

# Uniting community development efforts could benefit members of underserved communities

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Research shows that wealth inequality creates barriers to community development, due to the widespread effects of poverty. A report by the United Nations Children's Fund shows that more than one in five children in the United States falls below the poverty line. Although many organizations address poverty, they often serve similar demographics and may compete for clients and resources. Recently, University of Missouri researchers studied Cooperative Extension's efforts to link community development organizations and concluded Extension is the hub that can improve resource access for members of underserved communities.

"Many organizations promote community welfare, but they rarely pool resources," said Wilson Majee, an assistant professor of health sciences in the MU School of Health Professions. "Extension is the ideal hub for community development efforts because of its network of connections to [local communities](#) and other aid organizations. Community development helps citizens tap into resources and local strengths, and working in isolation defeats the core purpose of these groups."

Cooperative Extension partners with industry specialists and local, state and federal organizations to deliver relevant research-based knowledge to community members. Extension is present in every state and most counties across the country, with main branches housed in states' land-grant research universities. Extension specialists provide community members with information on a range of topics, such as agriculture,

business, nutrition, emergency management and parenting.

"Extension is a cooperative effort by land-grant universities throughout the United States to build strong communities by providing information to help individuals understand change, solve problems and make informed decisions about their lives," Majee said. "It is much like an extended arm of universities, connecting community members with university experts. Extension is a one-stop shop for local communities because it offers services and information that can benefit individuals of all backgrounds, from farmers to urban business owners."

Majee said that input from individuals is necessary for effective community development because residents are best-suited to identify realistic strategies for addressing their communities' concerns.

"Collaboration and individual empowerment are keys to addressing most of the issues faced at the local level, such as housing and job creation. This empowerment comes from providing residents with opportunities to influence what goes on in their neighborhoods," said Majee. "Each community faces different issues. Extension engages [community members](#) in planning and then brings research back to the communities to address those specific concerns."

Provided by University of Missouri-Columbia

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