Policy Education and Action for Fighting Poverty and Economic Hardship in Upstate New York

Research Team:
Andrew Fagan, Collaborator, CCE-Chemung and Tioga
Brian Gilchrist, Collaborator, CCE-Washington County
Danielle Hautaniemi, Collaborator, CCE-Schuyler County
Thomas A. Hirschl, Principal Investigator, Dept. Development Sociology
Beverly Mancuso, Collaborator, CCE-Genesee County
Kenneth Schlather, Collaborator, CCE-Tompkins
Nancy Welch, Collaborator, CCE-Hamilton County

BACKGROUND/JUSTIFICATION (CHARACTER LIMIT: 1600)

Poverty remains a central problem of the 21st Century for both the developed and the developing world. According to recent estimates by the World Bank, 1.4 billion people are poor by the criteria of living on less than $1.25 per day. Perhaps more surprising is that poverty is currently surging within the world’s wealthiest country, the United States, increasing to 44 million in 2009, including approximately one million residents of the upstate region of New York State.

The primary reason for the US poverty surge is the 2007-08 recession and its aftermath. Although the recession officially ended in 2008, poverty and unemployment continued to trend upward in 2009, repeating the pattern first observed in the US during the 1980s when economic growth, at the early stage of expansion, co-exists with rising poverty. This pattern, as well as other empirical facts, suggests that the fight against poverty needs to be waged with social policy because economic growth alone is insufficient.

The underlying logic of U.S. social policy is embedded within the 1935 Social Security Act. This legislation mandated not just social security transfers to retirees, but unemployment transfers, social support for the work-disabled, and cash welfare for dependent families. These programs embody social assumptions regarding family structure, gender roles with regard to work, and life expectancy, consistent with the social realities of the 1930s. Many of these assumptions, however, are no longer valid for the 21st Century.

New policies are needed to fight poverty and economic hardship successfully in the 21st Century. This project aims to contribute to this process by conducting educational programs that connect social science analysis and expertise to local policy makers and community leaders.
Specific Objectives (Character limit: 1000):

This project is designed to establish a social science program of research on poverty and economic hardship in upstate New York, and extend this research to a network of public decision makers and community leaders.

The project builds upon findings from an earlier study "Fighting Poverty in the 21st Century" that identified a market for local public policy education about poverty.

The specific objectives are the following:

1. Select a set of local leaders in 5 to 7 communities to engage in dialogue about the feasibility/advisability of activities and policies for fighting poverty in their area.

2. Create a regional/national social science base about poverty, and related social and economic trends.

3. Enrich the knowledge base to articulate with selected upstate New York communities. Use this knowledge base for educational programs in the selected communities

4. Establish a framework for communicating with community leaders about their progress against poverty. Incorporate the resulting two-way discussion into educational publications.

5. Establish a mechanism for extending knowledge from the selected communities across New York State.
**Approach/Methods:** *(Character limit: 1600)*

**Objective 1** begins with identifying five to seven communities by partnering with Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE) associations.

Selection of community leaders will be done according to: 1) diversity with regard to representing community diversity, and 2) leader reputation.

The database described in **Objective 2** will be derived from the U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey (ACS). Due to technical limitations of the ACS, care will need to be taken to obtain appropriate estimates.

Enrichment of the national/state database described in **Objective 3** will be accomplished using an online survey that will be made available to participating communities. A draft of the online survey can be viewed at [http://icadmedia.com/QoLSurvey/](http://icadmedia.com/QoLSurvey/).

The communication framework described in **Objective 4** will be negotiated between the Cornell campus/CCE-based staff and the community leaders. The framework for this relationship is envisioned as the following. First, a community research report will be authored by Cornell staff, and then distributed to the community leaders. Second, there will be a forum discussing the report. Third, the report will be modified based upon forum discussions and feedback.

**Objective 5** is a summary report based on the final product from Objective 4, summarized across all places, mailed/emailed to statewide lists of public officials and planners. The hope is that this publication will become an education resource for leaders across the state, and generate support for the program to continue beyond the study period.

Objectives 2, 4, and 5 will be accomplished with assistance from undergraduate interns identified by the principal investigator and the Community and Regional Development Institute. These interns will serve during the academic year, and during the summer.

**Stakeholder Engagement:** *(Character limit: 1000):*

This program of research and extension identifies a set of stakeholders in five to seven counties, and then works with these stakeholders by gaining their feedback and input (Objective 4). Under Objective 5 an additional set of stakeholders is generated by mailing reports to officials in the state legislature and state agencies, and to county planners and elected officials (Objective 5). The lists will be obtained from the Community and Rural Development Institute. The reports are intended to generate new stakeholders who could
potentially fund the program for more years after the research/extension program funding is terminated.

**INTENDED OUTCOMES AND IMPACTS: (CHARACTER LIMIT: 1000)**

The first outcome of the research/extension program is education and training of a corps of leaders in the five to seven targeted counties to understand and respond appropriately to poverty in their respective communities. This will be accomplished via activity and dialogue that engages Cornell staff with local leaders. This outcome will be measured by the quality of the feedback from the local leaders, observations regarding behavioral change (or not), and any new policies that are locally conceived and implemented (or not).

The second outcome of the research/extension program is education of leaders across upstate New York about poverty, and appropriate steps that can be taken to fight poverty. Mailing and emailing reports about activity involving the five to seven targeted counties will reach these leaders. This outcome will be measured by 1) the number of reports that are distributed, and 2) results from readers’ surveys regarding ideational and behavioral responses to the reports.

**INTENDED BENEFICIARIES: (CHARACTER LIMIT: 1000)**

The beneficiaries from this research/extension program are the following:

1) individuals experiencing poverty in the five to seven targeted communities;
2) five to seven targeted communities who will become more cohesive and integrated;
3) leaders in the targeted communities who will receive policy education and become more capable leaders;
4) New York State leaders beyond the targeted communities who will receive educational reports based upon the experience of the five to seven targeted communities;
5) communities and leaders beyond New York State who will benefit from the education materials and the project experience.

Are there jointly planned and interwoven activities between applied Research and Extension? Please, describe in detail (Character limit: 1000)

This project joins poverty research with local leadership training. Research conducted by the principal investigator will identify patterns, life course trends, and co-variates of poverty and economic hardship within New York State. The analysis will utilize U.S. census data from the American Community Survey, in combination with an online survey designed by the principal investigator. This analysis is then shared with community leaders and local decision makers in 5 to 7 communities, and a dialogue is established for refining the analysis to facilitate local policy education and action. This refined analysis is then published and shared with leaders across New York State.
As a recipient of federal funds, Cornell University is obligated to provide equal opportunity in research and extension programs and employment. Comment on how this research project directly or indirectly serves the interests of diverse audiences, especially Blacks/African Americans, Hispanics/Latinos or women in agriculture. (Character limit: 1000):

This project focuses upon the low-income population which is disproportionately composed of African-Americans, Hispanic/Latinos, and/or disadvantaged whites. The scientific analysis is focused upon the population below the poverty line, and the leadership training will focus on leaders from all sectors of society, including the poor. Thus we anticipate that many of the leaders will be African-American, Hispanic/Latino, and/or disadvantaged white.