

Tools to Eradicate Persistent Poverty in the South©

The Black Belt is a unique and richly diverse area with an assortment of communities and represented by many cultures where 34% of the population is African American¹. Sustained economic development for communities and families living in these 380 most challenged rural counties is elusive. An opportunity for success in underserved counties requires the creation of collaborative partnerships among and between states, service providers, higher education, affected communities, and agencies of local and federal government.



Middle Georgia Community

The depth and complexity of the situation and the need for sustained institutional commitment should not be underestimated. The barriers to full and equitable participation for all segments of communities are formidable. Health care is endangered, educational opportunity and achievement does not meet competitive standards, business formation and job creation lags the developing areas of all impacted eleven states.

Leadership

- Leadership within underserved rural communities must be closely tied to the visions of informed and empowered local organizations with the internal capacity for authentic participation in the planning and decision processes that determine the quality

of life and economic prosperity for those communities.

- Innovative opportunities for success in leadership development need to be initiated to reduce apathy and expand participation in local economic planning. These new approaches can be piloted in selected at risk counties with a history of limited leadership participation.

Education

- In order for the youth in rural southern states to become contributors in the future, larger numbers of rural students need to receive education that is comprehensive, challenging, and that prepares them for technological entitlement.
- At the middle school level, career education is needed to lay the groundwork for future career development by helping students formulate experiential and education paths to achieve their career goals.

Workforce Development

- Success in workforce readiness should entail addressing cultural beliefs and attitudes, habits, behaviors, and values in training opportunities for future development.
- Key industry sectors will require tailored special needs worker training.
- Create secondary and post-secondary career education networks that respond to needs of indigent industry and the global economy.



King cotton still lives in rural south

¹ US Census, 2000

Economic Development

- Models for success must include bringing together better educational opportunity, sustained environmental protection, improvements in health care, creation of new agri-business models, and re-building commercial and manufacturing infrastructure to attract and sustain new and emerging business.



Endangered Family farmer

Health Care

- Opportunities for success in rural health should involve the creation of regional partnerships to raise awareness and to improve access to healthcare in underserved sections of the south. Minority youth represent a rapidly growing demographic and represent an underutilized healthcare workforce resource and may be the target population in focused projects to increase

the numbers of healthcare technicians and future care givers in impoverished counties.

- Increase the promotion of health risk awareness to underserved focusing on diabetes, teen obesity, asthma, and the contribution of accumulated environmental factors.
- Low birth weight among newborns bode ill for the health of this future generation of young Americans. Investment in corrective measures on the front end will always be less than the cost and consequences of remediation.

The recommendations above represent elements of a change agenda for the region that can make it one that is no longer shackled with the legacy of persistent poverty. Reaching out and empowering communities with information that is timely, useful, and culturally relevant will help sustain the community-based partnerships that will emerge in the region. With access to information and technical assistance, stakeholders will be naturally vested to arrive at workable locally based solutions to business and income creation.

Considering that in the rural counties of the region 84% of the poor are African Americans, race and culture must be imbedded into the substance of any competent solution or remedy for sustained economic recovery.

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References

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