

## **Southern Rural Black Women's Initiative for Economic and Social Justice**

*"Women in my part of the United States still suffer a spectrum of indignities. Many lack affordable, humanely habitable housing and access to jobs paying a fair wage and retirement benefits. Many of them have no health insurance and no proximity to hospitals. For those who manage to make it onto some company's payroll, workplace harassment can be a major problem. And the further back into the woods one travels, women's circumstances seem that much worse."*

--- L. C. Dorsey, a Mississippi woman who came off a cotton plantation in the 1960s to participate in the civil rights movement and continues the struggle today as a regional and Mississippi state advisor for SRBWI.

The Southern Rural Black Women's Initiative for Economic and Social Justice (SRBWI), organizes grassroots women in the impoverished, former plantation areas of Mississippi, Alabama and Georgia to incubate businesses, build networks of leaders and advocate for public policies that help families and communities.

Founded in 2001, administered by CDF-SRO and financed by private foundations and individual donations, SRBWI has convened more than 1,000 women in 77 persistently poor counties to collaborate in creating and pursuing solutions to poverty and injustice, increasing control over their own lives and participating in economic development activities.

SRBWI uses the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights as a framework to tie participants and their communities to the international human rights movement in a way that is unprecedented in the United States. This focus also exposes the barriers of race, class and power that trap southern rural black women and their children in poverty. Working with women in local communities, SRBWI has adopted the following approaches to changing lives and prospects:

- **Human Capacity Building.** SRBWI's regional and state organizations regularly convene women, ranging in age from 13 to their 80's, to receive skills building and leadership training, connect to resources and develop intergenerational ties. Among the gatherings are advocacy and public policy training sessions at the annual CDF Proctor Institute ([www.childrensdefense.org/proctor](http://www.childrensdefense.org/proctor)) held each summer in Tennessee and use of the "More is Caught than Taught" training, developed by Alabama state partner FOCAL, to combat internalized oppression and enable women to "vision" and speak for themselves.
- **Advocacy and Public Policy through Mayor's Commissions on Human Rights.** Six Mayor's Commissions across Alabama, Georgia and Mississippi are made up of women from local communities and are led by black women elected officials. Their role is to educate women to understand that homelessness, inadequate education, lack of gainful employment and health care are human rights violations. The commissions meet regularly and receive training in public policy advocacy to change these conditions.
- **Lifting Women out of Poverty: Asset Development for Southern Rural Black Women.** Women's groups in local communities are creating income-producing, community-asset development projects, ranging from a regional sewing cooperative to a transportation company. SRBWI is also working to extend allied healthcare training in Mississippi to rural black women and to assist women in producing and marketing specialty crops and foods across the region.
- **Young Women's Leadership Development.** SRBWI sponsors a leadership institute for 85 young black women and their mentors each year. They are then integrated into the organization's work in their home counties.

For more information and contacts go to [www.srbwi.org](http://www.srbwi.org).



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