

# EXTENSION'S APPROACH TO THE POVERTY PROBLEM IN KENTUCKY

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## POVERTY DEFINED

Some people seem to think narrowly that poverty is the result of a deficiency in one major element—namely, money. However, over a half century ago Robert Hunter<sup>1</sup> indicated that poverty may be cultural, passed on from one generation to another. Robert Lampman<sup>2</sup> says the dollar poverty line neglects consumption. Helen Lamale and Margaret Statz<sup>3</sup> believe an allowance should be made for differences in size of families. For lack of a concise, authoritative definition, I offer the concept that poverty is a socio-economic condition of living below minimum standards of the basic needs of life. The condition of poverty may exist with an individual, a local community, or a large geographic area.

In Kentucky, 38 percent of the families and 70 percent of unrelated individuals, or a total of about 1,800,000 people, fall in the poverty category if money is used as the main criterion.

## PHILOSOPHY OF THE PUBLIC AFFAIRS EDUCATION APPROACH

### Public Affairs Education Defined

The purpose of public affairs education is to provide the people concerned with the facts about a situation, so they can clearly identify the problem and the alternative courses of action and understand the consequences of each possible course of action. Aside from developing an awareness and an understanding of public problems, public affairs education attempts to create in individuals and groups: (1) an ability to examine evidence critically in making judgments regarding various courses of action and the consequences

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<sup>1</sup>Robert Hunter, *Poverty*, The Macmillan Company, 1904, pp. 327-28.

<sup>2</sup>"Population Change and Poverty Reduction, 1947-1975," speech given by Robert J. Lampman, Professor of Economics, University of Wisconsin, at the Conference on Poverty Amidst Affluence, May 3-7, 1965, West Virginia University, Morgantown, West Virginia.

<sup>3</sup>Helen H. Lamale and Margaret S. Statz, "The Interim City Worker's Family Budget," *Monthly Labor Review*, Vol. 83, No. 8 (August 1960), Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor.

and (2) a desire to participate in solving public problems. The individual or group must decide upon the course of action to take and must assume responsibility for such action. In our democratic way of thinking, informed individuals or groups will make decisions which will appropriately solve the problems confronting them.

### **Approach of the Public Affairs Specialist**

*The primary task of the public affairs specialist is to formalize a program of public affairs education with reference to problems (or issues) that should be of broad general concern.* The steps in developing such a program include: (1) Discuss the situation and the specific problem or issue and educational approaches with local extension personnel. (2) Assist county extension personnel in training lay leaders. (3) Discuss the problem with organized groups. (4) Help groups organize study or action committees on specific problems. (5) Develop appropriate literature. (6) Lead discussions concerning the problem at educational meetings. (7) Involve experts from the university system and other institutions and agencies. (8) Cooperate with other responsible agencies and groups. (9) Assist county extension personnel in making use of mass media.

*The job of a public affairs specialist includes two other tasks:* (1) interpreting laws and programs for the public and (2) creating awareness, understanding and an appreciation of ongoing educational and technical assistance programs.

In addition to the full-time public affairs specialist, Kentucky has twenty-three resource development agents specializing in selected areas of public affairs education (e.g., constitution, taxation, housing, food stamp plan, etc.).

### **Approach of the Local Extension Worker**

In general, the approach of the local extension agent in public affairs education is the same as that of the specialist, except that he works at the local level and works directly with local individuals and groups. He is the local arm of the specialist-agent team.

### **Approach of Citizen Group**

Education, in essence, is the process whereby the individual through his own activity prepares himself for decision making. Generally an interested group of citizens follows the process previously mentioned (determines the objective, identifies the problem, studies the alternatives, weighs the consequences, decides, acts, takes responsibility).

In summary, Kentucky extension specialists and agents and local citizens all have clearly defined roles to play concerning public affairs. The above methodology is used with flexibility in all public affairs education, *including educational work concerning poverty.*

### THE PROBLEM OF POVERTY

In Extension in Kentucky one way to view the problem of poverty is in terms of inadequacies:

1. *Inadequate education* for satisfactory performance by people.
2. *Inadequate capital formation* for creating job opportunities and income, providing community services, and achieving quality living conditions.
3. *Inadequate balance of people with natural resources* for development and maintenance of high standards of living.
4. *Inadequate organization* for solving the first three problems.

### WHAT WE DID

In 1960, four years before the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 was passed, Kentucky initiated the Eastern Kentucky Resource Development Project (EKRD) with the objective of over-all economic and institutional development of a thirty-county depressed area of Appalachian Kentucky—our principal poverty area. The project was a joint effort of the W. K. Kellogg Foundation and the University of Kentucky, and was to be administered by the College of Agriculture's Cooperative Extension Service. The core idea of the EKRD was to conduct the work through a team of specialists located in a small county seat community near the center of the thirty-county area. The specialist positions were in public affairs education, adult education, youth education, tourism, institutional management, industrial development, business management, communications media, horticulture, soils, forestry, and family economics.

Surveys had revealed that in the thirty-county area, 65 percent of the families had total annual incomes of less than \$3,000. The area was widely characterized by the four major inadequacies listed above.

Let us briefly review some examples of what Extension has done, through the Eastern Kentucky Resource Development Project, during the past six years in trying to solve the problems of inadequacies in our principal poverty area.

## **Inadequate Education**

Since 1960 intensive educational efforts have been directed toward the needs of people of selected depressed areas of our state. This includes that depressed area of Appalachian Kentucky so widely publicized by Harry Caudill's book, *Night Comes to the Cumberland*s, and more recently, in part, by Jack Weller's *Yesterday's People*. Extension workers at all levels tapped the resources of all of the colleges of the University of Kentucky and many federal and state agencies in conducting seminars on population, education, health, government, natural resources, community facilities, etc.

We have found several facts to be unequivocally true about the Appalachian people. When they have a knowledge of the facts, they face up to the situation very objectively. They change attitudes as rapidly as any other group of people. When opportunity avails itself, the Appalachian is as quick to take advantage of it as people from most other places; he is ready and eager to improve his performance ability and record.

Following are some case examples which illustrate the readiness of Appalachian people for change.

CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT, 1960. The rugged, individualistic people of the poverty area of Appalachian Kentucky hold dear the right to vote. In a state-wide general election in November 1960, the people of Kentucky voted on two amendments to the state constitution designed to remove some of the rural-tradition aspects of the constitution and make it more suitable to our modern, urban-like society. Extension personnel conducted an intensive public affairs education program on the constitution in the thirty-county area of Appalachian Kentucky. (Remember, this is an area where 65 percent of the families had less than \$3,000 annual income per family according to the 1960 census.)

On the night of November 8, 1960, when the votes were tallied, the constitutional amendment was defeated. But it was defeated by urban people, not by rural people! The majority of voters in all of the thirty-county area of Appalachian Kentucky had voted favoring the amended constitution. The urban voters of our largest metropolitan city, Louisville, voted down the constitutional amendments. What a black eye this gives to those who claim that the people of Appalachia hold on dogmatically to tradition, that they are not willing to face up objectively to the facts of a situation!

SCHOOL DROPOUTS. In 1962, our specialist in youth education with the EKRDP decided to give priority attention to this problem.

In the thirty-county area, only 25 percent of the students who had entered the first grade in 1950 graduated from high school in 1962—and only one out of three of these graduates was going on to college or business or vocational schools. The specialist developed a multicounty effort to make the public aware of the dropout problem. He provided the facts on dropouts and statistics to illustrate the value of continued education. The result was 847 fewer dropouts in the thirty-county depressed area of Appalachian Kentucky in 1963 than in the previous year. Also, the Kentucky Commission on Children and Youth employed an executive secretary to work on the dropout problem.

**HEAD START.** In March 1965, our youth specialist in Appalachia drew up a situational statement regarding the needs of children of Head Start age and outlined the possibilities of the Head Start program to school and county leaders in thirty-one school districts. He did not tell the people of Appalachia that they should accept Head Start. He merely presented the facts of the situation and the possible courses of action. The result was that the thirty-county area of Appalachian Kentucky was the first such large geographical area in the nation to initiate the Head Start Program.

**MANPOWER DEVELOPMENT TRAINING ACT (MDTA).** Beginning on January 27, 1964, the MDTA offered job training for gainful employment to young people 17 to 21 years of age and adults who were unemployed heads of households and who had received less than \$1,200 net income the previous year. Extension personnel in Appalachian Kentucky interpreted the provisions of the act to hundreds of potential candidates. Many men took advantage of the opportunity to acquire an employable skill. Finally, in our regular extension program our specialists and resource development personnel helped set up and conduct classes or projects on strawberry production, orcharding, forestry, landscaping, highway beautification, sewing, and farm management.

**MEDICARE.** This year extension specialists in resource development and local extension workers all over the state joined with Social Security personnel in taking a crash educational program to the public through 337 meetings which reached over 5,000 people, 200 radio and television programs, and over 3,000 individual contacts. Thousands of people signed up for Medicare; it was their own decision.

**FOOD STAMP PROGRAM.** The Federal Food Stamp Program was not readily accepted in the thirty counties of Appalachian Kentucky. Our extension specialist in family economics assisted personnel of

the welfare agencies in interpreting the Food Stamp Program to the public. Today, this program is being used in twenty-two of the thirty counties. As a follow-up, our specialist in family economics is conducting a regular extension program through face-to-face demonstrations in small grocery stores on the use of food stamps for purchasing dried skim milk, etc. This example shows how effective public affairs education by specialists can establish an environment for subsequent regular extension education programs.

**INTERPRETING NEW LAWS.** Recently extension specialists have played an important role in interpreting new laws which have contributed toward solution of the problems in the field of education. These laws include the amended Vocational Education Act, National Defense Education Act, Primary and Secondary Education Act, Higher Education Facility Act, Economic Opportunity Act, Manpower Development and Training Act, and Appalachian Resource Development Act.

### **Inadequate Capital Formation**

**PRIVATE ENTERPRISE AND THE CREDIT SYSTEM.** During the past six years our specialists in public affairs, in business management, industrial development, institutional management, tourism, horticulture, poultry, and housing conducted a public affairs and general extension education program to help businessmen take a realistic look at their situation and the opportunities for development and to help them understand the kinds of financing available from private, state, and federal sources. As a result, today there are 149 new or expanded business enterprises such as forestry products industries, motels, hotels, plastic greenhouses, 10,000-bird poultry houses, etc. Over five and a half million dollars has been invested in these enterprises.

**INFRASTRUCTURE.** While the Appalachian Resource Development Act was being debated in the Congress of the United States, extension specialists conducted an intensive public affairs education program about it. By telegram, etc., the people expressed their views to Congress. After passage, the act was further interpreted to the people of Appalachian Kentucky. As a result of the passage of this act, 435 miles of roads with accompanying highway garages, etc., are being constructed.

**HOUSING.** There was so much public concern about the poor housing of Appalachian Kentucky in the winter of 1963 that one million dollars in federal funds was appropriated for winterizing

homes. Recognizing the poor housing situation (average about 50 percent substandard) and the seeming lack of will and determination on the part of the people to do anything about it, our specialist in housing and several of our resource development agents initiated a public affairs program to provide the public with facts about cooperative housing, homes for the elderly, low-rent housing, home financing under the various credit agencies, etc. In addition, our extension engineer and the extension specialist in housing developed a plan for a model three-bedroom house which can be constructed at a cost of \$4,000 to \$6,000. Over 1,300 of these house plans have been requested by individuals. There is a definite climate for new home building in Appalachia, which was developed by public affairs education.

### **Imbalance of Population and Natural Resources**

**FAMILY PLANNING.** In 1964, our extension specialist in public affairs education conducted a survey on work being done on family planning in Appalachia, Kentucky. He served as a catalyst to get the Council of Southern Mountains, Inc., to call together representatives of the responsible public and private health agencies and groups to review what was being done and to arrive at some common goals and procedures for an educational program on family planning. This conference led to the development of the Population Control Council for Appalachian Kentucky. The council is composed of representatives from the State Department of Health, the Council of the Southern Mountains, Inc., the Mountain Maternal Health League, and the Frontier Nursing Service, selected private physicians, and the extension public affairs specialist.

The council already has achieved some results. The Hartman Foundation made a contribution to the council to help with birth control measures for mentally and physically handicapped parents and extremely poor parents with more than five children. In 1965, the Mountain Maternal Health League alone reported reaching 3,313 women with its planned parenthood program. Were these poor families? The average family income was \$1,535. Today several of our home demonstration agents and resource development specialists are providing family planning information to homemaker groups through our regular extension programs and to men in the Work Experience and Training Program.

**POPULATION RELOCATION.** This very month, September 1966, Extension set up a task force to determine our role in the relocation of some 650 families in four Appalachian counties. This situation

developed as a result of the construction of a new dam at Carrs Fork in Knott County by the Corps of Engineers and the recent purchase of land in four counties for expansion of the Daniel Boone National Forest. Extension will conduct a survey, get the facts, and present to the people alternative courses of action to help them in making decisions.

**STRIP MINING LAW.** Last year our state legislature was faced with a controversial issue—whether or not to pass a strict strip mining law. We now have in Kentucky one of the strictest strip mining laws in the United States. Much thought is being given by development groups to the rebuilding of the natural beauty of the mountains of Appalachian Kentucky. The people felt that if we could rebuild and beautify Appalachian Kentucky, it would be a natural recreation area for tourists from the great metropolitan areas of the eastern seaboard. This would be a source of income to the people. However, if this natural resource were allowed to continue to deteriorate, as in the past, from uncontrolled strip mining, nobody, not even native Appalachian Kentuckians, would be interested in visiting this area.

### **Inadequate Organization**

Today, six years after the beginning of the pilot Kellogg–University of Kentucky EKR D Project, there are several types of vigorous, broadly representative development organizations. Appalachian Kentucky is served in whole or in part by nine multicounty area development councils, by twenty-eight county development associations, by thirty industrial development corporations, and by four regional tourist promotion organizations all of which are related to relevant state and federal agencies.

The extension specialists in community development, industrial development, and tourism, along with some seventy local extension agents, played a dominant role in creating an awareness of the situation that resulted in the present system of organizations.

There is an old adage that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts because the whole has a spirit. Extension in Kentucky is trying to help eliminate poverty, but Extension in Kentucky will continue to serve all the people with the whole spirit of Extension.