Root Cause and Prioritization Activity

Overview: This activity can be used with anyone. It is an easy and accessible method, regardless of literacy, to discuss an issue, its relationships with other issues and understand its root causes.

Goals:

1   Understand the root causes of an issue or the links between two issues.

2   Illicit potential solutions

3   Prioritize potential solutions

Materials Required

- Butcher paper or dry erase board
- Markers

- Stickers
- Prompt questions

Background

- **Health** is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. (World Health Organization)

- **Health is shaped by many influences**, including gender, genetics, access to medical care, our personal behavior as well the living and working conditions of our homes and communities and the economic and social opportunities or resources we have access to. These influences or factors are highly interconnected.

Activity Overview

1 Welcome and introductions
2 Goals and overview of activity
3 Map the root causes
4 Review and identify potential solutions
5 Prioritize solutions
6 Closing

Welcome and introductions. Greet everyone and thank them for their willingness to participate in the activity. Ask everyone to introduce themselves and answer the question. This activity is to help warm the group up to sharing and participating. It is

meant to be a safe space where they begin to trust the facilitator and each other. The question can be anything relevant to the group or current events. Examples could be:

- If you were able to travel in time, what point in the future or past would you visit?
- If you could ask President Obama one question what would you ask him?
- If you could talk to one person, now living, who would it be and why?

Goals and Overview. Provide a brief overview of what the goals of the activity are and why their expertise is so important to the solutions of the issue. The goals include:

1   Understand the links between *(insert your issue)* and infant mortality

2   Illicit potential solutions

3   Prioritize potential solutions

Map the Root Causes. Start by laying a few guides for sharing;

- everyone's opinion is their' s and shouldn't be considered right or wrong. We can't debate it or judge it,
- we will let everyone talk and complete their idea before the next person talks, and
- everyone will get a chance to share.

On butcher paper or a dry erase board, write and link your two words, *for the example we will use* **Poverty and Health**, but you should use the priority area that was identified.

Share with them that we know that there is a link between the two issues and we need their help in understanding what those pathways are.
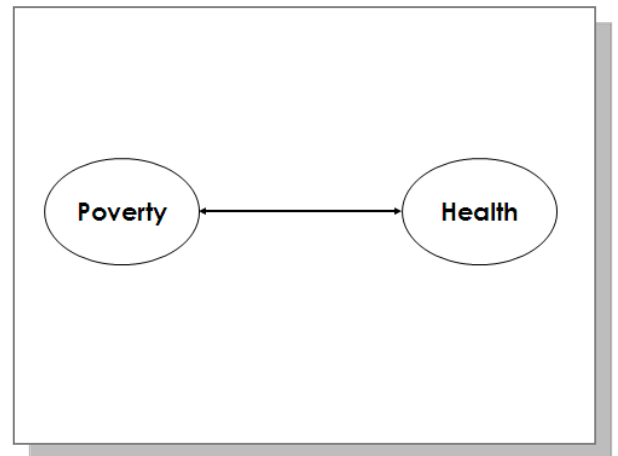
Ask them to start to brainstorm **how** and write their answers in words or short phrases on the paper or board.

For each answer, ask the follow up, **why**-why does what they shared cause it and how does that affect our health or poverty, depending on where they started.

Example

Participant: Poverty is caused by a lack of a job.

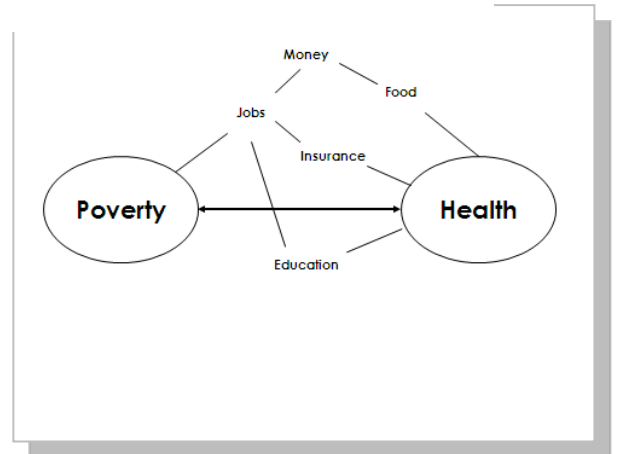*Facilitator*: Why does a lack of a job affect poverty?

Participant: With no job, there is no money.

Facilitator: Why does not having a job or money matter to health?

Participant: I can't buy food.

Facilitator: How does food affect your health?

As the discussion continues, ask for responses from a variety of individuals in the room. Begin to draw lines linking each concept together, mapping them together. Note, it can get messy but try to keep the lines that link readable.

Prompt Questions

Throughout the activity you may experience pauses in discussion or new concepts. Here are a few prompt questions to keep the discussion going:

- How do **living conditions** affect health? How are they affected by poverty?
- How do **working condition** affect health? How are they affected by poverty?
- How do **social connections** (family and friends) affect health? How do they affect poverty?

Review and Identify Potential Solutions

After the group has begun to slow down on their responses begin to shift to reviewing what has been shared and solicit potential solutions. Ask participants to share what they would like to see change or happen to improve the situation or causes of your issue, in this case, health and poverty. Refer to the map and the various responses to find solutions.

Make note of each one on a separate butcher paper or part of the board.

Additional prompt questions could include:

- What new programs or services would improve the situation?
- What current programs or services could be improved? How could they be improved?
- What can an individual do to improve the situation?
- Is there something the government could do to improve the situation? Healthcare organizations? Schools?, Churches and community groups?

If you hear ideas that seem similar to previously shared responses, clarify with the participant if what they shared is different from the other response and make note if it is.

3

Prioritize Solutions

Now that there is an extensive list of potential solutions, provide everyone with three sticker dots. Explain that they now get to vote for the solutions they feel are the most important to start with. Explain that they can vote for three different solutions or use their dots on one or two solutions; it is up to them how they vote.

Remind them that they are part of a series of these sessions to help inform the collaborative work and their time and energy is appreciated.

Closing

Once the voting is complete. Review the top solutions and ask if there are any observations that anyone would want to share.

Thank everyone for their time, honesty and openness to share.

Background References

Center on Social Disparities in Health, University of California, San Francisco.