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Southern Rural Black Women's Initiative launches groundbreaking report on extreme barriers, hardships faced by Black women in rural South

Former Obama appointee Shirley Sherrod says report data "shines a long overdue spotlight on the inequalities and resulting injustices Black women face on a daily basis"

ALBANY, Ga. — Today, the Southern Rural Black Women's Initiative (SRBWI) released startling new findings, revealing that on nearly every social indicator of well-being — from income and earnings to obesity and food security — Black women, girls and children in the rural South rank low or last. SRBWI, works in 77 rural counties of the South's "Black Belt," some of the most neglected regions in the U.S.

"We hope to shine a long overdue spotlight on the inequalities and resulting injustices Black women face on a daily basis as they work to obtain full economic security and to create a better life and future for their families," said former Obama appointee Shirley Sherrod, the former Georgia state director of Rural Development for the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Report data reflect findings from nine rural counties throughout Alabama, Georgia, and Mississippi in six main issue areas that shape the lives of women and families, including: poverty, income and employment, education, health, public infrastructure and housing. It provides never-before-seen baseline quantitative and qualitative data on the economic, social, and health status of Black women and families in the rural South.

Key findings include:

- In the rural South, more than 1 in 4 children and nearly as many women live in poverty; the poverty rate is more than double for African-Americans and Latinos compared to their white counterparts.
- In rural Georgia, Alabama and Mississippi, white women were four times more likely to be employed and Black women earned nearly one-third less than white women.

- In Clay County, Georgia, 36 percent of Black women had less than a high school diploma compared to 8 percent of white women.
- Nearly 80 percent of the 4.8 million uninsured U.S. adults who fall into the coverage gap that would be alleviated by Medicaid expansion live in the South.
- In Georgia, the teen pregnancy rate in rural counties was more than double the state rate, and the teen birth rate was at least 20 percent higher.
- Of the 19 million Americans without broadband Internet access, 14.5 million live in rural counties.
- In 2012, of the \$4.8 billion philanthropic investments allocated to the South, just 5.4 percent went to programs focused on women and girls and less than 1 percent to programs focused on Black women and girls.

“Today’s report should be a call to philanthropists, foundations, and our government to infuse critical resources into communities to build the long-term economic security and well-being of low-income Black women, children and families in the rural South,” said C. Nicole Mason, report author and executive director of the Center for Research and Policy in the Public Interest.

Report data also outline challenges to mobility or migration for these populations within the rural South. As these communities are hollowed out by loss of jobs, industries and vital services, the families and individuals left behind have fewer resources, more medical issues, lower levels of educational attainment, caretaking responsibilities or other barriers. These factors make it nearly impossible to migrate to another town or metropolitan area.

Report data are punctuated by compelling personal stories, outlining the effects of these conditions on the lives of real women and families. For example, Callie Greer described the loss of her twenty-year-old daughter Venus to breast cancer. Without insurance, Venus’ access to care was an uphill battle with treatment severely delayed. She waited more than five months to receive care and then several more weeks for medicine and medical equipment. Soon afterward, the cancer spread throughout her body and she succumbed to the disease. Women in the rural South are more likely to delay care and access to medical treatment due to costs. Lack of access to transportation is also an issue that impedes access to health care. Less than one-half of rural women live within a 30-minute drive to the nearest hospital or clinic offering perinatal services or other necessary medical services.

In the report’s foreword, Obama appointee Christopher A. Masingill, the federal co-chair of the Delta Regional Authority, said report data “will help decision makers, local officials, and community members craft the policies and programs that will address the infrastructure, access, and services rural black women and impoverished families across the South need to live healthy lifestyles, pursue a quality education and make a better life for their children.”

The Southern Rural Black Women’s Initiative (SRBWI) is administered by the Children’s Defense Fund Southern Regional Office (CDF/ SRO) and serves as regional administrator and state lead for program activities in Mississippi. The Federation of Community Controlled Child Care Centers of Alabama (FOCAL) is SRBWI state lead in Alabama, and the Southwest Georgia Project for Community Education leads work in Georgia.

To access the full report, click [here](#).

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[The Southern Rural Black Women's Initiative](#) (SRBWI) is the nation's foremost voice on the issues and concerns of low-income women and families in the deep and rural south. SRBWI works in 77 rural counties in the Black Belt of Alabama and Georgia, and the Delta of Mississippi, many of which are among the most neglected regions in the nation. For over a decade, the Initiative has helped bring resources to rural communities, harness the leadership of thousands of women and girls, and advance legislation and policies at the local, state and federal levels to improve the long-term economic outcomes for women, children and families.

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The [Children's Defense Fund](#) Leave No Child Behind® mission is to ensure every child a *Healthy Start*, a *Head Start*, a *Fair Start*, a *Safe Start* and a *Moral Start* in life and successful passage to adulthood with the help of caring families and communities.