

## *Lifting Women out of Poverty:* **Asset Development for Southern Rural Black Women**

Women living in the impoverished rural areas of Alabama, Georgia and Mississippi are not faring well in the current labor market and are poorly positioned to adapt to future economic challenges. Lack of economic opportunity, quality education and training, limited child care, and persistent racial inequality remain huge obstacles. In a survey of rural black women, 80 percent identified unemployment as a problem.



**Children's Defense Fund**

SRBWI's approach to lifting women out of poverty focuses on building skills, cooperative networks, and local and regional businesses in sectors with demonstrated growth potential rather than relying on traditional economic development practices, such as attracting industry, that have left many rural women behind. Sector initiatives include:

- **A Worker Owned Sewing Company** Women, many of them long-time garment workers who lost their jobs to industry globalization, are setting up a regional sewing company across Alabama, Georgia and Mississippi that they will own and operate. They are now busy designing a collection of Authentic and Hand-Crafted Home Décor, Personal Accessories and Gifts unique to the South through their cultural and social inspirations.
- **A Women's Value Added Agricultural Network** coordinates training and networking activities to assist women in producing and marketing specialty crops and foods. The network is also focused on improving community access to fresh, quality, affordable produce. Licensed commercial kitchens equipped for catering and commercial food preparation are being developed in the three SRBWI states.
- **Workforce Development Initiative in Allied Health Care** SRBWI is working with Mississippi community colleges to extend training programs in the allied healthcare professions. The project seeks to develop marketable skills and career pathways for unemployed or underemployed rural black women in a sector that offers livable wages and reliable employment.
- **Local Projects** SRBWI staff and consultants are working with local women's groups to develop income producing, community asset development projects from the Women on the Move transportation company in Mississippi to the Southern Alternatives worker-owned pecan processing cooperative in Georgia.
- **A Cultural Heritage Corridor** SRBWI is developing six cultural heritage sites as part of its Corridor (two in each state). One Hall of Fame site has been identified in each state and is being planned to house inductee exhibits and a digital film archive, including films produced by the young women in SRBWI "New Visions" digital filmmaking training program. State Halls of Fame will employ local women and sell their products. A traveling exhibit of 2005 Inductees entitled "Just Stand Any How!" will begin touring this spring.
- **Financial and Technical Assistance and Training** is made available through SRBWI staff, consultants, community based partners and SRBWI's Seed Grant Fund.

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