DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 433 974 RC 021 679

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TITLE Innovations in Community Development.
INSTITUTION North Central Regional Center for Rural Development, Ames, IA.
ISSN ISSN-0886-8611
PUB DATE 1997-00-00
NOTE 9p.; Two-part article appeared in two consecutive newsletter issues. NCRCRD is one of four regional centers coordinating rural development research and education throughout the United States.
PUB TYPE Information Analyses (070) -- Journal Articles (080)
JOURNAL CIT Rural Development News; v21 n3 p1-3,12 Sep 1997 n4 p1-3 Win 1997-1998
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Citizen Participation; Community Action; *Community Cooperation; *Community Development; *Economic Development; Leadership Training; Long Range Planning; Models; Participative Decision Making; *Rural Areas; Rural Development
IDENTIFIERS Capacity Building; *Community Empowerment; *Paradigm Shifts

ABSTRACT

Decentralization and budget reduction in the public sector, and globalization and downsizing in the private sector have placed more responsibility on localities to address challenges to the health of their economies, ecosystems, and people. Community development theory and practice are also changing, evidenced by changes in vocabulary. Community development, with its connotations of outside experts focusing on economic development, is giving way to community building, which focuses on continual improvement and grassroots efforts. Needs assessment, which focuses on what is wrong with a community, is being replaced by asset mapping, which identifies opportunities by focusing on a community's assets. Approaches that consider community residents as clients needing outside institutional help are shifting to considering them as citizens who form partnerships based on what they have to offer. Leadership building has changed from plucking individuals from their community for special attention to building the capacity of the community as a whole to identify and work toward its collective vision. Strategic visioning, which emphasizes continual examination and adaptation of ways to achieve a community vision, leads to a higher level of community success than the static model of strategic planning. Communities are moving away from development strategies based on getting outside resources to interdependent strategies based on working with a variety of entities to reach mutual goals. Industrial recruitment strategies are giving way to self-development strategies based on business retention and expansion. Feedback mechanisms are changing from outside evaluation to internal monitoring. (Contains 10 online resources and 9 references.) (TD)

Rural Development News

Illinois | Indiana | Iowa | Kansas | Michigan | Minnesota | Missouri | Nebraska | North Dakota | Ohio | South Dakota | Wisconsin

Vol. 21, No. 3 The North Central Regional Center for Rural Development September 1997

From the Director

Innovations in Community Development

by Cornelia Butler Flora

The context of community is shifting rapidly. Decentralization and budget reduction in the public sector and globalization and downsizing in the private sector have placed more responsibility on localities. Community development theory and practice is also changing.

The recent meeting of the Community Development Society (http://www.comm-dev.org) in Athens, Georgia, made clear what these changes mean, particularly in a professional development workshop with program officers of two foundations with major investments in community building. The change in vocabulary brings with it a change in approach.

Inside *RD News*

From Community Development to Community Building

By naming something, we determine how we act toward it. A shift in the name of an enterprise is often done to signal a different approach. Even when changes in approach really do not occur, the change in name of a firm or institution is done to signal major internal shifts to people inside and outside the organization. Many administrators are finding that it is easier to change a name than to change what actually is done.

Community development evokes an image of continuous growth along a predetermined path. As a child needs guidance to develop correctly, this mental model suggests that communities, too, need mature guidance from experts to ensure the proper developmental trajectory. While community development has always meant more than economic development, there has tended to be the assumption that once the economy is in place, everything else that contributes to better livelihoods and lives will follow. Community development suggests an expert model, with an individual with the proper credentials helping the community identify problems and then solving the problems for the community.

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Community building presents an image of continual improvement and grassroots efforts. The building metaphor implies a combination of mental and manual work, with a division of labor within the community, not between the community and the outsiders. Community building implies a broad set of participants and a shared vision of what the community should be like in the future, looking at the whole and not just a few parts.

The linking of community to building helps us go one step beyond the old story of the stranger who asks men moving rocks what they are doing. In the modern version of the story, we have men and women moving rocks. The first individual questioned responds, "I am moving rocks." The second responds, "I am earning money to feed my family by moving rocks." The third proudly states, "I am

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building a road!" The fourth tells the stranger, "*We* are building our community. The new road will link the parts of our town so that we can work and play together more easily. When we come together, we can do much more than any of us individually."

Community building through using a variety of forms of community capital is the basis for the Iowa State University Building Communities for Tomorrow Program (http://www.exnet.iastate.edu/Pages/communities/bct/). That web site links to a wide variety of community building resources.

From Needs Assessment to Asset Mapping

John McKnight (1985 and 1987) was one of the first to point out the debilitating aspects of a needs approach to community development, with a particular focus on urban areas. Jerry Wade (1989) was one of the first to point out the negative aspects of needs assessment within the Cooperative Extension System. The very methodology of needs assessment focuses on what is wrong with a community, generating list after list of what needs to be improved. Prioritizing those needs then reinforces that deficiency and the hope that someone from the outside will come in to remediate the situation.

Working with John Kretzmann (Kretzmann and McKnight, 1993; 1996), McKnight has developed a methodology for moving from a concern with what is NOT in a community to what IS in a community. By listing the gifts of individuals and the assets of associations and institutions, new opportunities can be identified along with the resources available to take advantage of them.

The advanced training institute of the Heartland Center for Rural Development (http://www.4w.com/Heartland/) is based on asset mapping, a set of tools it has developed through its work in both rural and urban areas. Nebraska, through the Nebraska Cooperative Extension Service (http://www.ianr.unl.edu/anar.coopext.coopext.html), the Nebraska Department of Economic Development and the Partnership for Rural Nebraska (http://www.ded.state.ne.us), have found this shift so effective that they have practically eliminated the word "needs" from the action vocabulary.

From Clients to Citizens

When the focus is on community residents and their needs, they become clients, who in turn need institutions to serve their needs. Institutions can grow only if they have enough clients, thus they tend to develop tightly controlled, top-down links to clients. There is little collaboration with other institutions which are viewed as competitors not only for clients, but for public and private funds.

When community residents are addressed in terms of what they can offer rather than what they need to receive, they become active participants in the process of social change. Citizens involve institutions, but through participation in civic associations, the political process, and economic activity. Citizens form partnerships based on what each partner brings to the collaboration, while clients strive to remain needy enough to have the institutions remain involved. What clients bring to the table is their needs, which

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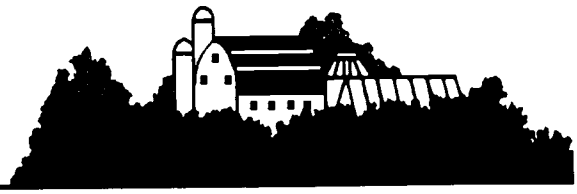

in turn are needed by institutions to mobilize resources and support their own bureaucracies.

Welfare reform has made the "client" identity less of a viable option for individual survival strategies. However, only if there is a strong link made with community-based opportunities can the transformation to citizen and the dignity that role deserves take place.

From Individual Leadership to Community Capacity

Change at the community level means that individuals need to change. However, we are increasingly finding that individual change takes places in a community context. A number of past leadership development efforts increased individual skills and connections. But often that increased skill level removed people from the community. Further, the term "leader" tended to attract only those who had or aspired to position of formal leadership, leaving out many individuals who provided the motive force for their communities of interest as well as their communities of place. Leadership building has shifted from plucking individuals from their community for special attention to building the capacity of the community as a whole as it identifies and then works toward its collective vision. Individuals who would not dream of calling themselves "leaders" learn leadership skills and act as leaders through associations which act in the benefit of the community.

Community capacity is more than the sum of its individual parts. It means the ability of the associations and institutions within a community to use the skills, knowledge and ability of all the people in the community to take initiative, responsibility and be adaptable in the face of constant change. It requires strengthened relationships and communications both inside and outside of the community. The Aspen Institute Rural Economic Policy Program (http://www.aspeninst.org/rural) has developed a workbook for a menu of indicators that allows community-based measurement of community capacity and its degree of change over time.

Community Development	→	Community Building
Needs Assessment	→	Asset Mapping
Clients	→	Citizens
Individual Leadership	→	Community Capacity
Strategic Planning	→	Strategic Visioning
Deficiencies	→	Capacities
Dependency	→	Interdependency
Industrial Recruitment	→	Building from Within
Outside Evaluation	→	Internal Monitoring

From Strategic Planning to Strategic Visioning

The 1970s were a time of strategic plans. An entire industry was developed to find out community needs and contract with town or county governments to compile those needs into a plan. Because strategic plans were necessary to receive a variety of state and federal funding, localities dutifully invested in their production. Handsomely bound with the community's name on the cover, the strategic plans were often quite similar on the inside. The rapid development of micro computers with templates greatly aided that industry.

Some communities actually know where these documents are stored. The strategic plans often read beautifully and offered an internally logical set of activities and outputs. However, they were seldom implemented or even referred to by local people (beyond, of course, writing government grants).

In the 1980s it became clear that strategic planning had to be participatory to be "owned" and implemented by communities. A number of excellent participatory strategies were developed (still based on a needs approach), which often required a commitment of at least one year on the part of local leaders.

However, there tended to be a falling away on the part of the doers, while the thinkers in the community became enmeshed in the discussion, the diagramming, and the intricacies of phrasing. Because of this separation, caused by the process itself, those strategic plans also remained far short of implementation, although they were more often referred to in terms of local allocation of resources as well as in seeking resources from the outside.

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Careful evaluation of both strategic planning and strategic visioning programs in 10 states shows the power of strategic visioning over strategic planning (Walzer, et al. 1995). An emphasis on the vision and continual examination and adaptation of alternative ways to achieve it leads to a higher level of community success (as defined by both the community and outside evaluators) than the more static strategic planning process.

Conclusions

This approach has been criticized for taking the pressure off government to provide for the needs of citizens. However, we need to empirically test if this occurs or not. In the current situation, those that have the most in our society tend to get the most government support (Sherraden, 1991; for discussion of how the newly-instituted tax provides tax incentives to meet the needs of different groups, see the web page of Citizens for Tax Justice (http://www.ctj.org/).

By moving people from clients to citizens, they are better able to organize for change, rather than simply mobilize to protest. And, in an era of privatization, this approach is the most likely to find community-based economic alternatives that support a holistic, community building vision.

In the next issue of *Rural Development News* I will discuss how this new set of terms, theory and practice impact community relations with the economy, government institutions, and outside sources of resources.

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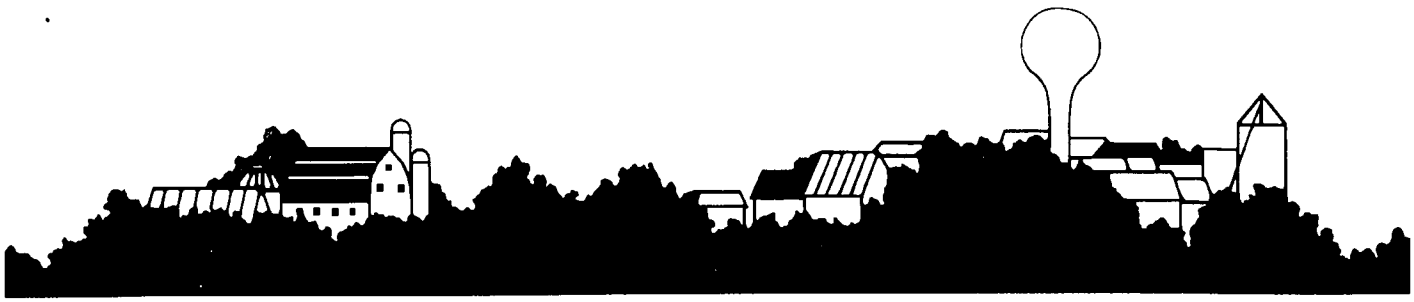

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Vol. 21, No. 4 The North Central Regional Center for Rural Development Winter 1997-98

From the Director

Innovations in Community Development (Part 2)

by Cornelia Butler Flora

Globalization has had the unexpected consequence of increasing the importance of place. As concern for the financial (as opposed to the economic) drives global level decisions and the Asian financial crisis gives a new meaning to world markets, responsibility for environmental, social and economic concerns is being squarely laid on local communities. This provides a special challenge for rural places, which must overcome the disadvantages of distance and dispersion with volunteer elected officials and multipurpose, scarce-paid staff.

Community building takes on ever more critical functions in a vastly changed political and economic context. Devolution

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and rapid changes in welfare programs and health care now require much more of communities. Deregulation, booming financial markets, and growing excess capacity has switched corporate strategies from cost-cutting to industrial consolidation (Wall Street Journal, December 31, 1997).

Community development practice is changing as well. In the last issue of *Rural Development News* I discussed how community development is moving to community building, needs assessment to asset mapping, clients to citizens', individual leadership to community capacity, and strategic planning to strategic visioning. In this issue I discuss the conceptual and practical shifts from dependency to interdepen-

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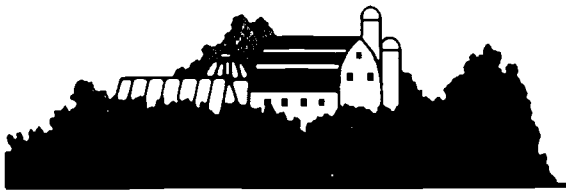

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dency, industrial recruiting to building from within, and outside evaluation to internal monitoring.

From Dependency to Interdependency

Many community development strategies in the past were based on getting resources from the outside. Block grants were preferred, but successful communities were those with good grant writers to find potential pots of money and describe community needs that fit those pots. A perverse dependency was present, as agencies were judged by how quickly they gave money away (and in whose district it was given) and community leaders were judged by the amount of funds they delivered to the community.

The increasing demand for accountability and a focus on results, rather than activities or even direct outputs, has helped drive this change. Even if x number of dollars are spent and y meters of sewer constructed, the real question becomes, "Are households more self-sufficient and the economy healthier as a result of this investment and this activity?" Thus both the community and the agency need each other to make this happen.

Interdependency also means that the use of "someone" (as in "if someone would just keep the community center in good repair") or "the government" (as in "the government ought to do something about that") decreases. Citizens who are aware of their assets are more likely to see how they can partner with a variety of entities, from state agencies to neighboring communities and regional centers, to reach mutual goals. The vision helps drive the collaborations which generate interdependencies.

From Industrial Recruitment to Building from Within

For the past 20 years, cost-benefit analysis has shown that industrial recruitment almost always costs the public more than it gains. Not only are such strategies costly for communities that do not successfully recruit a plant, but they are even more costly for those that do, particularly in the climate of increasing site competition, where the public sector attracts industry by tax abatements, infrastructure construction, environmental control leniency, and low interest, forgivable loans. Research by Grant (1995) links the presence of these strategies at the state level to numbers of business failures.

Despite the hard data suggesting the limits of industrial recruitment, that strategy has been the basis of many rural development efforts. In a national study of economic development strategies (J. Flora, et al. 1997), we found that communities which focused on self-development strategies were also able to attract industry.

Business retention and expansion activities through Cooperative Extension builds the capacity of communities to retain and expand existing business and industry and build networks of local firms. Business Retention & Expansion International is an association which supports the retention and expansion of existing business and industry as a primary economic development strategy.

The new cooperative movement is also based on the premise of

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ISSN 0886-8611

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building from within. These efforts not only have a higher probability of success in terms of actually establishing a profitable business, but a greater proportion of the profit remains in the community.

From Outside Evaluation to Internal Monitoring

The increased sense of civic responsibility which evolves from the shared vision, awareness of local assets and increased community capacity, combined with a vision of where the community collectively wants to go, has increased interest in developing feedback mechanisms that can be used to make projects more relevant and effective.

For projects funded from the outside, an occasional audit or outside evaluation pronounced the project "successful" or "unsuccessful." Reporting sheets were filled in to document items such as number of volunteer hours and feet of sidewalk laid. However, the evaluation and those numbers were not used locally for project improvement.

The increased emphasis on accountability, particularly through the Government Performance and Results Act and state mandates for outcomes, has caught the attention of local officials interested in continued collaborations with state and federal partners. But perhaps more importantly, with increased demands for funds and time on local communities, citizens themselves want to know if what they are doing with their resources has the anticipated impact.

A variety of efforts are building monitoring capacity for local communities, including the Rural Community Assistance program of the USDA Forest Service, with which the North Central Regional Center for Rural Development is affiliated, and the Learning Initiative of the Community Partnership Center at the University of Tennessee.

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The Heartland Center for Community Leadership (Lbv229@aol.com) and Yellow Wood Associates (hn4402@handsnet.org) both provide training in these methodologies. The NCRCRD has a workbook available on community-based monitoring (jstewart@iastate.edu). Community-based monitoring combined with a strategic vision allows communities to not only have greater control over where they go, but they can evaluate alternative ways of getting there, including creating for themselves more alternative partners, who in turn, provide resources for the effort.

These shifts mean a different role for the technical expert. That individual or firm must be able to listen to community goals and visions–which will differ. Communities decide where they want to go. Experts help them evaluate alternative means of getting there. Capacity building is based on learning to ask the right questions and figuring out good indicators of moving toward multiple community goals.

These changes in nomenclature can simply be the same old thing under a new label. Or it can be a radically different approach to the emerging challenges for communities in terms of the health of their economies, ecosystems and people.

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[1] Citizen, as used here, is not a term indicating a legal status vis a vis a nation state. Instead, it implies individuals taking on *responsibilities* for the collective well-being as well as the *rights* to share that well-being.

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