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sources produce the type of underdevelopment that is characteristic of Third World economies. Community-based development strategies offer localities an alternative path of development.

**Conclusions**

Can rural communities survive the structural forces working against the development of a viable local economy? Community-based development can have an impact on the margins; they probably cannot replace all of the jobs and income being lost to the restructuring process. It does, however, produce a more resilient economy that will be in a better position to develop in the future. Long-term development may be possible if communities learn how to capitalize on local resources and to expand the local social capital. For many communities, this will require a different approach to local economic development—one that is participatory and inclusive. Participation is learned, however, and there are few other local institutions that promote participation. Thus, community-based development will require a comprehensive approach to economic development that links the economy to social institutions in the community.

Community-based development strategies can be more effective if they are supported with national and state policies and programs that address the specific disadvantages that rural communities face. These policies and programs need to recognize the changing structure of rural economies, particularly the shift from a dependency on natural resources to other types of economic activity. Rural policies should be comprehensive, recognizing the linkage between economic development, environmental quality, housing, health care and other areas of the community.

— Gary P. Green

**Disaster Preparedness and Mitigation**

Steps taken to create awareness, increase safety and lessen negative consequences of a disaster. This entry will focus on the unique challenges rural areas present for disaster preparedness and mitigation efforts. Preparedness activities include initiatives that strengthen ability to respond effectively to a disaster. Mitigation efforts are aimed at preventing or minimizing damage to people and property.

One-fifth of the nation’s population lives in rural areas (HAC, 2008). Furthermore, most of the country’s farms, numerous power facilities and weapons of mass destruction are sited in rural areas (Office of Rural Health Policy, 2002). The formula used to calculate risk varies among experts but typically involves a hazard (natural, manmade, terrorist) multiplied by vulnerability to that hazard. Since there are fewer people in rural areas and population density is lower, a localized event will likely affect fewer people and fewer physical structures. In this light, rural areas can be viewed as less vulnerable to disasters. However, rural areas represent different types of vulnerability to extreme events. Saenz and Peacock (2006) reported that rural populations affected by Hurricane Katrina were vulnerable because of low levels of education, low incomes and minority status. Obstacles to disaster preparedness and mitigation in rural locations are closely associated with poverty, agricultural activities, limited resources and isolation.

**Poverty**

Rural poverty, particularly among minorities, female-headed households and children, is a continuing problem in the U.S. (HAC, 2008). According to the Housing Assistance Council (2006) all but 11 of the 200 poorest
counties in the U.S. are rural. Many of these areas reveal extreme poverty with rates above 30 percent. Poverty is particularly persistent in some rural areas including central Appalachia, communities along the U.S.-Mexican border, the Lower Mississippi Delta and Native American lands (HAC, 2008).

Whereas rural areas in the U.S. are typically more racially and ethnically homogeneous than urban populations, the rural poor are more likely to be minorities than non-Hispanic Whites. Rural African Americans experience poverty at 33 percent, three times the rate of rural Whites. Rural Native Americans have a poverty rate of 30 percent, and rural Hispanics have a poverty rate of 27 percent. When compared to urban minority groups, poverty rates are nearly 10 percentage points greater in rural areas. Rural children and elderly also suffer high poverty rates (HAC, 2006).

Disaster preparedness and mitigation efforts in areas of deep and persistent poverty are necessarily different from those in more affluent areas. For example, housing in poor areas is more likely to be substandard and therefore offer little protection during extreme weather events. Particularly vulnerable to high winds, for example, are manufactured homes which comprise 18 percent of rural housing units. In fact “minorities in rural areas are among the poorest and worst housed groups in the entire nation, with extremely high levels of inadequate housing conditions” (HAC, 2008). Additionally, poor households are more likely to have insufficient insurance in the event of damage to their residence, property and possessions.

Poor populations also have lower rates of private vehicle ownership, limiting ability to evacuate. When access to a vehicle is available, evacuation decisions are not independent but depend on the actions of other people. While this holds true for poor in urban areas as well, alternative forms of transportation, including public transportation, are less available in rural areas. Evacuation also requires money with which to purchase gas, food and shelter. For people with limited budgets, the unforeseen expenses of evacuation may make leaving impossible.

Communication is also likely to be shaped by poverty. Warning systems based on land line telephone systems may not achieve the coverage in rural areas that they do in urban ones if residents do not have phone service. Cell phones may link people if residents have access to them. Media bulletins and information is similarly dependent on residents’ ownership of televisions with cable/satellite service, radios and computers with Internet access.

Local Economies

Today local rural economies are less exclusively reliant on agricultural and extractive activities than in the past. However, jobs in rural areas are still often linked to farming, ranching, food production, extractive industries and tourism. All of these are highly dependent on the natural environment and can suffer devastating losses in the event of a disaster. Since these particularly vulnerable activities are concentrated in rural areas, efforts to prepare for, and mitigate the effects of, disasters are shaped by the local economy.

In any location people take measures to protect their businesses and livelihoods when faced with disaster. It is difficult to mitigate the effects of extreme weather on agricultural activities. Crops can be protected to some degree, but they cannot be moved out of harm’s way. Efforts to minimize damage require foresight, planning, people and equipment. Small communities may not have enough resources for everyone to simultaneously prepare for bad weather. Preparations also require time. Awareness of potential risk well in advance of the disaster is crucial but is only possible in slow onset events like storms, hurricanes or floods.

Similarly, sheltering and transportation of animals and livestock are complicated procedures. Evacuating even with domestic animals has proven problematic in that most official shelters do not allow pets for health and safety reasons, many hotels/motels do not accept them and separate facilities to temporarily house and care for pets are not yet routinely built into emergency response plans. When livestock is at risk, sheltering may be possible on-site or may necessitate transportation. Transportation of livestock to minimize harm is possible when there is a receiving facility to accommodate the animals. Furthermore, sheltering and transportation across state lines requires health documentation. In rural areas, where livestock is concentrated, preparedness and mitigation activities are more likely than urban areas to include efforts to protect livestock.

Limited Resources

Infrastructure and resources shape disaster preparedness and mitigation activities. Lack of infrastructure is a common characteristic of rural areas. Roads determine evacuation routes and traffic patterns. The size of school districts’ student population determines numbers of school buses available to provide transportation for those unable to evacuate themselves. Large, solidly
constructed buildings (often schools) may be available to shelter people or may be nonexistent, affecting how far and in which direction the population must be moved to safety.

Emergency response personnel including firefighters, police officers, emergency medical personnel and hazardous material experts play important roles in emergency preparedness and mitigation before a disaster strikes. Rural areas entrust more of the emergency response activities to volunteer personnel than urban areas. Reliance on part-time, non-professional firefighters or emergency responders makes it more difficult to ensure continued training and experience with the latest technology and procedures.

According to the Office of Rural Health Policy (2002), hospitals are the center of rural health care activities. Public health offices in rural areas typically do not have the resources that urban offices possess, with little staff and limited hours, and mental health resources are likewise minimal. Nationwide hospital bed capacity has been decreasing. Overly stretched resources in normal times translate into a severe lack of surge capacity if a disaster should cause large numbers of people to seek medical services at once. Preparedness activities then would include an increase in trained health professionals and plans to manage possible large numbers of patients either by increasing local surge capacity or through careful plans to transport patients to other facilities nearby.

The presence of commercial retail stores may be limited in number and inventory in rural communities. This is important in that during preparations for a disaster certain items (e.g., water, ice, food, gas, batteries, animal feed, lumber and generators) are needed by large numbers of people. Retailers with large inventories and extensive distribution systems are generally more able to bring in supplies quickly. Emergency managers often rely on agreements with businesses put in place before an event to furnish the emergency effort with supplies, particularly for emergency shelters.

The more limited emergency resources of rural communities mean a greater reliance on funding from external sources like grants. In order to locate and pursue funding opportunities, rural areas need more personnel with the relevant research and grant-writing skills. When emergency personnel are part-time, and/or volunteer, locating the human resources for these activities can be difficult.

Additionally, a lack of emergency management personnel results in increased reliance on nonprofit and faith-based organizations and volunteers. Some areas may be too scarcely populated to provide enough people to respond to the emergency. Where we see large numbers of volunteers, emergency management personnel face the task of effectively managing volunteers and donations, diverting them away from other tasks.

Isolation
Briefly, the isolation rural areas experience is another challenge to disaster preparedness and mitigation. If resources are unavailable locally, they must travel greater distances to arrive. In terms of communication, physical distance has been lessened by technology. However, rural areas may rely on fewer forms of communication. If a disaster hinders one form of communication, access to alternative forms may be limited or unavailable. Beyond the technological considerations, communication involves processes and languages that must be integrated so that the parties can understand the information transmitted. Organizationally, many rural areas are still in the process of integrating emergency response strategies with other levels of government by adopting the National Incident Management System (NIMS).

Rural Disaster Preparedness and Mitigation Strategies
Issues challenging rural areas as they prepare for disaster and attempt to minimize harm and maximize response capabilities have been briefly discussed. It should be noted that rural areas in the U.S. also typically enjoy some characteristics that help support community responses to disaster.

Small communities and rural areas have a strong tradition of voluntarism and social participation. When residents are connected with one another through kinship, friendships, acquaintances and overlapping organizational memberships, information and assistance flow readily. Repeated interaction within a small community also facilitates coordination of people. Even in unforeseen events, skills and resources available in the community can quickly be matched to needs. Capitalizing on these capabilities is one of the most promising disaster preparedness and mitigation programs in rural areas: the development of community Emergency Response Teams (CERTS) organized by Citizen Corps and Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) under the Department of Homeland Security (Brennan and Flint, 2007).
Typically, rural residents demonstrate a greater awareness of land use issues, environmental factors and natural hazards. Farming communities demonstrate a deep respect for nature. Recognition of nature’s power motivates residents to actively prepare for possible disaster, to be alert to information regarding potentially dangerous events and to take warnings very seriously.

Finally, rural residents value self-sufficiency. Most communities are accustomed to fending for themselves and therefore more readily prepare to face a disaster and respond to it by employing their own resources. While this is certainly admirable, the potential negative outcome of this independence is the possibility that it could hamper efforts to coordinate with external sources of assistance that might help the community.

In sum, rural areas in the U.S. present an array of challenges for disaster preparedness and mitigation including poverty, economic foundations linked to the natural world, limited resources and isolation. However, high rates of voluntarism and social participation, and a culture characterized by respect for nature and self-sufficiency, are also positive additions to disaster preparedness and mitigation activities.

— Lee Mary Miller

See also
Department of Homeland Security and Rural America; Emergency Management Professionals; Rural Emergency Management Programs; Rural Emergency Response and Recovery; Terrorism; Weather

References


Division of Household Labor
The allocation of domestic chores within the home, specifically unpaid labor as performed by spouses. The division of household labor in rural homes traditionally has been highly segregated; such that wives perform the majority of chores, and the more tedious tasks. Although recent studies support this allocation of labor, there is also evidence of a greater sharing of chores on the part of husbands. The conservative nature of rural attitudes, particularly those concerning family roles, is often cited as the reason for the segregation of household labor in rural homes.

The division of household labor attracted much attention among family researchers over the past several decades. One notable characteristic of this literature is the relative paucity of studies that sought to examine the division of household labor in the rural context. Whereas several researchers called for analyses of rural households in this regard (Dorfman and Heckert 1988; Hardesty and Bokemeier 1989), to date, few studies focused on the division of household labor in rural households.

Among existing studies, most do note the uniqueness of marriages, marital interaction, and family structure in rural areas. For example, researchers suggested that rural wives are more likely to espouse traditional marital roles and adhere to more conservative norms as compared to their urban counterparts (Rosenblatt and Anderson 1981). Rural and urban areas overall maintain different ideals concerning marital interaction and marital roles. Hansen (1987) concluded that rural residents hold more conservative attitudes concerning social, familial, religious, and sexual issues.

Despite the stereotype of rural couples being very traditional (i.e., almost exclusively patriarchal), several studies suggested that the nature of marital relations in rural communities is changing such that wives are becoming more influential in the decision making processes within marriage (Dorfman and Hill 1986). Given that much of marital partners’ influence in the decision making processes is derived from their employment