

ADDRESSING THE CHALLENGES OF CHANGE: ACHIEVING EQUITABLE DEVELOPMENT

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Congress
for the
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Bio: Angela Glover Blackwell is founder and president of PolicyLink, a national nonprofit organization dedicated to advancing a new generation of policies that achieve social and economic equity.

Ms. Blackwell was previously senior vice president for the Rockefeller Foundation, where she oversaw the foundation's domestic and cultural divisions. Before that, she gained national recognition for pioneering an innovative approach to community revitalization as a founder of Oakland, California's Urban Strategies Council. Ms. Blackwell has also been a partner with Public Advocates, a nationally known public interest law firm.

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The challenge of gentrification can best be met by implementing strategies that enable low-income residents to stay anchored in their neighborhoods and to thrive. This approach is rooted in the concept of community building, an approach that emphasizes local, community-oriented responses to pressing social issues. Community building seeks to achieve equitable outcomes by strengthening relationships in communities, building community assets, and encouraging the participation of residents in policy making. The principles of community building have been applied in addressing issues such as infant mortality through the federal Healthy Start program.

At PolicyLink we define community building as: *“Continuous, self-renewing efforts by residents and professionals to engage in collective action aimed at problem-solving and enrichment that results in improved lives and greater equity, and creates strong relationships, networks, institutions and assets, and new standards and expectations for life in community.”*

Sprawl has contributed to the persistence of inequity in this country. The policies that drove sprawl, as manifested in the suburbanization of America, were race-based. Therefore, achieving racial, ethnic and class equity must be at the center of the smart growth, anti-sprawl movement because our sprawling residential patterns contributed to inequity in the first place. We cannot rethink our living patterns without focusing on equity.

We have the opportunity to build real inclusiveness in this country through the smart growth movement which is bringing unlikely allies together. But this inclusiveness will only happen if we build broad-based coalitions that span the city-suburb divide and if we include the voices of low-income populations of color. It may not always appear to be the case but our destinies are linked. We will either all sink or all prosper together.

With renewed interest in urban America, we must think about strategies that will help everyone to thrive. The “Politics of Place,” the theme of this conference, means nothing unless the focus is on improving the lives of people in the context of where they live. We must strive to address issues of concentrated poverty through creating sustainable mixed-income communities where people who are poor, near poor, working poor and middle class can all live together. This work we are engaged in and are addressing at this conference today is a democracy project. Democracy will not be sustained unless we tackle this issue of equity. Equitable participation will make democracy strong and that will begin in the communities where people live.