Economic Development, Education, and Community Engagement in Rural Persistent Poverty Communities:

A Conference Summary

October 27-29, 1999
Arlington, Virginia

Rural reality doesn't always follow conventional wisdom, to wit, conventional wisdom being that improved schools equals improved student achievement equals improved community.

The reality we have found, over and over, is that when students achieve, they can compete in the outside world, and they leave.

- Allen Arnold, President and CEO, AEL , Inc.

Executive Summary

Economic Development, Education, and Community Engagement in Rural Persistent Poverty Communities, a conference funded by the National Science Foundation through its Transitions from Childhood to the Workforce program, was held in Arlington, Virginia from October 27 - 29, 1999. This conference, under the leadership of Dr. Patricia S. Kusimo and Dr. Carolyn S. Carter, brought together researchers from disparate disciplines along with experts in community engagement. The purpose of this meeting was to develop a coordinated focus on education and employment in rural persistent poverty communities and to make recommendations to policymakers and funding agencies about which research and development activities holds the most promise for these depressed communities. This assembly brought together divergent groups in a setting designed to foster networking and collaboration. Efforts were geared toward bringing together lessons that researchers and practitioners from various disciplines have learned, and to discover how we can work together in the future. Dr. Allen Arnold, in his keynote address, asked:

Can a partial answer to the dilemma of how we improve rural communities be to bring together academics who join with the community as co-equal partners, leverage the school as capital, and, employing technology, build the community to create jobs and prevent a brain drain?

This question framed discussions throughout the conference.

Participants discussed characteristics of successful revitalized communities. They also focused on critical missing factors in a community that could thwart efforts for successful revitalization. Assets in rural persistent poor communities, institutional responsibilities, and national resources were also discussed.

At the conference's conclusion, participants reflected and made several recommendations. They built on earlier discussions to identify and outline four areas–interactions between schools and communities, building community capacity, information dissemination, and public research and public policy–where immediate action and research would begin. This White Paper summarizes the conference's discussions and recommendations.

Background and Purpose

The *Economic Development, Education, and Community Engagement in Rural Persistent Poverty Communities* conference focused on the issue of revitalizing persistent poverty rural communities. The conference was funded by the National Science Foundation's Transitions from Childhood to the Workforce (TCW) Program as a supplement to grant HRD 9815117, and convened by AEL, Inc. Representatives from higher education, government agencies, and education research came together with experts in community revitalization and activism to discuss how efforts might be coordinated across disciplines to accomplish lasting reforms in poor, rural communities.

Those who attended have an interest in making rural communities sustainable, vibrant places to live; they recognize that education attainment and community viability are integrally interwoven. Everyone agreed that simply being together "recharges batteries" through contact with people who have the same goals and values. A gathering such as this helps also to achieve better articulation of issues and interests and provides cross-pollination of ideas. Participants were challenged to work across disciplinary boundaries, broaden their thinking, and create recommendations for research, policy, and intervention efforts. This paper summarizes conference participants' thoughts and recommendations.

Framing the Issues

Helping children successfully navigate the path from childhood to the workforce is never easy. Helping children who are both poor and rural navigate this journey requires extra focus on the schools they attend *and* the communities in which they live. As efforts to transform schools and communities are under way, they must be supported during the change process. Funding for research and development work in poor, rural communities often addresses only one aspect of the challenge and neglects the systemic supports needed to make reform efforts successful. This conference was an attempt to bring to bear a synergy for crafting holistic approaches to solving longstanding problems in poor rural communities.

Rural poverty differs in a number of ways from poverty in urban settings. Poor rural communities may be the result of extraction-based economies in Appalachia, former slave-based economies in the rural South, migrant agricultural communities in many regions, and the sequestration of Native American peoples on reservations (Economic Research Service, 1995). Inequality and outside control of resources have left behind many communities that exhibit deep social stratification, poor (sometimes dual) educational systems, low expectations for students from poor families, and few economic options.

While urban poverty is often highly visible because of its proximity to centers of commerce and decision making, rural poverty and its impact on children are often invisible. A relatively large portion of rural residents (26.3%) live just above the poverty line and are particularly vulnerable to economic crises on national, state, and local levels. In general, the rural workforce earns only about four-fifths of what urban workers earn (Huang, 1999). Only 47% of poor rural families with children received Aid to Families with Dependent Children in 1990, versus 67% of poor families in cities (Khattri, Riley, & Kane, 1997).

Recent events, such as President Clinton's tour of Appalachia and Jesse Jackson's Appalachian initiative, spotlight how far many rural communities have been left behind in the midst of a thriving economy. Community services such as housing, child care, transportation, education, health care, and elder care are often inadequate or unavailable. Resources are often controlled by outsiders or by those who rely on access to a low-paid workforce. New employment opportunities in rural areas typically offer low wages and provide few avenues out of poverty (Khattri, Riley, & Kane, 1997). Schools are asked to prepare students to join a workforce that may not exist locally. Lack of democratic relationships and processes, as well as fragile community relationships and inadequate physical infrastructures, make reform efforts difficult.

To achieve equity in education outcomes and to create communities that offer a high quality of life, these social contexts must be altered. A common desire to understand how to effectively support such changes was the premise for three days of discussions on revitalizing rural, persistent poverty communities.

Keynote Speech: Allen Arnold, AEL, Inc.

Allen Arnold presented a brief discussion of the changing workforce demographics. In the early 1900s, 85% of Americans worked in agriculture, today 3% do; in 1950, 75% of workers were involved in production and manufacturing, now 15% are. Today 44% of all workers are in data services, two-thirds of Americans work in the services sector, and knowledge is becoming the nation's most important product. Intellectual jobs are imported and exported. Telecommuting is becoming a familiar practice.

These shifts have implications for rural communities, where clinging to old assumptions and expectations about how careers should operate will almost assuredly continue the current economic decline. There are and will be opportunities for those who position themselves to take advantage of changing demographics. Now people in rural areas position themselves by leaving those areas.

Arnold challenged researchers and academics to broaden their perspectives when looking at the issue of improving the school system and rural life. Criticism about higher education and its lack of responsiveness to real-world problems applies to a number of other institutions, and is particularly true of some rural specialists who see their main role as defending the legitimacy of people choosing to live in rural areas rather than considering the social and economic implications of what is happening in rural America.

What can the social sciences do to help solve the awesome problems affecting our society and world? Universities have let esoterica triumph over public philosophy–narrow scholasticism over humane scholarship. Government and regional education labs are in the same place.

An example from Ira Harkavy's (Benson, Harkavey, & Puckett, 1996) work in West Philadelphia demonstrates the value of taking a different approach. Graduate students in public health went into a school and observed what the kids ate, then considered the implications of what they saw. What kind of nutritional value did the foods have? Their next step was the extraordinary one: the graduate students helped to set up a store in the school, which students now run, that sells healthy snack foods. They moved beyond intellectual development to actually becoming involved with and changing the health status of the people.

On a small scale, this example demonstrates how the school, because it is often the greatest source of financial and human capital in the neighborhood, can leverage improvement in its community. This action research approach treats each community entity as an equal partner, not as a puppet to be manipulated or facilitated. "Facilitation is by definition asymmetrical," according to Dr. Arnold. "The only symmetrical relationship is engaging someone in dialogue" Arnold believes.

Arnold concluded his remarks by asking, "can a partial answer to the dilemma of how we improve rural communities be to bring together academics who join with the community as co-equal partners, leverage the school as capital, and, employing technology, build the community to create jobs and prevent a brain drain?"

These remarks framed the discussions throughout the conference.

From Poverty to Vibrance

In small, role-alike groups, participants discussed the following questions:

- In rural communities where you've seen improvement, what were the most powerful factors that led to revitalization?
- Which of these factors have been most consistently underdeveloped or missing in rural communities that persist in poverty?
- Which institutions are in the best positions to create or strengthen positive factors?
- What assets do rural persistent poverty communities have that can be mobilized in resolving their problems?

Answering these questions helped the group juxtapose the realities of revitalization in rural communities with the impact community revitalization can have on local residents. One participant noted, "If you have the formation of a retirement community [which revitalizes the community], you may have in-migration of very wealthy individuals who push up real estate prices for the existing residents and tax local social service systems, including schools, sewers and other infrastructures. So we really need to be careful when we talk about revitalization what we mean by that, and what we mean by community. *Which community are we revitalizing, basically?"* The following comments summarize participants' thinking and responses.

Characteristics of Revitalized Communities

Visionary Leadership. Conference participants agreed that revitalized communities always had visionary *local* leadership willing to bring about change. This visionary leadership was able to engage people in the community in solving the community's problems, which often led to the development of underutilized resources and created a culture of experimentation within the community. The ability of the leadership to get people who are dedicated and committed, not just to one project but to working over the long run to improve the community, was viewed as essential.

Small-group discussions affirmed the importance of building leadership capacity. Experience shows that success comes from trained management in the field. It's important to discover community members/leaders who have the "knack" for leading and train them to know who and when to consult for expertise. Then "they become the middle person that keeps the community on track and helps it develop."

Focus on Quality Jobs. Although employment opportunities were viewed as key to community revitalization, jobs alone were considered insufficient for improving the community's economic conditions. In the words of one participant, "It's not just numerical increase, it's also the type of jobs and how they contribute to quality of life. Jobs with dignity." Communities can and have used loss of a major industry to become better. Social capacity can be suppressed under the model of a dominant industry that creates a company town and may emerge only after the industry leaves.

Strategic Economic and Social Development. Rural communities that have been revitalized often have natural amenities—recreation opportunities or a quality of life—that lead to economic and social development. In-migration resulting from the formation of bedroom or recreation communities often provides economic and social development. Improving the local economy and creating local jobs can lead to achieving broader goals, such as democracy and participation of all citizens, abandoning of hierarchical structures for decision making, and fairer distribution of wealth. In such a community, residents have horizontal relationships rather than top-down or hierarchical ones. This type of community was described as

"community that has a sense of public space; a community that lives on the sense of diversity of leadership, which means recognizing leadership can come from any place in the community, and a recognition that everyone has strengths and talents."

External Linkages. Revitalized communities have external linkages on their terms. They are not dependent on one industry. If one industry disappears, they cope with the changes and develop self-sufficiency. They are able to deal with internal divisions. Another form of external linkage is the stimulus that outside investment or leadership can provide. Participants expressed concern about relying on outsiders to develop a local community, but in reality that is the way some communities develop.

Critical Factors in Revitalizing Communities

Leadership. Recognizing that economic and political factors may ultimately thwart the most dedicated of leaders, the group identified lack of dedicated and effective leadership as the single factor most likely to be missing in persistent poverty rural communities. Participants felt that when leadership cannot get the citizens involved, they are fighting an uphill battle. Participants also acknowledged that communities may not have the ability to take advantage of their existing leadership resources, consequently they lie dormant or are wasted.

Policies that recognize rural differences. Rural communities often have economic, physical, and technological infrastructures that are attractive to small business development and local entrepreneurial efforts. These infrastructures can be weakened by global economic forces as well as federal and state policies that favor urban environments and redistribute resources from rural to urban areas. Imperatives to fund only programs that enjoy economies of scale sometimes create size biases that make rural areas ineligible because they do not meet size or partnership criteria. Policies developed from implicitly urban models may exacerbate rural challenges. For example, reducing class size by employing more teachers in urban school districts negatively impacts the number and quality of teachers available to any nearby poor rural districts. Current national and state policies often do not address inherent biases against poor rural communities by infrastructure developers such as banks and telecommunications companies. This type of policy environment makes it difficult for rural communities to succeed.

Participants expressed concern that while there are many funding sources that could be useful, finding them requires time and knowledge that are beyond many rural communities' capacity. Also, they were concerned about what appears to be an increasing tendency to narrow the scope for funding so that innovative program or research ideas have difficulty fitting within their boundaries.

Partnerships and power sharing. Community leaders and change agents need to look for appropriate partners. The cookie cutter approach (do it the same everywhere) that has been attempted by government programs in the past has not been successful. It's important to remember that, while persistent poverty communities have much in common, each also has vital differences. The social/cultural aspects are very important and must be understood within a particular community in order to help it change.

Participants noted that it can not be assumed that democratic processes actually work in distressed communities. Programs that favor a top-down approach to reform or provide grants to local agencies sometimes strengthen entrenched power structures that benefit from class divisions. Histories of social division across lines of class, culture, ethnicity, gender, or language have led to fragmented social and economic relationships. Developing a community's ability to form partnerships and coalitions that benefit all segments of the community is a critical and often missing component of many revitalization initiatives. Change can't be accomplished unless at least some of those who hold power are willing to support change initiatives.

Thoughtful development of technology. Technology can leave depressed communities even further

behind because of the super speed at which it moves. It creates problems as well as cures them.

Technology comes in different forms and it's easy to assume that "high" is best, but sometimes the need is actually for "appropriate." In fact, the higher the technology, the more vulnerable it may be. Technology can be an important tool, but sustainability can't be built solely on something so fragile.

Unless rural disadvantaged communities can take advantage of high-tech opportunities, current inequalities will be perpetuated and exacerbated. Initially, this will require funds for communications infrastructure. However, because it seems that future communication technologies will be wireless, it is questionable whether resources should be invested in wired technologies that will need to be replaced.

Humans are much less adept at finding social solutions than technological or scientific ones. There is a saying: "Science makes a good life possible, the humanities make it worthwhile." Improving the quality of life and striking a balance that makes a community tenable for all members must be considered when revitalization begin.

Institutional Roles in Revitalizing Rural Persistent Poverty Communities

Education institutions. Participants felt that education institutions could play several key roles. First, public schools could offer entrepreneurial curricula and provide a curriculum of "place" that educates students about local citizenship, local government, and economic issues. Schools could serve to create the next generation of rural residents, educate rural residents about existing opportunities in their communities, and encourage residents to create new opportunities. Other education institutions, including preschools, child-care facilities, and community and four-year colleges were also viewed as having roles in revitalization.

Schools can be used as focal points for revitalization. The first questions to ask are what role schools can play in community development and how schools can help young people in the community become resilient and adaptive. Using schools as community centers would invest the community in lifelong learning and strengthen the education achievement of children. These school/community centers would build capacity for self-sufficiency and upward mobility and build on both the formal and informal talents of the community.

Churches. Churches were felt to have an important place in local communities because they often offer services such as daycare, elder care, skills training, and basic adult education. Most rural communities have a number of churches, thus the physical infrastructure for dissemination of information and coordinated planning efforts throughout the community exists. There are numerous examples of local churches affiliated with faith groups capable of bringing human, financial, and skill resources into a poor rural community, making a substantial difference in the lives of its residents.

Extension services and local community development groups. The local extension service is a major asset in the community and represents an atypical education institution. Local government and community development groups can go beyond their traditional function or role—such as taking care of streets, water, and sewer—to become engaged in looking at a bigger picture. Local governments can be creative partners in economic and community development activities, broadening their traditional roles—however, getting local governments to think outside the box is a challenge. Economic development entities can sometimes provide the critical support necessary to pull together resources that may be external to the community by writing a grant proposal or application in conjunction with the community.

Community organizations. Community-based organizations play very important roles in community revitalization. Often their membership will assume leadership for one or more of a community's initiatives. There are a variety of these organizations—service clubs, voluntary organizations, youth groups, senior citizens groups, fraternities, and sororities—representing a cross section of the community.

Researchers. Researchers can study the outflow of resources from rural communities to get hard data that might influence governmental and legislative decisions. They can look at tax revenues, gross county products, and extraction of human and natural resources; to show relationships with GIS mapping. These will help to present the "real" picture of the rural challenges.

Researchers can gather and share information on best-practice programs in community development as is done in education and other fields. Knowing something worked in one community can help it work in another. However, researchers should not go into a community assuming they already know the answers. Continue support, especially financial, for longer research studies; change takes time.

Starting in the community, the change process must be supported, and researchers can help it become established.

Research should identify success factors of and barriers to various capacity-building models (i.e., the Tupelo, Mississippi model). This work should lead to developing and implementing an intervention to strengthen economic development and improve the quality of life in depressed areas. The Bidwell model in Pittsburgh is an excellent example of a successful community intervention. Established in 1968, Bidwell Training Center has attracted national recognition for its innovation and career-oriented training programs which feature strong partnerships with leading Pittsburgh corporations, agencies and organizations.

Many community revitalization components should be researched. Do people in poor communities control their own futures or do race, ethnic or tribal issues, and policy bias interfere with shared leadership? How do the wealthy feel about investing in the community? To what extent do racial and class bias of developers affect community life? How far has devolution gone in these rural areas, and how many federal and state dollars are currently being funneled into rural programs compared to past years, and compared to urban/suburban programs?

It is also vital to gain knowledge of the community. What are its strengths and weaknesses? What job skills are in the community now and what skills will be needed for new jobs? What are the technological capabilities? What resources are already in place and how are they being used? Answers to these questions would guide the design of strategies that build and create job growth and help communities envision new goals and the means to achieve these goals. Especially needed are strategies that empower people with the belief that they can achieve goals that at one time seemed insurmountable.

Assets in Rural Persistent Poverty Communities

Physical infrastructures. Many communities have taken positive and creative steps to revitalize their physical infrastructures. Abandoned local downtown areas have become tourist attractions that entice people to stop and eat, visit, or shop. Abandoned warehouses or manufacturing plants have been turned to creative uses in rural communities.

When the infrastructure is in place, technology offers opportunities for empowerment, shared decision making, and ways to inform public debate. However, access is currently stratified, not equal.

People and organizations. People and organizations can mobilize support at the grass-roots level. People who know one another and have a vested interest in improving their community can be invaluable. People who have dreams and visions, who are passionate and selfless, can be "spark plugs." They dedicate themselves to a cause and are tireless in making it happen. More and more seniors are playing a significant role in community development efforts. As people retire earlier and move to rural communities, they don't "just sit." They live an active life in retirement. They come from business, industry, and government, bringing skills and resources with them. Seniors who get engaged in leadership and community projects and activities become a real resource. Also, their retirement income, generated outside the community, contributes to economic development.

Social service organizations and other community groups often have as their mission community improvement projects.

Resourcefulness. Perseverance and resourcefulness, developed from the necessity to "make do," can be powerful, and rural residents develop unusual and innovative ways to meet their daily challenges. Rural communities often have a strong underground economy that may include some entrepreneurs whose skills have gone untapped or underdeveloped.

Technology. Clearly, technology can mean much better communication and access to information, and information is power. Researchers already draw on this availability of information. In many places, schools have fostered community use of technology and made apprentice-level use fairly widespread. Schools should now take a lead role in raising use to the next level.

The phenomenon of virtual community will have an impact, but it won't replace neighbors. Rather, Americans will become multi-community dwellers and will adapt not by substitution, but by addition and subtraction.

Use of *appropriate* technologies can affect community practices. Participants gave two examples; (1) A demonstration garden was moved from an out-of-town site to a public, in-town site. As community members had a chance to see a small but productive vegetable garden, they began planting their own gardens. (2) For the past 80 years the United States Department of Agriculture has been working with youth to create models of change for adults. In that spirit, about four years ago it created a new initiative, the 4-H Youth Technology Leadership Team. In July 2000 these young people will meet for the first time in College Park, Maryland, to present their demonstration projects.

National Resources for Rural Communities

In response to participants' concerns about availability of resource information, two suggestions were made: (1) Each local congressional office now has a funding search capacity. Office staff will help with the search. At the same time, concerns about funding criteria can be expressed to staff, who can pass them up the pipeline to those who shape the funding. (2) There is now a Department of Agriculture Web site that

was designed to be a one-stop shop for communities. *Community Toolbox* (www.ezec.gov) provides notices of funding for such topics as housing, job development and training, public safety, education, health, and environment.

Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement. One source of funds for research that is not subject to the economies of scale is the field initiated studies grant. Anyone may apply–a university, school district, community organization, or even an individual. The grants are for periods of up to three years for the purpose of completing research, with that term defined broadly.

Small Business Innovative Research (SBIR) projects are another source of funding. These are available from all federal agencies; those from the Department of Education focus on technology for educational use.

There are seven categories of school reform grants, one of which is specifically targeted to rural education. The Southern Regional Educational Board is currently using one of these grants to identify best practices in 100 rural school districts so that they may be shared with others.

Department of Labor. The Workforce Investment Act of 1998 replaces the Job Training Partnership Act with a new funding scheme for three groups of people–adults, dislocated workers, and youth. The youth portion of this funding supplements and complements the collaboration of the Department of Labor and Department of Education in the School-to-Work program. Use of these funds will be determined by state and local councils that are now forming. A youth council will oversee expenditures for youth. The act mandates that most council members will be business representatives, but now is the time to seek membership on these youth councils to be in a position to represent rural concerns.

A resource created by the Department of Labor specifically for the use of youth is *America's Career Kit*, (http://www.alx.org). A web site where young people can look at future job prospects, fill out a resume, file it in a talent bank, and use a locator bank for sources of training needed for particular professions. State employment agencies have adopted a common format and now list all jobs registered with them on this site, so that people can do a nationwide job search. This service has tremendous potential for rural people who have previously been isolated from such information.

This service also addresses a common rural concern that people who receive job training must then leave their communities to find work. Job training is offered to individuals only for jobs that currently exist in their communities.

American Association of School Administrators. The bulk of AASA membership comes from rural and small school districts, since 75% of all school districts in America have fewer than 2,500 students. One third of all districts serve fewer than 600 students. The AASA is currently working to pass a bill than contains a rural education initiative. It would allow small districts, those with fewer than 600 students, to combine all federal formula funds except Title I toward the goal of improving math and reading scores over a five-year period. In addition to these combined funds, each district would receive $20,000 plus $100 for every student over 50. This bill offers small schools the advantage of greater flexibility in fund use. The combined funds might allow a district to add a teacher, where no one of the funding streams would have sufficient dollars to allow this.

The e-rate is another source of help for schools and community organizations such as libraries and hospitals. Offered through the Federal Communications Commission, it discounts the cost both of Internet service and LAN wiring.

Many, if not all, persistent poverty rural districts operate school facilities that are in poor condition and lacking the amenities necessary to provide a complete education. There is now funding through the U. S. Treasury Department for improving school facilities.

Although not a source of funds, the U. S. Department of Education has just published a document detailing ways schools and communities can form partnerships to make the school a community center. This is another means for revitalizing both schools and communities.

The 2000 census is particularly critical for rural communities, since so much of the funding available to schools and communities is based on population, and rural communities have frequently been undercounted. Community leaders must encourage everyone, including migrant workers, to complete the census forms. The U. S. Bureau of the Census is offering kits to schools, available from www.census.gov. There is a set for each of three grade levels.

To keep abreast of what is going on at the federal level concerning education, go to the American Association of School Administrators (www.aasa.org) and click on *advocacy*.

National Science Foundation. The National Science Foundation (NSF) funds basic research in science and engineering education as well as research in social behavior and economic sciences. So, studies of rural communities could qualify for NSF funding.

Foundation programs also address inequities in representation of populations in the science and engineering workforce. In the past they focused on the pipeline that fed the research community, but the focus is broadening to the general workforce, because poor science and mathematics preparation affect all citizens' ability to carry out the nation's work.

The NSF is also concerned with equalizing access for minority populations. There is a program solicitation dealing with technology, called Information Technology Research, that is broad enough that research into technology issues in rural communities might qualify. Information about this program is available on the NSF Web site, http://www.nsf.gov/, on the publications page under "program announcement 99-167."

Reflections and Recommendations

A final conference activity provided groups an opportunity to reflect on what they had heard and to make recommendations. Conference participants identified and outlined four areas where immediate action could begin. These areas were (1) interactions between school and community, (2) building community capacity, (3) dissemination, and (4) research.

Interactions Between Schools and Communities

Reflections

- **Working to forge alliances between school and community in the interest of building more viable communities is a process.** It is important to look for targets of opportunity, that is, communities and schools that either are ready to begin that process, or have begun it but would benefit from outside assistance to continue. Such communities and schools are ready to form horizontal and vertical linkages within the community as well as linkages with outside resources and expertise. They are willing to adapt to change, if not to initiate it.

Recommendations

- **Three potential research topics surfaced during this discussion.** One is to determine what factors exist in places that show readiness to develop educational and community capacity. Here, research would help to identify communities and schools in which the coordinated use of resources would be most likely to produce results, as well as sets of community strengths that are associated with different types of revitalization successes. The second topic concerns identifying which process models demonstrate success in helping to grow rural places as viable communities. A third deals with the relationship between school improvement and community revitalization–i.e., how have communities been revitalized through changes in school?

  Research interest in these fields has waxed and waned in cycles. Some research was done in the early 1900s around the community school movement. Revisiting earlier work would be part of an effort to develop a means of profiling communities/schools and developing a tool kit of strategies from which to select, based on a community's profile and aspirations.

Building Community Capacity

Reflections.

- **Strategies for building capacity might begin with an inventory of what is already known.** Many organizations, foundations, and agencies have current information and deep experience with various pieces of the overall issue of viable communities. The group suggested compiling a directory of readings and contacting people with expertise in social, economic, and environmental issues. Other information to gather would include work opportunities that are indigenous to rural areas, such as skills exhibited in the informal economy, and indigenous resources, such as plants with pharmaceutical properties, topography with recreational and tourism potential, and so forth.

Recommendations:

- **Begin with individuals rather than organizations in communities whose progress is stymied by elite groups with vested interests in the status quo.** In such cases, the first work may be to build trust and connections among people who have been fragmented and isolated.

- **Gain access to media.** Group members knew of places where public access television had been used effectively. Local talk radio is another potential venue for sharing information and viewpoints. Opportunities to gather and celebrate community are also important. The New England town meeting was mentioned as a model for such gatherings. The Internet may become a means of developing local dialogues if all segments of the community are able to participate.

- **Interventions must be interdisciplinary, conducted by multiple institutions and social structures.** When schools are involved, families must be included as a constituency.

- **Leadership within the community must develop and be sustained over time.** Efforts to bring about change should be documented and evaluated over a longer period than has been the norm–5 or even 10 years would be best. Documentation and reporting of long- term impacts should also use multiple media to get the word out.

- **Programs currently exist that have documented long-term impact.** The Dukeson Model for looking at the economic impact of the health care sector is operating in six states. It is a community decision-making process that engages community people in assessing how well their health care system serves them and what they can do to improve it. Several extension service programs have also had success, among them a business retention and expansion program that engages the community in identifying local businesses and ways to strengthen them. Information is also available from the West Virginia Community Economic Workforce Development Web page. The Aspen Institute has a community capacity building process. Information about it is available on the Aspen Web site. A third process that has attracted interest in West Virginia is the Community Design Team model. This is a three-day process during which professionals from government, industry, and foundations learn about the community then develop proposals that build on its existing social, physical, or economic resources.

  One source of tools for use in communities is the Regional World Development Center Program. It can be accessed through the U. S. Department of Agriculture=s Web site: http://www.usda.gov/. Two other sites that house useful information are http://www.business.gov for people wishing to start and develop a business and http://www.nonprofit.gov/ for people who need resources in working with communities, such as grants, loans, surplus equipment, and supplies.

Dissemination

Reflection.

The dissemination group defined its task as suggesting means for getting products and processes into the hands of those who might use them. They determined that audiences would most likely be people both within and outside of persistent poverty communities who are concerned with social justice. Suggested venues for dissemination included churches, civic groups, businesses, and schools. One group member gave a caveat regarding schools as dissemination vehicles. He felt schools are not accustomed to seeing themselves as needing to support communities. They more commonly regard communities in terms of their need to support schools.

- **Policy concerns in dissemination are twofold.** When policies are formulated and disseminated,

the channel of communication needs to be two-way, so that funders and/or outside facilitators have a means of determining how they are interpreted in the field. At times information and policies offered at the macro level may lead to local policies that are based on misinterpretations of either the letter or the intent of the original source. It is also important to know the effect of such policies and information. It is not uncommon for policies formulated outside of local contexts to have unanticipated consequences when put into effect.

The very existence of this conference points out the importance both of disseminating and receiving information. Participants have information others can use, and this paper is a dissemination tool for that information.

Recommendations:

- **Potential research questions would concern effective dissemination methods.** What is being tried, how well are those things working, and how can we replicate the positives? The National Science Foundation publishes a dissemination model, the Huberman & Ealey Model, that has been helpful in framing dissemination efforts of the Eisenhower Math/Science Consortium. The model presents levels of dissemination from awareness to institutionalization. Other dissemination models include the notion of marketing from the world of business, and agricultural extension models.

  A database that includes information from various sources should be formulated and should include case studies that detail best practices.

  Other important community-based research initiatives include market research to determine what the community itself thinks of revitalization and where it wants to invest its resources and time. Demographic shifts in the area, ability to create financial capital, and action research to benefit researchers as well as the community are also important research aspects.

- Information that raises awareness of issues, programs, and policy developments should be widely disseminated by outside agencies.

Public Research and Public Policy

Reflection:

In order to bring about greater access to opportunities, there needs to be three-way communication between experts–i.e. researchers and academics, policymakers, and communities–so that each comprehends the circumstances under which the others operate.

Recommendations:

- **Education is one means of reducing inequalities in access to opportunities.** The group began with a premise that, currently, public policy is formed with a bias toward white, male, middle-class, suburban populations. Today in the Black Belt South there are places where over half the adult population lacks a high school education. Current school resources and practices in these disadvantaged areas are not providing the education needed to reduce inequities.

  Participants offered three recommendations for their own actions as researchers and funders of research:

- Universities should establish closer links with persistent poverty communities and devote larger places in their research agendas to participatory action research on equity issues.
- Funding agencies must be educated as to their biases of scale; these deny access to research funding by smaller research institutions and less dense rural areas.
- The media should be used to influence public perceptions about disenfranchised peoples.
- They can transmit demographic data and stories that will counteract stereotypes and myths such as those used to demonize welfare recipients.

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