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The Concept of Social Exclusion and Rural Development Policy*

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ABSTRACT Since the early 1970s rural research and public education programs have been intensified in efforts to improve living conditions and strengthen community life in rural America (Southern Perspectives 2000). During much of the 1990s, the nation, including the rural South, experienced a growing economy, a booming stock market and declining unemployment rates (Gibbs 2001). However, many serious social problems traditionally associated with the rural South remain to this day (Gibbs 2001). This paper introduces the concept of social exclusion, used extensively in European countries and now part of the European Union's official lexicon. Social exclusion is defined as the process and the resulting condition in which specific social entities are fully or partially prevented from acquiring the basic necessities of life. Further components are that it is seen as a product of the social system, not an individual attribute, and that it is multi-dimensional and dynamic in time and space. It is argued that the concept of social exclusion should be incorporated into rural development policy discourse in the United States. This would aid in countering the predominant pattern of neglect in rural development policies and programs in addressing the persistent problems which exist.

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Since the early 1970s rural research and public education programs have been intensified in efforts to improve living conditions and strengthen community life in rural America (Southern Perspectives 2000). During much of the 1990s the nation experienced a growing economy, a booming stock market and declining unemployment rates (Gibbs 2001). The rural South shared in this economic expansion. However, many serious social problems traditionally associated with the rural South remain to this day (Gibbs 2001).

This is exacerbated by the fact that, despite the overall prosperity of the last decade, the United States has the most income and wealth inequality of any industrialized nation, both for corporations and individuals (Wolff 2000; U.S. Bureau of the Census 2000). This gap between the richest and poorest people in the United States has been growing for decades (Braun 1991; Danziger and Gottschalk; 1995; Galbraith 1998; Blau 1999; Greenstein et al. 2001). This disproportionate wealth is used to influence political power and the public agenda from the national level all the way down to the local level.

When all of these direct and indirect gifts (donations provided directly to candidates or through numerous political action committees of specific corporations and general business organizations) are combined, the power elite can be seen to provide the great bulk of the financial support to both parties at the national level, far out spending the unions and middle status liberals with the Democrats, and the melange of physicians, dentists, engineers, real-estate operators and other white-collar conservatives within the right wing of the Republican Party” (Domhoff, 1978:148).

An enormous amount of *political* power is concentrated in the hands of a few (Domhoff 1998; Dye 1995; Parenti 1995; Silk and Silk 1980). This small minority defines the national agenda, which is more narrow and conservative than most other Western nations (Parenti 1995).

The answer to the question of why societies vary in their structure of rewards is more political. In significant measure, societies choose the height and breadth of their “ladders.” By loosening markets or regulating them, by providing services to all citizens or rationing

them according to income, by subsidizing some groups more than others, societies, through their politics, build their ladders. To be sure, historical and external constraints deny full freedom of action, but a substantial freedom of action remains. . . . In a democracy, this means that the inequality Americans have is, in significant measure, the historical result of policy choices Americans—or, at least, Americans’ representatives—have made. In the United States, the result is a society that is distinctly unequal. Our ladder is, by the standards of affluent democracies and even by the standards of recent American history, unusually extended and narrow—and becoming more so. (Fischer et al. 1996:8)

This brings us to the purpose of this paper, which is to suggest that the concept of social exclusion, already implicit in some rural development theoretical work, be *explicitly* incorporated into the rural development policy discourse in the United States, with the purpose of bringing to the forefront the structural problems described above. A concern, then, is that because of current political and social circumstances, there is a neglect in rural development policies and programs of these broader systemic issues.

Brief History and European Uses of Social Exclusion

Social exclusion finds its origins in the writings of Rene Lenoir in France in the 1970s (Sen 2000). It was initially used by the French “. . . to describe the conditions of certain groups at the margins of society who were cut off both from regular sources of employment and the income safety nets of the welfare state” (Pierson 2002:4). The term spread rapidly throughout Europe during the 1980s. “However, when the term began to be used in the European context it referred more to the European Union (EU) objective of achieving social and economic cohesion” (Percy-Smith 2000:1). Social cohesion was used to mean “reconciliation of a system of organisations based on market forces, freedom of opportunity and enterprise with a commitment to the values of internal solidarity and mutual support which ensures open access to benefit and protection for all members of society” (Geddes 1997:20).

While social exclusion is utilized in discussions and policy debates in most European nations (Byrne 1999; Cattacin et al. 1999; Atkinson and Davoudi 2000; Percy-Smith 2000), the concept is most widely used in Great Britain (Burchardt, Le Grand and Piachaud 2002). In addition to Great Britain establishing the Center for the Analysis of Social Exclusion (CASE) at the London School of Economics, numerous Social Exclusion Units exist throughout Great Britain, including most rural areas (Scottish Executive 2002). However, the official British use of social exclusion is not without its policy critics. It was seen as having been co-opted by the Labor Party to justify a draconian welfare-to-work program, still in place, in which people are placed in employment but remain socially excluded from full participation in their communities due to inadequate income and other support (Levitas 1999). Regardless of the legitimacy of these criticisms, the fact that the European Union and Great Britain have this extensive and in depth discourse surrounding the solutions to social exclusion, with programs dispersed throughout the nations, spotlights the lack of any similar discourse in the United States. Rural development policy in the United States, including the rural South, provides an excellent opportunity to further explore the European-born concept of social exclusion and offer new avenues for perceiving and initiating rural development policy.

Nevertheless, within the social context of the United States, the use of the social exclusion must clearly be differentiated and shown to expand upon similar concepts now commonly utilized by sociologists (e.g. social inequality, poverty, discrimination, segregation, alienation, and exploitation). We argue that there is a "value-added" use with this concept. As Kerbo (2000) points out: "[s]ocial inequality is the condition whereby people have unequal access to valued resources, services, and positions in society. Such inequality can emerge in terms of how individuals and groups are themselves ranked and evaluated by others, but, most importantly, social inequality is related to differing positions in the social structure" (Kerbo 2000:11). Poverty most commonly refers to living below some defined standard of living, most typically some specified income level. Social exclusion may encompass concepts such as poverty, deprivation, inequality, or discrimination (Percy-Smith 2000; Walker 1997; Burden 2000; Pierson 2002). However, the use of the concept of social exclusion allows for the *concentrated* attention to the *process* of excluding, most importantly including *who or what* is doing the excluding (institutions,

structures, powerful individuals and groups), the process by which they are doing the excluding, the relationships among those institutions and structures, and also how to *intervene* in the process in order to reduce the exclusion. “. . . the crucial issue is not the novelty in focusing on relational features (Adam Smith did the same in the eighteenth century, as have others before and after him), but the *focusing* that the social exclusion literature can provide in giving a central role to relational connections” (Sen 2000:6).

In sum, the focus is on the social structure, but more importantly the relations among the component parts of the social structure, and how they produce and perpetuate the processes that create social exclusion. Stated directly from the ideas of Dahrendorf (1959):

Organization means, among other things, that power will be distributed unequally. The population will therefore be separated into the haves and the have-nots with respect to power. Because organization also means constraint, there will be a situation in all societies in which the constraints are determined by the powerful, thereby further ensuring that the have-nots will be in conflict with the haves” (Eitzen and Baca Zinn 1995:50)

Rural and community development policy efforts must first and foremost examine the social structure and then direct policy toward changing the institutionalized exclusionary practices. This refers to the economic, political and social conditions that have been created and that have in turn set up barriers for certain groups of people and advantages for others.

Definition and Conceptual Explication of Social Exclusion

Definition

Drawing from a number of important works (e.g. Atkinson and Davoudi 2000; Byrne 1999, 1997; Peace 2001; Percy-Smith 2000),

we define social exclusion as the process and the resulting condition in which specific social entities are fully or partially prevented from acquiring the basic necessities of life¹. Seen as a product of the social system and not as an individual attribute, it is multi-dimensional and dynamic in time and space.

In defining social exclusion, the subject of social *inclusion* must be addressed as well. According to Northway (1997): “[A]n inclusive society is . . . one which embraces a wide range of diversity, rather than embracing conformity or assimilation within a narrow interpretation of ‘normality.’ Inclusion conveys a ‘right to belong’” (Northway 1997:164). It must be stressed that social inclusion is not necessarily synonymous with social cohesion and integration. In common with criticisms of Parsonian (Parsons 1971) functionalism, use of the term social cohesion and its related idea of conformance to the dominant social order, as narrowly defined by those in power, risks assigning the label of deviant to persons who do not fit “normal” expectations.

Components of the Definition

Our definition of social exclusion contains four important components. First, social exclusion results from a process that is fostered by the social structure that then leads to a state of being. Second, social exclusion is created by a social system in which individuals and aggregates (from neighborhoods all the way to nations) are prevented from acquiring basic necessities. Third, social exclusion as a concept is multi-dimensional. Fourth, social exclusion is dynamic in time and space. Each of these components has significance for rural development policy.

Social exclusion results from a process that is fostered by the social structure that then leads to a state of being. This first

¹While not the purpose of this paper to complete an in depth analysis of what is considered a basic necessity of life, in order for people to *not* be vulnerable to social exclusion, they should be able to own property, live in safe and sound housing, have access to reasonable credit, receive a good education and high quality health services, possess gainful employment, and live in a clean environment.

component seeks to avoid the problems with expressing social exclusion solely as a state of being and losing sight of those who are “doing” the excluding (Peace 2001). Byrne (1999:5) is most direct on this issue, stating that “the socially excluded are those parts of the population who have been actively underdeveloped.” Social exclusion is not simply a result of “bad luck” or personal inadequacies, but rather a product of flaws in the system that create disadvantages for certain segments of the population. Therefore, the unequal distribution of power in society from which social exclusion is derived should be the primary focus of attention for researchers and policy makers.

Everybody does not start the race at the same place. The consequences of such uneven distribution of wealth and power create barriers for those at the bottom of the socioeconomic structure. For example, a poor rural college student, who must drive to school in undependable transportation, work many hours in an outside job, and support family members, cannot achieve, on average, with the ease of another student possessing resources that allow more time and energy for academic activities.

Our social system is set up in such a way that the process of allocating health care resources precludes certain people from receiving high quality services. “How people live, get sick, and die depends not only on their race and gender, but primarily on the class to which they belong” (Navarro 1991:2). Members of the lower classes have less access to quality healthcare, are more likely to live in areas that are polluted, be inadequately housed, work in unsafe working conditions, have poorer diets, lack reliable transportation for health related activities, and have inadequate resources for pharmaceuticals and other health aids (Bhuyan and Leistriz 2000). The poor, including the rural poor, in the United States suffer more from these problems than citizens of most other Western nations (Blau 1999; Colman and Kerbo 2002).

Removing structural barriers is quite different from the aim of producing or providing *opportunities* for the “actively underdeveloped,” while leaving the status quo (or barriers) in place. Confronting and attempting to restructure the status quo, at any geopolitical level, is not typically an easy task in the United States, especially if change to any great extent challenges the legitimacy of laissez-faire economics or possessive individualism. Nevertheless, this is what will truly eliminate the “condition” of exclusion. Specific individuals may escape social exclusion, but the system that creates the exclusion remains intact.

Again, we recognize that the U.S. socio-political economy is not the only system in which there is social exclusion. The U.S. system is our current focus but there are alternative systems in which social exclusion is much less likely to occur.

Social exclusion is created by a social system in which specific social entities (this could be individuals, neighborhoods, communities, or nations) are fully or partially prevented from acquiring the basic necessities of life from other, more dominant, social entities. While of course some problems are due to the inadequacies of individuals, the dominant orientation of social policies is to place an inordinate amount of attention on changing individuals *in order to* eliminate social problems. We turn to the insight of C. Wright Mills (1959) in his classic work, *The Sociological Imagination*, where he makes the distinction between personal troubles and public issues. Unfortunately, this distinction is often blurred among residents in the United States, and particularly of the rural South, who adhere to strong individualistic, traditional values, whereby individuals are blamed for public issues that are beyond their control. What is paramount is the way some social entities are fully or partially prevented from acquiring the basic needs of life because they must overcome barriers *not* of their own making and *not* faced by other entities in the social system. Quite often the idea in rural and community development has been to provide individuals with the skills or resources to overcome these barriers. The more recent social assets assessment models, those focusing on social capital development, and holistic methods are an improvement in that they are attempting to create more participatory, democratic processes. However, because changing the distribution of power and status is so difficult, and requires tremendous resources by community development specialists, they will have difficulty succeeding. Given the nature of the current social system, this individual level approach—in lieu of major systemic change—is often a necessary one for sociologists. However, this is a very tentative solution. Providing skills or limited, temporary resources may not result in positive long-term solutions, but may provide relief for specific problems. At the same time, social exclusion may not be as alien to U.S. sociologists as first appears, and is instead congruent with the already valued conceptualization of the sociological imagination. This of course is significant because it keeps sociologists in touch with the institutional obstacles within which they work.

Reform of the educational system is one imagined remedy for declining incomes. Jobs and job training are the other. Here too, however, the prospects are limited, because neither a trained nor an educated workforce is, by itself, a guarantee of future employment. Employment programs confront just too many barriers to success. A trained worker may be hired over an untrained worker, but without a specific government commitment to job creation, businesses still determine the total number of workers they are going to employ. And if together, all their individual judgments threaten to create too many jobs, the Federal Reserve can be counted on to raise interest rates before unemployment gets too low. (Blau 1999: 113).

Rural sociology and rural and community development research provide many examples illustrating the social exclusion which exists. In education, Roscigno and Crowley (2001:268) note that: “[s]tudents living in rural areas of the United States achieve at a lower level and drop out of high school at higher rates than do their nonrural counterparts.” They point to the many factors involved in this outcome and the reciprocal nature that perpetuates the problem. Of most significance are the many different factors that have created structural barriers for rural students that negatively affect their comparative achievement. One factor is that rural schools in general receive less funding per student than nonrural schools (Roscigno and Crowley 2001). In addition, there are structures and processes in rural areas that restrict the resources of other institutions (e.g. family or the local labor market) or that can shape rural values. For example, rural youth may have reduced commitment to education, knowing the reality of the limited return on investment. This indirectly impacts their educational achievement. While some research has shown that investing more money into particular schools has not led to improved outcomes, one must ask whether even when true equity in funds is obtained, how long it will take for societal factors affecting achievement to be overridden.

Beaulieu and Freshwater (1999) address the potential employment problems faced by rural residents in the South due to the decline in the number of jobs that employ low skilled workers and the

disproportionate growth of higher quality jobs occurring outside the rural South. “. . . a higher proportion of rural southerners lack the necessary formal educational credentials to qualify for these jobs” (Beaulieu and Freshwater 1999:1). This, of course, is likely a product of the issue discussed above by Roscigno and Crowley (2001). Although gains in educational attainment have been made in the nonmetropolitan South, it still trails every other region of the nation on this measure (Gibbs 2000). Gibbs (2000) speculates that this is caused partially by firms that are reluctant to locate in areas in which there is a large number of persons with low educational attainment and when local decision-makers are reluctant to increase efforts to support greater educational attainment because they assume there will be a low return on investment.

Another structural obstacle that places undue hardship on rural southerners, especially the poor and elderly, is the lack of adequate and reliable transportation. This can hamper the ability to obtain adequate legal services (Lewis and Petrakis 2000) and prompt, high quality healthcare (Ricketts and Cromartie 1992; Rutledge, Ricketts and Bell 1992; Rosenberg and Moore 1992). In many rural areas, the closure or conversion of not-for-profit hospitals has made access to healthcare troublesome (Aday et al. 1998).

Social exclusion is multi-dimensional. Burchardt et al. (2002) identified four dimensions they see as key components of social exclusion: consumption, production, political engagement, and social interaction. Returning to the idea of inclusion, they maintain that social entities have basic rights to purchase goods and services, participate in economically valuable activities, be engaged in political and community decision making, and be socially integrated with family, friends, and community. Multi-dimensionality also refers to the ways social exclusion in its various dimensions can be both cause and outcome. “. . . it is the fact that disadvantage in relation to one aspect of life is linked to disadvantage in other areas that predispose individuals, households, neighborhoods, to become socially excluded” (Percy-Smith 2000:15). This interrelatedness also reflects on the difficulty of simply providing persons with employment as a solution to social problems. The interrelatedness of economic, social, political, and cultural factors combine, in various ways, to affect certain individuals and groups in negative ways.

In addition, and of great importance, is that the multi-

dimensional approach should not be thought of as a simple amalgamation of single indicators. Social exclusion emphasizes spatial, personal and economic *intensifiers* (Peace 2001), factors that make it more likely that certain segments of the population or particular individuals will experience negative consequences because of their present situation or social characteristics. These intensifiers also make persons more vulnerable to change (e.g. shifts in public policy, the closing or downsizing of a community's major employer, loss of lone physicians in rural areas). For example, a small community that depends on one factory as a major employer suffers as that factory closes.

This multi-dimensionality is not necessarily a unique idea. Civic community (Tolbert et al. 2002), community vitality (Grigsby 2001), community actualization (Robinson 1991) and other community development models incorporate a comprehensive approach to rural and community development. However, social exclusion, with its overriding concern with social constraints, power, and exploitation, is different from the civic models. It could, however, complement the use of civic models, adding this important orientation. In other words, it is explicit in the fact that social exclusion is based on the principles of conflict theory and that capitalism, the system within which we reside, is a central cause of social exclusion. At the same time, social exclusion can exist in other economic systems, although social exclusion is inherent within the principles of capitalism.

Social exclusion is dynamic in time and space (i.e., experienced episodically by certain social entities at various times and places). Economic, political and cultural factors; social change; the timing of the change; and the physical location and status at the time of the change all contribute to an individual's or group's social exclusion or, alternatively, freedom from exclusion. For example, an Afghani living in a large community of Afghani may suffer more discrimination at this time because of the Twin Tower attack, but twenty years ago, when the USSR was at war with Afghanistan and the United States was helping Afghanistan, that community may have received more positive public sentiment. This exemplifies the dynamic of time and space with circumstances.

Rural Development Policy

Since the early 1970s, many rural research and public education

programs have been designed and implemented to improve the living conditions of rural individuals, families, and communities (Southern Perspectives 2000). The question remains, however: why is it that “rural areas consistently do more poorly than urban areas on education attainment, earned wages, and employment status of its populace” (Beaulieu and Mulkey 1995:1)? Cook and Mizer (1994) found that of counties with persistent poverty, 20 percent or more lived below the poverty line between 1960 and 1990, and 83 percent (443 out of 535) of these were located in the South (Ghelfi 2001). More recent population data document the continued gap between urban and rural poverty, with a 13.4 percent poverty rate in nonmetropolitan counties compared to only 10.8 percent poverty for those living in metropolitan counties (Miller and Rowley 2002). Many poverty-related problems continue to plague rural United States, including employment (Barkley 1999; Glasmeier and Leichenko 1999; Jensen, Findeis and Wang 2000; Findeis, Jensen and Wang 2000; Mills 2000), transportation (Glasgow 2000), education (Beaulieu and Barfield 2000; Beaulieu, Barfield and Stone 2001; Roscigno and Crowley 2000), legal services (Lewis and Petrakis 2000), and health care (Lewis and Parent 2001; McLaughlin, Stokes and Nonoyama 2001; Parent and Lewis 1994). In part, these problems are products of the limited access to social, economic and political power that rural citizens, and many Americans, encounter (Galbraith 1998; McChesney 1999; Perrucci and Wysong 1999; Piven and Cloward 1997).

Historically, the U.S. government has directed most rural development resources toward agriculture, despite the small percentage of rural residents who are engaged in farming or other agriculture-related businesses (Schaeffer 2002). It is noteworthy that during the twentieth century there were important basic improvements in electricity, transportation, water and sewerage systems, housing, and recreation services for rural Americans (Rogers et al. 1988). However, today even these services are often deteriorating or inadequate (Wilkinson 1995). Rural development has by now expanded beyond agriculture, but remains primarily economic development, or, more specifically, private sector business development (Swanson 2001). “For much of rural America, federal policy has been a matter of *laissez-faire* triage, whereby places survive on the basis of market forces. This hidden hand perpetuates underdevelopment, encourages the marginalization (if not the isolation) of people and places left behind, and permits a myopic understanding

and social construction of rural America” (Swanson 2001:11). The general assumption is that if businesses prosper, jobs will be created and general well-being result (Blau 1999; Wermuth 2003).

Beaulieu and Mulkey (1995) add clarity to shifting rural development policy efforts by placing community development theories into three categories. First is human capital, for which it is believed that solutions reside in providing individuals with training and education. The second type are family and community focused, whereby family and social resources are seen as in need of strengthening. The third category sees family and community as relevant, but structural aspects take the forefront, concentrating on the job market and the need to link the job market to the local communities of workers (Beaulieu and Mulkey 1995).

More recently, locality-based policies and programs, based on civic engagement and civic community models, are the mainstream approaches promoted for use in the analysis and development of small communities and rural areas (Tolbert et al. 2002). There is an increase in programs using participatory approaches for leadership and social capital development, identifying assets that are available and that can be used to meet community needs. These approaches are seen by proponents to be more effective than the older problem identification and needs assessment approaches that focus on what is “wrong” with rural communities and residents (Kretzmann and McKnight 1996).

Swanson (2001) identifies three reasons for the renewed emphasis in locality-based policies for rural development. There has been a decentralization of government services, with corresponding cuts in funding. Second, globalization has had an effect: “an ironic consequence of attention on global issues may be a corresponding focus on locality. Global exchanges occur between people and places: therefore many discussions of global issues raise questions about local effects, especially on one’s own locality” (Swanson 2001:8). Third, he points to the now popular community and civility movements. For Swanson (2001) this shift toward local participation does not necessarily equate with good development. Too often current structural patterns persist in many areas, with their class, race and gender biases perpetuating or even exacerbating problems for certain segments of the population. To illustrate his point of the complexities involved in locality-based policies, he presents evidence from three case studies. The results demonstrate that the success of development efforts varies depending on the

presence of local democratic processes, a supportive infrastructure, and extra-local agency ties (Swanson 2001).

Wilkinson (1995) identifies two major social forces governing the future of rural areas: technology/telecommunications and national community development policy. While technology can “reduce the social cost of rural space” (Wilkinson 1995:76), it can also serve to reproduce the current structure of society. In fact, Castells (1989) shows that through advanced technology, the value of labor can be overpowered by corporate capital, and simply perpetuate unbalanced development, rather than increasing the economic resources for individuals living in rural areas (Wilkinson 1995). Sassen (1994) amplifies this notion by disputing what was a general assumption during the mid-1990s, that:

[a]s the end of the twentieth century approaches, massive developments in telecommunications and the ascendancy of information industries have led analysts and politicians to proclaim the end of cities. . . . With large-scale relocations of offices and factories to less congested and lower cost areas than central cities, the computerized workplace can be located anywhere. . . . (Sassen 1994:1)

This seems to imply that the most remote rural area or small community would be just as suitable as any large city for the relocation of information age “industry.” However, this expected trend did not materialize. Sassen (2001) has since supplied evidence that the technology/telecommunication-based economy has in fact resulted in more economic wealth concentrated in a few large cities—places identified as “global cities,” with little or no benefit accruing to smaller communities or rural areas. Further, there has been growing inequality within these global cities (Sassen 2001).

Wilkinson (1995:77) maintains that “factors that have constrained rural economic development in the past will continue to pose formidable barriers to the utilization of communications technologies meant to increase rural well-being in the future. These constraining factors include lower educational levels, limited capital resources, cultural biases in favor of traditional economic activities, inadequate economic and social infrastructure, and other factors associated with the

function of space.” Wilkinson (1995) questioned the move to locality-based policies, saying that “. . . unless impediments to community development are removed, simply handing the responsibility over to local actors causes no assurance that they will be able to carry out that responsibility” (Wilkinson 1995:78-79). To the contrary, Ross and Trachte (1990) provide a specific illustration of this situation by focusing specifically on the potential process outcome of local areas attempting to attract outside businesses into their area. “Faced by local transformation, [local commercial] interests, often with the support of local labor (especially in the building trades), turn to state institutions and to translocal capital for assistance in maintaining the viability of their enterprises. *The booster coalition is born.*” (Ross and Trachte 1990:204, emphasis added). This is a coalition that may or may not act in a way that meets the varied interests and needs of the community and its citizens. Ross and Trachte (1990) continue to emphasize their point by stating:

The criteria by which investors judge the relative attractiveness of a geopolitical area is termed the *local business climate*. When the competitive status of a local business climate is used to justify resistance to worker or consumer interests, activists call it the *business climate argument*. When accepted by local authorities, it operates to delegitimize working-class demands on the state. When implemented, it tends to drive down the social wage of the resident working class. (Ross and Trachte 1990:205, emphasis original)

In discussing the lack of impact that programs have had on the structure of inequality, Wilkinson (1995) and Swanson (2001) are in agreement that these new initiatives have had “little to say and promise to do little about the glaring inequalities among local population segments that hamper self-help efforts in rural localities” (Wilkinson 1995:79). Continuing, he summarizes: “[e]ven with the opportunities provided, rural community development faces the formidable task of overcoming the legacy of hegemony in rural-urban power relations and the pervasive quiescence of disadvantaged rural groupings. . . to the wishes and even the perspectives of more powerful groups (Wilkinson 1995:80-81). “New modes of organization are required to break out of entrenched

patterns of patronage and exclusion and to focus collective efforts on problems common to all local groupings” (Wilkinson 1995:81).

Conclusion

Social exclusion is an inherent feature of modern capitalism (Byrne 1999; Levitas 1999). A real, lasting, fair and equitable social system in which all members of society share roughly equally in the important elements of power, wealth and status is the only beneficial solution, but does not appear to be anywhere near reality. However, many positive things can be accomplished. Redirecting our desire for an unrealistic, quick and radical solution, Byrne (1999:137) expresses the following:

Attractive as the notion might be of watering the fields of blood of the super class, practically the way to deal with them is through other forms of bloodletting—through the proper taxation of high incomes and accumulated wealth with the revenues used to sustain a process of global development on a sustainable basis, coupled with a restoration of basic organizational rights to workers so that they can both resist job instability and reduce the levels of corporate profits and senior executive remuneration to the benefit of wage earners. I think that the development of local coalitions against exclusion, popular fronts based on all social forces which are prepared to set solidarity as the key social goal, is a means towards the development of a political culture in which such a programme has some chance of being put into effect.

Social exclusion could offer additional validity to rural and economic development activity at all levels of government and society. Southern rural areas consist of quite diverse groups of people. Since the concept is still under development and refinement, there is great potential for a value-added effect by employing sociological principles that illuminate its comprehensive and structural nature. Those who work in rural and community development and use social exclusion must be aware of and accept the constraints and resistance they are likely to commonly face as they introduce ideas and changes that run counter to dominant

structural and cultural components of our society. The primary cause of social problems that face rural residents is the inherent flaws in the social system. Micklewright (2002:5-6) states that because of the use of social exclusion “. . . the European Union is now beginning to know a great deal more about how living standards vary across the Union, how deprivation in terms of low income and lack of work is linked to that in other dimensions, and how the strength of this link varies from country to country.” While he notes that other organizing concepts may also work, *it is social exclusion that has accomplished this task.*

Our main concern with most approaches to rural and community development is due to their implicit acceptance of the status quo and their assumption that the programs and policies are much more inclusive and democratic than they really are. There is still room for unapologetic critical sociology in rural development policies in the United States. If we fully adopt the uncritical stance of other disciplines, sociology does become irrelevant, because we offer nothing new. It is our job to challenge the power structure that creates social exclusion and facilitate truly desirable living conditions for the whole of the population.

The real issue is not whether the idea of “social exclusion” deserves a celebratory medal as a conceptual advance, but whether people concerned with practical measurement and public policy have reason to pay attention to the issues to which the idea helps to draw attention. The answer, I believe, is in the affirmative, despite the misgivings that the somewhat disorganized and undisciplined literature has often generated. (Sen 2000:47)

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