

The Community Services Administration



# Public Policy Forum



# Report

1978

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# INTRODUCTION

Despite substantial efforts in past years on the part of the Federal Government to "eliminate poverty in the midst of plenty," there are between 25 and 40 million poor people in the United States today. Although past experiences have taught us to substitute systematic thinking and action for ignorance and confusion, the causes of poverty in America continue to defy solution. While the "War on Poverty" raised the hopes and expectations of millions of poor people, it ironically increased their frustrations with the inabilities and insensitivity of the "system" and its institutions.

Within the Federal Government, the Community Services Administration (CSA) is the central agency for advocating on behalf of the poor and developing, testing, and operating various programs to reduce poverty and its attendant problems in urban and rural areas. CSA came into existence on January 4, 1975, as the legal successor to the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO). It retains many of the functions and powers which OEO had at that time and currently operates seven basic programs—Community Action, Economic Development, Energy and Weatherization, Senior Opportunities and Services for the Elderly, Community Food and Nutrition, Rural Housing Demonstration, and Summer Youth Recreation.

In addition, and more importantly, CSA supports efforts at the local level to achieve participation of the poor in decision-making processes affecting their lives and is underwriting activities aimed at monitoring federally funded socioeconomic development programs to evaluate their effectiveness in meeting the needs of low-income people.

All of CSA's programs are characterized by grassroots involvement. The agency has sought (1) to establish locally based and operated community organizations, (2) to encourage direct participation of the poor, and (3) to develop cooperative arrangements within and between the government and private sectors to effect changes in the social and economic causes of poverty.

As a result of its program efforts, the CSA has developed a national network of community organizations which provide input to agency policy and implement its initiatives. Nevertheless, the present administration recognized a need to learn of the problems of poverty directly from its constituents and developed a unique approach to accomplish this. In order to break with the past and reaffirm the agency's "people" orientation, 10 public policy forums were conducted at regional locations. During these forums, CSA leadership spoke directly to program beneficiaries to identify the needs of the latter and to hear how poor people themselves felt their problems could best be solved.

## Conduct of the Forums

The overall purpose of the forums was to provide government officials with increased knowledge of the causes and problems of poverty and to identify ways to lessen poverty's impacts. More specifically the goals of the forums were:

- To provide an opportunity for the nation's poor to speak directly to key national policymakers about their needs and wishes.
- To inform these national policymakers about what the government has done, has not done, and should be doing to help poor persons satisfy their needs and realize their wishes.
- To give the poor an opportunity to suggest approaches which can be used by government to solve the problems of poverty.

- To establish a starting point for revitalizing national priorities, plans and programs for overcoming the causes and conditions of poverty in America.
- To reaffirm CSA's role as the primary public agency committed exclusively to helping the poor and representing their interests at all levels of government.
- To build agency policy from the grassroots up.

The forums were conducted between October 3 and December 3, 1977, at selected locations in each of the 10 Federal regions throughout the United States. Each forum lasted two days and provided an opportunity for contributors to submit verbal and written testimony. The Director, Deputy Director, or Assistant Director of CSA presided over the forums; heard direct testimony from scores of low-income people and their spokespersons; and shared the podium with a multi-representative panel of regional figures known to have provided exceptional leadership on behalf of poor persons. The entire series of forums included participants and audiences as diverse as the President, and members of Congress to hundreds of poor persons. Several distinctive features characterized the forums.

- Most people who spoke were poor, represented only themselves and their immediate families, and had previously never had an opportunity to tell government officials about their needs.
- The individual speakers were not limited to specific topics in expressing concerns and judgments.
- Attempts were made to learn the differences between urban and rural poverty, as well as disparities among regions.
- Participants were asked to suggest solutions to the problems of poverty (that is, what they would do if they were in the government's position) as well as to identify their needs.

The forums produced 7,000 pages of testimony from the 600 persons who were heard.

## Summary of Findings and Conclusions

The witnesses heard during the forums placed highest priority on the following need areas:

- |               |                              |
|---------------|------------------------------|
| • Employment  | • Transportation             |
| • Education   | • Energy                     |
| • Health Care | • Water and Sewer Facilities |
| • Housing     | • Food and Nutrition         |

While priority ranking of needs varied somewhat from region to region, and between rural and urban areas, the general spectrum of problems confronting poor people everywhere remained the same. Differences tended to be in terms of degree. The most striking note to be sounded was not the differences but the similarities of need, as well as the fact that the poor are confronted with a series of interlocking dilemmas, not just one or two isolated problems. Thus, while witnesses from rural areas may have stressed concerns over serious deficiencies in transportation and health care, they also cited compelling needs for housing, affordable energy and employment. Conversely, poor people from cities emphasized the crisis of unemployment, but also conveyed their desperation over a lack of adequate housing, health care and decent education.

Testimony also revealed the barriers which were felt to block satisfaction of poor people's needs. Major obstacles identified include the following:

- Insufficient resources and programs.
- Resources and programs that are poorly planned and administered.
- Bureaucratic insensitivity and unresponsiveness.

Finally, the testimony was analyzed to identify needed improvements in, and new approaches for, Federal policy and programs to impact on the problems of poverty. Suggestions were made for (1) revising CSA's policies, practices, and programs as well as those of other agencies and departments; (2) improving relationships between CSA and other Federal agencies; and (3) developing Federal programs in areas not presently or adequately addressed.

The CSA is now using these data to assess its current policies, practices, and activities, and has begun to take action to address the specific concerns of its constituents. In addition, the CSA will be providing other Federal agencies with data and results pertinent to their programs and activities. Thus, the results of the forums provide a framework for constructing national public policy around the people and their concerns, rather than around abstract theories of professional planners.

The remainder of this report presents a detailed discussion of the results of these forums.

## GENERAL FINDINGS

The testimony heard during the 10 forums was rich in its variety and confirmed the knowledge that not all poor persons are poor in the same way. Rather than including a preliminary analysis of all the general information that was transmitted and specific summaries of individual testimony, this report concentrates on identifying the significant issues related to the functions and missions of CSA. In this way, the analysis can be used by the agency to formulate coherent policies from which effective program responses could be developed and to focus CSA priorities for 1978 to 1980 relative to its mandated mission. However, it should be stressed that while much of the testimony is of direct concern and interest to CSA, its impact ultimately is germane to the entirety of the public sector dealing with problems of poverty. The findings and recommendations derived from these forums will be augmented in the future by data collected from other sources (additional forums, agency review, etc.) to develop and refine CSA's approaches to solving the problems of poverty, and will be communicated to other Federal agencies, where appropriate, for use in their policy development efforts.

The remainder of this section presents a preliminary analysis of the testimony related to the needs of the poor, problems faced by poor people, and CSA policy and programs.

### ***Needs of the Poor***

A significant portion of the testimony presented during the forums was concerned with the individual needs which either are a result of or contribute to conditions of poverty in this country. The needs which were most frequently identified by witnesses included the following:

- |              |               |                  |                      |
|--------------|---------------|------------------|----------------------|
| • Employment | • Health Care | • Energy         | • Food and Nutrition |
| • Education  | • Housing     | • Transportation |                      |

The subsections that follow present a brief discussion of the major issues raised by witnesses. However, a separate discussion of each of these need areas, while necessary, obscures an important point raised by several witnesses: *that the various needs of poor persons in this country are highly interconnected and have at their roots the structural causes of poverty*. For example, one witness made this point in the following way:

The main problem with most of the poor is no jobs. And even if you're lucky enough to find one, your ADC is cut or in some cases cut completely, plus your food stamps go up so high that you either pay your bills and not get stamps—either way, you lose, because if you pay—if you get your food stamps and not pay your bills plus your utilities, you still don't eat, because you don't have any place to cook.

### **Employment**

I would like to emphasize to those who are here at the forum that while looking at the entire problem, you're absolutely right that there is one priority for the poor people of this community—jobs—big, loud, and clear and jobs are what they need—jobs to be trained for, jobs to be given an opportunity to fill for themselves and their children and there is no more credible work that we can undertake than supply that component of the war on poverty. I understand very clearly that that is my principal priority.

This statement, made by Senator Jacob Javits at the Forum held in New York, summarizes a major need area identified by many other witnesses. The basic issue raised during the forums was that there are simply not enough jobs, especially ones which have a future, for minority poor and other ethnic group members. This problem was identified about as often by rural as by urban witnesses. While the causes cited for inadequate employment opportunities for the poor ranged from "general economic conditions" to the "flight of industry from our cities," the impact of unemployment was seen as devastating, both economically and psychologically. This point was dramatically illustrated in the testimony of one witness.

But then if you can't find a job, and then—like some of the people I know, they've been looking and looking and looking for jobs. And like this one lady, she's on welfare. She's got, what?—six kids, and they give her \$116 a month. And she's been looking for jobs, and she just finally decided, said, 'Well, I'm not going to do any better anyway, so what's with it?'

Employment needs were also seen as being particularly important to the young; not just the need for more jobs, but the need for jobs with career potential. For example, one witness reported:

Employers want experienced people, yet, when it comes to hiring someone under 18, basically the only jobs available are hamburger pushers, baggage clerks, or some other job pushing carts or lifting boxes.

The need for decent jobs and adequate job training is nothing new. Even the casual observer can come to this conclusion immediately. But it is the major problem which still is unresolved and will continue to be until imaginative and bold steps are taken to attack the structural causes of unemployment.

### **Education and Training**

A second need area which was frequently identified during the forums was for education and training opportunities for minorities and poor people. The basic issue that was raised was the need to improve our educational system so that minority children and poor youths are prepared to assume meaningful roles in adult life. As one mother put it:

Society is afraid of young people and pushes them aside. To be young and poor ... means gangs, pimps, pushers and impersonal school personnel. You're old and militant to each other by the time you are twenty.

Another witness made the following observation:

One of the most important enigmas that needs identification is the proper training of youth. Presently, young men and women are not being given a fair deal as far as preparing them for roles as productive adults. Learning institutions or society is not meeting its obligations to young people when it comes to training them at a young enough age so that by the time they reach their eighteenth birthday they are at least half as prepared as their 21-year-old counterpart of eight years ago.

Education and training were also seen as an important method for impacting on many of the other needs of poor persons in this country—both young and old. More and better training were felt to be needed to improve the unemployment situation. To those who are directly involved, many present government employment training programs are considered "dead-end arrangements that provide no real individual communities." A solution to the problem was that jobs program funds "should be (used for) training minds, not used for raking leaves."

Other areas in which basic education and training were felt to be required included nutrition, health care, budgeting, and home maintenance. Finally, witnesses felt that poor persons should be trained to obtain the services and resources already available through government programs, to organize community groups, and to learn how to advocate for themselves—to achieve independence, as it were.

### ***Health Care***

Many witnesses identified health care as a leading priority. It was frequently asserted that poverty is the principal cause of ill health for many people, especially as poverty makes medical care, particularly preventive medicine, an unobtainable service for many poor individuals and families.

Health care needs were identified as exceedingly vital by both rural and urban witnesses, but appeared to be of special concern among the rural poor. One rural witness capsulized this sentiment, asserting that:

Since (government) programs are geared to deal with a lot of people in communities I have found in the lower rural parts of southern Anne Arundel that there are ten or twenty thousand people that have no public health (service). Since CSA deals with people of low standard and poor I feel they should have a great input in helping to bring public health into this lower Anne Arundel County.

Senior citizens also expressed particular fears about lack of health care services available to them. Many elderly witnesses pointed out that Medicare and Medicaid are extremely limited, and that many physicians refuse to take patients under these programs. Others reported that they exist on fixed incomes and that the sky-rocketing costs of medical services prevented them from obtaining proper care. As one witness put it:

The greatest unmet needs are in the area of health care. It had been brought to my attention that no doctor in our town would take new Medicaid patients and that many older people, as well as children of poor parents, were going without needed medical care.

There was a constant theme stressing the need for health care, especially for the working poor unserved by Medicare or Medicaid. One respondent summed it up well by putting the burden on CSA to require it to:



Fight on behalf of the poor for preventative medical care that is affordable and accessible.

CSA is, of course, prepared to assume that responsibility. Again, the issues being raised are not necessarily new or surprising. It is just distressing that the problems continue to go unattended.

### ***Housing***

Lack of adequate housing, too, was emphasized over and over again as a major dilemma. The issues raised concerning housing were complex. Witnesses from both urban and rural areas pointed out that there is not enough public housing to meet the ever increasing demand. And even when public housing is available, facilities were often said to be poorly and arbitrarily administered, physically deteriorated, vermin infested, and a haven for criminal activity.

The situation did not appear to be any better for poor persons living in their own homes or renting from private homeowners. Witnesses also reported their homes were in poor condition and that money for repairs was unavailable or inadequate to solve their major problems. One witness described the situation this way:

Then there's the weatherization. This is very good for people with houses that need very little repair. But for the ones who need a new roof because it's raining on them, this is a different story.

As with health care, the elderly appeared to be particularly victimized by a lack of housing. Older witnesses felt there was not adequate public or private housing for them. They also felt that the housing which was available was not specifically designed for the elderly, and thereby increased their hardships and frustrations. This situation was aptly depicted by one witness:

If you live in the housing project, the high-rises that we have, which I think are an insult to senior citizens anyway—you know, they have a hard time going up and down stairs, going in elevators, some of them have fears about height and we stick them up in these big old high-rises. Half of them don't want to go there—and then there's big waiting lists. Those that live in the housing authority are scared to death to live there. You know, they get mugged, they get robbed, they get broken in, their checks get stolen, this kind of thing.

Finally, the need for emergency housing services was raised by a number of respondents. One summed it up like this:

One of the questions that I'd like to see this (forum) get into is that so often, I might interview an individual and the individual been out of a job or they just came to town, or—they have all types of problems. I cannot allow an individual to move in without some money. And this agency, hopefully, would formulate some plans in the future date that we would be able to have some monies available that these people might have emergency housing—now, if it's not but 15 days or 30...”

### ***Energy***

Another major need area which was frequently identified during the forums centered on energy-related issues. Particular concern was expressed about the high costs of energy for heating and transportation, and the differential impact of such costs on poor persons, minorities, and people living on fixed incomes such as the elderly. Several respondents felt that high energy costs force poor people to make difficult, and sometimes impossible, decisions, such as whether to do without heat and suffer the ensuing discomfort and possible health consequences so that more money is available to pay for food and other necessities; or to pay for heat and sacrifice nutrition, mobility, or some other basic necessity. Other



witnesses pointed out that poor persons spend a dramatically greater proportion of their incomes for energy than do members of the majority population. Both of these points were raised quite clearly in one witness's statement:

Utilities are constantly on the rise due to America's energy problem, and this causes (people on) fixed income such as seniors and others to have to spend much more of their income than the allotted portion on utilities, which then deprives them of other needed goods they should not have to do without.

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Other energy-related needs identified by witnesses centered on weatherization programs: "People need—in poor communities—need to save energy also, but we can't help it without the assistance of Federal programs."; emergency assistance to help pay high utility bills: "And daily they call me and daily they say, 'Please help me. My gas is turned off. My lights are turned off. I need something to help.'"; and increased Federal involvement to ease utility costs for poor persons: "Many of the problems, you know—of course, as you know—are the high cost of the utilities." While the energy crisis affects most if not all Americans, it is clear that the principal victims of inflated energy costs by far are the poor. One woman in Wyoming, for example, reported that she subsisted on a public assistance income of \$144 per month and used up the major portion of that "stipend" for utilities—and this is the wealthiest nation on earth!

### ***Transportation***

The testimony revealed urgent needs for improved and more accessible transportation. Urban and rural witnesses, including representatives from minority, senior citizen, and youth groups, stated that without adequate transportation they could not get to their jobs, health centers, recreational facilities, or other places to conduct normal, everyday affairs.

Differences were noted in transportation needs cited by urban and rural witnesses. While representatives from both of these sectors identified costs as an issue, testimony of rural witnesses concentrated on the lack of transportation services, especially infrastructural underdevelopment, and that of urban witnesses on the inadequacies of available services.

Based on the testimony, it appears that transportation creates a far greater hardship for the elderly than for any other group. The elderly are often not able to take advantage of public transportation because they are sick or handicapped, because major routes are too far from their homes or destinations to walk, especially in bad weather or when carrying packages, or because of inconvenient schedules. Special transportation programs for the elderly were felt to be inadequate, both in terms of the number of people who can be served ("the van that we've got, we can't carry but so many at a time") and the quality of the services provided ("and we try to keep them just as long as we can through the day ... Some elderly just want to go stay a little bit, maybe for a meal or something. And then they want to go home where they can lie down and rest or something."). Where public transportation is not available, older people stated that they must rely on family or friends—often with little success.

For the elderly, such problems appear to have a direct impact on their health and nutrition, and to increase their feeling of dependency and isolation.

### ***Food and Nutrition***

Witnesses at forums also pointed to food and nutrition as a priority need of the poor and minorities ("... we do physicals where I work for children under the ages of 13. Practically five out of every ten have a nutrition problem.") According to the testimony; this need results in part from the lack of money available to poor people to spend on food, and, in part, from insufficient knowledge of proper nutritional habits. Groups which were considered to suffer most from food and nutritional deficiencies included the elderly,

people on fixed incomes, pregnant women, and young children. Little difference was noted between the concerns of urban and rural respondents.

Witnesses also expressed the feeling that Federal, state, and local programs related to food and nutrition, such as the Food Stamp Program and Meals on Wheels, are inadequate to meet the needs of their clients. Criticisms addressed the lack of educational components in such programs, lack of outreach efforts ("Why don't the poverty programs try to get in touch with these poor mothers at a point of early—you know, right after conception—and try to get them to have the right food and make it available to them?"), and failure to provide more than "stopgap" assistance. Another criticism of food and nutrition programs was that they are not specifically targeted to reach certain key groups—in particular, pregnant women and very young children. Although actually speaking about the elderly, one woman pinpointed a major dimension of the problem.

The (poor) are running a losing race with inflation. Rent and utilities costs make food a luxury, never mind clothing.

## Barriers to Problem Solving

Aside from the substantive problem areas addressed by CSA constituents, a great deal of time and thought was devoted to obstacles to solving problems. As might be imagined the litany of barriers is long and all too familiar. But in the absence of reforms, it is necessary to repeat once again the difficulties encountered by the poor in their battle for even just a small share of the fruits of society. Four major obstacles to problem-solving fashioned a recurring mosaic:

- Insufficient resources and socioeconomic programs
- Resources and programs which are poorly planned and administered
- Bureaucratic red tape and needlessly complex regulations
- Bureaucratic insensitivity and unresponsiveness

While each of these issues is treated separately for discussion purposes, it is important to bear in mind that they are all generally interconnected, in much the same way that the substantive problems facing the poor are.

### ***Insufficient Resources and Programs***

A constantly recurring theme throughout the forums was that Federal, state, and local governments have not created the programs or provided the resources both financial and human that are truly required to overcome poverty in this country. In this regard, deficiencies were noted in efforts related to training and education, legal aid, transportation, health care, housing, and energy, among others. Witnesses explained their views clearly in their own words.

Maybe by addressing some of these programs, instead of just putting Band-Aids on them—if we could have it a people program, a full people program, and not just a bureaucratic program to satisfy some people's needs.

It's been a lot of frustrations and I feel like some of these programs are really set up to fail. They're one-handed. On one hand, you say, "Here is an amount of money to fix your house," and the other hand is tied behind you because there's no money to do the work, you know.

We have now asked the county commissioners to give us two hundred thousand dollars to build low-income (houses). We have purchased the land through the county—the housing authority. We have to fight them to get block grant money to get it implemented. We have a lot of stepping stones.

The funding process has been a very serious problem of mine for lots of reasons. It seems that the urban areas always get the biggest bulk of the money. That's because they have the manpower, the structure, who knows when the big pots of money are coming down. So when the rural areas know anything about it, you know, you have a just a little bit, and everybody's pulling for it.

But I also understand that there are some considerations as to using these funds to create possibly new programs, and I certainly hope that prior to the creation of new programs that we properly subsidize these programs that we have.

Clearly poverty is not only an issue of kind but of size as well. In the United States to be poor is not unfortunately a unique condition. As an anti-poverty official from Puerto Rico put it: "The uniqueness is the magnitude." Even if resources are better utilized, the poor are saying it still may not be enough. The problem is so large it may be necessary to direct even more resources at providing solutions.

### ***Resources and Programs That Are Poorly Planned and Administered***

In addition to the problems of insufficient programs and resources, witnesses indicated that many existing poverty programs are poorly planned and administered. The observations below bring to light some major difficulties.

- Lack of coordination between and within programs and levels of government. For example:

Now, what we've got to do—I'm giving you some solutions now. What we've got to do is we've got to coordinate these federal dollars with the local dollars and with the state dollars so that we can get this thing together to be able to do an effective job of alleviating poverty.

- Lack of sufficient funding to accomplish objective. For example:

A prime example of what I'm speaking of now was last winter when we had funds come in on the energy program. The funds were to be used for insulation—plastic that went around frames in windows—material in general to be used to help insulate these homes. None of these funds, however, was earmarked for salaries. We had extreme difficulty in getting money for the salaries.

- Lack of accountability of staff. For example:

Okay. I want to say this, probably in conclusion. You need, in terms of allocating the dollars you need a closer supervision of those people who administer your programs.

- Spending too much money on administration and not enough on providing goods and services to targeted beneficiaries. For example:

They spent \$5 million in administration money and haven't helped one poor person in housing yet.

- Nepotism (providing funds to friends and relatives rather than to people in need). For example:

Friendship was another one that tore things up. You're on the Board, you've got a friend out here, she's got a little extra time, but yet she got a good job. And you're going to work your friend on this job, too. So she's got two good paying jobs and here's two or three out here ain't got nothing.

- Failure to consider poor people's needs in locating service centers. For example:

I think that one of the problems that we have is when a person comes in, we'll tell them, 'Okay. These are the programs available,' but they have to run all over town. Manpower may be here, or their housing might be there, or the food stamps might be there (indicating).

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- Improper training of program staff. For example:

While I was rushing this morning to come here, I got a call from a social worker—probably has a Master's in social work—that wanted to know where she could find emergency food for two of her clients this weekend, you know. I'd be damned ashamed to take that (salary) and have to call somebody else to tell me where to find what I need for my clients.

- Profiteering/fraud. For example:

And then down the road, the program got so ineffective and so many people was profiting that didn't need it. See? So much of the money went where it wasn't needed until the poor went to scorning it.

- Duplication of effort. For example:

And I just think, like I said before, you know, whether it's right or wrong, the upswing should be again for advocacy, people doing kinds of things, instead of so much, you know—you had three programs in San Antonio that were basically overlapped. You had outreach, you had the referral thing, and you had the homemaker service, you know.

Improving the administration and planning of programs stands a better chance within agencies. A great deal of the trouble comes when efforts are made to coordinate among various programs represented by several agencies, both from the standpoint of program planning and implementation. Local communities have to live with the effects of the failure of federal interagency coordination. Fragmented and inadequate funding and inconsistent eligibility requirements lead to inefficiencies at the local and neighborhood levels. One witness put his finger on the problem accurately when he observed that, "If we don't coordinate we all lose, especially those who need the services most."

### ***Bureaucratic Red Tape and Complex Requirements***

Many witnesses expressed the opinion that poor people are not afforded maximum access to the benefits of poverty programs as a result of bureaucratic red tape and complex requirements. Criticisms were directed both at the agency and program level. These typically involved the observation that often so much of an agency's time and resources are spent in complying with convoluted requirements and filling out forms that direct services to beneficiaries are neglected ("I feel—I find that the CAP agencies are doing more paperwork than they are outreach in the community.").

Other remarks about red tape were made on a more individual level. Witnesses expressed a feeling of degradation at being asked to fill out detailed forms that "pry" into their personal lives ("Again, CSA has

the forms for the recipients to fill out and they're the same; they're so detailed and they pry sometimes a little bit too far...). They also felt that that some of the information needed to complete forms was meaningless or insulting to poor people ("...you're asked for a picture ID; you're asked for check stubs..."), and often impossible for them to provide. Even forms that do not pose these problems were troublesome to some witnesses, as the length and wording sometimes make them difficult to complete ("I don't care if the CAP director has to fill out a No. 20 form ... but not somebody that comes asking for emergency food or rent or utilities, you know.") The complaint was also made that, many times, completing new forms is unnecessary because the information has already been provided in the past ("...every three months I have to fill out forms, and they're the Goddamn same forms time and time again. They've had it. for 15 years, my forms, and they never change.").

### ***Bureaucratic Insensitivity and Unresponsiveness***

Another problem witnesses considered to be ~~severe~~ was that the bureaucracy is insensitive and unresponsive to the needs and wishes of the poor. In fact, some respondents felt that the bureaucracy often created more problems than it solves. As one person put it:

The rules and regulations of social services support the breakup of the family and punish the poor as if they were the offenders rather than the offended. The system is one which invades privacy and is oppressive and demeaning. It presupposes the poor are not deserving, and advocates are needed because the poor are still, to a great extent, without power and voice to respond to these charges.

Other witnesses stated that welfare programs are impersonal, designed for people other than the poor ("Because the food stamp program was not meant for the poor, you know. The food stamp program was meant to give more revenue to (growers)..."), and are staffed by "office workers" who do not understand the people they have to serve or who feel superior to program beneficiaries. But perhaps the most telling comment was made by one woman who in complaining about welfare offices said: "We don't mind being poor (necessarily), but we don't want to be treated poorly."

A major defect is that in too many cases bureaucracies have become ends unto themselves and have forgotten the original purposes behind their creation. The public sector is to serve the public, not dismiss it out of hand. In Boise, Idaho, one respondent expressed the problem in clear terms: "Humanize the bureaucratic structure instead of providing bureaucratic responses to human problems." Aside from the humanity of the issue ("I want to be treated as a human being"), the more demeaning aspects characterizing too many client/welfare agency worker relationships, and the systemic abuses ("the system is one which invades privacy and is oppressive") are uncalled for and result in counterproductive and costly paper work. As one understandably irate witness exclaimed, "It is no disgrace to be poor, just uncomfortable."

## **Recommendations for CSA's Policies, Practices, and Programs**

The testimony collected during the forums was also analyzed to identify ways for improving the effectiveness of CSA and for developing new approaches for solving problems of poverty. This section presents a distillation of specific recommendations made by witnesses across the country. Areas addressed include: CSA policy, programs, practices, and procedures; CSA's relationships with other Federal agencies; and areas not presently covered by CSA.

### ***CSA's Policies***

#### **Advocacy**

A significant number of witnesses and panel members felt strongly that CSA should define and strengthen its advocacy functions on behalf of its constituents. To accomplish this, CSA should advocate at the

national level for the inclusion of Community Action Agencies as prime sponsors for delivery of such programs as DOE/Weatherization and CETA, develop public positions on major issues affecting its constituents, and become involved in program planning and regulation development processes of other Federal agencies whose programs impact on the poor. It was also recommended that CSA require the State Economic Opportunity Offices to return to advocacy activities, and that citizen education and awareness programs be conducted at the local level. It is important to note that underlying the bulk of the testimony was a strong urging by the poor for CSA to engage much more forcefully in advocacy on their behalf. Of all the themes, explicit and implicit, which emerged from the ten forums, the need for more advocacy clearly dominated all others. Such remarks as "Let us do advocacy again" and "CSA should advocate nationally and support local advocacy," were heard time and again throughout the forums.

### **State and Local Strategies**

CSA should develop a strategy for state and local government involvement which is broader than the agency's present focus. This strategy should maximize opportunities for cooperation including a large educational component aimed at county officials, and provide a role for involving these sectors in future CSA policy development.

### **Education**

Changes in CSA's educational policies were also identified by witnesses. It was felt that CSA should consider serving more people defined as "near-poor," a group which has too long been ignored and which faces problems virtually identical to those who fall beneath the poverty guidelines. Witnesses urged that CSA also address energy-related crisis intervention in its new policy statements. That is, policies should be developed for including energy-related services to people in rental units, for public sanctions against disconnecting utilities, for consumer education and information, for priority consideration for the elderly, and for close monitoring of unregulated fuel dealers.

### **Personnel**

Finally, it was recommended that, when specifying personnel policies, CSA should stress career and job development (as they relate to affirmative action), job counseling, and the hiring and career development of non-degreed constituents. Such personnel policies should also establish and include, at the least, minimum wages, pension plans, and health insurance for participants.

### **CSA's Programs**

#### **Weatherization**

Witnesses believed that CSA program activities should be expanded in certain areas and that specific new programs should be initiated. A major concern was for programs dealing with energy conservation. For example, it was suggested that CSA should speed up funding for weatherization programs, address the issues of labor shortages for such activities in rural areas, and give high priority for the elderly under such programs.

#### **Research and Development**

Another area of concern was research and development sponsored by CSA. It was felt that CSA should fund R&D efforts through its CAAs whenever possible, fund more local self-help organizations, and publicize and promote its successful new programs. Also, it was suggested that alternative program models be developed for rural areas.

## **Youth and Families**

Emphasis for improving and augmenting special programs for youth was expressed, too. Witnesses believed that youth programs sponsored by CSA should consist of full-year, rather than summer, activities; involve the young in the program planning process, and stress job development.

Family Crisis Center Programs were another area considered by respondents for CSA involvement. They felt these should include assistance for single-parent mental health components, food stamp certification programs, and emergency assistance programs for abused children and battered spouses.

## **Other**

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Witnesses urged that public education programs be mounted by CSA, as well, to break down false stereotypes held by the non-poor and to increase public awareness of the country's poverty problems. Finally, it was suggested that CSA develop programs to address the unique problems of Indians, migrants, and immigrants (including undocumented workers).<sup>1</sup>

## ***CSA's Practices and Procedures***

### **Regulations**

A third area of concern expressed by witnesses at the forums centered on CSA's practices and procedures. It was strongly felt that the agency should communicate more effectively with its constituents, both by simplifying its rules, regulations, and procedures, and by providing educational materials geared to specific target groups. This could be accomplished, as suggested by one respondent, if CSA designed and published a handout to explain its policies, practices and procedures to poor people in the clearest terms possible. Topics which could be discussed in such a handout include rules for participation, the roles and functions of boards, CSA energy conservation programs, how "income" is defined, etc.

### **Monitoring**

In the light of the suggested policy and program changes, it was felt that CSA monitoring efforts should be revised. CSA should monitor and evaluate the CAAs and provide technical assistance to ensure that they hold their delegate agencies accountable, and that the poor are being genuinely involved in the planning and evaluation processes. The regional offices should be monitored, as well, so that CSA policies and procedures are applied and interpreted in a consistent manner. Finally, CSA should place greater emphasis on and resources in compliance monitoring and review (especially with respect to board structure) as a means of strengthening the role of the poor.

To make the most of its experiences and the experiences of its grantees, it was suggested that CSA develop and implement a management process or system to capture data on successful pilot project ideas so that public relations information will be available to "sell" such new concepts. Such a system would also enhance CSA's capabilities for providing technical assistance.

## ***CSA's Relationship With Other Federal Agencies***

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<sup>1</sup> Both an Indian Desk and Migrant Desk are in the final stages of establishment within CSA to address these very issues



Much concern was expressed during the forums with respect to CSA's relationships with other Federal agencies. The following specific suggestions were made as to ways interagency relationships could be improved:<sup>2</sup>

- CSA should enter into discussions with Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to push underwriting home ownership (especially for elderly poor), converting ownership in public housing, and increasing flexibility in Section 8 policies and procedures.
- CSA should undertake a priority evaluation of the Headstart Program to determine, among other things, whether there is continued maximum participation of the poor and whether emphasis has shifted to a professional education program.
- CSA should share its experiences with HUD, Farmer's Home Administration (FmHA), Health, Education and Welfare (HEW), Department of Labor (DOE)<sup>3</sup> and others and make those Departments more responsive to the needs of the poor.
- CSA should negotiate, if necessary, the loan packaging agreements with FmHA and reissue guidance to its grantees about this program.
- In general, CSA should monitor and evaluate antipoverty programs managed by other agencies to make certain they are adequately serving the poor.

Some of the overriding concerns which should be addressed by CSA in all its interagency dealings were felt to include the problems of conflicting eligibility requirements, complex eligibility forms, and bureaucratic red tape. Also, CSA was urged to develop a detailed inventory of available private and Federal resources for use by CAAs.

### **Areas Not Presently Covered by CSA**

In addition to recommending that CSA extend its CAA coverage to those counties in the country which are presently not served by the agency, a significant amount of testimony was devoted to the problems of the handicapped—people who are deprived not only of economic resources but who are burdened by physical or mental disabilities as well. Many witnesses remarked how the non-poor handicapped shared many common problems with the poor—handicapped or not. The handicapped, as are the poor, are one of the vulnerable sectors of society, discriminated against by physical barriers, shunned by the mental and physical mainstream as reminders of their own frailties and generally neglected by government ("The system isn't even providing basic needs; nursing homes are an avenue to despair and death.").

The Agency was repeatedly asked to become the vanguard of the handicapped, especially, of course, the poor handicapped.

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<sup>2</sup> CSA is already providing other Federal agencies with the information pertinent to their programs and activities.

## CONCLUSIONS

Because the transcript of the forums contains a wealth of data and important observations blended into the thousands of thoughts and messages of poor persons and others, they provide a basis to help CSA improve the use of its resources in the overall national effort against poverty. The very act of conducting the forums has already proved beneficial in many respects: for example, they provided an opportunity for the poor to be heard, served as a vehicle for CSA to re-emphasize its existence and concern for its constituents, and represented a visible break from the past era of "benign neglect."

More important, however, is the fact that analysis of the testimony produced opportunities for policy formulation, especially for areas and concerns raised by poor persons for the first time. The focus of many low-income witnesses on the major weaknesses and vacuums in present national programs and policies, and their suggestions for improvements, stimulated discussion and provided a framework for constructing national public policy around people and their concerns, rather than around abstract theories of professional planners. The CSA is now using these data to assess its current policies, practices, and activities, and has begun to take action to address the specific concerns of its constituents.

In the future, data resulting from these forums will be augmented with data and observations from other sources to direct further the agency's, and hopefully the nation's, efforts to redistribute its resources and put an end to the glaring inequities created by poverty in the world's wealthiest nation.

But the wealth of the testimony heard by CSA at the forums went well beyond the scope and abilities of the agency. The poor were addressing the entirety of government, expressing frustration as well as hope. Indeed, one of the most optimistic observations was the constructiveness and commitment expressed by the poor. The witnesses realized that government alone cannot and should not accomplish everything. But they also know and expressed their knowledge and feeling that government can and should be doing much more to achieve an equitable society than is presently the case. The mere fact that in the wealthiest and most advanced nation in history 25 to 40 million poor and "near" poor struggle daily to survive is sad testimony to their entreaties.

In the days that come CSA will be formulating policies and programs to help the poor in meeting the problems they shared with the agency. CSA will also be working with other agencies to provide them information and assistance with which they too can construct more sensitive policies. And, CSA will, of course, continue to share with the President and Congress the aspirations, frustrations and views of the vulnerable sectors of society.

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