Community Advancement through the Enabling of Women

Community Development Society
2015 Conference

Lexington, Kentucky

Paulette Meikle, Ph.d.
Chair and Associate Professor of Sociology and Community Development
Delta State University
Sustainable Communities! Inclusive Communities! Better Communities! have been persistent and pressing goals of men and women in disparate places in the world as they endeavor to improve quality of life for residents.
Why focus on the Role of Women in Community Development

On the basis of empirical evidence, experience, and a review of the theoretical and relevant literature, I FOCUS ON THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN COMMUNITY for the following reasons:

- there is a general absence of directed concern with women in community development literature;
- community development has not sufficiently advanced to be interpreted as gender-neutral—an understanding of the extent to which gender inequality impedes community development is essential;
- there are significant differences between men and women in the use of and access to resources, and this affects the way community development projects are designed and implemented;
- a disproportionate number of women and children live in poverty, which requires empirical and policy foci;
- there is a need to address the patriarchal propensities in community development. Not being aware of, or not focusing on, women’s roles in community development limits community development outcomes;
- Tap into women’s unique abilities for building Community Capacity and Community Resiliency.

That is:
- Women’s collective ability to respond to external and internal stresses and shocks; to create and take advantage of opportunities; and to meet the needs of residents.
- Women’s unique ability to positively respond to and adapt to change and efficiently manage change for community wellbeing.
Why focus on the Role of Women in Community Development

- women need to be seen as leaders, agents of change and advocates of success, rather than as traditional targets and objects of welfare;
- women generate unique responses to social injustice and quality of life issues;
- in practically all communities, **gendered division of labor also means unequal division of labor**, where women’s tasks and men’s tasks are valued differently;
- eliminating gender disparities is intrinsically a concern for women more than for men; and
- social, psychological and economic disengagement among poor women are challenges faced by many communities.

Need to tap into women’s unique abilities for building Community Capacity and Community Resiliency.

- **That is:** Women’s collective ability to respond to external and internal stresses and shocks; to create and take advantage of opportunities; and to meet the needs of residents.
- Women’s unique ability to positively respond to and adapt to change and efficiently managing change for community wellbeing.
Why Focus on the Role of Women in Community Development

I argue that community development is a gendered process - Feminists scholars would argue that Community Development is an uneven process between men and women.

Focus on women – historical lopsided access to decision making, economic resources, and cultural goods etc, yet women in the U.S. are traditionally pivotal in the struggle for social change in their communities.

Feminization of Access and Efficacy (continued erosion in the social and economic safety net for women and children).

A solution for the shortage women in policymaking is to promote women in community leadership.

A diverse group (of inclusive women), often make better decisions than an homogenous group.
Why Focus on the Role of Women in Community Development

**Pervasive Male Power:** (a) Community Patriarchy (b) Domestic Patriarchy (adapted from Kimmel, 2004)

- **Community Patriarchy**
  - This refers to the institutional/structural arrangements within the community, where there is a prevalence of male in power positions (economy and politics).
    - Glass Ceiling
    - Glass Escalator (men in female-dominated career often are promoted faster than women in male-dominated fields)
    - Inequality

- **Domestic Patriarchy**
  - This is refers to the emotional and familial arrangements in the community, the ways in which men’s power in the public arena is reproduced in domestic and private lives. Includes male-female relationships, family relationships, and child socialization.
    - Feminine mystique: A woman thinking of herself only as her children’s mother and her husband’s wife.
    - Domestic Violence
    - Displaced homemakers: Women whose primary occupation had been homemaking but who did not find full-time employment after being divorced.
Systematically Addressing Gender Issues in Community Development at Delta State University

- A Gendered Model of Community Development
- Creation of the DSU Gender Studies Group
- Community Based Empirical Studies

- Women’s Community Engagement: Shelby Mississippi
- Women’s Community Engagement and Community Building in Rural Grenada, West Indies
- Financial Capability for Fiscal Well-Being among Low Income Minority African American Women in the Mississippi Delta
Figure 1: A Community Development Model

- Problem
  - New Gender Balanced Community Based Organizations (CBOs)
  - Complex
  - Inclusive Participatory
  - Balancing
  - Comprehensive and Integrative

- Progress
  - Outcome
    - Gender balanced
  - Social Change
  - New policies

- Power
  - Gender balanced

- Planning
  - Gender infused strategies
  - Set meaningful targets and measures
  - Collaborative

- Process
  - Implementation Evaluation
    - (qualitative and quantitative)
  - CBOs (required to achieve CD goals)
  - Complete projects
Problem

Opportunities

1. Commitment to Community Development: Women have the ability to initiate local action projects which will reshape the outcome of their communities.
2. Women can identify and support opportunities for gender equality.
3. Women can establish horizontal and vertical networks to address community relevant matters.
4. Women can help workers get a voice in the workplace.
5. Women as voices for oppressed groups
6. Address: sexual harassment, domestic violence, equal pay, child abuse, homelessness etc.

Challenges

1. Limited human resource skills and leadership skills of women.
2. Lack of cohesion among women
3. Self esteem to mobilize external resources
4. Competing Domestic and Family Chores
5. Lack of personal empowerment
6. Quality of employment
7. Lack of trust and supportive relationships among women.
8. Poverty among single parents (feminization of poverty)
Planned Efforts

Opportunities

• Formal linkages with external organizations to help define and achieve CD goals.

• Long-term collaborative regional efforts.

• Enhancing the quality of local work.

• On-the-job training, adult literacy, and vocational education and technical training programs at community colleges and high schools.

• Training women in jobs that were once male oriented.

• High-skill and high-paying jobs that will stimulate the local economy.

Challenges

• Human resource skills and leadership skills of women.

• Family obligations
  (For women who are involved - Family life, and sometimes all relationships, often take a back seat to the demands of community organizing initiative).

• Anti-collective forces

• Solidarity struggles in within communities.

• Training and mentoring

• Getting more women in leadership and political roles (glass ceiling effect).
**Planned Efforts**

### Opportunities

**Leadership Development**: *(informed, committed, and passionate local leaders are essential to community and regional development).*

**Delta Partners Initiative** has been the [Delta Emerging Leaders Program](#) and the [Mid-South Delta Leaders Program](#).

Diverse groups, complete an intensive two-year leadership development program.

Graduates form an invaluable pool of Delta leaders.

Masters in Community Development degree program at Delta State University (Non–traditional students)

### Challenges

Human resource skills and leadership skills of women.

The leadership pool is small in many rural communities, and many key leaders have multiple responsibilities.
Process

- The interaction of human capital, organizational resources, and social capital existing within a given community that can be leveraged to solve collective problems and improve or maintain a given community.

- Creating jobs and enhancing the local tax base.
- Female –headed household
- Double Jeopardy
- Women’s Leadership
Process

- Building a state of women’s collective identity, the sense of women’s collective belonging, a sense of community solidarity, collective pride in the community as a place.

- A sense of achievement and fulfillment among the women of a community.

- A community is sustained when women have the collective ability and commitment to shape their destiny to the highest degree possible.

- Women’s empowerment, self-esteem, and confidence building.

- Social Capital Formation: Personal and organizational networks to facilitate mutually beneficial community organizing and development.
Women’s Commitment to process

- Enthusiasm and commitment are contagious social and psychological phenomena.

- Women must be committed to program goals, and share their belief that positive outcomes are possible through effective collective action.

- Women are more likely to contribute when they are somehow obligated to a project.

- Commitment to process creates a sense of belonging and identity—to achieve CD goals.
Process Challenges

- Female-headed households
- Job demands
- Lack of Awareness
- Lack of time between working and domestic responsibilities.
- A lack of accessible community organizations
- Social Exclusion
- No desire to participate.
- High cost of transportation
Progress (outcome)

- Women’s community participation and civic engagement
- Diverse leadership
- Consistent, tangible progress toward CD goals
- A state of collective identity among women and community residents
- A sense of collective belonging among women and community residents
- A sense of community solidarity among women and community residents
- A collective pride among women and residents in the community.
- A sense of collective achievement among women and community residents.
- A collective feeling of fulfillment among residents of the community.
- Effective community based organizations and institutions
- Efficient use of all community resources
- Economic Growth: Jobs for women, and other community residents, entrepreneurship etc.
Empirical Study : Women’s Community Engagement: Shelby Mississippi
Extant studies promote the notion that communities/regions with abundant social capital and diverse citizen participation are resilient and strong.

Since the publication of Putnam’s studies, several studies have emerged which have attempted to refine his social capital thesis and its implications for civic engagement.

Most important for this study has been a limited body of literature which focuses on gender differences in social capital between women and men in a variety of milieu.
Background

Caiazza and Putnam (2002) found that social capital is significantly related to women’s political participation, where levels of social capital are high, women have higher levels of political participation and representation.

Women fare better where civic engagement is greater, and they fare worse where people are isolated and disconnected from their communities.

Other scholars argue that the gendered dynamics of social capital has received far too little attention.

Our investigation on social capital and women’s civic engagement in Shelby builds on this growing literature and focuses on the gender differences in participation at the rural community level – in the Mississippi Delta.
Research Questions

- What are the perceptions and attitudes of women toward civic engagement in a small Mississippi Delta town?

- What level of trust exists among women in a small Mississippi Delta town?

- How satisfied are women with decision making in their local community?

- In what kinds of activities and organizations do women participate? And, what is their level of participation?

- How does civic engagement contribute to the empowerment of women and community activeness?
Methods

- Face to face in-depth interviews with local women in the sample community.

- Key Informant interviews/ Oral histories

- Focus group with local organizations: the Women United for Shelby group and the Women of Destiny group.

**Sample size** - 107

**Sampling Techniques:** Purposive Sampling and Snowball sampling
Some Findings
Women are more active in identifying local issues and coming together to solve community problems than men.

Sixty four percent of the respondents said women were more active than men in identifying and solving community problems.
## Table I: Gender-based Community Activeness: Identifying community problems and coming together to solve them

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>men</td>
<td>27.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>women</td>
<td>64.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both men and women</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither group</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=98
## Predictors and Inhibitors of Community Engagement Among Women

### Women’s interest in local Community Affairs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interest Level</th>
<th>Freq.</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not interested</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat interested</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>33.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very interested</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>53.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refused</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>106</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Predictors and Inhibitors of Community Engagement Among Women

### Time devoted to volunteer work in the last 12 months

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Valid</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>42.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>54.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*N= 106*
A major predictor of community engagement among women in Shelby is having women in leadership positions.

Having a woman in a leadership position motivates women to become engaged within the community.

Quotes:

“Because I think there are some very active women in leadership. There is a group in Shelby called the Shelby Women's United that have accomplished a lot of good things.”
“Because women are strong leaders in Shelby. Our mayor is a woman.”

“Because I have been hearing a lot of input from women. They are attending the board meeting. There are a lot of women to speak.”

“Women are speaking out more about progress and building up the community to see it grow and prosper.”

“The women are beginning to come out more.”

“I feel like there has been a change in Shelby and more women are stepping up to the plate than men.”
Why are Women not Participating?
Female-headed households, Job demands, Social Exclusion, Lack of Awareness.

- “I work ten hours a day and have two teenage girls and I have a husband I have to take care of.”

- “Because the women's club is very nice and they help a lot of people, but when they meet I am at work and you must be involved to be a member.”

- “If I knew of any, I would go to a meeting and see if I wanted to join.”

- “In this community, we really don't have any organizations like that. If we do, you have to be financially stable to belong to groups like that.”

- “First of all, if any of these organizations do exist, they are for the most important people. People who are higher up in the community.”
Are Women Powerless to Affect Community Decision?

Women and Comm Decision

Strongly Disagree
Disagree
Undecided/Neutral
Agree
Strongly Agree

Percent
40
30
20
10
0
# Types of Community Engagement in past 12 months

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community Engagement</th>
<th>Work with other people to deal with community issues</th>
<th>Telephone, letter or visit with a government official</th>
<th>Attend meeting about any issue related to community</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>35.5 %</td>
<td>23.4 %</td>
<td>46.7 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>60.7 %</td>
<td>72 %</td>
<td>48.6 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Membership in Various Organizations

Membership in various organizations

- refused
- don't know
- yes
- no

Data: 32
# Membership in Different Organizations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Membership</th>
<th>Professional/Business Associations (%)</th>
<th>Community Development / Self Help Group (%)</th>
<th>Women’s Group (%)</th>
<th>Community Religious Group (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Official Leader</td>
<td>.9</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active Member</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inactive Member</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>.9</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-member</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Women's voting behavior

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I did not vote</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am sure I voted</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I usually vote, but</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refused</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Women's voting behavior

I did not vote.  I usually vote, but.  I am sure I voted.  Refused.
## Women’s Source of News and Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of News</th>
<th>Radio (%)</th>
<th>Television (%)</th>
<th>News Paper (%)</th>
<th>Internet (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than once a month</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A few times a month</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A few times a Week</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Every day</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Women’s Interest in Local Affairs (in %)
# Educational Status of Respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degree</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than High School</td>
<td>9.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School</td>
<td>38.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocational</td>
<td>11.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>college/university</td>
<td>48.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Status</td>
<td>Percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>60.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>21.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>10.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Improvement in Women’s Life

Improvement in life past five yrs

- worse off
- better off
- about the same
- don't know
- refused

Percent
- 70
- 60
- 50
- 40
- 30
- 20
- 10
- 0

Improvement in life past five yrs
Women & Decisionmaking

- How satisfied were women with decision-making in their local community?
Women Are Powerless to Affect Community Decisions?
Women Powerless to Control Their Own Lives?

![Bar Chart]

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Responses:
- 0
- 5
- 10
- 15
- 20
- 25
- 30
- 35
- 40
- 45

42
Women Have Opportunities to Influence Decision-making in the Community?
Gender Role Paradox

- Seventy percent of women reported that they were heads of their household.
  - However, in focus group meetings and face-to-face interviews respondents revealed that “most women are the leaders in the household.”
  - In general women felt that men are not pulling their weight and not meeting family obligations.

- The general consensus is that “Men are more capable of governing.”
- “Women get out to campaign and help. This is done for all elections. There are three women on the school board. It’s just that women support the men when they run for office.” Another said, “Men are more capable of governing.”
- “Men have always run politics and I think they always will.”
Women are actually the breadwinners in most households, however men (the majority of whom are unwed) are considered head of the household by virtue of being a male and not because of the provision for and protection of the household.

One respondent said, “they watch the women work, but are leaders because they’re men.”
Gender Role Paradox

- One can infer that women in both research areas (Shelby, MS and Grenada West Indies) recognize that there are certain barriers which prevent them from participating civically in their communities, but maintain that they have the power to directly affect the processes which involve their lives.

- At the time of the study Shelby, Mississippi had a woman mayor; however, the board of aldermen was all male.

- Focus group participants expressed concern because, “the board really makes the decisions.”
Trusting Other Women

- Uslaner (1999), states that when people trust others they are more likely to become active in their communities.

- In Shelby 58% of respondents said they believed, in general, you can’t be too careful when it comes to trusting others.

- While 51% said that you can’t be too careful trusting other women and 28% said that you can’t trust politicians.
Women’s Community Participation - Inhibitors

- Perception of a lack efficacy
- Apathy and disillusionment
- Social Exclusion

- One respondent stated; “first of all, if these organizations exist, they are not for us, they are for the people who are higher up in society.”
- “Brain Drain”
Conclusions

- Women in Shelby share a common desire to participate in community development processes.
- Households are predominantly female headed and many of the same socio-economic barriers exist to stifle their community engagement efforts.
- Women’s community engagement in Shelby is not nonexistent, but rather is limited.
- Socio-economic factors, and social capital, or the absence thereof, are contributory factors in the promotion of civic participation among community residents.
- Women in Shelby are preoccupied with their livelihoods and preservation for their families; it is difficult for them to become civically engaged in a meaningful manner.
Conclusions

- When people trust others they are more likely to become active in their communities.

- In Shelby there were high levels of distrust among the respondents.

- This is a determining factor regarding women’s civic participation.

- If distrust remains among the women Shelby it will hinder effort to reduce gender inequality and enable women to become effectively and actively engaged in obligations and community activeness.
Conclusions

- Empirical data show that it would be challenging for these women to intentionally build social capital.

- Women of rural Shelby believe that they can impact the decision making processes in their communities. However, the tendency is for ceding or delegating authority to their male counterparts.

- Women should seek an equal balance between personal obligations and their community involvement.

- To remain passive in engagement would have major ramifications for the women community development.
Conclusions

- Trust building strategies:
  - Increase Associational Networks and community engagement opportunities (social interaction and trust building).
  - Collaborative leadership between men and women.
  - Gender conscious community organizing and planning.
  - Inclusive decision making.
Another Empirical Study

Financial Capability for Fiscal Well-Being among Low Income Minority African American Women in the Mississippi Delta
Purpose of Study

- To determine community capacity: needs, weaknesses, strengths, and assets in various Mississippi Delta communities that would facilitate (or impede) impactful asset building projects.
- To assess attitudes toward personal and family finances, financial education, fiscal responsibility and money management strategies among low income residents in Leflore County.
- To ascertain financial practices and impediments to asset building among low income residents in Leflore County.
Empirical data collection techniques:

- Questionnaire survey – 104 LMI residents (Purposive Sampling)
- Key informants survey - (N=21)
- Participatory Dialogue: three communities
The study revealed findings with strong gender inequality implications:

- African American women play a central role in balancing household budgets, yet they lack financial capability (70 percent of households are female headed).

- Asset accumulation is a gendered process - an uneven process between men and women.

- There are a number of vulnerable households in Leflore County........ those that are female-headed and have unstable income sources with children under the age of 18 years.
Feminization of Poverty in Leflore County affect asset accumulation (there is erosion in the fiscal and economic safety net for African American women and children).

A high percentage of the households are headed by African American women. As primary breadwinners and primary financial decision makers in their families, more fiscal responsibility research is needed among low income African American women.
There is a need for low income African American women in the community to access effective financial education that promotes and sustain behavioral change to help them manage their finances to make them financial capable to effectively support their life goals and their families.

There is a need to develop educational tools to educate African American women and measure change and progress among them regarding their fiscal literacy and savings and asset accumulation practices.
FINALLY - WOMEN!

Work
Organize
Mobilize, Manage and Maintain
Empower and Engender equality
Networks of Associations