
INTRODUCTION

The ability and capacity of community-based development organizations (primarily community development corporations) to socially and economically develop poor communities have come under greater scrutiny (Anglin 2000; Eisenberg 2000; Lehman 1994; Rohe et al. 2003). This scrutiny relates, in part, to how the community-based development movement has evolved.

The community development corporation and similar community-based development organizations evolved in the 1960s to provide voice and agency to the unorganized poor (Kelly 1976; Faux 1971; Simon 2001). CDCs provided a way for representatives of poor communities to articulate demands and redress problems such as redlining, deteriorating housing, and lack of economic development and jobs. CDCs were not conceived as a replacement for government; they evolved as an intermediary force playing much the same role as other “associations”—such as trade unions, manufacturing associations, and teachers unions (Faux 1971; Simon 2001).

In large part, their mission evolved into building a socially and economically vibrant community that attracted economic investment and created jobs, economic opportunity, and social mobility. An adjacent and no less important function was building, along with economic institutions, parallel democratic institutions in poor, distressed communities. In fact, CDC leaders thought the evolution of both economic institutions and democratic institutions was inseparable and bound to the larger project of community development (Faux 1971).

Critics now say community-based development, while interesting as a niche model, is not an effective antipoverty strategy because it has become specialized and focused on housing development and misses the focus on market forces driving development (Lehman, 1994). Others point out that community-based development is not a particularly good model for building democratic participation in poor communities. These critics contend that reliance on community-based development organizations siphons attention and resources from mass organizing to directly press government for attention and resources to help poor communities (Stoecker 1997). To still other critics, the model represents a near anachronism, given the decentralization of markets that render urban neighborhoods less important in a nation now characterized by metropolitan settlements and regional markets (Rusk 1999; Orfield 1997). Better, some say, for urban distressed neighborhoods, communities, and cities to build new coalitions with settlements on the

urban fringe to secure spatial mobility along with public resources and investment for development from federal and state governments (Rusk 1999; Orfield 1997).

More narrowly, the past 40 years have seen significant investment by government, philanthropy, and the private sector. If the community-based development model works effectively, then why do many communities in which such organizations labor remain marginal (Eisenberg 2000)? The answer remains elusive and complicated. Supporters of community-based development respond that asking such organizations to repair the failings of the market and government is unfair and ignores the limited, often Byzantine, and episodic resource infrastructure available to community development organizations (Hoereth 2003; Mott 2000; NCCED 1999; LISC 1998, 2002; Yin 1998; Walker 2002).

The present questioning of the community-based development model takes on added significance because a theoretical logic makes it an attractive tool to policymakers of many ideological stripes (U.S. House 1995). The emergence of faith-based community development as a policy tool provides a new reason to ask if organizations and institutions in poor communities can play a part in revitalization.

For policymakers, the questions and critiques of community-based development must seem an unsorted jumble. A recent book argued that community development organizations resulted in “Comeback Cities,” yet policymakers can legitimately ask why poverty and decay keep growing in distressed communities (Grogan and Proscio 2000). From another standpoint, one can ask whether community-based development has the capability to successfully transform whole communities or if it merely represents one strategy among a number of antipoverty approaches (Shabecoff and Brophy 1996; Harrison et al. 1995; NCCED 1999).

Those who believe in the fundamental nature of community-based development do not see it as free from weakness (Weinheimer 1999; Zdenek and Steinbach 2000, 2002). The problem rests with the lack of strong institutional and organizational elements, preventing the growth of the model’s ability/capacity to fulfill its potential as an antipoverty strategy on anything other than an idiosyncratic basis. Specifically, many of the organizations that perform much of the work of community-based development suffer from unclear staff and leader-recruitment structures and no accepted performance standards to characterize high-performance organizations (Weinheimer 1999; Zdenek and Steinbach 2000, 2002; Glickman and Servon 1999, 2003; Devance-Manzini, Glickman, and DiGiovanna 2002). Other limitations exist, but the larger issue is that the field is more underdeveloped, from an institutional standpoint, than other parts of the nonprofit sector and certainly the private sector. In

short, community-based development and its constituent organizations must build their sector and internal organizational capacity to be a disciplined, effective antipoverty strategy (Weinheimer 1999; Zdenek and Steinbach 2000, 2002).

Where do we start any effort to overcome these limitations? What literature or research can aid understanding and possible intervention? In the case of HUD, faith-based development and emerging organizations within the sector are increasingly a focus. What better way to assist this emerging sector than to look at the successes and challenges of a similar sector that has tenure and many lessons learned?

As HUD sought models to help build the organizational capacity of faith-based institutions, the limited documentation and analysis of the community development field surprised senior officials. Community-based development organizations form a core vehicle for many of HUD's grant programs, including the HOME program.¹ Recognizing the large gap in knowledge, documentation and analysis of capacity building in community-based development organizations became a larger institutional interest for HUD.

Realizing that the faith community follows its own evolutionary trajectory, HUD conceived of a research and documentation effort to achieve the following:

- Specify critical evolutionary points in the CDC and faith-inspired community development sector and glean points of convergence and divergence as they impinge on the ability of both to assist poor communities.
- Specify and examine the meaning and reality of the term *capacity* and what it means for the community-based community development movement and specifically the CDC and faith-based sectors.
- Examine core issues of capacity building, such as leadership, recruitment, and training, and the appropriate institutions to help community-based development grow in impact.
- Examine the possibility of establishing performance and productivity measures for the community-based development sector as a whole.

Any piece of this agenda requires a complicated research and documentation project. Rather than construct research projects based on initial impressions of the knowledge gap, HUD staff opted for a deliberate approach by commissioning a set of research and policy papers designed to explore the question of growing the

capacity of community-based organizations to impact the various facets of community-based development.

HUD did not intend for the commissioned papers to be exhaustive. The goal focused on providing documentation of great thinking and reflection on the issue and providing policymakers and the public a clearer view of the operational and research gaps facing community development.

The authors, practitioners, and academics provided much-needed analysis of the history and current working of the faith-based and CDC sectors. The reader should review the essays as an initial attempt to fill the gaps in what we know about strengthening the basic working of a field. Many questions did not get asked and many questions did not get answered. The authors achieved what HUD asked them to do: start a dialogue about the capacity-building issues facing the community-based development field. We hope that others—not just HUD—will use this compendium as an impetus for a much richer dialogue on the future of community-based development.

Roland V. Anglin, Editor

NOTES

¹ For a description of the HOME program see <http://www.hud.gov/offices/cpd/affordablehousing/lawsandregs/laws/home/homelaws.pdf>.

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