

Constraints to Poverty Reduction in Africa: The Perspective of Community Studies

**Cornell University
401 Warren Hall
April 22, 2002**

Cornell University's program of research on Strategies and Analyses for Growth and Access (SAGA, see <http://www.saga.cornell.edu/>) takes a distinctively "bottom up perspective" on the constraints to poverty reduction in sub-Saharan Africa. It starts from the observation that the macroeconomic reforms of the past two decades have not delivered the extent of growth and poverty reduction that was expected. It then advances the hypothesis that the reason may lie in micro level factors influencing the capabilities of individuals, households and communities—their productivities, their vulnerabilities, their institutions and their environment. It proposes analyses in four key areas—education; health and nutrition; risk and vulnerability; and voice and empowerment. Of course, it recognizes the interactions between these dimensions.

It is not surprising, given SAGA's emphasis on the ground level micro realities that face the poor in Africa, that household surveys form the foundation of the analytical database. There has been a significant increase in the availability of these data sets in Africa, and the Cornell team will collect and collate these data sets to the extent possible. Careful econometrics based on these data sets will provide the core analysis of the project.

However, Cornell's SAGA proposal recognizes that conventional nationally representative household surveys do not constitute the only type of information that is available for Africa. While SAGA's terms of reference and its budget preclude the conducting of significant numbers of community level studies, there are a large number of studies, conducted primarily by anthropologists, sociologists, and by NGOs, which study particular communities in great detail. These studies are not necessarily designed specifically to investigate the key SAGA issues, but there is no question that they constitute a wealth of knowledge that can be utilized in the research program. This is particularly true since the "bottom-up" perspective is central to our approach to poverty reduction in Africa.

This one day meeting is designed as a brainstorming exercise to discuss (i) the contribution that the community studies perspective can make to SAGA's research, (ii) an intellectual framework for interacting the findings of community studies with SAGA's quantitative research, and (iii) a pragmatic road map of how to do it, given the many constraints, budgetary and otherwise. The participants will include the SAGA team; members of the Cornell campus with a keen interest in Africa, poverty and community level studies; and distinguished visitors from outside Cornell who have made significant contributions to the debate.

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The Perspective of Community Studies**

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Program

- 9.00 – 9.30 Participants assemble
- 9.30–10.30 Introduction: SAGA and Community Studies
David Sahn (Nutrition), Ravi Kanbur (Applied Economics and Economics), N'dri Assie Lumumba (Africana Studies and Education)
- 10.30 – 11.00 Coffee
- 11.00 – 12.30 Experiences with Community Studies I
Michael Lipton (Sussex), Josephine Allen (Policy Analysis and Management), N'dri Assie Lumumba (Education and Africana Studies)
- 12.30 – 2.00 Lunch (By invitation)
- 2.00 – 3.30 Experiences with Community Studies II
Scarlett Epstein (UK), Dimitra Doukas (Anthropology), Terence Turner (Anthropology), Christopher Barrett (Applied Economics)
- 3.30 – 4.00 Coffee
- 4.00 – 5.30 A Road Map for the Cornell Community Studies Program
SAGA Team

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