

PREFACE

COMMUNITIES ACROSS THE UNITED STATES and around the world have been devastated by the ups and downs of the global economy for over a generation. Economic factors in combination with scourges such as racism, classism, and sexism have created conditions such that countless inner-city neighborhoods could aptly be described as war zones. Burned-out and abandoned buildings, vacant and overgrown lots, drug dealing, murder, homelessness and hopelessness, adults and kids hanging on the streets for lack of jobs and boredom at school, failing public schools, general neighborhood blight, and myriad other problems persistently plague these areas.

In some cities, civic leaders see the salvation of these areas in a kind of gentrification. A new baseball stadium is built. A waterfront is redeveloped. Houses are rehabbed. People with higher incomes start moving in. Police begin to patrol regularly, crime goes down, property values increase, businesses open up, and voilà, a hot new neighborhood is born. But the former population is gone. This kind of neighborhood change is not community economic development. It is development, even economic development, but it occurs because of unbridled market forces. In a very real sense, the community is left out of the development process. And in actuality, most of the residents who lived in these neighborhoods for years or even generations are forced out only to relocate to another devastated part of town. The existing residents do not profit from the redevelopment and gentrification of these neighborhoods; the speculators and middle- to upper-middle-class people who move there do. Community economic development is an alternative method of economic development: it is an antidote to development

based on unbridled market forces, and it has demonstrated success in cities across the country in a wide variety of neighborhoods.

This book presents to social workers the field of community economic development (CED), or, as some have begun to refer to it, community building. There is a rich history behind this practice, much of which has not been part of today's social workers' education and training. This is ironic because, in many ways, the story of this field of practice is the story of social work. The origins of the CED field owe much to social workers, especially community organizers, and CED methods are right in line with the mission and values of social work and the existing skill set of social work practitioners. Yet, with few exceptions, social workers infrequently take employment today in the CED field.

Reversing this trend could bring the gifts of social work to one of the most important challenges to the continued success of CED in low-income, culturally diverse communities. We believe that CED has entered a new stage of practice, a more comprehensive community-development approach to economic development that calls for a closer relationship between business and real estate development and family self-reliance and community empowerment—areas long the strength of social workers. Revealing the relevance of CED to effective social work practice is the primary motive for writing this book.

In this book, we provide a framework of CED that social workers can use as a baseline for practice as well as innovative methods for incorporating social work practices and skills into the CED field. We explore how social workers' core values for working with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities align with CED practice. And we demonstrate why coursework in CED practice should be fully incorporated into social work curricula across the country.

The first step in understanding how to use CED methods is to understand what CED is, and we have devoted the book's first section to explaining CED thoroughly and how it has evolved over the past several decades. For the purposes of this book, we define CED as the practice of revitalizing the economic, physical, and social infrastructures of low-income communities in ways that enable the residents of those communities to benefit from that revitalization; indeed, the CED process involves and empowers them. This people focus is essential. CED is not only about infrastructure improvements—these would make little difference in and of themselves

if the community's residents could not benefit from them. When a community is revitalized using a CED approach, the community does not act against but rather with the individual. In fact, the community acts with groups of people, as one individual can rarely revitalize an area alone. *Co-development* is the watchword in successful CED endeavors.

Furthermore, CED benefits the community because the community's residents retain the wealth from the revitalization rather than seeing the wealth flow to those who live outside the community, such as property speculators. CED practitioners use private sector tools and attract private sector investments to create a sustainable economic and social dynamic in the community. CED makes the community viable over the long term, reconnecting it to the mainstream economy and the social and political structures of its region through partnerships of organizations in the community and the public, private, and nonprofit sectors. Profits are recycled in the community and resources are replenished because reinvestment is sustained without major subsidies. The concrete benefits to the community might be reaped by individuals in the form of empowerment or housing or by new and viable institutions owned or controlled by a cross-section of community residents, such as local businesses. The endgame is a community that is economically viable and sustainable and people who successfully participate in the regional economy.

In explaining how organizations accomplish these kinds of benefits to communities and their residents, we stress several major themes throughout this book. One is collective action or, as some people prefer to call it, community empowerment. With individual freedoms come both personal and community responsibility. And as people get involved in rebuilding their neighborhoods, they are empowered, and multiple benefits are also reaped by the community. True CED empowers neighborhood residents to take charge of the planning and rebuilding process. Using a CED approach to neighborhood renewal improves the quality of life for individuals and the community as a whole, thus encouraging residents to stay there. It produces a sustainable local economy in which market forces enable residents to improve their geographic space. It also prioritizes providing necessary social and human services for residents who are in need as the sense of community responsibility instilled through CED methods grows.

Another key theme is that CED methods represent a balance between market forces and public benefit in practice; neither unfettered capitalism

nor complete government intervention will produce thriving inner-city neighborhoods. CED practitioners seek a reasonable market-oriented approach to community development that employs the techniques of private sector development in partnership with private developers to bring as much conventional private investment to the revitalization of the neighborhood as possible. But CED also involves enough safeguards and public or government involvement to ensure that the major vehicles of CED—be it the community development corporation (CDC) or other development initiatives that rebuild the neighborhood—do not become desensitized to the community or vulnerable to the dangers of the marketplace.

It is also important to note that CED is an evolving practice. The field is in constant flux, and it realizes a new level of maturity—and complexity—as each decade passes. Community builders are daily trying new experiments—some succeeding, some failing—that expand CED practices. Much information about what works and what does not is not recorded in any fashion, at least in one that would allow practitioners to find it easily. Keeping up with the latest in the field is a challenge even for experienced practitioners. This book provides a thorough introduction to CED, now when CED is at a crucial turning point. However, those who intend to practice in the CED field should continue seeking information about changes, experiments, and the evolution of CED techniques. The Internet certainly helps in tracking these changes and is an excellent starting point for CED study.

CED practice is also multifaceted and comprehensive. It is multidisciplinary, calling on some of the skills one might learn in a variety of graduate schools: urban planning, business, and law as well as social work. As we shall see, the multidisciplinary and comprehensive CED approach is more often referred to as “community building,” and there are many positive examples of significant change happening at the local level across the country. Some of these will be highlighted, and we discuss the importance of this shift in the book. We postulate that a “new wave” of CED is on the scene, one that has been recognized only recently.

Finally, we believe that CED is an effective method of addressing and ameliorating in concrete terms the issues of poverty, despair, powerlessness, racism, and income and gender inequality—the very issues that social workers face in their work with individuals, groups, organizations, and communities every day. CED organizations and projects put these issues

at the forefront of their analyses of problems and in their mechanisms for planning and operating in order to overcome the “business-as-usual” economic, political, and social dynamics that disadvantaged communities experience in the first place. CED succeeds precisely because it challenges existing policies and practices through concrete projects and programs that produce immediate revitalization outcomes as well as by influencing the adoption of new policies at all governmental levels. Today’s social workers should be right at home learning to be effective CED practitioners and improving lives for low-income people in communities in the United States and around the world.

*COMMUNITY ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT IN SOCIAL WORK*

