

N U M B E R 25

**State and Local  
Approaches  
to Poverty in  
Washington, D.C.**

*Joyce Malombe*

WOODROW WILSON INTERNATIONAL  
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Joyce Mwende Malombe, from Kenya, received her MA in urban and regional planning from the University of Nairobi, and earned her Ph.D. in 1990 from the University of Western Ontario, Canada. She has served as a consultant to the World Bank, the Kenyan government, and the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements. Malombe is a senior research fellow at the Housing and Building Research Institute in Nairobi, where she studies housing policy, urban poverty, and environmental issues. Currently, she is working at the World Bank. Malombe's written work on current conditions in Kenya includes articles entitled, "Women's Groups and Shelter Improvement in Kenya" and "Small-scale Metal Enterprises and Environmental Pollution in Kenya: Interim Report."

**About the Comparative Urban Studies Project's International Working Group on the District of Columbia**

Seeking to find new ways to look at old problems, the Woodrow Wilson Center's Comparative Urban Studies Project (CUSP) launched a research program, in 1996, to examine Washington, D.C., as a case study of some of the most complex and difficult urban dilemmas facing the world's cities. The International Working Group on the District of Columbia brings urban specialists from around the world together with an advisory committee comprising prominent civic, business, and political leaders of the District of Columbia who serve as both a resource for the Center's visiting scholars and as an audience for the project's research findings.

Coming to the Woodrow Wilson Center for two summer months from such places as Tanzania, Brazil, Kenya, Mexico, Russia, Spain and Japan, the Urban Guest Scholars—who are architects, economists, sociologists, political scientists, community activists and planners—have been able to apply their extensive knowledge of urban dynamics to the dilemmas that face the nation's capital.

Findings of the International Working Group are published in the Occasional Paper Series and available in CD format. Please contact the Comparative Urban Studies Project for copies of "Washington, C.D." featuring interviews with Guest Scholars and George Liston Seay, producer and host of *Dialogue*, the Woodrow Wilson Center's award winning radio program.



## Executive Summary

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*Federal government policies have affected cities in various ways depending, among other things, on their level of poverty and their ability to design and implement effective local programs. In Washington, D.C., Malombe finds that in addition to inadequate policies and programs to address poverty, there is the added dimension of power struggles between the state and local governments, a history characterized by racial tensions. This is further compounded by mismanagement that has created a city in which “nothing works,” a city that cares for its poor primarily via ad hoc approaches to poverty and policies that are often misdirected. Malombe gives an outsider’s view of poverty in Washington, D.C., and the approaches to its reduction by state and local organizations, including government and the nonprofit sector.*

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### State and Local Approaches to Poverty in Washington, D.C.

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#### 1. Introduction

The United States has seen an increase in poverty in the 1990s, despite the many policies and programs put in place at the federal, state, and local levels and the many actors involved, including governments, the nonprofit sector, and local communities. Federal government policies have affected cities in various ways depending, among other things, on their level of poverty and their ability to design and implement effective local programs.

Unlike other states, the District of Columbia was fully controlled for one hundred years by Congress, in which it has no representation. The introduction of Home Rule in the mid-1970s seems to have left many issues unresolved and even to have intensified conflict. In addition to inadequate policies and programs to address poverty, there is the added dimension of power struggles between the state and local governments, a history characterized by racial tensions. This is further compounded by mismanagement that has created a city in which “nothing works,” a city that cares for its poor only via ad hoc approaches to poverty and policies that are often misdirected.

This paper gives an outsider’s view of poverty in Washington, D.C., and the approaches to its reduction by state and local organizations, including government and the nonprofit sector. Research is based on existing data on poverty and interviews with various stakeholders in the District.

## 2. The Federal Government and Poverty

Federal-level approaches to poverty have been shaped by historical episodes of expanded relief-giving that were preceded by sharp economic dislocations. Market downturns left large proportions of the workforce unemployed and drove the wages of those still working below subsistence levels. Shifts in the market for goods and in production methods destroyed entire when new equipment and new ways of organizing production were introduced (Piven and Cloward 1993:368). These conditions left many jobless and in poverty needing both local and federal support at a time when there were serious cutbacks in assistance and basic services.

The 1960s were characterized by a concerted effort to deal with poverty mainly through antipoverty programs. The period between 1960 and the mid-1970s saw new or expanded government programs that were more inclusive and emphasized citizen involvement. These programs focused on reducing poverty, hunger, malnutrition, and disease, increasing access to important social services, and lowering barriers to political participation, employment, housing, and education (Piven and Cloward 1993). The programs also increased the availability of social work, health care, and legal assistance, services that were seen as vital to getting many households out of the poverty cycle. In the same period, income maintenance programs quickly expanded and began to include people who had not qualified before; nearly “half of the income of the bottom fifth of the population was derived from social welfare benefits” (Katz 1986:263).

This peak in the welfare explosion in the early 1970s coincided with a growing crisis in the economy and a mounting campaign by business to solve the problems of profitability by reducing wages. This was made worse by large-scale changes in the labor market occurring as the economy shifted toward high technology and the service industry. Those low-income people who were skilled only in traditional forms of employment or semiskilled work were greatly affected by this shift. In addition, new jobs in the service sector paid lower wages than traditional industrial-sector jobs. These conditions, among others, forced even many of those employed at the time to accept lower wages, fewer benefits, and less job security in the 1970s and 1980s (Katz 1986).

With labor cowed and fewer jobs available, business could make cuts in the permanent workforce, hire temporary and/or part-time workers, and slash wages and benefits. Many people were laid off or clustered in low-wage jobs with no benefits (Piven and Cloward 1993:352). “Part time” or “independent” work meant that employers could pay lower hourly wages and save on health care and pension costs and in many cases avoid payroll and unemployment insurance taxes. For example, estimates of those newly hired receiving pensions fell from 43 to 38 percent between 1979 and 1990, and newly hired receiving health benefits dropped from 23 to 15 percent over the same period. Thus the use of contingent workers emerged as a “permanent strategy” for cheapening the workforce and weakening the bargaining power of labor unions. It threatened the economic security of all workers by dragging down wages and increasing wage-income inequality (ibid.: 354).

Given the unreliable job market, many poor residents preferred welfare; one was at least guaranteed some income and medical benefits throughout the year. However, this stability in the welfare system was short lived. During the 1980s and 1990s, many social programs were slashed and benefits to the poor suffered severe and lasting damage; for example, unemployment benefits, originally tax exempt, became partially and then fully taxable during the 1980s. Eligibility for benefits was also sharply limited, resulting in a drop in coverage (Katz 1986:363). In addition, industries were moving from older American cities to the sunbelt or developing countries where labor was cheap. No measures were taken to address this further loss of jobs for American workers.

Once well-paid industrial workers faced a future of joblessness or low-wage unskilled work; minority unemployment—especially among the young—soared; and official poverty rates climbed, most steeply among women (Katz 1986:275). Federal policies and worsening conditions in the inner cities further encouraged the exodus of middle-class families to the suburbs, which affected the poor in a number of ways. For example, they were left with a dilapidated infrastructure, including deteriorating schools. Many cities were unwilling to invest in inner city schools since there was no pressure to do so. The problems of joblessness were thus further aggravated by marked inequalities in a public school system characterized by uneven funding and hence differential access of students to a high-quality curriculum and well-trained teachers, further excluding poor children from a very competitive labor market (*ibid.*:210). In addition, most of the new jobs that the poor could do were in the suburbs. This presented difficulties for inner-city residents who could not afford the rising cost of transportation to the suburbs (Katz 1986:218). The poor had to tackle the problems of shrinking revenue, inadequate social services, and the gradual disappearance of work near where they lived.

Although there are many reasons for the sharp drop in federal support for basic urban programs since 1980, one of the primary reasons is the declining political influence of cities and the rising influence of electoral coalitions in the suburbs—a factor that still makes the voice of those in the inner city least heard and their problems least addressed. The inner cities have also suffered neglect due to the negative attitude toward them because of their contribution to crime and other urban problems: “Overall, suburbs contain not only more residents but also more jobs than cities. They hold the new balance of political power, and the great majority of those voters not only distrust welfare-oriented politics, they find themselves increasingly removed from the circumstances that produced such an ethos in the first place. The constituency for urban-oriented federal initiatives may still exist, but it is increasingly a minority position nationally” (Gillette 1995:210).

Family structure has also been changing, with a sharp increase in single-parent families, many of whom are trapped in persistent poverty because low skills and lack of education make them unemployable in the current competitive job market. Even in two-parent families, both partners must work outside the home to make ends meet. The absence of widely available high-quality preschool and child-care programs places additional stress on these families and hampers their ability to provide an environment that reinforces the learning process and prepares children for school (Katz 1986: 215).

Other changes in the 1990s include the erosion of Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) benefits after 1991. Only Alabama, Hawaii, Montana, New Mexico, and South Dakota maintained the same level of benefits between January 1991 and January 1994. Benefit levels were actually cut in nine states, sometimes more than once, and they did not keep pace with inflation in the remaining states. At no time in the past twenty-five years, and



perhaps never in the history of the program, have so many states enacted such deep cuts for so many families over such a short period (Wilson 1996:165). Implementation of the welfare bill approved in 1996 has further limited the number of years for support, denied benefits to migrants and children, and requires those on welfare to work.

### 3.The Local Government and Poverty

#### 3.1 *Who Are the Poor in Washington, D.C.?*

Studies done by Grier (1992a, b) and Grier and Grier (1988, 1993) indicate that the number of poor in Washington, D.C., has been growing, while the general population has been declining over the past twenty years. Although there are many reasons for the city's population decline, lack of adequate services, particularly good schools, and security problems have accelerated out-migration of the middle class, the only pressure group that could make city authorities act because they represented such a strong power base. This exodus has left behind a significant population of the poor who have to be content with inadequate and mismanaged services.

A total of 39 percent of the poor in the metropolitan area live in the District, where the poverty rate is 16.9 percent (compared to 4.5 percent in the suburbs). Children (one child in four in Washington, D.C. is in poverty, compared to one in twelve in the metro as a whole), the elderly, and women form disproportionately large percentages of the poor in the District (Grier 1992a: 10-11). Child poverty is concentrated in female-headed families (Grier 1992b). The data shows three-quarters of the poor families with related children in the District and one half of the poor families with related children in the metropolitan area are headed by a single African-American woman. A total of 49,500 children are

living in families in the metropolitan area that are headed by single persons who are in poverty. These make up nearly three-quarters of all poor children in the area.

Studies done by Kids Count Collaborative (1994, 1995, and 1996) indicate that a higher percentage of children in Washington, D.C., than in the United States as a whole, are cared for badly, if at all. Many live in severe poverty; are from broken homes; receive poor health care; and experience unsafe conditions at home. Most of the poor children in the District depend on welfare (Kids Count Collaborative 1995). For AFDC alone, 70 percent of the recipients were children without parental support. These figures are particularly important in view of the welfare bill of 1996. Most of these children come from single-headed households and, given the low and constantly decreasing child care facilities in the District, which lost approximately one hundred child care providers in 1995 (Kids Count Collaborative 1996), this percentage is likely to increase. Poverty goes hand in hand with many social problems. Children growing up in a poor family are less likely to get a good education than children growing up in a middle- or high-income family. Poor children also live in areas of the city that often lack basic services. Thus, for children growing up in poor and poor one-parent families, the effects of insufficient income are compounded by bad neighborhoods and inadequate services.

#### 3.2 *Why Are the Poor in Washington, D.C. Poor?*

**Lack of education.** The school situation in the District is the worst in the metropolitan area and is said to be partly responsible for the flight of middle-class families to the suburbs. The schools are badly managed; for the past three years they have not opened on time after summer holidays due to incomplete building repairs. Some have had to close



at other times because of physical plant problems—leaking roofs or air conditioners that do not work. Most of the schools have a poor performance record; less than half of the District’s children have completed high school.

**Lack of low-skilled jobs paying adequate wages.** There are no industrial jobs in Washington, D.C. The low-skilled jobs that do exist do not pay enough to enable the poor to support their families forcing both partners in two-parent families to work. The problem is further aggravated by lack of adequate and affordable child-care facilities. Many single parents are forced to choose between taking care of their children and having to work for a living.

The growing number of new migrants to the city, some of whom lack required qualifications, such as language, also find it difficult to compete in the current job market. It is worth noting that part of the welfare bill savings are expected to come from denying food stamps and Supplemental Security Income (SSI gives cash to low-income persons, the aged, and the disabled; it would be reduced by 12 percent) to legal immigrants until they become citizens or have worked in the United States for at least ten years (Katz 1997).

**Lack of affordable transportation to jobs outside the District.** “There is no shortage of jobs in the Washington Metropolitan area. In fact there are about as many jobs as people” (Kids Count Collaborative 1996:9). But transportation costs and difficult connections make movement between the city and suburbs difficult for the poor. The jobs they get also tend to have irregular working hours. Because city buses run on a peak-hour basis and are limited at other times, a bus may not be available when needed. Some work schedules are after bus hours, which means a car would be needed to get to work. According to Grier and Grier (1988:9), about

50 percent of the working-poor households in Washington, D.C. do not have a car (compared to 19 percent of the non-poor); another 30 percent have one car. In multi-adult households, a single car can provide job access for only one person, unless others are going in the same direction at the same time or they share the car by working different shifts.

**Lack of experience.** Most people on welfare have never worked before and do not have marketable skills. This gives them access only to low-paying jobs, which may sink them further into poverty.

**Lack of job matching experience.** Changes in the job market from traditional forms have left some workers without jobs, since their experience is no longer required. This leaves them stranded unless they have funds to undertake a different kind of training; even then, they will be entering a job market that is highly competitive and may already be saturated. Most of the jobs available in Washington, D.C.—in government and the private sector—require both experience and education; the poor generally have neither.

**Insecure jobs.** The jobs that poor people hold are often subject to layoffs and other job dislocations. Job insecurity is a common problem, but is particularly acute for the poor, whose options are limited; such jobs also usually come without benefits such as medical care, thus putting them at more risk.

**Criminal record.** A particularly tough barrier to employment is having a criminal record, especially for men. Drug and other substance abuse (particularly high in the District) itself affects or has affected the ability of many to work. This, coupled with high school dropout rates, makes it difficult for low-skilled men to participate in the labor market.



**Poor service delivery.** Like many other cities preoccupied with issues of control and power, the District is too disorganized to maintain efficient service delivery programs. Although the nonprofit sector has done a fine job in meeting many of the needs of the poor, its limited resources cannot fully address the problems.

**Inefficient city management.** Poor management, which impedes the city's ability to address the problems faced by the poor, compounds all of the problems mentioned above; this is evidenced by ad hoc and poorly funded poverty reduction programs. Further, whatever programs have been supported by the District have tended to concentrate on short-term solutions, not long-term strategies. This approach can address emergencies but cannot deal with the complex nature of poverty. Acting in response to pressure also means that only those who have a voice will be heard. Many poor residents do not participate in neighborhood activities, let alone press for their rights.

### *3.3 Power Struggles: Congress vs. The District*

Washington represented a capital governed under the exclusive jurisdiction principle, with Congress serving as a direct legislative body for the federal district. Since 1975, however, limited Home Rule has been in effect in the District, resulting in shared government between the national and local governments. Serious problems remain in the home rule relationship. The general conflict between local interests and the desire for more autonomy on the one hand, and federal goals on the other, has not disappeared. The fact that the District is largely black and Democratic has influenced both the city government's agenda and the degree of willingness of the federal level to agree to certain government changes—notably congressional representation. (Harris 1995:2)

The continued power wrangles between Congress and the District has kept the city more preoccupied with this balance of power than with the needs of its citizens. These wrangles have also been used to fuel racial tensions, and these tensions have greatly influenced implementation of both federal and local government programs.

During the mid-1960s national urban policy underwent a dramatic turning point. Under a proclaimed War on Poverty the federal government directed funds to neighborhood-based organizations with the intent of enabling local residents to improve their own lives...As the leading example of a predominantly black city plagued by social problems while denied fundamental political rights, distance between the city of federal monuments and its residential areas. (Gillette 1995:170)

However, redevelopment efforts, which improved the city's appearance, also moved people without necessarily providing viable alternatives. Although slum dwellings were removed, the District did not provide alternative housing at affordable prices to those it displaced. The redevelopment activities were also seen as attempts to destroy black communities and as motivated by the desire to move blacks further away from the city center. This point was clearly indicated by Rev. Walter E. Fauntroy in the Shaw community, who described the Southwest redevelopment as a "new reconstruction" in which "unscrupulous" investment interests were planning to make untold profits through the shrewd manipulation of race prejudice.

Fauntroy led a coalition of 150 community organizations, churches, and a variety of civic groups known as the Model Inner City Community Development Organization (MICCO). MICCO's articles of incorporation state:

“[T]his is our area. We not only live, work or serve in it, but we also pray and play within these boundaries. . . . We are not wholly without assets. We have ourselves and high hopes. We have leadership, to give and take... This corporation is formed so that we can work effectively with our governments in a partnership that will develop our area and our people into the kind of community and citizens that we and the City deserve” (quoted in Gillette 1995:175).

The declaration of the War on Poverty led to the creation of the Office of Economic Opportunity and the Model Cities program, each with its requirements for citizen participation. After the 1968 riots, there was concerted effort from all quarters to involve citizens in rebuilding the cities. However, citizen participation faced marked resistance, and problems in the 1970s saw a return to vesting the authority to plan with government officials. “As the locus of power shifted to large organizations and to elected city officials, the partnership between local and federal agencies dissolved, leaving as yet unmet the nation’s best chance to use Congress’s power of exclusive jurisdiction over the District to establish a model city for the rest of the country” (Gillette 1995:189). Shifting the power of decision making away from the communities confirmed fears that the federal government was not serious about their participation. Today most of the city’s residents feel strongly that no matter what they do, nothing will work.

An elected city government was restored in 1974, and civil rights activist Marion Barry was elected mayor in 1978. Home Rule, however, came with limitations that made it very difficult for Barry to implement his ambitious social welfare program. Congress prohibited a major potential source of revenue to the District (a commuter tax), retained control over the city’s budget and court system, and also retained the right to override District legislation. Washington, D.C. remained without voting representation in Congress. Barry also inherited a bloated, unresponsive bureaucracy and a sizable deficit. The Home Rule charter required a balanced budget. Four months after his election, the federal government cut \$25 million of appropriations; Barry was faced with a severe fiscal crisis.

Barry allied himself with Washington’s black residents. He set goals to increase business with minority contractors from 10 to 35 percent and informed developers that they would have to include blacks in joint ventures if they wanted to build on city property. At the same time he moved from a racially mixed neighborhood on Capitol Hill to the politically strategic black middle-class Hillcrest section of Southeast Washington (Gillette 1995:194-95), and later moved to Ward 8 when he needed the support of Washington’s poorest neighborhood. Barry later shifted his emphasis from the communities to promoting businesses in the District, which (between 1980 and 1986) created a total of forty thousand jobs—although only one thousand District residents were employed in the new positions. This trend continued throughout his tenure. Instead of attempting to revive a neighborhood-based strategy, like that pioneered by MICCO, he continued to concentrate capital in the downtown.

Barry’s tenure saw increased mismanagement of the city and numerous scandals at a time when the power of the city had already been eroded. Not only did the District population and share of area wealth

continue to fall as they rose in the suburbs, but Washington's shifting social composition heightened divisions inside the District. Failure to improve schools, provide affordable housing, or assure public safety encouraged the black middle class to follow the lead of whites a generation earlier to flee the city (Gillette 1995). Although Barry failed to bring the changes he promised he continued to have support.

[S]uch support is understandable, given the long history of federal meddling and interference in District affairs. The very success in establishing a federal enclave that was physically set apart from the city to serve as a specialized government and tourist center made it easier for local residents to make their case for separation of city from capital. Neither effort to implement black power activism nor federal intervention had been able to resolve the structural problems continuing to plague the city. Hope, not reason, pointed to a better future for the District under statehood. (Ibid.:207)

By early 1995, however, Barry renounced the statehood cause by declaring that the city could no longer sustain the cost of functions normally absorbed by the state government. Less than two months later, Congress imposed a Control Board on the city that sharply curtailed the power of Washington's elected officials; by mid-1997 Congress literally stripped the mayor of most of his power and gave it to the Control Board.

The District is polarized by power struggles and racial tensions that have created mistrust. This is compounded by mismanagement, which the mayor blamed on the Congress, despite his own failures. These problems have had a great impact on

approaches to poverty, which have been short-term and unsustainable, mainly influenced by political calculations instead of clear-cut poverty reduction strategies. In a sense the poor became alienated as the mayor tried to make them feel he was doing his best, that things would be different if only Congress would not frustrate his "good intentions." These factors left the poor worse off, more disillusioned, and fully convinced that their poverty is inevitable, that Congress wants it that way and is bent on taking back the little power that they had given through Home Rule.

#### 4. The Nonprofit Sector and Poverty

Nonprofit organizations include volunteer networks that coordinate a range of projects, as well as agencies that focus their programs on serving the homeless, providing relief for the hungry, building and reconstructing low-income homes and housing projects, providing for those in need of health care, coordinating tutoring and literacy programs, and undertaking various socioeconomic activities. Washington, D.C. has more than six thousand nonprofit organizations (although some of them serve the metropolitan area or represent lobbying groups). An important nonprofit group, not included in our study, are black churches, some of which run schools for the poor, have feeding programs, develop housing, and generally attend to the needs of the poor in their congregations.

Some of the organizations serve specific parts of the city; others have activities throughout the city. The latter group includes, for example, the Coalition for Nonprofit Housing Development in the District, which has over fifty organizations and individuals under its umbrella. Its members build and rehabilitate safe, quality housing that targets individuals and families earning up to 80 percent of the median income. In the former group are

Community Development Corporations (CDCs) like Marshall Heights and Columbia Heights. Marshall Heights, which serves Ward 7, hopes to end violence and the social decline that engenders it by pursuing a shared community vision that will transform deteriorating neighborhoods. Its approach to economic development is democratic capitalism, which will enable families to become self-sufficient through collective effort. A seventy-member volunteer board represents the businesses, civic associations, churches, neighborhood groups, public housing residents, and residents at large. Marshall Heights Community Development Organization (MHDCO) also created a Rebuilding Community Steering Committee and its working groups, which actively involve two hundred residents. MHDCO has three for-profit development subsidiaries that act as project developer, prime contractor, and partner within limited partnerships. These subsidiaries can own, lease, or manage property on a profit-making basis, with any profits realized reinvested in MHDCO's nonprofit activities.

The Columbia Heights Community Development Corporation targets redevelopment along the District's 14th Street corridor. Initially an advocacy organization, it pressured to revitalize housing and retail services in the neighborhood and provide critically needed financing and training for neighborhood businesses and entrepreneurs. These activities were expanded to strengthen the community's infrastructure by joining together service delivery organizations, schools, neighborhood groups, and churches to focus on creating economic and social self-sufficiency. The strategy used by the Community Development Corporation is to increase the capacity of communication across the neighborhood and to build coordinated program relationships among the neighborhood's many organizations and leaders. Some of the areas of focus include community-based job training, employment, and business development opportunities. Funding for such organizations comes

from federal and local governments, foundations, individuals, and other interested parties. The CDCs rely heavily on government resources. It is, however, worth noting that both Marshall Heights and Columbia Heights have diversified funding sources; although they have reduced their dependency on the government, they have not yet reached sustainability. Public funding has a number of limitations: it is not flexible since it is usually tied to a specific project and/or specific ways of implementing the project. In most cases the CDCs are unable to tackle problems not covered by their funding. This means that social problems that may need to be addressed before implementing the project are often ignored: for example, services such as child care may be needed before recipients of a job-training program can actively participate in the labor market. The issue of project-based funding is also compounded by lack of coordination in poverty reduction activities among the nonprofits or other organizations. This can lead to duplicating activities and, hence, to wasting limited resources. Further, the funding often falls far short of the needs of the community, which affects the impact of the work of nonprofit organizations. Nevertheless, the nonprofits in Washington, D.C., are the main actors in addressing poverty in a comprehensive manner. Their programs are broad-based and, where funding is available, many try to deal with associated local social problems.

Some new initiatives have also sprung up. The D.C. Agenda acts in partnership with existing organizations and institutions to help fill gaps in expertise and resources, foster consensus, and plan strategies for addressing the District's numerous problems. The stakeholders in this partnership include the federal government, local governments of major surrounding jurisdictions, the nonprofit sector, educational and cultural institutions, the private business sector, and the government of the District of Columbia. Although it is not evident yet how these partnerships will work, it is a good effort

at coordinating activities to devise a strategy that addresses the problems of the District. The D.C. Agenda's approach to revitalization is comprehensive and does not only address issues of housing and community development, but also the human and social needs of a neighborhood—community services, businesses, schools, jobs, transportation, recreation, and cultural activities. It offers a vision of an “urban village,” the objective of which is long-term, sustainable development that empowers its residents and improves the overall quality of life.

Significant efforts have been made to involve residents in participating in their local communities, but this has often proved to be an uphill battle; some actively participate while others do not see why they should be involved; some seem to have given up or cannot see what difference their participation will make. This mentality is perpetuated by a welfare system that seems to maintain the status quo rather than encouraging self-sufficiency. Community involvement also seems to come only at the implementation stage, after decisions have already been made. Nonprofits are not wholly responsible since many are not involved in the decision-making process either and get funding only for what has already been approved.

Although nonprofit organizations have played a significant role in addressing some aspects of poverty, they still need an enabling environment in which to perform their activities more effectively. For example, they need a functioning local authority to provide supporting infrastructure, which is often lacking or in a state of disrepair. Provision of a secure environment with basic services is also the responsibility of the city. Nonprofits can support the city government, but they cannot play its role. Their resources and responsibilities cannot and should not be stretched that far. The city should not abdicate its responsibility to the weakest members of society; instead it should concentrate its resources on improving the lives of the poor.

## 5. Conclusion

The activities of the 1960s and mid-1970s were influenced by the civil rights movement and witnessed an increase in programs that addressed the plight of the poor. The economic realities of the 1980s and 1990s and the changing structure of the cities led to abandoning the poverty focus of the 1960s. The decline in importance of the cities, where most of the poor live, saw a rise in importance of the suburbs and their increasing influence. There has also been an increasingly negative attitude toward the poor and the welfare system; policy reforms in the 1990s decreased support for the poor in a time when unemployment and poverty has been increasing.

There has been no specific poverty reduction strategy targeting the poor in a meaningful way. Most of the strategies address specific problems like unemployment, disability, or single mothers with children. There seems to be no comprehensive strategy aimed at dealing with poverty in a holistic manner and addressing complex social, economic, and political problems that affect those living in poverty. The dominant political group also influences the piecemeal strategies at any given time; there are special interest groups at all levels, and whoever has the power at that particular point wins the day. It has been argued that negative attitudes toward poverty and the poor (namely the growing negative attitude toward welfare recipients which seems to be generated by those who work and feel that those on welfare are just waiting for a handout without necessarily looking for a job) has been an impediment to dealing with issues of poverty. Although this is not true, it has influenced decision-making.

The failure of most of the programs that have been implemented by the District could partly be blamed on mismanagement, but the city also inherited a number of problems from the federal government when it attained Home Rule. The District has long

suffered from lack of funding and it also lacks power to increase its revenue base through taxation. These problems are critical in the District, where competition for scarce resources leaves out those who are unable to compete. Strong pressure groups tend to have a say on how resources are distributed, and lack of action on the part of local authorities leads to further suffering for the poor. Bureaucracies intimidate the poor, who do not understand how the system works, and further alienate them. The unusual political staying power evident in the District means that elected officials tend to concentrate on cosmetic issues and immediate benefits in order to justify their survival. This makes it easy for the city to ignore long-term strategies.

Much needs to be done in Washington, D.C. The city needs to work effectively, which requires addressing some of the governance issues discussed here. The issues of the powerlessness of the city and existing historical racial tensions need to be taken seriously. There is a need to build trust between Congress and the District's poor residents because without it measures undertaken by Congress are interpreted as mechanisms to control and interfere in the affairs of the City. There is a need for a long-term poverty reduction strategy that focuses on the many issues facing the poor, including social problems. This strategy has to especially target children and single parents, who represent some of the most vulnerable groups in the District. Child care facilities need to be expanded and public schools improved. Not dealing with these issues locks many children in a cycle of poverty that they are unable to break. Single parents of working age should be helped to get an education and job training and be given social support. The scarcity of jobs that pay a living wage affects all poor households and needs to be addressed before enforcing the back-to-work welfare bill. Transportation needs to be made affordable for the poor, with linkages that allow them to go where the jobs are, in most cases, the suburbs.

Activities of different stakeholders must be coordinated, especially at the local level. Without coordination resources are wasted and the impact of well-meaning projects is reduced, especially in the nonprofit sector. There also needs to be increased community participation in planning and management of social policies. Although participation is a challenge in the District, it is critical in addressing long-term poverty. To bring middle income people back to Washington, D.C., investment in the city is critical; a number of changes are necessary, especially improvement of public schools and security.

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