Public Policy Initiatives (PPI) Review

Initiative 1: Food Deserts (Local - Baltimore)

To exemplify a working PPI from a local perspective, I have decided to present the current and actively promulgated PPI of great concern to the city of Baltimore, Maryland - known as The Baltimore Food Policy Initiative'. The city's Office of Sustainability under the Department of Planning under the Directorship of Holly Freishtat. MS have come to realize that a good proportion of the city's residents have limited or no access to healthy and affordable food, creating overlapping sections of 'Food Deserts' in the city. People especially in low-income communities who have limited or no access to sustained income with limited transport to food retail sources that can supply healthy and affordable food have developed diet-related problems. The impact is not only in one ethnicity but in a multicultural spectrum.

In summary the city, under current Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake, has enacted 2 regulations as part of the initiative. They are as follows (Baltimore City, 2012):

• "Zoning Regulations: In 2012, BFPI updated the city’s zoning code to support urban agriculture by removing the permit requirement for hoop houses, community gardens and farm stands in community-managed open space is now a permitted use, and urban agriculture is allowable with a conditional-use permit and submittal of a management plan."

• "Animal Husbandry Regulations: In 2012, BFPI updated health code to allow for chickens, rabbits, goats, and bees. Note that the Health Code does not explicitly prohibit fish, but aquaculture is currently not regulated by the City of Baltimore. The Maryland Department of Natural Resources does regulate aquaculture for potential impacts on surrounding water bodies."

While it is these 2 regulations that have become the legal action associated to the initiative, the Office of Sustainability have put together several projects and community action programs in support of these. They are also actively campaigning in the state of Maryland to enact food policy changes in support of the initiative. The Office of Sustainability (Baltimore City, 2012) published this information of their activities at state level - "Federal Nutrition Benefits at Farmers Markets: Advocated for a change in state policy prohibiting first-year farmers’ markets to accept federal nutrition assistance and as a result, the State Farmers’ Market Policy was changed to allow all new markets in food deserts to accept federal nutrition assistance." The relevance of this lies in the fact that there is political will behind the Office of sustainability so that the city department is staffed with individuals who hold specific roles to roll out the policy in the city as part of the enacted regulations. They also work closely with other government branches and public outfits so that the policy has become well-funded to roll out the projects and put in place retail infrastructure to support the initiative. Another important element is the inclusion of Baltimore city's Food Policy Advisory Committee (Food PAC), which includes, "over 45 member organizations that represent stakeholders in Baltimore’s food production, distribution, and consumption system," so that the food desert issue becomes something the public can confront and resolve together with their city government promoting cooperation and direct action.

Initiative 2: Miami-Dade Teen Dating Violence Prevention Team Initiative

This is a county-wide initiative known as the "Miami-Dade Teen Dating Violence Prevention Team Initiative", a public policy initiative that was the result of the collaboration of the following government and non-government organizations (Villar & Rochester, 2009), "the Florida Department of Health Sexual Violence Prevention Program, The Florida Coalition Against Domestic Violence and the DELTA State Steering Committee, and The Lodge/Victim Services Inc.," and "funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention CORE II-Part C grant program." The overwhelming aim of the collaborators is to (Villar & Rochester, 2009), "assess the community’s readiness to undertake comprehensive prevention efforts to address teen dating violence."

The collaboration resulted in the undertaking of a public study that assessed 4 components (Villar & Rochester, 2009), "(1) an environmental scan, (2) a policy scan, (3) an assessment of data sources and potential teen dating violence indicators, and (4) a community readiness and capacity assessment. The assessments were used to develop recommendations for moving forward with teen dating violence (TDV) prevention in Miami-Dade County. Recommendations were organized into four categories: 1) Data Surveillance, 2) Policy, 3) Prevention Programming and, 4) Capacity Building/Partnerships." The collaborators found out that while there is a lot of prevention programs available, much of them are at the activity level rather than the strategy of policy level so that they made no meaningful impact on the problem.

Why this policy initiative is relevant lies in the revelation of the authors - in schools across the county, Teen dating Violence (TDV) remain largely unreported. Incidents that should be labelled as TDV are coded as battery or assault while the public school system do not flag for TDV but only of academic achievement, school attendance, truancy and related issues. As such, the report successfully argues the urgent inclusion of new measures to incorporated TDV education into the current curriculum from 7th to 12th grade as well as the enactment of a dating violence and abuse policy.

Data Type

Both initiatives presented mixed data - numeric and textual data. Baltimore's Food Policy Task Force released a "FINAL REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS;" in 2009 containing both nominal, ordinal and interval data set. As such, the ordinal and interval data allowed for the report to quantify the values related to access to affordable healthy food within certain areas by certain populations to the degree of difference between people and their access. The results can thus be ranked as well as scaled. The Miami-Dade Teen Dating Violence Prevention Team Initiative by Villar and Rochester (2009) contained nominal and interval data so both qualitative and quantitative analysis can be undertaken to study the information presented.

Cost-Benefit Analysis

This is a simple CBA of each initiative based on the information provided.

Baltimore's Food Policy

• Cost - the city is currently funding the planning department to keep office and staff function to support the policy. The 45 different inter-governmental agencies working together also allocate resources while the 4 funding bodies have set aside large sums that is aimed at funding various projects to develop resources and systems that can element food deserts by helping in creating jobs and ensuring access to affordable and health food even in the most deprived areas. The city funds not just small businesses, small farms and retail operations but works towards establishing industries to allow for employment. Current cost estimated to be 1/3 or the Planning Department's budget.

• Benefit - jobs are created, small holdings are encouraged, people get access to healthier food from farm to plate so that revenue for the city increases while health of citizens also increase in the effort to abolish food deserts.

Miami-Dade TDV Policy Initiative

• Cost - the county's investment in the initiative is also a direct investment of the county into the local education system as the project is deemed workable only in the form of an additional learning module in class so that students can learn ways to prevent, avoid and overcome TDV. Outside of the budget of the organization set aside to hire experts and maintain presence in the community as well as continue campaign, the cost to some is the impact of the TDV on community psychology and the negative population socialization brought on by TDV and the trauma it brings.

• Benefits - whereas specialists are required to teach the new TDV courses, the beneficiaries are the teen students themselves as additional experts to learn from means further investment of the county towards the employment of specialists to keep the school environment neutral and safe.

Resources:
1. Baltimore City, Maryland (2012). Planning / Baltimore Food Policy Initiative. URL: http://www.baltimorecity.gov/Government/AgenciesDepartments/Planning/BaltimoreFoodPolicyInitiative/About.aspx
2. ------------------------ (2009). BALTIMORE CITY FOOD POLICY TASK FORCE FINAL REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION. URL: http://cleanergreenerbaltimore.org/uploads/files/Baltimore%20City%20Food%20Policy%20Task%20Force%20Report.pdf
3. Villar, M.E. & Rochester, R. (2009). Miami-Dade Teen Dating Violence Prevention Team Initiative: Final Report and Recommendations. URL: http://www.dvsacmiami.org/Resources/Miami%20Dade%20TDVPT%20Initiative%20Final%20Report%20and%20Recommendations.pdf