1 The Role of Assets in Community-Based Development

Community development has its roots in several academic disciplines, including sociology, economics, political science, planning, social work, and even architecture. The interdisciplinary approach of community development has many advantages, but it also presents analytical problems. It lacks a common language, a conceptual framework, or a set of agreed-upon issues and problems. Community development is frequently driven more by practice than by theory. There also is considerable debate among practitioners whether community development is primarily a process or an outcome.

Community development has always had a diverse set of objectives: solving local problems (e.g., unemployment and poverty), addressing inequalities of wealth and power, promoting democracy, and building a sense of community (Rubin & Rubin, 1992). As a result, it has been defined in a variety of ways, including local economic development, political empowerment, service provision, housing programs, comprehensive planning, and job training. In this book, we do not overcome this ambiguity, but we define some of the major concepts and issues for which there is considerable agreement in the community development field today. We believe the asset approach offers the best potential for providing a common conceptual basis for community development theory and for practitioners. We begin with one of the most slippery terms—*community*.

BOX 1.1 COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT FACTS

- The share of the metropolitan population in extreme-poverty neighborhoods (census tracts with poverty rates of 40% or more) was 12% in 2000.
- The share of high-poverty neighborhoods in the suburbs is increasing, but central cities still have the highest proportion.
- The share of high-poverty neighborhoods with predominately African American populations has declined markedly since 1980, whereas those that are predominately Hispanic increased during this period.

SOURCE: Pettit and Kingsley (2003).

Whither Community?

Community is one of the central concepts in the social sciences, yet it frequently lacks a precise definition. In a review of the community literature many years ago, Hillery (1955) found more than 94 separate definitions. The term *community* also has been used interchangeably with *neighborhood*. In this section, we provide working definitions of *community* and *neighborhood* and discuss some of the implications of these definitions for the field of community development.

Following Wilkinson (1991), we define *community* as including three elements: (1) territory or place, (2) social organizations or institutions that provide regular interaction among residents, and (3) social interaction on matters concerning a common interest. This definition excludes communities of interest, such as professional organizations or religious groups. Although many people have broadened the concept of community to include interaction solely on interest, we focus on communities of place in this book. As we will discuss in more detail later, our approach is somewhat problematic because people are becoming less attached to specific places and increasingly linked to communities of interest. Growth of the Internet, for example, provides new opportunities for individuals to connect with other people who have similar interests and concerns. Individuals have become more strongly linked to national and international organizations and institutions. Many issues that affect residents, however, remain place based, such as schools, housing, and environmental quality. So, though we recognize that there are social and economic forces changing the nature of community, place-based issues continue to influence the quality of life of most people. Communities of place can vary considerably in terms of size and density. Areas with very low population densities present some obstacles to community development. Low density may reduce the opportunities for social interaction, which may ultimately make it more difficult to develop a sense of community.

We also consider the existence of local institutions, such as a school or even a restaurant, as an important factor in facilitating the development of a sense of community. Local organizations and institutions are important for a couple of reasons. They provide residents with opportunities for interaction and frequently represent the common interests of those in the area, such as a school district. Many local institutions today, however, are actually controlled by national and international organizations. This situation may influence the relationship of the institution to the locality. We will discuss in the later chapters how community-based organizations and institutions are more likely to benefit local residents and contribute to a sense of community. One of the central goals of the **asset-based development** approach is to provide stronger ties between institutions and the residents in a locality.

Finally, this definition suggests that community is a contingent phenomenon, dependent on a number of conditions to achieve social interactions in pursuit of mutual interests. Simply living in the same place does not create

community. Action promoting a common interest is not necessarily a result of objective conditions, participation in local organizations and institutions, or even the realization that individual well-being is linked to the quality of life in the community. We discuss some of the factors that can contribute to community later in the book. This argument suggests, however, that community development is often more of an art than a science. It is not just about helping people realize their own interests. It is about identifying assets that can help, developing the leadership to mobilize residents, and building the capacity to act in the future.

We need to make one more qualifying remark about this definition of community. Some critics charge that the concept of community implies a consensus or common values. Communities of place are often sharply divided by class and race. Other divisions, such as gender or length of residence, may also create **conflicts.** We do not believe the process of community development assumes homogeneity of values or consensus. In fact, much of the discussion in this book focuses on conflict and power relations within communities. There are numerous case studies, however, that illustrate how diverse communities have been able to identify common interests that provide the basis for local action. Of course, there will always be those instances of structural conflict, say between developers and environmentalists, where it is more difficult to find common ground. Conflict is not inherently bad. It may help to resolve some of the underlying tensions that communities face.

Next we turn to distinguishing between the concepts of **community** and **neighborhood.** Probably the easiest way to distinguish between the two is to use the latter to refer exclusively to a specific geography and the former as social interaction on matters concerning a common interest. Based on this distinction, a community may or may not be place based. Community can be defined, for example, as a group of residents acting on a common interest, such as a school or road issue. Or community may be defined as a group sharing a common interest that is not necessarily place based, such as religious beliefs, professions, or ethnicity. In most cases, the development of a sense of community involves the existence of social institutions or organizations that provide the opportunity for regular social interaction among members. For our purposes, we limit our discussion to place-based communities. Neighborhoods usually refer to a specific geography, such as residential areas demarcated by major streets or other physical barriers. This does not assume, however, that there is any social interaction or effort to address common needs in the area, as is the case in the definition of community.

This simple distinction between neighborhood and community does not resolve some of the conceptual problems that exist in using these concepts. One of the perennial problems is that individuals in neighborhoods and communities of place, especially those people who live in metropolitan areas, do not limit their social relationships to people in the same locality. Studies have consistently shown that most individuals have extensive social ties with other people outside their neighborhood (Gans, 1962; Suttles, 1972). Thus, the

boundaries of the neighborhood or community are difficult to define. Many researchers use official areas, such as census tracts (Jargowsky, 1997) or counties (Lobao, 1990), to define neighborhoods or communities. These designations, however, do not necessarily correspond to bounded areas of social relationships, although the Census Bureau considers things such as natural barriers in its process of defining census tracts. One result of the growing tendency to maintain contacts outside one's neighborhood is that it may be increasingly difficult to develop a sense of common interest.

This problem of defining the boundaries of neighborhoods and communities, however, does not mean that individuals do not maintain social relationships and ties with their neighbors. There is ample evidence that neighborhood ties and relationships continue to be important sources of support for many people (Campbell & Lee, 1992). Communities of place, therefore, should not be considered bounded entities that contain the bulk of social ties and relationships that residents hold. As individuals now tend to work, live, and consume in different places, it is more likely they will develop social relationships in these different settings. The liberation of community ties may make the development of community of place more difficult to achieve in some settings, but not impossible. Although local crises, such as a plant closing or an environmental threat, may lead to short-term actions based on common interest, these actions may not be sustained long term.

Growth Versus Development

Growth and development are often considered synonymous. Community residents see the two concepts increasingly in negative terms, especially by those who assume that growth and development automatically lead to more people, traffic, congestion, and environmental degradation. There are some important differences, however, between the two concepts. *Growth* refers to increased quantities of specific phenomena, such as jobs, population, and income. It also could be used to refer to changes in quality, such as better jobs or more secure sources of income. *Development* involves structural change in the community, especially in how resources are used, the functioning of institutions, and the distribution of resources in the community. One of the primary goals of community development is to reduce vulnerability to shifts in production technology and in the market environment. Many people suggest that there is actually a great deal of overlap between the concepts of development and sustainability. Perhaps a more precise definition would focus on community resiliency.

Community development is often equated with economic development. Many practitioners, however, consider community development as a set of activities that must precede economic development. Communities need to provide a good infrastructure, including housing and schools, in order to generate jobs and income. Some community development activities, however, are

more directly related to economic development, such as job training and business management. The concept of community development, then, is broader than economic development and may include many activities that are directly economic in nature.

Amartya Sen, the Nobel Prize winner economist, defined development as freedom (Sen, 1999). From his perspective, high levels of social and economic inequality present obstacles to development because the poor do not have the same opportunities to develop their capacity. Sen argued that development should encompass five different types of freedom: (1) political freedoms, (2) economic facilities, (3) social opportunities, (4) transparency guarantees, and (5) protective security. Political freedoms refer primarily to civil liberties. Economic facilities are the resources that families hold to produce, consume, or exchange in the marketplace. Social opportunities are the societal arrangements for the conditions to improve quality of life, such as education, health care, and so on. Transparency guarantees can be defined as the level of trust that exists among individuals and between individuals and their government. Finally, protective security includes institutional arrangements that "provide a social safety net for preventing the affected population from being reduced to abject misery, and in some cases even starvation and death" (Sen, 1999, p. 40). Although Sen's analysis focuses on national and global development, many of these elements can be applied to the local level as well. The main point, however, is that development cannot simply be reduced to growth in income or jobs. Instead, it should be viewed as a much broader process that improves the opportunities and quality of life for individuals. Many economists assume that economic growth will automatically improve quality of life. Sen's analysis suggests the relationship is much more complex.

Based on this discussion, we can see that growth may or may not lead to development. A few examples may help to further illustrate this difference. If a community experiences an increase in wealth, but most of it is held by a few families, this change would be considered growth and not development. Similarly, if a community is able to attract a new employer that provides 100 new jobs, but 90 of the jobs are taken by people outside the community (and those 90 workers do not purchase goods and services locally), this too may be considered an example of growth and not development. Another example might be if a fast-food chain establishes a restaurant in a community but most of the profits from the operation are drained from the local area. This is an example of growth rather than development. Finally, if a forest-dependent community is able to attract a paper mill that exploits the natural resources of the area in an unsustainable manner, this case would be considered growth, not development. If the resources for future economic activity are destroyed, it cannot lead to additional development.

Development may lead to a more efficient use of resources, reduce a community's dependency on external resources and decision making, and create a better system of managing markets (financial, housing, labor, etc.) to satisfy

local (societal) needs. A key element of the process is the allocation of development decisions to the local level, where relationships between economic development, the environment, and social needs are most visible.

People Versus Place

One of the continuing debates in the field of community development is whether policies and programs should emphasize place or people. Supporters of people-based policies contend that there is no evidence that place-based programs really work (Lemann, 1994). These critics point out that it is very difficult to attract established businesses to poor communities or to help new businesses start there. There also is a tendency for workers to leave the community if the community programs are successful. The dilemma for most communities is that increasing the skills and education of their existing workforce may not have any payoff if workers cannot find jobs in the area. Lemann (1994, p. 30) argued, however, that there are several reasons that place-based policies are attractive. First, politicians represent geographic areas, so they see logical benefits in promoting the welfare of places. If they can provide benefits to residents, they are more likely to get reelected. Foundations invest in place-based development because they can have a greater impact at that smaller scale. It is more difficult for them to reform large-scale systems, such as an educational or health care system. Finally, the business sector often supports place-based approaches to development because it eschews big government approaches. Community development often receives support from those who would like to see the federal and state governments downsized and services shifted to the private sector or to nonprofit organizations.

Place-based approaches have been at the core of community development efforts for more than 50 years. Advocates of place-based programs argue that an emphasis on people rather than places ultimately leads to more problems because those who are successful leave their community. As a result, these programs contribute to concentrated poverty and social problems. Placed-based strategies assume that community still matters. Advocates of place-base strategies recognize the social and economic costs of promoting community disintegration. In many cities, for example, local policies promote growth on the suburban fringe and decline in the inner city. This pattern has enormous costs that are not often considered. Building new schools and providing new infrastructure to the suburbs adds to the fiscal pressures for most cities. Abandonment of old buildings and declining enrollment in inner-city schools adds to the problems of poor neighborhoods. A more appropriate strategy is to emphasize place-based development in existing neighborhoods that reduces the social, economic, and environmental costs.

There is a variety of place-based strategies. For example, communities may choose to attract outside capital through tax and financial incentives. The Clinton administration established the Empowerment Zones (EZs) and

Enterprise Communities (ECs) in several poor communities in the United States in an effort to promote development. These communities offer a variety of incentives for businesses locating in these areas.

Other place-based approaches focus less on outside investments and more on ways of increasing the quality of life by establishing new institutions, improving the physical infrastructure, or building on existing resources in the community. The New Urbanism movement emphasizes the benefits of higher density development and in-fill of existing properties as a key to promote place-based development. The assumption behind New Urbanism is that the existing institutional structure undermines the viability of most poor and minority communities. Institutional change is required to improve the quality of life and to capture the resources leaving the community. Most of these efforts attempt to leverage local resources to promote local ownership and control of resources (i.e., land, labor, capital). In other words, community-based strategies frequently generate demand among extralocal actors that produces benefits and returns the created surplus to the community (Gunn & Gunn, 1991).

Finally, place-based approaches recognize the contribution and value of community sentiment and support to residents. Many would argue that building strong social relationships is essential to both human and community development. In addition, places become the shared arena in which the disenfranchised can obtain political power. Many of the policies we discuss in later chapters focus on helping the poor become more spatially mobile. Although research suggests this may have some individual benefits for families, there are still questions about the impacts of such policies on community activism.

Community Sustainability

There is a growing interest in promoting social, economic, and environmental sustainability at the community level. This concept is taken from the environmental literature but has much broader meaning in the context of community development. Efforts to promote community sustainability focus on local practices and policies and evaluate whether they contribute to the long-term survival of the social, economic, and environmental base of the locality. Sustainability is often considered an outcome of community development, but we view it as a guiding principle to the process of community development practice. This approach forces us to examine the interconnections between local economic, social, and environmental issues. Practices that promote economic development, for example, need to ensure the sustainability of the environment and provide opportunities for marginalized residents in the community.

What is the relationship between community sustainability and asset-based development? First of all, we must recognize that sustainability strategies must

focus on finding new methods of connecting local resources in a way that reduces environmental problems and increases economic opportunities. In a later chapter, we will explore how community development practitioners are working on sustainability efforts through local food systems and renewable energy projects. The success of these sustainability programs will depend largely on identifying the key assets or resources that are available at the local level.

Similarly, we need to understand that many of the assets that exist in communities are multifunctional in nature. By this we mean that the resources can serve a variety of functions or purposes. Natural resources, for example, can serve both production and consumption functions. They can be the inputs into an extractive production process or amenities to support tourism-related activities. Community development efforts need to work at the local level to find the most appropriate strategy that provides social, economic, and environmental benefits to residents.

The Challenge of Regionalism

Aside from the criticism that it is too difficult to create development in poor neighborhoods and communities, two other critiques frequently are made of place-based community development efforts. The first critique is that the focus on community and neighborhoods ignores the regional nature of development, especially in metropolitan areas. For example, Myron Orfield (1997) has argued for a regional approach to addressing the problems of concentrated poverty in the central city. Orfield contended that racial segregation of housing, the lack of resources in ghettos, and incentives for migration to the suburbs make traditional community development efforts inadequate unless they address these social and economic forces. Among Orfield's policy recommendations are property tax base sharing across cities and suburbs, deconcentration of affordable housing across suburban areas, and land use policies that discourage sprawl. Other regionalists such as David Rusk (1993) have emphasized the importance of cities' ability to expand their boundaries to capture the benefits of the movement of people and jobs to the suburbs.

A second critique is that the community development literature creates a false choice between people and place. One example is the so-called mobility strategy (Hughes, 1991), which attempts to help city residents commute to suburban jobs, rather than try to bring employers to the city or move workers to where the jobs are. This approach has the advantage of solving the labor market and income problems of the poor, while still keeping them in their neighborhoods. This strategy could be addressed in a few different ways. The most common tactic is to develop transportation systems that assist workers in finding and obtaining jobs in other parts of the region. Many cities are now providing transportation from the inner city to jobs in

the suburbs. Another approach, however, might be to bring work (rather than the entire business) from employers in the suburbs into the inner city. This tactic helps develop the experience of the workforce in the inner city and often provides employers with some confidence that these workers have the needed skills.

These regional strategies are not necessarily an alternative to traditional place-based community development strategies. Instead, they build on existing links between communities and their regions. Recommendations for the mobility strategy are still based on the assumption that it is important to build the community or neighborhood. The challenge for regional development strategies is to remain connected to community-based organizations and local efforts to mobilize residents. Without these connections, regionalism can take a "top-down" approach and lose grassroots support.

Asset Building

Community development is a planned effort to build assets that increase the capacity of residents to improve their quality of life. We now turn to a more detailed discussion about community assets. Kretzmann and McKnight (1993) defined assets as the "gifts, skills and capacities" of "individuals, associations and institutions" within a community (p. 25). Melvin Oliver (2001), the former vice president of the Ford Foundation, further elaborated on the importance of asset building:

> An "asset" in this paradigm is a special kind of resource that an individual, organization, or entire community can use to reduce or prevent poverty and injustice. An asset is usually a "stock" that can be drawn upon, built upon, or developed, as well as a resource that can be shared or transferred across generations. . . . As the poor gain access to assets, they are more likely to take control of important aspects of their lives, to plan for their future and deal with economic uncertainty, to support their children's educational achievements, and to work to ensure that the lives of the next generations are better than their own. (p. xii)

This focus on community assets, rather than the needs, represents a significant shift in how community development practitioners have approached their work in recent years. In the past, community development practitioners began their efforts by conducting a needs assessment that examined the problems and weaknesses of the community (Johnson, Meiller, Miller, & Summers, 1987). One of the advantages of needs assessment is that problem identification can help mobilize communities to address local issues. The tendency, however, is for residents to look to others outside the community, especially to professionals, for help. By relying on professionals and others, communities become more dependent on outside resources and often lose

control over the development process. In response to these tendencies, Kretzmann and McKnight (1993) emphasized the importance of looking to community assets as a way to identify strengths and resources that can contribute to a strategic planning process.

As McKnight (1995) suggests, it is in the interests of professionals and technical-assistance providers to promote dependency. Communities frequently turn to outside assistance because they believe the issues or problems are too complex for local residents. This type of assistance does very little to help build community capacity. It is possible, however, for professionals and technical-assistance providers to empower local residents. This might mean helping residents develop the research skills, substantive knowledge, or both, to address community issues.

The distinction between needs and assets does not mean that practitioners have to make a decision to use one approach or another. In many cases, it may make sense to begin by identifying a community's assets and then assess its needs. A discussion of the needs and problems is almost inevitable in community processes and often serves to mobilize residents to act on an issue. The concern with an exclusive focus on needs is that a community often jumps immediately to problem solving rather than identifying its goals and strengths.

CASE STUDY 1.1 THE DUDLEY STREET NEIGHBORHOOD INITIATIVE

Probably one of the most widely acclaimed success stories in the community development field in recent years is the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative (DSNI). The philosophy behind DSNI was to build on the local assets rather than to focus on the needs of residents. Dudley Street is located in Boston's Roxbury District, one of the poorest areas in Massachusetts. Approximately 35% of the families in the area live below the poverty line, and the neighborhood contained many abandoned buildings, a large number of vacant lots (20% of the lots), and a persistent drug problem.

The DSNI began in 1984 when the Riley Foundation, a Boston-area community foundation, decided to make an investment in the neighborhood. Local residents challenged the plan presented by the Riley Foundation because it was not "their" plan. In response to this initiative, residents established DSNI, which had a 31-member board of directors, with the majority consisting of local residents. There are more than 2,500 voting members of DSNI and the organization employs approximately 16 full-time staff.

The organization launched several projects that were immediately successful, including removal of illegal dumps on Dudley Street and even provision of affordable housing for residents. Part of DSNI's success was due to its combining the role of developer of low-income housing and provider of social services with the role of community organizer. The most controversial project of the DSNI was their program to take eminent domain of 30 acres of vacant land and develop it as a land trust. The DSNI had strong support from the city government for this project.

The DSNI took control of more than 1,300 abandoned parcels of land in the neighborhood, converting them into parks, gardens, and other public spaces as well as 400 single-family and cooperative homes for low- and middle-income residents. DSNI organized a youth committee to address young people's concerns, such as recreation and educational opportunities. The DSNI, which has been especially concerned about recognizing the various cultures in the neighborhood, sponsored several multicultural festivals. The organization also has moved into the area of economic development but has had less success with these efforts.

For more information on DSNI, see Medoff and Sklar (1994).
The video *Holding Ground: The Rebirth of Dudley Street*
(Lipman & Mahan, 1996) documents the efforts of DSNI as well.

CASE STUDY 1.2 ASSET BUILDING IN INDIAN COUNTRY

The First Nations Institute was founded in 1980 to assist Native American people in building the capacity of tribal communities. The institute has used asset-building strategies to promote culturally compatible stewardship of the assets they own, including land, cultural heritage, and natural resources, to develop tribal communities. They consider several types of assets in their approach, including financial, physical, natural, institutional, human, cultural, social, and political assets. The institute emphasizes strategies that enable Native American communities to control, retain, increase, use, leverage, and create assets. Some examples of asset-building strategies include starting a Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI), using Individual Development Accounts (IDAs), and establishing a fitness program for tribal youth. For a good discussion of their approach and model, see http://www.firstnations.org/publications/AssetBuildinginNative CommunitiesJanuary262004.pdf.

It is difficult to identify a single theory or conceptual basis for the asset-based community development approach. Asset-based development is more a method than it is a theory of community social change. It clearly has some intellectual ties to Wilkinson's (1991) interactional theory of communities, which rejects the view of communities as independent social structures. Instead, through interaction in a locality, an awareness of common interests emerges. In this process, people learn to identify, manage, and leverage local resources to the benefit of their locality (Wilkinson, 1991). Much of this is dependent on developing social ties and relationships that enhance the ability of residents to act collectively to address local concerns.

Asset building has some interesting similarities to social capital theory as well (Putnam, 2000). Participation in local organizations and associations builds social relationships and trust that are so essential in mobilizing community

residents. Social capital becomes the basis for building other community assets, such as human and financial capital.

There are a variety of other theoretical ties to asset-based development. Dependency theory, which is often applied to nation-states, points to the exploitive relationships that develop through international trade and investment. Its focus on the development of dependency is very similar to the critique of needs-based approaches that McKnight (1995) criticizes. Finally, there are some parallels to theories about social movements, such as resource mobilization theory. The success of social movements depends largely on the ability to mobilize people and to acquire resources that enable them to achieve their goals.

The bottom line is that asset-based development has a variety of intellectual ties and roots to other social and political theories. The strength of this approach is that the connection between theory and practice is much stronger than most social or political theories. Asset mapping is a process of learning about the resources that are available in a community. The following items include examples of assets mapping:

- The identification of economic development opportunities through the mapping of available skills and work experience
- The documentation of natural resource assets that may promote economic development through tourism or increased home values
- The assessment of consumer spending practices to identify the potential for new businesses in the neighborhood
- The development of a community resources inventory to identify the expediencies of residents in providing services, such as child care, to identify the potential for more providers in the community

In this book, we expand the definition of community assets to include seven forms of **assets:** physical, human, social, financial, environmental, political, and cultural. There are other assets that we might consider, but most community development activities focus on these seven forms of **community capital.** We use the term *community assets* for a couple of reasons. First, this concept suggests that there are underused resources available in the community (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993). Individuals may have jobs skills or experiences that do not match the local demand. Individuals and families may have savings that are being invested outside the community. The community may have natural resources that could potentially be of value as an amenity. The goal of asset-based community development is to identify these resources and mobilize residents to make use of them to meet the needs of residents.

We refer to these forms of assets as community capital. *Capital* is used here in a very broad sense. Most of the time capital is defined as wealth that is used to create more wealth. This concept, however, can be applied to other resources as well. Investments in education and training (human capital)

produce additional benefits for workers. Similarly, investments in social relationships (social capital) generate social resources that can be used later. When communities make the right investments in the resources they have, it creates future benefits in the quality of life for residents.

The asset approach also implies that the community development effort is directed toward the locality or place. Rather than providing training for jobs that workers must take elsewhere, there is an attempt to match training efforts to jobs that can be created locally. Similarly, if an absentee-owned firm processes natural resources, many of the benefits will flow outside the community. The same thing may occur if families place their savings in banks and other financial institutions that invest these resources in other localities.

Finally, the asset-based approach assumes that there are many institutional obstacles to the development of places that cannot be overcome through individual action but instead must be addressed through the activities of community-based organizations (CBOs). Community-based organizations can overcome many of the collective-action and economies-of-scale problems associated with community development. For example, though individual employers in a community may lack skilled workers, and though they all have an interest in having a skilled workforce, individual businesses may be reluctant to invest in training because they may lose these trained workers. Community development offers collective solutions to these problems by building on the existing resources within the community. In his analysis of community-based development organizations (CBDOs), Rubin (2000) found that asset building is the real objective of these organizations:

> It matters less what is built than that projects introduce assets, both material and social, for those in neighborhoods of deprivation. These assets create an economic stake in society, for both recipients and the CBDO, as well as a set of obligations—paying rent, maintaining property, concern with the quality of the neighborhood—that is socially empowering. (p. 162)

Kretzmann and McKnight (1993) identified several steps in mobilizing community assets. The first step is to identify the capacities of residents, organizations, and institutions. The idea that all individuals have the capacity to contribute to their community is fundamental to this approach. Also often overlooked are the potential contributions of youth, seniors, and people with disabilities. In addition to standard labor market skills and experiences, communities need to know about volunteering activities, hobbies, care-giving experiences, and so on. This information is often captured through surveys, conducted either face to face or through the mail. An excellent resource for measuring individual capacities is a workbook by Kretzmann, McKnight, and Sheehan (1997).

Associations and organizations can facilitate mobilization. Asset-based development efforts usually attempt to map both formal and informal

organizations in the community. Formal organizations are usually visible, and there are directories to help identify them. Informal organizations, such as block clubs, neighborhood watches, and garden clubs, however, usually do not appear on formal lists because they are not incorporated or they do not have paid staff. Probably the most efficient way to collect this information is to conduct a survey of individuals that asks them to identify all of their memberships. These data can help identify the organizations to be contacted. It is helpful to compile a list of board members, leaders, and resources available in the organization.

Community institutions, such as schools, hospitals, and libraries, are potentially important resources for community development. Institutions purchase goods and services that could contribute to the local economy. They have facilities that can be used for community events. They also employ workers, which affects the local economy. Mapping these institutions involves assessing the institutional assets with the goal of identifying resources that could contribute to community building. For example, farm-to-school programs have developed across the country in recent years. These programs identify ways of improving markets for regional farmers and improving the quality of food in school. By purchasing local produce, schools are a powerful asset of the local economy.

After mapping these community assets, practitioners build relationships across the community that will help implement the goals and vision of the project. Mobilizing assets requires broad-based support. The asset-based development approach relies on leveraging local resources to gain outside support. Although it is important to build from local resources, it is also important to tap into existing resources that will enhance those assets.

The asset-building approach is not without its critics. Proponents of asset-based development have often been accused of ignoring power relations within communities. The needs assessments approach, however, establishes power relationships between professionals and citizens. By identifying problems and needs, communities often become dependent on technical assistance and experts to help address these issues. Asset building attempts to address these power relationships by building on existing resources and strengths to guide the community planning effort. This approach does not rely solely on local resources but focuses on innovative ways of leveraging these resources.

Asset-based development tends to be less conflict oriented than many other community organizing approaches. It emphasizes common interests and can serve as an excellent basis for mobilizing residents to address the critical issues facing their communities. In this regard, it has much in common with the techniques and strategies employed by the Industrial Areas Foundation, which is discussed in a later chapter. There is nothing inherent in the approach that avoids conflict with the power elite. Nor does the emphasis on common interests ignore conflict. The approach seeks to overcome racial, gender, and class differences that frequently constrain community development projects.

Public Participation

Community development requires the involvement and participation of local residents in identifying the strategies they wish to use to improve their quality of life. Most people use the term citizen participation to characterize this process. We prefer to use the concept of public participation. Langton (1978) defined *citizen participation* as "purposeful activities in which citizens take part in relation to government" (p. 17). This concept is too restrictive for a couple of reasons. First, this definition is limited to citizens (i.e., legal residents). By using the term *public,* we also include people who do not have all of the rights and obligations of citizenship. Given the high rates of immigration in many American cities, and rural areas as well, and the disproportionate number of poor communities with a large number of immigrants, this restriction does not make sense today. Second, citizen participation includes only activities related to the government. Public participation refers to activities in any public institution of society or the government, which includes organizations and institutions other than government. Although many community development activities either collaborate with or are directed at governments (e.g., improving social service provision or transportation systems), many more activities do not involve government at any level.

Having differentiated between citizen and public participation, we should comment that much of the public's participation in the past has been in relation to local, state, and federal governments. It is useful to distinguish between two types of participation here. First, there is community action resulting from activities initiated and controlled by CBOs that is frequently directed at changing government services and policies. Second, there is community action that can be referred to as public involvement, which is initiated and controlled by the government.

There has been rapid growth in the number of programs initiated by the government to promote public involvement. Increasingly, the public has been directly involved in decisions (Roberts, 2004). Almost all federal and state programs contain some element of public participation. Some examples are federal requirements for public participation in the Coastal Zone Management Act, the Federal Water Pollution Control Act, the Airport and Airways Development Act, and, more recently, the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA). The primary purpose of these programs is to gain support for decisions, programs, and services. Of course, many of these programs have been criticized for not allowing the public to make these decisions but simply to have an opportunity to comment on decisions that have already been made. We examine these issues in more detail later when we discuss the community development process (in Chapter 4).

Why is there so much emphasis on public participation in community development? Participation is seen as developmental, educative, and integrative and as a means of protecting freedom (Roberts, 2004). One of the key

assumptions of participation is that local residents will be more supportive of the project, and therefore increase the likelihood of its success, if residents have input in the decision-making process. Also, local residents probably have much better knowledge about the assets and needs of the community. Finally, public participation is considered the centerpiece of the democratic process. Local officials, however, have not always accepted this emphasis on public participation. As we discuss in Chapter 2, public participation among the poor during the 1960s was an especially controversial topic.

The Role of Community-Based Organizations

One of the distinguishing characteristics of community development is that it involves the creation of local organizations to help build assets. Throughout this text, we place a great deal of emphasis on the role of CBOs. These organizations offer several advantages, compared with nonlocal organizations, for carrying out place-based programs. CBOs are rooted in place and have extensive contacts and information about the neighborhood. Their primary mission is aimed at the community; they emphasize the importance of place over other goals. Also, in ideal situations, CBOs are controlled by local residents. Typically, control is characterized by representation on the board and input into the organization's policies and programs.

One of the principal vehicles for carrying out community development activities in the United States today is the community development corporation (CDC). Because these organizations are so important to the community development movement, we devote almost an entire chapter to discussing their activities (see Chapter 5). Community development, however, can occur in a variety of other CBOs. For example, we also examine local development corporations, which are responsible for coordinating economic development activities in many communities and regions. Neighborhood associations address issues such as real estate development and social service provision. Faith-based organizations are increasingly called on to provide social services to the needy. Religious organizations have played an increasingly important role in providing services to the poor and are more involved in job training and housing issues than they were in the past, largely due to welfare reform. A large number of nonreligious nonprofit organizations, such as homeless shelters, neighborhood clinics, and child care centers, serve a more specialized function in communities. And nongovernmental organizations are major actors in international development. Community foundations are nonprofit organizations that provide long-term funds for organizations and activities in a defined geographic area. Currently, more than 400 community foundations exist, with their total assets exceeding $8 billion (Mayer, 1994). Throughout this book, we discuss other specialized community-based organizations, such as loan funds and training organizations.

The organizations discussed previously tend to have paid staff. There are many nonprofit organizations without staff that play a critical role in

community development. Examples of these organizations are parent-teacher organizations, tenant associations, block clubs, recreational clubs, and other smaller organizations. These organizations receive very little attention in the literature.

──────────────────────── Models of Community Development

Although there are some common issues and problems in the field of community development, there is still wide variation in how practitioners approach their work. One of the ways of conceptualizing these differences is the typology developed by Christenson (1989). Christenson identified three different community development themes or models: self-help, technical assistance, and conflict. Although many community development efforts do not fall neatly into one of these three models, the typology is useful for understanding some of the different ways practitioners may approach their work.

Self-Help

At the heart of the **self-help** approach is the belief that community development is primarily about helping people to learn how to help themselves. Practitioners who adopt this model tend to define their role as a facilitator, helping communities identify goals and increasing capacity to participate in the solution of collective problems. The facilitator adopts a neutral position in the change process and is primarily concerned about the process of community development rather than the specific outcomes (e.g., jobs, houses, services). The self-help approach assumes that increasing the capacity of residents to address their problems will ultimately result in long-term improvements in quality of life.

The self-help approach requires several conditions to be effective: Individuals must have the necessary democratic skills, participants must have a reasonable expectation that their efforts will have some impact, and they also must identify their shared interests to develop a common set of goals. When these conditions do not exist, it may be necessary to build the capacity of the community prior to taking on development projects. This may involve building leadership skills, resolving conflict, or simply bringing residents together to identify common concerns. Community development efforts using the self-help approach tend to have more long-lasting effects than do some of the other approaches because residents have greater ownership in the process.

Facilitators are always faced with the dilemma of how to balance the need for information and technical assistance with the facilitation process. We will discuss this issue in more detail in the chapter on the community development process. It is important that facilitators clearly identify the goals and expected outcomes before the community moves to "solutions." In addition, there are

strategies facilitators can use to help ensure that the community maintains control of the process while seeking information and technical assistance.

Technical Assistance

Practitioners who adopt the technical assistance model assume that the most important obstacle communities face concerns information. This model is firmly rooted in the rational planning approach to development. Thus, the appropriate role for the community development practitioner is one of a consultant. Those who advocate the technical assistance model are much more concerned with the eventual outcome of the community development effort than they are with the capacity of residents. Technical assistance also can be provided in a variety of ways, from ongoing local assistance to short-term consulting.

A variety of issues should be considered when taking the technical assistance approach to community development: Whose values are being served by the assistance? How have the goals been established? Should other alternatives be considered? Will the assistance help residents address community problems in the future?

Technical assistance can be provided through several different institutional arrangements: a centralized location, a regional provider, or local assistance. Technical assistance offered through a centralized location is the most cost efficient but often lacks the follow-up that is frequently necessary. The consultant may deliver a product or advise and leave it to the community to decide whether or how to use the information. An alternative is to provide technical assistance through local or regional providers. This approach has several advantages. The consultant usually has much more knowledge about local or regional conditions and also is available for follow-up consultation once the project has been initiated. Of course, this type of technical assistance is usually much more costly than the traditional consultant model.

Conflict

Probably one of the most established traditions in community development is the conflict approach, which is most often identified with Saul Alinsky (1969). The practitioner's approach in this model is one of organizer or advocate. Practitioners who adopt this approach assume that the fundamental source of most community problems is the lack of power. And this approach is most often used in places where residents have been marginalized or lack the ability to shape decisions that are affecting their quality of life. Neighborhoods generally lack power because they are not well organized. This approach often begins with an assessment of the local power structure. We discuss several methods of analyzing local power structures in a later chapter.

According to Alinsky (1969), the community organizer then needs to choose a problem to address and organize the community around this problem. The conflict should be small and winnable. The goal is to demonstrate to residents that they can be successful. Alinsky's approach is based on the assumption that community organizations should not directly confront the power structure. Instead, they should use a variety of tactics to embarrass local political leaders and to demonstrate the value of power to residents. Although this approach has proven to be successful in low-income neighborhoods, it is unclear how successful these tactics would be in middle-class neighborhoods. This approach also may have difficulty in cross-racial, ethnic, and class lines in a neighborhood. Finally, community organizers using this approach frequently have difficulty maintaining momentum in the community development process once residents have achieved some success.

To address some of these weaknesses, Alinsky (1969) argued that it was important to work through existing organizations in the neighborhood. These organizations can provide resources, contacts, and legitimacy in the neighborhood. His strategy was to identify common concerns and issues that are identified by leaders of these organizations and work toward a consensus on addressing the problem.

These three models represent very broad approaches to community development. It is important for practitioners to understand how the context may influence their decisions about which model is most appropriate for a particular situation. Similarly, it may be necessary to shift models in the process as the community develops capacity or encounters obstacles in its path.

Summary and Conclusions

Community development defies many of the standard assumptions we make about community and development in America today. Its emphasis on community-based organizations rather than the power of markets or government programs challenges the policy prescriptions of both political conservatives and liberals. The requirement that residents participate in the solutions to common problems contradicts the accepted view today that community no longer exists. Emphasis on place rather than people also puts community development squarely in opposition with the individualistic nature of our culture and society.

Yet community development is consistent with some of the ideals we hold, regardless of our political views, to be extremely important, such as democratic control and local autonomy. The political system may be driven by financial interests and individuals may have little control over bureaucratic institutions (e.g., corporations, educational systems, the government), but the community offers a place for people to learn the value of cooperation and civic virtue. Participation, like any other skill, must be learned through experience. The promise of community development is that these skills can be transferred to other walks of life.

KEY CONCEPTS

Asset-based development	Growth
Assets	Neighborhood
Citizen participation	Public involvement
Community	Public participation
Community capital	Regionalism
Community sustainability	Self-help
Conflicts	Technical assistance
Development	

QUESTIONS

1. Compare and contrast the three models of community development described by Christenson.

2. What are the three necessary elements in the definition of community? Why is community such a difficult concept to define?

3. What is the difference between growth and development? Provide some examples.

4. Identify three key differences between the assets approach and the needs assessments approach to community development.

5. What are the basic strengths and weaknesses of place- versus people-oriented approaches to development?

EXERCISES

1. Ask several of your neighbors to draw a map of your community or neighborhood. How much agreement is there in these maps and how do they differ? How many neighbors do they know in this area? How often do they have contact with these people? Do they belong to any clubs, organizations, or associations in this neighborhood?

2. Identify all of the CBOs (both nonprofit and profit) in your neighborhood or community. Build a directory that identifies the services that each provides and a contact person for each organization. Assess the overlap in their missions and the networks that exist between these organizations.

3. Identify a community-based organization and evaluate its efforts to promote public participation. How does the organization engage the public? To what extent is the board representative of the community? How does the organization solicit input from residents? How could the organization improve its efforts to promote public participation?

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Websites

ABCD Training Group—http://www.abcdtraininggroup.org/. This website provides information on training in the principles, concepts, and application of asset-based community development.

Asset Building Community Development Institute—www.northwestern.edu/ipr/abcd.html. This program at Northwestern University provides resources, publications, and training on capacity-building approaches to community development.

Comm-Org: The On-line Conference on Community Organizing and Development—http://comm-org.wisc.edu/index.html. This site has a wealth of information on references, data, syllabi, and other resources on community organizing and development.

Community Development Society—www.comm-dev.org. The international Community Development Society is a professional association of community development practitioners. The society represents a variety of fields, including health care, social services, economic development, and education.

Ford Foundation Asset Building and Community Development Program—http://www.fordfound.org/program/asset_main.cfm

International Association for Community Development—http://www.iacdglobal.org/. This organization aims to develop a global network of practitioners involved in community development. On the website, there are several publications and case studies of asset-based development.

NeighborWorks—http://www.nw.org/network/training/training.asp. This nonprofit organization provides financial support, technical assistance, and training for community-based revitalization efforts.

Search Institute—http://www.search-institute.org/. This nonprofit organization focuses on asset building, with a focus on youth and communities. The institute provides several tools for asset building and has a wonderful set of case studies.

Videos

Mobilizing Community Assets, by John Kretzmann and John McKnight. This video training program is for *Building Communities From the Inside Out.* Produced by Civic Network Television. Distributed by ACTA Publications, 4848 N. Clark South, Chicago, IL 60640; phone: (800) 397–2282.

Inviting Neighbors to Participate in Community Development. This video provides a nice summary of how to engage local citizens in a community development process. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g4b56ky6118&feature=related

Other Resources

Community Development Council. This nonprofit organization was established to promote the accreditation of community development educational programs, professional certification, and the development of community volunteer leaders. It offers training and certification programs in several different locations of the United States.

Community Development Digest. This publication provides an excellent summary of pending legislation on community development issues.

A Guide to Careers in Community Development, by Paul C. Brophy & Alice Shabecoff (2000). Washington, DC: Island Press. This book is an excellent reference for anyone considering working in the community development field. The authors include information on jobs, universities and colleges offering community development curricula, training programs, and other resources on community development.

Shelterforce (http://www.shelterforce.org/). This is a valuable source of information on housing and community development. This online magazine is published by the National Housing Institute and covers a wide variety of community development topics, including housing, community organizing, economic development, sustainability, and policy issues.

The Urban Research Monitor. A useful reference tool developed by HUD USER. The publication makes it easy for researchers, policy makers, academicians, and other professionals to keep up with the literature on housing and community development. Each issues contains a listing of recent books, articles, reports, dissertations, and other publications related to housing and community development.