Center for Community Change

Strengthening Community Voices In Policy Reform

*Community-Based Monitoring, Learning and Action Strategies
For an Era of Devolution and Change*

A Special Report Developed for the Annie E. Casey Foundation

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EDITORIAL NOTES ADDED SEPTEMBER 7, 2016 BY ANDREW MOTT

Larry Parachini wrote this report with my help almost two decades ago, and it still is highly relevant to issues of government accountability, democratic involvement in policy debates, and social and institutional reform. I have not edited the following report in any way, but I did want to add some general observations and updating which may be helpful for today's readers.

First, the Casey Foundation chose not to follow the report's recommendations and has not emphasized community-based action research and empowerment among its priorities. This report was never published or circulated, and it has been unavailable until this time. Nevertheless, the lessons have strong implications for the US today.

Second, the US Department of Agriculture decided not to publish the final report from the major research and monitoring report which was developed by citizen teams working with the University of Tennessee and Macarthur Award-winner Professor John Gaventa. Apparently, it's findings were too controversial for the Department.

Third, there has been an increasing frightening groundswell of public criticism of government at all levels as being unaccountable and unresponsive to the public will, as severely limiting opportunities for the public to learn about, evaluate and influence public policies which have an enormous impact upon their lives. This has led to growing cynicism and anger and dangerously low levels of voter participation.

It is our conviction that what we called "community-based monitoring, learning and action" can be enormously beneficial is helping ordinary people become far more active in revitalizing our democracy and rebuilding public confidence.

PREFACE

Over more than a decade, the Annie E. Casey Foundation has systematically approached a series of issues related to children and families. Its goal has been to stimulate reform in the key systems which affect life chances for children. It has done this through a series of important Initiatives, each of which has built upon the experience of the Foundation's earlier work.

Over time, the Foundation's emphasis and strategies have shifted substantially. In particular, when evaluations of the early Initiatives confirmed the importance of having a strong community component to systems reform efforts, the Foundation increased its focus on particular neighborhoods and the involvement of grassroots community groups.

It is our understanding that the Foundation is now entering a new phase in its development, concentrating a major portion of its future work on investing in particular metropolitan areas and states. As it makes those investments, it will be assessing how it can most effectively bring together the three main thrusts of its work over the years -- a commitment to systems reform, a conviction about the central importance of research, analysis and reliable data in helping drive reform, and a commitment to community involvement in systems change. It will also be pursuing its strong interest in issues related to devolution of federal programs to state and local administration.

We very much hope that this report will be helpful to the Foundation as it continues its ongoing process of reassessment and redesign. We strongly believe that the Community-Based Monitoring, Learning and Action strategies reviewed in this paper illustrate particularly effective ways of closing the often daunting gap between the grassroots and systems reform, including issues related to block grants and devolution. Done well, community-based monitoring and learning can provide ordinary citizens with the data and understanding they need to take informed action in constructive alliances with others to make sure that essential services and programs are accountable, responsive and of maximum benefit to those who most need help and new opportunity.

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INTRODUCTION

As we approach the new millennium, the long-held conservative vision for a stripped-down federal government of the United States has built powerful momentum and is now moving inexorably into place, piece-by-piece.

This vision seeks to incorporate a wide spectrum of changes. It features devolution of domestic policy authority to the states with few strings attached, lower taxes to spur investment and economic growth, restricted regulatory powers, severely reduced spending on domestic social programs, accommodation to the dictates of a balanced budget, privatization of government services, and dramatically increased reliance on the private sector in addressing the needs of the poor. The vision resonates strongly with the leaders of both major political parties and the general public. For better or worse, this rapidly emerging, lean and limited model of government looks to be around for quite awhile.

While many critical policy and structural issues remain contentious and unresolved, the transformation is already more comprehensive and radical than any reforms the federal government has initiated since the New Deal. It is having very significant if unpredictable effects on the economy and the stock market, state and local governments, low-income communities from the West Side of Philadelphia, to East LA, to Yellow Creek, and virtually every other aspect of society.

Long-standing federal programs targeted to the poor are the highest priority for "reform"[1] efforts. These are the main programs being terminated, folded into block grants providing wide latitude for state government decision-making, or otherwise revamped to save money for tax cuts or budget balancing. By one recent estimate, cuts in low-income programs already enacted would, by the year 2020, be six and one-half times as deep as the reductions made in means-tested entitlement programs in the 1980s, the era which set previous records in cutting basic programs for the poor.[2]

The most publicized and far-reaching of the federal reforms thus far signed into law -- the "Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996" --

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[1] For many, the emerging conservative vision of government represents a diminution or abandonment of government rather than "reform." Throughout the paper, we use the word reform -- in its neutral sense "to form again" (not, "to improve") -- as a synonym for the massive governmental changes underway.

[2] The Conference Agreement on the Welfare Bill, Washington, DC: The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 1995.

"ends the welfare system as we know it." A block grant to states has replaced AFDC, JOBS and other key ingredients of the federal "safety net," representing a $54 billion cut over six years in low income benefit programs. According to the Urban Institute, this reform is seen as likely to increase poverty, moving 2.6 million people, including 1.1 million children, into the ranks of the poor, and causing a decline in income for 10% of all American families.[3]

Other analyses and investigations by a variety of researchers and organizations project adverse impacts on poor people from changes in various laws, programs, funding levels or practices that are products of reform, including major cuts in public and assisted housing, job training, and social service programs. The Center for Community Change's own continuing interactions with and experience in low-income communities underscore these findings.

Looking beyond the numbers, many are convinced that the general thrust of the reforms is long overdue. Block grants in particular are seen by some as opening-up attractive possibilities for program design and implementation that will be far more responsive, creative and effective -- and beneficial to poor people -- than what the federal government has been able to achieve. Most who embrace the notion of block grants agree that the capacities of most state and local governments will need to be bolstered to ensure success, but believe "Problems are usually solved better by people who know the situation and who have to live with the consequences than by faraway bureaucrats. Properly administered, with honest evaluation and good communication from one state to another, block grants can bring greater freedom, less red tape, lower expense and faster learning."[4]

Whatever one's philosophy of government or views about the reforms, there can be some agreement that many long-term, basic assumptions about government and its responsibilities to the poor -- in place until just a couple of years ago -- are no longer operative. Those working in the interests of the poor need fresh thinking and strategies if they are to meet the challenges and capitalize on the opportunities which are now opening up.

This paper focuses on how poor people themselves are becoming and can become far more effective in creating positive social change, not only in influencing future

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[3] Peter Edelman, "The Worst Thing Clinton Has Done," Atlantic Monthly, March 1997, p. 46. The recent balanced budget/tax cut agreement restored some benefits to immigrants and others, somewhat reducing the impact of welfare reform in increasing poverty.

[4] Donella Meadows, "Block Grants: Pro and Con," The Neighborhood Works, August/September, 1995, p. 7.

government decision-making, but in developing, articulating, and working for their vision of community and a healthier civil society. The strategies brought together and reviewed in the paper -- and the lessons to be taken from them for future application -- are especially well-suited for this era of devolution of federal programs to state and local government control. These strategies, which we call **"Community-Based Monitoring, Learning and Action"**, involve low-income people in a three-fold process: *monitoring* government programs; *learning* about programs and policies through a rigorous research process; and then taking collective *action* on the basis of the data gathered and lessons learned.

To develop the paper, we have surveyed a wide range of local, national and international experiences, both past and present. Those discussed vary considerably. However, all are initiatives marked by common elements that are critical in involving poor people in bringing about the kinds of systemic reform which benefits them and their communities.

We believe that community-based groups, policy makers, funding sources and others will find that the strategies and lessons this paper reviews provide intriguing and important answers which they should consider as they decide how to work toward making government programs more accountable and effective, and addressing issues of crucial importance to poor people.

STRENGTHENING GRASSROOTS PARTICIPATION IN EVALUATING AND REFORMING POLICIES

There appears to be a growing consensus across the country that the most serious problems of America's poor communities can only be solved if poor people assume leadership for bringing about positive change -- beginning in their own neighborhoods.[5] This conviction crosses political and ideological boundaries, finding support from the right and left, and from many ordinary citizens and leaders who are searching for new answers to our country's problems.

In broad terms, growth in support of the view that the poor can and should take charge springs from three streams of thought: 1) an increasing perception that our big institutions, especially government, are failing us and are not good instruments for tackling the toughest problems challenging our cities and rural communities; 2) a strong wave of belief that people must do more for themselves, and, especially among poor

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[5] Andrew H. Mott, Building Systems of Support for Neighborhood Change,≅ a report to the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation (Washington, DC: The Center for Community Change, 1997), p. 1.

people, a rising determination to end dependency on government; and 3) mounting conviction, after three decades of experimentation and growth, that grassroots community groups have demonstrated their capacity to tackle community issues and to help make government more accountable and effective in addressing the needs of low-income people and their neighborhoods.[6]

In a recent report, CCC discussed what in general a bottom-up grassroots approach to change entails:

Such an approach is especially needed to address the seemingly intractable problems of very poor neighborhoods which suffer from decline, middle and working class flight, instability, a weakening of social fabric, waning hope, and a growing sense of powerlessness and alienation. There is broad recognition that success in the face of those obstacles requires the transformation of people and relationships. It requires the rebuilding of self-esteem, hope, and a stronger sense of community. It requires the development of community leadership and institutions through a bottom-up process. These are the essential steps in rebuilding the social capital of those communities.[7]

A report from the Casey Foundation made similar findings:

The past several decades have produced powerful evidence that social programs aimed at reducing specific problems of individuals in poor communities are not effective over the long term in either changing lives or improving community conditions. To positively impact the lives of poor people, many policy makers now believe, requires a reshaping of key social elements in their communities, usually involving a shift from reliance on strategies designed and operated by "experts" toward reliance on approaches that involve local residents and organizations.[8] *(emphasis added).*

The emerging consensus ratifies what has long been the belief and *modus operandi* of community-based groups tackling critical social and economic issues. For several decades, many have been working to solve problems from the bottom-up, convinced that positive change demands leadership from those most affected by the issues requiring resolution. They have sought to develop their constituencies' skills, resources and power to work for change, to help them take their appropriate seats at

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[6] *Ibid.*, pp. 1 - 2.

[7] *Ibid.*, p. 4.

[8] Lauren J. Kotloff, Phoebe A. Roaf, and Michelle Alberti Gambone, The Plain Talk Planning Year: Mobilizing Communities to Change, A Report Prepared for the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Public Private Ventures, Spring 1995, p. I.

decision-making tables, and to get positive results benefiting their constituencies and their communities as a whole.

Increasingly, however, these groups are faced with the realization that the impacts of governmental reform and a vast array of complicated issues whose genesis may be in Mexico, Japan or the board room of the Federal Reserve, require sophisticated and broad-based strategic work outside their experience. Many are seeking to build their capacities to tackle the complex issues, to work in new ways to effect policy changes, and to ally with others for influence. But resources and support for taking these steps are exceedingly scarce.

For example, while there has been growing recognition of the importance of involving grassroots groups in community revitalization and in efforts to improve schools and services, there has been little support for efforts to involve low-income people in processes which help them analyze the impact of current and proposed public policies, help others in their communities to understand these issues, and then work collectively to ensure that their voices are heard when policy decisions are made, when systems are reformed.

As the latest wave of devolution moves to the states and local jurisdictions, grassroots groups have much to offer. Rooted in their communities, determined to see conditions improve, intimately familiar with the strengths and weaknesses of current and past programs, organizations of low-income people represent a major source of energy for and commitment to real reform which leads to more accountable, better designed programs. However, to play that role with maximum effectiveness, grassroots groups will need help expanding their capacity to monitor and evaluate current and possible alternative policies. Greatly increased financial and other support for Community-Based Monitoring, Learning and Action strategies -- as discussed in this paper -- would enable poor people to take-on these and other challenges with increasing skill and effectiveness, in cooperation with allies in the broader society.

EXAMINING COMMUNITY-BASED MONITORING, LEARNING AND ACTION STRATEGIES

Survey Considerations.   The primary objective of our exploration was to examine the "field" of "citizen monitoring and related experiences," to focus on a number of significant experiences within that "field," and to learn more about the utility and effectiveness of these experiences in an era of devolution and change.

Conducting the survey required that we develop an operational definition of the "field", drawing on the advice of the project's advisory committee and others with whom we consulted. We decided to concentrate on those efforts that included all of the following elements:

1) *monitoring and/or research by poor people* of targeted government or private sector institutions, policies or practices to gather and analyze data essential for strategies of change;

2) *participatory learning processes* to build the research and/or monitoring skills and other capacities of poor people, and to involve them in determining strategic goals, objectives and plans; and

3) *strategic action* directly involving poor people in efforts *intended to influence* the targeted institutions, policies or practices.

We saw the elements of our definition as a continuous, interactive process -- **community-based monitoring // learning // action // ongoing monitoring, learning, action** // [9] -- with each element reinforcing the others in an on-going cycle. We looked for experiences in which those involved conceptualized their work in this way (as opposed to compartmentalizing these elements or seeing monitoring or learning or action as an end in itself). We then took an inclusive approach, looking broadly to the fields of government reform, research and evaluation, community organization, and leadership development to find examples of effective work involving community people in the three central elements of this paradigm -- monitoring/research, learning, and action on policy issues.

To help focus our study further we used four additional criteria. We were most interested in learning about strategies in which: 1) *the primary research objective is monitoring issues of devolution, deregulation or accountability; 2) program evaluation*

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[9]   The University of Tennessee's Learning Initiative depicts this as a learning circle.

through data collection and analysis is critical to effectiveness; 3) *poor people take strong leadership roles*; and 4) *participatory learning processes are marked by continuity and depth,* not one-shot deals.

We found that this approach provided us with a very helpful "lens" through which to view and sort out a wide variety of systems reform and bottom-up social change strategies. We then decided to coin a new, inclusive term to encompass the work of a wide variety of groups which draw on different traditions as they follow an essentially similar approach -- **Community-Based Monitoring, Learning and Action** -- stressing all the elements of this interactive process.[10]

As we anticipated, we identified a huge number of experiences that feature some but not all the elements of our definition. For example, many groups prioritize participatory research processes to build the capacities of poor people, but do not move from research to action, or focus on community issues rather than broader policy issues. Virtually every community organizing group utilizes some form of data collection and/or monitoring, but many do not employ participatory learning processes to involve poor people in doing the analysis, to deepen their understanding of current policies and strengthen their capacity to take the lead in advocating policy changes. And so on. These groups and their strategies that appear to be on the margins of our definition -- though enormously important for social change -- are not discussed in this paper.

Our choices of the examples to highlight stem largely from the opinions of advisors and interviewees and our own judgment about their value for the paper. They should be seen as illustrative of what can be found and learned through more systematic and extensive exploration.

Fields From Which Examples Are Drawn. Community-Based Monitoring, Learning and Action has drawn from several different histories and traditions, each of which has operated largely in isolation from the others. All of the experiences examined or noted in this paper are products of one (or more than one) of the following traditions, for which we offer brief definitions:

1) <u>Citizen Monitoring</u> -- an approach to increasing the accountability of government and other large institutions by helping low-income people analyze policy issues, develop their own policy priorities and common strategies, build alliances with others, and hold the institutions accountable for meeting low-income needs and running effective programs.[11] This approach featuring low-income people as central in research,

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[10] For purposes of this paper, we selected the word Amonitoring≅ rather than the broader term Aresearch≅ because of this paper=s specific emphasis on tracking, analyzing, and taking action on data on devolution and other public policy issues.

[11] ACitizen Monitoring,≅ Center for Community Change, October, 1996

learning and action is part of a larger tradition which has involved such civic groups as Leagues of Women Voters as well as service providers and other nonprofits in monitoring government and holding it accountable.

2) <u>Participatory Action Research</u> -- an experiential methodology, widely used in developing countries and increasingly in the United States, that combines research, adult education and sociopolitical action to build the power of the poor.[12]   Under the broad heading of Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation, several other related methodologies are employed to involve poor people in evaluating conditions affecting them and to empower them. These include Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA), Rapid Assessment Procedures (RAP), empowerment evaluations, participatory evaluations, stakeholder evaluations, and others.

3) <u>Community Organizing</u> -- an approach which seeks social change through the empowerment of indigenous communities, the development of local leaders, and the establishment of new relationships with the larger society and its institutions. At the heart of organizing is the building by disenfranchised constituencies of an independent power base that enables them to come to the table as equal negotiating partners and hold institutions and systems of power accountable.[13] CO often employs a process of research, action and reflection to build the capacities and effectiveness of constituencies involved, and to further strategic aims. This often includes detailed research into particular community or policy issues by a committee of community leaders, furthering their understanding of those issues and enabling them to develop action strategies.

4) <u>Popular Education</u> -- introduced and popularized by Paulo Freire, a Brazilian educator, and by the Highlander Center, "education for social change" is an approach to adult education based on the belief that poor people themselves have knowledge crucial to working out the solutions to their own problems.[14] It brings groups of people together to critically examine their past experiences and present situations, to analyze their needs

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[12] Several sources in <u>Action and Knowledge: Breaking the Monopoly with Participatory Action-Research,</u> (New York: The Apex Press, 1991).

[13] Sally Covington and Larry Parachini, "Community Organizing: Democratic Revitalization Through Bottom Up Reform," in <u>Foundations in the Newt Era</u> (Washington, DC: National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy, September, 1995), p. 44.

[14] Gilda Haas, with Kent Wong, "Popular Education: Building a Bridge Between Social Action and Public Policy," prepared for the Rockefeller Foundation, July 8, 1996.

and priorities, and to work collectively to solve community problems through a deeply democratic process.[15]

     5) <u>Learning Initiatives</u> -- an approach which draws from the traditions of popular education and citizen monitoring, learning initiatives generally involve the establishment of local citizen "learning teams," a strong emphasis on a popular education and learning process, the involvement of academicians or professional researchers, and the provision of outside technical assistance.

     While there have not been close links among these different traditions in the past, each has much to learn from the others, and all make use of the basic techniques of Community-Based Monitoring, Learning and Action.

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[15] Denise Nadeau, <u>Counting our Victories: Popular Education and Organizing</u> (New Westminster, BC, Canada: Repeal the Deal Productions, 1996).

KEY SURVEY FINDINGS

Our survey surfaced data on a wide range of bottom-up strategies involving monitoring, learning and action, and also on the organizations involved in planning and implementing them. We found much of the data very useful for purposes of the paper, but the quality, type and depth of the data varied considerably from one experience to another. Written information and informed opinion about some of the examples we looked at -- especially those with a long history -- is readily available, but for many other experiences the only truly useful data is in the minds of the participants.

At this stage of our exploration, we can draw only a tentative and partial overall picture of the Community-Based Monitoring, Learning and Action "field," how it is evolving, and other relevant factors. Our findings to date suggest the following:

Parallel Development.   In our survey we found that the major traditions defined above are moving in a similar direction. Movement is clearly away from single issue, single-pronged, non-strategic approaches to change, and away from mobilizing relatively uninvolved or uninformed constituencies on issues prioritized by others. The common movement is toward use of participatory learning and popular education to enable constituencies to think about the larger economic and social context affecting their communities. This process can be shaped to help people understand the views and values they share and work through their differences with others, develop longer-term strategies, and take carefully researched and planned actions which fit their contexts, priorities, and styles of operating.

Emerging Practice. Our survey also provided substantial evidence that a range of important techniques and strategies have been developing in each of these fields. Those can be extremely useful in building the capacities of poor people and their organizations, and contributing to the development of more relevant and effective policies. These techniques and strategies include:

∃   from citizen monitoring and other efforts to make government more accountable and effective -- techniques and strategies for *tracking and monitoring government* decision-making and performance, by involving constituencies in structured research and evaluation of particular government policies, programs or processes, developing an analysis of findings, drawing conclusions, making recommendations for improvement, and pressing for those changes. These strategies are also applicable for monitoring and influencing private-sector institutions.

∃   from participatory action research -- techniques and strategies for *involving constituencies in research* on an issue that takes their perspectives fully into account,

works to encourage learning and deep understanding, and gains commitment to planning and action. Work in this field also features useful techniques specifically focused on overcoming cultural and language differences across racial and ethnic lines -- that are often barriers to joint action among constituencies -- and can help to develop culturally sensitive and responsive objectives and action strategies.

∃   from community organizing -- techniques and strategies for developing leadership skills by involving emerging leaders in studying issues, analyzing power, and understanding decision-making processes (perhaps as a committee of the organization), and then deciding on actions to take, taking action, debriefing and reflecting on the action experience, and developing further plans. Community organizing groups are especially skilled at *systematically building the power and capacity of their constituents to bring about significant change*. This is done in part by moving carefully to increasingly tough issues, broadening the community base, educating the leadership, and building the alliances needed to prevail.

∃   from popular education -- techniques and strategies for bringing constituencies together for examining common problems and determining solutions based on their own knowledge; for introducing contextual learning modules (focused on economic literacy or other areas determined by the constituencies involved) that can broaden understanding and inform solutions; and for developing constituency-determined plans and actions. Popular educators are particularly strong in their emphasis on and skills in *facilitating in-depth learning by large numbers of people on the issues which concern them* (and on which they may already be well-informed but unsure of themselves and their knowledge).

Community-Based Monitoring, Learning and Action draws from the best elements of each of these traditions and applies them systematically to the task of involving people in evaluating and changing public policies. Such an approach has much to offer a country which is going through massive shifts in power, responsibility, and approaches to poverty with enormous stakes for families and children.

Building Broader Alliances for Systems Reform. These days, hardly anyone interested in systems reform is thinking that their group or effort can make a substantial difference on its own. Reformers inside and outside government are equally stymied by the seeming intractability of our problems and immovability of our systems. Our survey suggested that an increasing number of groups are not only working more strategically to build a stronger, more well informed base of constituents, but are deliberately crafting strategies in cooperation with other groups not previously thought of as allies, including people inside government. According to survey respondents, heightened awareness of common concerns and the development of new alliances have been fueled by two major factors: 1) the sense of crisis and change brought about by devolution, cutbacks, and the

ascendancy of a conservative, market-oriented direction for society, and the resulting challenges for poor people and for the non-profit sector as a whole; and
2) increasing clarity that the causes of poverty and related issues must be addressed outside as well as inside communities.

However, despite the need for broader coalitions and alliances bringing together low-income people with people of other income levels and other powerful allies, alliance-building across lines is still far more the exception than the rule:

A lot of poverty groups tend to organize poverty groups. We can't keep organizing the choir and think we're going to get somewhere.[16]

Our survey reveals that some groups involved in social change are using participatory learning and popular education to break out of this pattern and bridge differences among groups sharing common concerns. Going through a research, analysis, and educational process together can be an excellent way of developing a shared understanding of issues and their solutions. This approach is still rare. Nevertheless, it can provide a solid base of knowledge and shared experience which creates a strong sense of joint ownership and common purpose in pursuing action strategies, bringing together low-income and middle class people, and building bridges among people outside and inside government.[17]

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[16]   Steve Barrow, Children's Advocacy Institute, CA. As quoted in Rachel Timoner, "Ready or Not? An   Assessment of Low-Income Advocacy in California." (Oakland, CA: Applied Research Center, 1996).

[17] Oakland=s Urban Strategies Group provides a well-known example of such a joint research process, involving people inside government agencies with community people in reassessing particular services and programs.

EXAMPLES OF COMMUNITY-BASED MONITORING, LEARNING AND ACTION STRATEGIES

The examples of Community-Based Monitoring, Learning, and Action developed below and in the appendix include national or multi-community initiatives, initiatives on key poverty issues, and other CMLA initiatives which are instructive for people addressing issues of poverty in an era of devolution and change. Some of the examples are developed much more fully than others. They are experiences about which there is considerable information available and/or they are experiences we spent more time on, including, in several cases, conducting brief site visits. To keep the paper relatively brief, all the descriptions are partial outlines or summaries of what we learned. Where possible, we have highlighted the aspects of each which best illustrate a key element of Community-Based Monitoring, Learning and Action.

We offer some comments about the value and performance of several examples -- where we felt it appropriate based on the quality and extent of our data -- but did not attempt to do so with others.

A) EXAMPLES OF NATIONAL OR MULTI-COMMUNITY COMMUNITY-BASED MONITORING STRATEGIES

There are relatively few examples of national or multi-site efforts involving Community-Based Monitoring, Learning and Action. During the first waves of devolution, or Anew federalism,≅ several major projects were launched which gave community groups resources, research help, and national advocacy backup as they tried to monitor and influence the implementation of programs being devolved to the local level. However, since no similar multi-site monitoring projects have been launched to address the modern equivalents of those challenges -- welfare reform, public housing reform, the devolution of responsibility for workforce development, etc. -- we have surveyed multi-site CMLA projects on local issues as well as issues related to devolution in order to draw lessons regarding the potential of Community-Based Monitoring, Learning and Action.

In describing experience with CMLA on a multi-site basis, we have given primary attention to three projects, one focussing on implementation of a block grant, the second involving community-based monitoring of a somewhat narrower program for which responsibility has been devolved to the local level, and the third addressing largely local issues.

The first project, which was phased out years ago, focussed on the devolution to local and state governments of responsibility for the Community Development Block

Grant program. CDBG replaced urban renewal, model cities, and six other programs with a flexible block grant of over $4 billion, with few federal strings or safeguards. The second project is now operating in ten rural communities, helping community learning teams conduct a formative evaluation of implementation of the Empowerment Zone/ Enterprise Community Program, the Clinton Administrationɘs main initiative aimed at revitalizing declining communities, a contemporary example of devolution. The third project involves community people in a series of issues related to health care, including the devolution of more authority to states in shifting Medicaid recipients to managed care.

For each of these examples, we describe its purpose, central elements, and results, and render an informal assessment based on our survey findings. All three have catalyzed local initiatives using Community-Based Monitoring approaches which we briefly discuss. Finally, we note a few other national experiences that hold important lessons for purposes of this paper and warrant further attention.[18]

1) The National Citizens' Monitoring Project on Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) (1978 - 1982).

This project is perhaps the best known and most comprehensive national citizen monitoring initiative ever carried-out. Conceived shortly after the $4 billion CDBG legislation was enacted -- by several national organizations hearing from local groups concerned about CDBG's impacts on and value for the poor -- the CDBG Monitoring Project grew to become a sizable initiative. At its peak, the project involved local groups in monitoring CDBG's implementation in 43 cities, with over 80 groups involved at one time or another during the course of the project.

Funded by a Title IX grant from the federal Community Services Administration, the project was staffed and carried-out by Working Group for Community Development Reform, a coalition of over 75 national, regional and local organizations. The Center for Community Change served as fiscal agent for the project and played a leadership role in the Working Group, including conceiving of and designing the project based on its previous experience monitoring General Revenue-Sharing. (A parallel project carried-out by Rural America monitored CDBG's implementation in 26 rural areas during this same period.)

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[18] By national in scope, we mean that a primary objective of the nationally coordinated effort is to affect a federal policy by work in many communities; by multi-community in scope, we mean a centrally coordinated effort whose primary objectives are to affect local or regional decisions.

Purpose. The project was intended to help community groups research, monitor and evaluate CDBG's performance at the local level, and bring together a national evaluation of CDBG from the data collected and analyzed locally. The research process and documents produced by the project were aimed at helping community leaders thoroughly understand the CDBG program -- as background for taking action to improve the CDBG program's performance locally, and to work with other local organizations and the national Working Group to effect necessary changes in national policy, regulations and administration.

Key Elements. The ingredients of this project that were central to its effectiveness in applying Community-Based Monitoring, Learning and Action techniques to bring about change from the bottom-up were:

∃ funding for local and state groups so they could deploy staff accountable to them for research, organizing and coalition-building work.

∃ a rigorous research design enabling ordinary people to participate in conducting research, and through the research process -- incorporating data review and analysis, structured interviews with decision-makers, participation in public meetings, the preparation of research reports and other activities -- to learn about applicable laws, the process of decision-making, how decisions were being made, who the key decision-makers were, how the program was being administered locally, and whether the program was meeting local needs and federal standards.

∃ on-going training and technical assistance provided on-site by a highly qualified central staff with skills in the subject area, participatory and action research techniques, training and skill transfer, and the organizing, strengthening, and maintenance of local and state coalitions of grassroots organizations, service providers, churches, middle class supporters and others.

∃ national convenings twice a year for representatives of all sites -- to learn from each other, receive further training, analyze the results of the monitoring, and develop joint recommendations and action strategies to bring about policy changes.[19]

∃ the preparation of an annual national report, based on an aggregation of data from the sites, which was then presented to HUD and the Congress for review and information and used as the basis for advocacy on regulatory, administrative and policy issues.

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[19] "Citizen Monitoring."

Results. By all accounts, the project achieved major victories in improving CDBG's responsiveness to the poor -- through significant changes in regulations, monitoring policies, and legislation at the federal level, and in decisions made by public officials locally, many of which still hold today. Its primary federal impacts were: winning a requirement that 75% of all CDBG funds must benefit lower-income people; major reforms in public hearing and accountability requirements; and strengthened federal monitoring and enforcement of federal requirements.

An example of its local impact: work by the monitoring coalition led to a commitment that 60% of Philadelphia's community development funding would go to non-profit housing; that victory still stands today, almost two decades later. Some of the project's numerous other accomplishments centered on substantial growth in the capacities and sophistication of local groups to participate effectively in shaping government decisions affecting their communities, and in the development of leaders in many locales (at least two of whom went on from project and related work to hold seats in Congress, three others to chair or direct national organizations, and several others to take prominent national roles in foundations, local and state governments and other institutions).

Informal Assessment. Many observers, including several of our interviewees who had direct involvement with the initiative, see the CDBG Monitoring Project as a very useful model for bottom-up policy evaluation and change, though not a perfect one. From some reports, the project apparently suffered initially from an over-emphasis on what was needed in Washington to affect both Legislative and Executive Branch considerations. As the Working Group followed its plans to increase the emphasis on local needs and capacity-building, the central staff shaped project efforts in increasingly close collaboration with local leaders. At the same time local monitors replaced national and regional organizations on the project board, giving grassroots groups a national forum for working on federal policies related to CDBG.

This evolution was seen by virtually everyone involved as a positive accomplishment. It served to improve project performance at the local level, and to increase rather than diminish the project's national accomplishments. National and regional organizations continued to be actively involved in the Working Group, working side-by-side with local monitors to reform the CDBG program.

Respect accorded the project nationally -- respect coming from federal officials who were the focal points of the project's pressure for change as well as from others -- grew measurably as the project moved away from more typical Washington-determined national public interest work and closer to the grassroots. It was greatly reinforced by the quality and reliability of the data gathered by local monitors and by the insights it gave

policy-makers and others: in the words of federal government=s chief CDBG evaluator, AOne word summarizes our views on your research -- credibility.≅

Assistant Secretary Robert Embry, the chief official responsible for administering the CD program and currently President of the Abel Foundation, stated publicly that he found the information and insights which came from the community groups to be of tremendous help to him in getting candid feed-back on how the program was being administered locally. It thus helped him carry out his responsibilities for administering and strengthening the program.

If the project's designers were to do it over again, they would opt for earlier involvement of more local groups on the project's initial goals, objectives, and strategy development. One particularly important outcome of this, they believe, would have been earlier design and utilization of a research instrument providing maximum flexibility for local groups to focus on issues which concerned them most. The Working Group's initial research design -- subsequently altered -- focused primarily on national data needs and required local monitors to collect very detailed information, a time-consuming process that could divert time from local strategies.

Project leaders would also design a plan for on-going evaluation of the impact of each local project to better capture the project's many positive local impacts and many valuable lessons for the future. They would also commit even more effort to the long-term strengthening of local groups, and to training local leaders in needed skills areas (like research and community organizing).

All of those we interviewed agree that the most critical ingredients in the "tremendous" success the project did have, and the potential it might hold as a model for other initiatives, centered on its determination to work for change from the bottom-up and its skill in tieing together local research with national as well as local action. The high quality and responsiveness to local needs of national staff, the high quality of many of the local leaders and groups involved, the utility of the grant money support for local groups, and the quality of the research design, process and results were key factors in assuring success.

Finally, on another level, the work of the CDBG Monitoring Project offers great lessons in this new era of devolution. In an earlier phase of decentralization and decategorization, the CDBG project developed effective techniques for assessing, understanding, and addressing the issues which are instructive as the current wave of devolution hits local communities. And it identified many issues that are relevant to today's changing government reform environment, particularly reforms centered on the devolution of federal responsibilities to the states and block grants. These issues include:

a) the lack of systematic program evaluation -- especially formative evaluation designed to lead to midcourse improvements in programs -- by local and state governments and federal agencies;

b) the absence of direct evaluation and feed-back from the primary Acustomers≅ of programs intended to address poverty and community revitalization -- the low-income people who are the principal beneficiaries of these programs and who are intimately familiar with their impact, strengths, and weaknesses;

c) serious weaknesses in the capacity of local and state governments to plan and deliver needed services to the poor or to address poverty and community-building issues in ways which are culturally appropriate, well targeted, and effective;

d) the importance of federal standards, oversight and enforcement; and

e) the advantages of closely linking data collection and analysis with productive action strategies which involve and are driven by low-income community interests. On this last point, citizen monitoring and related strategies that involve community-based organizations in key roles hold considerable potential to make "special and vitally important contributions in areas overlooked by much of traditional research," especially in the context of the devolution of increased power and flexibility to state and local governments.[20]

Current Local Initiatives Catalyzed by the CDBG Monitoring Project.

Some 15 years after the CDBG Monitoring Project was ended (because the federal program providing funding was abolished), many local groups brought into the project are still operating. A number of these groups have continued to work on CDBG and related issues at the local level, in some cases playing highly instrumental roles in resource allocation decisions affecting the poor.

A prime example that remains influential in shaping a city's community development budget is the **San Francisco Information Clearinghouse (SFIC).** SFIC provides a range of assistance to some 25 housing and community development organizations in San Francisco (organized as a coalition -- CCHO), and works with and through them to communicate with residents, interact with and pressure city government officials around issues of importance, and mobilize residents on key ballot issues.

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[20] Interview with Pablo Eisenberg and review of his 9/23/80 presentation sponsored by the Center for Responsive Governance.

According to one of its co-directors, "SFIC has never stopped doing citizen monitoring. It's been a central strategy, a terrific approach. It has helped immeasurably to give us the ability both to alert our constituencies to issues and opportunities relative to the city's community development budget, and to present sound plans in influencing the city's budget decisions...We really hold their (*i.e.*, the city's) feet to the fire, and, frankly, they look to us and our constituencies for help and advice."[21]

Currently, the $20 million CDBG allocation to San Francisco provides the core funding for 80 - 90 neighborhood and other community development groups in the city, including community centers, and jobs and economic development groups as well as those involved in housing. SFIC closely tracks the city's plans for and use of CDBG and other community development funds, and serves as the central source of information for local groups about community development funding and related issues. SFIC is also the primary point of communication with city officials about grassroots needs and expectations relative to funding. SFIC's and its constituencies' access and influence today extends throughout all the relevant city agencies, with the Board of Supervisors, and the mayor's office. In short, citizen monitoring techniques and data have played a critical role in establishing and maintaining SFIC's and its constituencies' important role in San Francisco, and in assuring a high level of funding and support for neighborhood and community development work in the city -- through many tough budget battles, and through several changes of administration -- for two decades. The use of community-based monitoring, learning, and action techniques has thus made a major, continuing contribution to the accountability and targeting of government programs which were devolved to local governments many years ago.

Add quotation from Margery Turner

2) **The National EZ/EC Learning Initiative** (1995 - present).

This innovative project, developed and administered by the Community Partnership Center at the University of Tennessee, has focused on the rural side of the Clinton Administration=s major Empowerment Zone/Enterprise Community program (the EZ/EC program). That program is distributing more than a billion dollars to 104 rural and urban communities, with the goal of fostering a Abottom-up,≅ broad-gauged community development effort with heavy community involvement. The EZ/EC program is essentially a multi-site experiment in devolution, for it allows jurisdictions tremendous latitude in designing and operating their own programs, with very limited federal oversight. However, the application and planning process was specifically designed to make it unmistakably clear to applicants that they must have very heavy

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[21] Inverview with Rene Cazenave, Director, SFIC.

community involvement during the planning phase if they hoped to compete successfully for funding.

The rural EZ/EC Learning Initiative was designed to foster continuing citizen involvement in monitoring, learning, and action in ten rural EZ/EC communities. It was funded initially by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), the Ford Foundation, and the Rural Economic Policy Program of the Aspen Institute. The Learning Initiative (LI) began with a year of planning and outreach that produced an evaluation design for approval by USDA, and then moved to a pilot year of operation during which it focused on 10 of the communities that had been designated by the federal government as rural EZ/EC sites.[22] The Initiative, with adjustments based on its work and learning to date, is now in its second operational year.

Purpose. The EZ/EC Learning Initiative is intended to monitor and measure the impact of the federal EZ/EC program -- and document its lessons for community development in the communities it has targeted -- and provide a national assessment for federal officials.[23]

By design, the federal EZ/EC program enables communities to develop their own strategic vision and capacity for change, and emphasizes "bottom-up" participation and planning. The Learning Initiative was intentionally crafted to fit this framework. It provides a means through which community representatives themselves can monitor and measure their EZ/EC program's progress as it develops, and recommend midcourse corrections to the agencies running the EZ/EC program. The LI design is radically different from traditional evaluations that rely on outside experts and more often than not examine and report on the success or failure of a program very late in its implementation or after it has been completed.[24]

Key Elements. The Initiative draws heavily from the traditions of popular education, including those of the Highlander Center, whose former Director John Gaventa now is Co-Director of the Community Partnership Center. Associate Program Director Vicki Creed has brought the leadership development and organization building

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[22] The Empowerment Zone/Enterprise Community (EZ/EC) program, created in 1993, is considered the most extensive new federal community development program of the '90s. 104 urban and rural communities were designated EZ's or EC's, and are now engaged in carrying-out locally developed plans and programs intended to revitalize their communities.

[23] "Learning Initiative," EZ/EC Learning Initiative, introductory materials, 1996.

[24] *Ibid.*

experience of the Southern Appalachian Leadership Training (SALT) Program to the Initiative.

The Learning Initiative's participatory monitoring strategies in each targeted EZ/EC community are carried-out by a cross-section of residents organized into a "learning team." The learning team members decide which local goals of the EZ/EC program are most important to them, and assess how well these goals are being achieved. The Learning Initiative seeks to build the knowledge and capacity of the learning teams to do monitoring, and then helps them analyze and report on their findings and conclusions to local EZ/EC administrators and the federal government with the goal of improving the EZ/EC program as it moves into its later phases. To meet its bottom-up objectives, the Initiative:

∃ employs a central staff that first took charge of developing the overall LI evaluation design and now supervises program operations, provides training and technical assistance for local sites, convenes local coordinators and regional researchers for cross-site learning, and prepares and oversees preparation of progress, evaluation, and case study reports for the federal government.

∃ catalyzes creation of and helps to organize and support the volunteer local learning teams (teams range in size from 8 to 20 persons) in the targeted communities, made up of local residents, representatives of various community services and organizations, and other groups.

X takes a collaborative approach, at least initially, with the agency responsible for running the program locally, with the learning teams selected by the LI in consultation with local EZ/EC authorities and some teams including representatives from the local EZ/EC board and/or staff. As noted, the teams play the critical role in monitoring and evaluating the progress of the local EZ or EC programs. They develop analysis and feedback for local decision makers, and provide their local evaluations for use in the LI's national evaluation report and in periodic briefings for USDA officials.

∃ utilizes a "local learning coordinator" from the community, paid by the project on a part-time basis, who basically takes the role as staff for the learning team, and who serves as the primary point of contact with the Initiative's central staff.

∃ employs experienced "regional researchers," based in parts of the country where there are concentrations of rural EZ/EC programs, to support the learning teams and coordinators in implementing participatory evaluation processes and in carrying out monitoring functions.

∃ places emphasis on team learning, participation, and monitoring/evaluation locally, not necessarily involving advocacy on policy issues, but intends that its efforts will result eventually in positive program improvements locally and nationally.

∃ has developed an operational design that permits flexibility in meeting local needs and conditions, resulting in wide variations in structure, process and products from site-to-site.

The learning teams provide an ongoing formative evaluation of various aspects of the local EZ or EC program, with the explicit goal of encouraging local program operators to learn from the process and to introduce midcourse corrections. This is seen as a collaborative process -- though some differences in views, and friction, would seem inevitable -- leading to continuing improvements in the program. In that way, as well as in its emphasis on participation and learning, the process differs markedly from traditional evaluations which so often are explicitly not designed to influence and improve the program on a relatively current basis.

Results. In some respects, it is too early to project what the results of the Learning Initiative will be, locally or nationally, though it is showing considerable promise. Factors outside the control of the Initiative -- centering on implementation of the EZ/EC program (criticized by the federal General Accounting Office, among others) -- have impeded LI work in some locales. For example, in several communities targeted by the LI, anticipated funding for EZ/EC was held-up at the state level, or promised funding has not yet materialized. In some cases local programs have been slow to complete EZ/EC plans or to begin implementation. Local and state politics critical to program success is often a swamp, causing delay, confusion and turf battles. Largely as a result of these factors, but also because the LI is new, complex, and time consuming for those involved, notable LI achievements to date are limited to just a few of the targeted communities, while other communities have had little to report or have encountered real problems.

The most telling impacts from the Initiative thus far center around the work of the learning teams in influencing the outreach processes and planning decisions of local EZ/EC decision-making bodies, and in the empowerment through capacity building of the learning team members. Significant results include the development of a widely acclaimed "social capacity audit" in one community, McDowell County, West Virginia, that is contributing markedly to the EC program's plans and decisions, and increased community accountability in the highly controversial EZ in Jackson County, Kentucky. Both of these local LI experiences are briefly discussed below.

In addition, the local learning team leaders and regional researchers have periodically conducted lengthy briefings on their findings and recommendations for USDA and White House officials. The knowledge which they have gained concerning implementation of the program and the leadership skills which they have demonstrated in their presentations have been remarkably impressive to public officials and others attending the briefings.

Informal Assessment. On a broad basis, the Initiative has significantly affected the relational dynamics, decision-making and/or outcomes in many of the targeted communities, changing them for the better from what could have been anticipated if the communities' "power structures" had been left to their own devices. The keys to this have primarily been the work and very presence of the local learning teams and coordinators, backstopped by project staff and the regional researchers. On a substantive level, the teams have produced timely and in some cases groundbreaking information and analysis useful to EZ/EC decision-makers.

Learning teams' involvement in systematically and publicly monitoring and evaluating local progress -- and local officials' awareness of the local learning teams' connections to a national initiative -- have clearly built greater public accountability by EZ/EC decision-makers, albeit slowly and inconsistently across the sites. The learning process, which introduces a variety of perspectives and increased public dialogue and debate, has proven to be especially needed in rural areas where (as in many disadvantaged urban communities) the decision-making arenas tend to be the private, "no trespassing," hidebound preserves of the "good ol' boys."

A full and fair assessment of the learning team "model" will only be possible after the teams have had at least another year under their belts, during which they will need to deal effectively with a number of critical factors greatly affecting their potential. Currently, the learning teams have little funding and some have relatively little independence. Consequently, in some targeted communities, they must tread (or are treading) lightly even on issues of serious consequence.

Moreover, the learning teams are new creations -- bringing diverse people (*e.g.*, poor and non-poor) together as volunteers, sometimes for the first time, and doing challenging work new to them and their communities. As a result, they have been quite dependent on the learning coordinator (and the skills of that person) in the first stages in their development. Until this year, because of budget constraints the Initiative's central staff has not been able to take a strong role in assisting the learning teams to come together as efficient working groups. Plans for providing increased on-site technical assistance and training are moving toward implementation, and will be of considerable future help. Regional researchers have already been playing a technical assistance role to

some extent, but most are not trained in organizational development issues and can provide assistance mostly around the monitoring and evaluation process itself.

As a result of these and other factors, the Initiative will be working with fewer communities this year than last, concentrating on the learning teams which are demonstrating the greatest persistence, increased capacity and enthusiasm.

Another level of difficulty for this unique and important Initiative stems from various problems inherent in a government-funded monitoring project such as this. It goes without saying that government officials often do not readily appreciate the value of having others "looking over their shoulders," exposing program weaknesses or poor decisions, and holding them accountable. USDA took the unusual step of funding the Learning Initiative with backing from then Undersecretary Karl Stauber, whose experience in foundations supporting community-based efforts led him to see the advantages of an independent, community-based, formative evaluation and educational process which would give USDA forthright feedback on the program and help sustain community involvement and control in the AEmpowerment≅ program. The reactions of more traditional government officials who bear day to day operating responsibilities for the program may very well include blaming (and throttling) the messenger. There are some indications this may severely restrict the Initiative's potential in some locales and possibly at the national level, as well as jeopardizing continued government funding for this independent monitoring effort.

Despite all these obstacles, the Learning Initiative clearly has considerable potential to make a huge difference locally. Moreover, it is developing the only credible "bottom-up" data about the federal EZ/EC program, the government's "flagship" (and largest) community-building effort. As it continues and refines its evaluation design and process, the LI stands a chance of having significant influence on future decisions about the EZ/EC program at the national level.

Finally, those outside observers most familiar with the Initiative see in it some important lessons for developing other bottom-up strategies. In fact, projects built on the LI model are already being planned in several small, low-income rural communities. These projects, organized by residents who have had some exposure to operations and actors of the Learning Initiative, are targeted not around EZ/EC but to visioning and planning for bottom-up community development. The Ford Foundation and others are enthusiastic about this project, which is drawing international as well as national attention as a major multi-site experiment in Community-Based Monitoring, Learning and Action.

Examples of the LI in Practice. Of the ten sites in which the LI functioned over the past year, considerable attention has been drawn to two of them, for very different reasons. In the first, **McDowell County, West Virginia**, the learning team is considered

locally, by the EC and the community as a whole, to be a critical player in helping the EC to succeed. The director of the EC and one of the EC's board members are members of the nine-person (initially 15-person) learning team, whose other members represent a variety of interests in the County. The nine volunteer team members were all active participants in the extensive strategic planning process leading to the County's application for EZ/EC designation, and, when named to the learning team, hit the ground running. They have been intensively involved ever since, many regularly spending four to six hours or more per week in task force and other team meetings, doing interviews, collecting and analyzing survey data, and attending the EC's meetings.

The McDowell County learning team's objectives are long-term. In the first year of operation, they gathered baseline data in three areas: jobs, business and capital creation; inter-governmental and inter-agency collaboration; and community revitalization. EC progress is then to be measured over time against the baselines established by the three working groups looking into these areas, and within the criteria and framework determined by the team. The first-year data were used by the EC in its planning and decision-making. A "social capacity audit" was developed by the team to begin the process of determining how to measure the EC's "community revitalization" progress. It catalogued for the very first time in McDowell County's history the current make-up of every important sector -- 15 areas in all, including churches, social service agencies, government institutions, media, business, and the arts.

The audit provides the basis for the community to begin shaping its own vision for its future, going beyond the strategic planning done to attract the EC designation, and to design responsive EC initiatives. The learning team is moving now to map the assets of the County, and, with the EC, is gaining confidence that the extremely poor and isolated County has a lot more going for it than anyone had realized. Moreover, the learning team's participatory processes have proven very effective for team members' personal growth, and for developing a cohesive and challenging evaluation document -- to meet LI requirements -- which the EC has found to be of great practical value. Team members see the value of participatory learning processes for community-building, and are making plans for extending their use throughout the County, applying similar processes to other community services.

Learning team participants in McDowell County are advocates for the LI process. As one stated, "I'll never again be part of any evaluation performed by an outside consultant. The quality and utility of what we can do on our own -- with proper and sufficient assistance as we have had from a person knowledgeable about and committed to participatory research and evaluation -- far surpasses any 'professional' evaluation I've ever seen."

The story in **Jackson County, Kentucky** is a dramatic one, illustrating once again the great obstacles which often block progress in the heart of the coal country, where county political structures often are entrenched, unaccountable, and corrupt. Jackson is one of several counties included in the Kentucky Highlands Empowerment Zone, a $40 million federal commitment to turning around a depressed rural area.

Even before the Jackson County learning team began its work, the Kentucky Highlands EZ program ran into heavy national criticism because of controversies in the southern counties included in the program. With the funding secured, the Community Development Corporation sponsoring the Kentucky program to reverse its plans and reallocate funds from industrial development to a poultry processing plant. Enraged over the lower wages and environmental problems which would result from this reversal, local citizens gained the attention of legal services lawyers, the press, USDA and the White House, and eventually forced the CDC to drop its revised plans.

As the learning team got under way farther north, it took its business very seriously. It selected three projects which were included in the EZ proposal and dug into understanding what had been promised and what, in fact, was being done. Under the leadership of its learning coordinator -- a woman who was picked by the EZ authorities and who was working on her GED and had no previous civic experience -- a committee of eleven people did extensive interviewing in the community and attended well over 400 EZ meetings during 1996.

The learning team discovered many problems as it proceeded. One of the three projects which the group chose to study furnishes an example. It was to be the development of an industrial park in the northern part of the county. This was eliminated in a peremptory fashion, with the EZ board stating that it could not proceed with the development because that part of the county was unincorporated (there are, in fact, no such federal, state, or local legal barriers to development, but it was clear that, now that the funding was secured, county politicians had other priorities). A number of highly politicized, possibly corrupt, transactions came to light, and, over time, a key EZ official began to confide in the learning team about those transactions and other serious legal and ethical issues related to implementation. Literally fearing for his life, he eventually left the county.

The learning team=s evaluation report called for mid-course corrections by the EZ -- a program by then much in the news in a County long split politically -- especially calling for increased citizen participation in the program as a whole, and for re-starting a badly flawed community center initiative of the EZ. The report was seen by outside observers as balanced. However, those at the center of power in the EZ program felt otherwise. Charges and counter-charges flew. The most respected newspaper in the region, the Louisville *Courier-Journal*, editorialized in support of the learning team,

starting its column with the memorable line ACount us among the stupid,≅ referring to the county judge-executive=s reference to the learning team as Anot only ignorant, but stupid≅.

While all the returns are not in at this writing, positive changes in the EZ program are likely since the data assembled by the learning team are highly credible and now public. Indeed, in one early "concession," the Vice Chairman of the EZ board agreed that the arrangement of furniture in the EZ's boardroom -- in which board members sat with their backs to the public and "mumbled" -- would be changed to allow for increased citizen/EZ discussions.

On a broader level, there could be few better examples than in McDowell and Jackson counties of how ordinary citizens can research, learn and take joint action on important policy issues if they are given the financial and research help and training they need, and of how they can use that learning process to begin addressing the most fundamental issues of political and systemic reform which our country faces.

Learning teams in the LI were not established as outside advocates for change, and most are working closely with EZ/EC officials. Nevertheless, as seen in these two LI examples, inserting even such a modest and politically neutral new ingredient inserted in processes of community decision-making can raise new questions, develop alternatives, and improve outcomes. The LI and its learning teams are an important experiment from which much can be learned for developing CMLA strategies that give citizens a stronger voice in influencing and improving programs for which responsibilities have been devolved to the local and state level.

3) **Health Care For All (HCFA)**

In health care reform circles, Health Care for All's (HCFA's) top-notch work and significant achievements -- accomplished with strong support from Community Catalyst (formerly the Boston office of Families USA) -- are legendary. HCFA has built an exceptional reputation as an organization which has transformed itself from being an effective advocate into an organization which represents and is accountable to a broad constituency of low- and middle-income people, and whose power and impact have increased as a result. Thus it is especially useful to examine how HCFA has used community-based research and learning techniques to transform itself and build its power and capacity.

Structurally, HCFA was originally a coalition of advocacy groups. Today, the explicit goal of all its work is to expand its consumer base and bring grassroots activists into all levels of the organization, from its Board of Directors, to project leadership, to

staff, to volunteers. Within this organizational vision, HCFA has taken steps to expand its diversity at all levels, and to build organizational ties with a diverse group of community-based allies, seeking to make HCFA the "voice of the people."

HCFA has traditionally used every known strategy in its advocacy work -- law suits, coalition building around single issues, mobilizations, media, and others. It continues to pursue all of them, but its efforts now most often are built from the bottom-up:

When people see that they are not alone, that their problem is part of a wider inequitable system, they often undergo a powerful transformation in consciousness. They can become highly motivated activists and leaders in their communities, in Health Care For All, and in wider reform efforts. The trust that Health Care For All builds with individuals through this process is one of the fundamental building blocks that makes the organization a credible consumer voice with state legislators, hospital officials and other decision makers.[25]

HCFA integrates CMLA strategies into virtually all elements of its work. Through its Community Health Leaders Program, the coalition helps consumers -- with special attention to low-income consumers -- go through a popular education process to think through what health means to them, how the health care system affects their lives, how that system works, how it might be changed, and what issues they should tackle together in order to improve the quality and responsiveness of health care.

The starting point for HCFA's strategies and its use of CMLA is the particular concerns of people -- for example, the lack of health insurance, changes in entitlement programs, inadequate translation services, the closing of a local hospital. One important way HCFA makes contact with people and learns about emerging health issues is through its Health Care Helpline. This telephone link assists thousands of people to get access to care, and also is used to encourage people to become active on their own behalf and to work with others with similar problems. When several people call up with similar concerns, HCFA suggests that they meet together with staff to explore their common issue and decide whether to tackle it together. The contacts and trust that HCFA builds with individuals through this process is key to making the organization credible with consumers and a powerful voice with state legislators, hospital officials and other decision-makers.

People identified through the Helpline (and other vehicles) are organized into single issue campaigns and participate in actions. This process usually involves

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[25] Annual Report: 1995, Health Care For All, p. 3.

participatory learning processes. For example, when HCFA received an increasing number of phone calls from working poor families in desperate need of health care, it became clear that eligible people did not know about Massachusetts= special program of health insurance for working people with limited incomes. They invited several callers to meet with them, explained the state=s program, and learned about the difficulties people were having because of the program=s low visibility and limited outreach.

Another example of HCFA's use of participatory learning processes is its <u>Boston at Risk 2000 Project,</u> organized with assistance from Community Catalyst. In this project, community leaders from many different organizations, neighborhoods and ethnic groups came together in a ten-month process to explore one another's views of health, to discuss their shared and unique experiences with health care, and to build a vision of a reorganized system. The leaders then joined with HCFA's Boston Health Access Project to make its vision the basis for an on-going "people's health council" to monitor, assess and press for changes in the health care system. Community Catalyst is now helping statewide health care reform groups around the country adapt the methodology of the Boston at Risk 2000 Project.

For the research, monitoring and assessment aspects of CMLA, HCFA has developed numerous tools to help consumers and organizations develop the data and analyses most useful in action strategies. One of these is the <u>Helpline</u> itself, which is an enormous resource for understanding the problems of the system and the concerns of everyday people. An extensive and growing database resulting from numerous daily calls to Helpline from around the state enables HCFA to stay on top of issues and investigate new ones as they arise. Other tools include:

∃	<u>Legal Policy Monitoring System.</u> The constant flux of proposals, rules and regulations, service delivery changes, and changes in the market and the political arena has a dramatic impact on health. Policy experts on HCFA's staff, with support from HCFA's legal services network and academic advisors, carefully evaluate what is happening with an eye to the impact on grassroots constituencies. HCFA then uses this critical information in participatory learning processes to inform and activate consumer-directed action strategies.

∃	<u>Community Needs Assessment/Financial Analysis.</u> HCFA works with communities to understand their assets and needs, and analyzes the financial resources of institutions, such as hospitals and health centers. It does this by linking research with learning processes that help people understand what is learned through the research, analyze how it relates to their needs and priorities, and take action on the basis of that analysis. For example, community leaders using the Boston at Risk 2000 discussion model analyzed an extraordinarily important report on the financial conditions and

assets of the area=s major teaching hospitals which was conducted by a Professor at Harvard=s School of Public Health. This information and joint analysis laid the groundwork for the Boston Health Access coalition=s demand that the nonprofit teaching hospitals allocate more of their assets to community benefits. The result: millions of dollars reallocated to health centers in needy neighborhoods throughout Boston.

X   Applying the CRA Approach to Health Care. With encouragement from HCFA, Massachusetts= Attorney-General has pressed all of the states= charitable hospitals to follow an approach similar to the Community Reinvestment Act in its emphasis on access to information, public hearing, and planning processes designed to improve conditions for low- and moderate-income people. To demonstrate that they are serving their charitable purposes, tax-exempt hospitals are urged to involve the public in helping them develop annual plans to meet the health care needs of their community, especially the needs of lower-income people in their service areas.

HCFA=s work with a health task force in Lynn, Massachusetts furnishes an example of its use of community-based monitoring and learning approaches, using the Attorney-General=s directive to charitable hospitals. It worked with the task force of health care consumers to analyze the Acommunity benefits report≅ filed by AtlantiCare Medical Center. In a detailed critique based on its research into community health needs as well as its analysis of AtlantiCare=s report, the Health Task Force pointed out many ways in which the Medical Center failed to assess and respond to local health needs. For example, it contrasted Lynn=s incidence of such infectious diseases as Hepatitis B, syphilis and gonorrhea as well as its rates of substance abuse and alcohol abuse at more than three times the state average with the Center=s failure to include these health problems among their health care priorities. It pointed out that, in fact, the Center had eliminated its infectious disease clinic and its substance abuse facilities.

Finally, HCFA is working to extend the use of both its assessment/monitoring tools and its participatory learning processes through the development and distribution of training materials, and a training of trainers process. HCFA also makes extensive use of culturally-relevant educational materials that it develops and distributes to help consumers understand their legal rights, and determine how to enroll in a health program, how to redress grievances, how to improve or defend programs through the legislative process, and other actions.[26]

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[26] Most of the material in this section is drawn from "The Health Care For All Organizing Approach," Health Care For All, 1996.

Community Catalyst (CC)

A national support organization created in 1997 to carry on the work previously done by the Boston office of Families USA, Community Catalyst works closely with HCFA and other statewide and local consumer organizations addressing health care issues. It shares offices with HCFA, with which it shares strong common values as well as a formal partnership. The participatory approaches which HCFA pioneers are often further developed, promoted and supported by Catalyst through its technical assistance and training strategies across the country.

Community Catalyst gives high priority to helping demystify health care issues. Catalyst does this largely through experimenting with ways of helping people build upon their current understanding of health care issues until they are confident, more fully informed participants in efforts to make the health care system meet their needs better. The organizations with which CC works have begun to institutionalize both policy analysis capacity and community organizing so that there is a two-way street between analysis and consumer needs. In the process, some of the organizations are deepening their capacity-building work with consumers, using a variety of popular education and participatory training techniques to help consumers undertake effective monitoring and advocacy. Two examples:

∃ **Oregon.** Tackling a major issue of devolution -- the shift to managed care under Medicaid -- the **Oregon Health Action Campaign (OHAC)** informed Medicaid beneficiaries about the design and implementation of the Oregon Health Plan (OHP -- a Medicaid managed care program that also expanded access). When clients in one region found themselves unable to find primary care physicians under the managed care system, OHAC helped these consumers research how they could change this situation. They obtained an analysis of access requirements under the state Medicaid waiver, the OHP regulations, and copies of OHP=s contracts with the health plans. Clients then conducted a phone survey of all listed physicians for health plans in the area to find that there was only one open practice. The survey results were provided to state policymakers who had previously been unresponsive to concerns about inadequate primary care capacity. Within months, one health plan established a new primary care clinic in the region and OHP officials focused attention on primary care capacity issues.

A parallel approach has been used to address issues for Latino OHP beneficiaries. After identifying significant access barriers, including no language translation services and lack of cultural sensitivity, OHAC's analysis of OHP regulations and contract provisions enabled beneficiaries to raise these concerns effectively and propose solutions. Meetings between beneficiaries and twenty health plans have

taken place to address issues. The state has also revised cultural and language access regulations with full participation of beneficiaries in this process.

∃ **Maine.** In three parts of the state, "community health leaders" projects have brought together diverse community members to learn about and address health issues. The projects provided members with education, training, and a constant flow of information about policy developments. Topics covered included managed care; financial analysis of local hospitals; and nonprofit conversions to for-profit status.

Within its first year, project participants used the state's administrative procedures act to obtain new access and quality regulations for Medicaid managed care, including grievance procedures and primary care access standards; participated in stopping an effort by Blue Cross to abandon its charitable status; intervened in the HMO license application of a hospital and Blue Cross, winning a requirement for expanded community benefits for vulnerable populations; and engaged in discussions with the CEOs of local hospitals about expansion of community benefits, including provision of charity care.

Of particular relevance for CMLA, CC and its network extensively utilize monitoring strategies in comprehensive approaches to identify people's problems, analyze policy and the political environment, train community leaders, and effectively use the media to organize affected people and win improvements in the health care system. The processes are centrally coordinated but depend on effective bottom-up involvement to bring results. CC and its network's CMLA-related strategies are constantly evolving. They learn from experience, and much can be learned from their experiences.

Other National and Multi-Community Initiatives. Certainly, lessons important for this paper can be drawn from other national or multi-community initiatives. We note several here that warrant time and attention we were unable to give them.

∃ **HMDA and CRA**. Absolutely central to the entire community reinvestment movement have been the importance of Adisclosure≅ of data on lending patterns and community involvement in analyzing that data, assessing community credit needs, learning about banking practices, and taking action to bring about change in policies. As community groups from 38 states came together to form **National People's Action (NPA)** in 1972, their principal goal was to reverse bank and insurance company redlining in their neighborhoods, opening up access to the mortgage and home improvement loans which represented lifeblood for their communities= housing and economic future. Working with other national and local groups, they secured passage of the Home Mortgage Disclosure Act (HMDA) in the 1970s, gaining access to much of the data they needed to compare the lending records of different financial

institutions and base their demands for increasing lending upon a solid factual base. With this added information, NPA and other national and local organizations subsequently took the leadership in pushing for enactment of the Community Reinvestment Act (CRA).

Both of these important struggles were built from the bottom-up. They banked on research and monitoring strategies carried-out by community groups, coupled with community organizing, to identify discriminatory practices by financial institutions. The accuracy and potency of the data gathered in these strategies proved to be the key to effecting change locally, and fueled media attention, widespread mobilization, and successful national strategies. Overall, the work on HMDA and CRA has, by some estimates, generated some $140 - $160 billion dollars in housing and other investments benefiting low-income people and neighborhoods. Today, both national and local organizations continue to be involved in efforts to protect and strengthen these laws and to work for additional benefits for their low-income constituencies through HMDA and CRA. Some of the local groups taking the lead in strategies, past and present, invested heavily in building the capacities of their constituencies to do research and monitoring. How they succeeded and how their capacity-building, training and learning strategies have evolved are important lessons for the development of CMLA strategies.

A prime example of a local organization deeply involved with HMDA and CRA efforts is the Charlotte Organizing Project (CHOP) which continues to meet with bank executives to monitor an agreement it helped to negotiate eight years ago with the First Union Corporation of Charlotte. The agreement was forged through a CMLA approach, using research data CHOP assembled, through use of HMDA, to demonstrate that 90% of local mortgage lending was going to affluent white neighborhoods. CHOP joined with others to form the Charlotte Reinvestment Alliance to address this problem. Among other efforts, the Alliance challenged a planned First Union bank acquisition, worked to gain support from the Federal Reserve Board (which held up the acquisition based on the data presented by the Alliance), and eventually extracted a commitment from First Union of $9 million in real estate and business lending for Charlotte's low-income neighborhoods.

∃ **General Revenue Sharing.** In the first wave of ANew Federalism≅, or devolution, in the early 1970s the General Revenue Sharing monitoring project pioneered citizen monitoring, or CMLA, at the national level. Funded by the Edna McConnell Clark and Rockefeller Foundations, it was carried out by a consortium of four national organizations, including the League of Women Voters and CCC. The Harvard-MIT Joint Center assisted in designing and field-testing the research instruments. The project's design and approach encompassed many of CMLA's elements, with research being conducted in eight communities by low-income groups which then took action

on their findings. The project also involved another 16-20 sites where the leadership on monitoring came from Leagues of Women Voters and Urban Coalitions.

Los Angeles furnishes an example of the project=s impact. The lead community organization formed a broader coalition which succeeded in convincing the county to allocate 25% of its Revenue Sharing funds to social service programs run by nonprofit groups. In other communities, local chapters of the League of Women Voters and other non-low-income organizations took the lead, monitoring and intervening in the decision-making process on General Revenue Sharing in order to increase the accountability and openness with which local governments allocated GRS funds. The project also influenced federal legislation and oversight, particularly regarding civil rights and citizen participation.[27]

In Cleveland the GRS monitoring had an impact well beyond Revenue Sharing. By getting citizens involved in the budget process in a structured and informed way, it transformed the local municipal budget process. The City Council, learning through the citizen monitoring, went from making 3 changes in the municipal budget one year to making 99 the next. These shifts greatly benefitted low income communities, which were represented in the monitoring by a city-wide coalition of Community Development Corporations (CDCs).

X **Job Training and Employment.** CCC launched a similar monitoring project on another block granted program -- the Comprehensive Employment and Training (CETA) Program. This project built on the Center=s contract with the Department of Labor which enabled CCC to provide technical assistance on CETA to dozens of community groups throughout the country. The Center devised a monitoring instrument which local groups could use to familiarize themselves with the CETA program, how decisions were being made at the local level, how funds were being allocated, whom was being served, and related questions. The community-based groups then used that analysis to press for better policies and processes at the local level, and gave the information to the Center for analysis and action nationally.

This monitoring provided a solid base of information which undergirded the work of the National Alliance of Community Based Organizations (NACBO), a coalition of hundreds of community groups which CCC convened and staffed. NACBO had a substantial impact on national legislation and regulations, including expansion of the Public Service Employment program and the use of CBOs as primary operators of that program to improve and provide services to low-income communities. Two years in a row, NACBO was a central force in blocking efforts to eliminate the public jobs program, saving 300,000 jobs for low-income people. This experience can be

[27]Cite CCC articles, etc.

especially instructive if Congress and the Administration agree on a new block grant on workforce development.

B)   **SINGLE-SITE EXAMPLES OF CMLA STRATEGIES ON KEY POVERTY ISSUES**

In addition to learning from these multi-site projects, there is much to be learned from looking at how community groups have used CMLA strategies in their local communities in order to understand and have an influence on policies related to devolution or to other issues of poverty. We therefore decided to select a few examples of how groups have used research, learning, and action in a variety of contexts to get at key issues. Several more are included in the appendix.

1) HOMELESSNESS

RWARM (Boston). RWARM is a unique participatory research initiative working through the College of Public and Community Service (CPCS) at the University of Massachusetts, Boston. RWARM -- the Roofless Women's Action Research Mobilization -- features key roles for six previously homeless women as project investigators in exploring causes and solutions to women's homelessness. The six women are now enrolled in CPCS and are pursuing bachelors' degrees in community planning and advocacy through grants which provide free tuition, a stipend and reimbursement for child care and transportation. A University professor supervises their work, which is guided by a steering committee comprised of formerly homeless women and a variety of groups concerned with homelessness, poverty, and domestic violence.

RWARM's creation was influenced in part by The Boston Foundation, a large and highly respected community foundation. The Women's Institute for Housing and Economic Development proposed a needs assessment project dealing with homelessness, to be carried out by formerly homeless people to be trained by the Institute. Foundation staff insisted that the Institute should have started by involving homeless people in the project and survey design, and recommended that the Institute ask for money for this purpose. With advice from the project's faculty advisor, the Institute broadened the project to encompass leadership development as well as needs assessment and research, and convened a task force of homeless people (and others) to think through the approach. The key ingredients of the project that was funded and is operating today -- the role of people who had experienced homelessness in project governance, stipends for investigators, and the production of materials which were of immediate use to homeless people -- came from homeless women on the task force. The women also prevailed over heavy opposition from some agency representatives when they chose the word "roofless" to describe their condition and their project, arguing that while they and their children

might lack a roof, they made up their own home and family and thus were not
"homeless".

       <u>Project Outline.</u> The project seeks to educate the public and policymakers about
experiences of homeless women and about effective preventive measures; change
disempowering and ineffective shelter policies; highlight programs that work, and
recommend new ones; and prioritize state spending to emphasize prevention. In addition,
the project sets empowerment goals for the investigators -- learning how to collect and
analyze data, and gaining skills in interviewing, public speaking, and media- and
community-organizing.

       RWARM's work has centered around evaluation. As process, the evaluation was
designed to involve formerly homeless women in all phases of the study; complete 150
interviews with homeless women; provide relevant research and community-organizing
skills for the investigators; initiate community organizing; change policies and funding;
and document and share the model. As outcomes, the evaluation sought to elicit women's
insights into how their homelessness could have been prevented, what their situations
were before they became homeless, and whether they knew their housing rights; to
publicize survey findings; and to fortify campaigns to influence state and national
policies and programs.

       <u>Status and results.</u> The project has now published its findings and
recommendations -- a report drafted by the six women investigators. Groups represented
on the steering committee are pursuing the policy recommendations, while RWARM's
investigators deepen outreach to and involvement of homeless women in strategies of
change. The steering committee groups have committed themselves to collaborate in
seeking policy changes, which many had not been motivated to do before, and to consult
directly with homeless women in their decision-making processes. As an example of the
investigators' work, they are developing pamphlets and designing training around five
key topics that emerged in the evaluation -- civil rights in shelters, raising children in
shelters, the connection between domestic violence and homelessness, and issues related
to single women (many of whom have children being raised by others) whose needs tend
to be neglected. The surprisingly high number of single women found to be homeless is
one of several new insights resulting from the evaluation which have policy implications.

       This historical sketch is intended to underscore the importance and significance of
previously homeless women taking leadership, developing skills, and working for policy
change from the project's very beginning -- a methodology that has proven highly
effective in this project. In empowerment terms, the development of the six women
investigators has been called "phenomenal." All have done well in school, all have new
jobs, all have joined boards of non-profits, and all are confident public speakers and
advocates for changes in public policy to benefit the homeless. The University of

Massachusetts has built from this success to create a special program called Women in Community Development to educate and support low-income women in community development work.

The Chicago Coalition for the Homeless. This organization centers all of its multi-faceted work -- from service provision, to economic development and job creation, to community organizing, to policy advocacy -- around capacity-building with and involvement of formerly homeless and currently homeless people, and uses key elements of CMLA to advantage in accomplishing its mission. During a recent inquiry for another assignment, we learned of the Coalition's accomplishments on several fronts -- winning 165 units of assisted housing and 1,000 Section 8 certificates, establishing a housing trust fund, winning the first state law mandating school districts to accept homeless and formerly homeless children into their schools, making creative use of national legislation to forge agreements with the city for an economic development venture (on Chicago's famed Navy Pier) with profits going to the homeless and job training of homeless people, developing a youth organizing project of homeless youth who effectively lobbied the state legislature to salvage funding for homeless youth, and others. All of these efforts were spearheaded by homeless or previously homeless people whose skills -- from how to do research to develop data for work on policy issues, to how to negotiate agreements with government agencies -- were developed through the Coalition's participatory learning processes, and strengthened by hands-on roles in the Coalition's action strategies.

Most recently, the Coalition has employed a veteran community organizer to engage previously uninvolved homeless people in a unique, long-term process of participatory learning -- involving nightly meetings with small groups in homeless shelters and elsewhere -- to identify and strengthen new leadership. Overall, the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless and its CMLA-related strategies were cited as unique and extraordinary by several survey respondents, but time did not permit examining them for this paper.

2) WELFARE REFORM

Women and Poverty Public Education Initiative. Operating since 1994 with support from the University of Wisconsin's Women's Studies Consortium, this project works with diverse groups in 10 Wisconsin communities to monitor the experiences of persons impacted by welfare reform, to use that information to educate the general public and policy-makers, and to advocate for effective policies.

Each local group that is working with the initiative is co-led by a member of the poverty community and a professional support person. The groups are made up of poverty leaders, advocates, service providers, academics and many others concerned with

poverty issues. The local groups develop education and advocacy strategies suitable to their own situation, in the context of priorities set by a statewide Initiative Steering Committee comprised of the local groups' co-leaders. Monthly statewide meetings are convened electronically, and face-to-face cross-site meetings are held four to five times a year for training sessions and other events. Regional meetings are more frequent.

Initiative strategies include development of speakers' bureaus in each locale -- in which low-income leaders and others make presentations to community groups -- and preparation and distribution of a video of poverty leaders telling their own stories. The Initiative's newest strategies, formed in the face of the imminent launching of Wisconsin's much publicized W - 2 program, are oriented directly to impacting policy decisions and implementation. As one step, a recent Initiative report -- "In Our Own Words: Mothers' Perspectives on Welfare Reform" -- has gotten wide circulation among policymakers and the general public. The report was developed from data gathered at each site primarily by low-income women in a survey of 740 women affected by welfare reform.

A key feature of this project is its in-depth training of low-income women in how to do and interpret research -- to build research capacity in the poverty community for purposes of impacting policies -- and how to communicate the information most effectively. The research process itself is a collaborative model, bringing together faculty members and poverty community representatives.

To date, many women have benefited from the training and have participated in distributing, collecting, coding, analyzing and interpreting the data. They have also been trained to do focus group facilitation and in-depth interviews. The research process provides opportunities to make organizing contacts, and has resulted in identifying hundreds of women who can be called on in project advocacy strategies. With the W - 2 action moving now from the state level to local communities, the project is attempting to inform and influence local service providers and legislators, and to establish on-going and systematic communications, not one-time testimonies, with variations in strategy determined at the local level based on local needs and opportunities.

3) JOBS AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Campaign for a Sustainable Milwaukee (CSM). A broad-based, progressive and aggressive coalition supported by the Annie E. Casey Foundation through its Jobs Initiative, CSM brings together community, government, labor and business representatives to form "a grassroots organizing project for family-supporting jobs and a community voice in economic decisions."

CSM's specific strategies, encompassing community organizing, coalition building, education and advocacy, and technical assistance, are often built-on the CMLA cycle of participatory research, learning, and action for change. As CSM is well-known to the Foundation, we will not describe its CMLA work in detail. Following is an emerging example of CSM's planned use of CMLA that should be studied in future months to learn more about how CMLA can be integrated with job access, development and training strategies.

Recently, CSM has begun planning a pro-active strategy for addressing welfare "reform" issues. Key to this strategy is CSM's recently opened Central City Workers Center. The Center, which initially will connect at least 150 residents to family-supporting jobs (entry-level positions in the Laborers Union that pay more than $12 an hour), is intended to demonstrate an alternative to low-wage, dead-end jobs that are likely too often to be the outcomes from Wisconsin's W - 2 version of welfare "reform." More than that, however, the Center is planned as a means (and a place) to organize the poor into a membership-based union, to utilize participatory learning and popular education techniques in order to deepen their understanding of issues, and to develop their research, monitoring, leadership and advocacy skills so that they can take instrumental roles in developing and implementing CSM's action strategies.

Whether or not the CSM Workers Center can effectively combine its varying objectives and approaches into a cohesive strategy for change is unknown at this stage, but, more than most organizations, CSM is conscious of the fact that it is breaking new ground. With the use of CMLA elements in the Workers Center and the Center's intriguing mix of objectives, and with an unusually comprehensive, challenging and exciting array of its strategic interventions taking hold and achieving results in Milwaukee, CSM is an excellent and novel vehicle for exploring the value of CMLA strategies.

4) ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH -- CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

The field of environmental health is much like that of community reinvestment -- access to data and thorough analysis of that data are central to any strategies for addressing community problems and needs. The ARight to Know≅ has been as crucial to the identification and clean-up of toxic wastes as ADisclosure≅ has been in the pursuit of better banking and lending policies.

The SALTA Project of the Environmental Health Coalition (EHC) (San Diego). Created in October of 1994, SALTA -- *Salud Ambiental, Latinas Tomando Accion* (Environmental Health, Latinas Taking Action) -- illustrates the critical role of

research and education in the environmental health arena. SALTA is an innovative project of EHC's Toxic Free Neighborhoods Campaign. With a unique participatory learning and training design at its core, the SALTA project has successfully built on a cultural phenomenon which occurs in the Latino community -- that of women forming information and assistance networks to help each other -- in order to develop community activists who aggressively pursue objectives of the Campaign. Over a dozen foundations, local and national, have contributed support for the SALTA project.

EHC's Toxic Free Neighborhoods Campaign works from the premise that residents of every community are equally entitled to protection from exposure to toxic materials. The Campaign -- empowering residents to confront environmental health hazards in their communities -- focuses on San Diego's low-income communities of color to work for land use and planning reforms, disclosure of environmental problems, relocation of hazardous industries to industrial zones, reduction of air toxic contaminants, and abatement of lead hazards. SALTA says that its training program is the first environmental justice training program in the country to be developed and implemented for Latinas.

Since May of 1995, when SALTA moved from designing its training curriculum to program implementation, the program has trained twenty women from the target communities to be *promotoras de salud ambiental*, or environmental health educators. These women then recruited and trained ten women each from their own neighborhoods. The end result has been intensive training for 220 women in the three targeted communities. Five of the women are now employed part-time by EHC as Campaign organizers. Virtually all of the other women are working as volunteer *promotoras*, educating residents and taking key roles in action strategies to safeguard the health and well-being of children and families in the target neighborhoods.

Action Strategy. Armed with facts and figures about family health issues generated in a house-to-house survey by the *promotoras*, residents of Barrio Logan, organized by the *promotoras*, have recently demonstrated their increased knowledge and effectiveness. They are deeply involved in a battle with the area's powerful Port Commission around pesticide use, specifically fumigation of imported fruit with the toxic pesticide methyl bromide at the Port's cold storage facility less than a mile from a Barrio Logan elementary school. Outraged by the Port's seeming disregard for their health, some 200 residents attended a critical Commission meeting and presented their "case" responsibly and well. They were accompanied by the City Councilman for their district who had previously been less than fully responsive to the community, who spoke strongly in support of the residents.

The Commission stopped short of guaranteeing an end to methyl bromide use, but were seen as clearly on the run even in the conservative local press. Newspaper

headlines capture the essence of the fight and the results of SALTA's training and organizing: "Fumes make Barrio Logan students literally sick of school;" "Barrio Logan education shouldn't reek."

News that SALTA's work, and that of EHC and the Campaign, had finally paid off was received just as we were editing this paper. The San Diego Union Tribune reported that the Port Commission agreed in late July to stop regularly using the toxic pesticice in the community.

SALTA's Key Feature -- Participatory Learning and Training. EHC and its Toxic Free Neighborhoods Campaign stress research and monitoring. SALTA training is EHC's most fully developed participatory learning strategy. The SALTA training program is built from a model of peer education developed by the Por La Vida project of San Diego State University to promote personal and family health. EHC worked with Por La Vida to adapt the model for its organizing strategies. In brief, the training program came together and functions as follows:

- Assessment of community attitudes and knowledge about the issues. EHC convened two focus groups of ten low-income women residents in the target neighborhoods. A pervasive lack of knowledge about the health hazards of various household products was evident in both sessions. Most of the women were also unaware of local, state and federal agencies responsible for enforcing environmental laws. Most were aware that their children were being educated about environmental issues in school. Over half were aware of what businesses in their community were contributing to pollution, expressing concern about auto repair and painting businesses, and plating shops.

- Curriculum design. Drawing on its findings from the focus groups, during which a strong interest around issues of household safety was demonstrated, EHC developed a twelve-session training program. The program, utilizing linguistically and culturally appropriate learning materials, emphasizes practical information on the following topics: getting to know each other, getting toxicities out of your home, getting rid of pests, getting the lead out, our neighborhood is important, leaders in our neighborhood, effective community organization, the responsibilities of a *promotora*, and methods for recruitment of participants for the groups the *promotoras* are to themselves train.

- Recruitment and Training. EHC hired a community leader as SALTA's Coordinator who took responsibility for both recruitment and training of the initial two groups of ten trainees each. All were residents selected because of their community service and leadership qualities. Convening every Wednesday evening for twelve weeks, the training drew one-hundred percent attendance for all twelve sessions for both groups

of trainees. Training involved homework for each session to reinforce concepts learned. The homework assignments were evaluated and discussed with the trainees.

During training, all of the *promotoras*, and those they subsequently trained, attended a series of events and public meetings at which they learned to express their concerns. For example, the first group took their concerns to City Task Force meetings on industry compliance, Port Commission hearings on Convention Center expansion and methyl bromide fumigation, and a half-dozen others. The climax of their training was a "People's Summit," in which government officials were invited to listen to questions and complaints from community residents.

All 220 residents selected for SALTA training received small stipends for their participation.

∃   Curriculum Review and Revision. After every third training session, a special feedback session was held to look at the three previous sessions and to evaluate the curriculum. The curriculum was revised as appropriate for future use. As the *promotoras* began their work in the community, they used the revised curriculum to conduct their group sessions, and continued the review and revision process. (The detailed curriculum and worksheets, hundreds of pages in a handsome loose-leaf binder in both English and Spanish are being made available by EHC to other groups around the country.)

∃   Pre-test/Post-test. All *promotoras* were asked to complete a basic test at the beginning of training to evaluate their knowledge of toxicities issues in their communities, identify elected officials, and so on. On the pre-test, 70% of the *promotoras* scored under 70%, with only one in ten scoring over 90%. A comparable test was administered during the last training session. On average, there was a 35.7% improvement over the pre-test results. 100% of the promotoras scored over 70%, and eight of ten scored over 90%.

Informal Assessment. While SALTA itself does not at this time incorporate a formalized research/monitoring component, research and monitoring play a very important role in the EHC approach. Those involved in SALTA as organizers and *promotoras* are beginning to gain the skills necessary to develop strategies using these techniques. It should be noted that EHC is a highly regarded organization, considered by activists and funding sources alike as one of the best grassroots environmental health and justice organizations in the country.

Overall, SALTA is an outstanding example of grassroots involvement in an in-depth participatory learning process that moves constituencies from dealing with immediate concerns to informed action on larger issues. SALTA starts where the

residents are, and helps them to gain knowledge of the community's assets and an understanding of their place in the community, see the ways in which they can affect change, and develop a vision for what they would like the community to be. It then helps them gain the confidence and skills to work for change. To meet its objectives, SALTA has dealt with the important and unique facets and potential barriers of language and customs in a low-income community of color in a very effective way, reaching, educating and involving an extraordinary number of low-income residents for whom English is, at best, a second language.

EHC sees many improvements it can make in future SALTA training -- for example, incorporating economic literacy training modules, opening consideration of the jobs/environment issue, and doing more to help residents understand how government functions and can be affected through citizen action. Because of its success, EHC wants to extend the SALTA project's concepts to other initiatives, using project staff (including the five part-time organizer/graduates of the project), but is still thinking through budget implications and other issues.

One on-site observer summarized SALTA's value: "The process of education that empowers the *promotoras* is then transferred to other women in the community and the cumulative effect grows. The trainees in the program do not merely 'learn things,' but are transformed in the process of this learning experience."

SALTA's Coordinator, previously an informal community leader never before in a job of this sort, is very proud of the effort to date. She believes that "We are accomplishing what we set out to do. Together, SALTA and the *promotoras* are creating an awareness as to what's around us and why we always find low-income neighborhoods saturated with high polluting industries. We asked why there is mixed-use zoning use only in low-income communities of color and why government ignores these communities. We're taking action in the best interests of our children."

Yellow Creek Concerned Citizens (YCCC). (Bell County, Kentucky). The exciting case history of this long-term effort in one of America's poorest counties is a powerful example of CMLA strategies.[28] From Yellow Creek community residents' expressions of frustration and anger about the health effects of groundwater pollution in 1980 -- a condition by then over 20 years in the making -- the organizing/popular education strategy employed led to municipal water for this community and many

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[28] Larry Wilson, Popular Education and Community Organizing: The Bell County, Kentucky Example, Working Paper Series #22 (New Market, TN: Highlander Research and Education Center, 1995). This important publication may provide the best overview of and hands-on feel for YCCC's work and results for learning purposes. It is authored by the community leader who became the organizer of the YCCC and who continues to work on environmental justice issues in Yellow Creek and around the country.

surrounding communities, a solid waste program, vastly improved health for children and families, political empowerment never before achieved, jobs for low-income residents, infrastructure improvements in the county, development of new community organizations, and many other significant accomplishments. YCCC -- with assistance from the Highlander Center -- is a demonstration over two decades of CMLA in action, and its work continues today.

The YCCC story has been well-documented, and we will not try to summarize it here. The following example illustrates YCCC's use of participatory research and learning to strengthen its organizing strategies. It is but one of many lessons for CMLA that can be taken from the YCCC experience:

Keeping a large number of people very involved presented an ongoing challenge. However, we as a group were committed to encouraging hands on involvement by each person. In order to do this, it was imperative that we continually educate ourselves. Group members were constantly invoking the Freedom of Information acts in order to gain information from city, county, state and federal government agencies and bodies. They were attending many meetings of civic, environmental, religious and other groups. They were making presentations, attending workshops at Highlander and other places, traveling to other communities, writing letters, monitoring the sewage treatment plant and tannery activities, etc.

When we became concerned about human health along the creek, we decided that we needed to know if there were health effects already apparent. The group decided upon a community health survey. We contacted the Center for Health Services at Vanderbilt University and asked for assistance. They offered to design the survey, send student interns to interview and then their staff would interpret the data and write a report of findings. We said, "No, you train us to do interviews and we will do them, that way we can interview everyone in the valley instead of a sampling. And, we will design the survey, you work with us to make sure we are asking questions that can be quantified. We will assist in the compilation and interpretation of the data and will approve the written report -- that way we can better understand everything."

We explained that people would be more comfortable talking about personal health to people they knew and trusted. We also knew who could gain access and talk to whom, and that we knew the area, the creek, how it once was and would, therefore, know which questions to ask toward understanding all of this. We also explained that we needed to know and understand what was happening, and we could better gain this understanding if we were involved in every step of the survey. As a result of this, we interviewed over 97% of the people of Yellow Creek Valley. We saw the breadth and depth of the health problems and could better talk to the residents about the

overall health of the community. This also enabled us to make personal contact with almost every resident along the creek and helped them make connections between their health and the condition of the creek.

CRITICAL LESSONS FOR THE FUTURE

These examples of Community-Based Monitoring, Learning and Action come from many different traditions, but they share the same critical elements. Whether the people who initiated them were motivated primarily by a desire to reform government systems and policies, or to help low-income people gain a place at the policy bargaining table, or to educate larger numbers of ordinary citizens on key issues, or to strengthen research and evaluation through participatory processes, they all combined monitoring, learning and action on policy matters. And their combined experience -- along with the experience of many other groups, including those reviewed in the appendix -- has generated a series of important lessons for this era of devolution and the rethinking of policies on poverty.

Outcomes

What have been the key outcomes of Community-Based Monitoring, Learning and Action? What are its implications for future work on reforming government, strengthening democracy and participation and strengthening communities?

1) Public Policy Change. From the CDBG monitoring project of 15 years ago, to the continuing work of Health Care for All spanning two decades, to the emerging efforts of SALTA=s health educators, Community-Based Monitoring strategies are unmistakeably effective in positioning poor people to have influence and arming them with capabilities and hard data with which to argue against bad policy and offer positive alternatives. The list of legislative and policy changes resulting from the sampled CMLA experiences -- some of which are mentioned in our write-ups -- is a lengthy and impressive one by any standards, quite frankly dwarfing the results of most program evaluations.

2) Research, Monitoring and Evaluation. In these fields often thought of as the preserve of academicians and other professionals, the initiatives we examined have consistently demonstrated the value of participatory research, monitoring and/or evaluation involving low-income people -- both in terms of the quality of data and data analysis, and in terms of the quality of outcomes. Equipped with a rigorous research design, assisted by people with evaluation and capacity-building skills, the initiatives demonstrate that teams of ordinary people can develop highly reliable data and bring unique insight and perspective into the policy arena. This kind of process eliminates one

of the primary weaknesses of most program evaluations -- their failure to include the perspective of poor people, those who are intended to be the primary beneficiaries of many programs and who are most intimately familiar with those programs= real impact and value.

Furthermore, the examples in the paper help to illustrate the value of formative evaluations linked to action: "monitoring by advocates (ordinary people, activists) benefits everyone: advocates' questions and findings push ... (governments) ... to respond by improving their own data collection and analysis. Data combined with advocacy make possible genuine improvements in ... (programs, policies, services) ... Monitoring offers advocacy groups guidance for strategically directing their work and a tool for building coalitions, reaching out to new constituencies, and identifying community needs."[29]

Central to CMLA is the tie between (1) research, monitoring and evaluation and (2) learning and action by affected constituencies. No community-developed data or documents sit on the dust-covered shelves where many reports of costly research and evaluation projects can be found.[30] Research and monitoring in CMLA strategies are designed to make change, based solidly on factual analysis and the direct experience of those most affected by the policies. The examples that make this most clear include Health Care for All, Yellow Creek, the CDBG Monitoring Project, and others.

3) <u>Grassroots Capacity-Building and Leadership Development.</u> Most of our regional or national examples of Community-Based Monitoring cited local groups that have spun-off to continue related work, or that have gained strength through the Monitoring experience [31] All of the examples are featured because they have developed or are developing leadership at the grassroots, leadership which goes well beyond the performance of tasks within the CMLA initiative. All of the examples have contributed to strengthening the organization sponsoring and/or implementing the CMLA strategy. Many of the examples have brought organizations together for common efforts, often for the first time, leading in some cases to on-going collaboration benefiting and informed by poor people empowered in the CMLA strategy (for example, RWARM and Wisconsin=s Women and Poverty initiative).

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[29] "Monitoring the Impacts of the Changing Health Care System," <u>States of Health,</u> The Center for Community Health Action, Boston, MA, August, 1996.

[30] A pointed comparison of citizen monitoring with traditional academic research, showing the cost/ effective value of the former and touching on many important issues, is found in the old classic, "Citizens As Experts," by Nick Kotz, <u>Working Papers</u>, March/April, 1981.

[31] See, for example, the CDBG Monitoring Project, above, and the CSPA and Immigration Law Enforcement Monitoring Projects described in the appendix.

4) <u>Building Community Social Capital and Civic Participation.</u> Almost by definition, CMLA brings previously uninvolved low-income people more confidently and knowledgeably into civic and social engagement within their communities. No better long-term example can be found anywhere in the country than Yellow Creek Concerned Citizens, or more recent ones than RWARM and the Women and Poverty Public Education Initiative. The EZ/EC Learning Initiative's learning teams are a demonstration of civic participation in day-to-day practice, and the LI's McDowell County, WV project is carrying-out strategy expressly aimed at bringing "synergy" to the work of many organizations so as to renew social capital and inspire civic innovation.

Ingredients of Effectiveness and Success

While the examples featured in the paper start and proceed in very different places, common threads running through them suggest what it takes to design and carry-out an effective Community-Based Monitoring, Learning and Action strategy. These include:

∃   the starting point of a CMLA strategy may be identification of an issue or just an idea of one or a few persons, but the issue or idea must have importance to many people. At the very earliest stage of developing a CMLA strategy, the people to whom the idea or issue is important must be involved in fleshing out the CMLA strategy. (RWARM).

∃   the CMLA strategy must "start where the people are" and build on their vision for what should happen, using on-going participatory learning processes to sketch out and inform the vision. The strategy must be seen as long-term. (SALTA).

∃   each of the key operational elements of CMLA must be carefully developed with and by the participants. Expertise in the techniques of citizen monitoring, participatory research, participatory learning, popular education and others to be featured must be incorporated in the CMLA strategy's developmental process. If not present among the participants, a trusting relationship must be established with persons or groups outside the participating group, who can provide informed advice and useful hands-on assistance as may be necessary. (HCFA and, in the appendix, PUEBLO and CSPA).

∃   plans for and implementation of key operational elements need to be well-thought through, meticulously done, tested and revised, and targeted to the objectives of the strategy. For example, citizen monitoring instruments need to incorporate both a rigorous research design, so that data are meaningful, and ease of use, so that, with

appropriate training, ordinary people can work with the instruments effectively. The GRS and CDBG monitoring projects field-tested their research instruments in pilot cities. (RWARM, the Women in Poverty Public Education Initiative, the CDBG Monitoring Project, GRS).

Ǝ roles and relationships of all involved must be clear and acceptable to participants. (the CDBG Monitoring Project).

Ǝ outside assistance for the strategy must be of high quality and consistently available and must include both research and organization-building components. (the Learning Initiative).

Ǝ learning and communications about learning should infuse and direct the strategy throughout. Participatory learning processes should incorporate modules that deepen learning about contextual issues (*e.g.*, popular economics, community history) and encourage participants to expand their own investment in learning. (SALTA, as well as AGENDA and SAJE in the appendix).

Ǝ a committed and trusted staff, adequate in size for the strategy, competent to work in participatory processes, dedicated to seeing the process build toward action must be in place throughout. (all examples).

Ǝ a means to "reward" low-income participants and/or their organizations for their involvement in the CMLA effort -- through acknowledgment of their contributions, provision of stipends or benefits, development of roles for them beyond the effort, or others. (SALTA, the CDBG Monitoring Project).

Ǝ finally, very important to the effectiveness and success of any CMLA effort, grants (or other funding support) of sufficient size and flexibility are essential for organizing and convening; project, strategy and research/monitoring design; learning and leadership development processes; action strategies; and evaluation.

Barriers to Strengthening and Extending Community-Based Monitoring

We learned in our survey of some very practical problems (aside from societal issues and conditions) that impede the progress and restrict the potential of these research and learning strategies.

Funding. As might be anticipated, the lack of resources for monitoring and action strategies was a major topic among survey respondents, and was mentioned more than any other issue as a major barrier to maximizing CMLA's potential.

The lack of philanthropic support for Community-Based Monitoring, Learning and Action is stunning. Other than the rural Learning Initiative, we were unable to find any current examples of funded multi-site projects to help community people use CMLA strategies to have an impact on devolution or the other policy issues which are central to lower income people and their communities. Furthermore, the lion=s share of support for the Learning Initiative, and all the funding for the CDBG and CETA monitoring work, was from government rather than private funders. Obviously, grassroots groups and efforts are not sufficiently recognized for their accomplishments, especially the quality of their research and monitoring, their expertise in developing policy, and their ability to seed hope and keep the flames of democracy from dying out where demoncracy is most at risk.

To stay alive and involved, many grassroots groups find themselves scratching for virtual crumbs.[32] Moreover, very little of the limited funding they can hope to obtain is provided for their most crucial needs -- for example, building their organizational and constituencies' capacities; research, monitoring, learning, planning and strategizing; program and strategy development; organizing their communities to develop greater power to influence critical decisions; and so on. Even less opportunity is provided community-based groups -- alone, or in tandem with others in community, statewide or national alliances and coalitions -- to receive funding support for advocacy strategies aimed at affecting important public policies.

Funders for the most part require community-based groups to seek funds for specific, largely funder-determined, narrowly defined projects targeting particular human service or community development needs. Most funders provide less than full support for these projects. The grants are generally awarded for one year at a time for no more than three years, with the groups expected to round-up needed additional funding from other sources without assistance from the funder. Needless to say, community-based groups are forced to spend an enormous amount of time on fund-raising.

Everyone involved in community building and social change work knows this picture and can embellish it with personal and usually frustrating experiences. Many of our interviewees made a point of saying that whatever we sought to accomplish with our survey, we should not minimize how crucial the lack of resources and support for grassroots efforts has been in restricting the potential of bottom-up strategies.

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[32] See especially Craig C. Jenkins, "Channeling Social Protest: Foundation Patronage of Contemporary Social Movements," in Private Action and the Public Good, Yale University Press, 1996.

Strategies to increase funding for Community-Based Monitoring must take into account funders' continuing lack of confidence in or respect for community-based efforts despite growing public acknowledgment of their value. Obviously, dramatically increasing support for CMLA strategies -- as called for by the new wave of devolution and other challenges of our times -- will not happen absent an overall increased willingness to support grassroots organizations.

Community-Based Monitoring, Learning and Action has great potential value for funders as a strategically significant, rigorous, comprehensive, developing and intriguing approach which has demonstrated remarkable results and return on investment. Funders looking to take leadership and catalytic roles in addressing public policy and systems reform, community-building, and other issues important to the poor should see CMLA as a means through which they and other funders can achieve their objectives in research, empowerment and positive reform.

Organizational Problems. The progress of the experiences featured in this paper was often held back by other problems common to grassroots groups and, in fact, to all institutions -- finding, training and holding capable staff; developing strong boards or operating mechanisms and sound management systems; working productively with other organizations and efforts; fending off media and other outside attacks; designing and implementing programs responsive to the priority needs and concerns of poor people rather than having to concoct programs to pursue scarce resources from programs which are not of central value, etc. These problems of course must be resolved on a case-by-case basis, but many can be anticipated, and avoided or minimized, through on-going training, technical assistance and other support, as well as through peer-to-peer and other outside strategies. However, developing these kinds of assistance on a sustainable basis very quickly becomes a major "lack of money" issue as well.[33]

Cross-fertilization. One kind of problem borne-out in our survey, one that is long-standing and pervasive, will need to be creatively addressed if learning about CMLA is to grow and if its potential is to be fully realized. Stated bluntly, leaders, spokespersons, and organizations in any field, or in a particular niche or network within that field, tend to have an ostrich-like stance toward the rest of the world they work in and little time to investigate other approaches. Theoretically, for example, the techniques and strategies discussed in our selected CMLA experiences are of potential interest and

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[33] Mott, Building Systems of Support for Neighborhood Change. This publication cited many times in this paper is a particularly useful document for understanding community-based groups and efforts and their needs, and for thinking about specific forms of assistance that are most useful in strengthening them and their work.

value to actors and organizations in all of the fields from which they are drawn, and working to develop a useful combination of them could bring representatives of the various fields together for mutual learning and action. But chances are this will not occur without tangible incentives, such as grants made available for cross-sector learning or collaboration, cross-sectoral convenings underwritten by funding sources, or other outside strategies.

Foundation Roles. An interesting, provocative and useful publication highly relevant to this paper made its appearance as we were completing our survey. Called "Foundations and Comprehensive Community Initiatives: The Challenge of Partnership," the Chapin Hall Center for Children's discussion paper makes points that strongly reinforce our survey findings about the influence of foundations on community development dynamics and bottom-up approaches, and problems raised by the relationship between foundations and community leaders.[34]

In that publication, Prudence Brown raises the central dilemmas involved in outside institutions designing their own initiatives and then seeking ways to institute those initiatives in a Abottom-up≅ fashion. What is the proper role for foundations in fostering CMLA and other bottom-up approaches? If a foundation is heavily involved, can a truly community-based approach be developed and sustained? How do you ensure there is basic parity, trust and honesty in the relationships? These and related issues are complex and were a continuing theme in our interviews.

Increasingly, the contradictions analyzed in the Chapin Hall paper are raising serious difficulties for community change efforts. There is acknowledgement among a growing number of funders that efforts to improve lives and opportunities for families, and to promote community-building, require a bottom-up approach. Often, however, the funding sources infuse their work on "bottom-up" initiatives -- frequently designed with heavy foundation influence to meet foundation as well as community objectives -- with demands and expectations that may not be realistic. The problems are often further compounded when funders invest in a variety of "support strategies" for the initiatives that are far more attuned to funder expectations than to local needs and realities or locally-determined plans.

This dilemma also affects philanthropic decisions about their role vis-a-vis major policy issues affecting poor and working people. Few funders are open to initiatives from community-based organizations and others which allow the groups to choose the issues which are of priority, design their own approaches to those issues, and argue for

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[34] Prudence Brown and Sunil Garg, <u>Foundations and Comprehensive Community Initiatives: The Challenges of Partnership</u> (Chicago, Chapin Hall Center for Children, April, 1997).

support based on the merits of their design.   Unquestionably, for the bottom-up approach to succeed, the foundation world will need to invest and trust much more, while controlling far less:

Many international donors are now interested in an approach that enables local people to "undertake their own appraisal, analysis, action, monitoring, and evaluation." While this presents many opportunities, the dangers can come from "demanding too much, in a top-down mode, too fast, with too little understanding of participatory development and its implications." ... the behavior and attitudes of donors and development agencies will need to change if this approach to development is to succeed.[35]

Tactics and Fervor of the Opposition. Working to address critical issues through Community-Based Monitoring, Learning and Action is hardly a piece of cake. In most of the experiences cited, the "battle-lines" have been or were drawn, and the opposition has fought back hammer and tong. Two examples among many crystallized this problem for us during our survey. In San Diego, the work of the Environmental Health Coalition, and its SALTA project, have targeted the Port Commission (among others). The school system, aroused by press publicity about toxic hazards seriously harming children in a Barrio Logan elementary school and pressed by EHC, has joined the fight against the Commission's toxic fumigation practices. The Commission's response has been to file a lawsuit against the School District and the EHC charging "civil conspiracy to damage the Port." While the suit has no merit, the time and money required of EHC to battle back, including filing a counter-suit, is enormous, and resources for doing this are difficult to come by.

In Jackson County, Kentucky, where the learning team's balanced and credible evaluation report of the EZ program produced a firestorm, a controlling faction of EZ decision-makers has attempted to terminate the Learning Initiative by manufacturing a critical report on the learning team and its research methodology (which was developed by an internationally known, university-based researcher). The report reached USDA officials and caused its own firestorm, requiring Initiative staff to spend time and resources defending its work both locally and nationally. Years ago the early reaction to the CDBG Monitoring Project at the US Department of Housing and Urban Development was one of hostility; however, this gradually changed to one of respect and, on the part of the Assistant Secretary, gratitude for the facts and insights which emerged from the monitoring and action.

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[35] *Ibid.*, p. 19. (Citing sources, including ACTIONAID, India and SPEECH 1996, 70.) See appendix for brief discussion of CMLA strategies related to evaluating World Bank projects and other overseas examples.

Targets of Opportunity

Despite these barriers, these challenging times present extraordinary opportunities for developing Community-Based Monitoring, Learning and Action strategies. The devolution and governmental reforms that triggered the initial discussion between AECF and CCC leading to this paper are the source of many of these opportunities.

We have noted that the government reforms create a rapidly changing and critically important context for meeting the challenges of addressing the needs of poor people, rebuilding disadvantaged communities, and establishing a healthy civil society. As the reforms ripple out from the nation's capital, they are forcing a re-examination of virtually all community-driven strategies, programs, and priorities and of the assumptions and commitments of those who support these vital efforts. While problems facing the poor are mounting and resources shrinking, forcing many community-based organizations and efforts into defensive and survival modes, the reexamination can also lead to identification of new "targets of opportunity" flowing from the new environment.[36]

These opportunities may be found or forged in at least four general areas:

1) The arena of governmental reform and devolution holds many potential targets of opportunity. At the state and local levels, much is unresolved and in flux. As the "devil is in the details," many decisions yet to come -- bearing on governmental structure and authority, the role of the legislature, program regulations, funding levels, the extent of decentralization to local governments, the potential roles and responsibilities of community-based groups, and others -- will have enormous impact on the poor.

A considerable chunk of the unfinished business and continuing work in this arena necessarily falls under the category of trying to minimize harm by seizing on opportunities to "prevent bad or worse things from happening." However, the sweep and volatility of the reform effort, the flexibility provided states through devolution and block grants, and other factors also open-up some fresh and creative opportunities for poor people and their allies to put forward their ideas, assert their influence, and, by helping to craft responsive policies and programs, "make good things happen" as well.

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[36] We recognize that the "conditions of the new environment" are not caused primarily by governmental reform efforts no matter how sweeping the reforms. Other influences -- from poverty to changing values to global economics -- are equally or more important factors.

This is clearly a time when it is particularly important that low-income people and their organizations be directly involved in policy debates in state capitals and local government. They must be there to defend their interests, express their knowledge and views, and project their vision and priorities for future policy. And they must be equipped with the factual base, learning experiences, broadened constituencies and alliances, and consensus on action strategies which will enable them to be fully informed and influential parties in the decision-making process. The techniques of Community-Based Monitoring, Learning and Action are tailor-made to equip them for these debates and to improve the results of devolution and reform.

A key part of this is for community groups and others to be assisted to become far more deeply involved in program evaluation. As the intended beneficiaries of many programs, their experience and perspective can be invaluable, and their commitment to improving programs can be a powerful engine for reform.

2) All of the specific program and issue areas important to low-income people have already been affected by reforms or the anticipation of reforms, even though we have seen just the tip of the iceberg so far. Community-based efforts in every area -- preservation of public housing, jobs for welfare recipients, access to health care, day care, youth development, services for seniors, income maintenance, food stamps, education reform and charter schools, and many others -- require new thinking and strategies. No matter how devastating the immediate and projected impacts of budget cuts and policy and program changes may be, targets of opportunity exist in each of these areas as well. They include opportunities: to monitor and assess the impacts of policy, program and regulatory changes, and to work for quick midcourse corrections; to demonstrate new programs that fit new governmental requirements and challenge stale thinking; to devise new working relationships where collaboration is necessary to bring positive change; and to develop new "market niches" and gain new entree to and support from the private sector.

3) A wide variety of foundation-inspired "comprehensive community initiatives" (CCIs) and many locally designed comprehensive programs funded by the federal government's EZ/EC initiative have emerged in recent years. They have been created and promoted as innovative new strategies to rebuild communities, many involving community-based groups. Most, however, are heavily driven from the "top-down." The community-based monitoring and learning approach offers opportunities to get back to basics -- reconstituting and deepening local processes involving residents, identifying issues and strategies from the "ground-up," and taking other steps that could substantially influence and perhaps change the course of the CCIs' development and improve on their outcomes.

Community-Based Monitoring can also enable people involved in a neighborhood-focused CCI to study and understand the broader policy issues which affect the entire broader community and to figure out how to intervene on those issues in an informed and effective way. Finally, use of community-based learning processes can affect the thinking and future work of initiative designers, advocates and evaluators in foundations, research organizations and government. It can help them fashion new comprehensive initiatives which are built from the bottom-up and which lead to reforms in important policies and systems.

CMLA approaches can be equally useful for designers of strategies which target an entire city or metropolitan area with the intention of stimulating reform of a series of systems to increase opportunities for poor people and address significant systemic obstacles to those opportunities. Community-Based Learning focused on city-wide and metro-wide policies is an excellent educational approach for helping people from various neighborhoods go beyond their customary work on neighborhood-level issues to analyze larger issues, identify common interests and take joint action.

4) As poor people feel the pinch and threat of policy changes and budget cuts, their desire to learn what can be done opens many doors for community-based constituency-building and participatory learning and education. The potential for attracting new grassroots participants to fight for change, strengthening and better connecting grassroots groups and efforts so their combined influence increases, and helping people understand and grapple with increasingly fundamental issues could be significant. It will be critically important to help community-based groups do more than mobilize outrage and apply bandaids, instead delving into these policy issues in depth, researching and learning about current and possible alternative approaches, and then using those facts and that learning and organization-building process to take strategic advantage of this era of change.

Our survey findings clearly point to the unique and significant value of Community-Based Monitoring, Learning and Action strategies for building the capacities and power of the poor and for seizing on targets of opportunity in these and other areas.

ACTION RECOMMENDATIONS

We believe the data gathered in our survey and presented in this paper argue strongly for bolstering Community-Based Monitoring, Learning and Action strategies now underway as well as supporting development of similar strategies on other key issues related to devolution and reform. Over twenty-five years a series of projects have demonstrated the tremendous potential of combining rigorous monitoring and research, broad-based learning, and joint action on key community issues in order to produce both

solid data and solid change. We strongly believe that the time has come for private philanthropy and government to give solid financial backing to this important approach to increasing the accountability and effectiveness of government and private sector institutions.

In addition, we believe that it would be worthwhile to commission further learning and information dissemination about these community-based research and educational approaches. Community-Based Monitoring and other forms of grassroots research are seldom recognized as uniquely effective ways of addressing major issues while building community capacity. The goals of further research should be to document and draw lessons from current and past experience and to disseminate that learning widelyt to strengthen and Agrow≅ the field. Through this support for Community-Based Monitoring, foundations can deepen the practice of democracy and close the gap between the Agrassroots≅ and the Amajor systems reform.≅ They can help link low-income community leaders and organizations with major policy reform issues and initiatives in practical and effective ways.

The following brief recommendations stem from our findings and experience, and the experience and perspectives of the advisory committee to this project:

Circulating and Building Upon This Paper

With appropriate revisions, this paper should be disseminated widely to people involved in monitoring and learning initiatives, others involved in community-based and participatory research and evaluation, policy-makers and analysts, community groups and the support organizations and coalitions which assist them, funders, and others. The goals of this dissemination effort should be to stimulate dialogue about and expand support for Community-Based Monitoring, Learning and Action, especially on key issues related to devolution and policies affecting low-income people.

In addition, as a starting point for a serious, long-term effort, we urge the Annie E. Casey Foundation -- perhaps in conjunction with other funders and/or organizations -- to convene a two-day meeting of key actors who have pioneered various forms of community-based monitoring/research, learning and action. In this meeting participants should review this paper and consider its findings and implications. They should further identify barriers and opportunities for advancement of this approach, recommend ways to increase the knowledge base on CMLA learning and practice, and suggest steps for increasing funding and other support for monitoring. The results of this meeting should then be developed into a plan of action by a group of practitioners and foundation officials.

<u>Expanding Community-Based Monitoring to Address Devolution</u>

In this era of devolution and almost unprecedented change, community-based groups, social service providers, organizations concerned about children, families and the broader problems of poverty are at an extraordinary disadvantage. Change is happening so rapidly on so many fronts that it is almost impossible to track it and to intervene effectively to make sure that the interests of poor and working people are protected and advanced, that positive Areform≅ happens.

There is no time to waste. Grassroots groups and other nonprofits must have immediate access to the tools and resources they need to play an effective role as decisions are made at the state and local level. This requires access to information -- on the new programs, on legislative and regulatory requirements, on the decision-making processes and opportunities to influence them, and on key actors and potential allies inside and outside government. In short, it requires immediate access to the techniques of Community-Based Monitoring, Learning and Action, with the financial, research assistance, and other advice and support which is needed to apply those techniques.

We urge the Casey Foundation and other funders to take the lead in making timely and large-scale commitments to helping organizations apply these approaches at the state and local levels. It is particularly important to help groups use these techniques to address issues of welfare reform, public housing, the shift to managed care under Medicaid and other steps in devolution on which policy decisions over the next two years will determine what opportunities poor and working families have for years to come.

Applying the Approach in the Casey Foundation's Work

As the Casey Foundation moves into its next phase of pursuing systems reform issues, involving the community in efforts to improve policies toward children, families and neighborhoods, there are many opportunities to use Community-Based Monitoring and Learning to close gaps between the grassroots and major systemic issues.

These strategies could be *integrated into some of the Foundation's current initiatives*, providing new techniques which could be useful as, for example, RCI grantees address issues of social services integration or child care, or Jobs Initiative grantees approach the policy side of their work, tackling workforce or economic development issues.

We urge the Foundation to consider *development of one or more new initiatives* which would help community-based groups and collaboratives apply CMLA techniques to addressing a particular set of policy issues related to devolution, such as welfare reform or the massive changes affecting public housing.

Finally, as the Foundation moves forward toward the *selection of several cities and states for focussed attention*, we urge the Foundation to consider the potential of Community-Based Monitoring as a way of helping community-based groups and collaboratives study and learn about the major systems and policy issues which they then may want to address through the marshalling of data and collective action.

Supporting Further Research and Dissemination about CMLA

The richness and potential of Community-Based Monitoring, Learning and Action can only be hinted-at and sketched in this paper. Because the various experiences brought in under the CMLA umbrella have not been studied as a field, information and experience are scattered. Indeed, most of our survey respondents were clearly able only to tell us about groups or strategies in their own arenas -- organizers about organizing groups, popular educators about participatory learning and training, and so on -- with few able to steer us knowledgeably in any other direction.

The task of examining CMLA is made even more complex and difficult by the (generally healthy) lack of uniformity, categorizations and definitions across the spectrum of bottom-up experiences and strategies, and the (unhealthy) lack of well-developed written evaluations, case examples or other materials that can help in thinking about and acting on the importance of the bottom-up approach to change. Available materials are for the most part top-down renderings of bottom-up experiences, less than useful for the groups and efforts noted in this paper.

Our survey findings strongly suggest that additional research and the further development of a conceptual framework for more consistent and helpful assessments of community-based monitoring efforts would be of great value to practitioners in the field and to policy-makers, funders and others looking for new ways to increase the accountability and effectiveness of public programs and policies.