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COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AS A RESPONSE TO COMMUNITY-LEVEL ADVERSITY: ECOLOGICAL THEORY AND RESEARCH AND STRENGTHS-BASED POLICY

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In this chapter, the authors propose strengths-based community development as a community-level antidote to the economic, political, social, and physical environmental challenges facing communities. Community development initiatives that encompass multiple community domains, build and sustain local community capacity, and bring together the public and private sectors are central to this approach. Special importance is placed on meaningful grassroots (citizen) participation in such community development efforts. An array of strengths-based public policies at the local (e.g., community land trusts), state (e.g., "smart growth"), and federal (e.g., community development block grants) levels are presented. This chapter illustrates the value of recognizing and building on existing community strengths, building new

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community strengths, strengthening larger social environments, and engaging in a collaborative, participatory community change process.

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Much of the variation in social, economic, environmental, and political adversities and strengths occurs not at the individual or family level, but at the community level. Individual problems are often rooted outside the individual, family, or group and ultimately become community problems (Caughy, O'Campo, & Brodsky, 1999; Wandersman & Nation, 1998). Thus, individual change is not the key to solving community problems. Indeed, unless community adversities are understood to be rooted more in the environment than in individuals or families, we risk blaming the victim. This is antithetical to a strengths orientation. Therefore, we believe that both strengths and adversities must be examined from an ecological perspective, which places individuals, families, and communities in context. That context includes multiple systems, institutions, and environments that, interdependently, both affect people and are affected by them.

This chapter takes such a view of community-level adversities and argues that to address them adequately, our theories, research, and policies must be comprehensive and systemic. We first describe four interconnected forms of community-level adversity—economic, political, social, and physical environmental. We then describe how these adversities can be countered with five strengths-oriented community development (CD) theories: sustainability, empowerment, social capital, capacity building, and asset-based CD. These strengths-based theories have guided many promising and successful local and international CD programs, but their influence on state- and national-level CD policy making has been more rhetorical than substantive. We present an ecological model of community economic, political, social, and physical environmental development with parallel, complementary, and interdependent roles for policymakers and local communities. The chapter concludes with a review of strengths-oriented and ecological CD policies.

FORMS OF COMMUNITY-LEVEL ADVERSITY

Economic Adversity: Neighborhood Decline

With low-wage service jobs replacing unionized manufacturing jobs and welfare time limits expiring, economic problems may be the most pressing adversity to consider. Poverty is also a primary cause of poor health and poor health care, educational deficiencies, and most of the other social, environmental, and political problems discussed in this chapter and throughout this volume. One need only travel from one side of any city to the other to ob-

serve the clustered neighborhood-level effects of poverty. Factors triggering neighborhood decline include Skogan's (1990) "four Ds": (a) disinvestment, or even systematic "redlining" (the illegal refusal to make loans in poor communities); (b) deindustrialization (factory closings) and the resulting decline of wages that can support a family, tax base, schools, and services; (c) demagogues (e.g., in media or real estate) whose negative portrayal of a neighborhood creates a self-fulfilling prophecy as the resulting residential instability and fear decrease community confidence, collective efficacy, and safety; and (d) demolition and construction (e.g., of highways, redevelopment projects). Ironically, large-scale building projects are seen by many politicians as the cure for neighborhood decline. But they often lead to what we would call the fifth and sixth Ds: displacement of those who can afford to leave and those who cannot afford to stay and discouragement of those who do stay in communities destroyed by cycles of decline and urban renewal.

Political Adversity: Disempowerment

Communities that are oppressed, that lack political connections and influence, or that have significant segments of disempowered members face political adversity. Government agencies often use community advisory boards and public hearings to pay only lip service to grassroots participation in decision making. This sets agencies up for failure as community knowledge is ignored, and the community is more likely to be suspicious of, and resist, the decisions made (Perkins, 1995).

Disempowerment contributes to all other forms of adversity. For example, the housing crisis is as political at root as it is economic or physical. Since 1980, housing costs have risen, sharply in many areas, while real federal spending on low-income housing has fallen. Shelter is a basic need, yet public housing for the neediest has been all but abandoned politically. The federal HOPE-VI program is an attempt to empower moderate-income residents by rebuilding public housing projects as mixed-income developments, including owner-occupied homes. Because it often displaces low-income residents without providing adequate units of replacement housing, however, this may not be the best example of a strengths-based policy. Housing adversities are political because renters—especially low-income ones—are difficult to organize. By contrast, homeowners participate more in their communities and are more empowered than renters, even among lower-income residents (Perkins, Brown, & Taylor, 1996; Saegert & Winkel, 1996, 1998). The political clout of homeowners may explain why they, not those in public housing or other renters, receive 77% of all federal housing subsidies in the form of tax deductions. Developing and maintaining an adequate supply of safe, decent, and affordable housing is a political as well as economic challenge.

Social Adversity: Crime, Disorder, and Cultural Diversity

Crime is just one manifestation of social adversity, but it is of great and consistent concern to the public. As with poverty, criminal victimization and justice are not distributed equally. Both victim and offender rates are significantly worse for poor, minority communities. More young African American men are serving criminal sentences than in college, and the rate is rising (Palen, 1997, p. 191). There is also geographic variation in police practices, even within the same city.

Much more prevalent than serious crimes are social and physical symbols of disorder. Social disorder includes "victimless" crimes (drugs, prostitution) and such noncriminals as "menacing" youths and homeless persons. There is mounting evidence that disorder begets crime and more disorder (Perkins, Wandersman, Rich, & Taylor, 1993; Skogan, 1990). Residents become fearful and withdraw from outdoor spaces, which reduces community cohesion, informal social control, and organizational and commercial life. Group conflict and actual crime may increase as the downward spiral continues.

Group conflict may also be exacerbated by cultural diversity, which is not in itself an adversity. However, prejudice and discrimination based on race, nationality, religion, income, age, sex, sexual orientation, or length of residence are community problems because of the conflict they engender and the difficulties diverse groups encounter in sharing concerns and goals and working effectively together.

Physical Environmental Adversity: Deterioration, Disasters, and Contamination

The physical deterioration of neighborhoods affects housing conditions and satisfaction (Brown & Perkins, 2001), crime (Perkins et al., 1993), fear (Perkins & Taylor, 1996), and the outmigration of residents, business, and jobs (Skogan, 1990). Urban blight and decayed infrastructure (roads, bridges, water and sewer systems) are fiscal time bombs for older cities and towns and the nation (Palen, 1997). Instead of investing in established urban areas, housing and road subsidies have favored development at the suburban fringe (Calthorpe & Fulton, 2001).

Two other forms of community-level environmental adversity are natural disasters and ground, water, and air contamination. There are an estimated 425,000 toxic waste sites in the United States (Rich, Edelstein, Hallman, & Wandersman, 1995). The distribution of the problem is highly concentrated—geographically, economically, and racially—which has led to charges of "environmental racism" (Bullard, 1994). Consequences of toxic exposure include serious health, psychological, family, and community cohesion problems (Edelstein, 2001). Communities that are decimated by a disaster or merely

threatened by contamination or a large construction project may be disempowered by the government response to it. Emergency or recovery policies and agencies often take a top-down, rather than bottom-up, approach and concentrate on rebuilding without necessarily restoring the community fabric.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT: COMMUNITY-LEVEL STRENGTHS BUILDING

What Is Community Development?

All four types of adversity underscore the need for widespread community development efforts. We define CD broadly as a process whereby government, nonprofit organizations, voluntary associations, or public–private partnerships ameliorate or prevent adversities and develop strengths in a community's economic, political, social, or physical environment. Economic CD encourages business and job opportunities. Political CD implies effective community improvement associations with broad and active participation. Social CD encourages safer streets and more neighborliness. Environmental CD improves housing conditions, city services, and recreational facilities and helps clean up or prevent toxic or littered sites and instill residents' pride in their home and community.

We advocate a broad-based, bottom-up, public–private approach to CD rather than top-down public or private efforts that focus on one issue. Government funding, regulation, and support at all levels (federal, state, and local), community support and participation, and an encompassing (ecological) perspective are all necessary for CD to be effective.

Strengths-Based Principles of Community Development

Community development policies have often been paternalistic, imposed from above and from afar, and based on the assumption that poor communities have little to offer besides cheap land and labor and social problems. But CD theory and practice worldwide have become more consistent with the strengths orientation of the present volume. A 1995 United Nations Development Program report cited four essential components of strengths-oriented human development: productivity, equity, sustainability, and empowerment. The last two, along with the equally strengths-oriented concepts of social capital, capacity building, and community asset identification and development, have become guiding principles for CD.

The concept of *sustainability*, popular in international development (Ginther, Denters, & de Waart, 1995; Rao, 2000), is also relevant to CD policies and practices in the United States (see 1999 President's Council on

Sustainable Development, 1999). Economic sustainability, developing a local economy that can be maintained without reliance on regular infusions of outside capital or credit, was the original goal. Since the U.N.-sponsored Earth Summit conferences, however, environmental sustainability, or developing means of production that do not contaminate the ecosystem or exhaust natural resources, has also become important. Analyses of sustainable development rarely transcend the economic or bioecological. Yet the principle of sustainability can be usefully expanded to include the political and social domains of CD as well. Political sustainability at the local level can be thought of as developing and maintaining active and meaningful participation in grassroots community organizations. The issues they choose to address can make a big difference (Perkins et al., 1996; Perkins, Florin, Rich, Wandersman, & Chavis, 1990). Development decisions must also be politically sustainable, in legal and governance terms, on a societal level (Ginther et al., 1995). Social sustainability may be considered the degree to which communities develop and maintain social capital. Sustainability is strengths based in its emphasis on ecologically healthy development over time based on renewable community resources.

Grassroots *empowerment* involves residents organizing collectively to influence the institutions and problems affecting their community. Decisions are made, democratically or consensually, from the bottom up by local organizations. Empowerment operates at many levels, from psychological to organizational to community. Block and neighborhood associations and tenant groups aim to empower their members while improving community conditions (Perkins et al., 1990, 1996; Saegert & Winkel, 1996; Speer & Hughey, 1995). Internationally, empowerment has become a guiding principle for many CD organizations (Friedmann, 1992; Perkins, 1995). Empowerment is strengths based in focusing on people’s and communities’ rights, abilities, assets, and resources more than on their needs or problems.

Social capital, a popular concept among CD professionals and policy makers, is the level of residents’ integration into the community in terms of informal networks and mutual trust, participation in civic and service organizations, and links among those organizations (Coleman, 1988). Faith-based CD is a form of social capital with a long and effective history, especially in Latin America and the African American community. Recently, CD researchers have emphasized the role of group learning processes in building social capital in communities and organizations (Falk & Harrison, 1998). Social capital fits well with our ecological focus because, in contrast with the older term “human capital,” it focuses on the strengths related to interdependent social networks (not simply on individual strengths, such as education levels). As with empowerment, however, it is important for researchers and policy makers to be specific about defining social capital, its formal and informal sources, the dynamic processes to achieve it, and how to measure these along with its material effects (Saegert & Winkel, 1998). It is also important not to focus so much on social

capital that we ignore communities' political, economic, and physical capital (Bourdieu, 1985; DeFilippis, 2001; Perkins, Hughey, & Speer, 2002).

Capacity building refers to the development of skills, information, or other organizational resources or the development of organizations and coalitions within an entire community. Whereas social capital describes the small-scale community social and political conditions for grassroots CD to occur, capacity building is a resource development process applied to extant CD organizations. Both concepts are based on the notion that communities have indigenous human resources that can be developed and used to address community problems.

Asset-based community development (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993) is an approach to mobilizing people and local organizations for the social, economic, and physical revitalization of a community. It is based on the identification, mapping, and development of community assets or strengths, as opposed to needs or problems. Assets are broadly defined and overlap well with our ecological model: they may be physical (e.g., land, community gathering places), social (cohesion, volunteers), economic (consumers, entrepreneurs and workers, funding agencies), and political (voters, advocates, local officials, community leaders).

An example is Building a Healthier Mesa (Arizona) Neighborhood Development Initiative (http://www.mc.maricopa.edu/academic/compact/carter.html). When residents identified the need for a youth program and community center, they created one in a backyard. When they outgrew that space, the city donated a new property and hired a neighborhood liaison. The Initiative has grown into a coalition headed by block and neighborhood leaders, with representation from United Way, the Chamber of Commerce, public schools, and the local community college.

All five CD principles (sustainability, empowerment, social capital, capacity building, and assets-based CD), as well as the terms *strengths* and *resilience,* are so overused and co-opted for different ends that they have become buzzwords. Despite their popularity, strengths-oriented CD concepts have not received the systematic research and programmatic support they deserve. Although there has been a plethora of government policies based, at least nominally, on empowerment (e.g., Empowerment Zones, discussed later in this chapter), most have failed to apply the concept of empowerment clearly or consistently (Perkins, 1995).

By their very nature, strengths-based CD principles do not generally require large public expenditures. Social capital and asset-based approaches, by definition, rely primarily on local private resources, not public funding. Sustainability implies that beyond any initial investment, the need for new outside resources is limited. Yet many local CD programs would be greatly enhanced with more government funding, technical assistance for capacity building, sponsored research, and dissemination (Schorr, 1997). How to sup-

port grassroots CD efforts without compromising their autonomy or making them dependent on that support is both a tremendous opportunity and a challenge for policymakers.

AN ECOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK FOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT: ECONOMIC, POLITICAL, SOCIAL, AND PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENTAL COMPONENTS

Most of the CD literature addresses just one or two domains of adversity. In contrast, our conceptual framework is ecological in placing CD simultaneously in the economic, political, social, and physical environmental contexts in which adversities, and the policies and community action addressing those adversities, reside (see Figure 18.1). It is also ecological in viewing CD as a dynamic and interdependent system operating at multiple levels (individual, small group, organization, community), in which change in one area and level affects the other areas and levels.[1] The following sections give examples of public and private CD strategies. The interdependence of these spheres of development becomes readily apparent in these examples.

Economic Development

Urban redevelopment policies in the United States have focused on large, downtown projects and freeways at the expense of revitalizing older neighborhoods. Cities have experienced fiscal crises, declining federal support, crumbling infrastructure, and myriad social problems (Palen, 1997). But can waterfronts, ballparks, convention centers, and hotels undo the "malling of America" (the flight of economic activity to the suburbs)? If they could, how much good would it do the vast majority who live not in downtowns, but in residential neighborhoods? Following are some promising public and private strategies for community economic development.

Community development block grants represent a large federal expenditure that could address many community-level adversities. But during the 1980s, much block grant funding went to less needy neighborhoods to fund public infrastructure instead of to housing, physical improvements, or economic development in poor areas (Catlin, 1981; Watson, 1992). How should these funds be targeted? Neighborhood revitalization's track record is mixed (Ginsberg, 1983), but four generally successful strategies are (a) involving a

[1]For more on the variables and relationships in the framework, see Perkins et al., 1996. For other ecological principles applied to community organizing and development, see Speer and Hughey, 1995. For links to community organizing and development-related Web sites, including many of the policies and programs discussed in this chapter, see http://www.people.vanderbilt.edu/~douglas.d.perkins/cdwebsites.htm.

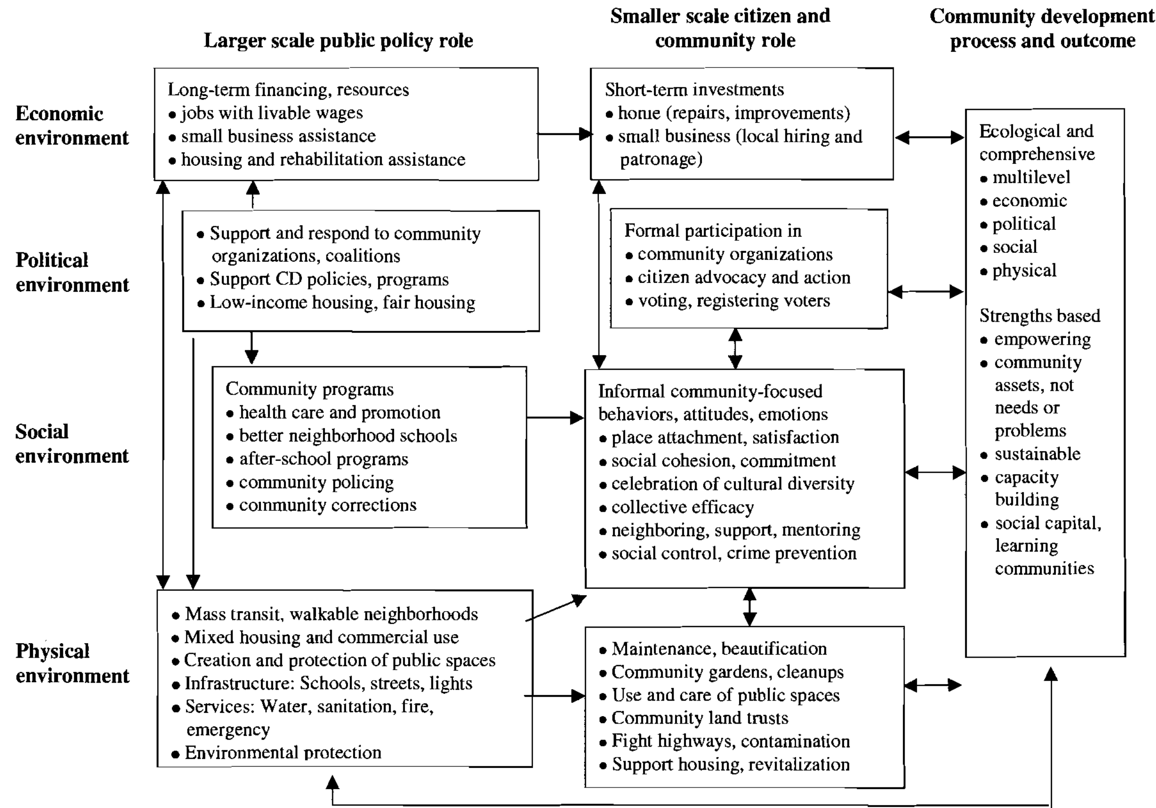

Figure 18.1. An ecological framework for community development. CD = community development. Arrows indicate directions of theoretical causal links. Two-headed arrows imply mutually reinforcing set of variables.

broad base of residents; (b) building on existing community strengths; (c) promoting cooperation among local public and private agencies, along with funding and technical support from higher levels; and (d) targeting common urban problems, such as inadequate sense of community, safety, housing, schools, youth programs, and economic opportunity (Schorr, 1997).

The Empowerment Zones/Enterprise Communities federal policy of the 1990s was based on the 1980s' "urban enterprise zones" of targeted capital investment and training and employment tax incentives. Reviews of the policy have been mixed, with critics arguing that the incentives were either too small (to offset entrenched poverty and related individual and community disadvantages) or too large (essentially a business subsidy that does little for local residents; Palen, 1997). But it incorporated several strengths approaches, including a bottom-up orientation requiring local planning; partnerships between business, government, and community organizations; and local hiring requirements. Some Empowerment Zones enhanced resident opportunities and skills through job training, day care programs, and microcredit.

Community development financial institutions and local exchange trading systems are two of the newest and most innovative economic development strategies. The former include CD-focused corporations, banks, venture capital funds, and microenterprise (microcredit) funds. They are specifically dedicated to serving low-income individuals and communities by developing investments, entrepreneurs, and jobs. Microcredit extends small business loans to those who cannot qualify for a traditional loan because they are poor or have no credit history. Loans are usually small (e.g., for a sewing machine) and come with technical assistance and peer supports. The most famous example of microcredit is Grameen Bank in Bangladesh, which organizes village loan pools, whose collective responsibility for debts gives borrowers more incentive to repay on time. In the United States, South Shore Bank in Chicago has made hundreds of millions of dollars of loans in poor, inner-city neighborhoods. Working Capital in Cambridge, Massachusetts, organizes low-income, small business owners into peer-lending groups.

Local exchange trading systems are bartering co-ops, including local currency programs and "time dollar" exchanges. Ithaca Hours is an alternative economy that pays $10 an hour in a local currency that can be traded for goods and services. Time dollars also equalize the value of work but have no monetary value. In rural Utah, the Emery County CD Initiative developed a Computers for Kids program, which matched junior high tutors with elementary school readers. The tutors earned time dollars, which they used to "purchase" donated computers.

Political Development and Housing Policy

Grassroots organizing, or political CD, is a key, though often ignored, activating ingredient for any CD program's chances of stopping and revers-

ing the process of neighborhood decline. It empowers residents, is a long-term solution, costs little (other than time and energy), and helps maintain neighborhood stability (Perkins et al., 1996; Speer & Hughey, 1995). Political CD means both pressuring every level of government through community organizations and larger coalitions and creating private, nonprofit community self-help programs.

Local, nonprofit CD housing programs address the political and economic gaps in the housing market. They turn homeless people into renters and renters into homeowners. Homeowners are less likely to move and more likely to have a material stake not only in their own home, but in their entire neighborhood, on which property values depend. Many such programs are based on the limited-equity home ownership model ("urban homesteading" or "sweat equity") for providing privately owned housing to low- and moderate-income families. These "third sector" housing programs differ from for-profit housing in both their initial and their permanent affordability (Davis, 1994). A limit is typically placed on the future price at which units may be rented or resold. New York City has seized hundreds of tax-defaulted apartment buildings and turned them over to the existing low-income residents as limited-equity co-ops. Empowering those residents to take control over the revitalization and maintenance of their buildings has resulted in significant improvements in housing quality (Saegert & Winkel, 1996, 1998).

Community land trusts can be used for any particular land use (housing, commercial, or open space) or purpose (historic preservation, local control, neighborhood revitalization; Peterson, 1996). Similar to conservation trusts, which are used to protect open space or agricultural land, community land trusts also acquire land but usually for affordable housing or other CD ends. In general, democratically run groups, such as Share the Future in Heber, Utah, own the land collectively but lease parcels of it to individuals for long-term use. Buildings on the land are sold to the individual lessee. This, along with resale price restrictions, helps keep ownership affordable for the duration of the trust. Community land trusts have preserved family farms, helped stem the cost inflation associated with speculation and gentrification, educated first-time home buyers, and developed special-needs housing and commercial space for lower income entrepreneurs (Peterson, 1996). They protect or improve the physical environment, are a political and economic innovation, and can result in social benefits and so illustrate well the interdependence of all four domains of CD in our framework.

Direct government roles in improving low-income housing rest largely on returning public and subsidized housing budgets to an adequate level. Other housing-focused CD policies include encouraging incumbent upgrading (housing improvements by long-term residents, not gentrifiers and speculators) through CD block grants and subsidized loans, increasing management ac-

countability in public housing through tenant organizations[2] and improved quality assurance and grievance procedures, and mixing housing cost levels to avoid concentrated ghetto effects.

Social Development

Cultural diversity, sometimes described as a potential adversity (if prejudice, discrimination, and conflict are left unchallenged), is better viewed as a community asset. Diverse neighborhoods can be interesting and vibrant places to live. Different groups bring different perspectives, knowledge, connections, and strengths to the community and its organizations. CD efforts must include public events that celebrate diversity and help residents learn about and appreciate their differences. Organizations must actively recruit members of different groups and accommodate differences in language, religious and cultural holidays, and other customs.

Social cohesion consists of a variety of behaviors, attitudes, and emotions that signify the social and psychological creation of community (Perkins et al., 1996). Areas with more neighborliness, greater use of outdoor space, and informal social control of behavior exhibit better quality of life and a greater commitment of members to the community. This commitment both is motivated by and leads to a stronger sense of community and collective efficacy, as well as satisfaction with, pride in, and attachment to the people and place and confidence in its future (Perkins et al., 1990). Social cohesion is the strongest and most consistent predictor of citizen participation in CD (Perkins et al., 1990, 1996). CD organizations, in turn, encourage greater community cohesion by helping residents to discuss and work to address shared concerns and by sponsoring cultural events. Public officials, community leaders, and organizers cannot afford to ignore social cohesion. Communities without it will be hard to mobilize, and communities with it will be better able to change policies with which they disagree.

Community crime prevention programs may be organized by civilians or police or may focus on the physical environment. Civilian crime prevention encompasses both various victimization prevention strategies (e.g., publicizing crimes, increasing home security, organizing resident surveillance; Rosenbaum, 1986) and broader, more strengths-based approaches addressing the root causes of crime (via youth development, employment, or other CD programs). Community-oriented policing consists of a variety of methods (foot patrol, neighborhood miniprecincts, school programs, community crime information meetings and newsletters, home security checks) for officers to interact more with the community, gain their trust, and address local crime and delinquency problems. Related to community environmental develop-

[2]It is important that tenant organizations be legitimate, empowered, and active. Just as housing authorities that are unresponsive or disregard agreements erode tenants' sense of collective efficacy, mandated or token participation can undermine community strengths.

ment, Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design, or "defensible space," is a set of architectural and planning principles that encourage natural surveillance and a sense of ownership and limit access in ways that deter crime (Taylor & Harrell, 1996).

Crime rates in the United States have generally gone down over the past 20 years, although there is little empirical evidence for any law enforcement or crime prevention strategy being responsible for that drop. Furthermore, crime and fear tend not to elicit broad or lasting citizen participation (Perkins et al., 1990, 1996). A more promising study of neighborhoods and crime found that, controlling for demographics, communities with more social cohesion and informal social control suffered less violence (Sampson, Raudenbush, & Earls, 1997). Taken together, these findings suggest that community anticrime policy must take a more comprehensive, empowerment approach that addresses the root causes of crime and motivates active community participation through a combination of CD and prevention programs for youth.

Physical Environmental Development

The condition of the local physical environment is closely linked to resident fears, confidence in the community's future, and participation in community organizations (Perkins et al., 1990, 1996; Skogan, 1990). People's attachments to their neighborhood as a place are linked to less crime, fear, and disorder and better housing and home satisfaction (Brown & Perkins, 2001). Organized activities to clean up parks, streets, and yards and to replace vacant lots with urban gardens are excellent ways to get and keep people involved in their community.

New development should promote the quality and vitality of community life and preserve open space. City and regional planning, design, and transportation must be geared toward people and transit (not cars), density (not sprawl), and mixed-use zoning (not suburbia, with its isolated subdivisions, shopping malls, freeways, and office parks; Calthorpe & Fulton, 2001).

Some communities must pay even more serious heed to environmental conditions. Contamination and other environmental disasters and threats require government support for cleanup and protection. But they also require community organization and development to keep local residents united (Edelstein, 2001). Community Development focused on protecting the environment can have an empowering effect at both the individual and community level (Rich et al., 1995).

Although community developers have become more environmentally conscious, they have not benefited from as much collaboration or coalition building with environmental groups as they could. Yet environmental development is perhaps the ideal context for sustainability theory. For new construction (e.g., highway, housing, natural resource development, manufactur-

ing plant) to be sustainable, it must neither pollute or deplete resources nor poison the social and economic climate. It must also be politically acceptable: The decision process must be open and truly participatory from beginning (gathering and evaluating information) to end (ideally, using a partnership rather than an adversarial approach to making and implementing decisions).

The Sawmill neighborhood in Albuquerque, New Mexico, is an example of a community that started out by rallying around an environmental issue and kept residents involved over the long term by thinking ecologically about the economic, social, and political, as well as physical, health of the community. The community initially organized against a particleboard factory that had been polluting the neighborhood for years. After a successful cleanup campaign, the residents formed a CD corporation to help the city develop the abandoned property. As the neighborhood began to gentrify, they formed a community land trust to keep housing affordable to successive generations. The Sawmill Community Land Trust continues to thrive and recently broke ground on a 27-acre commercial, residential, and open space development.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS TO ADDRESS COMMUNITY-LEVEL ADVERSITY THROUGH STRENGTHS-BASED COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

The strengths-based approaches to community level adversity outlined in this chapter point to specific policy recommendations at the local, state, and federal levels. In most cases, these policy recommendations are not new—they are being implemented in individual communities or states and are included here as examples of policies that can be replicated or adapted in other localities. Some of the federal policies discussed in this chapter can be made more effective by strengthening community control and implementing programs in more coordinated and integrated ways that address all four forms of community adversity.

Although government entities can and should be partners in facilitating, financing, and coordinating CD programs, the process for planning and implementing programs should be community driven. This is a critical point. The call for "maximum feasible participation" of the community has been around for decades. Yet in practice government often makes only minimum efforts to elicit meaningful participation (Perkins, 1995). Both research and practice in participation and empowerment may be helpful in changing this (Friedmann, 1992; Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993; Perkins et al., 1996; Saegert & Winkel, 1996; Speer & Hughey, 1995).

The common thread, and some would say the root cause, running through each form of community adversity is the economic marginalization of certain individuals and communities. Thus, it is in this area that we offer the broadest range of recommendations, all of which attempt to focus eco-

nomic resources and control at the local level. We have not categorized the recommendations by area of adversity (economic, political, social, and physical environmental), because we believe approaches should be designed to address multiple areas in an integrated manner.

Our recommendations are in the following categories: facilitating the ability of individuals and neighborhoods to address adversity on their own; directing state and local resources to community and economic development, controlled by neighborhoods and communities; and strengthening existing federal policies to support a strengths-based approach. The first category most clearly represents the CD principles of sustainability, empowerment, social capital, capacity building, and asset-based CD. But those working at the grassroots level know best how critical government resources are at every level to address the most entrenched adversities and support communities' own efforts.

Facilitate Grassroots Initiatives

Local governments can support the development of organized mutual supports such as block and neighborhood associations and local exchange trading systems. City staff and resources can be applied to a broad range of indigenous CD approaches by providing training and technical assistance as well as community outreach.

State, Local, and Regional Community Development Policies

State and local governments are well positioned to direct resources to the communities most in need, but they often fail to do so or to connect related policies to each other. Strengths-based local and state CD policies would invest in programs that provide opportunities for economic development at both the individual and community levels, such as microcredit programs, CD financial institutions, community land trusts, and individual development accounts that match the savings of low-income individuals with public or private funds for purposes of education, business start-up, or housing acquisition.

There are numerous examples of communities that use local or state economic development subsidies or financing mechanisms to overcome adversities. These include tax increment financing or industrial revenue bonds for job creation and affordable housing development (e.g., housing trust funds) and tax credits and other incentives to increase wages and benefits or establish "first source" agreements (in which employers commit to offer jobs first to local workers or other target populations, such as welfare recipients, or to promote greater permanence in the jobs created). Other communities use these subsidies to develop industrial retention and expansion programs aimed at keeping higher wage manufacturing jobs in a community. Some commu-

nities have successfully addressed economic and environmental adversity by improving transit for low-income citizens, and others have developed elaborate sectoral job creation strategies that target unique local skills, assets, or resources to strengthen the local economy. For example, a rural community in Utah that suffered the closure of a sawmill formed a partnership between local unemployed workers and environmentalists to practice sustainable harvesting of wood products and to develop a market for the value-added products created by a cooperative of local woodworkers.

Local planning and zoning authority can be used in more strengths-oriented ways to promote low-cost housing, improve the social and environmental characteristics of neighborhoods, and assist small business (e.g., mixed-use zoning). Inclusionary zoning ordinances require that a certain percentage of new housing be affordable. Local governments are seizing abandoned, unsafe, and tax-defaulted properties for low-income rehabilitation.

One proposal for keeping the most concerned and resourced residents involved in their own communities is to improve neighborhood public schools (as opposed to magnet or charter schools or vouchers for private schools) so that children stay in the neighborhood. Schools are one of the most important institutional anchors for any community and the second most common place for community participation (after religious organizations). Parents and even local businesses are playing a more direct role in education. Federal leadership and resources are also needed. But the biggest responsibility still rests with state and local government.

Community development policies tend to concentrate on central business districts, residential neighborhoods, or rural areas, but rarely all three at once. This is a serious problem because it tends to preclude mixed-use development, metropolitan region transportation planning, open-space preservation, and other aspects of ecologically "smart growth" and "new urbanism" (Calthorpe & Fulton, 2001).

Strengthening Federal Policies

Fannie Mae, the U.S. Rural Development Agency, and other agencies are beginning to support such strengths-based CD initiatives as community land trusts, self-help housing, individual development accounts, and microlending institutions. The Council for Urban Economic Development recently issued a detailed federal policy agenda, including a focus on skills training for the knowledge economy, encouragement of private investment in CD, and other strengths approaches (Garmise, 2001). We would add that many existing federal programs, although consistent with a strengths orientation to community development, are underfunded (e.g., low-income housing, Empowerment Zones, CD block grants, earned income tax credits). Others have inadequate provisions for private investment, including the Community Reinvestment Act (which is currently under serious political threat),

the Home Mortgage Disclosure Act, and minimum wage laws (Center for Community Change, 2003; Federal Financial Institutions Examination Council, 2003; U.S. Department of Labor, 2003). Some federal programs should be expanded to other agencies (e.g., Housing and Urban Development's Community Outreach Partnership Program and its HOME Program's incentives for subcontracts to local CD organizations) or to younger target populations (e.g., Americorps service or CD job opportunities for high school and college students). Student loan forgiveness programs could be expanded to include college graduates who do community development work in poor urban and rural areas (similar to incentives for teachers and doctors to select underserved areas in which to work).

There is also a need for more federal funding of ecological research (i.e., systemic, interdisciplinary, multimethod, longitudinal research analyzed at multiple, ecologically valid levels) and for strengths-based CD research (i.e., participatory, driven by locally defined needs, and leading to the identification and development of individual and community assets). The Ford Foundation is not the major supporter of CD research it once was. The Fannie Mae Foundation has filled some of that gap but tends to emphasize housing rather than the broad range of CD issues. The Department of Housing and Urban Development continues to fund a broad range of CD projects, including some major university-based ones; however, it has always funded more interventions than research. Another important federal role in CD research is to ensure that national data gathering better reflects the ecological and strengths orientation toward community-level adversities and development (and not just individual or household indicators).

Although funding is important, federal leadership is also critical for regulatory changes. For example, often CD block grant and other resources are captured and redirected by political interests outside the control of marginalized communities. State and local applications of federal strategies could have greater impact if their regulations specifically required broader and more meaningful participation, not only by the general public but also by the low-income communities facing the greatest adversities. A more specific example of a regulatory problem is that limited-equity, low-income housing cooperatives do not have access to tax credit financing. Federal underwriting practices often prohibit mortgages for extended families or co-ops and restrict the construction of common spaces that would make group life more productive. A recent exception is the loosening of restrictions on common space in housing for elderly people, which may open the door to better accommodations for collective ownership models.

CONCLUSION

Dividing CD policies by level of government helps to target advocacy, but it runs counter to the ecological and systemic perspective we advocate.

Some of the most compelling examples of CD are the growing number of comprehensive community revitalization initiatives (e.g., Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative in Boston, Massachusetts, and Sandtown-Winchester in Baltimore, Maryland) and comprehensive community health and substance abuse prevention initiatives, which are encouraged by multiple public and private funding agencies. Thus, CD policies at all levels must include both programs to address as many of the social problems discussed in this volume as possible (not just infrastructure and economic development, as important as those are) and meaningful participation at the grassroots level. By the same token, interventions that deal only with the social and psychological symptoms of poverty and injustice and do not address the economic and political root causes of those problems or make real and tangible gains in people's lives (e.g., decent affordable housing, livable-wage jobs, crime reduction, cleaned up neighborhoods and toxic sites) may be doomed to fail.

Implicit in this chapter are at least three different, but equally valid, strengths-based orientations. These include CD policies and organizations that strengthen individuals and communities by building on existing strengths (e.g., community assets and citizens as social capital vs. communities and citizens viewed only as problems); developing new strengths (i.e., empowering and capacity building vs. top-down, bureaucratic decision making, blaming victims and trying to fix them), and making the goal the development of economically, politically, socially, and physically sustainable and healthy environments (vs. the mere absence of adversities).

CD is relevant to each of the other chapters in this volume because CD programs and policies reduce, at the community level, many of the adversities discussed in the other chapters. Furthermore, CD directly contributes to the capacity of individuals, organizations, and communities to cope with any remaining psychosocial adversities, thereby strengthening children, youth, and families in the process.

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