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**MDC and Duke Complete Rural Poverty Study
Focus Is on Local Strategies for Exiting Poverty**

MDC, with Duke University's Terry Sanford Institute for Public Policy, has completed a study of rural poverty based on methodology developed by Duke Professor Anirudh Krishna and used to study poverty in Asia, Africa and South America. The MDC/Duke study is the first application of Dr. Krishna's methodology in the United States. The study was conducted this summer among 312 families in four rural North Carolina counties: Gates, Beaufort, Burke, and Vance.

"The value of this study is that we are not relying on some static definition of poverty that assumes poverty in Washington, NC, is the same as poverty in Washington, DC," said Leslie Boney, who manages MDC's [Program for the Rural Carolinas](#) (PRC). "Instead local people are telling us what poverty looks like to them and, more importantly, which programs and services actually help them and which ones don't. Then the challenge is finding a way to strengthen the programs that really work, so that more people can get out of poverty and stay out."

To conduct the study, five trained student researchers from Duke worked with eight representatives of PRC teams. PRC is a rural economic development program, funded by the Duke Endowment and

co-managed by MDC, that works with rural communities in North Carolina and South Carolina on both small and large-scale projects to spur economic development and community revitalization.

The poverty study team held community forums in each of the four counties to develop local community definitions of poverty. The research teams then interviewed 312 individual families from those communities to learn the details of their family situations and examine how the families have moved into or escaped poverty over the past 10 years.

Early findings indicate that poverty is not static. Families regularly move into or out of poverty. Though results varied among the counties studied, the following needs were common to all:

- Job training for 21st century jobs
- Budgeting so that families have a cushion for tough times
- Health insurance; escalating health care costs are increasingly pushing families into poverty
- Family stability; two-parent families are much better able to escape poverty
- Accessible support services; rural families often have difficulty with transportation and cannot reach the services provided by their counties

Once the study findings are confirmed, the real work begins, Boney said. MDC will work with PRC community leaders to design and host a series of meetings in each community to craft community-based responses to the needs of the impoverished and to enhance the programs and services that help families escape poverty.

Look for updates on the poverty study in future issues of *MDC Connections*. [*Preliminary results of the poverty study now available in pdf.*](#)

MDC Board Chair Ambassador James Joseph Holds Civil Society Forum in South Africa

In early October, approximately 50 nonprofit leaders from the United States and South Africa gathered at the University of Capetown, in Capetown, South Africa, to collaborate on issues relating to philanthropy, HIV-AIDS and social justice. Ambassador James Joseph, MDC board chair and former ambassador to South Africa, led the meeting, which was organized by the United States-South Africa Center for Leadership and Public Values at Duke University and the University of Capetown. Ambassador Joseph is executive director of the United States-South Africa Center at Duke.

Lance Buhl, deputy director of the Center, said the goal of the conference was to find ways to focus the attention of U.S. and South African leaders on social justice issues. "HIV-AIDS, community self-help and philanthropy are all issues that are part of the search for social justice in our two countries," Buhl said.

Ivye Allen, MDC's chief operating officer, participated in the community philanthropy group at the Capetown meeting. "We looked at the role that both individuals and institutions play in influencing outcomes for their communities," Allen said. She said she was struck by the similar traditions of giving in the United States and South Africa. Any differences, Allen noted, were more semantic than real. "In South Africa," Allen said, "instead of 'philanthropy,' the term 'self-help' is widely used, so Ambassador Joseph coined a new term, 'assisted self-reliance,' to bridge the semantic gap." In both countries, Allen said, acts of giving and help are similar and are spurred by both family upbringing and religious training.

One important divergence Allen noted is that South African self-help is more organized than that in the United States. For example: "South Africans have burial societies supported by everyone in the community," Allen said. "When a loved one dies, then the burial society pays for the funeral

expenses. And community members will sell livestock to pool money in order to send someone to college. South Africans with limited resources have created innovative ways to be self-reliant, and in that regard, we can learn from South Africa.

"As MDC manages the Ford Foundation's community philanthropy portfolio and seeks to define what community philanthropy is, it was good to hear others' views," Allen added.

Dodson and Lipsitz Lead Nonprofit CEOs Through Session on Strategic Philanthropy

MDC President David Dodson and Senior Fellow Joan Lipsitz led a group of more than 200 nonprofit CEOs and staff in a plenary session (at the North Carolina Center for Nonprofits annual meeting) designed to help nonprofits think strategically about how they apply their philanthropic assets. "We wanted this group to think about the assumptions they base their work on," said Dodson. "And we wanted them to see the strengths and limits of those assumptions and to understand that in order to bring about positive change, no single giving tradition will suffice on its own."

Lipsitz and Dodson took as their departure point the four [Traditions of American Philanthropy](#) penned by Susan Wisely and Elizabeth Lynn. Each of the four traditions - philanthropy as relief, philanthropy as improvement, philanthropy as social reform and philanthropy as moral discourse - is associated with an impulse, a philosophy and limits. Impulses vary from building community to addressing immediate needs. Philosophies range from "love thy neighbor" to "change, not charity."

"What we did," Lipsitz explained, "was to introduce the traditions and work with the group to fill in the strengths and limits of each. Then we asked the group to think about their own practices. We asked, 'which tradition of philanthropy reflects your organization's analysis of community issues?'" Lipsitz and Dodson capped the session by asking group members to imagine themselves as the distribution committee of a community foundation charged with allocating \$100,000 to build a virtuous and prepared community in the wake of the Katrina disaster.

The framework prompted participants to think about their organizations and missions in a new way, Lipsitz said. As an example, she related the comments of a soup kitchen staff member who said, "we'd like to put ourselves out of business, but we find there is more and more business. Using our private outcome measure, we're failing." The challenge for the staff member, Lipsitz explained, is to think about how the soup kitchen can serve its direct mission while at the same time have an impact on people working in the third tradition - philanthropy that changes the system. "The soup kitchen staffer recognized that his mission didn't need to change but that he needed a structured way of connecting to the third tradition," Lipsitz said.

"I like this tool (the four traditions framework) because it gives us a shared language to talk about philanthropy," Lipsitz said. "I like it because it presses you to reflect on the strengths and limits of a particular form of philanthropy in relation to what it is you're trying to do."

"This is a powerful, deceptively simple tool that gets people to think differently about philanthropy in a short period of time," said Dodson. "We've used this tool in our work in Jacksonville, Florida, with the Children's Commission and the Community Foundation, and in Alabama with the Alabama Donors Forum-to get people to be more reflective practitioners. We provide data enabling donors to examine social, educational and economic inequities in their communities and then we ask, 'given the realities that your community is facing, does your community need more philanthropy, or different philanthropy, or both?'"

News Briefs

Lumina Foundation for Education Gives MDC \$5.9 Million to Lead National Initiative to Help More Community College Students Succeed

MDC has been awarded \$5.9 million by [Lumina Foundation for Education](#) to lead Achieving the Dream: Community Colleges Count, a national initiative to help more community college students succeed - particularly students of color and low-income students. Thirty-five community colleges in seven states now participate in Achieving the Dream, which is funded by Lumina Foundation, KnowledgeWorks Foundation and Nellie Mae Education Foundation. More colleges may be added in 2006.

[Achieving the Dream](#) is a multi-year initiative that focuses on measurable outcomes, particularly closing achievement gaps. Participating colleges are committed to using data to drive strategies, monitor progress and evaluate outcomes. Each college works closely with an Achieving the Dream coach, many of whom are former college presidents, and an Achieving the Dream data facilitator who provides hands-on help with the use of data in evaluating student progress.

MDC Hosts Symposium on Philanthropy and Equity in the American South

In mid-October, MDC brought together more than 30 foundation leaders whose organizations invest in the South to examine how philanthropy can do more to help the South address chronic inequities in education, poverty, public health and social justice. The meeting was held to get input from the philanthropic group for MDC's next *State of the South* report, due out in the fall of 2006, which will focus on how demographic, social and economic trends in the South bear on the work of philanthropy and what philanthropy's response to the changing South should be.

Ambassador James Joseph, MDC board chair and executive director of the United States-South Africa Center for Leadership and Public Values at Duke University, gave the [keynote address](#) to the group, calling upon them to invest in the empowerment of those who are economically and socially marginalized and to inform the public policy process.

President David Dodson Makes Case for Community Colleges at New York Meeting

MDC President David Dodson participated in a panel on community colleges at the annual meeting of Grantmakers for Education in New York City. The goal of the session was to garner more support from foundations for community colleges, especially since funders attending the meeting typically focus on K-12 education.

With Christine Johnson, president of Denver Community College, and Robert Ivry, senior vice president of MDRC, a nonprofit, nonpartisan social policy research organization, Dodson discussed the role of community colleges and how important they are for economic development, educational attainment and social justice, especially since more than 50 percent of community college students are minorities from working class backgrounds.

MDC Lead Partner in \$1.5 Million Disaster Preparedness Demonstration Project

In July, the [Federal Emergency Management Agency](#) awarded [MDC and the UNC Center for Urban and Regional Studies](#) \$1.5 million to help develop an emergency preparedness demonstration program targeting disadvantaged communities. The project is too new to have helped the victims of Hurricane Katrina, but it can address some of the issues raised in the aftermath of the hurricane. The project will last two years and MDC is the lead partner.

MDC Senior Staff Associate Carol Lincoln Receives George B. Autry Award

The [Rural Community College Alliance](#) bestows the George Autry Award annually to someone who has made significant contributions to rural community colleges as agents for educational access and place-based development. Carol was recognized for her directorship of the [Rural Community College](#)

[Initiative](#) during its demonstration phase and for helping rural colleges work with their communities to address economic development challenges. The award is named for MDC's founder and first president, George B. Autry who died in 1999.

David Hollars Tapped for George B. Autry Leadership Award

David Hollars, executive director of Centralina Workforce Development Board, was the recipient of the George B. Autry Leadership Award at the Governor's Awards for Excellence in Workforce Development Banquet. The award is given in memory of Autry, MDC's founder and first president who died in 1999.

This newsletter is published quarterly by MDC, a nonprofit organization dedicated to advancing equity and opportunity for all.