

CHAPTER 6

HISTORICALLY BLACK COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES: UNTAPPED RESOURCES FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Marcia E. Kingslow
Kingslow Associates LLC

The theme of the 47th Annual Professional Agricultural Workers Conference, "1890-1990, A First Century of Outreach to the Rural Disadvantaged: Moving Into the 21st Century," brings feelings of pride, disappointment, and optimism. Pride in from the fact that most 1890 land grant universities as well as other historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) have maintained their historic commitment to community service and outreach. Disappointment in the fact that after 100 years poverty, disenfranchisement and neglect still impede progress for far too many rural families and communities. Optimism in the awareness that the problems facing rural communities today cannot be solved by approaches that ignore the importance of human development; that the very components so critical to rural development – human and community capacity building – have long been an area of commitment and expertise of the 1890 and other historically black universities. The challenge is to garner the support and resources needed to allow HBCUs to participate and contribute fully to the formulation of policies and programs that will shape the rural development agenda in the 1990s.

This paper examines some of the factors and policies that have affected the development of rural communities and economies. The position is taken that rural development in the South will be fragmentary at best without the full involvement of HBCUs, and that their involvement and contributions benefit more that just the African American community. Recommendations that may broaden the role of HBCUs in rural development are offered.

Changing Dynamics in Rural America

During the latter part of the 1980s, rural development became the focus of increasing attention. Largely precipitated by the farm crisis, the problems of rural communities were elevated to national prominence. Despite the inflow of people to rural areas, industrial development, and government and service sector expansion that occurred during the 1970s and early-1980s, many rural sectors were experiencing stagnation and decline. Unlike previous periods of flux the recent changes in rural America were identified as structural rather than cyclical. Rural communities were no longer driven by regional dynamics. The globalization of the Western economic model had swept the rural sector right along. A range of factors such as increasing global competition, shifting capital control, low wage rates in underdeveloped countries, natural resource depletion,

AUTHOR'S NOTE: This paper was prepared for the 47th Annual Professional Agricultural Workers Conference, December 3-5, 1989.

CITATION: Kingslow, Marcia E. "Historically Black Colleges and Universities: Untapped Resources for Rural Development," in *Outreach to the Rural Disadvantaged: Issues and Strategies for the 21st Century*, edited by Ntam Baharanyi et al., 49-56. Tuskegee, AL, Tuskegee University, 1990.

growing Third World self-sufficiency, increasing cost of production inputs and more have had great impacts on those sectors tied to the international marketplace.

Many rural communities have become dependent on economic sectors that are inextricably linked to the global economy, particularly those of manufacturing, agricultural, and extractive industries. In agriculture, for example, data show that sixty percent of all farming-dependent counties in the U.S. derive more than half their total farm sales from commodities produced for export (Sommers and Hines, 1988). Although many of these regions are comprised mainly of large-scale farming enterprises that have been able to stay in business, the policies and programs devised to help keep them afloat, coupled with market conditions and increasing input costs, have had an adverse affect on smaller producers. Many have been displaced or are dependent on off-farm employment, as there has been little room within our highly mechanized, capital-intensive agricultural system to absorb them.

Similar global forces have had an impact on manufacturing and mining. By 1984, manufacturing had grown to make up 40 percent of rural employment, compared to 9 percent in farming. Since these labor-intensive operations largely employ low-skilled, low-wage workers, and tend to be located in areas that offer few other employment options, declines in this sector can have a tremendous impact on rural areas. Natural resource dependent and extractive industries have also declined, further underscoring the shift toward a technology-oriented service economy. As many rural-based sectors scale down or move their operations offshore, the ranks of the unemployed have swelled. Many have lapsed into poverty during a time when an unprecedented number of others amassed great wealth, and corporate profits soared. Between 1978 and 1987 rural, or nonmetro, poverty rose from 13.5 percent back to the 1970 level of 16.9 percent. (Some contend that the decrease in the number of rural poor during the 1970s was not so much due to increases in the number of people moving out of poverty as it was to the number of middle- and upper-income people moving into rural areas.)

Local governments have been ill equipped to deal with rural decline. Confronted with eroding tax bases and demands for more services, many have continued to employ traditional development strategies that seek to attract large-scale industry through infrastructure development. In addition to global factors that frustrate these efforts, these initiatives are often hampered because of the poor educational and skill levels of many people who comprise the rural workforce. Other studies indicate that such factors as the racial composition of a region, and proximity to research institutions and infrastructure influence growth and development decisions (Rosenfeld, Bergman and Rubin, 1989). At a time when many observers suggest putting resources into small-scale developments that encourage entrepreneurship, many local governments have few resources to invest in the incentives needed to make this happen.

State governments have generally taken a strong stand in favor of rural development (John, Batie, and Morris, 1988), but have also been limited by shrinking resources. Reduction in federal assistance, the decentralization of program responsibilities, and the lack of clear national policy in such areas as health care, housing, childcare, and education weigh heavily on states' abilities to address rural development. Despite the interrelatedness of these issues in promoting economic well being, many still view rural development as large-scale infrastructure development, from which benefits will eventually accrue to all in society. With not enough resources to address all

communities, some planners play out a sort of economic triage – targeting resources to those communities that are already growing, and away from those that are not, regardless of the need.

Agricultural Sector Dominance and the Lack of National Policy

Although the nature of development affords each community or region the flexibility of creating solutions that are compatible with its own dynamics, the lack of a national rural development policy and adequate program support has hindered progress. Despite the historic persistence of rural poverty, rural development policy has, since the 1930s, been a patchwork effort involving several agencies – mainly those of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The creation of rural infrastructure and services were key components of the westward expansion of the family farming system in the late 18th century. The industrialization of agriculture that occurred during the mid-1800s marked the separation of rural development and agriculture, and resulted in the domination of agricultural interests in most rural affairs. Past administrations sought to develop rural policy separate from agricultural policy, but farm interests have maintained control. Issues of rural poverty have paled in importance compared to issues of concern to the powerful farm lobby; earlier rural development proposals that implied a redistribution of resources were perceived as threats to farm program subsidies, and hence rejected (de Janvry, Runsten and Sadoulet, 1988).

The Rural Development Act of 1972 sought to bolster nonagricultural economic development, research and extension, and credit systems, but was basically used to facilitate industrialization. True, many rural jobs were created, but many were low-skill, low-wage positions, while others were out of reach of the average worker. Moreover, many new businesses were owned by outside corporate interests, which took profits out of the local area. Given the ideological perspective of that period, however, benefits of industrialization were expected to trickle down to those at the bottom of the economic ladder. Late in the Carter Administration attempts were made to refocus rural development to include community-based initiatives with the passage of the Small Community and Rural Development Policy Act of 1979 and the Rural Development Policy Act of 1980. However, the Reagan Administration did not embrace these objectives. By the mid-1980s, as economic dislocation and poverty raged and rural communities begged for alternative solutions, USDA shut the Office of Rural Development Policy. Other federal agencies with resources that could contribute to rural development, such as the Economic Development Administration; Small Business Administration; Appalachian Regional Commission; Tennessee Valley Authority; and the Departments of Health and Human Services, Housing and Urban Development, Labor, and Transportation, were scaled down as well (Weidemann and Kingslow, 1989).

That USDA fails to loosen the rural development reigns and develop viable consortia with other agencies is indicative of a degree of myopia within the larger agricultural community. Internal USDA research amply describes the national and international factors that have precipitated a structural change in the rural economy, moving it away from agricultural and natural resource dependence toward a system based on services and nondurable goods (Brown et al., 1988). This research also describes the limitations of the rural workforce to compete effectively in a service and information economy, and the national implications of this. The false notions that rural development is synonymous with agricultural development (Swanson, 1989), and that

agricultural development can only occur through large-scale, capital-intensive initiatives that spread the benefits throughout rural communities have impeded the development of a balanced, thoughtful, long-term rural policy.

The notion of enhancing overall rural well being through trickle-down agricultural development has also stymied, albeit indirectly perhaps, Congressional attempts to strengthen research and experimentation efforts in rural development through agricultural appropriations, since the land grant university system has taken its cues from the Reagan Administration policy and downsized its rural development research capabilities. Similarly, during the same period, USDA Extension Service, the primary agency responsible for outreach and technology transfer, has reduced overall staff and decreased community development positions. Despite discrete accomplishments in some rural areas, a void of rural development data, research, and models persists within the land grant system, further affecting at-risk communities.

Recently there have been encouraging signs within USDA and the land grant university system that rural development is gaining in importance and that these institutions are looking beyond their immediate universe for partnerships (New Alliances for Rural Development, 1989). Likewise, some rural development legislation drafted for consideration in the 1990 farm bill debate looks beyond agriculture to address the range of factors that preclude rural communities from full participation in economic and job development strategies. They include capital and technical assistance for small business development, community and business infrastructure development, improved health care and education, and the need for leadership development. While other legislative proposals reflect the status quo of industrialization strategies, it is refreshing to see new options that reflect the realities of a changing economy and attempt to directly impact the lives of those outside the mainstream.

Southern Initiatives

The South poses an interesting laboratory for rural development. It offers challenges unmatched by other regions of the country. These distinctions were captured and brought to national attention during the mid- to late-1980s in a number of reports by such organizations as the Southern Growth Policies Board, the Southern Rural Development Center, MDC, Inc., and organizations supported by the Ford Foundation and the Aspen Institute's Rural Economic Policy Program. These studies underscored the fact that the Sunbelt's sunrise of the 1970s did not shine its light on all; that many of its region's rural communities and small towns were overshadowed by the growth of southern cities and growth centers.

For example, in 1986, 22.4 percent of rural residents in the South lived below the poverty level, compared to 16.9 percent nationally. More of the nation's nonmetro, or rural, poor live in the South – 54 percent, compared to 23.3 percent in the Midwest, 14.5 percent in the West, and 6.6 percent in the Northeast. USDA has documented that areas with persistently low-incomes tend to have higher proportions of minorities, female-headed households and other disadvantaged, and experience low growth (Hoppe, 1985). In addition, 97 percent of all African Americans who are poor and live in nonmetro areas are in the South. African Americans comprise approximately 42 percent of the rural poor living in the South (Porter, 1989).

The South still leads the country in low educational expenditures and high rates of functional illiteracy. The structural shifts in the economy have made industrial development less effective, while the outmigration of capital and brainpower from the region and the lack of technical infrastructure hinder small business and entrepreneurial efforts. The region's competitive position has been further weakened by its high human development needs. It is unlikely that its wealth of natural resources and recreational amenities is sufficient to sustain equitable growth and development.

The new studies of southern rural development call for innovative strategies, including the strengthening of disadvantaged communities, facilitating small business development, and strengthening the workforce through a strong educational system. More recently, the Lower Mississippi Delta Development Commission has called for increased participation of community-based nonprofit organizations in human capacity building, leadership development, and service delivery (LMDDC, 1989). Importantly, an expanded role for higher education institutions in rural development was identified repeatedly.

Higher education institution can be an important resource to any human development strategy, particularly if they are attuned to grassroots needs. They are also a logical source of technical assistance to government units, private business, and community organizations that have inadequate resources to undertake development alone. They can generate an up-to-date research base of rural development information, testing new models in their communities and refining them for broader replication. Colleges and universities are also a stabilizing factor in local areas. They create jobs and support the local economy and, in some cases, generate new ventures that stimulate growth.

The Importance of HBCUs to Southern Rural Development

When speaking of a higher education role in rural development in the South, it is imperative that historically black colleges and universities play a key role. To better understand their importance it may be helpful to distinguish the types of development that are needed to move the South forward.

Economic Development is regarded as an action that improves an area's competitive advantage by increasing productivity, income, and jobs. It is generally capital-intensive and associated with large ventures and infrastructure improvements. It may or may not produce public benefits.

Community Development is also designed to improve an area, but generally benefits those that live there. Community participation is a critical component, with emphasis placed on leadership and organizational development.

Rural Development has traditionally been used as a synonym for economic development. However, as the need for human, organizational and leadership capacity building takes on greater importance, rural development strategies have begun to embrace a more community-oriented definition. Considering the dynamics of the South this duality of definition becomes increasingly important. It is critical, however, that program planners and evaluators recognize the distinction in definition as well as the objective of various development strategies. Caution must

be exercised in using traditional economic development criteria (job, investments, productivity) as the measure of community development efficacy.

Weidemann and Kingslow (1989) identified a number of factors that suggest a broader role is warranted for HBCUs in rural development, nationally as well as in the South. Several deserve elaboration.

1. HBCUs have a historic commitment to community service and outreach. Many identify community service in their mission statements as being as important as their teaching commitment. There appears to be widespread administrative support for proactive outreach programs to support rural and community development.
2. With the majority of HBCUs located in the South and found in or near rural areas, their services are in increasing demand by communities traditionally not served by them. HBCUs serve as resources to address regional problems of economies in transition, not just "black problems," as some would rather relegate them to.
3. HBCUs have a vested interest in the African American community and other disadvantaged groups that mainstream institutions have failed to serve.
4. HBCUs have an excellent track record of producing community and national leaders. More African American Ph.D.s attended HBCUs as undergraduates than attended predominantly white institutions. HBCUs have developed impressive models of grassroots leadership development as well.
5. Partially due to discriminatory funding patterns in research and extension, HBCUs have become specialists in many small-scale systems and applied research. Many of these approaches, previously shunned by mainstream institutions, are now looked to as critical components of development strategies for the 1990s.
6. HBCUs play a vital role in stimulating business development and providing services to local entrepreneurs. They are often the only source of technical assistance in their communities.
7. HBCUs and particularly the 1890 land grant universities have a unique entrée to the national rural development policy debate by virtue of their strong presence in Washington D.C. legislative circles, their ties to USDA, and the national commitment to enhancing HBCU participation in federal programs. Similar influence exists at the state level.

There are also a number of limitations that hinder HBCUs' ability to expand their rural development activities.

1. The disproportionate lack of funding going to HBCUs, compared to predominantly white institutions, severely affects their ability to undertake new research and development new models and applications. The general bias against rural development on the part of many

policy makers, and particularly against initiatives that address at-risk communities, poses additional obstacles as HBCUs seek new resources.

2. Problems associated with inadequate funding have been further exacerbated by cuts in federal student aid, and the shift from grants to loans that occurred during the 1980s. HBCUs have historically served high numbers of economically disadvantaged students. Federal cuts have restricted access of these students to higher education. The direct loss of grant-assisted tuition has forced many HBCUs to curtail rural development as well as campus-based activities.
3. Inadequate support forces HBCUs to spread resources thinly. Teaching responsibilities and an increasing involvement in international development minimize the availability of staff for domestic rural development activities.
4. Private foundation and corporate support of HBCU-initiated rural development is lacking. It also appears that HBCUs are not highly visible in national rural and economic development networks.
5. Special initiatives, like the White House Initiative on Historically Black Colleges and Universities, that are designed to strengthen HBCU participation in federal programs lack specific reference to rural and economic development.

Summary and Recommendations

Rural America has become increasingly vulnerable to exogenous forces and has undergone structural change in its economy. These changes have hit the South harder than other regions and undermined its competitive position. Traditional rural development policies have failed to adequately address issues of equity, poverty, and community-based development. Broad-base rural development has been hindered by the dominance of agricultural interests in decision-making circles, despite the evidence that agriculture accounts for a shrinking share of the rural economy. The problems of rural communities have grown beyond the scope of a purely agricultural perspective. There is a human dimension associated with the problems confronting rural communities that calls for creative approaches to building capacity, developing leadership, and improving individual and community self-worth. When coupled with scale-appropriate economic and technological options, this facilitates greater community participation, control and growth.

Historically black colleges and universities have a rich history of providing outreach and extension services that strengthen the human capacity component upon which successful development strategies are based. They are also experts in developing systems appropriate to the scale of community-based needs. However, the resources of these institutions are thinly stretched, and the problems continue to grow.

More people must become familiar with the HBCU legacy of community outreach and service. Particularly in the South, but not limited to this region, HBCUs must become full partners in developing the rural development agenda of the 1990s and beyond. The following

recommendations are suggested as means of broadening the HBCU rural development profile, and refining public and private support of HBCU-initiated rural development. These recommendations are elaborations of those offered in Weidemann and Kingslow (1989).

1. Undertake a national effort to highlight and strengthen HBCU activity in rural development in order to facilitate their participation in shaping the rural development agenda of the future.
2. Convene a national conference on the involvement of HBCUs in rural development. Participants would include citizens, researchers, practitioners, policy makers, community-based organizations, business leaders and others within and without the HBCU community who are committed to attacking the problems confronting at-risk and limited resource communities.
3. Compile a full inventory of rural community and economic development activities undertaken by HBCUs. These data could become the foundation for a clearinghouse of HBCU technical assistance and resources.
4. Increase the number of HBCU researchers studying rural development issues and establish a national working group of experts devoted to the economic betterment of HBCU-served communities.
5. Conduct an informational campaign aimed at public agencies, foundations, and others in the rural development network to publicize HBCU accomplishments and resources.
6. Capitalize on HBCUs' influence in Congressional and State legislatures to leverage funding for rural development activities.
7. Develop mechanisms that will allow HBCU staff as well as administrators to keep abreast of policy and funding initiatives so that they can quickly position themselves to compete for resources.
8. Develop more consortia within the HBCU community and with predominantly white institutions, businesses and community-based organizations in order to better target regional resources and minimize fragmentation.
9. Lobby the White House Initiative on Historically Black Colleges and Universities to specifically target rural development as a priority and to direct federal agencies to respond accordingly.

REFERENCES

- Brown, David L., J. Norman Reid, Herman Bluestone, David A. McGranahan, and Sara M. Mazie, editors. Rural Economic Development in the 1980's: Prospects for the Future. Washington, DC: USDA/ERS/ARED, Rural Development Research Report No. 69, 1988.
- Commission on the Future of the South. Halfway Home and a Long Way to Go. Research Triangle Park, NC: Southern Growth Policies Board. 1986.
- de Janvry, Alain, David Runsten and Elisabeth Sadoulet. "Toward a Rural Development Program for the United States: A Proposal," in Summers, 1988.
- Hoppe, Robert A. Economic Structure and Change in Persistently Low-Income Nonmetro Counties. Washington, DC: USDA/ERS, Rural Development Research Report No. 50, 1985.
- John, Dewitt, Sandra Batie, and Kim Norris A Brighter Future for Rural America? Strategies for Communities and States. Washington, DC: National Governors' Association. 1988.
- Lower Mississippi Delta Development Commission. Body of the Nation. Memphis, TN: Lower Mississippi Delta Development Commission . 1989.
- New Alliances for Rural Development: Colloquium Proceedings from Land Grant Universities Presidents and Science and Education/United States Department of Agriculture Administrators. University Park, PA: Northeast Regional Center for Rural Development. No. 56, February 1989.
- Osborn, Sandra. Rural Policy in the United States: A History. Washington, DC: Library of Congress, Congressional Research Service. 1988.
- Porter, Kathryn H. Poverty in Rural America: A National Overview. Washington, DC: Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. 1989.
- Rosenfeld, Stuart A., Edward M. Bergman, and Sarah Rubin. Making Connections: After the Factories Revisited. Research Triangle Park, NC: Southern Growth Policies Board. 1989.
- Sommers, Judith E. and Fred K. Hines. The U.S. Farm Sector: How Agricultural Exports Are Shaping Rural Economies in the 1980's. Washington, DC: USDA/ERS/ARED, Agriculture Information Bulletin No. 541, 1988.
- Summers, Gene S. et al. Agriculture and Beyond: Rural Economic Development. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin, College of Agricultural and Life Sciences. 1988.
- Swanson, Louis E. "The Rural Development Dilemma." Resources. No. 96, (Summer) 1989.
- Weidemann, Celia Jean and Marcia E. Kingslow. The Involvement of Historically Black Colleges and Universities in Economic Development. Washington, DC: Global Exchange, Inc. 1989.