above. For younger age groups, you may need a youth facilitator to provide guidance for discussion.

Time Required: 60-90 minutes

Group Size: This activity can be done individually or in small groups of up to 6 people maximum, to allow everyone to have the opportunity to share their knowledge and thoughts. If there are more people, consider having multiple groups and compare the answers.

Examples of factors that fall under the PESTLE analysis can be found below.



Political	Environment	Social	Technology	Legal	Economic
Government system	Environmental impact	Population growth	Access to technology	Laws and regulatory frameworks	Economic growth (GDP)
Level of corruption	Environmental education	Gender equality	Innovation culture	Enforcement of laws	Foreign investment
Policies	Protected areas	Media pressure	Impact of new technology (e.g. smart phones)	Labor rights	Wealth inequality
Government budgets	Pollution	Cultural beliefs and traditions	Internet access	Copyright laws	Tax incentives
Technical capacity	Environmental awareness	Education system (quality, level of attainment)		Health and safety standards	Infrastructure
					Corporate reporting
					Access to financing

Instructions:

Step 1: (30-45 minutes)

Complete a PESTLE analysis by looking at your study or the Iceberg analysis and brainstorm a list of the Political, Environment, Social, Technological, Legal and Economic factors you think have an impact on your topic of interest. Brainstorm a list of factors for each of the PESTLE aspects in the appropriate column.

Your Issue / Topic of Interest: ______________________________

Political	Enviroment	Social	Technology	Legal	Economic

Step 2: (30-45 minutes)

Based on the list of factors you have identified in Step 1, transfer them onto this table and think about the impact each factor has on your topic of interest. What research methods can you use to find out more?

PESTLE Aspects	List of factors impacting your issue	In what ways are each of the PESTLE factors impacting your main issue?	What do you need to know more about concerning any of these factors to have a more solid understanding about the issue you want to address? Jot down your ideas. (e.g. related policies, international agreements, past or ongoing projects, trends, etc.)
Political			
Environment			
Social			
Technology			
Legal			
Economic			

2.4

CONNECTION CIRCLE

Connection Circle is a tool to help you visualize and understand the complex interactions and dependencies among different components within their issue, promoting a more holistic approach to advocacy efforts.

Age Group: 18 years old and above. For younger age groups, you may need a youth facilitator to provide guidance for discussion.

Time Required: 60 minutes

Group Size: While you can use the tool by yourself, it is recommended to work in a small team of 4-6 people so you can collaborate and get a wide range of perspectives looking at your issue.

Materials:

1. The Connection Circle Video
2. The Connection Circle Template. You can print the template on a big sheet of paper or you can draw a large circle on a flipchart paper
3. Pens, pencils or permanent markers
4. Sticky notes (if available)

KEY QUESTIONS

While drawing a connection circle, ask yourself these questions:

- What are the key variables or elements in this story and what are the cause and effect relationships between the variables?
- Where are the important connection hubs? Why are they so connected?
- Are there any complete feedback loops present?
- After gaining a big picture view of the various interconnections between linked elements in the system, what insights can draw out in terms of interventions to change the behavior of the system in a positive direction?

Instructions:

1. **Draw a Circle:** Begin by drawing a circle in the center of a piece of paper or a whiteboard. This circle represents the system you are examining, in this case, water pollution.

2. **Identify Key Elements:** Start by identifying the key elements related to the issue you would like to work on.

   Place each key element you identified around the circle. Try to keep it within 10-15 elements.

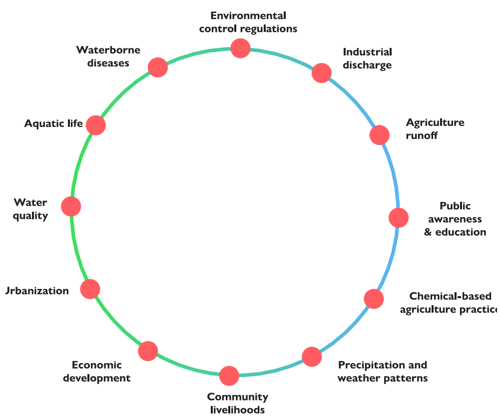
   For the water pollution example, these elements may include sources of pollution (e.g., industrial discharge, agricultural runoff, sewage), affected bodies of water (e.g., rivers, lakes, oceans), impacts on ecosystems and wildlife, and consequences for human health.

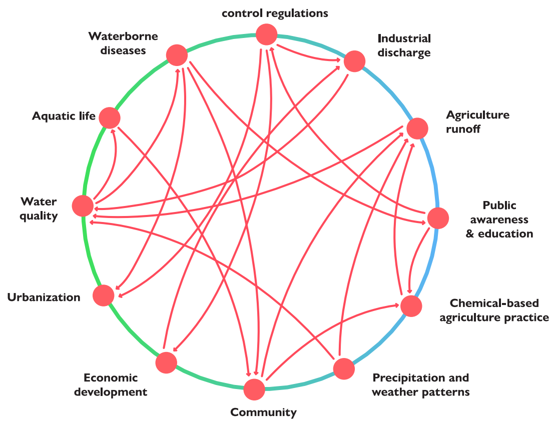
3. **Draw Arrows:** Draw arrows between the elements to indicate the directional relationships and connections between them. Use arrows to show how one element influences or impacts another. For instance, you can draw an arrow from "Industrial Discharge" to "Water Quality" to show how pollution from industries affects the quality of rivers.

   Continue this process until you cannot see any more direct causal connections between these elements. Links may be based on actual data or on hypotheses.

4. **Identify Feedback Loops:** Identify any feedback loops in the system. A feedback loop occurs when the output of a process loops back and affects the input.

Example using issue of Water Pollution





For example, Agricultural runoff negatively impacts water quality, which in turn harms aquatic life. This degradation of water quality and aquatic ecosystems affects community livelihoods, often driving farmers to increase chemical-based agricultural practices in an attempt to boost their income. These practices, however, exacerbate the agricultural runoff, creating a harmful feedback loop that further deteriorates water quality and aquatic life.

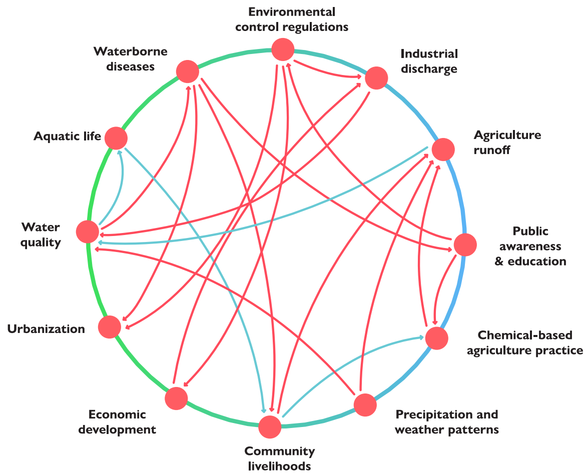
Draw feedback arrows to represent these loops. Use a different color to distinguish feedback loops from regular connections.

5. **Review and Refine:** Step back and review your diagram to ensure that the connections and feedback loops accurately reflect the complexity of the water pollution issue. Make any necessary adjustments or additions to improve clarity and understanding.

6. **Selecting an Advocacy Feedback Loop:** There might be several feedback loops represented in your connection circle. However, it is unlikely that you can effectively intervene in all of them. It is recommended to select the feedback loop sub-system that you and your team have the ability to intervene in and make some level of measurable change.

Discuss with your team to select the feedback loop that most makes sense to you as a "story" of cause and effect. It should be a loop that you can build an advocacy campaign strategy around that will resonate with different stakeholders in your community.

In Chapter 3 of the toolkit you will identify those stakeholders, and in Chapter 4, you will develop an advocacy plan that draws from this Connection Circle system feedback loop story.



ADDITIONAL TIPS: HOW TO READ AND ANALYZE A CONNECTION CIRCLE

Below are some key consideration points for you to look at in your Connection Circle. These are not strict rules, but can give you some insights about the connections you identified using the Connection Circle.

Which elements have lots of arrows around them? Why? Elements with lots of arrows moving to and from them tend to be leverage points in the story. Because of all their connections, key elements create lots of changes. In a connection circle about "French Fries in the economy", "French Fries Sold" might have lots of arrows pointing to and from it because it drives the key issues raised in the article.

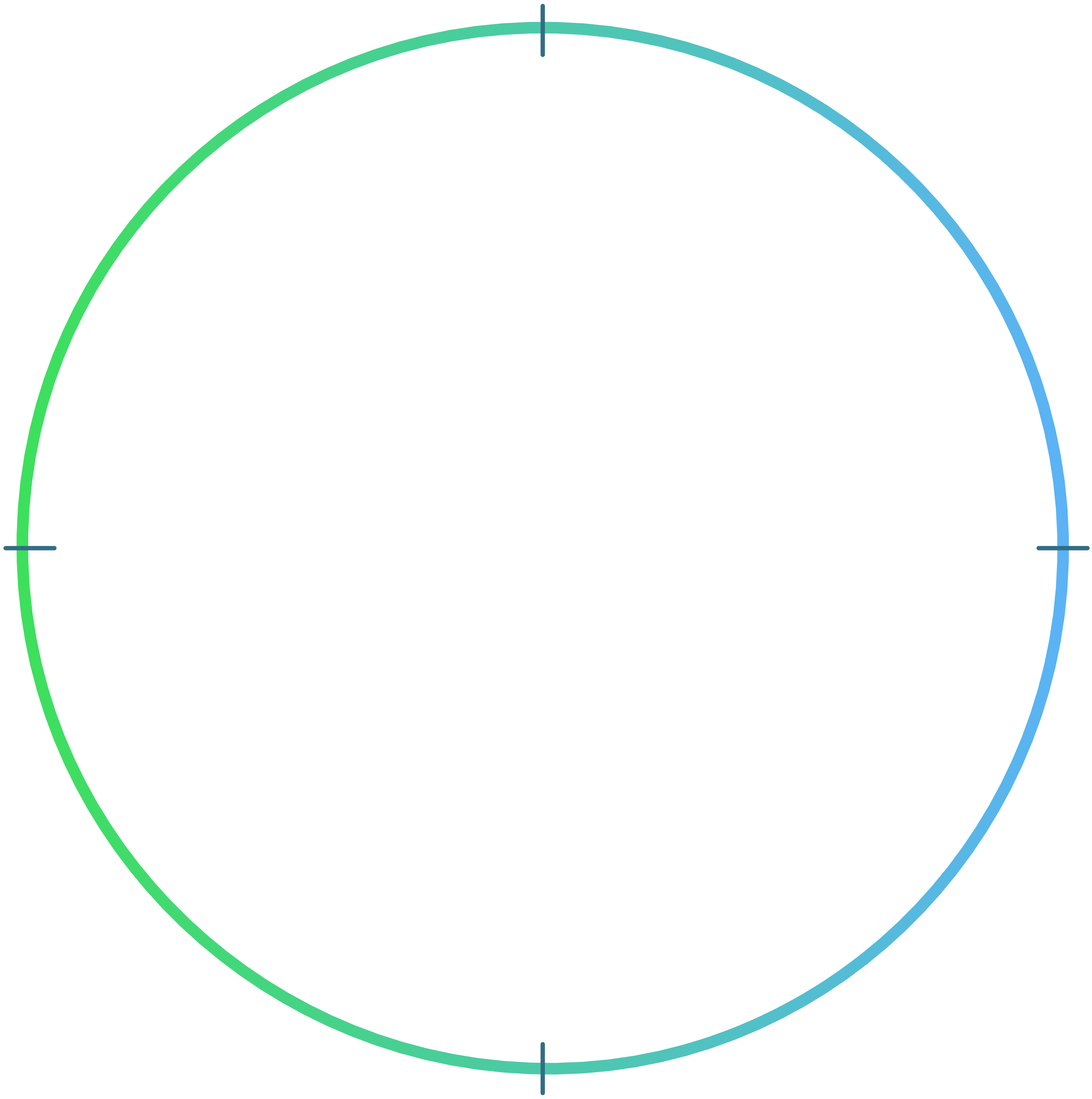
What is the significance of an element that has no arrows pointing to it? When an element has no arrows pointing to it, it is not being changed by any other element represented in the circle. If it is important, you may need to add another variable that causes the first variable to change.

What is the significance of an element that has no arrows coming from it? No arrows out means that the element doesn't influence anything that is currently in the circle. You may need to add one or more new elements.

What is the significance of an element with no arrows connected to or from it? No arrows at all means the element is not critical to the part of the story being traced, or other elements have been omitted that need to be included.

What does it mean when a pathway of arrows leads back to the starting element? When a pathway of arrows loops back to the original element, there is feedback in the story. Each closed loop identified is a feedback loop. When one element in the loop changes, the effect ripples through the whole loop, eventually affecting the original element as well.

CONNECTION CIRCLE TEMPLATE



2.5

TOOL: GMS YOUTH ADVOCATE RESEARCH PLAN TEMPLATE

Instructions:

1. **Write down the Issue or Problem:** Start by writing the specific issue or problem you have identified at the top of the template.
2. **Develop Specific Questions:** In Column A, write out questions that specifically reflect the issue or problem you want to address. For example, instead of a general question like "Is there a problem?" for the issue of "sand dredging in river systems, which is causing massive erosion of river banks," you could write ***"What are the associated problems caused by river sand dredging?"***
3. **Identify Key Stakeholders:** In Column B, list the ***stakeholders you need to speak with to find out more about the issue***. Include individuals or groups who are already working on this issue and try to consult with them early in your planning. They may become valuable collaborators in your advocacy journey.
4. **Choose Research Methods:** In Column C, select the research methods you will use to answer each question. Refer to the Research Methods section of the toolkit. You can use one method, such as interviewing, to answer multiple questions.
5. **Analyze and Reflect on Your Research:** Use the tools provided in the toolkit (or your own tools) to help you analyze, organize, and reflect on your research information. For example, to answer the question "What needs to change?" you could use a Problem Tree or the Systems Iceberg for analysis.

Example:

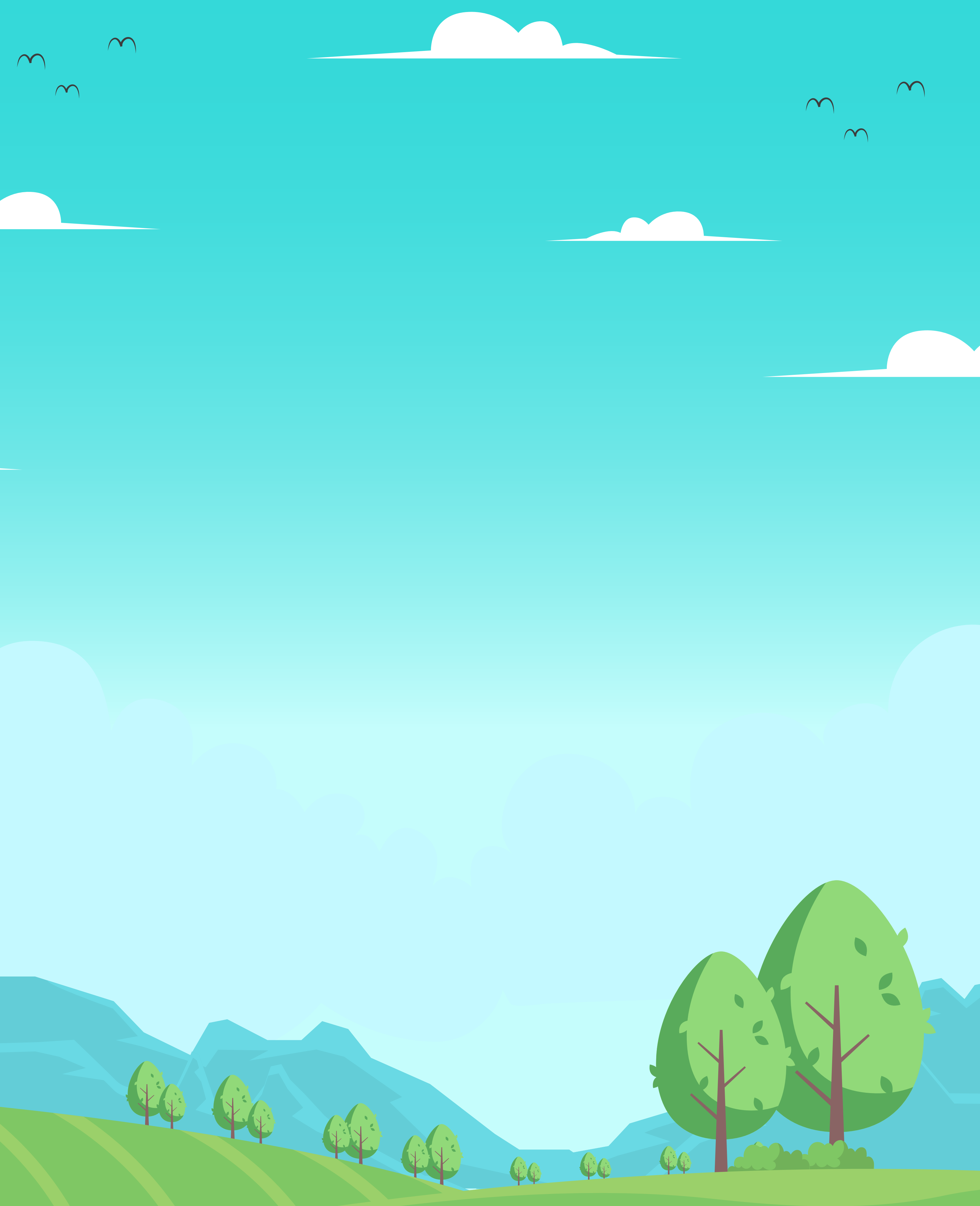
Issue Identified: Sand dredging in river systems causing massive erosion of river banks.

COLUMN A: Key Questions	COLUMN B: Stakeholders	COLUMN C: Research Methods	COLUMN D: Analysis Tools
What are the associated problems caused by river sand dredging?	Environmental scientists, local residents	Interviews, field observations	The Sustainability Compass, Problem Tree, Systems Iceberg, PESTLE
How does river bank erosion impact local communities?	Local community leaders, government officials	Surveys, focus groups	Stakeholder Mapping, System Mapping
What regulations exist regarding sand dredging?	Legal experts, regulatory agencies	Document analysis, expert interviews	Regulatory Framework Analysis
What are potential solutions to mitigate the erosion?	NGOs, environmental engineers	Literature review, case studies	SWOT Analysis

By following these steps, you will be able to systematically approach your issue and gather the necessary information for your advocacy efforts.

TOOL: GMS YOUTH ADVOCATE RESEARCH PLAN TEMPLATE

COLUMN A: Key Questions	COLUMN B: Stakeholders	COLUMN C: Research Methods	COLUMN D: Analysis Tools



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