COMMUNITY-BASED ASSET BUILDING
THE ROLE PLAYED BY CREDIT UNIONS,
COOPERATIVES, AND OTHER
COMMUNITY-BASED BUSINESSES
(EXAMPLES FROM MISSISSIPPI, ALABAMA,
LOUISIANA, AND FLORIDA)

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ABSTRACT

Cooperatives and community-owned enterprises are mechanisms for community economic development because they provide jobs and business ownership for community members, recirculate resources within their communities, promote environmental sustainability and social responsibility, and develop economic, human, and social capital. Cooperatives also have lower failure rates and higher survival rates than traditional investor-owned businesses, in part, because of their community base. This study expands Gordon Nembhard’s research on these topics with additional case studies and information about several cooperatives and community-based businesses in four southern states. The authors suggest that cooperatives and community-owned businesses are themselves, and also develop, community assets, and thus are an important strategy for urban and rural revitalization and asset building, particularly in under-resourced communities.
INTRODUCTION

Small businesses are the backbone of community economic development in most countries, as well as in the United States. Small business ownership, however, is precarious and risky. Research confirms that 60 percent to 80 percent of traditional investor-owned corporations and small businesses fail within the first year and only 3 percent to 5 percent are still in business after five years. Cooperative businesses, however, have lower failure rates - only 10 percent fail after the first year and 90 percent are still operating after 5 years in business. This is often because of the amount of people involved in starting a cooperative and the high level of community support for cooperatives (World Council of Credit Unions study in Williams 2007). Other studies find similar longevity or survival rates for cooperative businesses (Ryder 2013). Evidence also suggest that cooperatives both successfully address the effects of crises and survive crises better (Borzaga and Calera 2012; also see Ryder 2013). Joint ownership and strong ties to the surrounding community therefore provide both the support small businesses need in order to sustain themselves and a structure through which community development happens.

During this time of growing asset poverty and increasing wealth inequality – impacts of the Great Recession - community ownership, particularly cooperative ownership of community enterprises, is an important strategy to counteract these inequalities (Gordon Nembhard 2010, 2013, 2014a). When addressing asset building, we often forget that there are limitations to what individuals (families) and government can do to limit asset poverty (Gordon Nembhard 2008b, 2014a). If we examine community level institutions and the effects of collective ownership and “locational” assets/wealth, we increase the menu of options available for effective and meaningful asset building among low-wealth households and their communities (Gordon Nembhard 2008b, 2008a, 2014a). Business ownership is a significant component of the portfolio of the wealthy. Social entrepreneurship and collective ownership are important strategies to provide business and home ownership opportunities to those with low-incomes and few financial assets (Gordon Nembhard 2008b, 2014a).

This paper is based on Gordon Nembhard’s previous research on cooperatives and community economic development, measuring the benefits and impact of cooperatives on communities, and credit unions as community assets (Gordon Nembhard 2002, 2004a, 2008a, 2010, 2011, 2013, 2014a and 2014b). Gordon Nembhard (2004a) finds that cooperatives stabilize their communities – providing affordable goods and services, creating good jobs with benefits and often living wages, increasing local economic activity, and encouraging civic participation. Cooperative businesses are group-centered, needs-based, asset building local development mechanisms based on pooling of resources, democratic economic participation, and profit sharing. They are internally driven democratic institutions that promote group learning, economic interdependence and consolidation of resources, development of assets, and protection of people and the environment. Community-based, cooperatively-owned enterprises are characterized by greater community input and participation in the planning, development and governance of commercially-viable, socially-responsible businesses. Cooperative and community ownership provide opportunities for low-resourced people with few traditional opportunities to create new economic opportunities for themselves. Gordon Nembhard’s (2004b and 2014b)
research on African American cooperatives further finds that cooperative business ownership, cooperative financial institutions, and co-op housing have been solutions to past economic challenges, such as debt peonage under Jim Crow, lack of food, affordable housing and financial services during the Great Depression, and various forms of racial economic discrimination throughout the past 200 years.

This study further investigates the community benefits of cooperatives and community-owned businesses through case study analysis of several community-owned businesses, cooperatives, and credit unions, particularly in four Southern states: Mississippi, Alabama, Louisiana, and Florida. It focuses on understanding community businesses as community assets, and how they develop economic, environmental, social and cultural capitals in their members, employees, and communities. We suggest that enterprises that can develop collective as well as individual financial benefits (such as good jobs, business equity, retirement and other savings, land ownership, affordable housing, and commercial real estate) and positive externalities (such as leadership development, economic and environmental sustainability and revitalization, job ladder mobility, education and training, financial literacy, and civic engagement) are community assets because these impacts extend beyond the individuals who are directly connected with the enterprise. While the net worth of the business translates into individual shares through member accounts (or stock ownership) and patronage rebates, a cooperatives’ collective wealth is a store of value with a potential greater than itself. For example, members of cooperatives, their families, and communities prosper because the business prospers. They also have access to the value of the business as a whole separate from their monetary interest in it. “Being a member-owner of a cooperative enterprise provides opportunities for cost savings and income generation (that can lead to asset ownership), as well as opportunities to maximize corporate savings, partner with the corporation on value added activities, and leverage corporate equity for individual and group gains” (Gordon Nembhard 2008a: 22; also see Gordon Nembhard 2014a). Community-owned businesses have many similar benefits.

This paper briefly reviews the roles of community businesses in community economic development and asset building through cooperative and microbusiness development. We start by defining small businesses, microbusinesses, community-based businesses and cooperatives. Next we review, outline, and discuss what we know about community-based businesses and their benefits to individuals and communities. We provide examples of how cooperative businesses and community-owned businesses contribute to local economic development and asset building, using examples of community-owned businesses and cooperative businesses in the South. We also briefly document the efforts of four community-based not-for-profit organizations in Louisiana and Mississippi whose mission is to support home ownership and urban revitalization for low-income people of color displaced by the disaster associated with Hurricane Katrina in 2005. Here we explore not just the ways that these community organizations help residents to build assets, but also how they are able to leverage outside resources to increase economic activity and asset ownership in poor communities. We then provide an overview of findings about the impact and benefits from credit unions in the U.S., particularly the impact of Community Development Credit Unions (CDCUs) on low-resource populations, and the formerly unbanked and under-banked. This section includes examples of three credit unions in the South in terms of
the benefits they provide to members and their communities. This paper concludes with a discussion of common mechanisms used by community enterprises to contribute to local economic development and asset ownership particularly of low-resourced people, as well as best practices for and challenges to these missions. We recommend community development strategies and public policies that promote and support cooperative and credit union development, and community ownership.
WHAT ARE COMMUNITY-OWNED BUSINESSES, COOPERATIVES AND CREDIT UNIONS?

This study focuses on three kinds of community-owned businesses: microbusinesses, cooperative businesses and credit unions. A community enterprise or a community-based organization is defined as “a public or private nonprofit organization of demonstrated effectiveness that-- (A) is representative of a community or significant segments of a community; and (B) provides educational or related services to individuals in the community” (from the 20 USCS § 7801(6), USLegal.com). Community-based organizations provide human, social, and educational services that help to ensure a decent standard of living for residents and citizens. These community-based organizations provide voices to collective interests and needs that may not be heard in electoral or policy forums - voices like those of children and youth in need of assistance, homeless families and individuals, immigrants, and others (Jennings 2002). The roles of community-based organizations are heavily dependent on the needs of their local neighborhood and community members. Community-based organizations “plan, implement, and monitor social and economic development programs, and provide technical and financial help to the communities” (Hussain, Khattak, and Khan 2008). The goal of community-based organizations is to get involved at the grassroots level, and to empower the marginalized segments of the population.

Community Development Corporations (CDCs) are non-profit, community-based organizations that anchor capital locally through the development of both residential and commercial property, ranging from affordable housing to shopping centers and even businesses (Community-Wealth.org). CDCs are “dedicated to the revitalization of poor neighborhoods. They undertake physical revitalization as well as economic development, social services, and organizing and advocacy activities. Because public services for poor communities are fragmented across multiple agencies and levels of government, CDCs often are the only institution with a comprehensive and coordinated program agenda” (Walker 2002, 1). CDCs usually provide a variety of services to different communities and depending on capacity, mission and local need, they take on a wide variety of roles, including but not limited to:

- advocating for, and building affordable housing
- building and running childcare centers and/or community facilities
- developing neighborhood shopping centers
- spearheading community planning efforts
- running charter schools, and
- delivering afterschool and social service programs (NeighborWorks).

A small business is a for-profit enterprise that is privately owned and operated, with a small number of employees and relatively low volume of sales. The classification of a small business varies depending on the industry and country, but can employ as many as 100 workers.¹ Microbusinesses are small businesses with fewer than 10 employees. The American Association

¹ Large businesses have 500 or more employees and are the smallest percentage of businesses in the U.S. Small businesses are the largest percentage of businesses because they include microbusinesses which make up over 95% of all businesses in the U.S. See The U.S. Small Business Administration website, www.sba.gov.
of Microbusiness, however, specifically defines microbusinesses as any business with fewer than 5 employees (Jennifer 2009). Most community-owned businesses are microbusinesses, cooperatives and credit unions.

**Cooperative businesses (Co-ops)** are community-owned private enterprises owned and governed by its members (Gordon Nembhard 2014b, 2008b, also see International Cooperative Alliance 2012a and National Cooperative Business Association 2012) that facilitate democratic group ownership, and address some economic and often social need. Cooperative ownership eliminates middlemen and reduces costs (of supplies or products), solving the general economic problem of overproduction and business uncertainty (Warbasse 1918). Cooperatives compensate for market failure by filling the gaps that other private businesses and the public sector ignore like the provision of rural electricity or other utilities in sparsely populated areas; provision of affordable healthy and organic foods; access to credit and banking services like a credit union; affordable housing; quality affordable child or elder care; and markets for culturally sensitive goods and arts.

A co-op’s primary purpose is to meet member-needs and not just to earn a return on investment (which is the main purpose of a traditional investor-oriented corporation). Cooperative governance is based on one member, one vote, rather than the number of shares owned or amount of investment. Profits, called surplus revenues by co-ops (income over expenses and investment), are distributed to members in proportion to use, unlike corporations where profits are distributed according to stock ownership (in proportion to investment). Co-ops also pay taxes on income kept within the co-op for investment reserves, and on surplus revenues that are returned to individual members as income (National Cooperative Business Association 2012). Some cooperative enterprises are multi-million dollar businesses while others are either small businesses or microbusinesses. The International Cooperative Alliance indirectly represents over one billion individuals throughout the world that are members of at least one cooperative (International Cooperative Alliance 2012b).

There are three major categories of cooperatives, based on the relationship of the member-owners to the purpose: consumer-owned, producer-owned, and worker-owned cooperatives (a hybrid combination of stakeholders, consumers and workers is another emerging structure of cooperatives). Consumers jointly form a buying club or a cooperative retail store in order to

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2 Cooperatives are autonomous internationally recognized enterprises owned democratically by their members, the people who created the cooperative to satisfy a common economic, social or cultural need or fill a gap left by market failure. They operate according to the values of self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity and solidarity; and seven guiding principles: voluntary and open membership, democratic member control, member economic participation, autonomy and independence, education, training and information, cooperation among cooperatives, and concern for community. See ICA 2012a (http://ica.coop/en/what-co-op/co-operative-identity-values-principles); and Gordon Nembhard 2008b.

3 The International Cooperative Alliance (ICA) is a nongovernmental trade association founded in 1895 to represent and serve cooperatives worldwide, see www.ica.coop.

4 This paragraph and the next three paragraphs are based on the description of cooperatives in the “Introduction” of Gordon Nembhard 2014b. For more information on cooperatives see Gordon Nembhard 2008b; also The International Cooperative Alliance website, www.ica.coop (also see section “Cooperative Identity, Value and Principles”). The National Cooperative Business Association, the U.S. co-op trade association, website is www.ncba.coop. Also see
pool their money to buy in bulk, the kind and quality of goods and services they want at an affordable price. A grocery cooperative, for example, allows consumer-owners to provide themselves with fresh produce, and natural and vegetarian foods that are often not supplied elsewhere or are very costly. Other consumer cooperatives include electric, financial (as in a credit union), sustainable fuels, pharmaceuticals, and child care services. The most common kind of consumer-owned cooperatives are credit unions, and cooperative retail enterprises such as natural-food grocery stores and rural electric and energy cooperatives.

A credit union is a consumer-owned co-op that addresses market failure, market insufficiency, and asymmetric information. They offer financial services and loans to a specific group of members through their affiliation with a union, workplace, church, or to underserved communities. They are democratically-owned, community-based, not-for-profit (in the USA) financial institutions whose purpose is to provide affordable high quality financial services to their members. Community development credit unions (CDCUs) are credit unions that serve underserved communities, and are part of a larger group of community development financial institutions (CDFIs) whose purpose is to provide accessible financial services and to open capital markets to low-income communities. Credit unions provide a variety of services similar to commercial banks but are often more sensitive to the needs of their depositors/members. Credit unions are controlled by boards of directors composed of community members, not stockholders looking for a good investment. Services provided by credit unions include: ATM/debit card program, with no surcharge ATMs; check cashing; money orders; business share accounts; no-cost share drafts; share certificates with low minimum balance requirements; bilingual services; insurance/investment sales; student scholarships; credit builder; overdraft lines of credit; real estate loans; risk-based loans; share draft credit cards; financial education; financial counseling; financial literacy workshops; first-time home buyer programs; international remittances; low-cost wire transfers; money orders; business share accounts; interest only or payment option first mortgage loans; micro business loans; micro consumer loans; overdraft protection/courtesy pay; participation loans; real estate loans; risk-based loans; stage of life specific services; character lending; flexible loan extensions; personal services; and personal relationships. Community development credit unions also engage in activities to help their members/depositors make successful financial decisions and become asset owners. These activities include public education; conference sponsorship; branches in ethnic communities; establishment of affiliate or group structures to reduce risk and to gain access to resources otherwise unavailable; expanded flexibility in lending and investment; provision of non-transaction services such as financial counseling; facilitation of membership expansion; and partnering to find best services and products for members (Gordon Nembhard 2010 and 2013).

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5 Much in the following paragraphs about credit unions and community development credit unions derives from Gordon Nembhard 2010 and 2013.
A housing co-op (cooperative housing) is also a consumer-owned co-op that facilitates home or apartment ownership for people who may have trouble owning their own unit. Co-op housing addresses both financing and maintenance issues, and often builds in long-term affordability.

Producers form cooperatives to jointly purchase supplies and equipment and/or to jointly process and market their goods. Agricultural marketing and processing cooperatives as well as craft cooperatives are the most common worker-owned cooperatives. Agricultural cooperatives are some of the largest and most successful cooperatives in the U.S. Workers form cooperatives to facilitate business ownership and democratic management. This helps to stabilize workers’ employment and allows them to share the profits and participate in making policy for the business. Worker cooperatives can also be a result of a conversion from an established company, to save the company that is either being sold off, abandoned, or closed down. It also may result from a specific effort to start a democratic workplace, with collective management, that hires local residents.

Cooperative ownership, overall, provides a strategy to address market failure and economic marginality. Cooperative ownership also supports education and training, economic transparency, democratic participation, and profit sharing. While the net worth of a cooperative business translates into individual shares through member accounts (or stock ownership) and patronage rebates, a cooperative’s collective wealth is a store of value with a potential greater than itself. “There is an accumulated benefit stored in the business that is an asset in-and-of itself, as much as a distributional benefit from each member’s share of the business’ net worth, particularly as the value of each member’s account appreciates” (Gordon Nembhard 2008a, 22; also see 2014a). Members, their families, and communities prosper because the business prospers. They also may have access to some part of the value of the business as a whole, separate from their individual interest in it. “Being a member-owner of a cooperative enterprise provides opportunities for cost savings and income generation (that can lead to asset ownership), as well as opportunities to maximize corporate savings, partner with the corporation on value added activities, and leverage corporate equity for individual and group gains” (Gordon Nembhard 2008a, 22).
THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY ENTERPRISES IN COMMUNITY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Gordon Nembhard (1999, 2006a, 2006b, 2008a, 2010, 2011), Haynes and Gordon Nembhard (1999), and Fairbairn et al. 1991 suggest that cooperative development is an important community economic development strategy. In particular, we propose that co-operative development can contribute to revitalizing inner cities and redeveloping places like New Orleans and the Gulf Coast after disasters. Fairbairn et al. (1997: 15), for example, find that

Co-operatives and credit unions have a greater capacity to influence their community environment than do most businesses. Their directors are typically community leaders; their memberships represent community networks; and they are committed to education and improvement. In the economic sphere, they administer pools of capital under democratic control that can be used according to local priorities and they accumulate economic surpluses that are re-invested or redistributed back into the communities from which they came.

Nevertheless, we still do not have good measures and have not fully delineated the mechanisms by which community-ownership contributes to asset building, especially among low-resourced people and their communities (see Gordon Nembhard, Hammond Ketilson and Thomas 2012; and Gordon Nembhard 2008a and 2010).

In part to address such challenges, and to further illuminate the myriad outcomes from community ownership, we explore additional examples and analysis. The hypotheses for this study are: 1) Community businesses have a social mission(s) and provide benefits to and positive impacts on their communities. 2) This analysis will help us to better measure various impacts of, and outcomes from, community-based enterprises and cooperatives, including asset building. 3) This analysis will help us to better understand how community enterprises operate as community assets. This will enable community developers and policy makers to develop strategies and policies to support cooperatives and community-based businesses which, in turn, will facilitate asset ownership and joint assets among members and contribute to community-based asset building. These hypotheses are more or less obtainable depending on how community enterprises report information that we can use to analyze their potential as employers, green businesses, successes as businesses that provide business equity for their owners; the donations they make to their local communities; the support they provide for employees; and the quality of their member volunteer activity. Most community organizations and microbusinesses, however, do not have published data about their payrolls, sustainability programs, or member/owner equity. Some information must come from surveys and interviews as well as participatory action research working among these enterprises.

Community-owned businesses vary in their function and have unique roles to play in their respective communities. Some of these enterprises provide specific services to the community, while others educate the community on various issues. Although small with lesser payrolls, community-owned businesses do create jobs, and insert income into local economies. They
create economic activity and stability in a community, exchange goods and services with other community enterprises, pay taxes, and provide business equity to their owners. Lyon et al (2002: 5-6), for example, find that a larger proportion of smaller businesses have owners living in the locality of their business and contributing to it; that social enterprises “have a much greater emphasis on delivery of local services especially in under-served communities;” and that community enterprises donate money and resources to their communities, participate in community groups, help other local businesses, and encourage and guide members of the community. These businesses are also more “embedded in local supply chains” which recirculate resources (Lyon et al 2002). Credit unions such as Hope Federal Credit Union, First Delta Federal Credit Union and Federation of Green County Employees Federal Credit Union all pay competitive wages with benefits to their employees, make loans to community members and local businesses (that may not otherwise get awarded loans by commercial banks), and give donations to their community which provide local delivery of services as well as opportunities for resources to recirculate within the community (see Gordon Nembhard 2013, and Hope Federal Credit Union).

Hayton (1996, 7) finds that employees report preferring to work in a community business because they have more day to day control over the business activities, team work is emphasized, and they have regular contact with the community. For example, at the beginning of each year, the members of Indian Springs Farmer’s Cooperative in Mississippi meet as a group to discuss what they want to produce (flour, honey, spinach, wild mustard, cabbage, and broccoli). The members of the cooperative then figure out how much to produce based on the size of their farms and the amount of available resources. The cooperative creates about 20 to 30 jobs year round within the community, and offers a beginner’s farmers program and other services like estate planning.6

Green County Democrat newspaper, in Green County, AL, is another community-owned company that provides important information to the Black community in the county (that the previously white owned newspaper did not do), and also supports community activities that increase tourism in the area.7 The newspaper sponsors an annual free event called the Black Belt Folk Group Festival which is held in the center of town and includes blues music from local musicians on Saturday and gospel music on Sunday. The Festival was started by Miles College but Green County Democrat owner, Carol Zippert, has continued the tradition. The most important thing the Green County Democrat newspaper does for its community, according to its owners, is to provide fair objective news about the community and the world. It helps to know the history of the community to understand why this newspaper is so important. Back in the 1960s, Alabama was at the heart of the fight for voting rights and Dr. King came to Greene County to speak several times. In 1968, for the first time, Black candidates ran for political office under the National


7 From a 2012 interview with John Zippert, publisher, Greene County Democrat. Also see Greene County Democrat http://greenecountydemocrat.com/.
Democratic County of Alabama party, however, local officials neglected to include their names on the ballot. The candidates then sued and won in the Supreme Court and a special election was conducted which included the names of the Black candidates and since then, the county has had 43 years of Black political control (celebrated on June 30, 2012). The *Greene County Democrat* newspaper of record in Greene County before 1968 and 1969 had very little news on Black people. From 1969 to the 1980s, the paper was used to degrade Black officials as lazy, crooks, and people not able to function in office. The newspaper was used by the white economic structure as a weapon and the news coverage was biased and did not cover both sides. A group of individuals including John and Carol Zippert, who grew tired of the biasness, formed a committee to challenge the newspaper. The committee asked to buy the paper in April 1984 but the offer was declined. Later in the year, the committee received an offer to buy the paper for $40,000 which bought the name, subscription list, a few pieces of equipment, and some of the principal debt the previous owners had to the publishers. In order to purchase the newspaper, John and Carol Zippert mortgaged their home and received $1000 each from 20 individuals which was enough to buy the newspaper.
COOPERATIVES AS TOOLS FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Cooperative businesses stabilize communities because they are community-based business anchors that distribute, recycle, and multiply local expertise and capital within a community. They pool limited resources to achieve a critical mass. They enable their owners to generate income, jobs, and accumulate assets. They also provide affordable, quality goods and services, and develop human and social capital as well as economic independence (Gordon Nembhard 2002, 2004b, 2008a, 2014; Fairbairn et al 1991; Logue and Yates 2005; WAGES no date; Yes! Magazine 2013). In addition, co-op enterprises and their members pay taxes, and are good citizens by giving donations to their communities, paying their employees fairly, and using sustainable practices (Gordon Nembhard 2013; Iowa Association of Electrical Co-ops. 2011).

According to Zeuli, Freshwater, Markley and Barkley (2003), since most cooperatives are owned and controlled by local residents, they have a vested interest in and are more likely to promote community growth than an investor-oriented firm (IOF) controlled by non-local investors. Cooperatives are more likely to ensure their objectives within the community are met and are interested in promoting community economic development. Many non-agricultural cooperatives are created to serve a local need and so the objectives set by their members may not include profit maximization at the firm level. The objectives are usually more needs oriented; therefore, cooperatives may be more likely to stay in the community. This is unlike IOFs that may be under considerable pressure by investors to grow as fast as possible, which may lead them to outgrow the community, and relocate to a place where the supply of labor is larger and other inputs can be more easily and efficiently obtained.

“Cooperatives are oriented to solving local problems by organizing local people into stable organizations...and [they] have an explicit mission to keep funding, distribution of benefits, and responsibility and accountability in local users’ hands” (Zeuli, Freshwater, Markley and Barkley 2003, 1). In a survey performed by Bhuyan, Leistritz, and Cobia (1998), of 162 non-agricultural cooperatives, 44% of the respondents said they could not have opened their business had it not been organized as a cooperative. Cooperatives “aggregate people, resources, and capital into economic units that overcome the historic barriers to development” (Ziewacz 1994, 189). In addition, evidence shows that cooperatives both successfully address the effects of crises and survive crises better than other types of enterprises (Borzaga and Calera 2012, 7). Cooperatives are collective problem solvers.

The cooperative structure yields several community benefits. For example, food co-ops spend more revenues locally, buy more products locally, buy more organic produce, recycle more plastic, and create more jobs than conventional grocers. For every $1,000 spent at a food co-op, $1,606 goes to the local economy; for every $1 million in sales, 9.3 jobs are created (Yes! Magazine 2013). During the Great Recession, credit unions approved more mortgages for low- to moderate-income households, had lower denial rates for all nonwhites, and had lower loan delinquencies, while doing more lending than commercial banks (Yes! Magazine 2013). WAGES - an organization in California that develops women’s ecological cleaning worker cooperatives - has found that before working in and owning the house cleaning co-op, Latina's had a median
income of $24,000; but after owning the co-op their median income is over $40,000 (WAGES no date) - where the national median income for Latino households is only $38,000. So, ownership of the co-op has increased income for this group to a level higher than the national average for their ethnic group.

The economic activity of the 30,000 cooperatives in the U.S. contributes an estimated $154 billion to the nation’s total income. These co-ops have helped to create over 2.1 million jobs, with an impact on wages and salaries of almost $75 billion (Deller et al 2009). There is some state level impact data available on the economic benefits of cooperatives, but much more research is needed in this area. In North Dakota, for example, “cooperative business spending lifts economic activity” throughout the state, particularly by increasing sales and employment in the private sector, and tax revenues in the public sector (McKee 2011, 9-10). So far, we know more about direct benefits of cooperatives (which helps to explain the large impact). For example, based on the University of Wisconsin Center for Cooperatives (2012 Research on the Economic Impact of Cooperatives),

- Mississippi has a total of 875 cooperatives, most of which are water/waste cooperatives, followed by credit unions. Mississippi cooperatives have a total of 2.25 million members, and have generated 6,410 jobs, $4.6 billion in total revenues and $222 million in wages and salaries.  
8

- Louisiana has a total of 324 cooperatives, the majority of which are credit unions. These cooperatives have a total of 1.5 million members and have created 8,450 jobs, total revenues of $2.5 billion, and wages and salaries of $316 million.  
9

- Alabama has a total of 256 cooperatives, with the majority being credit unions. Alabama cooperatives have a total of 2.18 million members and have created 10,770 jobs, $4.29 billion in total revenues, and $373 million in wages and salaries.  
10

- Florida has a total of 850 cooperatives with the majority being in housing, and the second largest sector being credit unions. These cooperatives have a total of almost 5.6 million members. They have created 21,670 jobs, and have generated $9.04 billion in revenues and $848 million in wages and salaries.  
11

In terms of the impact of African American and low-income cooperatives in six states in the South who are members of The Federation of Southern Cooperatives/Land Assistance Fund, Zippert (2014) summarizes that: “Over the years, the Federation/LAF has provided services, learning and leadership experiences, saved family estates, reduced costs, increased revenues and enhanced stability for members (through producer, marketing, consumer and credit cooperatives), and

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taught techniques and skills that are of incalculable worth.” Zippert estimates that the additional monetary impact of the Federation/LAF for the past 45 years is over $400 million. This includes:

- $85 million in sales through cooperative marketing;
- $25 million of member shares saved in credit union accounts;
- 50,154 loans to low-income families totaling $97.5 million;
- $30 million worth of housing units constructed and rehabilitated;
- $75 million mobilized in resources for support of member cooperatives and credit unions; and
- $100 million worth of land saved and retained (Zippert).12

Zippert (2014) also describes some of the intangible benefits from the cooperatives and the Federation/LAF’s support. They include: the leadership growth of people, the changes in behavior that makes collective decision making more effective, a greater appreciation of sharing by people as a means of working together economically in communities, and teaching people in co-ops how to make decisions about their collective well-being.

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12 Also see Federation of Southern Cooperatives/Land Assistance Fund 2007 and 2012.
WAYS THAT COOPERATIVES AND SUPPORT FOR COOPERATIVES AID ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Start up support:
Start-up costs for cooperatives are often low because co-ops are eligible to apply for loans and grants from a number of federal and state agencies designed to support co-op development. There are also other “non-governmental financial institutions like cooperative banks that provide relatively low cost loans to cooperatives either because they are chartered to do so by the federal government or because they have been established to assist cooperatives and non-profit firms” (Zeuli, Freshwater, Markley and Barkley 2003, 4). There are tax advantages for cooperatives that also make the model attractive.

Meaningful work:
Cooperatives, in particular, are often able to provide meaningful work and a good work atmosphere for their members and/or employees. Levine and Tyson (1990) find that cooperatives provide superior working conditions, and both participation and ownership have a positive effect on productivity. Logue and Yates (2005, 56) find that “Cooperatives facilitate people in pooling their greatest asset—their labor—along with small amounts of cash (perhaps all the cash they have), to create a larger enterprise from which they will receive a benefit and return.” More than what they could do on their own, “employee ownership of the means of production and farmer and small business ownership of purchasing and marketing cooperatives increase income and wealth for employee owner, farmer and small business owner” (Logue and Yates 2005, 57).

Many of the worker-owned cooperatives, in particular, increase industry standards in wages and benefits as well as provide self-management or team work between management and “labor,” job ladder opportunities, skill development and capacity building, job security, and general control over income and work rules (for example Cooperative Home Care Associates, Childspace, Workers’ Own Sewing Company, APR Masonry Arts, Colors Restaurant, see Gordon Nembhard 2004b, 2006b, 2008a and 2014b). Women-owned catering and house cleaning cooperatives provide women with control over the hours of work, work rules, health and safety, benefits, and income generation that allow them to balance home, family and work lives and own their own business (for example Emma’s Echo Clean and the other cooperatives developed by WAGES, and the cooperatives developed by Cooperative Economics for Women, see Gordon Nembhard 2004b and 2006b). Cooperative music production companies (such as the emerging Rhythm Collective in New Orleans) similarly bring musicians together with social entrepreneurs to create their own company so that musicians can control their own production, distribution and profits, and remain local. There are many other such examples (see Gordon Nembhard 2006b and 2014b).

There are many aspects to meaningful work, and many ways that cooperatives can be seen to contribute to creating decent jobs. Are wages in the cooperative higher than in the industry? -Are higher wages for the sector or in the community established to compete with the co-op’s wages? Are more opportunities for advancement created in the cooperative? The answers to these
questions appear to be yes (see National Cooperative Business Association, 1998, Gordon Nembhard 2002a and 2004a, for example), although much more research needs to be done. In the 1990s, fifteen mutual benefit service sector cooperatives in California provided higher wages for members than the national minimum wage and wages higher than comparable entry-level jobs (for the unskilled, non-English speaking immigrants who are their members), engaged in profit sharing, returned surplus earnings to members, and provided some form of benefits (Conover, Molina, and Morris, 1993). Childspace’s cooperatives provide above average salaries for the industry, with full medical coverage, child care services for all worker-owners, and have access to a career ladder (Clamp 2002; and “Providing Living Wages...” 1998). Also, Cooperative Home Care Associates provides multiple benefits rarely seen in its industry or in any low-skilled employment. African American and Latina women became owners of a home care worker-owned cooperative as an alternative to public assistance and to create quality jobs and quality care in what was a low-grade industry (see Cooperative Home Care 2009, Schneider 2009, and Gordon Nembhard 2008a).

The missions of the above mentioned cooperatives are to create quality service by creating quality jobs. Worker ownership in a cooperative structure is a combination that these businesses have made work to both deliver meaningful and quality jobs as well as quality services. Cooperative ownership enables low-income residents, women, immigrants, and others (who often are without any avenue to gain income or assets) to provide affordable, quality goods and services, generate jobs, stabilize their communities, and accumulate some assets. Cooperative ownership also allows low-income residents, women, and others, to generate income and at the same time be family and community friendly (Gordon Nembhard 2004b). Collective and cooperatively owned enterprises often provide not only economic stability, but also develop many types of human and social capital, and economic independence. This alternative model of development is based on recognizing and developing internal (to the individual and to the community) capacities and re-circulating local resources of all kinds. It creates mechanisms that distribute, recycle, and multiply local expertise and capital within a community, creating a solidarity economy.\footnote{The term “solidarity economy” is becoming increasingly popular since the first World Social Forum in Brazil. The US Solidarity Economic Network (www.usen.org) describes a solidarity economy as an alternative economic framework grounded in shared values, solidarity and cooperation that promotes social and economic democracy, equity in all dimensions (e.g. race, class, gender...), and sustainability. It is pluralist and organic in its approach, allowing for different nonhierarchical forms and strategies in different contexts, always building from the grassroots up. The term economic solidarity refers to economic activities whose purpose is to support, promote and develop a particular group, using shared values, trust and loyalty (see Gherardi and Masiero 1990).}

\textbf{Wealth Building:}

Some studies find that successful cooperative businesses create wealth and help their members accumulate wealth and/or assets (Gordon Nembhard 2002a, 2008a, 2010, 2014a; Logue and Yates 2005; Williamson, Imbrosio and Alperovitz 2004; Ownership Associates 2003; and Scharf 2001). Cooperatives are a form of communal, joint, and democratic ownership of a business whose equity is an asset that can contribute to an individual member’s wealth portfolio (Gordon Nembhard 2008a). Members of cooperatives put equity into a cooperative enterprise. A
successful enterprise gives a return on that investment. In the case of cooperatives, the return is sometimes annual dividends or patronage refunds (often distributed upon exit from membership), and sometimes the return takes the form of job security and living wages and benefits, or reduced costs of products and services (Gordon Nembhard 2008a; also see National Cooperative Business Association 1998). Individual cooperatives decide democratically how much of the surplus should be allocated to members and how much should be unallocated or retained in the business. Because of the democratic nature of cooperatives, distribution occurs in an equitable fashion which places the wealth generated from the business into the hands of the owner-members (and sometimes other stakeholders) (Gordon Nembhard 2008a). This means that cooperatives as a business are also a democratic mechanism for wealth creation.

Some cooperatives such as Cooperative Home Care Associates (New York City) provide retirement accounts and encourage their members to be banked and to have a savings account, in addition to paying bonuses and dividends (Schneider 2009). Other cooperatives offer retirement accounts for their worker-owners, and in some industries are actually more likely than non-Employee Stock Ownership Plans firms (ESOP) to provide retirement accounts and higher valued retirement plans. Childspace (Philadelphia) provides an IDA (Individual Development Account) program (Clamp 2002 and no date) linked to the federal program which matches the savings of low-income people for education and business development. Mandela Food Co-op in West Oakland, CA has plans to partner with its neighbor, People’s Federal Credit Union, to donate some of the cooperative’s surplus earnings toward matching credit union members’ savings in IDAs (Gordon Nembhard 2013).

**Working with the incarcerated and formerly incarcerated:**
Several places around the world have begun to use cooperative business development as a strategy to serve the incarcerated and formerly incarcerated. The Puerto Rican cooperative movement has created several cooperatives among inmates with support of the Department of Corrections. In the InsideArt program in Canada, prison and community artists own a marketing craft cooperative together. The co-op aids the incarcerated artists in obtaining the supplies they

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14 Two studies about the extent to which Employee Stock Ownership Plans (ESOPs) transfer wealth to employees are beginning to answer some of these questions for ESOP companies (i.e., worker ownership of stock), and particularly in regard to retirement savings. Washington State in 1998 found that not only are wages higher in those ESOP companies, but also the ESOP firms “provide their employees significantly higher retirement wealth than similar non-ESOP firms” (2). For example, the average ESOP participant’s account value was worth $24,260 (in 1995) and the average value of all retirement benefits in ESOP companies in Washington state was $32,213, compared with the average value of $12,735 in the comparison companies. Thus employee-owners had more retirement assets without “sacrificing their wages” (4). Similarly a smaller Massachusetts study conducted in 2000 found that per participant wealth held for ESOP employees was $39,895 (in 1999) (3). An impressive 12% of Massachusetts ESOPs have average participant accounts worth over $100,000 (3). The vast majority of these ESOPs in both cases use the ESOP ownership as a supplemental pension which explains the higher value. This is one way to show that broader ownership increases assets at least for retirement. Scharf also notes that much more research is needed in this area.

15 The Atlanta Cooperative Development Corporation started an Individual Development Account (IDA) program in the late 1990s with a grant from HUD (the U.S. Agency for Housing and Urban Development) that would allow savers to use the savings not just for education or small business development but for cooperative development as well - to use to pay for their equity share to start a cooperative business. This information comes from an email correspondence with Gloria Bromell Tinubu (one of the founders of the Atlanta Cooperative Development Corporation), December 28, 2007.
need, supports their art, and sells the finished products at fairs and through the Internet. Once released, the artists already own part of a business, and have a community to connect with. Italy and the UK are working with models that empower both the human promotion and social integration of citizens through the establishment of worker cooperatives for social service employees and the clients or customers (such as the incarcerated or formerly incarcerated).
CREDIT UNIONS AS COMMUNITY ASSETS

Credit Unions are cooperative financial institutions that are owned and controlled by the people that use their services. The philosophy behind credit unions is that people should be able to pool their money and make loans to each other (Cerise 2010). Community Development Credit Unions (CDCUs) have a unique role in that they provide a safe haven for families without access to financial credit by granting fairly priced loans and financial counseling and education for their members as well as products, services and support that can help members free themselves from high-cost and predatory debt, gain control over their personal finances, and achieve economic independence (National Federation of Community Development Credit Unions no date, also see Gordon Nembhard 2010 and 2013). The lending practices of community development credit unions, federal credit unions and other state chartered credit unions are important to low-income families because it gives them an opportunity to build assets in a variety of forms. Most credit unions provide both short-term and long-term loans to their members as well as car loans, mortgage loans, Individual Development Accounts, personal accounts, savings accounts, small business loans and the like (Gordon Nembhard 2010, 2013).

Credit union data and findings reported in Gordon Nembhard (2010 and 2013) suggest that credit unions, particularly community development credit unions, are important community-based institutions that provide fair, low-cost credit and financial services to the under-banked and the unbanked, and to low-wealth communities (also see Fairbairn et al 1997). Specifically, they provide lower cost, stable loans and services, higher rates on deposits (savings), and overall stability of rates leading to economic stability (especially for those who have retired). Credit unions tend to focus on their members, provide convenient branch locations, invest within the community, reinvest in the community, tailor services for members, and practice relatively conservative lending. Gordon Nembhard (2010, 9) summarizes findings from case studies of several community development credit unions around the country:

A major recurring theme ... is the uniqueness of credit unions, that they are people-focused and mission-driven. One interviewee articulates that the mission of his credit union is “to create and protect the ownership and economic opportunity for people of color, women, rural residents and low-income families and communities.” Others reiterate that their credit union stresses service for members and the community – personalized, tailored services, and being people focused. “We are local. We tend to look at people in the face.” “We know them and they know us.” “If we make them [customers] stronger, then we make the community stronger.” Credit union staff helps their members to personalize the services and to make decisions about what kind of loan they need - and even if they need a loan. As community-owned financial institutions that encourage democratic participation, credit union members feel comfortable making requests, asking questions, [voting for the board of directors], and looking for alternatives through the credit union.
Credit unions provide financial options, loans and education. They also are good employers (providing stable jobs with decent wages and benefits) and good neighbors (giving financial and in kind donations, sharing meeting space, and supporting community development projects and affordable housing). Gordon Nembhard (2010) concludes that most CDCUs are deeply involved in their communities, and the larger ones actually provide donations, encourage their employees to volunteer in the community and are generous employers. Most credit unions provide salaried jobs with benefits, often with job ladder opportunities. Gordon Nembhard (2010) also finds that some of the credit unions offer innovative services and instruments designed to be flexible in helping their members or to start them saving, increase their savings, or help improve their credit. Members are allowed to open and maintain accounts with low balances. Wiring to other banks and sending remittances abroad usually cost less than at commercial banks.

Some of the credit unions actually compete with check cashing outlets. One credit union provides a payday loan rate of 18% while the payday loan outlet down the street charges 124%.

Starting in 2005, the National Federation of Community Development Credit Unions (NFCDCU) has encouraged community development credit unions to include services that discourage members from going to predatory lenders like payday lenders and pawn shops to get loans which are heavily located in low-income communities. Providing an alternative to predatory loans helps low income families reduce their debt and save more. This increases their economic stability and theoretically increases the amount of money that can be used for other things - and may be reinvested in the community.

Many community development credit unions find ways to help their members totally avoid a payday loan (even a less risky one that the CDCU might offer). Some provide low-cost microloans (consumer loans) and help clients work out a budget and financial plan (Gordon Nembhard 2010). In most credit unions, every loan is reviewed by the staff to determine if the member has the ability to repay. Loan officers of CDCUs often advise more than they lend, and provide financial information and counseling (Gordon Nembhard 2010). Even the smallest credit unions offer financial education, financial counseling and financial literacy workshops, and youth programs; some offer first time home buying programs and home ownership training programs. Also, community development credit union loan managers try to guide clients/members to a better financial position, not just sell them a loan. CDCUs also have more flexibility in how they provide loans and in the variety of loans they offer their members. They may rate employment record higher than credit score, for example. CDCUs’ regulator, the National Credit Union Administration, explains the uniqueness of CDCU lending (NCUA 2010, 4):

LICUs [low-income credit unions] and CDCUs generally make credit available to their members by offering non-traditional lending products. These credit unions

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16 On the other hand, however, many of the credit unions do not provide any kind of payday lending because they have found it does not help their members in the long term, but rather ties them up in more debt; and it is not prudent for a lender or borrower to lend “with no questions asked.” See Gordon Nembhard 2010.

17 The National Federation of Community Development Credit Unions began to offer a special grant program and training seminar to promote the development and expansion of affordable anti-predatory lending programs to its members (National Federation of Community Development Credit Unions no date).
adapt their operations to fit the unique needs of their membership. Non-traditional products, procedures, and services that some credit unions use to better serve low income members include: non-traditional loan underwriting, such as explaining limited, negative, or no credit history; requiring payroll deductions for loan payments; documenting history of making timely rent and utility payments; and, using a qualified co-signor who sufficiently offsets credit risk.

Some credit unions also offer Individual Development Accounts (IDAs) that match members’ savings (a federal program in which commercial banks cannot participate) to encourage and reward saving behavior. ¹⁸ Credit union services are often place-based, and credit unions with this mission are increasing. Many of the newer credit union missions are to serve people in a certain neighborhood or zip code. They make loans in the community they serve for the community they serve, to help individuals, families and communities (Gordon Nembhard 2010).

Credit unions therefore contribute to economic stability as well as help to re-circulate money and resources in their local communities. Because they are community-based and democratically owned, local community members participate in the decision-making process which may generally increase their voice and may develop their leadership skills. Because they provide savings instruments, as well as credit and mortgages to obtain assets, credit unions are asset builders, that is, they aid their members and depositors in building assets.

¹⁸ One CDCU is even piloting an IDA program that would be in part supported by the local worker cooperative - a health food grocery store located next door.
CONCLUSIONS

Cooperative enterprise development makes possible new strategies (and connects with established practices from all over the world) for economic development and wealth creation, particularly among groups who have been excluded from them. Cooperatives have played an important role in forwarding the rights and prospects of low-income urban and rural communities (Gordon Nembhard 2014b). African Americans, for example, have owned cooperative farms, marketing boards, grocery and other retail stores, gas stations, credit unions, insurance companies, construction companies, sewing factories, child care and home care agencies throughout the centuries, often as a strategy to gain community economic independence as well as the needed services (Gordon Nembhard 2004b, 2006b, and 2014b). Because they also provide business equity and sometimes give dividends on ownership shares, cooperatives and community businesses are asset builders (Gordon Nembhard 2008a, 2010). The impacts of cooperative businesses on their members and communities are often transformational because an increase in finance capital is accompanied by increases in human and social capital.

With a significant proportion of people still unbanked (34 million in 2011, an increase of 13% since 2009, Adler 2012), not to mention the unprecedented number of home foreclosures since 2007 (see RealtyTrac Staff 2012), there is a role for alternative financial institutions such as credit unions that are non-predatory and community based (Gordon Nembhard 2013). While not perfect, and often cannot or do not serve all the people who need their services, credit unions, particularly CDCUs, provide financial education, affordable financial services and access to affordable credit (see examples of these in the appendix). As such, they are asset builders, and because they are rooted in their communities and governed by their community members, they also are community assets. Previous research (summarized in Gordon Nembhard 2010 and 2013) documents many of the successes of credit unions and how they benefit their members.

Policy recommendations therefore include: increasing awareness of and information about cooperatives among the general public and government agencies and employees; expanded, less restrictive, and more uniform co-op laws (at state and federal levels); more support for community development credit unions; and enabling laws and supportive infrastructure, particularly for startup, capitalization, and financing (at all levels), including loan funds, small business services, and workforce funding dedicated to cooperative development. States which have stronger laws in support of cooperatives, and that have more cooperatives, experience more of the benefits from cooperatives.

Policy should focus on increasing the number of credit unions under state and federal charters, and increasing the percentage of community business members and business loans – commercial banking – in which they can engage. There is, however, an issue of the National Credit Union Administration (NCUA) liquidating or merging many of the smallest CDCUs because of worries about their viability. Another strategy would be to work with credit unions and their supporters to figure out how to increase the viability of small CDCUs because it is important that low-income and marginalized as well as unbanked people be supported in owning their own financial
institutions. The answer is not to just shut them down or force them to merge with larger credit unions that are not even located in their communities, but to strategize about how to maintain local ownership of the CDCU both to remain viable and able to provide full services. Partnerships, and/or requirements that commercial banks deposit certain percentages in CDCUs are some of the policies that would help.

While microbusinesses are the majority business form in the U.S., more attention needs to be paid to supporting and encouraging locally owned businesses that are focused on community needs and community control. A main issue that the Partnership for Self Employment faces is that there is no federal lobbying voice for small businesses as there is for big businesses. A coalition of small businesses needs to be organized to lobby for a seat at the table. The voice of the group should be based on the number of small businesses in the country instead of the amount of money they donate.

As the World Council of Credit Unions found (Williams 2007), cooperatives are a resilient and stable form of microbusiness. Collective ownership, pooling of resources, shared risk, and democratic distribution of profits create stable enterprises that support their member-owners and contribute to their communities. Municipalities that invest their workforce development and community development funds in worker cooperatives see a return on their investment, since these businesses often pay living wages with benefits and provide business equity to their worker-owners. More of this kind of investment is needed. Federal and state supports for cooperatives and community owned businesses are needed. The Small Business Administration and community developers should support and promote cooperatives and community-based ownership. At the federal level, the Small Business Administration should be knowledgeable about cooperatives and be able to advise cooperative business developments and provide loans to cooperatives. Individual Development Account savings should be eligible for investment in cooperatives and/or to cover one’s equity share in a cooperative. Cooperative law needs to be standardized across states, perhaps with federal charters.

In addition, some community businesses also use cooperatives as suppliers, or create second level cooperatives to maximize their success. Nadeau (2012, 103) notes that small businesses “use co-ops to purchase goods and services rather than to market them.” He adds: “Small businesses can benefit from co-ops in a variety of other ways in addition to joining together to buy or sell goods and services. For example, many small businesses are members of credit unions and, as such, are eligible to borrow from them” (103-104). In this way, individual microbusinesses do not have to change their structure but also can use cooperation to stabilize and enhance their businesses. Information about this strategy and enabling laws should be put into place to increase knowledge about and availability of this model.

19 The problem is not so much that the mergers are not successful. Most of the time, they have been successful, as in the example of Hope and Shreveport FCU. The problem is that it is more difficult for CDCUs to support local and small scale community economic development and be democratically controlled by local members if they must become a branch office of a separate large credit union not in their jurisdiction, and mergers reduce the sense of local ownership. However, often the larger credit union does make it possible for the smaller CU (now a branch office) to provide the needed services with a strong enough reserve base.
Education about cooperative business development needs to be more widespread. The general public needs to know more about the advantages of cooperatives, and have access to training in cooperative economic development. In addition, we have federal laws that support converting Single Proprietor Businesses to Employee Stock Ownership Plans (ESOP) or Cooperatives. This information needs to be more widespread, and workshops and training about this option should be sponsored by municipalities and support organizations.

High schools should teach cooperative economics, and help young people develop their own cooperatives. Engaging students in cooperatively-owned businesses, in democratic decision-making, and group learning using real-world experiences has been found to motivate and excite them to further their education, and to help them develop their social capital and leadership skills while jointly running their own business (Gordon Nembhard 2008b). They gain confidence, general and technical skills, motivation to learn, and incentive to go on to college (and sometimes the savings to pay for higher education).

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Puerto Rico, for example, has a law requiring co-operative education and that each high school support at least 1 youth cooperative [From a presentation by Jaime G. Cuebas Mercado, Education Service Department Manager of Cooperativa de Seguros Multiples de Puerto Rico, at the Association of Cooperative Educators Institute, Austin TX, July 16, 2014].
APPENDIX – EXAMPLES OF COMMUNITY ENTERPRISES

A. CREDIT UNIONS IN THE SOUTH

First Delta Credit Union
First Delta Credit Union began as Quitman County Federal Credit Union (FCU) in 1981 in Marks, MS, and after another merger became First Delta in 2004. Started in the back of a church, First Delta provided financial services as well as community development support such as homeownership initiatives and small business services to residents in the Delta Region of Northern Mississippi. In 24 years, the CDCU gained 5,450 members, five branches and $7 million in assets, with over $13,500 loans disbursed ($25 million cumulative in loans) (Morrison 2006). After some setbacks and being put under conservatorship by the National Credit Union Administration (federal regulator) in October 2009, First Delta merged with Shreveport Federal Credit Union in Louisiana in June 2010 (CUNA 2010) to become the “Delta Division of Shreveport FCU.” The National Federation of Community Development Credit Unions (the CDCU trade association) notes that “the merger of First Delta FCU in Marks, Miss. with Shreveport (La.) FCU will preserve vital community development credit union (CDCU) services in four low-income counties” in “one of the most economically disadvantaged communities in the U.S.”(CUNA 2010). Shreveport FCU CEO Helen Godfrey-Smith explains the similarities between the two once independent credit unions:

The missions of both credit unions are near-perfect reflections of each other – to provide the highest level of personal financial services to under-banked and underserved communities, while encouraging and increasing the knowledge of thrift, savings, and the wise use of credit by individuals and small businesses in targeted communities (CUNA 2010).

Federation of Greene County Employees Federal Credit Union
The Federation of Greene County Federal Credit Union was established and incorporated in Alabama in 1975. Since its inception, the credit union has made over $8 million in loans to Greene County residents. As of the end of its 2010 fiscal year, the Federation of Greene County Federal Credit Union had about $1,265,179 in assets with 564 active members. The credit union serves anyone living, working or worshiping in Greene County, Alabama. The services the credit union provides to its members include:

- Individual Development Accounts
- Financial Counseling
- No Cost Bill Payer
- Savings
- Share Certificates with low minimum balance requirements
- Auto loans and
- Personal loans (Cuhub.org)
Hope Federal Credit Union

Hope Federal Credit Union (HOPE) was organized in 1995 by the members of Anderson United Methodist Church and was Mississippi's only church-sponsored credit union. The credit union started as a small church project to help low- and moderate-income people build a solid financial foundation for a better future. The credit union now has branches in Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Tennessee. Its mission is to strengthen communities, build assets, and improve lives in economically distressed areas of the Mid-South by providing access to high quality financial products and related services. The vision of the credit union is to be a community development financial institution that provides a substantial number of low-wealth people and communities with the financial tools and resources needed to achieve a better quality of life that influences policies and resources that impact their constituents and their interests, and is financially self-sufficient. Hope Federal Credit Union provides various services for individuals, organizations and Socially Responsible Investors (SRIs). For individuals, the services include personal finance services, personal loans, financial counseling, business loans, and night deposit. For organizations, the services include business accounts, nonprofit accounts, and business loans. For SRIs, investors who build their own wealth while helping people in one of the nation's most economically distressed regions, HOPE’s services include HOPE certificates, high impact certificates, money market accounts, saver accounts, IRA accounts, nonprofit bonus rate accounts, and jumbo rates (Hope Federal Credit Union).

HOPE’s 2010 and 2011 consolidated and combined financial highlights:

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<tr>
<th>Years Ended December 31</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Results of Operations</strong></td>
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<td>Earned Revenues</td>
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<td>Operating Expenses</td>
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<td>Loan Loss Reserve Expense</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Results of Activities</strong></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
B. COMMUNITY-OWNED BUSINESSES IN THE U.S. SOUTH

Alabama Catfish Producers: Division of Alabama Farmers Federation
Alabama Catfish Producers was founded in 1974 as a division of the Alabama Farmers Federation, which is comprised of fish farmers across the state involved in aquaculture. Alabama has about 22,000 water acres of fish farms where nearly 200 commercial farmers produce 25 different aquatic species. Farm-raised catfish is by far the dominant species with Alabama ranking second in the U.S. in annual catfish sales. Alabama farmers currently produce well over 100 million pounds of catfish per year, and Alabama still has the land and water resources to support an industry 10 times its current size (Alabama Catfish Producers).

Greene County Democrat
Greene County Democrat is a newspaper in Eutaw, Alabama covering local news, sports, business, jobs, and community events. The newspaper is a small for-profit corporation operated by local residents John and Carol Zippert that was acquired in 1985 in order to publish more news on African Americans who represent about 85% of the total population in Greene County, AL. The main focus of the Greene County Democrat is to provide a community newspaper that represents and reflects the community. The newspaper, however, is not exclusively a Black newspaper; its goal is to fairly represent the community of Green County. The newspaper includes a limited but free community calendar and an announcement column. The paper is also active in different community organizations, such as the Alabama New South Coalition, the local SCLC Chapter, and Black Belt Community Foundation (Greene County Democrat).

Louisiana Oystermen’s Association
The Louisiana Oystermen’s Association, formed in 2006 as a community organization in response to Hurricane Katrina, is comprised of minority family fisheries in lower Plaquemines Parish. They include African American, Vietnamese, Cambodian, Native American, Laotian, and Hispanic fishers. The group focuses on minority family owned fisheries and preserving the culture of the communities. The organization is a membership-based organization of oyster fishermen. The Association aims to strengthen the growth of the Southeastern Louisiana oyster industry by helping its members optimize their returns on the oyster seafood harvest through developing innovative, value-added seafood and marine products that utilize and extract optimum value from every part of the oyster (Louisiana Oystermen’s Association).

Lower 9th Ward Neighborhood Empowerment Network Association (NENA):
Lower 9th Ward Neighborhood Empowerment Network Association (NENA) is a community-based organization established in 2006 with a mission to play a vital role in their neighborhood's redevelopment. The organization is located in the lower ninth ward in New Orleans, LA and its Board of Directors include seven members, all of whom live, work, or worship in the Lower Ninth Ward. NENA works to address not only the immediate destruction of the storm, but also the institutional neglect and disinvestment that plagued the neighborhood long before Katrina. The organization operates with a small staff of an Executive Director and an Administrative Officer, but is looking to expand its staff as more funding is secured (NENA).
NENA receives an abundance of technical assistance from Mercy Corps, an international development agency currently working in post-Katrina New Orleans. They also receive technical assistance and capacity building training from two local Universities (Tulane and UNO) through the Neighborhood Capacity Collaborative (NC2).

Areas of Service include, but are not limited to:
- Emergency Evacuation Planning
- Community Engagement/Community Night Out Programming
- Neighborhood Block Captain Programs
- Housing Assistance
- Workforce Development & Contractor Training/Approval
- Business Incubator Services
- Literacy Programming (NENA).

C. COOPERATIVES IN THE SOUTH

Indian Springs Cooperative
Indian Spring Cooperative is a for profit charter established in 1981 that covers six counties in Southern Mississippi—Bolivar, Jefferson Davis, Covington, Marion, Lamar, and Lawrence counties. Farmers must be a member in one of the counties to be in the co-operative. The cooperative presently has thirty three members ages 20 to 85, including 28 African Americans, 5 Whites, 3 women, and 3 youths. The main focus of the co-operative is the production and marketing of agricultural products and vegetables. The members meet at the beginning of the year to talk about what they want to produce like flour, honey, spinach, wild mustard, cabbage, and broccoli. Then they figure out how much to produce based on the size of their farms and amount of resources.

Through the cooperative, the farmers create about 20 to 30 jobs year round within the community. The co-op also has a three-year beginners’ farmers program. There are 10 beginner farmers in Michigan, 10 in Alabama, 10 in South Carolina, and 10 in Georgia.

Indian Springs also has 30 to 40 products marketed for people that are not members of the co-operative and the farmers get the proceeds. In terms of prices, for example, the co-op charges buyers $2.75 per watermelon of which $2.10 goes to the farmer, and the other $.65 goes to the upkeep process and to pay wages. The warehouse also sells such things as bags, boxes for $1 and storage services for $.75 per box. The cooperative provides estate planning to its members. Additionally, through the Federation of Southern Cooperatives, members can receive training on heir property issues, how they can maintain land ownership, and how they can set up a land trust. The cooperative has almost two full-time employees in the facility warehouse and offers no health insurance or retirement benefits. The problem with the cooperative is that younger members are needed. Aggressive programs are therefore needed to recruit young members to farming, otherwise in ten years the co-op will be dead (Indian Springs Cooperative).
Rainbow Cooperative
Rainbow Cooperative was established in 1980 in Jackson, MS with a dedication to providing high quality, wholesome foods at reasonable prices. Its mission is to provide products and services that promote health awareness, a clean environment and a strong community, all at the best price. Rainbow Co-op is the largest natural and organic food store in Mississippi. It has organic and natural foods and products including groceries, fresh organic produce, vegan foods, vegetarian foods, macrobiotic foods, coffee, tea, beans and grains, nuts and flours, herbs and seasonings, soy milk, cheese, local wildflower honey, healthy frozen foods, cereals, healthy snacks, natural health and beauty aids, natural cleaning supplies, pet care items, pet foods, special orders, supplements, health notes kiosk, culinary, gifts, books, free range eggs, organic milk and cheese items, organic beef, chicken, turkey, fish, pork, and vitamins (Rainbow Cooperative).

North Bolivar County Farm Cooperative
North Bolivar County Farm Cooperative (NBCFC) is a cooperative started by the Tufts-Delta Health Center in Mound Bayou, Mississippi (and the North Bolivar County Health Council), as “a more permanent response to the problem” of malnutrition, rather than just treating health issues, and the symptoms (according to Lefkowitz 2007, 38-39; also see de Jong 2005, and Gordon Nembhard 2014b). NBCFC started in April 1968 with initial funding from the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) and “an anonymous northern donor” (de Jong 2005, 401).

In 1973, Wilkening described the NBCFC to potential funders as a cooperative incorporated in December 1969 “for the purposes of economic development, education support and welfare assistance. The cooperative supports a community center in Rosedale, the Afro-American Book Store and Library in Mound Bayou [its headquarters], several sewing and clothing cooperatives in Rosedale and Shelby, and a low-income housing development covering 20 acres in Rosedale” (Wilkening 1973, 3). In 1973, the farm had 424 acres of land it was farming, planting mostly soybeans with some cotton and a few vegetables.

De Jong also reports that NBCFC bought 40 acres of land and rented another 80 acres from local Black farmers. NBCFC puts about 250 members to work with daily wages of $4 in cash and $6 in food credit. In addition, members can buy food from the co-op at minimal cost. In the first season, the cooperative produced more than one million pounds of food which was enough to feed 12,000 people and “end hunger in the area served by the co-op” (de Jong 2005, 401). NBCFC was a founding member of the Federation of Southern Cooperatives in 1967; it continues to be a successful farm cooperative to the present day.

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21 The Federation of Southern Cooperatives also established a community health center, the Black Belt Community Health Program in Sumter County, AL near the Training Center in Epps. It eventually merged with the West Alabama Health Services (FSC/LAF 1992: 66).
South Plaquemines United Fishermen’s Cooperative
The South Plaquemines United Fishermen’s Cooperative in Louisiana began to form in September 2005, after members attended cooperative education workshops that were part of the Federation of Southern Cooperatives/Land Assistance Fund Hurricane [Katrina] Relief efforts (Livingston 2007, 20). For generations, the fishers of Plaquemines Parish only had access to private commercial docks to buy essential services and to sell their catches (Livingston 2007, 20) and most families lived below the poverty line.

After Hurricane Katrina hit, 80 percent of the Parish’s commercial fleet was destroyed and almost every dock had been washed away, along with equipment and businesses of those who lived by the water. The “multicultural fishing community” came together “surmounting overwhelming obstacles” to form a cooperative (Livingston 2007, 20). This diverse community includes African Americans and Native Americans whose families have lived in the area for generations, and Vietnamese and other Southeast Asian newcomers looking for work and entrepreneurship opportunities. With the help of the Federation of Southern Cooperatives and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Rural Development co-op development specialists, the group’s steering committee developed a feasibility study and business plan. They also surveyed potential members and found that the fishers (men and women) in the area were very interested in forming a cooperative and working together to “create a more robust community” (Livingston 2007, 21). This would allow them to own their own boats and their own company. In all, 50 families joined the new marketing cooperative, trading in shrimp, crabs and oysters (FSC/LAF 2009). The cooperative has earned grants for boat repairs and co-op facilities, in addition to monies from a Louisiana Community Development Block Grant to develop a docking facility (FSC/LAF 2009). With the new dock, all members will have access to docking facilities and services, and the ability to fish. Collective marketing will help them earn a good price for their catch and connect with lucrative markets (FSC/LAF 2009).

Carver Homes Worker’s Cooperative
Carver Homes Worker’s Cooperative in Atlanta, Georgia started with a convenient store in the Carver Homes public housing community that operated from 1976 to 1988. Manager, Louise Watley, had been interested in starting such a store in the 1960s but things did not come together until 1976 (FSC/LAF 1992, 47). The Co-op was started with a grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). From there, monies were raised to start a sewing cooperative to employ women-owners from Carver Homes (FSC/LAF 1992). Grants from local churches as well as the Federation of Southern Cooperatives made this possible. Funding from a Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) enabled them to renovate a school building for the sewing factory which also houses a community center that includes a wellness center and food and clothing banks (FSC/LAF 1992, 47).
D. COMMUNITY-BASED NOT-FOR-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT CORPORATIONS (CDCs) IN THE SOUTH

Partnership for Self Employment
Partnership for Self Employment (PSE) is a Community Development Corporation (CDC) and a CDFI that was incorporated as an independent 501(c)(3) in 1993, serving Miami Dade, Broward, and Pinellas counties in Florida. Its mission is to promote the financial well-being of low- to moderate-income individuals and families in South Florida via financial literacy training and opportunities to borrow and save. On average, clients increase their income by $8,000 in the first year. The organization has also had success in creating new jobs within the community, generating about 60-75 jobs per year. The organization gives both large and small loans. While large loans created about 22 jobs in the last year for both start-up and seasoned businesses, small loans created at least one job for the loan recipient. The organization offers an IDA program that matches client-savings toward home ownership or business expansion. It also matches $2 for every $1 saved with the IDA program while bringing in professionals to talk about credit repair and financial training in insurance and investing.

PSE originally served older retirees interested in starting a small business. Today, most of their clients are nonwhite (90%), in their mid-to-late thirties, female, have low- to moderate income, and have completed 1-2 years of college. Additionally, PSE has begun to provide financial literacy training to the growing immigrant population with no banking or credit experience. Since 2001 (when it began keeping good records), the Partnership for Self Employment has granted over 6,879 loans, IDAs, and training services to local businesses. However, some of these businesses are no longer active. Some of the businesses helped by PSE (and most of the small businesses are service oriented) include: day care centers, beauty salons, seamstresses, lawn services, pool maintenance services, car services, cosmetics, and braiding. One of PSE’s success stories is a woman who wrote and published her own children’s book that is used in the local day care centers.

A small portion of PSE’s funding comes from the Department of Health and Human Services, Miami Dade County, the Treasury Department, City of Miami, the Small Business Administration and other community investment agencies (Partnership for Self Employment).

HERO: Hale Empowerment & Revitalization Organization Inc.
Hale Empowerment and Revitalization Organization Inc. (HERO) is a CDC that was incorporated as an independent 501(c)(3) in 1994. HERO works as a catalyst for community development in areas of the Alabama Black Belt to end rural poverty. Specifically, HERO works in Hale County, AL and has extended its services to eight more Alabama counties including Greene, Sumter, Marengo, Perry, Escambia, Monroe, Clarke and Washington counties. “As a non-profit housing resource center, HERO provides community resources, housing education and youth programming. HERO seeks to empower families through changing their environment, and providing both housing and community resources.” The goal of HERO is to reduce rural poverty,
and create ways for families to live better by generating more wealth. The primary question HERO seeks to answer within the household is how to provide home ownership for the lowest income tier families living on less than $674 per month on average or minimum Social Security Income (SSI). Additionally, for small businesses, the goal is to create sustainable permanent jobs lasting a year or longer. HERO also has a youth and job training program for 16-24 year olds since there are about 50 high school dropouts in the area each year. The goal of the program is to help high school dropouts get their GED. The organization has another youth program that is designed to get young adults to attend college to increase their job opportunities and income. HERO also offers financial literacy programs with credit improvement classes for people that need access to a secured credit card which will help them build credit. The classes are for everyone including persons in the fire and police department. To assist people living in impoverished areas gain access to credit, HERO works with United Bank to use their own offices as a bank branch to help their client’s access traditional banking services. With access to a secured credit card and if in good standing, then clients can transfer to traditional credit cards and are eligible for a mortgage loan within 6 to 12 months. HERO also has a home ownership course which deals with the home ownership process, including such things as mortgage options, closing costs, credit scores and good credit.

Another major area of focus for HERO is heir property. HERO views heir property as dead capital or negative property. It works with National Vacant Properties Campaign to clear the title of vacant abandoned properties and increase available land in the city.

HERO has two specific policy recommendations concerning clearing titles. One is to have city zoning ordinance mirror the state’s ordinance which would facilitate clearing land titles quickly. The other is to have a federal clear title program with funds set aside and made available for people with heir property issues that would facilitate the clearing of titles (HERO).

**Community Enterprises Investment Incorporated (CEII) CDC**

Community Enterprises Investment Incorporated (CEII) is a 501(c)(3) CDC incorporated in 1974. Its mission is to create and develop opportunities among low- to moderate-income area residents for employment, business ownership, and affordable housing. It also seeks to revitalize economically depressed neighborhoods and communities throughout the North Florida service area through a combination of small business and microbusiness lending programs, affordable housing, and neighborhood/community improvement programs. It primarily serves North Florida with its branch office located in Pensacola, FL. The city of Pensacola is in Escambia County which has the second highest percentage of low income persons in Florida. CEII, additionally, provides small and micro business loans to new and expanding enterprises in 45 counties of Southern Alabama. The service areas served by CEII are mostly middle and low income communities and neighborhoods.

CEII has two main focus areas—affordable housing and micro lending programs of up to $50,000. The organization also develops new home ownership projects by buying foreclosed properties at below the appraised value, rehabbing them and selling or renting them. Foreclosed properties are also donated by banks like Wells Fargo and Bank of America as they have programs to donate
properties to not for profit organizations. CEII also has multi-family home apartments and single family homes for rent. The single family homes are rented to families below 50% AMI (Area Median Income). CEII is actually developing two new projects that should be out in six months. The first project is a partnership with Pathway for Change which is a faith-based program that provides housing for male ex-offenders involved in a court-mandated rehabilitation program. This housing will be a transition for the ex-offenders. CEII will focus on the housing portion of the program and the offenders who participate in the program will be released from jail a year early to live in the house. The offenders who decide to join the program would spend time with Pathway for Change for a year prior to being released. Participants who finish the Pathway for Change year long program are usually serious people who are looking for a fresh start. Pathway for Change has an 86 percent success rate. The second project is a permanent housing program for the homeless that will consist of two duplexes. Florida already has emergency shelters and transitional housing, but CEII is trying to take the next step to provide below market rate affordable housing where the homeless can have shelter and pay rent as they find some form of employment in the community.

CEII has also partnered with Gulf Power Company to provide up to $15,000 in rebates to homeowners with eighty percent or lower area median income. If a person buys and stays in a house, then the $15,000 becomes a grant and this money is for energy efficiency house rehabilitation. The power company would do an energy audit on pre efficiency rehab and post rehab to be able to prove and document energy savings. The goal is to produce the maximum amount of savings on energy efficiency products. The hope is to rehabilitate up to 400 homes per year with this program. The Gulf Power Company would provide rebates (up $10,000-$15,000) on furnishings, furnaces, any energy efficient tools used to rehabilitate the house. The rebate money will go into further rehab or repairs that are needed on the house. The goal of the home rehabilitation program is to help build wealth for low income families and minorities (CEII).

Wealth Watchers Inc.
Wealth Watchers Inc., located in Jacksonville, FL, is a non-profit 501(c)(3) HUD Approved Housing Counseling and Community Development organization that was established in 2001 to serve residents in Florida. Its mission is to “build viable communities by expanding the knowledge of low-to-moderate income individuals for the purpose of understanding the importance of basic finance and the accumulation of wealth.” Wealth Watchers achieves its mission by providing lending and education, neighborhood stabilization, community revitalization strategies, and small business services. Its goal is to “empower individuals to achieve their self-determined goals with some measure of significant control over the processes and strategies of attaining those goals.” As a Certified Housing Development Organization (CHDO), Wealth Watchers offers many diverse types of housing, including affordable single family and multifamily rentals, new construction for homeownership, and renovation for homeownership. As a HUD certified housing counseling agency, Wealth Watchers provides services like landlord-tenant rights workshops for renters, one-on-one counseling, group homebuyer-education courses for potential home buyers (which satisfies the requirement for down-payment assistance through the City of Jacksonville’s Headstart to Homeownership program, the State of Florida’s Housing Finance Corporation and various other down-payment assistance programs offered by
participating lenders), and foreclosure prevention counseling for homeowners experiencing a financial hardship and who are unable to meet their mortgage payment obligations.

Another aspect of Wealth Watchers is its commitment to community and economic development through creating and promoting programs and services that stimulate economic growth. The focuses of such initiatives are job creation, job training, and industry innovations. In addition to Wealth Watchers’ core economic development activities, key partnerships with United Way, Small Business Administration, and Beaver Street Enterprise Center have been established to ensure that organizational goals are met (Wealth Watchers).

**Florida Farmworkers Association**
The Farmworkers Association of Florida is a community-based organization founded in 1983 due to devastating freezes that decimated the citrus crop and impacted farm workers’ livelihood in Central Florida. The purpose of the Association is to organize farmworkers more effectively in their struggle for better housing, wages, and working conditions. In the last 25 years, it has become a state-wide organization with more than 8,000 member families and five locations throughout Central and South Florida. The Florida Farmworkers Association’s mission is to build power among farmworkers and rural low-income communities to respond to and gain control over social, political, workplace, economic, health, and environmental justice issues that impact their lives.

The Farmworkers Association has seven chapters in seven counties. Three chapters including the main office are in West Orange County; the remaining chapters are in Collier, Volusia, Miami Dade, and Indian River counties. It currently has about 10,000 members; a majority of these members are Latinos with a sparing number of Haitians and African Americans as well as a number of female farmers. Farmworkers Association hopes to advocate justice for immigrants, and social justice for farmworkers and rural communities in Florida. Farmworkers Association currently has a variety of programs underway, including immigrant rights, programs to improve working conditions for farmers, outreach and support for immigrants and Latino farmers, programs and support for women, and research on health issues affecting farm workers like women in the citrus industry. Additionally, the organization just finished a research project on health and safety issues affecting women farmworkers. They also operate a vocational rehabilitation program for former farmworkers that are injured, and a community garden where members participate in growing their own food. The community garden is part of the Association’s plan to increase access to food within the community, especially fruits and vegetables. The Association also supports civic participation, including registering Floridians to vote, educating the public on politician’s position in the community, as well as providing support to immigrants looking to establish their immigration status. Furthermore, the Association has a response-trained team to educate the community and act in case of disaster; women’s groups to deal with issues specifically affecting women; HIV testing; and sponsor a local credit union, Community Trust Credit Union (Florida Farmworkers Association).
Central City Renaissance Alliance
The Central City Renaissance Alliance (CCRA) is a resident-led community-based organization in one of New Orleans’ historic uptown neighborhoods. CCRA operates within the central city area, including Louisiana Avenue, Toledano Street, South Salcedo Street, and Earhart Boulevard. Its vision is a Central City where the quality of life for everyone is defined by high quality schools, full employment, an abundance of business and entrepreneurial opportunities, and a healthy and safe environment. CCRA and the Central City Community Vision were created through a series of community planning meetings and charrettes over an 18-month period. However, a month before the organization’s grand kick-off of the first stage of implementation of the central city plan, New Orleans was damaged by Hurricane Katrina which led to the displacement of most of the target area’s 19,000 residents for many months as the city dealt with unprecedented challenges stemming from catastrophic levee failures. Immediately after Katrina, the community focused on addressing pressing needs while continuing to advance the seven themes (strengthening community connections; telling the community story; quality housing; neighborhood beautification; employment, business development and wealth building; lifelong learning; and health and safety) that were articulated in the 2004 Central City Community Vision and outlined in the 2007 United Nations Office of Project Services (UNOP) plan.

CCRA’s mission is to honor and support the collective voice and collaborative strength of Central City residents in order to create neighborhoods that are powerful and economically vibrant. The goal of CCRA is to help with the revitalization and transformation of Central City by employing community education, community economic development, leadership development and advocacy. In 2008, the organization received $300,000 in general support for community-based education, economic development, leadership development and advocacy to revitalize and transform New Orleans’ Central City neighborhood. The services offered by CCRA include Resident Leaders Fellows; Learning for Life; Come Home to Central City; Healthy Neighbourhoods New Orleans (HNNO); Mahalia Jackson Early Childhood and Family Learning Center; and Promise Plus Collaborative.

CCRA has addressed issues such as how to manage their residents, how to build a community, and how to partner with government and private developers. These are questions young organizations have to face and CCRA has answered these questions by hiring a community organizer, weaving the city’s commonalities together, partnering on specific projects such as asset mapping, and organizing a Community Benefits Coalition and Funders Collaborative (Central City Renaissance Alliance).
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ABOUT THE HOWARD UNIVERSITY CENTER ON RACE AND WEALTH
The Howard University Center on Race and Wealth seeks to enrich the dialogue and research on asset building, wealth accumulation, and racial wealth disparities. As a resource grantee of the Ford Foundation Building Economic Security over a Lifetime initiative, the Center’s goal is to provide ongoing technical assistance and research support to the Initiative’s state and regional asset building coalition grantees in developing and promoting policies to reduce the wealth gap and build assets among low-income persons and in communities of color.

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