The Nature of Rural Development
THE PHILOSOPHY AND PROCESS OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

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Every time we make a significant technological advance, we create the necessity for economic, social, environmental, or institutional changes in our community. Thus, rapid changes in these areas are necessary in periods of rapid technological change. The thought has been expressed by many people in recent years that we are in a technical and social revolution and that we are closer to its beginning than we are to its end. If this is true, and there is good reason to believe that it is, the task of developing and redeveloping the human environment and the human community is among the most important concerns of our society.

Nearly every citizen, from one in the smallest hamlet to the resident of one of our great metropolises or from the individual voter to a member of Congress, supports the concept of community improvement in its broadest sense. It is when we talk about how it is to be brought about and what kind of development we want that sparks begin to fly. This paper is designed to clarify the philosophy and process of community development in rural areas. It also looks at some difficulties with regard to community development that arise because of requiring decisions from groups as well as from specialized public agencies. Finally, this paper examines the approach to community development in Indiana through citizens'
committes, to provide an example of organization and development procedures that have been successful there.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEFINED

When we talk about community development, it is first necessary for us to have an understanding of the terms "community" and "community development." A community is usually defined as a group of people who organize for a common purpose, and in this sense an individual can belong to many communities. He may belong to one community in connection with the primary school for his children, to another from the standpoint of taxes, to another where he trades, to another from the standpoint of his cultural center, and so on. Thus, a community may be large or small in geographic area depending upon the function involved. It may also consist of many different types of people, such as businessmen, farmers, housewives, children, retired people, servicemen, school teachers, and many others.

The term "community development" is defined differently by many people. This is natural at this stage of community development. However, if we are to make the most progress, we need to agree basically on what activity we are discussing, even though we may use slightly different terms to describe it. I should like to define community development as an effort to increase the economic opportunity and the quality of living of a given community through helping the people of that community with those problems that require group decision and group action.

The terms "economic opportunity" and "quality of living" are as broad in scope and in subject matter as anyone could desire. They include developing new jobs; providing better services; construction of homes, streets, and sewers; developing good school systems; providing opportunities for the elderly; recreation; and a host of other activities. The phrase "with those problems that require group decision and group action" is restrictive in the sense that it rules out all problems that may be solved on an individual basis. For example, under this definition, whether a county should have an educational program in the wise use of credit might be a community-resource-development issue, but the providing of an individual family with information for making a credit decision would not be a community-resource-development activity.
Some might define community development as making the community a better place in which to work and to live. This puts every activity of the Extension Service and nearly every other community organization under the umbrella of community development. It is an appealing approach but not very useful in developing programs. It is not sufficiently definitive to be workable as an activity. Community development needs to zero in on the group decisions of the community and not dissipate its energies on everything.

Some might also argue that this definition does not allow for measurement of progress. It is granted that it is difficult to measure progress when the criteria for each community are different. However, it is unrealistic to assume that there is a set of criteria that fits all communities. There simply is not such a set of criteria. The people of a given community can tell you whether the community-development work in their community helped them to reach their goals. Quality of life is like beauty—it is in the eye of the beholder.

Community-resource development is an effort to combine the body of known knowledge in the area of community development with the brainpower of the community for the purpose of speeding up and improving the solving of community problems. A basic premise in community development is that only the people of a community may determine what should be its goals after they have been made aware of the problems and opportunities of their particular community. The value judgments are rendered by community leaders, not by the technicians who carry out the development projects or by educators who may be helping the community in its decision-making. The technicians should be on tap but not on top.

**The Community-Development Process**

Community development may be involved only in helping communities effectively carry out whatever activities certain groups are sponsoring or may decide to sponsor, or it may be involved in the broader context of determining what the goals of the community should be, what the fundamental problems are, and what the priorities in the problems attacked in the community should be. To my way of thinking, if community development is to progress and move ahead on a sound basis, it must eventually take this last approach.

Many groups are ready to champion a cause. The real gap in our communities is the making of an analysis of the community's
problems and opportunities, the crystallizing of opinion based on sound analysis, the setting of priorities, and the developing of workable alternatives as a basis for communities to make rational decisions. Successful corporations have divisions to analyze and set forth alternative opportunities for their boards of directors. Successful communities require so much technical information and are affected so much by trends and developments that they need some way to combine technicians with the influence leaders, to do the same thing that happens in well-run corporations.

The community-development process is a decision-making process. This process is outlined in figure 1 and begins with people who are concerned about their community. These concerned individuals must collect, analyze, and interpret background information about their community to properly identify the problems that they are confronted with. Also, if the community is going to find lasting solutions, they must determine their goals and the kind of development they desire. Since many problems may be present, the most important should be identified as priority areas. Furthermore, each problem may have several possible alternative solutions with different consequences of each. Each solution must be examined to see if it is feasible and how it should be carried out. These possible

**Figure 1**  THE COMMUNITY-DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

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- Determine Priorities and Alternatives
- Analyze Problems
- Identify Basic Problems and Goals
- Peoples Concern
- Determine Consequences of Alternatives
- Transfer Knowledge to Public
- Determine Objectives and Choices
- Local Gov’t
- Community Leaders
- All People
alternative solutions, consequences, and strategies for action need to be made known to the whole community, so that the various groups and individuals of the community can properly choose objectives and solutions. These choices may be made by many different organizations and groups, ranging from local government units and community leaders to all of the people in the community.

When this decision-making process has been properly carried out, the implementation of the development programs becomes a technical procedure, which is not included in the community-development process. For example, the decision to have a youth-training program and how to implement it might well be community development, but once such a program was under way it would not be considered community development. This would be true even though the activity might be contributing greatly to the economic opportunity of the community. If an architect becomes involved in the actual construction of all the houses he plans, he soon becomes diverted from his real task. This does not mean that he does not study how the houses he designs meet his clients' desires in the final analysis.

The educator's role in community development involves helping a community to identify and define its goals broadly. He helps the community identify and rate the importance of various problems in attaining its goals. He helps the community put the problem in a decision-making framework. He develops new alternatives for the community by inventing new arrangements or institutions to take care of new situations. He helps the community measure the cost and benefits of each alternative. He helps the community in its strategy in carrying out its objectives after it chooses the approach it wishes to use. But he leaves the actual decision-making up to the community.

**Leadership and Community Structure**

If community-development workers are going to contribute most effectively to better decisions, they must have access to the decision-makers. In some way the decision-makers must be found and exposed to useful information, just as the decision-makers in a business must be involved if technology is to be changed.

Not everyone becomes involved in the community-development process. Leadership and participation will vary greatly between
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communities. Generally, however, the structure of the community can be stratified among leaders, followers, and nonparticipants, as shown in figure 2. At the top of the pyramid is a small group of influence leaders, followed by a larger group of action-oriented people. Beneath these two leadership groups are found larger groups of interested citizens and also those who do not care. Often the group of people who do not care is the largest group within the community.

The influence leaders are the people in the community with foresight and awareness who are able to identify the community-development problems and their solutions. They have become influence leaders in the community because of their record in past decisions of being correct and timely. This group is looked on by the rest of the citizens as a source of information and ideas and decision-making expertise. They usually are the best qualified to serve on a community-development committee.

The second group of leaders in the community are the action-oriented people. This group is somewhat larger than that of the influence leaders, and it often includes the leaders of civic organizations and action groups. Its members are looked on by the community as the people who can get things done, but they may not necessarily be asked for the initial decisions and ideas. Both the influence leaders and the action-oriented leadership group are important in community development. The responsibility for community-development decisions will rest primarily with the influence leaders, while the action-oriented leadership group will usually have the responsibility for implementing these decisions.

![Community-Participation Triangle](image)

**Figure 2** Community-Participation Triangle

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The charge is made by some reformers that working with the influence leaders tends to perpetuate the status quo. Working with this group does not decrease the opportunity for the crusaders to work in the community. As the attitudes of the community change, the influence leaders change. By being sensitive to the community’s attitudes was the very way they became influential. The very fact that these individuals are willing to get together and study the potentialities of their communities insures a certain amount of open-mindedness.

Some community professionals get the idea that the influence leaders shape the community and that, therefore, all groups should be represented on the committee to see that their rights are protected. The influence leaders have influence because they do represent the attitudes and goals of the total community and are experts at timing and putting operating legs on community programs. The people in any community who have this ability are scarce. If you bring together representatives of various pressure groups, you are right back in the political arena again; and we already have our political system for making decisions of this type. Major decisions worked on by a community-development committee are still settled by the political process, but they may be decided differently because of the better understanding and better proposals that may be brought to the public by the community-development committee.

Community-development efforts must take into consideration the special characteristics of each community. These characteristics can be grouped into four different systems:

1. The political system
2. The cultural system
3. The social system
4. The economic and technical system

Each of these systems contributes to the way people act, think, and work within the community. Differences in these systems between communities account for major differences in the approaches and results of community development. Each community, for example, may have a different political system and may vary in the extent of participation by its citizens, the attitudes of the power structure in the community, and the receptivity of elected officials to suggestions for needed changes. Cultural influences may also influence community decisions. Entertainment that includes the serving of alco-
holic beverages is certainly accepted differently among the German immigrants of Wisconsin and among many of the citizens of Kansas. Social systems may influence where people live in the community, and they may be important in determining which programs will be acceptable. Likewise, the economic and technical system within the community may determine which programs are feasible, such as the kinds of employment opportunities that can be developed in the community. These four systems are important determinants of how community members will react to community changes. They are the structure within which community development must take place.

**INNOVATIONS AND COMMUNITY DECISION-MAKING**

We are making progress in community development, but this progress has come slowly and with much hard work. One of the reasons for the relative slowness of this progress is the nature of community change.

Community development is a group decision process. Most of our business and personal decisions, however, are individual ones. In the last one hundred years we have made great technical advances in agriculture. Each individual farmer or manager has had an opportunity to take this technical information by himself, evaluate it, and either adopt or reject it. These were individual choices. When it comes to community changes, however, over 50 percent of the group involved must make up their minds the same way at the same time. Thus, it is much more difficult for a community to arrive at decisions and to take action than it is for a single individual.

A good example of differences in individual and group adoption of technological change is the introduction of tractors. As a boy, I went to the first tractor plowing demonstration in our rural community. There were two tractors: the old Titan and another make, which I cannot remember. The demonstrators showed how rapidly they could plow. A group of our neighbors went in a lumber wagon. On the way home they appraised the tractors and everyone agreed that he would not have one because it would pack the ground, it would break down, it was too costly, and so on. The group decision on tractor adoption here was negative. But do you know, there was one crazy farmer who bought one (he didn’t have the approval of the American Horse Association either). This model ran only part of the time, but with a little work it was improved. One by one we
bought tractors and mechanized American agriculture. So it has been with adoption of other technologies, with a few individuals accepting the change where the group as a whole would not. If group choice had been required for the adoption of all our technologies, we might still be plowing with horses today.

In addition to slowing the adoption of technical improvements, group decision-making also has impaired rapid adjustment in our social institutions. Today many communities are faced with a great need to renovate and improve many of their social institutions that changing technology and social values have rendered obsolete. Slower response through group decisions than by individual action has often caused a great lag in the adjustment of these institutions and at times has made community progress toward improvement of them difficult.

CITIZENS COMMITTEES FOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

If community services and development are going to be relevant and coordinated with the people of the community, they must be related to them through some form of a citizens' committee or committees. Processes must be developed so that communities, whether they be on a basis of growth centers, counties, or smaller areas, exercise more power of coordination and direction.

In my observation and study, there is no substitute for the part that citizens' committees play in community development, whether in the rural or urban areas, in this country or abroad. This is true no matter how many official boards, agencies, or planning groups are established.

Members of action organizations and agencies often say that community-development study groups only get involved in lengthy discussions, whereas their organizations are the ones that finance the housing or get the sewers and water lines laid—the things that really count in community development. Of course, both types of organizations are needed; for improvements such as housing or sewer and water lines may actually compound the problems of the community if the total needs of the community and the implications for the community are not taken into consideration. This sometimes happens, just as some community-development groups do nothing but talk. Nevertheless, saying that a community does not need an effective overall development group is like saying that in order to
construct buildings it is only necessary to have masons, carpenters, plumbers, and painters, that it is not necessary to have any input from owners, architects, or contractors.

In every community, decisions are being made every day. There are people in every community who are making decisions for that community or choosing not to make decisions, regardless of whether we have a community program going on or not, or whether we think highly of the quality of the decisions being made. This is an obvious observation, but often we tend to forget it. The function of community-development activity is to tie into this operation and to coordinate, speed up, and improve the quality of the decisions being made.

If better coordination of the community goals and services is to be obtained, the citizens of influence or the natural leaders must be brought together for the same vigorous study and analysis that they use in their businesses and professions. They likewise must be serviced by the best knowledge that is available concerning community management.

Furthermore, experience would indicate that from lists of these leaders an overall committee of 75 to 150 should be selected. This committee would only meet once to four times per year and would have the responsibility of determining the community problems and setting priorities. A smaller committee would be involved in making studies and recommendations to the larger committee and in trying to get the suggested action.

These larger committees should also include representatives from all government agencies located in the county who are involved in action programs for community improvement. This is important in getting greater coordination at the local level. Today each agency has good interagency communication from the local level to the state or national level. However, many of the local problems require a coordinated approach of several agencies. This coordination between agencies at both the state and national level leaves much to be desired.

In Indiana, we have used an approach for selecting citizens' committees by interviewing a group of forty to fifty active leaders who are interested in various community activities. These leaders are asked to name, say, five people that they believe are dedicated, broad-minded, highly respected individuals, sensitive to the community's needs, whom they would like to see entrusted with develop-
ing the community. On this assembled list will appear individuals who have been named several times. The thirty to forty people named most often by this group are next interviewed and asked the same questions. From both of these lists the fifteen to twenty-five individuals most often named are then taken as a community committee. The second list generally tends to center on certain individuals more than the first list, and the silent leaders come into greater prominence.

In the rural communities, where the background and goals of the people are more homogeneous, one tends to get an influence group that fairly well represents, as a group, the total community. In the more complex industrial communities, one gets a merging of leaders, each of whom may represent the background and goals of individual groups in the community. This makes more complex the problem of operating a community-development program. It requires modifications in some of the approaches used, as compared to rural communities. The greater use of mass media becomes more necessary in the larger, more complex communities.

In every one of our communities, there are many official and nonofficial groups organized to study and carry out programs. We believe the uniqueness and strength of community-development committees rests on their not having any official power and not becoming directly active in any particular cause. These people are the thinkers and planners, not the ones to carry out the programs. Their skills are too scarce and heavily committed to allow them to become involved in the action phase of development. The members’ satisfactions must come from helping the community realistically think through its problems in an integrated manner, in helping to establish community goals, in inventing new approaches, in encouraging education when needed, in determining priorities and timing, and, finally, from seeing things happen in the community in which they know they had a part. This is the way such people have always achieved their satisfaction. The job of carrying out the programs then falls on the already established or newly established official and nonofficial action organizations. These organizations also receive the credit or blame.

There are at least two requirements for the success of such committees: (1) They must not be responsible to any action organ-
ization, and (2) they must not become involved in action as a committee.

I have seen such committees successfully organized by Cooperative Extension, the Chamber of Commerce, lawyers, bankers, and others. But the ones that were successful over a period of time had to abide by the previously mentioned restraints. They also had to be served by some unusual individual or some organization.

In Indiana, we have thirty such committees operating. They vary from a county like Parke, with 15,000 people, to a county like Lake, with 600,000 people. Lake County includes such cities as East Chicago, Hammond, and Gary. The committees in Parke have been operating for fifteen years; the one in Lake, for four years. Such committees usually meet regularly once a month. They are working on problems from human relations to parks, governmental reorganization, and solid-waste disposal. The most important thing is that they are working on problems that are important to the people of their communities.