

# People Helping People

An Assessment of the  
Market Towns and Related Initiatives,  
and the  
Extent to Which They Addressed  
Rural Poverty  
(Volume 1 of 2)

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**I certify that all material in this thesis which is not my own work has been identified and that no material has previously been submitted and approved for the award of a degree by this or any other university.**

**Signed: .....**

# Abstract

This study evaluates, by means of face to face interviews and a postal survey, aspects of the Market Towns Initiative (MTI), the Beacon Towns Programme (BTP), and related programmes of community-led work, the majority of which arose from the British Government's Rural White Paper of 2000. Particular emphasis is placed on: participants' experiences, achievements and opinions about the programmes; their understanding of rural poverty; the extent to which they thought that the programmes should have had poverty alleviation as an aim, and to which they believed that the programmes had helped to identify and address rural poverty.

A review of the literature relating to rural policy reveals that political interest (and, therefore, policymakers' interest) in the functions of England's country – "market" – towns, and their place in the settlement hierarchy, has waxed and waned since the Second World War. During this period the nature of government, in particular the balance between the various tiers, has tilted in favour of central government. Consequently, the powers available to County and District/Borough Councils, if not Town/Parish Councils, have reduced. Central government has increasingly looked to partnerships formed from public, voluntary, and private sector organizations to implement policy. It is **governance**, therefore, rather than **government**, that has grown in importance in recent years. The MTI/BT programmes were both designed for implementation by broad-based partnerships of professionals and volunteers.

The literature also reveals that the post-war period has seen research into poverty become increasingly nuanced and sophisticated, with definitions moving away from the relatively simple to understand (eg lack of money) to more complicated notions of disadvantage, deprivation, and social exclusion. The factors that affect rural poverty have, since the 1970s, been remarkably constant (eg access to services, affordable housing, low income self-employment). The problems of rural poverty have not been solved.

It is argued, based on the results of the data acquired from this research, that community-led development programmes such as the MTI/BTP, have the potential to inform the development of policy and practice relating to community-led development and poverty alleviation, to add to the body of knowledge about rural poverty, and to improve the overall understanding of the functions of England's small towns. Despite the potential of partnerships to effect change, the important role of local authorities as democratically accountable organizations, and contributors to partnerships' success and effectiveness, is noted.

# **Acknowledgements And Dedication**

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