Poverty, Race and Community in Rural Places:

The Empowerment Approach

J. Norman Reid, Ph.D.*

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*Acting Deputy Administrator, Office of Community Development, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Rural Development, Washington, D.C. The author may be reached at nreid@ocdx.usda.gov. The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of any other persons or organizations.

Introduction

In rural communities of the Old South, poverty, race and community are closely intertwined. Indeed, it is hard to talk meaningfully about any of them without addressing them all simultaneously. Nonetheless, policies and programs for rural areas have operated at a very different plane, focusing on infrastructure, broad social institutions and business investments that—however critical to providing a base for overall well-being—leave untouched critical aspects of the underlying social fabric that inhibit the full value of these investments from being realized and appropriately shared. Specifically, the nexus between poverty and race and the difficulty racially divided communities have in achieving true community has been largely neglected by policy. However, feasible and appropriate methods are at hand to help address this missing element. This paper discusses one of these methods—the community empowerment approach.

Poverty and U.S. Rural Policy

Virtually from the time the first Africans and Europeans touched America's shores, poverty has been with us. In the first hundred years after the colonization at Jamestown, the majority of black Africans and white Europeans arrived in servitude and without means of self-support. Over the decades, some escaped servitude and with the availability of cheap land were able to rise in the world, while others languished in bondage. By the time of the Revolution, bondage had become almost entirely black slavery, the effects of which live on today in concentrations of poverty and the climate of separation and misunderstanding in which it exists. For whites, there were more opportunities; nonetheless, many—particularly those who settled in the mountainous areas of the Appalachians and Ozarks or who lived under the oligarchic plantation system of the South—were trapped in lifestyles and economic systems that offered little or no chance of escape.[1]

Since the beginning of European colonization, America has made countless investments in transportation and other infrastructure that opened up the continent to economic expansion. The greatest concentration of these investments came in the 19th Century and included the building of canals, roads, railroads that first gave access to the land beyond the Appalachian mountains and then across the prairies to the Pacific. At the same time, the availability of seemingly endless supplies of land—once cleared of native peoples—enabled millions of free Americans to stake a claim at independent living using skills handed down from parent to child.

In the 20th Century, transportation investments continued to be a major force for development. First the national highway system and investments in paved farm-to-market roads and later the Interstate Highway System gave access to all parts of rural

[1]Lerone Bennett, Jr., *The Shaping of Black America* (New York: Penguin Books, 1993), chapters 1-2.

America without reliance on the railroad monopolies that had plagued farmers in the 1800s.

Rural policy extended into other areas as well. Education was a major element, promoted first by the granting of lands for schools in the Old Northwest and later the establishment of land grant universities for the agricultural and mechanical arts in 1862 and 1890. A national forest system was established to manage access to this critical national resource. Growing out of the Great Depression, the range of rural policies was extended by creating a social safety net to assure incomes for many elderly that later grew into today's welfare system, promoting effective conservation practices and helping rural residents enjoy adequate housing and essential community facilities.

These national investments established, in its broad outlines, the structure of today's rural policy, though many additional services and benefits have been added in the areas of business development, education, labor and transportation, among others. Altogether, they have protected critical national resources, created economic opportunities, and produced a rising tide with the potential to lift all boats.

But still, poverty has persisted. Furthermore, it continues to be concentrated in many of the same areas, and in the descendants of many of the same peoples, Black and white—who came in poverty and bondage to these shores, as well as Native Americans whose enforced containment on "reservations" of land left many with little hope of prospering.

In 1996, the rural poverty rate was 15.9 percent, higher than the urban rate of 13.2 percent, a level that has been relatively stable for most of a decade. Among minorities, however, poverty is three times as prevalent as for whites. Poverty rates are highest in the South and West, where Blacks, Native Americans, and Hispanics are the most concentrated within the rural population.[2] The vast majority of persistent poverty counties, 443 of 535, are located in the South; of these counties the majority have populations that are one-third or more Black. These heavily Black southern counties made up the majority of the 399 persistently poor southern counties that remained poor in 1995 and 43 percent of the 44 counties that, while still persistently poor, had lowered their poverty rates in 1995.[3]

Consequently, key questions for rural policy are why is this so, and what strategies can be developed to produce better results for the poor and their descendants?

What's Missing in Poverty Policy

The answer to these critical questions lies not in what is contained in current rural development policy, but rather in what is missing from it. These historical approaches

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[2]Mark Nord, "Rural Poverty Rate Unchanged," Rural Conditions and Trends (Vol. 9, No. 2): 81-84.
[3]Linda M. Ghelfi, "Most Persistently Poor Rural Counties in the South Remained Poor in 1995," *RuralAmerica* 15 (February 2001): 36-49. Persistently poor counties are defined by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service as having 20 percent of more of their population in poverty in each of the census years of 1960, 1970, 1980 and 1990.

share a common theme: they address issues in the aggregate by creating institutions, structures, and investments to enhance the value of natural resources and expand economic growth in other ways. With some exceptions, most notably the Cooperative Extension System, relatively few investments were addressed to building institutions in rural communities, and even when these programs existed, they were often targeted to those who could add most to aggregate productivity rather than those who needed them for basic livelihood.

During the 1960s, a wave of Federal programs established sub-state regional networks to address a wide range of issues through planned, citizen-controlled processes.[4] Of these, few remain: Community Action Agencies (CAA), a product of the War on Poverty, Economic Development Districts whose precarious existence over the last two decades is supported by Economic Development Administration (EDA),[5] and USDA's Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) Districts, the only one of these programs that has continued to expand into new areas. All three have important presences in rural America and provide critical focus and capacity for rural development.

Programs that gave direct aid to the poor in such areas as housing and income support were generally intended to raise their standards of living and stave off the worst consequences of poverty, thus maintaining their livelihoods at more acceptable levels. But these programs did little or nothing to address the causes of poverty or provide either incentives or means to escape it, and poverty remains at shockingly high levels in many rural areas of the U.S.

What is missing in rural policy is a concerted effort to engage individuals and communities in poverty in their own economic and social enhancement. What is missing is the willingness to face up to the root causes of poverty, which are often an outgrowth of historic and contemporary social divisions that cut the poor out of opportunities to share power, equal opportunities and, in the end, hope. To see that this is so, we have only to glance backward to whence much of today's poverty derived—in the economic, geographic, racial and social segregation that was established early in our history, often even before our Republic began. Poverty in America today is concentrated in Appalachia, among Blacks and whites in the former plantation and slaveholding areas of the South, among Native American populations on and off reservations and in the Southwest and other areas where persons of color and Hispanic culture are numerous.

If exclusion from power is a major factor in creating and sustaining poverty, another is the pervasiveness and entanglement of its root causes. Access to critical services has come last to those who can least afford to provide for themselves. Nearly all rural Americans now have running water, but only because of major investments over the

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[4]See Jerome M. Stam and J. Norman Reid, *Federal Programs Supporting Multicounty Substate Regional Activities: An Overview*. RDRR-23 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economics, Statistics, and Cooperatives Service, August 1980) and J. Norman Reid, *A Statistical Profile of Substate Regional Organizations*. ESS Report No. 8 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economics and Statistics Service, May 1981).

[5]In the Appalachian region, they are known as Local Development Districts (LDD).

last three decades, and even now some areas—often high poverty areas—are getting this service for the first time. Housing quality has been greatly improved, but housing affordability is a critical issue for many rural Americans because wages and salaries, even for those who work full-time or more, are insufficient. Education has improved, but without meaningful job opportunities in their communities, many of the better educated leave for the cities to achieve lifestyles impossible at home. Transportation provides improved access to regional cities and shopping malls, but further drains local economies of retail dollars and empties small town downtowns of vitality. Those with the least income find it hard to reach those shopping opportunities, or jobs that would help them out, because limited mass transportation is available.

Traditional rural development policies don't address the powerlessness and lack of hope that are handed down from one generation to the next. Nor do they ordinarily touch root causes, instead tackling limited issues that are symptoms and consequences of the underlying disease of poverty; even then, they do so serially and incompletely. While traditional rural development programs certainly meet worthy and pressing needs and enhance the lives of the impoverished, they frequently contribute little or nothing to alleviating the causes of poverty. As a result, they leave the impoverished vulnerable to a continued existence on the margin of society.

Nor do traditional macroeconomic policies have much likelihood of reducing poverty in rural areas where poverty and race are conjoined. In a recent study of poverty and the macroeconomy, Michael LeBlanc finds macroeconomic growth has been less successful in reducing poverty since the mid-1970s than it had been in earlier decades. Changes in wage rates have more important effects on long term reductions in poverty, but more so for white households than Black households. He concludes that the results of his analysis "weaken the belief that output growth acting alone will significantly and permanently reduce poverty in the United States." The results suggest instead the need for "complementing growth strategies with targeted interventions that lie outside the traditional system of monetary and fiscal policy."[6]

The Empowerment Approach to Tackling Poverty

The best way to directly bring about lasting reductions in poverty is to eliminate the social and geographic isolation in which it is rooted. To do so requires more than categorical investments in infrastructure and businesses **inside** community boundaries, which has often been thought to be the objective of rural development policy, to building real communities themselves, through holistic and integrative methods. Eliminating poverty is more than raising wages and incomes. It also requires changing beliefs and local institutions—both formal and informal--that retard development or restrict it from benefiting the poor. One approach that addresses these shortfalls is the community empowerment process.

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[6]Michael LeBlanc, *Poverty, Policy, and the Macroeconomy*. Technical Bulletin No. 1889 (Washington: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, February 2001), quoted at p. 22.

The community empowerment approach derives from the rural Empowerment Zones and Enterprise Communities (EZ/EC) program, enacted in 1993, which provides one example of a way to address high concentrations of rural poverty. In its broadest outlines, the EZ/EC program provides highly flexible grants to local areas with high rates of poverty that have undertaken a community-based, long term, comprehensive strategic development planning process. Thus far, through a series of three competitive "rounds," 60 EZ/ECs have been designated in rural areas. In addition to these, some 127 Champion Communities—unsuccessful applicants for the EZ/EC program that decided to implement their strategic plans without the grants—and five Rural Economic Area Partnership (REAP) Zones are participants in the Empowerment Program.[7]

Organized around four "key principles"—economic opportunity, sustainable development, community-based partnerships, and strategic vision for change—the program provides an institutional context for channeling individual investments toward the resolution of underlying causes and issues. Simply stated, the key features of the Empowerment Program include the following:

- It promotes an holistic, comprehensive program of actions
- It focuses on root causes and not merely their symptoms and consequences
- It takes a long-term perspective on reducing poverty and enhancing community vitality
- It fosters strategic and articulated actions instead of isolated projects
- It requires inclusive and open participation in all phases of planning and implementation
- It encourages partnerships with helping organizations, public, non-profit and private
- It is performance-based
- It is informed through training, experience, and information sharing
- It encourages learning through self-assessments
- It builds internal community capacity to sustain continuing processes of growth

In addition to the strategic plan and community mobilizing activities, successful program applicants are given flexible grants and the Empowerment Zones receive tax credits. The grants are a critical part of the program, since they provide resources to enable these small, poor communities the ability to establish administrative and leadership support, functions that few can otherwise afford and that are essential to implementing a strategically planned development process. The tax credits have been used by some EZs as a tool in recruiting outside business, but the available evidence suggests that even in this case they have been underutilized and far less useful overall.[8]

What is most important to the program is not the EZ/EC grants, though they are obviously critical in low-income communities, but the empowerment process the

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[7]J. Norman Reid, "Community Empowerment: A New Approach for Rural Development," *Rural Development Perspectives*, 14 (May, 1999): 9-13. Additional information is available on the Web at http://www.ezec.gov.

[8]U.S. General Accounting Office, *Businesses' Use of Empowerment Zone Tax Incentives,* RECD-99-253 (Washington: U.S. General Accounting Office, 1999).

program embodies, particularly its inclusiveness and emphasis on active community participation.[9] That approach is important because it places the opportunity and the responsibility for the development process in the hands of its intended beneficiaries—the poor.[10] It provides a sound basis for kindling hope where hopelessness has lived for decades and longer. It builds the capacity of the poor themselves to achieve, and it establishes the credibility of impoverished communities with organizations that have the ability to help. It identifies and mobilizes underutilized assets, including people, inventiveness and partnerships. Traditional rural development programs seldom serve these objectives. Yet without directly focusing on them, rural poverty will not be eliminated.

The Empowerment Staircase

The record of rural EZ/ECs shows clearly that the empowerment program has generated many important gains within the high-poverty places where it is at work. These small rural communities, averaging about 15,000 residents, have created or saved over 32,000 jobs and made numerous investments in businesses, and much new infrastructure and public services have been added (Table 1). Perhaps most impressive is the ability of these EZ/ECs, communities so long left in the backwash of national development and in many cases without experience in using government programs, to find and put to work large amounts of resources. Not long ago, rural EZ/ECs pushed over the $3.5 billion level in total funds raised to implement their strategic plans. All but the six percent that came from the EZ/EC grants themselves were from resources previously available but unused. Still, despite these obvious successes, it is empowerment itself that is the major goal—the ability of communities without belief in a different future to push through their doubts to gain the confidence and the skills to achieve the seemingly impossible.

Based as they are on a foundation of strategic planning, individual projects undertaken by communities in the short term must be viewed not merely as worthwhile ends in themselves but as building blocks to even greater advances as the process continues. This is true for all communities that undertake development as a process rather than a scattering of projects. But in high-poverty communities, some of the steps in that process are specific to the depressed conditions from which they begin. We have come to describe this process of community empowerment by using an analogy called the "empowerment staircase."[11] In effect, the process of community empowerment is a

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[9]J. Norman Reid and Cornelia Flora, "Advancing Knowledge and Capacity for Community-Led Development," in *Participatory Governance*, W. Robert Lovan, Michael Murray, and Ron Shaffer, eds., (London: Ashgate, forthcoming).

[10]Elsewhere I have argued that the trauma of slavery has been passed down to present day generations of Blacks and whites in former slaveholding areas and that community empowerment is a critical process without which all other investments are hopelessly ineffective in producing meaningful and lasting improvements. I also discuss the applicability of psychotherapeutic theory and practice to healing race-based wounds. See J. Norman Reid, "Trauma Theory and Racially-Divided Communities," Paper presented at the 2002 International Community Development Society Conference, Cleveland, Mississippi, July 22, 2002.

[11]For more information, see J. Norman Reid, "How Empowered Is Your Community? A Simple Self-Exam to Check Your Progress," available at www.ezec.gov.

series of steps that must be climbed in approximate sequence. The following sections describe these steps.

Table 1—Selected Accomplishments of Rural Empowerment Zones and Enterprise Communities Since Inception, as of April 2002[12]

Category	Number
Jobs Created or Saved	32,137
Business Loans Made	953
Businesses Started or Attracted	854
Youth participating in programs	27,155
Education Program Participants	69,608
Environmental & Natural Resources Projects	39
New Health Care Facilities	25
Houses Constructed	1,447
Houses Rehabilitated	3,928
New utility hookups	6,061
New/Improved Water & Wastewater Systems	203
New/Improved Recreation & Tourism Facilities	117

Hope

For communities mired in poverty, despair is often the first problem that must be overcome. Isolation from the social and economic mainstream brings with it a belief that things can never improve, a hopelessness that defeats dreams of a better life before they have a chance to emerge. Racial division compounds the problem by introducing a layer of separation that is especially difficult to overcome.

Moving a despairing community to action is no simple task. An inspired and respected civic leader may be able to generate the enthusiasm needed to set in motion a process of development. Sometimes a major event, such as a natural disaster or the closing of a plant, can mobilize a community response that can be built into an empowerment process. Or hope might be kindled by a special opportunity, such as the national competitions for the EZ/EC program.

In high-poverty communities, initiatives must offer convincing evidence that they are intended to reach the poor. This can best be given by assuring an active role for the poor themselves. The EZ/EC program accomplished this by offering grant dollars that were for exclusive use within high poverty areas and to the benefit of the poor. In addition, the poor were required to be prominently represented in EZ/EC leadership and in the subsequent steps of the process. In communities divided by race, color or

[12]Inception is January 1995 for Round I, January 1999 for Round II, January 2002 for Round III.

social class, the requirement that participation be open and representative is also needed.

Community-Wide Participation

An empowerment program cannot be the operation of a leader or a narrow group of promoters. In fact, such an arrangement is antithetical to the very idea of empowerment. It is essential that there be broad involvement of citizens—especially the poor themselves—in the empowerment process. In many high-poverty communities, this is a job that requires special sensitivity. Many poverty communities have an established power structure that is accustomed to making things happen and a large base of the poor who expect to be left out. In others, the poor may be in charge but insensitive to the importance of citizen involvement. Empowerment requires broad participation. Empowerment cannot happen with only the involvement of elites who intend to "do for" the community. One of the principal assets of poor communities is the hands and hearts of citizens—their enthusiasm, their labor, their ideas. Public engagement is the way these often hidden assets are brought forward. In addition, citizen involvement creates consensus behind the community's work that helps build momentum. Where racial or class distinctions are prevalent, participation must be organized to bring differing groups together. Without this, any program that is undertaken will be a sham and its ability to eradicate poverty will inevitably fail. The experience of the EZ/EC program shows that where participation is most open and broadly representative, overall results are highest.[13]

Building Partnerships

Many community development efforts are undertaken by a single organization that sees itself as being "in charge." At the same time, similar efforts may be carried out by parallel organizations within the same area, with little or no communication or collaboration among them. But few poor rural communities have such a luxury of institutional capacity that they can afford to use their resources so wastefully. Therefore, reaching out to all the organizations within the community—as well as key organizations on the outside—is a critical part of the process of identifying the community's assets and building the institutional capacity to move forward. And finding meaningful roles for each will help them bring forth their best contributions.

Creating a Vision and a Plan

Before a community development process can move forward, the community must have a vision of where it is and where it wants to go. Citizens begin by making a frank assessment of their community's strengths and weaknesses. The resource assessment identifies all of a community's assets, including those often overlooked, and evaluates the community's ability to sustain them in the future. The needs assessment is more than a listing of symptomatic "needs" or "wants"; it must fearlessly attempt to clarify the root causes of a community's circumstances. Often this means an honest

[13]Reid and Flora.

exploration of racial and class discrimination that cleaves the community and prevents it from acting as a whole.

Based on this assessment, the community is then in a position to develop a vision statement that sets forth the broad directions in which it wants to go. A vision statement need not be elaborate, but it should be clear, capable of inspiring and focusing action, and widely shared within the community.

Drawing on its vision, the community can then develop goals and strategies to reach them.[14] A strategy is a series of specific objectives and the means by which they will be achieved. Strategies respond to specific obstacles in the path of achieving vision-inspired goals, such as a lack of well-paying jobs, a high rate of school dropout or poor inter-racial communication. They spell out a specific approach to overcoming each obstacle, such as recruiting businesses with skilled jobs and training local workers to fill those jobs.

Creating a Workplan

Strategies are high-level roadmaps that define a path from baseline conditions toward targeted outcomes. While essential for setting the specific directions for community action, they are too general to guide the day-to-day work of community and economic development. Creating detailed workplans requires turning strategies into specific action steps, with assignments of responsibility, timetables, and budgets. This is a critical point in the process of turning dreams into realities that must be carefully tended.

To assure that implementation stays on track and is making meaningful progress toward meeting the community's goals, successful communities establish performance benchmarks—statements that set targets and establish outcome measures by which progress can be measured and performance evaluated.[15]

Finding Resources

Once a budget is established, the next step is finding resources to support implementation of the plan. Resources can come from many sources, public and private, and in many forms—grants, loans, and user fees are some examples. Most communities, including the very poorest, have far more local resources than they recognize; in addition to money, they can mobilize donations of time, expertise, and facilities that can make important contributions to the success of individual project steps. What is critical for the empowerment process is that the plan must guide the search for resources, rather than changing the plan because resources become

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[14]David W. Sears and J. Norman Reid, "Successfully Matching Development Strategies and Tactics with Rural Communities: Two Approaches", chapter 16 in David W. Sears and J. Norman Reid, editors. *Rural Development Strategies* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall Publishers, 1995), pp. 282-96.

[15]USDA Rural Development has developed a highly effective Web-based Benchmark Management System (BMS) for use by rural communities participating in the Empowerment Program. A portable CD-based version of the BMS is being developed that can be used by any community to manage its strategic plan activities and track the progress of its individual projects; it is expected to be available later in 2002.

available. It is a matter of who is in charge: the community and its plan, or the funding source. Empowered communities follow their own plans, not someone else's.

Creating Successes

Maintaining momentum, especially during the early phases of implementing a plan, can be difficult. Failing to do so can mean the end of an empowerment process before it really gets under way. Nowhere is this more true than in impoverished communities, where longstanding hopelessness is always ready to reassert itself and thrust the community back into the depressed condition from which it so desperately needs to escape. To keep the spirit of community development alive, it is essential to create and publicize early "wins" that prove change is really possible.

Often, the first focus of impoverished communities is on filling major gaps in key services such as health care and the provision of even low-wage jobs. These "successes" may not reach very far toward the community's vision or even be very desirable in the long run, but they can be critical to taking the heat off in the short run. Successes of any kind defuse the potential criticism that the strategic plan is a pipe dream, and they can also take nagging problems off the table so that more fundamental and lasting improvements can follow.

Building Community Capacity

To progress from early, and perhaps simple, projects toward more complex projects that move beyond the obvious to address fundamental causes, the community must build its capacity to function in the mainstream. Major emphasis of the community's strategic plan and workplans must be placed on capacity issues that include building a broad-based leadership corps, creating institutions where those that exist are unresponsive or ill-suited to the need, enhancing skills in leading, partnering, raising resources, and managing projects. Starting as they usually do from outside the mainstream, impoverished communities often begin with meager supplies of critical skills. For empowerment to be achieved, continuous attention to capacity building is essential.

Capacity is not something that should be supplied by outside organizations on behalf of these communities. "Doing for" is at best a short-term fix that has disempowering consequences. Lasting changes depend on building from the inside out, and for those who assist high-poverty communities, this means allowing communities to learn for themselves from the "school of hard knocks."

Adapting Strategic Plans

For communities that start the development process from so far out of the mainstream, strategic plans inevitably become outdated. Successes in the early phases lead to changed conditions and improvements in the community's capacity to respond to them. As implementation progresses and learning occurs, plans must evolve in order to be relevant and effective. It is important that communities re-examine their goals and

strategies periodically and amend their plans as needed. Just as the initial visioning and goal-setting must be open, participative processes, assessments of progress and strategic plan amendment processes must be as well. This should take place at least annually.

Building Toward Sustainability

For an empowerment process to succeed, the solutions that are implemented must be sustainable in the future. Community development processes never really end; they merely change in response to changing conditions and the successes of the past. Sustainability can be built in a number of ways, by continually enhancing the community's leadership capacity, inviting new blood into the process, reinvigorating inter-organizational partnerships, creating self-sustaining programs, and treating the community's ecological, social, and economic environments in a way that enhances and protects their value, rather than depleting them or using them in ways that are ultimately self-defeating. In the end, the success of an empowerment process is measured not by the outcomes of individual projects—the number of houses built, jobs created, crimes reduced or students graduated—but by the ability of the community to carry forward the process it has begun with limited dependence on financial or technical assistance from helping organizations. Communities themselves can measure their own success by graduating from an empowerment program, secure in the knowledge that neglect and isolation can never again put them in the subordinate positions from which they have risen. It is when they can move forward on their own, with confidence that they need never again fall into hopelessness, that empowerment has occurred.

Putting the Empowerment Process to Work

It is not necessary to have an EZ/EC program to put empowerment processes to work, though it is clearly a major advantage. Even without a special program, local areas and the organizations that represent them, such as Economic Development Districts, RC&D Councils and Community Action Agencies can use many of these principles to enhance their effectiveness in addressing poverty. Rather than presuming to tread on either the creativity of these organizations or their need to adapt these principles to unique local circumstances, I will simply describe some possibilities, many of which can be readily applied without creating a formal empowerment program. However, while these principles and practices can be used individually, it must be expected that partially adopting an empowerment approach will also achieve incomplete results.

Diversify Governing Board Membership

The empowerment process requires broad representation and to the extent possible board membership should be expanded to include representatives of the disempowered. Representation that is more than token will give the impoverished a greater stake in the organization's work and open up opportunities and access to resources that may never have been considered previously.

Welcome Conflict

In diverse communities, conflict is best viewed as a sign of community building, rather than a barrier to progress. Bringing in new groups may be quite uncomfortable at first, and conflicts arising from different interests and misunderstandings are to be expected. But instead of presenting barriers, conflicts represent the emergence of hidden truths about the community, truths that may have festered for generations or even centuries. Resolving them is not only an essential first step, but it can also unleash a burst of unexpected progress. In former slaveholding areas, this may require special steps to release deep emotions and bring about a reconciliation between racial groups within the community.[16]

Expand Community Participation

Make roles for all who wish to be involved. People can be a great resource and a source of inventiveness. Organizations, too, have much to offer and can multiply the ability of development organizations to undertake development within their service areas. This requires welcoming them to share in the work but also in the credit for what is accomplished. Development organizations that are willing to share leadership will, in the end, be more successful than those who hold their limited power close at hand.

Think Strategically

Just as problems do not exist in isolation, so there are no single solutions, no "magic bullets." Use available categorical programs, but not in isolation. Fit them into a meaningful plan that is based on the community's vision for its future. One-time projects have valuable but limited results. Projects that build upon and complement each other can truly bring about the case in which "the sum is greater than its parts."

Work Beneath the Surface

Focus on root causes rather than symptoms. It is attractive to tackle that which is staring us in the face. Less easy is to identify what lies behind the obvious and how addressing it may lead to more satisfactory results in the long term. Sometimes local political conditions require action on pressing symptoms before the flexibility to go deeper can exist. But insightful leadership can move the community as deep into those causes as it is prepared to go at any moment and in doing so make far greater progress than in communities that remain at the surface level. Nowhere is this more true than in addressing the roots of poverty.

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[16] Reid, "Trauma Theory and Racially Divided Communities," discusses the deeper psychological issues involved and suggests and approach to workable community development practices to achieve this objective.

Stimulate "Out of the Box" Thinking

Sometimes the best ideas come from elsewhere, and development organizations should seek out and publicize examples and best practices that can lead to new and better ways of promoting development. It is always useful to challenge traditional ways of thinking. Showing that others have trod this path before can be an effective way of doing so.

Conclusion

It is no accident that poverty and race are so highly correlated in rural America. Especially in the former slaveholding areas of the South, poverty began in the oligarchic separation of opportunities that has continued since emancipation. Most rural development strategies throughout American history have been directed at aggregate improvements in economic performance or the provision of services that are seen as essential to health and well-being. While these strategies have had much success in achieving the goals for which they are best suited, they fail to address poverty—at least poverty that is deeply connected to racial divisions, as it is in much of the South.

In effect, there is little reason to expect that targeting funds to high poverty areas—though laudable and appropriate—will address the underlying factors that cause poverty in these areas to persist. Those factors are deeply rooted in the racial separation that persists within the culture of high poverty areas and in the consequences of past traumas and lack of opportunity.

While there is no single solution to the poverty issue, it is clear that an essential element of an overall approach must be to address the racial separation itself, directly and systematically, and to set about building the capacity for racially-divided and impoverished communities to function as whole, and healed, communities.

The community empowerment approach developed in implementing the EZ/EC program offers a model for this work, by building from the very lowest levels—creating hope and bringing all the members of the community into open, participative dialogue about their shared futures. Though still in the learning stages, this approach has already shown significant progress and holds out great potential for application in other impoverished communities.

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