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The possibilities of 'bottom up' development in rural communities

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This paper

- ▣ **Poverty has a geographic dimension**
- ▣ **Community action that builds social cohesion will mitigate against the adverse affects of poverty**
- ▣ **Conversations with those concerned about rural communities, particularly social disadvantage and interested in creating sustainable social change; paid and non-paid activists in North-Eastern US; Scottish Highlands; Northern England; and New South Wales.**

Rural poverty



People are living in poverty if their income and resources (material, cultural and social) are so inadequate as to preclude them from having a standard of living which is regarded as acceptable by ... society generally. As a result of inadequate income and resources people may be excluded and marginalised from participating in activities, which are considered the norm for other people in society (Government of Ireland, 2002)



We lost about almost 40 per cent of our job offerings in [the paper industry] downsizing when the ownership changed [to multinational companies] and with that you also lost a lot of the philanthropy that the locally owned paper companies had ... they had a very strong community giving, community responsibility, fraternal role and a lot of the leadership was wrapped up in the corporate management prior to the sale and when the sale took place a lot of that management was wiped out, so you lost a lot of the community leadership as well.

(CEO Heart of Wisconsin Business and Economic Alliance)

Rural poverty

- ▣ **Australia**

On the heavily populated east coast urban settings were outnumbered 4:1 by rural settings among the most disadvantaged communities (Band 1)

- ▣ **United Kingdom and Ireland**

The Carnegie Commission for Rural Community Development 'identified significant inequalities and associated poverty across rural UK and Ireland.'

- ▣ **United States**

95% of counties with 'persistent-poverty' defined as experiencing poverty rates of 20 percent or more in each decennial census between 1960 and 2000 were non-metropolitan

Top down responses



Responses to rural poverty dominated by top down strategies including

- ▣ **Poverty alleviation via employment and wage policies.**
- ▣ **Poverty alleviation via social security and income support.**
- ▣ **Charity responses.**
- ▣ **Discrete rural programs**

(Clinton & Pawar, 1999)



Conversely, Vinson (2007) strongly supports community development initiatives that build social cohesion to mitigate against the adverse affects of disadvantage and poverty

‘There is little doubt that civil society has a strong role in creating a healthier, more equitable society’ (Alston 2002)

This hints at the possibilities of bottom up processes in addressing rural social exclusion

- Community action**
- Community empowerment**
- Social entrepreneur/community economic development**

	495 postcode areas	LOW social cohesion N=164	HIGH social cohesion N=155
CRIME			
Unemployment/imprisonment	.44	.67	.17
CHILD MALTREATMENT			
Low family income/child mistreatment	.36	.59	.27
NON-ATTENDANCE AT PRESCHOOL			
Low family income/no preschool	.39	.56	.17
UNEMPLOYMENT			
Early school leaving/unemployment	.42	.67	.14
PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITAL ADMISSIONS			
Unemployment/psych. hosp. admissions	.30	.50	.12
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE			
Unemployment/domestic violence	.41	.44	.30
LOW BIRTH-WEIGHT			
Early school leaving/low birth-weight	.19	.46	.11

Vinson, 2007

Charter for Rural Communities

We suggest that the dynamic, vibrant, engaged, sustainable rural community in the future would display a number of interrelated characteristics:

- Identifying, utilising and optimising assets
- Achieving fairness for everyone
- Empowering local governance
- Increasing resources for community benefit
- Enjoying locally relevant services
- Enriching social capital and well-being
- Valuing local distinctiveness
- Developing reliable infrastructure
- Enhancing environmental capacity
- Supporting a dynamic local economy

Carnegie Commission (2007: 16)

Bottom up possibilities



I believe in locally determined development, almost universally across the board. I don't think that - I think, for instance, at a statewide level you can build capacity and you can build strategies that make sense for the local area, but there's no way that any development is sustainable, unless people come up with it and they implement themselves and they have a stake in it. (Manager, State Rural Development Council, NE United States)

Community development work is done in ways which challenge oppression and tackle inequalities. It involves changing the relationships between ordinary people and people in positions of power, so that everyone can take part in the issues that affect their lives. (CEO, CDX England)

Bottom up possibilities


*Our biggest challenge was to create a culture of debate, to enable people to participate. They had no experience of this – the remote landowner created no forums for debate or dialogue. For many people this was completely new and we had to build this culture from scratch. And sometimes putting your head up over the parapet is dangerous – you know ‘who are you to talk?’
(Community activist, Eigg)*

- *Isle of Eigg Trust reversed population decline; built local businesses; protected ecological values; pioneer local decision making processes that enabled real participation following years of neglect from string of absentee landlords/lairds*

Bottom-up possibilities

There is a community in Eastern Oregon, Mount Vernon, that we focused on in a comprehensive way. We helped them develop priorities which included infrastructure, housing and community pride and throughout a five-year period we were able to help them access resources for a range of projects. Some resulted in a downtown development plan that helped leverage a five hundred thousand dollar grant ... we helped them leverage a grant for their community hall revitalisation project ... we helped increase the visibility of Mount Vernon through partnership building, featuring their progress and success at meetings and conferences. All of this helped the community increase its pride, increase their understanding of success and it just built and continued to snow ball. Small community of six hundred and fifty people out in the middle of Eastern Oregon.

(Rural Development Specialist-Environment, Rural Community Assistance Corporation)

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- **How do we exploit the opportunities and possibilities of ‘bottom up’ development in rural communities?**

Lessons



- ❑ **The importance of rural community activists and the broader civil society**
- ❑ **The need to work with local strengths and engage people ‘where they are at’**
- ❑ **Economic development must be a key element of community development initiatives**
- ❑ **Avoiding funding programs that determine priorities top down and without local decision making**
- ❑ **Accepting that community development will not be effective or appropriate in all settings**

Lessons



- ❑ **The need for greater clarity about what community development is trying to achieve**
- ❑ **Urgent need to build evaluation tools and knowledge of effective strategies**
- ❑ **Training and infrastructure support for community development work is vital**
- ❑ **The need to work creatively with the State**
- ❑ **Remember community development must be complemented by structural initiatives such as income support or development funds**