



D o n o r s O u r s e l v e s

Rural Development Philanthropy from East Tennessee to East Africa and Beyond

Edited by **Katharine Pearson Criss, Center for Rural Strategies**

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FOREWORD

This is a book about community building. It looks at the practice of creating local foundations as a way to help small towns and rural villages gain a measure of control over their own future.

Too often, and now more predictably, rural communities stumble. Markets shift. Policies change. Local economies weaken. Families move away. There is no Plan B. Country people who have worked hard each day expecting something better begin to see decent opportunities for themselves and their children list further out of reach.

The true test is imagining something better.

In the dizzying speed of the globalized marketplace, small communities can easily assume that the answers to their challenges lie far away in complex systems and in the decision-making caprice of others. And perhaps some of those answers do. Still the community foundation movement is an attempt to put a particular set of tools within the grasp of local communities that can help them plan, conserve and build a future that grows from who they are and what they know: their skills, their culture, their capacity to look after each other.

Community foundations are not inoculations against unforeseen change and unexpected cataclysm, but at their best they are measured, democratic practices that can marshal community aspiration and invigorate meaningful cooperation. And when that happens resources and opportunities seem to follow in even the poorest communities; sometimes when the outlook is bleakest. Neighbors become donors and give themselves a fighting chance for a decent future.

It is a belief in the potential of community foundations that brings us at the Center for Rural Strategies into this discussion. As local communities control their assets, invest them and mete them for public purpose, they get stronger. And it takes strength to endure.

What follows here is a range of accounts and perspectives from practitioners who have been closely engaged in building local foundations and imagining how similar enterprises can help more small communities do better. Their experiences move across continents and ecosystems and vary in theory, approach and reach. But no matter their differences, they hold a common awareness of what is at stake. Half the world's population lives on less than two dollars a day. Half of the world's population is rural. Where those maps overlap, humanity faces a daunting test.

In creating this discourse about locally owned rural philanthropy – the challenges and best practices – what these several authors do is invite a thoughtful exchange about community building that stretches beyond metropolitan limits and past much of the current conversation. They share what they have learned and what they imagine. And in doing that, they invite others to join in and help out.

Dee Davis, president, Center for Rural Strategies, Whitesburg, Kentucky, USA

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