

Oromo Community Engagement: Bridging Social Capital in the Cedar- Riverside Neighborhood

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Bridging Social Capital in
the Cedar-Riverside Neighborhood**

**A report prepared for the West Bank Community Development
Corporation and the Center for Urban and Regional Affairs**

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January 10, 2007**

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	2
Introduction	8
Project Background	9
<i>West Bank Community Development Corporation</i>	10
<i>Cedar-Riverside Neighborhood Demographics</i>	11
<i>Dania Hall Redevelopment: Opportunity for Partnerships</i>	12
Project Goals	12
Key Concepts	13
Research Methods.....	15
History of the Oromo.....	16
<i>Language and Religion</i>	16
<i>Traditional Governance</i>	17
<i>Loss of Self-Determination</i>	18
<i>Current Conditions of the Oromo in Ethiopia</i>	18
<i>Oromo Immigration to Minnesota</i>	18
<i>Oromo Community in the Cedar-Riverside Neighborhood</i>	19
Research Findings.....	19
<i>Oromo community strengths</i>	19
<i>Oromo Core Cultural Values</i>	21
<i>Challenges</i>	21
<i>Priorities of the Oromo Community</i>	22
Recommendations to the West Bank CDC.....	24
Appendix A: Author Interviews.....	31
References.	31

Executive Summary

The Cedar-Riverside neighborhood in Minneapolis is located adjacent to the University of Minnesota on the west bank of the Mississippi River. It has served as a settlement for new immigrants for over two centuries, starting with the influx of families from Scandinavian countries during the 1800's. More recently, significant numbers of immigrants from Africa, and to a lesser degree Asia and Latin America, have chosen the neighborhood as their new home.

One of the newest immigrant groups to enter the scene of the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood is the Oromo, the largest cultural group within the Horn of Africa, centered in Ethiopia. The Oromo Community of Minnesota (2006), a nonprofit organization created in 1985 to provide assistance to new arrivals, estimates 12,000 Oromo now live in the state, with the largest concentration being in Cedar-Riverside.

For many centuries the Oromo functioned with their own political, cultural and religious systems as an independent nation (Hassen, 1994). Their independence was lost through the systematic invasion of their territory in the 1880's as part of the military effort supported by European forces to build what is now Ethiopia. Since then, the Oromo have endured many forms of oppression as the target of a genocidal effort to destroy their culture and oppress their spirit. In an attempt to regain sovereignty, the Oromo have been organizing a political movement which is building momentum. Political tensions have concurrently escalated in Ethiopia, forcing a growing number of Oromo to flee the country as refugees or political asylees.

The Oromo have increased their presence in Cedar-Riverside during a time of growing dissent around community development prospects, exacerbated by circumstances surrounding the destruction of Dania Hall in 2000. Consequently, Cedar-Riverside has lacked a unified community voice for many years. The lack of unity is ultimately disempowering and makes the neighborhood vulnerable to future development without community regard or input. In response, the West Bank Community Development Corporation (WBCDC) has made it a priority to unite new immigrants as well as longer term residents in revitalizing the neighborhood.

Within this context, the WBCDC initiated the Oromo Community Engagement Project out of a sense of disconnection with their new Oromo neighbors and colleagues. The Oromo have been less engaged in collaborative planning processes, and for the most part, absent from the creation of a common vision for neighborhood revitalization. It is the intent of the WBCDC to ensure the interests of the Oromo are not overlooked as the planning for significant community development projects moves forward.

Research Purpose and Methodology

A qualitative research design was employed to assess the potential for engagement of the Oromo community in planning for the redevelopment of the Dania Hall site and Cedar Avenue. Research included interviews with key stakeholders, participation in community events, and personal observations by the researcher. The qualitative data produced through these methods has been supported by the review and incorporation of relevant literature. Rather than going for quantity in stakeholder interviews, a significant amount of time was spent building relationships with, and learning from a core of community leaders. Questions were developed to pursue with key stakeholders in order to learn from their collective wisdom and embrace their life stories. Through this process, the core strengths, interests, priorities, values, and challenges of the Oromo community were identified.

The research culminates with recommendations to the WBCDC's Board, staff and neighborhood stakeholders for action steps they can take to work in partnership on community development initiatives. Key concepts referenced by the researcher as the foundation for action steps include creating cultural competence, bridging social capital, and building multicultural coalitions. Developing an aptitude in these three areas is essential for the successful implementation of action steps outlined in the recommendations section.

Project Findings: Understanding the Oromo

Political tensions in Ethiopia have forced many Oromo government employees, professionals and academics to flee the country as political asylees. Consequently, the Oromo community has a significant number of highly educated and skilled people who have chosen Minnesota as their new home. The social capital of the Oromo community clearly extends beyond the local level. Cedar-Riverside has become a hub for Oromo networking on a national and international scale. Each year, the neighborhood and surrounding area is the location for many significant Oromo events, including the national conferences of the Oromo Studies Association, Oromo Liberation Front, Oromo Youth Association, and the Oromo International Lutheran church. Each event draws hundreds of people.

Even though the leadership of the Oromo community is strong, a larger number of Oromo refugees were not so fortunate and lived in extreme poverty in Ethiopia. Given the circumstances, Oromo leaders have reported it's a challenge to provide services and link people with resources sufficient to build the capacity for all refugees to fair well in their new home. These challenges are multiplied when the cultural oppression experienced by the Oromo is taken into account. A study conducted in Minnesota to determine the prevalence of torture among Oromo refugees revealed that 69% of all men and 37% of all women had experienced torture before leaving Africa (Butcher, et al., 2004).

The OCM continues to expand services to assist new Oromo refugees in resettlement. Yet, the organization's highest priority is the purchase and rehab of a building in the Seward neighborhood, located on Franklin Avenue. Just as the Oromo strive for sovereignty in Ethiopia, controlling their own building is a step towards achieving independence and self-determination.

Of great concern to the Oromo is the well being of elders and youth. Elders are least likely to become fluent in a new language and successfully pursue employment. Youth, on the other hand, are trying to catch up with their U.S. born peers and define their future within the political, social and economic realities of our times.

Barriers to participation of the Oromo community in community development efforts are similar to those experienced by other new immigrants. Initially, speaking a different language, compounded by isolation from the dominant culture, makes it difficult for people to participate. Contributing to the problem at the neighborhood level, relationships and networks created around community development tend to become entrenched with little change in leadership roles and structures. This makes it very difficult for newcomers to meaningfully participate in the development process. At the same time, long term neighborhood leaders see the changing population and want to engage new immigrants, but are unsure about the best way to include them in initiatives. Even the best attempt by community development organizations to involve others often results in no more than a narrow role for new immigrants as either tokens or followers of the existing leadership, rather than as equal partners. Lastly, new immigrants are often not aware of the potential gains they may receive through participation in community development at the neighborhood level or how to access this particular social capital network.

To some degree the perceptions of non-Oromo community members have presented barriers to their engagement. At the start of this project, stakeholders within Cedar-Riverside perceived the Oromo community to be significantly distracted by current affairs in their home country and uninterested in partnerships with others locally. Certainly, the Oromo are highly passionate and knowledgeable about the struggle for sovereignty in Ethiopia. However, the *perception* of it being so great that it thwarts all potential partnerships has created a barrier. This perception may have impeded conversations from moving forward to discover the greatest interests of the Oromo around which partnerships could be developed. Due to a lack of investment in significant relationship building with the Oromo community, the neighborhood has missed an opportunity to assist them in deepening their roots in the neighborhood. The Oromo Community of Minnesota's consequent move to the Seward neighborhood is a true loss for Cedar-Riverside.

On a positive note, even though the future space in which the OCM will be located is outside of the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood, Oromo leaders

acknowledge that the neighborhood is still central to their community, and will continue to be an important place where people live, do business, and come together for large events. That being said, access to large public and private spaces at no or low cost is important. For this reason, the Oromo Community of Minnesota has recently joined the WBCDC and partner organizations to plan for redevelopment of the Dania Hall site and Cedar Avenue.

Recommendations

The recommendations for a process to engage the Oromo community in neighborhood planning and to bridge the relationships among the Oromo community and other neighborhood stakeholders are provided below. Most recommendations are not reserved solely for Oromo community engagement. Rather, they move the WBCDC and other organizations in the direction of strong multicultural coalition building for community development purposes.

1) Increasing cultural competence:

A number of steps can be taken by the WBCDC and those interested in multicultural coalition building to increase cultural competence. First, creating safe spaces for informal dialogue and cross cultural learning, absent of any community action agenda, can go a long way in building relationships and developing cultural competence. Important considerations in creating safe spaces including 1) choosing the right setting, 2) inviting stakeholders, and 3) developing a process in which consideration is given to power dynamics and an aim for equity among people. Depending on the skills and comfort level of the people involved, it may be beneficial to engage an outside facilitator to provide some training on reflective listening processes, and lead a dialogue in a group setting.

One option for creating a safe space is to host a cultural dialogue with the Oromo community at which people break into small groups or pairs for dialogue around a common set of questions that explore cultural identity. Subsequent cultural dialogues could be hosted quarterly, focusing on a different culture at each. If preferred, each quarterly dialogue could be inclusive of all cultures rather than focus on one culture in particular. Another option is to incorporate the theme of cross cultural relationship building into the annual meeting of the WBCDC. The agenda could include time for attendees to meet with someone they don't know for a short discussion, say 20 minutes, on a set of questions. If this strategy is utilized, the agenda should also include time for group sharing to encourage learning and reflection by all who attend.

Communities have come up with many creative ways to explore self-identity while also discovering the power in the stories of others. Events can incorporate various forms of expression to symbolize cultural competence and respect in a multicultural setting, honoring the human spirit. Examples include

oral or written storytelling, art, multimedia, tree planting...the possibilities are endless.

2) Bridging social capital:

One method the WBCDC can utilize to bridge social capital is initiating an outreach strategy. Each Board and staff member could conduct at least 5 one-to-one conversations with community leaders from cultures other than their own within a designated period of time. At the completion of the interview timeline, all who participated would be invited to an event to celebrate and summarize the potential areas of mutual interest for working together in the future.

The WBCDC has recently launched an information sharing web site regarding current Cedar-Riverside community development initiatives. Positioning the organization as a center for networking and sharing of information relevant to all who live and work in the neighborhood can be expanded. As mentioned earlier, the Oromo community has significant community events that serve as opportunities for learning and networking. However, these events are almost solely known to and attended by Oromo's. The WBCDC could expand the exchange of information and help the Oromo and other groups in the neighborhood by publicizing their events, sharing relevant news, broadcasting opportunities for networking on common interests, and encouraging broader participation in a multicultural context.

3. Expanding capacity for community development:

As the Oromo and other new immigrants realize their full potential and expand their work beyond direct service to new arrivals, the prospects of community development become more appealing. Likewise, their participation is in high demand by neighborhood organizations who sincerely want to ensure all subgroups of the community are represented in decision making. Without an intentional effort to create equity and develop capacity, issues such as structural racism and tokenism in the community development arena are very difficult to move beyond.

One option for investing in the community development future of new immigrants, so to speak, is by designing internship and work study opportunities in partnership with post-secondary educational institutions and ethnic-based organizations in the neighborhood. This provides a chance to

mentor and pass on the knowledge about community development to the next generation, which is very important to the Oromo community. Another method is to utilize a leadership development strategy, providing technical assistance to new immigrant communities in the neighborhood by offering a leadership training series on community development techniques.

4. Strengthening multicultural collective action:

The WBCDC has already initiated multicultural coalition building with a focus on the development of the Dania Hall site. The challenge around this is two-fold. First, planning for community development projects is usually a long term process, in which progress is slow and hard to measure. Keeping people motivated toward a common vision with little pay back in the short term is a challenge. Second, while the Oromo Community of Minnesota and other organizations have committed to a partnership around the redevelopment of Dania Hall, many also recognize the limitations of the site (i.e. lot size and limited parking) as a future gathering place for the neighborhood. Due to the dynamic energy of the neighborhood and external forces of change that are concurrently pushing forward, there is a sense of immediacy for action on more pressing issues.

These challenges call for an approach to multicultural community development that incorporates organizing around short term neighborhood issues. Immediate outcomes can be achieved and celebrated, at the same time that long term goals are pursued. A disciplined organizing strategy could be developed, incorporating clear outcomes that leverage significant resources for the community. Successfully addressing any issues in a multicultural context needs to ensure that 1) the goals meet the interests of all parties, 2) all parties are coming to the table with a sense of equity and shared responsibility, and 3) public action is taken in the short term that produces measurable results. As a bench mark, the WBCDC and coalition partners should incorporate public action with specific goals and outcomes on no less than a quarterly basis.

Still another reason for a joint community organizing strategy, as expressed by the Oromo Community of Minnesota, is the potential for shared benefits through outreach and relationship building among community members. For instance, the OCM lacks the resources to conduct outreach on an ongoing basis to Oromo's living in the neighborhood. This gap could be filled by a skilled community organizer who intentionally would link Oromo's with whom they meet to the OCM as well as to other joint endeavors in the neighborhood. Such outreach would focus on surfacing the hidden or informal leaders in the neighborhood and continually bring new energy to organizational initiatives.

The recommendations in this report lay out objectives that will take the Oromo community, the WBCDC and other partner organizations to the next level of

successful multicultural community development. It is hoped that the ideas presented here spur discussion among CDC Board, staff and partners about opportunities, which may result in the identification of other creative options for strengthening multicultural community development.

Introduction

The Cedar-Riverside neighborhood in Minneapolis is located adjacent to the University of Minnesota on the west bank of the Mississippi River. It has served as a settlement for new immigrants for over two centuries, starting with the influx of families from Scandinavian countries during the 1800's. More recently, significant numbers of immigrants from Africa, and to a lesser degree Asia and Latin American countries, have chosen the neighborhood as the place to rebuild their lives. While immigrants may be leaving their homelands for different reasons and through different paths, all come with the hope of finding prosperity, security, and peace for themselves and their families as they establish new roots in Cedar-Riverside.

Source: West Bank CDC, 2006



Cedar-Riverside has been a place where immigrant communities live in unity, putting aside any ethnic and cultural conflicts that may have kept them divided in the past. In 1886, a landmark symbol of immigrant unity was established in the building of Dania Hall, located in the center of the neighborhood on Cedar Avenue. The creation of this immigrant center was initiated by Danish Americans. While it housed the Dania Society, it also served as a public space for large community gatherings for all Scandinavian immigrants. At a ceremony to celebrate the building of Dania Hall in 1886, keynote speaker Judge Rand proclaimed,

“...it is the foundation of a building within whose walls the spirit of intelligence, unity, friendship and brotherly love will be taught...for we shall delight to meet with you, discuss and learn that our interests are mutual, that the social relations...are so interwoven with one another that nature herself feels aggrieved when we fail to work hand in hand...(Armitage, 1973).”

This sentiment is carried on today in the work of the West Bank Community Development Corporation (WBCDC) to unite new immigrants as well as longer term residents in revitalizing the neighborhood. As the CDC has focused on building community partnerships, the phrase “many languages, one voice” has become symbolic of their efforts.

One of the newest immigrant groups to enter the scene of the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood is the Oromo, a cultural group from Oromia, which is located within the Horn of Africa, centered in Ethiopia. The Oromo in Cedar-Riverside have been overshadowed at times by the large number of Somali immigrants in the public view. However, the Oromo have been quietly increasing their presence. They are steadily moving forward in building a solid organization, the Oromo Community of Minnesota (OCM), currently located in the Brian Coyle Center, and expanding their work beyond the initial concentration on meeting the needs of new Oromo arrivals. Even so, the West Bank CDC initiated the Oromo Community Engagement Project out of a sense of disconnection with their new Oromo neighbors and colleagues. It is the intent of the WBCDC to ensure the interests of the Oromo are not overlooked as significant community development projects are implemented in the future.

The focus of this project is on the presence of the Oromo community in the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood. The purpose is two-fold. First, the project was designed to research and assess the potential for engaging the Oromo community in planning for the redevelopment of the Dania Hall site.¹ Secondly, the project is intended to produce action steps for bridging relationships and building a strong multicultural coalition in Cedar-Riverside that can leverage the resources for significant community development initiatives in the future.

Project Background

The history of the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood is preserved in many rich stories of people coming together...in struggle, diversity, social and political protest, in celebration and in music...to name just a few of the neighborhood's nuances. The most recent political tensions and social movements that were birthed in the 1970's have been put aside in this report in order to focus on the neighborhood as it is now, and to look towards the future. The future brings Cedar-Riverside full circle to where it began; a community rich in diversity, striving for unity for the well being of all who live and interact here.



Source: West Bank CDC

¹ Dania Hall was destroyed by a fire in the year 2000. The lot on which it was located is currently vacant.

West Bank Community Development Corporation

The West Bank Community Development Corporation (WBCDC) was created by neighborhood residents in 1975 to develop affordable housing in line with the Cedar Riverside Urban Renewal Plan (WBCDC, 2006a). In the 1980's and 1990's, the WBCDC produced over 510 units of affordable rental housing in the form of leasehold cooperatives, and developed an additional 27 units for home ownership. The WBCDC also purchased and rehabbed two commercial buildings located at the intersection of Cedar and Riverside Avenues, one of which is the site of their office.

Currently, the WBCDC concentrates its efforts on three main program areas; 1) community building, 2) housing asset management and development, and 3) economic development. The organization is governed by a Board of Directors elected by neighborhood residents at a public meeting held annually. At times, the CDC is the center of neighborhood tensions, since all community development initiatives bring change that may not be embraced by a full consensus. Consequently, Cedar-Riverside has lacked a unified community voice for many years, further exacerbated by circumstances surrounding the destruction of Dania Hall in 2000.



The lack of unity is ultimately disempowering and makes the neighborhood vulnerable to future development without community regard or input. To begin rebuilding community trust, the WBCDC initiated a neighborhood project in 2001. A memorial, carefully designed with a mosaic of cultural symbols to unify the neighborhood, was erected in the center of the Dania Hall site at a celebration representing the coming together of all cultures and people (picture source: WBCDC). This project served as an important step forward in the empowerment of the Cedar-Riverside community. The WBCDC has also initiated the next step by bringing stakeholders together to plan the

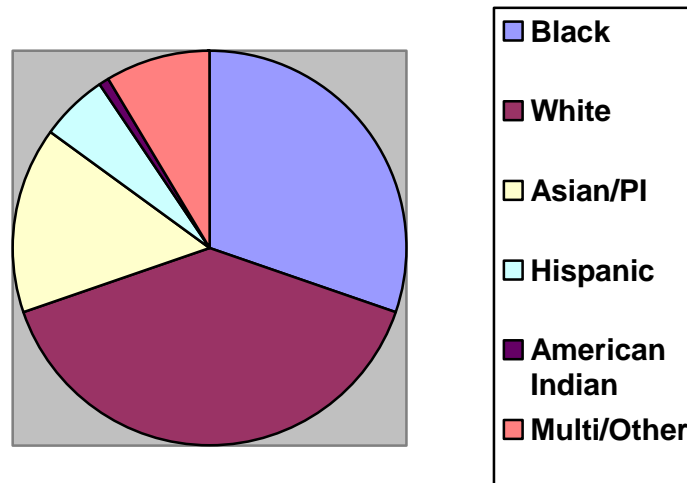
redevelopment of the Dania site. Following through on community projects such as this, in a multicultural context, will support the development of new leadership and create a model for having an impact on a range of community issues in the future.

Cedar-Riverside Neighborhood Demographics

Cedar-Riverside has a population of 7,545 people, of whom 2,420 live below the federal poverty level; the largest number of any neighborhood in Minneapolis (City of Minneapolis, 2005).² According to the 2000 census, the median household income is just \$14,367 a year. The unemployment rate is 17 percent. Only 12% of the housing stock is owner-occupied, and it's estimated that 75% of the rental units are publicly subsidized in some form (WBCDC, 2006a).

Population changes over the past decade have resulted in a much more diverse community. African American/Black residents increased from 11% of all residents in 1990 to 32% in 2000. Caucasian residents, on the other hand, comprised 70% of the total in 1990, and decreased to 42% in 2000. Of the total, 16% of residents are Asian or Pacific Islander, 6% Hispanic, and 1% American Indian. Those identifying as multi-racial comprise 5% of the total, and those identifying as other than any of the census categories is 4% (NRP, 2005).

Table 1: Cedar-Riverside Race Breakdown from 2000 Census



The influx of large numbers of new immigrants to Cedar Riverside, combined with existing political tensions among long term residents, has contributed to neighborhood fragmentation. Different populations or community subgroups look inward for support and work in relative isolation from each other. The first priority of new immigrants is meeting the most basic social and economic needs of their people, and they initially tend to rely on their own social capital to do so. However, once new immigrants move beyond initial resettlement needs, they bring a greatly needed fresh

² Forty-two percent of Cedar-Riverside households overall, live in poverty.

perspective and energy to neighborhood endeavors that can bridge relationships beyond historical tensions.

Dania Hall Redevelopment: Opportunity for Partnerships

Momentum to bridge relationships in a multicultural context has already begun. According to the WBCDC (2006a), the Dania Hall site as a focus for Cedar Avenue redevelopment has consistently been identified as important to all subgroups in the neighborhood. This presents a unique opportunity. An authentic multi-cultural process focused on community development may generate the kind of unified neighborhood support necessary to make redevelopment successful.

A number of organizations have already signed a *Memorandum of Understanding* pledging to work together in a planning process for Cedar Avenue redevelopment (WBCDC, 2006b). The organizations signed on by the beginning of this project include the Brian Coyle Community Center, African Development Center, Confederation of Somali Community in Minnesota, Family Opportunity for Living Collaborative, Dar Al-Hijrah Cultural Center, West Bank CDC, Somali Action Alliance, Riverside Plaza Tenants Association, and Korean Service Center.

Project Goals

Though significant progress has been made in building relationships among neighborhood stakeholders to create a vision for the Dania site and Cedar Avenue redevelopment, barriers to the engagement of key stakeholders existed on two fronts at the beginning of this project. First, the Oromo community has been less engaged in neighborhood planning processes, and for the most part, absent from the creation of a common vision for Cedar Avenue. Second, current stakeholders who have become engaged lack the core relationships with the Oromo community to bridge the social capital necessary to put neighborhood residents in a position of united leadership.

Without the political and social capital gained by all communities uniting around a common vision, recent history shows us that proactive Cedar Avenue redevelopment won't happen. Two likely prospects remain; either physical structures in the neighborhood will continue to deteriorate, along with the community's quality of life, and/or redevelopment on a broader scale will occur, instigated by those outside of the neighborhood. Either option is not in the best interest of the community. A clear process to engage the Oromo in neighborhood planning and to bridge the relationships among the Oromo and other neighborhood stakeholders are the primary goals moving forward. The community engagement process designed as a result of this project will support existing WBCDC board members and staff in the development of new

leadership skills as well as creation of new relationships, while mutually benefiting the Oromo and other community stakeholders.

Key Concepts

Throughout this report, references will be made to the concepts of cultural competence, social capital and multicultural coalition building. Developing an aptitude in these three areas is essential for the successful implementation of action steps outlined in the recommendations section.

Cultural Competence

Cultural competence has supplanted the notions of cultural sensitivity and cultural awareness with the aim of placing a higher value on the knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, and skills necessary to respectfully and effectively work with others in a multicultural society (Potockny-Tripodi, 2002). A common mistake in the interpretation of the meaning of cultural competence is the belief that it is solely a measure of knowledge about cultures other than one's own. On the contrary, being culturally competent first requires clarification of one's own history, beliefs, values, prejudices, and life experiences (from privilege to personal oppression) that form personal identity, and to know how this impacts our interactions with others.

The process of understanding one's self in relation to others, especially in the context of multicultural community development, must parallel an analysis of race and a commitment to undoing racism in our society (Institute for Democratic Renewal, 2000). Second, it requires a deep sense of curiosity and interest in the life stories of others, which moves us into the process of mutual discovery and interpersonal relationship building. Community development organizations that have successfully embraced new immigrants in the development process have demonstrated a commitment to cultural competency among all board members and staff (Fernandez, 2003). The richness of our stories provides the foundation on which all mutual endeavors can be built.

Social Capital

Author Robert Putnum (2001) describes social capital as the value individuals and communities gain from reciprocal relationships and networking. An increase or decrease in social capital is ostensibly linked to positive or negative consequences for an individual, community, community subgroup or even an entire nation. Since Putnum's initial research on the subject, growing attention has been given to the measurement of social capital and its worth in regards to a number of societal indicators of well being. Changes in social capital which have been documented through research range from increased

economic well being, government quality, judicial efficiency, and neighborhood stability, to indicators such as personal health, happiness and trust among community members (Glaeser, 2001; Kazemipur, 2004). When social capital declines, a negative correlation exists with the same indicators.

Social capital has also been found to be strongest in homogeneous societies in which all members are of the same ethnicity and share a common language (Glaeser, 2001). At face value, this finding may lead some to hastily determine a community as diverse as the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood as having less or weakened social capital. Quite the opposite, the heterogeneous make up of Cedar-Riverside is actually a conglomeration of subsets of homogeneous communities, which carries a strong potential for increasing social capital. Each of the immigrant populations of the neighborhood comes with their own social capital, creating an environment where the entire neighborhood can be strengthened through the *bridging* of social capital among subgroups. By identifying the main focus of this project as the bridging of social capital, recognition is being given to the value each subgroup brings, removing the ethnocentric and xenophobic tendencies of homogeneous communities that ultimately thwart their ability to be inclusive and create powerful multicultural coalitions for community development purposes.

Multicultural Coalition Building

Multicultural coalitions involving new immigrants can provide the vehicle for successful community development, not only bridging social capital between new and long term community members, but also providing linkages between new immigrant groups (Gozdziak & Melia, 2005). According to authors Gazdziak and Melia (2005), the most successful initiatives include partnerships across sectors and community subgroups, which may be formal or informal in nature. Even the newest of immigrant arrivals should be included. Such partnerships place high value on reciprocity, with all stakeholders benefiting from and investing in achieving the broader goals. Successful multicultural community development initiatives take hard work, requiring solid commitments and accountability from all coalition partners.

A significant challenge in multicultural coalition building is the imbalance of power among groups and the need to intentionally create equity among partners. To some degree, imbalance exists in a multicultural context simply by the differences in length of time each group has been present in a place; time spent in deepening and building social capital tied to locality in a societal context. As immigrants stay longer, however, the gap in social capital is lessened (Kazemipur, 2004). Structural racism and discrimination also are significant barriers to multicultural coalition building due to the resulting imbalances in power. Special attention to the creation of equity, through

organizational structure, leadership, mission, values, and activities, is required to breakdown systemic racism in order for successful multicultural coalition building and community development to occur.

Research Methods

A qualitative research design was employed to assess the potential for engagement of the Oromo community in planning for the redevelopment of the Dania Hall site and Cedar Avenue. Research included interviews with key stakeholders, participation in community events, and personal observations by the researcher. The qualitative data produced through these methods has been supported by the review and incorporation of relevant literature.

Rather than going for quantity in stakeholder interviews, I spent a significant amount of time building relationships with, and learning from a core of community leaders. The value gained from a concerted effort to establish relationships based on mutual interests and trust surpassed that which could have been achieved through a greater number of interviews. Questions were developed to pursue with key stakeholders in order to learn from their collective wisdom and embrace their life stories. Through interviews, the following data was specifically collected:

- History of the Oromo and immigration to Minnesota,
- Strengths, interests, and challenges of the Oromo community in relation to participation in community development initiatives,
- Issues of the highest concern to the Oromo community,
- Any historical tensions with other communities that may hinder Oromo involvement in a neighborhood coalition,
- Significant roles and relationships within the Oromo community that should be respected in an engagement process,
- Core cultural values of the Oromo in relation to community engagement,
- Type of process appropriate for Oromo engagement, and
- Contexts in which relationships exist among the Oromo community and other people in the neighborhood and surrounding area.

Inclusion of community members in the research process, and in the implementation of project recommendations, is fundamental to the ultimate success of this project. In addition to outreach to the Oromo community and other stakeholders, the WBCDC staff and board members have an important role in bridging relationships as stated in the recommendations section.

History of the Oromo

The Oromo represent the largest cultural group in Ethiopia, as well as one of the largest in all of Africa, estimated to be over 24 million strong (Adugna, 2006). For many centuries the Oromo functioned with their own political, cultural and religious systems as an independent nation, separate from Abyssinian³ rule (Hassen, 1994). Their independence was lost through the systematic invasion and brutal conquest of their territory in the 1880's as part of the military effort supported by European forces to build what is now Ethiopia.



Source: *The Minnesota Daily*

Language and Religion

The Oromo speak one common language, called Afan Oromo, Oromiffa, or simply Oromo. Even though the Oromo are the largest group in Ethiopia, the government has deemed Amharic the official national language. Those who are heard speaking Oromo are punished (Oromo Community of MN, 2006). In addition to Christianity and Islam, some Oromo still practice their indigenous religion known as Waaqqefata, with a belief in Waaqa or God (Melbaa, 1988). The Oromo place high value on religious acceptance and mutual respect. Interviewees reported it's common to have a nuclear family in which family members may practice different faiths with full acceptance of other family members (Oromo community of MN, 2006).

³ The name Abyssinia pre-dated the development of Ethiopia as a country, and was considered a Christian nation in the northern part of the region.

Traditional Governance

Prior to colonization, the Oromo lived by the Gada system, a form of governance organized according to successive generational classes and grades from birth to death (Hassen, 1994). Following an 8-year cycle through

one's lifetime, each being a grade, male Oromo took responsibility for economic, social, political, military, and ritual leadership. The full Gada system generally included ten grades (80 years). The first five grades focused on increased levels of responsibility and training to prepare men for leadership. To understand the Gada system, imagine a clear division of responsibilities in which those under eight years old have the least for which they are responsible, and then receive progressively more responsibility as they age. Entering their early 40's they assumed positions of greater governance. The succession of grades effectively served as term limits as elders moved out of official roles and made way for the next generation.

The Gada system was organized by clan and region, which included local, regional, and national structures of governance. Even though the Gada system was tied to generational alignment within clans, it also included the use of assemblies for community democratic decision making (Hassen, 1994). Additionally, electoral decision making was utilized in military affairs (Legesse, 2000).

Assemblies were traditionally held under the Sycamore tree, a sacred spiritual place seen as the source of all peace (OCM, 2006). In political terms, the Sycamore tree also represented the source of unity, since all leaders needed to show commitment to the implementation of decisions made by the full assembly.



Source: www.oromocommunitymn.com

Women did not play a formal role in governance through the Gada system. However, they were not entirely absent from the realm of community decision making. Women were highly respected in the Oromo culture, as previously noted. Carrying this reverence, women would use satire through song and chants to make their opinions known and influence the formal Gada decision making process as it was happening (Legesse, 2000). This brings to mind the right to freedom of speech upheld in the United States and other democratic societies, in which political expression is allowed to take on many forms, regardless of social or political status.

Loss of Self-Determination

The conquest of the Oromo was not only a physical takeover of their territory and removal of their independent governance, but more directly a genocidal effort to destroy their culture and oppress their spirit (Jalata, 2006). For over a century the Oromo have felt their inalienable right to self-determination has been violated. Under the pretense of supporting democratic decision making, in 1994 a constitution was formally adopted that established

a government structure for the Republic of Ethiopia including the establishment of eleven states, one of which is Oromia (Adugna, 2006). For the Oromo, this landmark event that recognized their status under the state of Oromia was temporarily a source of hope. However, in reality Ethiopia still operates under the control of Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, described by Professor Asafa Jalata (2006) as an authoritarian-terrorist regime. In an analysis conducted by economist Abebe Adugna (2006), by all indicators Ethiopian governance has actually decreased steadily since 1998 in its public accountability and recognition of the voice of the people.

Current Conditions of the Oromo in Ethiopia

Ethiopia is one of the poorest countries in the world with a poverty rate of over 44% (United Nations, 2005). In comparison, Oromia has a slightly lower poverty rate of 40%, which may be attributed to the amount of family subsistence food production, which lowers the total household food cost⁴ (Adugna, 2006). By a number of other gauges, the Oromo fare worse in comparison to all of Ethiopia. The Oromo have the highest number of births in Ethiopia at 6.4 births per woman. They also have the highest infant mortality rate at 116 deaths per 1,000 births, the highest mortality rate for children under age five at 195 deaths per 1,000, the least number of children fully vaccinated at just 10%, and the highest population to physician ratio of one per 60,835 people (Adugna, 2006). Regarding education, 62.5% of all Oromo children attend primary school (grades 1-8). The total number of children attending grades 9-12 drops to merely 11.6%.

Oromo Immigration to Minnesota

The first Oromo immigrants who came to Minnesota in the 1970's did so with the financial resources necessary to pursue college education (Oromo Community of MN, 2006). Since then, as political struggles have increased and the lives of the Oromo have continued to be threatened in Ethiopia, a growing number of people have fled the country through refugee camps, or by applying for political asylum.

⁴ The cost of food sufficient to support a family is the basis for calculating the poverty rate.

Determining the true number of Oromo immigrants who have come to Minnesota in the past 30 years is extremely difficult. According to the Minnesota State Demographic Center (2004), 7,500 people came from Ethiopia to Minnesota prior to 2004. These numbers do not exclusively represent the Oromo, however, and information gaps still exist based on immigrant status; whether refugees, asylees, etc. The Oromo Community of Minnesota (2006) estimates 12,000 Oromo people now live in the state, with the largest concentration being in the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood. Data

from Minneapolis Public Schools (2006) confirms that the largest concentration of Oromo-speaking students live in Cedar-Riverside, with Seward and East Phillips next in line.

Oromo Community in the Cedar-Riverside Neighborhood

Located in the Cedar-riverside neighborhood, the Oromo established the OCM as a nonprofit organization in 1985. Starting as a volunteer-run nonprofit, the main focus was to bring people together for cultural activities and mutual support. They relied solely on financial support from the Oromo community through membership dues and donations for over a decade. In the year 2000, the Board of Directors applied for and received the organization's first grant and was able to hire an Executive Director. By the beginning of 2007, the OCM had grown to the size of seven employees. They implement multiple strategies for the well being of the community, including community building and cultural education activities; services targeted to youth, women and elders; health education; employment services; mediation and conflict resolution; and other social services. Embracing the potential of their growing capacity, OCM is beginning to embark on policy advocacy and economic development initiatives. In doing so, they are increasingly finding partnerships with non-Oromo allies useful and necessary to achieve larger goals.

Research Findings

Oromo community strengths

Political tensions in Ethiopia have grown as the movement for Oromo sovereignty has increased, forcing many government employees, professionals and academics to flee the country as political asylees in order to protect their lives and their families. As a result, the Oromo community has a significant number of highly educated and skilled people who have chosen Minnesota as their new home. The Oromo have been able to draw on their pool of talents, skills and relationships to create a solid organization, the OCM, and assist their community in resettlement. The Board of Directors, comprised of professionals from the public, private and nonprofit sectors, is committed to the success of the organization and provides strong leadership. Oromo stakeholders interviewed for this project expressed great pride in the progress

made by new Oromo immigrants in a fairly short time. In addition, Oromo leaders are extremely passionate about the plight of the Oromo in Ethiopia and the movement for self-determination. I listened with great interest as Oromo leaders spoke in detail about the political, social and economic conditions, from past to present, within local, national and international contexts, that inform the Oromo experience. They are truly the experts from whom we can all learn.

Within OCM, the youth have created the Oromia Youth Association, through which they independently lead and organize all of their initiatives, as well as manage their own website (OYA, 2006). Youth initiatives in other organizations are usually sustained through a certain amount of support and leadership from adults. The OYA, on the other hand, functions with a degree of autonomy and self reliance beyond any group I've observed.

The OYA is a very energetic group. They hold regular monthly meetings, organize community building events and fundraisers, focus on cultural preservation through Oromo language classes and cultural dance groups, and stay abreast of current affairs in Ethiopia. The youth run a democratic organization, holding an election of officers annually by their dues paying membership. Dues are collected and dutifully paid at regular monthly meetings of the OCM. Even though the youth leaders live throughout the Twin Cities metro area, the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood is still the hub of activity. OYA meetings therefore are held in the neighborhood, either at Davanni's Pizza or at the University of Minnesota's Carlson School of Management.



OYA members Miessa Gamedea, Hussen Ejero and Tibeso Foge. Source: The Minnesota Daily.



OYA members Lensa Dawano, Lalese Dawano, And Barite Bati doing a traditional Ragada dance.

The second generation of Oromo immigrants are embracing the opportunities available to them and developing their own leadership. Placing a high value on learning, they are graduating from high school and pursuing post-secondary education. At the University of Minnesota, the students have organized the Oromo Student Union. Their presence is also being felt at other post-secondary institutions in the Twin Cities.

Source: The Minnesota Daily.

Based on my observations and conversations with Oromo immigrants, it seems that regardless of socioeconomic status Oromo youth are pursuing post-secondary education at a high rate. I asked an Oromo leader about this observation and received the following explanation. During the 1980's in Ethiopia, in an attempt to suppress Oromo cultural practices while elevating Amharic as the national language, all Oromo were required to attend Amharic classes.⁵ Farmers were virtually pulled from the fields in the middle of the day to learn Amharic. Perhaps an unintended consequence of this forced learning by the government was the development of a high value for education among all Oromo families, regardless of socioeconomic status.

The social capital of the Oromo community clearly extends beyond the local level, being inclusive of national and international networking. Cedar-Riverside has become a hub for Oromo interaction on a large scale. Each year, the neighborhood and surrounding area is the location for many significant Oromo events, including the national conferences of the Oromo Studies Association, Oromo Liberation Front, Oromo Youth Association, and the Oromo International Lutheran church. This year for instance, the Oromo Studies Association will hold their annual conference in Minneapolis on July 28-29 utilizing space at the University of Minnesota (Oromo Studies Association, 2007). Each event draws hundreds of people. Additionally, the Oromo hold an annual Independence Day picnic on July 4th in Riverside Park, as well as a national soccer tournament.

Oromo Core Cultural Values

The Oromo are proud of the sophisticated Gada system described earlier that served as their traditional structure for community governance and decision making. Core values within the system include personal responsibility, community service and leadership, investment in the development of the next generation, negotiation and debate on issues during decision making with a goal of achieving consensus, and conflict resolution utilizing mediation and arbitration. These values are upheld in the structure of the OCM. Another value often mentioned in interviews with Oromo leaders is a respect for people's differences; preserving the human dignity and worth of all people, regardless of religion, ethnicity, etc, based on the principal of self-determination. Along the same theme of respect, women, children and elders are held in high esteem in the Oromo Culture.

Challenges

⁵ The government push to establish Amharic as the official national language impacted other indigenous populations and was not limited to the Oromo.

Even though the leadership of the Oromo community is strong, a larger number of Oromo refugees were not so fortunate and lived in substandard conditions in Ethiopia. Survival was a daily challenge. Many families and elders resettled in Minnesota after escaping extreme poverty. As noted earlier, more than 88% of the Oromo in Ethiopia didn't have the opportunity to attend school beyond the 8th grade and 37% received no formal education. This would be a challenge under the best of circumstances for immigrants moving

to the United States, however the consequences are multiplied when the cultural oppression experienced by the Oromo is taken into account.

A study conducted in Minnesota to determine the prevalence of torture among Oromo refugees revealed that 69% of all men and 37% of all women had experienced torture before leaving Africa (Butcher, et al., 2004). Of the total, 90% of Oromo torture victims experienced both physical and psychological forms of torture. Each person interviewed for this project chose how much they were comfortable disclosing, but virtually all, regardless of social class, divulged experiences of structural oppression in which their lives or the lives of family members were threatened, or worse. Many have been imprisoned, witnessed family members being murdered, have had children kidnapped, and the list of horrific experiences goes on.

Given the circumstances, Oromo leaders have reported it's a challenge to provide services and link people with resources sufficient to build the capacity for all refugees to fair well in their new home. Two populations of highest concern include elders and youth. Elders are least likely to become fluent in a new language and successfully pursue employment. Youth, on the other hand, are trying to catch up with their U.S.-born peers and define their future within the political, social and economic realities of our times. Even though many youth are succeeding, the prospect of many more not being able to catch up and resigning to a life of poverty is troubling to the Oromo community.

Priorities of the Oromo Community

The OCM continues to expand services to assist new Oromo refugees in resettlement. Yet, the organization's highest priority is following through with the purchase and rehab of a building in the Seward neighborhood, located on Franklin Avenue. Over \$100,000 was raised for this purpose from Oromo members of the organization in 2006, and a capital campaign is currently underway. A major donor has come forward who committed to a dollar for dollar match of all contributions received at a recent fundraising event. This resulted in an additional \$100,000 raised for their capital campaign.

Securing a space fully owned and operated by the Oromo community is meaningful for a number of reasons. Just as the Oromo strive for sovereignty in Ethiopia, purchasing their own building as a nonprofit organization in Minnesota is a step towards achieving independence and self-determination. Being a community that has suffered under the terrorist tactics of a genocidal government for over a century, for the Oromo the prospect of controlling their own space here has significant healing affects and symbolizes a continued hope for a change in circumstances in their homeland. Also, their own space provides an arena for a greater focus on cultural preservation and education

as the Oromo work to restore values and traditions they've had to vigilantly suppress for decades.

Even though the space in which the OCM will be located is outside of the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood, Oromo leaders acknowledge that the neighborhood is still central to their community, and will continue to be an important place where people live, do business, and come together for large events. That being said, access to large public and private spaces at no or low cost is also important. For this reason, the Oromo Community of Minnesota has recently joined the Dania Partners Roundtable to plan for redevelopment of the Dania Hall site and Cedar Avenue. It's also worth noting that the Brian Coyle Center has provided a solid base for the Oromo community to build the OCM, access services and hold community events over the years. The Brian Coyle Center will continue to be pertinent to the Oromo community regardless of a change of address for their main office.

Other issues of relevance to the Oromo in Cedar-Riverside include low cost public transportation, access to employment opportunities, and last but not least, ensuring youth have the opportunity to succeed in school and receive higher education. A representative of the OCM has been involved in initial discussions about planning for the next light rail transit stop in the neighborhood. Small business development as an economic strategy has not been a high priority thus far for the Oromo. Many believe this will soon change as their skillfulness in interacting within the U.S. economic system increases. In the past month, for instance, Oromo community members met to discuss the prospect of establishing their own bank in Minneapolis.

Barriers to participation in community development initiatives

The Oromo community experiences the same barriers to participation in community development efforts as does any new immigrant community. Initially, speaking a different language, compounded by isolation from the dominant culture, makes it difficult for people to participate. Contributing to the problem at the neighborhood level, relationships and networks created around community development tend to become entrenched with little change in leadership roles and structures. This makes it extremely difficult for

newcomers to meaningfully participate in the development process. At the same time, long term neighborhood leaders see the changing population and want to engage new immigrants, but are unsure about the best way to include them in initiatives. Even the best attempt by community development organizations to involve others often results in no more than a narrow role for new immigrants as either tokens or followers of the existing leadership, rather than as equal partners. Lastly, new immigrants are often not aware of the potential gains they may receive through participation in community

development at the neighborhood level or how to access this particular social capital network.

The perceptions of non-Oromo community members have presented barriers to their engagement to some degree. At the start of this project, stakeholders within Cedar-Riverside perceived the Oromo community to be significantly distracted by current affairs in their home country and uninterested in partnerships with others locally. Certainly, the struggle for sovereignty in Ethiopia is of deepest concern to the Oromo here. However, the *perception* of it being so great that it thwarts all potential partnerships is a barrier. This perception may have impeded conversations from moving forward that could uncover the greatest interests of the Oromo around which partnerships could be developed. Due to a lack of investment in significant relationship building with the Oromo community, the neighborhood has missed an opportunity to assist them in deepening their roots in the neighborhood. The Oromo Community of Minnesota's consequent move to the Seward neighborhood is a true loss for Cedar-Riverside.

Despite these barriers, the Oromo community has been able to build their own social capital so that they are positioned to explore partnerships that bridge their interests with broader community development goals. Through the OCM, their first partnerships outside of their own community were focused on leveraging resources for mutual assistance to Oromo refugees. This expanded to include participation in the New Americans project initiated by the Wilder Foundation, bringing a diversity of new immigrants together around common interests. And most recently, OCM has partnered with Seward Redesign to negotiate a purchase agreement for the site of their future community center and office.

Recommendations to the West Bank CDC

The recommendations for a process to engage the Oromo community in neighborhood planning and to bridge the relationships among the Oromo community and other neighborhood stakeholders are provided below. Most recommendations are not reserved solely for Oromo community engagement. Rather, they move the WBCDC and other organizations in the direction of

strong multicultural coalition building for community development purposes. Options are provided for the WBCDC to focus on four core objectives, which include, 1) increasing cultural competence, 2) bridging social capital, 3) expanding capacity for community development, and 4) increasing multicultural collective action on community issues.

1. Increasing Cultural Competence

A number of steps can be taken by the WBCDC and those interested in multicultural coalition building to increase cultural competence. First, creating safe spaces for informal dialogue and cross cultural learning, absent of any community action agenda, can go a long way in building relationships and developing cultural competence. Generally, creating safe spaces takes an intentional strategy and can't be left to chance (Forester, 2000). Important considerations in creating safe spaces including 1) choosing the right setting, 2) inviting stakeholders, and 3) developing a process in which consideration is given to power dynamics and an aim for equity among people. Depending on the skills and comfort level of the people involved, it may be beneficial to engage an outside facilitator to provide some training on reflective listening processes, and lead a dialogue in a group setting.

One option for creating a safe space is to host a cultural dialogue with the Oromo community at which people break into small groups or pairs for dialogue around a common set of questions that explore cultural identity. Subsequent cultural dialogues could be hosted quarterly, focusing on a different culture at each. If preferred, each quarterly dialogue could be inclusive of all cultures rather than focus on one culture in particular. Another option is to incorporate the theme of cross cultural relationship building into the annual meeting of the WBCDC. The agenda could include time for attendees to meet with someone they don't know for a short discussion, say 20 minutes, on a set of questions. If this strategy is utilized, the agenda should also include time for group sharing to encourage learning and reflection by all who attend.



Communities have come up with many creative ways to explore self-identity while also discovering the power in the stories of others. Events

can incorporate various forms of expression to symbolize cultural competence and respect in a multicultural setting, honoring the human spirit. Examples include oral or written storytelling, art, multimedia, tree planting...the possibilities are endless. The WBCDC has organized multicultural events in the past with great success. The event pictured to the left, which celebrated the

unveiling of the Dania site memorial pillar is one example. An intentional and ongoing focus on using events to create cultural competence and build relationships would increase the organization's ability to bridge social capital and move multicultural community development initiatives forward.

The growing attention on multiculturalism and cultural competence has also meant many resources are available locally that provide opportunities for learning and dialogue. Just to name a few, the Science Museum of Minnesota has developed a series of RACE Speaker's Forums; Intermedia Arts presents *Talking Suitcases* which includes participatory workshops on what you would take with you if you had to leave today with one suit case; and the YWCA has trained facilitators who lead Undoing Racism workshops. The WBCDC can take advantage of these opportunities by organizing group participation in them as they become available. A commitment to identify at least one opportunity a year in which to participate is recommended.

2. Bridging social capital

The WBCDC has initiated the bridging of social capital with the creation of the Dania Partners roundtable. Given the organization's longevity, community development history, and experienced staff who have their fingers on the pulse of neighborhood activity, they are in a good position to expand this focus. Building on the foundation of increased cultural competence, one way the WBCDC can bridge social capital is by initiating an outreach strategy. Each WBCDC Board and staff member could conduct at least 5 one-to-one conversations with community leaders from cultures other than their own within a designated period of time. The concentration of these conversations would be on learning the histories, interests, connections and resources each brings to their neighborhood relationships and identifying areas of common interests. At the completion of the interview timeline, all who participated would be invited to an event to celebrate and summarize the potential areas of mutual interest for working together in the future. The best scenario would include a commitment to maintain these new relationships over time while pursuing projects of mutual interest/benefit.

The WBCDC has recently launched an information sharing web site regarding current Cedar-Riverside community development initiatives. Positioning the organization as a center for networking and sharing of information relevant to all who live and work in the neighborhood can be

expanded. As mentioned earlier, the Oromo community has significant community events that serve as opportunities for learning and networking. However, these events are almost solely known to and attended by Oromo's. The WBCDC could expand the exchange of information and help the Oromo and other groups in the neighborhood by publicizing their events, sharing relevant news, broadcasting opportunities for networking on common

interests, and encouraging broader participation in a multicultural context. The WBCDC has the technical capacity to offer this as a service to bridge social capital. Culturally specific organizations in the neighborhood have the language proficiency to ensure information is available in the primary languages spoken in the neighborhood, thus enhancing a partnership that recognizes the strengths and assets contributed by all stakeholders. Cedar-Riverside residents could access the information exchange through the internet, but also through postings around the neighborhood and the distribution of flyers.

Yet another option for bridging social capital in the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood is by employing an asset mapping strategy. Asset mapping, as developed by Kretzmann and McKnight (1993) can take many forms. Applying the concept to the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood, the WBCDC and other organizations could begin with a specific process to build relationships and identify assets among their Board and staff leadership. The Oromo community is about to embark on an asset mapping project with other organizations in the New Americans initiative, so extending this effort at the neighborhood level may be an efficient use of time and energy. Such a project would include joint training for each organization's leadership and a facilitator to assist in the mapping process. The project would conclude with a formal way of acknowledging and potentially sharing assets among the organizations for community development purposes. Asset mapping in this context could also incorporate evaluation methods to document increases in social capital achieved through the project.

3. Expanding Capacity for Community Development

Research conducted by Catherine Fernandez (2003) has demonstrated that community organizations most successful in partnering with new immigrants for community development have continually self-assessed their technical and organizational capacity to meet the interests of their ever changing constituency. The WBCDC could incorporate self-assessment in relation to the broader community into strategic planning processes. This would allow the WBCDC to be proactive in setting goals and determining their future role in the neighborhood. Such a process would include the Oromo community and others in providing feedback to the WBCDC about community development roles, rather than only including internal stakeholders in an assessment. The key here is for the WBCDC to be open to new directions,

focused on present and future neighborhood dynamics, instead of holding on to historical roles and tensions that can get in the way of proactive development.

As the Oromo and other new immigrants realize their full potential and expand their work beyond direct service to new arrivals, the prospects of community development become more appealing. Likewise, their participation is in high demand by neighborhood organizations who sincerely want to ensure all subgroups of the community are represented in decision making. Without an intentional effort to create equity and develop capacity, issues such as structural racism and tokenism in the community development arena are very difficult to move beyond. Assisting new immigrants in capacity building, at the same time as the WBCDC expands cultural competence among staff and board members, results in all having a role in creating equity.

The West Bank CDC can partner with the Oromo community and others by assisting in the development of their capacity. One way to invest in the community development future of new immigrants, so to speak, is by designing internship and work study opportunities in partnership with post-secondary educational institutions and ethnic-based organizations in the neighborhood. This provides a chance to mentor and pass on the knowledge about community development to the next generation, which is very important to the Oromo community. It also provides the CDC with human resources to broaden their impact in the neighborhood. Another method is to utilize a leadership development strategy, in which the WBCDC invests in and provides technical assistance to the leadership of new immigrant communities in the neighborhood by offering a leadership training series on community development techniques.

4. *Strengthening multicultural collective action*

As previously mentioned, the WBCDC has already initiated multicultural coalition building with a focus on the development of the Dania Hall site. The challenge around this is two-fold. First, planning for community development projects is usually a long term process, in which progress is slow and hard to measure. At best, such a strategy may be implemented in four or five years, however it's not unusual for neighborhoods to create a vision that takes ten to twenty plus years before coming to fruition. Keeping people motivated toward a common vision with little pay back in the short term is a challenge.

Second, while the Oromo Community of Minnesota and other organizations have committed to a partnership around the redevelopment of Dania Hall, many also recognize the limitations of the site (i.e. lot size and limited parking) as a future gathering place for the neighborhood. Due to the dynamic energy of the neighborhood and external forces of change that are concurrently pushing forward, there is a sense of immediacy for action on

more pressing issues. A narrow focus on the Dania Hall site could prove to actually diminish the ability of the WBCDC to act as a catalyst for multicultural community development, and ultimately weaken the impact of the organization overall.

These challenges call for an approach to multicultural community development that incorporates organizing around short term neighborhood issues. Immediate outcomes can be achieved and celebrated, at the same time that long term goals are pursued. The WBCDC is aware of the pressing issues in the neighborhood related to light rail transit, youth, land use, access to public spaces, future housing development, and public safety. The need for expansion and rehabilitation of the Brian Coyle Center is also of utmost importance. While the CDC is in the initial stages of bringing people together around a couple of these issues, a more disciplined strategy could be developed, incorporating clear outcomes that leverage significant resources for the community. Successfully addressing any issues in a multicultural context needs to ensure that 1) the goals meet the interests of all parties, 2) all parties are coming to the table with a sense of equity and shared responsibility, and 3) public action is taken in the short term that produces measurable results. As a bench mark, the WBCDC and coalition partners should incorporate public action with specific goals and outcomes on no less than a quarterly basis.

This is easier said than done. As the Applied Research Center (2002) noted in *Mapping the Immigrant Infrastructure*, "...Organizations that consciously build issue-based solidarity between immigrants and established residents are still the exception rather than the rule." Yet, the WBCDC and immigrant groups are in a unique position to follow through as a multicultural coalition, especially given the progress made so far.

Moving forward with a community organizing strategy will be most successful if resources can be leveraged to employ skilled organizers with cultural and language competencies. This is also easier said than done. Nevertheless, the WBCDC and Dania Partners have already begun a joint fundraising strategy to support planning for redevelopment of the site as well as other development along Cedar Avenue, so the prospect of a joint fundraising strategy for community organizing on a broader scale is not a big leap. While public and private funding sources tend to limit resources that go towards community organizing strategies, an aggressive fundraising plan can still successfully leverage the needed resources to employ community organizing staff.

Still another reason for a joint community organizing strategy, as expressed by the Oromo Community of Minnesota, is the potential for shared

benefits through outreach and relationship building among community members. For instance, the OCM lacks the resources to conduct outreach on an ongoing basis to Oromo's living in the neighborhood. This gap could be filled by a skilled community organizer who intentionally would link Oromo's with whom they meet to the OCM as well as to other joint endeavors in the neighborhood. Such outreach would focus on surfacing the hidden or informal leaders in the neighborhood and continually bring new energy to organizational initiatives. The same principal of outreach and linkages can be applied to other organizations in the neighborhood.

Conclusion

The Oromo community brings many assets to the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood and welcomes partnerships with enthusiasm, as long as they are a fit with their strategic goals and interests. All immigrant communities who have moved here over time carry with them a rich history and vibrancy, as does the Oromo community. The WBCDC and longer term residents have much to contribute to partnerships with their new neighbors also. The WBCDC, in relation to the Oromo community and other stakeholders, has already initiated a number of projects around which all can potentially unite. The missing element has been an intentional effort to learn about and discover each other's strengths in a multicultural context to deepen relationships and then pursue concrete outcomes to address issues and successfully leverage resources for community development purposes.

The recommendations in this report lay out objectives that will take the Oromo community, the WBCDC and other partner organizations to the next level of successful multicultural community development. A number of action steps are proposed, giving the CDC and stakeholders the opportunity to choose the best fit from a set of options. It is hoped that the ideas presented here spur discussion among CDC Board, staff and partners about opportunities, which may result in the identification of other creative options for strengthening multicultural community development.

Appendix A: Author Interviews

All interviews were conducted between September 1 and December 28, 2006.

Hashi Abdi
Director
Somali Action Alliance

Alemayehu Baisa
Executive Director
Oromo Community of MN

Hawi Baisa
President
U of M Oromo Student Union

Bizuwork Balla
Professor of History

Edao Dawano
President
Oromia Youth Association

Amano Dube
Self Sufficiency Coordinator
Brian Coyle Center, P.U.C.

Tim Mungaven
Executive Director
West Bank CDC

Abshiro Said
Parent and resident
Cedar-Riverside
Neighborhood

Amina Saleh
Community Organizer
Family & Children's Service

Hussein Samatar
Executive Director
African Development Center

Ali Tahiro
Refugee Services Officer

Teshite Wako
Comptroller

Oromo Community of MN

Neighborhood Dev. Center
Treasurer, OCM Board

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