

Global challenges and local legislations: using GIS maps as an educational tool to mobilize low income residents and bring awareness to local legislators- case study

Case report

With approximately 870million people of the 7.1billion people in the world suffering from chronic undernourishment, alleviating hunger is imperative as it burdens societies economically, socially, and politically. Though the majority effected live in underdeveloped countries, there is a rapid rise in developed countries from 13million in 2004 to 16million in 2012, reversing a steady decrease from 20million in the early 1990s.¹ In the U.S., movement to alleviate food scarcity for vulnerable populations (particularly women and children), has been on the forefront for public health policy since 1974 with the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children.² With the continuation of this federal mandate to ensure the well-being of the American underprivileged, local governments struggle to inform their communities on regularly revised WIC packets though education and community mobilization. Aiding needy populations through effective outreach and local policy is a great challenge, especially as there are expectations to do both simultaneously. In Jersey City, food insecurity is a global issue of current local focus where GIS mapping serves as an educational tool to spur both residents and legislators into advocacy.

Jersey City's Department of Health and Human Services (JCDHHS) and undergraduate community health students from New Jersey City University implemented "Cooking Matters", a program designed to provide educational grocery store tours to low-income residents to increase access to healthy foods. The students employed GIS mapping to identify correlations between residents' levels of economic

prosperity and local food distribution businesses. The maps were displayed at community health events for educational purposes. What was found was that the GIS maps assisted with communicating to both targeted residents and policy makers quickly and comprehensively to ultimately motivating advocacy in both parties. Due to the maps' ability to transcend multiple barriers such as language and literacy, they have the capacity to deliver effective services consistently while easily explaining diverse and ever changing complexities. One map can serve as multiple methods as an educational tool to showcase crucial patterns for community engagement and policy development (Figures 1-3).

Volume 2 Issue 6 - 2015

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Received: June 19, 2015 | **Published:** November 27, 2015

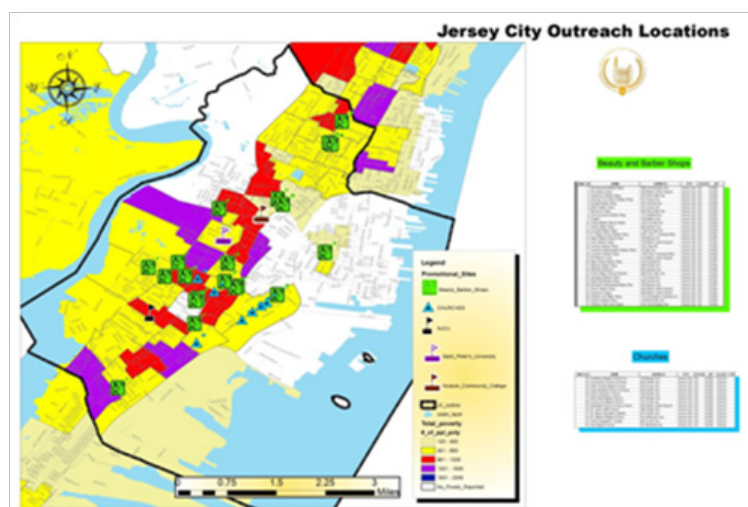


Figure 1 Jersey City Community Assets & Outreach Locations.

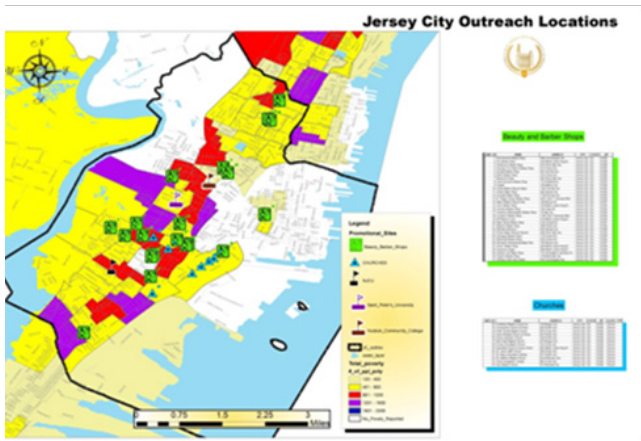


Figure 2 Jersey City Community Assets & Low-Income Fast food Restaurants.

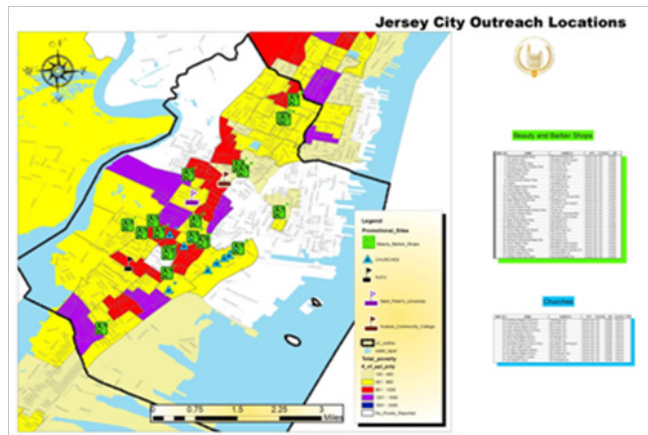


Figure 3 Jersey City Community Assets & Low Income Supermarkets.

Acknowledgements

None.

Conflict of interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

References

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2. United States Department of Agriculture. *Women, infants, and children (WIC)*. USA; 2015.