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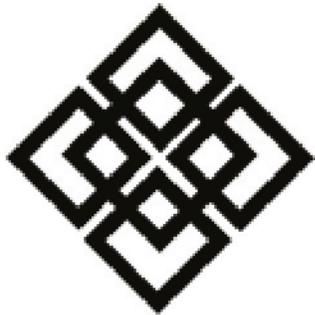
• PROMOTING PRINCIPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE •

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COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
S O C I E T Y

Values, Operational Principles, and Models For Universities to Follow While Implementing Development Programs in Diverse Rural Communities

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This paper presents the lessons I have learned about rural and community development programs throughout almost forty years of work in a university setting conducting field work and teaching in community and economic development. The purpose is to present a mission statement, values and principles, frameworks for collaboration among community groups and university extension staff (Figure 1). Operational models that university outreach workers can use in comprehensive rural development programs are discussed. Guidelines are presented that have worked for me while creating programs. Also, suggestions are presented for measuring inputs and outcome indicators of sustainable community development organizations.

The following statement is proposed for universities engaged in rural development.

Helping Regional and Community Organizations Create Solutions to Issues in Leadership, Community and Economic Development

Note that key words are *helping* and *create solutions*. The university is there in a servant role and the emphasis is on outcomes, not input.

Values and Basic Operational Principles For Rural Development Programs

The following values and operational principles guide my work with rural communities as rural development projects are developed, implemented, evaluated, and sustained in diverse communities. These values and principles were developed with and by participants in rural development programs in Illinois and Mississippi. I believe they are generic and apply in most cultures.

1. We believe community and economic development is everybody's business.

2. We believe that planning for rural development programs should be implemented *with and by* citizens from all walks of life in the community, not *to and for* them.

3. We believe the primary driving force for developing and sustaining long-term programs in community and economic development and in social and cultural change can come from informed citizens and organizational leaders *within* our communities, thus we will develop our capacity to provide technical and process assistance.

4. We believe that community development must precede economic development in areas with an undereducated workforce, high out-migration, deteriorating social and physical infrastructures, and high unemployment.

5. We believe that leadership, community, and economic development are *both processes and tasks that are never finished.*

6. We believe our framework for public and private sector teamwork will bring innovation, creativity, and synergism to rural development programs.

7. We believe there is a strong local commitment to development within most regions and that citizens have the ability to initiate local action projects which will reshape the destiny of their communities.

8. We believe that the human resource skills and leadership skills of citizens from all walks of life can be developed, and that innovation and creativity can be stimulated among all segments of the population in a community.

9. We believe local decision makers must understand how local problems are continually influenced by the changing global economy.

10. We know that many formal linkages with external agencies are present, valued, and operational in most communities, and we believe that linkages with external organizations will help us achieve our goals.

11. We believe that the problems of communities are complex, holistic, and massive; but that they are solvable—solutions lie in comprehensive, systematic, and long-term collaborative regional efforts.

12. We believe priority must be given to creating and implementing action strategies which capitalize on developing our natural resources, agricultural products, all types of business ventures, infrastructure for developing industry and manufacturing, and our area's vast human resource potential.

13. We believe that the primary *wealth of the region is its people.* Human resource development programs must have priority as communities develop and implement

Figure 1. A Framework for Teamwork in the Delta Partners Initiative*
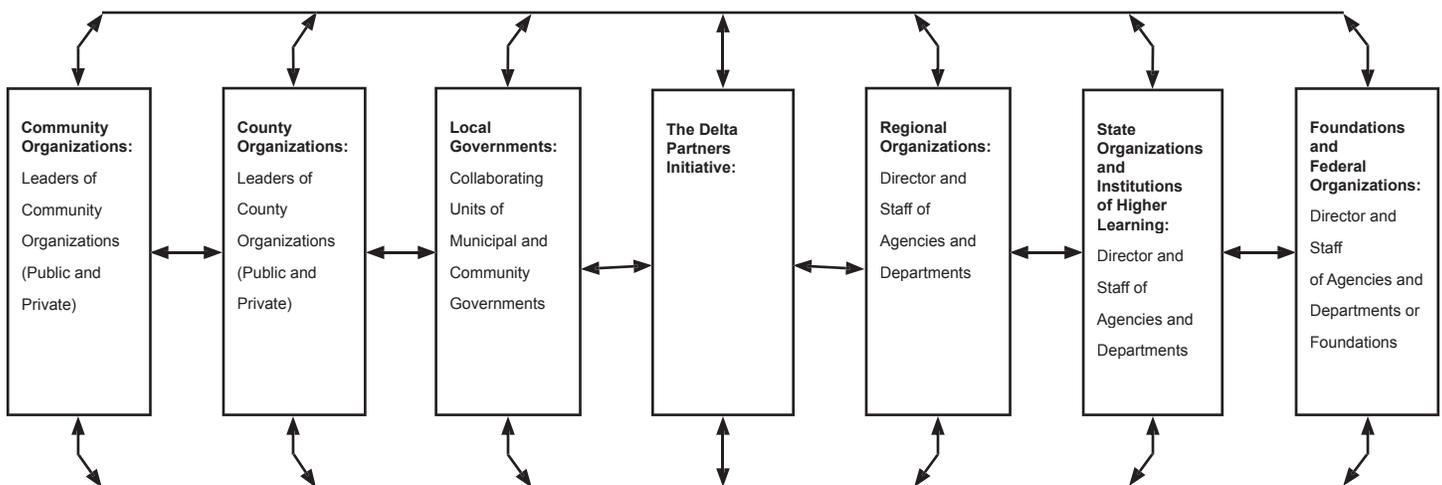
*The Framework for Teamwork in the Delta Partners Initiative, which follows, was modified from a model that was created and used in the Illinois Rural Partners/Kellogg Program from 1988 through 1994.

projects guided by these operational principles. Day care, Head Start, primary and secondary education, higher education, vo-tech and workforce training, and life-long learning are critical issues.

14. We believe there is *no quick or easy fix* for most rural development challenges. It will not be easy for our communities to achieve our goals and fulfill our mission. We know progress is achieved step-by-step and project by project, and we are committed to a long-term effort.

15. We believe our commitment to the process of empowering citizens and the communities where they live and work is the key to success.

16. We, universities and community participants, will learn together from our successes and our failures. We will celebrate success together and, when we fail, we will not lose hope. We will be steadfast as we pursue our shared vision for community and economic development.

17. We believe our commitment to the process of empowering citizens and communities will help make our shared goals of success become a reality.

A Comprehensive Model for Creating Sustainable Development Programs

The following comprehensive model can be used to guide development efforts by universities and other technical and process assistance providers, especially if they work with communities that have limited resources:

$$H.R.D. + L. D. + O.D. + C.D. + E.D. = S.D.$$

This formula provides a broad foundation for outreach efforts in needs and resource assessment and long-range strategic planning for creating sustainable rural development programs. Strategic planning goals for community and regional development are likely related to issues in several elements in this holistic formula (Figure 2). While a university's outreach must be consistent with its primary mission, educators in universities can use this formula as an organizational framework to support all of its development efforts.

H. R. D. = Human Resource Development. *Enhancing the quality of the local work force is a major challenge for many if not most rural communities.* Goals for strategic planning in human resource development require objectives and action strategies for contemporary projects in on-the-job training, basic literacy, and vocational education and technical training programs at community colleges and high schools. Jobs demanding higher levels of skill allow highly skilled workers to demand better wages. These high-skill and high-paying jobs will stimulate the local economy. As regional strategic planning committees establish a human resource development goal, they usually collaborate with local high schools, community colleges, existing businesses, manufacturing firms, and other local organizations to develop objectives and implement action strategies to achieve this goal within a time frame.

L. D. = Leadership Development: *Numerous studies have indicated that informed, committed, and passionate local leaders are essential to community and regional development. In small communities experiencing out-migration, the leadership pool has become smaller and many key leaders have multiple responsibilities. Thus, a formal leadership development program becomes critical to the success of any university's continuing education and outreach programs.*

A major thrust of the **Delta Partners Initiative** at Delta State University has been the Delta Emerging Leaders Program and the Mid-South Delta Leaders Program. Five diverse groups, of 30 to 36 participants each, have completed an intensive two-year leadership development program—that's more than 180 indigenous leaders between the ages of 21 and 40. Program outcomes indicate that participant's attitudes, values, and behaviors have changed significantly. These diverse groups have become committed to each other and to the Delta region (Tab and Montesi 2000). In the fall of 2004, Delta State University received a grant from the Delta Regional Authority, a new eight state initiative funded by the federal government, to implement an "Advanced Leaders Program" in eight states, including the delta regions of Southern Illinois.

O. D. = Organizational Development. *Strong local organizations are required to achieve goals in human resource development, community development and economic development.* Let me emphasize that my approach to development always begins with leadership and organizational development. My definition of community development is **NAAAP: N**etworks of **A**ctors (leaders and citizens) in **A**ssociations (formal groups and informal groups) engaged in **A**ctivities in a **Place. T**ry as one may, one never does community development with the entire community but neither can one engage in community development without working with and through local organizations.

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Technical and process assistance providers must identify existing organizations in the community through which it can work to achieve local goals for community and economic development. If a local organization does not exist to implement community development efforts, one must be created and empowered with the responsibility for getting the job done.

Goals in organizational development require objectives and action strategies which mobilize collaboration through formal organizations throughout communities. For example, the establishment of formal networks for collaboration among existing organizations for community and economic development could be an organizational development goal. Efforts in organizational development build local social infrastructure or social capital of the community.

C. D. = Community Development. Let's begin with defining community. My approach to community and community development is based on the interactional or field perspective (Wilkinson 1991). As described earlier, I use **NAAAP** to define community in my teaching and community development work. In view of this fact, community development *is* the essential ingredient to building social and economic capital. I believe that c*ommunity development must precede economic development in areas with declining population base, low resources, weak social infrastructure, and an undereducated workforce.* Local citizens and organizations must drive efforts to enhance the attractiveness and utility of the social capital (community organizations) and physical infrastructure of their rural communities.

A community development goal which supports economic development could be the rehabilitation of downtown areas in villages and towns throughout the community. For example, data from community needs assessment studies suggest that many citizens support formal collaboration among units of government and institutions within the community and county. For example, one county where we work has a population of 42,000—there are 16 municipalities, each with a mayor. The County Board of Supervisors (or commissioners) has five members. The largest "city" has a population of 15,250. There is a great need for formal collaboration, organizational and community development, in this county. It is likely that a university can work with local public and private sector groups to help them develop goals, objectives, and action strategies for community development among the units of local government.

In cases where downtown revitalization is a goal, it is important to develop objectives and strategies to initiate action. For example, community development objectives could include "community beautification," or "creating a better system for handling garbage." Action strategies would be organized into specific steps to accomplish each task. The steps will name persons accepting responsibility; outline each deadline for action; list resources necessary to complete the task; and describe how those resources will be provided.

E. D. = Economic Development. *The primary strategic goals for economic development in most communities are likely to include objectives and action strategies for creating jobs and enhancing the local tax base.* How?

Figure 2. Formula for Sustainable Development

S.D. = Sustainable Development

E.D. = Economic Development

C.D. = Community Development

O.D. = Organizational Development

L.D. = Leadership Development

H.R.D. = Human Resource Development

Efforts may be initiated to create jobs by: (1) retaining local businesses and industry and helping existing firms expand; (2) targeting new firms; (3) helping local entrepreneurs get started; and (4) developing tourism resources and marketing the county's tourism events and sites more effectively. When communities need outside help, faculty from universities can provide technical assistance on elements in their plan that relate to important economic development issues.

S. D. = Sustainable Development. The goal of development programs is to create sustainable development. *Sustainable development creates a state of collective identity, a sense of collective belonging, a sense of community solidarity, collective pride in the community as a place and in its associational networks, and a sense of achievement and fulfillment among the residents of a community.* Development is sustained when local citizens have the collective ability and commitment to shape their destiny to the highest degree possible.

Rural communities have and are experiencing many severe problems. By working together, communities can develop and implement programs that will create change. Success will change the way people feel about their communities. The following sections describe how sustainable community development organizations might be derived from conditions that stimulate individual and collective achievement.

Reinforcing or blocking individual and group needs. There are many ways in which the needs of individuals and groups can be enhanced or thwarted by university-sponsored development programs. When individuals are not permitted to work on projects that challenge their abilities, that use their skills, or pique their interest; their quest for involvement and fulfillment is blocked. Examples of blocking individual or groups needs include: (1) when a university outreach worker decides for a volunteer what projects he or she will be allowed to undertake; (2) when volunteers are not involved in decisions to establish community development goals, objectives and strategies; and (3) when the opinions of volunteers are not considered. Such exclusive behaviors stifle the right to expression and fulfillment. For example, given that some community and organizational cultures demand that disenfranchised groups accept and adopt the behavior and values of the majority to gain acceptance; it's not surprising that conflicts occur or that these groups withdraw.

Volunteer leaders working within a strictly directive university program will become frustrated because their desire to participate or need for fulfillment is blocked. Conflict occurs because individuals dislike the failure and frustration that is caused by working on projects that aren't related to their interests and long-term goals for developing the community. They will become discouraged and withdraw if they have no ownership in the program. *Communities support community development programs that they help create.*

Dealing with contradictions. A dilemma can develop between the needs of individuals and a university. The demands of a program that is funded by an outside organization seeking to create change or to stimulate development can create conflict. Conflicts between the growth needs of an unhealthy community and the requirements of large, formal organization are common. Similar conflicts may develop between informal groups and a bureaucracy. The structure and principles of directive or autocratic organizations tend to create conditions which block an individual's self-actualization. A strictly directive organization creates a climate of control; individuals are rewarded for dependency, subordination, and passivity; individuals focus on fulfilling short-term goals and are able to use only a narrow range of their skills and knowledge Robinson 1972; Robinson and Heinze-Silvis 1993). Can this be true for groups, too?

A major problem occurs when a program demands dependency, subordination and submissiveness. A program's organizational structure, management philosophy, and operating systems must allow each individual to grow, develop and mature, rather than remain dependent upon program staff. Thus, the focus of this paper is to provide a model for creating sustainable ownership for development among diverse groups in community organizations.

Community Control and Sustainable Community Development Organizations

The key factor in achieving sustainable community development organizations is the level of local community input and control. Our first developmental projects required commitments for creating and sustaining community and economic development across in the community. The program staff "controlled" the involvement of local leaders in the first local action projects by convincing community and organizational leaders that economic development must be driven by informed decision making and leadership skills among local leaders. We insisted on diversity of participation before funding commitments were formalized. The lead sponsoring organization and all of its formal committees had to be diverse in terms of race, age, and gender. Also, membership had to be representative of both the private and public sector. No resistance was experienced as a result to staff insistence on diversity and the necessity of private and public sector participation.

The balance of power and influence between local leaders and external resource providers can become a delicate

issue. Also, the program staff insisted that scientific and systematic procedures be followed as projects are being planned and implemented. Random sampling was used in needs assessment studies and leaders had to be inclusive of diverse groups when committee members were selected and appointed.

As the program emerged, the products of each community action were controlled by local citizens, not university outreach staff. Local citizens selected the issues to be addressed, developed the priorities for local action, and created outcomes. They wrote reports on needs assessments and developed long-range strategic plans from data obtained through action research projects. Projects were implemented with little or no conflict; however staff insistence on the necessity for adhering to systematic procedures and avoiding shortcuts sometimes created the impression that the program staff was being "too academic."

An objective of the program was to provide opportunities for collective identity for every community leader and participant. We all need to belong to something great. Why can't it be the community? The need for personal growth, development, and collective identity can be met partly through work on a specific community action project. The following strategies were used to stimulate individual growth, development, and fulfillment within the Mississippi Delta Partners Initiative.

Social and Psychological Conditions Which Support Sustainable Development Organizations in Diverse Organizations

Community development professionals (Technical and Process Assistance Providers) affiliated with universities can create conditions and activities to encourage self-improvement and development of volunteer leaders in a community development program. Six conditions or inputs which professionals can create to promote Sustainable Community Development Organizations are described below.

1. **Intellectual stimulation.** Program staff (community development professionals) must provide opportunities for citizens to participate in activities which will help them develop self-esteem, stimulate their intellectual growth, and express their creativity. Emerging leaders learn through experience. Duties and activities should be well-planned—boredom and ambiguity inhibit intellectual growth. Meaningful work assignments are required to stimulate intellectual curiosity. We have found that community leaders enjoy action research which yields information they can use to make decisions about community and economic development projects.

2. **Responsible freedom.** Community leaders and volunteers need to feel competent and responsible for completing a project without fear of failure or ridicule. They will rebel if they are treated as students in a classroom, taught by an authoritative teacher. A later section of this paper deals with the issue of control, and balances it with responsible freedom. Adults need to experience an open and stimulating environment in which to test their abilities and to develop a sense of capacity. Responsible freedom opens the road to creativity. Challenging and difficult situations allow persons to test their abilities.

3. **Social and psychological support.** Program staff must provide technical and process assistance to community leaders in risky situations. Emerging leaders need to develop and maintain confidence in themselves, their peers, and in the program staff. If they are secure in their roles and confident in the ability of the program staff, they will focus on the task at hand, rather than on their personal insecurities, or on the possibility of rejection from peers or program staff.

    > *Whatever diminishes the self-image of a volunteer leader has NO PLACE in a community development program.*

    Rejection, humiliation, ridicule and degradation destroy self-image and create a sense of social rejection. "Social and psychological lynching" undermine confidence, produce fear, and cause individuals to withdraw from the program. These behaviors thwart fulfillment of belonging needs. It is tempting to criticize volunteers when they make mistakes, but most people perform as best they can. If they do not, local program leaders must help volunteers improve.

4. **Focus on success.** What does your program staff do to stimulate success among community leaders and volunteers in your community development project? Successful experiences in your program will help a volunteer develop a positive self-image and confidence in your ability to help them help themselves. When volunteers are satisfied with a job well done, they enjoy a sense of achievement. However, this does not imply an environment free from failure; weathering some failure is quite different from being a failure. Self-actualized volunteer leaders have developed positive self-images largely through successful experiences.

    Program staff must enable volunteers to perceive failure as a learning experience, a necessary trial in self-development. Failures are regarded as temporary setbacks, not determinants of future outcomes. Successful experiences as a volunteer not only contribute to increased productivity, but can also

bring about more positive attitudes and improved interpersonal relationships. Encouragement will allow volunteers to take risks that support success. Helping volunteers redefine "failures" as "opportunities to try again, learn and grow" will strengthen their abilities and commitment to community and economic development. It will create a sense of ownership and belonging.

5. **Commitment to process.** Enthusiasm and commitment are contagious social and psychological phenomena. Community development professionals must be committed to program goals, and share their belief that positive outcomes are possible through effective collective action. Community leaders and volunteers are more likely to contribute when they are somehow obligated to a project. Commitment to process is an important factor in creating a sense of belonging and identity. Individuals become committed if they believe that the task requires skills which they possess, and if they help define and set priorities. Individuals need to feel that the task has some personal significance for them and that they will be able to follow through to achieve the goal.

6. **Self-insight.** Through participation in community development programs, leaders and volunteers will learn strengths and limitations, they will gain self insight. They understand the relationship of their skills to the task at hand. They learn to accept their limitations and channel their efforts toward developing strengths. They can set realistic goals for themselves and, if they feel that some of their weaknesses can be strengthened, they establish goals they can readily achieve to strengthen those weaknesses.

We have found that these conditions help satisfy the need for identity, belonging, solidarity, esteem or pride, achievement, and fulfillment among community residents and leaders who are participating in community and economic development programs. Figure 3 illustrates how these conditions reinforce actualization among community residents who are participating in community and economic development programs. Research questions have been developed to determine the extent to which the Delta Partners Initiative meets each of the following "preconditions for Sustainable Community Development Organizations." In our research project, Toward Excellence and New Policy From Delta Partners Participatory Research, we developed five questions to assess the extent to which each of the six preconditions for creating Sustainable Community Development Organizations are present in the outreach efforts. Data are being collected from all members of the needs and resource assessment and strategic planning committees in each community, boards of directors for the lead sponsoring organizations in each community, and from program staff.

Output Indicators of Sustainable Community Development Organizations

Our construct for creating positive indicators for sustainable community development organizations is comprised of a hierarchy of six indicators or outcomes: (1) a state of collective identity among the community's residents; (2) a sense of collective belonging among the community's residents; (3) a sense of community solidarity among the community's residents; (4) collective pride among the residents in the community as a place and in its associational networks; (5) a sense of collective achievement among the community's residents; and (6) a collective feeling of fulfillment among the residents of the community. We hypothesize that our continuum will be a hierarchy; i.e., groups of community residents will not possess those characteristics at the top of the hierarchy unless the requirements for lower level needs have been met (Figure 3). The following are operational definitions for each indicator of Sustainable Community Development Organizations we used when we began with the directors of the lead sponsoring organizations in each community.

1. **Collective identity among the community's residents.** This indicator refers to the degree to which the residents identify and/or have attachments to the community. "Where did you live before you moved here? Where did you grow up? Where did you attend school? Where do you work? Why did you move to our community? Tell me about your family? Do you belong to the Lions Club? Rotary? What's your religion? What do you do in your spare time? Do you play bridge? Fish? Hunt? Golf?," These questions are among those that rural residents are likely to ask a newcomer. Why? The answers provide reference points which facilitate communication and interaction. They may provide common points of reference, interests, and identity.

   Level of identity includes the degree to which residents relate (1) to the community as place and (2) with its formal and informal associations. To measure this variable, one might ask, "What is the largest and the smallest community to which you belong?" Follow up with questions that measure the level of respondent's identity (1) with the geographical community, and (2) with its formal and informal associations. Identity with the community is the foundation variable in the Sustainable Community Development Organization's hierarchy of needs.

2. **Collective belonging among the community's residents.** This indicator refers to the degree to which the residents feel that they belong to the community.

Belonging includes more than identity with a place or with another person. Belonging is a feeling of mutual respect, acceptance, and affection. People do not belong to a place or to community infrastructure; people belong to groups and they may feel that they "belong" to or with other individuals. To measure this indicator of Sustainable Community Development Organizations, one must obtain data on the degree to which community residents (1) believe they are attached to the community, and (2) are participating in the most significant associational networks, formal and informal, in the community. Are community residents attached to formal and informal community groups?

3. **Collective solidarity among the community's residents.** This indicator refers to the strength of the attachment among the formal and informal associations dedicated to enhancing community and economic development in the community. Solidarity is derived from group identity and one's sense of belonging—it involves moving up the hierarchy of Sustainable Community Development Organizations needs another step. Questions to measure community solidarity must assess the degree and strength of attachment which members of formal and informal associations have with each other and these associations, and citizens perceptions of the strength of collaboration among these associations.

4. **Collective pride in the community as a place and in its associational networks.** This indicator refers to the degree of pride which residents have for the geographical community and the accomplishments of its formal and informal organizations. Community pride is derived from the successful outcomes—accomplishments of formal and informal community development groups. There is much evidence that residents in many rural communities are apathetic and have a sense of failure. Such communities are haunted by problems associated with rural poverty and the "ghosts of jobs lost" from farming, mining and heavy manufacturing. If formal and informal organizations for community and economic development can create high levels of identity, belonging, and solidarity; we hypothesize that pride in the community will increase. This variable is measured by assessing the level of pride that local leaders have (1) in the community as place and (2) in its formal and informal associations.

5. **A collective sense of achievement among the community's residents.** This indicator refers to (1) the degree of achievement present within community and economic development organizations in the county, and (2) the feelings of community residents about how participation in these community and economic development organizations meets their individual and collective needs for achievement. The apathy described in Indicator 4, above, results from a perception of failure because of loss of agrarian, mining and manufacturing lifestyles; by population decline in rural communities; and by the failure of local institutions (e.g., school and church closings). There has been a drastic decline in rural ceremonys—graduations, weddings, community festivals, county fairs, etc. which used to be celebrations of community and individual achievement.

Through the Delta Partners Initiative, local leaders launched new types of community action projects. These projects were designed to reverse decline in community life, to bring a new spirit of community activity; and, hopefully, to prepare the community to participate more effectively in the economic development arena. Each project has a specific outcome, tangible or intangible and these outcomes can be identified and the effects measured. The intention of a large number of community leaders and or the program staff is to empower formal and informal associations in each county to create at least part of the change that local citizens desire. Some communities had more than 30 persons serving on their Strategic Planning Committee for Community and Economic Development and its subcommittees. Thus, this variable will be measured by assessing the sense and degree of achievement which residents and local leaders have as a result of participating in self-help projects sponsored by the community's formal and informal associations seeking to create and manage change.

6. **A collective sense of fulfillment among the residents of the community.** This indicator refers to the degree of fulfillment which community residents have obtained because of their participation in action projects sponsored by the formal and informal associations for community and economic development in the county. It is hypothesized that those residents with the highest levels of fulfillment will also have the highest sense of achievement, pride, sense of solidarity, sense of belonging and identity with the community as place, and with its associational networks. This variable can be measured by assessing the level of fulfillment which residents and local leaders have as a result of participating in self-help projects sponsored by the county's formal and informal associations for community and economic development.

Do these Models Work?

Documenting Sustainable Community Development. In a research project on our outreach program, we developed questions to assess the extent to which each of the above six collective indicators for Sustainable Community Development Organizations were present in the Delta Partners Initiative's outreach efforts. During 2002, this questionnaire was completed by participants in Mississippi Delta Demonstration Communities. Respondents were members of Boards of Directors of the lead local organization that sponsored community development projects, local members of Resource and Needs Assessment committees, and local members of Strategic Planning Committees. They responded to questions that assessed their personal experiences and opinions as participants in the Community Development Demonstration program.

The first 30 questions helped us discover the degree to which the preconditions or inputs for Sustainable

Community Development Organizations were present. Questions 31-60 helped us discover the degree to which collective Sustainable Community Development Organizations had been achieved among our community partners. Also, a few demographic questions, such as age, gender, race, income, occupation, role in the demonstration program, and community of residence were included at the end of the questionnaire.

Our data indicate strong statistical significance and internal consistency and validity between the Preconditions and Predicted Outcomes. Regression analysis demonstrated relationships between levels of success in three communities where more than 100 "community improvement" programs were implemented. Participants in each community reported that their local community development organizations and its programs would be sustained (Robinson and Hales, forthcoming).

Summary

This paper described what I learned while working in outreach and community development programs that operated through land grant and regional university settings. It presented a generic mission statement for outreach programs in rural development programs that may be initiated by university faculty and field staff, or practitioners. Values and principles, frameworks for collaboration, and operational models for comprehensive rural development outreach programs were discussed. Also, guidelines were presented for creating programs and suggestions for measuring inputs and outcome indicators of sustainable community development organizations. My belief and hope is that this paper will help university outreach workers and faculty be more sensitive to and effective with community groups that they serve.

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