



Reclaiming Our Humanity

by

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Preface

This paper is the first step in the process of articulating a social vision for Canada. It is a background document intended as a springboard for discussion at a meeting of voluntary sector leaders held in Mont Tremblant, Quebec, in November 2001.

This vision for social development seeks to inspire both head and heart. It sets out the relevant events of the past and spells out our hopes for the future. Filling in the next steps – how to get there – is the next step in this process. These will be outlined in a subsequent document to be issued by voluntary sector leaders.

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Less is More

The well-being of nations has become a numbers game. What is important is what we count – how much we produce and consume – as though production and consumption equal well-being.

‘More’ is the typical economic answer to an improved standard of living. More production. More consumption. More efficiency. Higher quality apparently derives from higher quantity. More and faster have become the tired, but not necessarily tried and true, solutions to a better life.

Our answer? Less is more.

We do not oppose economic growth. Only a vibrant and healthy economy can support crucial social investment. What we do seek is economic growth with social and moral limits, growth with intelligence, and growth with respect for the environment and for human well-being.

Clean and caring growth that pays attention to nature and nurture.

Nations throughout the world obsess with getting the economics right – putting the fiscal house in order through debt reduction and removing barriers to global trade. Fiscal health is essential. But not when it comes at the expense of social health. And it has.

Economics holds the trump card in the developed world. Although we pay lip service to the three-legged stool of sustainable development, the social and environmental legs run a distant second from the importance of the ‘economy.’

But human beings do not live in ‘economies.’ We live in families, in neighbourhoods, in communities, in cities and towns, and in nations [Pascal 2001].

A new vision is needed because the unrelenting pressure to use more, produce more and consume more cannot be sustained. We want to counter the heavy weight of the almighty dollar. We want to build a world in which caring for and about people is a priority.

We want to reclaim our humanity.

The Vision

The Canada of tomorrow? A nation of active citizens in vibrant communities. Communities which provide support. Which promote inclusion. Which encourage learning.

Vibrant communities ensure that basic needs are met. There is no family without a roof over its head. No child goes to school hungry. No person suffers from abuse or violence without having a safe place to go. No family lives as an island – without help and support when needed. Everyone has access to clean air and water.

Clean air and water are not the direct focus of this paper. But a healthy environment is understood implicitly as a foundation for social development. The Walkerton tragedy highlighted the need for high-quality public infrastructure – the amenities that benefit us all but are either invisible or simply taken for granted. Walkerton was about far more than the quality of water. It was about how we make public investments to promote and protect the quality of life [Torjman 2000b].

Inclusion means that all members of a community are able to participate to the best of their ability. Inclusive communities remove more than just physical barriers. They remove the fiscal obstacles to participation and seek to engage citizens in meaningful ways.

Learning is about the development of knowledge and skills at all ages and stages of life. Learning communities also engage members in resolving complex social, economic and environmental challenges.

Vibrant communities recognize the wide range of ingredients necessary for social development. They take steps to harness these resources in new and creative ways. They bring together the players who can effect change.

Vibrant communities can do a lot. They can nurture well-being, promote healthy economics and protect the environment – but only up to a point. They cannot do it all. And they cannot act alone.

Communities form part of a nation, an entity far greater than its constituent components. A thousand points of light together may create a strong shining star. But it first takes a bright shining star to shed light over a nation. Communities need guidance by strong government with clear vision. Strong government creates the context that both makes – and makes possible – substantial investment in social, economic and environmental well-being.

But while strong government is essential, it is not sufficient. Vibrant communities know this well. Power and passion come not from government but from citizens and groups that operate outside government. Communities are driven not by organizations that exist by law but by organizations that exist by commitment – because people want and support them.

This vision for reclaiming our humanity seeks three ends: to be on the table, to be at the table and to turn the tables.

First, we seek to ensure that the environment and social well-being are *on the table* as issues equally important and intrinsic to economic growth. And we would like to see the federal government act like a government. It should provide vision, leadership, exemplary behaviour and investment in key social areas like child development, skills and learning, affordable housing and inclusion of all citizens in the social and economic mainstream. Ottawa should actively promote the creation of healthy cities and vibrant communities rather than justify inaction on the basis of tired constitutional, we-can't-go-there excuses.

Second, we want to be *at the table*. We want to be a full partner in discussions and in work undertaken to pursue a social development agenda. In fact, it is not only the voluntary sector that should have a seat at the table with governments – business, labour, educational institutions and First Nations should be included as well.

Third, we wish to *turn the tables* to ensure that communities can lead from a position of strength. They must be at the forefront of ensuring support, inclusion and learning.

This vision of being on the table, at the table and turning the table is far more than an intellectual exercise. It also is shaped by our hearts – and by strong, clear values to which we are deeply committed.

Values

Canadians value democracy, social justice and inclusion

As citizens who live in a strong democracy, Canadians value freedom and our ability to make choices. But while most Canadians are free to make choices, many cannot. Or at least their choices are different from most. They must decide between feeding the kids and paying the rent [Hurtig 1999]. They can choose to upgrade skills or buy a heater for the winter – but they cannot do both. This social development vision seeks a society that promotes equity and diversity.

Canadian values have been expressed in many different ways. One articulation is found in the Voluntary Sector Initiative, described below, which has developed a model accord to guide its work with the federal government and other sectors. The accord is rooted in a commitment to the shared values of democracy, active citizenship, social justice and inclusion.

Democratic values lie at the heart of what Canadians do as individuals and together as a nation. These are the values that uphold the right of individuals to associate freely with one another in pursuit of a common purpose, recognizing that freedom of expression and advocacy are integral to democracy.

Active citizenship is another important value. It acknowledges the worth derived from Canadians expressing their sense of responsibility to each other by becoming engaged in civic matters, whether through political and/or voluntary activity.

Social justice seeks to close the gaping gaps between rich and poor, and to remove the disparities in treatment between those with resources and those without; between those who are ‘in’ and those on the margins of society. Social justice involves a respect for the Canadian *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* and the rights of individuals throughout the world as defined by the *United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights*.

Inclusion involves recognition of and respect for diversity. It also entails the right to speak and be heard – and to partake in all aspects of Canadian society. It means that all citizens have the opportunity – and believe that they have the opportunity – to participate in society.

In addition to these formal statements, Canadian values have been captured in other ways. Public opinion polls are just one example. Several national polls conducted throughout the 1990s found consistent strong support for human concerns and investment in social programs.

In fact, a national profile of values was developed through a time-series of polling data drawn from 18 public opinion databases. The profile determined that Canadians generally value self-reliance but, at the same time, acknowledge the importance of compassion leading to collective responsibility. Canadians also support social investment, especially in the next generation, while recognizing the need for fiscal responsibility [Peters 1995: 5].

The polling data found as well that most Canadians view social programs as vital and have been uncomfortable, at least in the past, with the idea of reducing spending on them. While opinions vary by age, region and income, polls generally noted that programs such as health care, education, Unemployment Insurance (renamed Employment Insurance in 1996) and Old Age Security are considered an essential part of Canada’s social fabric [Peters 1995: 8]. But not all Canadians hold this view; a high-income elite group sampled on this issue suggests a sharp divide with the general public.

In the past few years, health care has ranked consistently as the top-of-list polling item [Ekos Research Associates 1999]. Education and child poverty ranked as second and third priorities, respectively, ahead of improving economic activity, cutting the national debt, tax cuts and national unity. When asked where the federal government should place its emphasis in planning its budget for the following year, 55 percent of Canadians replied that investing in social programs, like health and education, should rank at the top. Debt reduction and some personal income tax cuts were identified by 24 and 19 percent of respondents, respectively.

The globalization of terror, embodied by the events of recent weeks, not surprisingly has shifted Canadians' priorities. A check of the nation's pulse found strong support for investment in security and improved defence. In a recent poll, 77 percent of Canadians reported that they had been deeply and permanently affected by the events of September 11 [Ekos Research Associates 2001].

Most believed that Canada should raise spending on defence even if it means a tax increase. It is unknown at this point whether this penchant will be short lived or whether the focus on security will become the new 'normal.' The post-September-11-syndrome may affect the Canadian psyche for some time to come. Certainly, the support for military spending stands in sharp contrast to the many polls of the last decade that likely paint a more balanced picture of Canadian values.

But a note of caution is in order. Public opinion polls are important because they track the pulse of the nation. They help politicians and policy-makers keep their ear to the ground.

At the same time, an inordinate reliance on polling can create problems. The concerns of marginalized Canadians – for disability supports, shelters for the homeless and protection from violence – typically do not make the list of 'preferred' issues. They are rarely among the areas for top billing. Public 'pollicy' can be dangerous if it continually keeps these key issues off the radar screen [Torjman 1998c]. Because of the complexity of social issues, it is necessary to move beyond polling and consultation to the active engagement of citizens, discussed below.

Human rights are an expression of values

We express our values not only through what we say and do. Values are embedded in our national identity through the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* that comprises part of the Canadian Constitution. Values also are rooted in the international covenants that this country has signed.

Canada has committed itself to a definition of rights by signing and ratifying a series of international covenants, including the UN *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948), the

International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966) and the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* (1966). These three instruments comprise the *International Bill of Rights*; they define and establish basic human rights and fundamental freedoms. These instruments also form the foundation for more than 50 additional United Nations human rights conventions, declarations and principles [Osberg 2001].

Through their signatures, nations accept responsibility to fulfill the obligations set out in these covenants. State parties voluntarily bind themselves to bring national legislation, policy and practice into line with these obligations. “By ratifying these and other binding texts, states become accountable to their citizens and to the international community at large by solemnly committing themselves to respect and ensure the rights and freedoms found in these documents” [Osberg 2001].

Article 25 within the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* gives everyone the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care, and necessary social services. At least 12 different texts adopted and proclaimed by the United Nations explicitly recognize the right to adequate housing alone [Osberg 2001].

The protections afforded under the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* are especially relevant to social development. Article 11, in particular, recognizes the right of all citizens to a decent standard of living, including adequate food, clothing and housing, and to the continuous improvement of living conditions. Article 12 specifies the right of everyone to enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health. Article 13 recognizes the right of all to education.

These articles set clear obligations on governments to ensure that these human rights are met. Unfortunately, the poverty statistics and the numbers of homeless people lining far too many Canadian streets provide stark evidence of a job not yet done. There is something wrong when the realities of the country do not match the ideals to which it has – on paper at least – made a formal commitment.

But there are more to citizenship rights than the rights of citizens. *Rights confer a responsibility*: to make contributions that reinforce and enhance the entitlements embedded in national law and international accords. Citizenship involves a give and take. The social development challenge is to engage those contributions in the service of both individual well-being and the larger public good.

The Context

Communities need a solid foundation on which to build. But this foundation has been anything but stable in recent years.

Societal Context

Social programs emerge from the ravages of the Depression

The voluntary sector looked after community needs long before governments became involved. In the 19th and well into the 20th centuries, family and private forms of assistance were the basic channels of help for individuals and families faced with loss of income or other problems. In Quebec, churches and religious organizations were the primary deliverers of health and social services, providing food, shelter and comfort to the sick and those in need.

“In the 1920s in Canada, a head of a household who found himself unemployed and unable to secure another job would be expected to meet his living expenses by drawing on his savings, seeking help from relatives or having recourse to some agency in the private market – a bank, finance company or pawn shop – or by prevailing upon his creditors to carry him until he was able to meet his commitments. If these normal avenues of help were not available, he would be forced to apply to his municipality for aid. More often than not, he would be referred to some charitable agency for temporary help, as municipal departments of public assistance were the exception rather than the rule in the 1920s” [Guest 1985: 1].

In the early 1900s, Canada was marked by the proliferation of private charities, often organized around religious or ethnic loyalties [Guest 1985: 14]. Organizations in the voluntary sector were involved in protecting abused and neglected children, assisting the unemployed or persons with disabilities, and providing nursing care to the sick and elderly.

The public role did not really take hold until after the ravages of the Depression – through the collective promise of ‘never again.’ Much of the thinking that shaped current social programs in Canada evolved in the postwar reconstruction era. The period was marked by three major influences. First, the depth of the Depression steeled the determination to ensure that its hardship never was repeated. Social programs grew out of the economic devastation and social despair of the Great Depression and wartime national mobilization. Second, the economy grew dramatically in the postwar period due primarily to technological and industrial advancement. Third, Keynesian thinking strongly influenced government involvement in the economy [Battle and Torjman 1995b].

The convergence of these forces vastly expanded the role of the state in the economy and resulted in a substantial investment in social programs. A national system of social security evolved in Canada in the years following the Second World War. The various programs that comprised the social security system were an antidote to the hunger and deprivation that pervaded the country in the 1930s. The major social programs that comprised the foundation of the welfare state – family allowances, Unemployment Insurance, Old Age Security, the Canada/Quebec Pension Plan, Canada Assistance Plan, Hospital Insurance and Diagnostic Services Act, and subsequent Medical Care Act – were introduced at a time of relative economic prosperity from the 1940s through the 1960s.

The model of social security that evolved in the postwar reconstruction period was based on the conviction that government has a legitimate and necessary role to play in altering the unequal distribution of income, goods and services in the marketplace. Industrialization brought increased prosperity. But the private market could not, on its own, eliminate the risks to income from unemployment, low wages, illness, disability and old age. These risks and insecurities could not be borne by individuals or private institutions alone. The state, through social programs, had a responsibility to protect and compensate its citizens from earnings loss and income inadequacy [Battle and Torjman 1995b].

Canada's federal government played an especially important role in the postwar period. A hard lesson of the Depression was that the existing social infrastructure was inadequate to meet the challenges posed by high unemployment. Charities as well as local and provincial governments simply did not have the resources to address widespread economic and social needs. Many municipalities went bankrupt trying to pay skyrocketing welfare costs.

The federal government played a major role in postwar reconstruction through both income redistribution and the provision of services. It helped redistribute market income and establish income security through direct transfers to families and a progressive income tax system. It provided essential services, such as health care and education, outside of the private market.

The mid-1960s to mid-1970s saw a major expansion of Canadian social programs – medicare, public pensions, greatly increased access to postsecondary education and a more generous Unemployment Insurance program. Earnings and spending on public programs increased during this period, and Canadians generally were prepared to pay a higher proportion of their incomes in taxes in exchange for greater security and improved public services. The terms of this trade-off worsened after the mid-1970s, when Canadians faced stagnating incomes and higher taxes were used not primarily for social programs but for the growing interest burden on government debt.

Restraint: The new social policy ‘reform’

By the late 1970s, Canada was facing major social and economic problems that increased prosperity and Keynesian economics could not entirely resolve. The country began to experience financial difficulties due to several factors: the impact of the oil shock, the indexation of the income tax system which cut into government revenues, and mounting social spending and debt financing costs. Deficits and debt resulted not only from rising social spending as a share of the economy but equally importantly from high interest rates, rising unemployment and slow economic growth. Mounting deficits and accumulating debt pushed Ottawa and the provinces to reduce public spending – especially in social areas – in the 1980s and 1990s.

The 1990s, in particular, saw two exhausting and dispiriting social security reviews. The first was the official Social Security Review announced by the federal Minister of Human Resources Development on January 31, 1994. It was billed as a comprehensive reform of social programs. This review proceeded with great fanfare – with Ministerial Task Force, Parliamentary Committee, background papers and the largest public consultation in the history of Canadian social policy – until it was stopped dead in its tracks by the second review undertaken by the federal Department of Finance.

In contrast to the first review that took place over 14 months, the Finance ‘social security review’ was swift and tough. There were no options or alternatives. There were no public hearings, background papers or debates. There was simply a matter-of-fact announcement in the February 1995 Budget of *fait accompli* changes that would have a profound impact on Canada’s social programs. The dismantling of the Canada Assistance Plan, discussed below, was the centerpiece of the reform.

Social policy ‘reform’ assumed the form of restraint as Ottawa managed to convince most Canadians that the deficit had to be vanquished no matter how bitter the medicine. Cutbacks to social programs and public sector downsizing were justified as part of rethinking government. The public sector was seen to have a less important role in promoting economic and social well-being than it did in the past.

It is unclear just how much thought went into this particular ‘rethink’ of government. But what is all too clear is the negative impact that the restructuring and cuts have had upon families and the services that support them. The results were unforeseen. Yet the effects are all too well seen and the picture is not pretty.

Canadians need social programs now just as much as they did in the past. The role that government plays in redistributing income through income taxes and transfers is crucial in narrowing the growing gap in market earnings between rich and poor Canadians – a gap that has been kept

in check only because of income security programs. Social programs provide the infrastructure central to Canada's economy and to our competitive advantage in the global economy.

But social programs have been the victim of more than the knife. They also have been the target of the war on words – in some ways, a more insidious foe. International newspeak began to shift social agendas away from so-called 'passive' programs, like income security and social services, to 'active' work-based programs that promote self-sufficiency and self-reliance. The pull-yourself-up-by-your-bootstraps mentality is based on a not-subtle assumption: Those who don't make it in this big world of opportunity are responsible for their own failure.

The roots of this view are embedded in 'tough love' philosophy. Tough love refers to the new (actually old) conventional wisdom shaping the design of social programs. The tough-love theme is one of the oldest in social policy history: The presence of relief will corrupt the moral character of the poor and dampen their incentive to work. It typically gets used in reference to welfare – the income program of last resort. The problem with tough love is that it is all too conventional but none too wise. Nor does it involve any love [Torjman 1998d].

A world-is-your-oyster mentality also has taken hold. And, indeed, the world of opportunity has grown – the result of rapid globalization. The concept of globalization, while much discussed, is not new. The movement of people and goods across borders has taken place for thousands of years. What is new – and therefore makes the phenomenon seem new – is the speed of change, hastened by technological innovation and direct government action to expand markets. International meetings seek the rapid liberalization of trade and investment.

The world also has become smaller as ideas, information, people, money and products move across borders. We know more about each other – and far more about what we don't know.

But globalization is a two-edged sword. On the one hand, it has generated new sources of wealth in many countries, which have seen an overall rise in living standards. It also has made clear the interconnections among nations and the interrelations of geography and climate. Many young people see themselves as global citizens and clearly want to have a say in international affairs. Seattle, Quebec City and Genoa were not just physical demonstrations – they were demonstrations of concern about the current and future state of the world.

At the same time, globalization has given rise to unprecedented disparities. It has encouraged a 'race to the bottom' in which a search for cheaper and leaner modes of production has stripped away millions of decent jobs [Korten 2001]. It has created social dislocation as a result of widespread unemployment and glaring inequalities of wealth – which, in turn, have led to problems of social cohesion and marginalization.

Also on the negative side of the ledger is the impact upon the economic sovereignty and decision-making powers of national governments. The integration of capital markets, for example, has made it more difficult for governments to carry out stabilization policies in conventional ways – i.e., using monetary and fiscal policies to steer domestic economies on a path that avoids recession and inflation. National governments have less control over domestic fiscal policy as billions of footloose (and untaxed) dollars travel around the globe every day.

Yet while there are downward pressures associated with globalization, it is far from clear that social spending is indeed a barrier to competitiveness in the new world economy. In fact, some countries have been quite economically successful in the 1990s while resisting the general trends toward cuts and greater inequality. Social investment has economic benefits as well as costs.

This general societal framework has been shaped by other relevant aspects of context. One of the most important is constitutional influence.

Constitutional Context

The division of powers is messy

Canada is a federated structure whose governance framework is set out in the *British North America (BNA) Act* of 1867. The framework was supplemented by the introduction of the *Constitution Act* in 1982. Under the BNA Act, the federal government is responsible for the “peace, order and good government of the country.” The Act confers a spending power that allows the federal government to make payments to individuals, institutions or other governments for purposes that Parliament does not necessarily have the power to regulate.

This interpretation means that the federal government has jurisdiction over areas that affect the well-being of the nation, including the armed forces, communications and international trade. More complex is the issue of income security, which basically became defined as a field in which both federal and provincial governments share an interest. From an area of virtual provincial dominance in the 1860s, income security emerged as an area of decisive federal dominance.

The transition to an industrial economy and the emergence of high unemployment in the Depression of the 1930s created a demand for income support that proved beyond the fiscal capacity of local governments. The scope of social problems facing the country and the pressure for greater action set off a series of federal responses.

The time was ripe for federal involvement – primarily because of the need for postwar rebuilding. The first stages of intervention came in the form of grants to provincial governments. A constitutional amendment was passed in 1940 to permit the federal government to become involved in the provision of Unemployment Insurance. Subsequent constitutional amendments allowed Ottawa to provide old age pensions in 1951 and survivor and disability benefits in 1964.

The federal government now has responsibility for the programs deemed to be social insurances – namely Employment Insurance and the Canada Pension Plan. Even here, the issue is not ‘neat’; the province of Quebec runs the twin Quebec Pension Plan and significant changes to the Canada Pension Plan require the agreement of a majority of provinces. Provincial governments administer workers’ compensation as well as last-resort social assistance (commonly known as ‘welfare’).

The federal government pays for and administers the Canada Child Tax Benefit. Ottawa is responsible as well for the delivery and costs of the three key elderly benefits: Old Age Security, the Guaranteed Income Supplement and the Spouse’s Allowance. And the federal government effects a significant redistribution of income through a progressive income tax system. It both collects revenues and distributes social benefits through refundable credits, nonrefundable credits and deductions.

Constitutional responsibility for health and welfare, by contrast, was accorded to the provinces. But the constitutional waters have been muddied through federal involvement in health, education, welfare and social services arising from its constitutional spending power.

Ottawa used to transfer money to the provinces for health and postsecondary education under a block-funded arrangement known as Established Programs Financing. Moreover, the federal government had (and continues to have) authority to enforce the conditions of medicare under the Canada Health Act and to withhold funds for contravention of its conditions. Ottawa also used to share with the provinces in the cost of welfare and social services under the Canada Assistance Plan. Established Programs Financing and the Canada Assistance Plan were rolled into a new arrangement called the Canada Health and Social Transfer, described below.

The fact that the federal government contributed funds to these areas of provincial jurisdiction has made more complex the federal-provincial divide. But constitutional arrangements become even more complex when seen through the equally messy political lens.

Political Context

Meet the new kid on the block

The division of federal and provincial powers is determined not only by the terms of the Constitution. The division of powers also has been shaped by a new commitment called the Social Union Framework Agreement (SUFA).

In February 1999, the federal and provincial governments, except Quebec, signed a Social Union Framework Agreement that spells out general rules for how these two levels of governments should work together. Its purpose is to promote a respectful and collaborative approach to resolving key social issues not clearly defined as exclusively federal or provincial.

How did SUFA appear?

The federal and provincial governments had been embroiled for years in constitutional discussions. The negotiations that took place in 1986 and 1987 and which led to the drafting of the proposed Meech Lake Accord were regarded as a failure. Crucial negotiations affecting the future of the country had been held in secret. Canadians deeply resented this backroom approach to nation building and were unclear that the proposals on the table actually would strengthen the country. Parliamentary approval and the consent of all provincial legislatures were necessary for the ratification of Meech; it failed ultimately to be ratified within the three-year deadline set out in the Constitution.

Another round of constitutional talks also ended in failure. These talks produced in 1992 a set of proposed constitutional amendments, known as the Charlottetown Accord. But like Meech, the Charlottetown Accord never was ratified, having been rejected in a national referendum.

Meech and Charlottetown were followed by the Quebec referendum in 1995. The results made starkly clear that the old rules of the federal-provincial power game no longer would work. There was pressure to find new ways to do business – to renew the country outside of a constitutional framework. Equally important, there was a need, at least on the part of the federal government, to demonstrate that Canada is a viable federation. The social union discussions evolved as a way to renew and rebuild Canada outside of a constitutional framework.

SUFA goes only so far

A key feature of the social union is that work in any substantive area should be conducted in a collaborative fashion. Ottawa alone no longer should spell out the rules with which provinces and territories must comply to receive federal funds. Rather, the social union ‘theory’ or intent implies that any rules – whether on funding, program delivery or reporting – should be set jointly by the federal government and the provinces/territories [Biggs 1996].

The thinking that shaped the Social Union negotiations viewed federal and provincial/territorial relations as a partnership in which both levels of government have an important role. Partnership effectively results in different responses to a certain issue. It can give rise to differences across regions in the same policy area. The resulting variability is seen not only as inevitable but also as desirable as jurisdictions identify their respective fiscal and political priorities.

While provinces and territories may develop unique responses, they jointly have been involved in a process in which they share a common vision and a set of values, principles and objectives. This new federalism sometimes is referred to as a ‘pan-Canadian’ approach. The individual routes may vary but the end point is presumably the same.

Quebec is the one jurisdiction that has not formally participated in the social union discussions. But this comes as no surprise; it always has followed an asymmetrical route in terms of social programs. Moreover, Quebec is recognized as a progressive leader, especially around policies related to children and the family, disability, and health and social services.

But asymmetrical federalism makes it harder to have a strong national framework with a clear vision that points the way forward for the country. Not impossible but certainly more difficult. This tension is not new – it is intrinsic to the never-ending federalism saga. Yet the equal-players approach does make it more problematic for one player to play leader, lest it be interpreted as crossing the collaborative connection.

Another distinguishing feature of the social union is the encouragement of ‘horizontal policy-making’ [Biggs 1996]. This term means that various levels of government and different ministries within the same jurisdiction ideally should work together to tackle the issue at hand. In any given province, for example, the ministries of education, social services, health and recreation should collaborate on issues pertaining to children.

This so-called ‘whole-of-government’ approach was intended to address an important problem. Human needs tend to be divided into political jurisdictions or single ministries as though these needs can be compartmentalized into neat boxes. That approach not only exacerbates existing problems but often creates new problems.

And governments typically deal with issues through a ‘silo’ approach. Individual departments are assigned responsibility for a given set of issues and cannot easily cross the line to work with other government departments in related areas of interest.

The disability agenda, for example, includes concerns about human rights, transportation, communications, employment and training, support services, technical aids and equipment, and income security. Taken together, these issues are effectively about full participation in society and naturally cut across the mandates of many different departments. The Federal Task Force on Disability Issues, established in June 1996, framed its work upon the concepts of citizenship and inclusion. But it has been difficult within current government structures to move forward a broad-based agenda, when each department can chew off only its own little bit. The whole-of-government approach was intended to break down the silos into horizontal processes.

Yet another dimension of process inherent in the social union – at least in theory – is the concept of accountability. In looking for ways to rebuild the federation, the social union was supposed to open up public processes and make governments more accountable for their activity. The social union also provided a framework for actively engaging citizens in consultation.

The focus on accountability has created new pressures for the voluntary sector. It has a longer role to play in monitoring the progress of the SUFA talks – or lack thereof.

Indeed, federalism with clear conditions attached to dollars has evolved into ‘handshake federalism’ based on collaboration and agreement. The voluntary sector has long played the public watchdog role but its importance has increased significantly in the SUFA climate. Add this to its long and growing ‘to do’ list.

As if added responsibility were not enough, SUFA comes with no associated mechanisms to allow this accountability process to happen. There are no suggested methods for ongoing monitoring, reporting and assessing progress. It is nice to say that accountability is important. But there is no clear process for the process. Another barrier to clear reporting is the fact that much of the federal-provincial/territorial dialogue takes place behind closed doors. It is hard to monitor words not heard.

The social union practice has been far from its ideals. There has been little consultation on key social issues. And the reporting process that was supposed to make governments more accountable has much to account for. There has been precious little public information – perhaps a reflection of the lack of progress to report.

Did Ottawa sell the shop?

The Social Union Framework Agreement is coming up for renewal, a good time to raise questions. Collaboration is an ideal ideal, but not if it ties the federal government's hands. There are concerns that SUFA could water down federal leadership if Ottawa becomes preoccupied with conciliation. It may have no appetite for clear leadership or definitive action.

A potential problem is that the working group process which has evolved within the SUFA context could encourage a 'lowest common denominator' approach. On the one hand, it is invaluable for all key parties to work together to improve social programs. But in seeking harmonious relations, a federal-provincial/territorial group may back away from a certain proposal if even one jurisdiction objects to any aspect – be it price tag, ideological perspective or new way of addressing a problem. Timidity may be the price of harmony.

SUFA requires public accountability. It talks about the need to monitor and measure the outcomes of social programs and report regularly on their impact. This commitment to transparency is crucial, especially in light of the fact that the federal-provincial/territorial discussions are largely closed-door processes.

There are also questions as to how the new federalism affects the relationship between governments and voluntary organizations. Much of the business of the social agenda is being considered in working groups involving government officials, not elected politicians. It is difficult for organizations on the outside the closed doors to know how they can relate to, let alone influence, this process.

Where does the voluntary sector fit in this new dynamic? The government-to-government dialogue leaves out many important players. A primary ingredient – voluntary organizations as well as representatives from other sectors – is missing. A cake mix with no baking powder will not rise. And a government process with no catalytic agent – the voluntary sector in particular – likely will not go far. More on this later.

But while SUFA has been trying to buy some social policy peace, tensions have been brewing on another front: fiscal federalism. This term refers to the various financial arrangements between the federal and provincial/territorial governments that define the ways in which they collect revenues and share the cost of public programs. While there are several arrangements, it is the equalization agreement that comprises the backbone of fiscal federalism.

The basic principle underlying the equalization agreement is to enable all jurisdictions to provide public services at the level of the national average without having to resort to unusually high taxes of their own. Equalization payments make up the difference between a province's revenue and this national average [Torjman 1993].

Ontario, Alberta and BC do not receive equalization payments because their revenues are above the national average. They are the 'have' provinces when compared with the seven 'have not' provinces on the receiving end of the equalization arrangement. The federal government effectively acts as the conduit for the transfer of funds from 'have' to 'have not' jurisdictions.

The equalization formula was altered in 1982 as a result of an imbalance in energy revenues and the large increases in oil and gas proceeds in the Western provinces. At the time, Alberta's revenues were dropped from the equation in order to remove distortions introduced from big gains in energy profits.

Tensions are now running high as a result of a 1982 agreement on the management of offshore oil and gas. The intent of the agreement was that both Nova Scotia and Newfoundland and Labrador would receive the proceeds from these offshore resources until their economies reached at least the level of the national average. But they currently get only 20 cents of every offshore revenue dollar, while the remainder goes to the federal government.

The Atlantic region is arguing for fiscal fairness, claiming that a primary route to economic independence is being cut at the pass. Ontario Premier Harris added fuel to the fiscal fire by casting their demand as welfare mentality. Needless to say, these comments won him few votes down east.

Of course, the capacity of all provinces to generate revenue both affects and is affected by the broader economic context.

Economic Context

High unemployment plagued the 1990s

The postwar vision of the welfare state was predicated on a healthy economy with a stable labour market that paid relatively decent wages. But this is no longer the case; the economy has undergone fundamental restructuring in the face of technological change and the globalization of markets. And despite the prospect of prosperity due to expanded global markets, economic growth in Canada has been disappointing over the past ten years in both absolute and per capita terms [Policy Research Initiative 1999].

But there is more to the story than poor growth. The labour market of the 1990s was marked by major upheavals. First, the lack of jobs. The 1990s was the second worst decade on record, surpassed only by the Great Depression of the 1930s when estimates put nearly one-quarter of workers as unemployed.

Canada's official unemployment rate has dropped since its record double-digit high. It stood at 7.5 percent at last count (November 2001). But the real unemployment rate is far higher. The 'real' rate counts those who have given up an active job search or are working part-time because they cannot find full-time work.

While labour market insecurity affects all, it has hit certain groups especially hard. Between 1966 and 1990, women had a higher unemployment rate than men in all but four years. The story changed dramatically in the 1990s, with the percentage of jobless females about seven points lower than the male rate. This reversal reflects the worsening job prospects for men in that decade.

Neither has it been a good bet – at least when it comes to joblessness – to be young. The youth unemployment rate is significantly higher than workers between the ages of 25 and 44. And some groups experience difficulty in transition to the workforce. For young people, in particular, the length of the school-to-work transition has increased to an average eight years [Schetagne 2001: 9].

As if the general youth employment picture were not bad enough, the prospects for Aboriginal youth are even worse. The jobless rate for on-reserve young people is close to 80 percent or five times higher than for other Canadian youth.

Unemployment is not the only issue: Underemployment is a serious problem as well in both quantity and quality. Many Canadians can find only part-time work. Others are employed in jobs that are below their credentials and experience. A living wage remains a distant dream for far too many families and individuals, a reality made worse by the growing divide in jobs themselves.

There is a growing divide between good and bad jobs

The labour market has been split increasingly into good jobs and bad jobs [Jackson and Robinson 2000; Economic Council of Canada 1990]. The so-called good jobs pay well and typically require specialized training and higher levels of skill. In addition to good pay, these jobs usually provide benefits, such as employer-sponsored pensions and supplementary health insurance.

Bad jobs, by contrast, refer to low-paid work that requires relatively few skills. These jobs rarely provide a pension, benefits or opportunities for promotion. Workers in these positions are more likely to experience unemployment than workers in good jobs.

The growth of high-end and low-end jobs also has seen some shrinkage of work in the middle-earnings range. The shift is partly the result of changing technology. Silicon chips have

replaced many middle managers. And many middle-level positions have been shed through downsizing.

The labour market has moved to extremes in yet another way: the growth of both long and short hours of work. Hours of work are increasing for some full-time workers who tend to have high incomes. At the same time, there has been a growth of part-time work, much of it involuntary and most producing low earnings.

Some workers like the flexibility and added pay from extra work. But for many, long hours and less play have had a negative impact: more stress, sleep disorders, family tensions or breakup, and less time with children. At the same time, there are far too many Canadians who desperately need more work. Perhaps the predicted skills shortage will help rebalance a labour market that has moved increasingly to the extremes.

A shortage of skilled labour may be looming

Over the past two decades, jobs have been in relatively short supply. The future may hold a new picture.

Canada's population is aging rapidly. Women and men age 65 and older are projected to reach 8.3 million or 22.7 percent of the population by 2031 [Policy Research Initiative 1999]. Population aging is the single most consistent pressure on federal income security spending, and also is placing increasing demands on health care and social service costs.

But the effects of this aging population are felt first in the labour market where, for the time being at least, there are more experienced workers than there are younger workers [Schetagne 2001: 4]. A shortage of skilled labour now is forecast in many fields, including nursing, education and construction.

A survey of 8,767 respondents conducted by the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, for example, found that one of every 20 jobs remains unfilled because of the lack of suitably skilled labour. This rate translates into an estimated 250,000 to 300,000 jobs going unfilled among Canada's million small- and medium-size employers [Bruce and Dulipovici 2001]. The Conference Board of Canada and TD Bank have issued reports predicting similar shortages.

Social Context

There is widespread poverty in Canada

Canadians, on average, are highly educated. The proportion of the population with a postsecondary education is the highest among OECD member countries. But this good news has not translated into good outcomes for many Canadians.

Poverty is widespread; almost one in six Canadians is poor. Their circumstances fall well below those of comparable households. One child in five lives in poverty. The high rate of child poverty is due, in part, to the proportion of children in single-parent families and the growing levels of poverty in two-parent families headed by recent immigrants. And while high, these figures actually underestimate the extent of poverty in Canada because they do not include Aboriginal people on reserves, residents of the Yukon, Nunavut and Northwest Territories, and people who live in institutions (prisons, hospitals and homes for the aged).

Canada's poverty rate was pegged at 16.9 percent in 1998, the latest year for which national data are available. But this national average skews the fact that the rate varies widely by province – from a 'low' of 13.4 percent in Prince Edward Island to a high of 20.4 percent in Quebec. Poverty also is becoming increasingly concentrated in certain neighbourhoods in large urban centres. Together, Winnipeg, Montreal and Quebec City account for nearly half of distressed and near-distressed urban areas [Policy Research Initiative 1999: 17].

While some regions of the country risk higher rates of poverty, so do certain groups. These include single-parent families with children, persons with disabilities, recent immigrants, Aboriginal Canadians, the single 'near elderly' and, increasingly, young families with children trapped in 'precarious' employment [Jackson 2001: 16].

There is a clear gender factor in poverty. Women have seen significant gains in earnings in recent years. Yet they continue to be at greater risk of being poor, especially those unattached or heading lone-parent families. Women earn less on average than men and are more likely to have low incomes.

A second income within a household helps keep families out of poverty. The poverty rate for unattached individuals is much higher (39.6 percent) than the rate for families (14.0 percent). The poverty rate for unattached youth (24 years and under) is particularly high at 60.7 percent. In 1998, 40.9 percent of non-elderly unattached women lived in poverty, while 35.1 percent of non-elderly unattached men were poor.

There is a higher-than-average rate of poverty among Canadians over age 65 – 18.7 percent of whom live below the poverty line. The risk of poverty is greatest for senior women (49.1 percent) who are on their own.

While Aboriginal Canadians are not counted in national poverty statistics, other surveys have found that they face disproportionately high rates of poverty. Forty-three percent of Aboriginal Canadians were poor in 1998 [Jenson 2000b: 2]. Registered Indians overall have a per capita income less than half of the average of non-Aboriginal Canadians, a life expectancy more than seven years shorter and substantially lower educational attainment [Policy Research Initiative 1999].

New immigrants to Canada face exceptionally high and growing poverty. The percentage of recent immigrants falling below Statistics Canada's low income cut-off jumped dramatically from 23 percent in 1985 to 39 percent in 1997. This high rate of poverty is startling given that 57 percent of working age immigrants at landing held a postsecondary educational degree in 1999 compared to 42 percent of Canadians who held a postsecondary educational degree in that year [Galabuzi 2001].

Yet it is not only the rate of poverty that is high across the country and among certain groups. The depth of poverty also has been growing, particularly for the long-term poor.

All Canadians face some risk of poverty. It is often brought on unexpectedly by loss of employment, the death or disability of a family breadwinner, family breakup, or increased costs because of a major illness. Changes in the economy and problems in the labour market can mean not enough jobs, not enough hours of work, declining real value of minimum wages or very low wages. And members of some groups are at greater risk of poverty than others because of discrimination or unequal opportunities.

But there is more to poverty than poverty.

Many factors threaten social cohesion

Being poor means poor food, poor housing and poor health. Its effects are devastating not only for individuals. Nations are at risk when such a large slice of their population is excluded from participating and contributing to the fullest of its ability.

From an historical perspective, the distribution of income in Canada is not more unequal now than it was 25 years ago. This is in sharp contrast to the US where income inequality has increased sharply. In Canada, by contrast, our tax and transfer systems have achieved significant income redistribution. "Canada's income security system has performed remarkably well over the

years in narrowing the income gap between the affluent and the poor and in combating growing inequality in market incomes – i.e., income from employment, investments, private pensions and other non-public sources” [Battle 2001: 189].

In recent years, after-tax transfer inequality has risen due mainly to the reduction in transfer payments – notably Employment Insurance and welfare. “After-tax and transfer income inequality crept up during the 1990s as a result mainly of growing market inequality and, to a lesser extent, cuts to transfers. In 1989, families, in the top quintile had 4.9 times the share of after-tax income of those in the bottom quintile, but by 1998 that ratio had increased to 5.5 times [Battle 2001: 190]. There are disturbing signs of rising inequality due both to program cuts and growing wage gaps in the second half of the 1990s [Heisz, Jackson and Picot 2001].

Narrowing income inequality is a concern not only at home. A major challenge at the international level is to reduce the gaps in market income between rich and poor households as well as between rich and poor nations. A combination of actions is required: direct aid, assistance for local development, reform of international financial institutions, support for democratic governance and investment in education, especially for women.

The need to narrow inequalities arises from more than social concerns. The World Bank has committed itself to “a world free of poverty” after its research found a negative relationship between income inequality and economic growth. It notes that wide differences in income also contribute to stress, leading to higher illness, mortality and violence among poor populations [World Bank website].

There are concerns that rising inequalities can create pressure on social cohesion – a relatively new analytic concept for investigating the capacity of societies to manage the stresses and strains of modern life [Policy Research Initiative 1999: 24]. Pervasive social pressures and economic stresses may erode the sense of community, trust and equity necessary for a civil and functioning society. The worry about social cohesion, in particular, is a response to growing malaise from persistently high unemployment and widespread social exclusion manifesting themselves in various ways in nations throughout the world [OECD 1997].

Families are experiencing a serious time crunch

The postwar policy framework was built on the one-earner (male), two-parent family – no longer the predominant family type. The typical middle-class family of the 1950s and 1960s – father in the labour force, mother working at home and three children – has been transformed by profound changes in the economy, society and culture [Battle and Torjman 2000].

One of the most significant changes in the family arises from the dramatic increase in women's participation in the paid labour force since the 1960s. In seven of every ten couples with children, both parents work outside the home. Nearly two-thirds of married women with children under age 6 are in the labour force. The majority of single parents are now in the labour force as well [Battle and Torjman 2000].

Not only are most parents employed, but a growing number works longer hours on the job in order to make ends meet. Since the mid-1970s, the total working hours of two-parent families with children has increased considerably [Jackson 2001: 28]. They have less time for housework, shopping and, most important, spending time with children.

This time crunch is serious in light of research findings, which show that parental time spent with children, particularly young children, is a key ingredient in good development, perhaps even more important than income. Moreover, "less time for and with children and parental stress are associated with child exclusion through the potential underdevelopment of capacities and, perhaps, less child involvement in the community" [Jackson 2001: 28].

Juggling the dual and sometimes conflicting demands of work and parenthood can be tiring and demanding. It also has health consequences and is believed to account partly for the reported increase in stress and higher incidence of depression.

The burden is especially hard on women, who shoulder most of the responsibility for caring for children and housework. Families are smaller today; most have only one or two children. Unlike earlier generations, they cannot rely upon older children to help take care of younger brothers and sisters. Families also move more often, so many are isolated from traditional support networks of relatives.

The time crunch has meant not only that families have less time for their children. They also have less time for their communities. Statistics Canada's 2000 National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating found that Canadians were volunteering less – even though they gave more money than in 1997 [Voluntary Sector Initiative 2001: 1].

The face of Canadians is changing

Canada's population is more than just gray. Our ethnic profile has become steadily more diverse over the past 40 years. More than 200,000 immigrants arrive in Canada every year, most of whom go to major urban centres: Toronto, Vancouver and Montreal [Policy Research Initiative 1999].

In fact, the proportion of visible minorities is expected to rise to 20 percent of the national population by 2016, from 12 percent in 1996. Traditional sources of immigrants from Europe and more recently Southeast Asia have shifted toward Latin America, mainland China, west Asia and Africa.

The proportion of Aboriginal Canadians also is expected to grow at twice the rate of the population as a whole. One-half of the Aboriginal population is under age 25. Population projections show a 25 percent increase, from 1.1 million Aboriginal Canadians today to 1.4 million by 2005.

Pressures on Social Programs

These demographic, social and economic forces are additive. Divorce, unemployment and low earnings threaten to condemn a growing group of Canadians to poverty in old age. Child poverty brings an above-average risk of a range of health problems, accidents and below-average school performance. These risks also can work against poor children when they reach adulthood, resulting in a greater likelihood of unemployment and low wages, increased demands for social programs and lost tax revenues.

Political, economic and social changes all have created a new and growing burden on social programs. Ironically, these pressures have come at a time when social programs themselves are facing serious strain. These pressures are the result of many factors including reductions in social spending, loss of the Canada Assistance Plan, lack of national vision for social development and strained relations with the voluntary sector.

Social spending has gone down modestly

Mounting government deficits and accumulating debt pushed the federal government and the provinces increasingly to reduce public – especially social – spending in the 1980s and 1990s. The forces of social policy reform-through-restraint gathered strength as Ottawa managed to convince most Canadians that the deficit had to be cured no matter how bitter the medicine [Battle 2001].

Rising unemployment has placed high demands on welfare, Unemployment Insurance, social services and employment services, health care and other social programs. To make matters worse, widespread unemployment robbed federal and provincial treasuries of badly needed tax revenues.

But while the 1990s are seen as a decade of cuts to social spending, the expenditure on income security has come down modestly rather than sharply. Reductions in income security and

social service spending have outweighed those in health and education. Total federal and provincial/territorial spending on income security programs went from \$50.9 billion in 1980-81 to a peak of \$93.4 billion in 1992-93, declining to \$86.5 billion in 1997-98, although it inched back up to \$87.3 billion in 1998-99 [Battle 2001: 184].

Elderly benefits and Canada Pension Plan payouts have risen steadily over the years. Their increase swamped the sizeable reduction in Employment Insurance expenditures in the 1990s, which dropped from 29.7 percent of total federal income spending in 1990-91 to 19.8 percent by 1998-99. Rising unemployment and the 1991-92 recession pushed social assistance expenditures from \$9.4 billion in 1989-90 to \$15.8 billion in 1993-94 and 1994-95. They dropped in the latter half of the 1990s to \$11.2 billion in 1998-99 [Battle 2001: 188]. The employment picture had improved but reductions in welfare benefits as well as tightened rules of eligibility played an equally important role in driving the cuts.

The end of the Canada Assistance Plan coupled with the tightened rules for Employment Insurance eligibility mean that the federal government effectively has protected itself from economic downturns in the economy. The provinces and territories are left far more vulnerable to the pressures of rising unemployment as they now must pick up welfare costs on their own. Employment Insurance and welfare cuts were offset somewhat by increases to the Canada Child Tax Benefit that goes to 80 percent of families with children. By 2004-05, nearly 95 percent of families will receive some child benefits because of growth in the base amount of the benefit as well as the rising threshold for maximum payments [Battle 2001: 187].

An important trend of the 1990s appears to have been the shift in income security policies for the working age population. There has been a move away from transfers to the unemployed and those outside the job market (Employment Insurance and social assistance) to transfers to those who are working but have low incomes (i.e., Child Tax Benefit, GST credit and provincial supplements). This approach has emphasized the importance of inclusion through paid work, but also has raised some important issues. At what age should single parents with young children be expected to work? How much should governments supplement the incomes of the working poor and to what extent should employers be required to pay higher minimum wages? What kinds of supports and services should be made available to low-paid workers to help them gain access to better jobs that provide real ladders of opportunity?

The social infrastructure is dismantled

Prior to 1995, there were two major financing arrangements for social programs: Established Programs Financing (EPF) and the Canada Assistance Plan (CAP). Established Programs Financing was a block fund under which transfers were made to provinces and territories for health and

postsecondary education. The transfers were a combination of cash payments and tax points. Provincial/territorial entitlements were calculated on the basis of a formula that took into account growth in population and Gross National Product (GNP). The Canada Assistance Plan, by contrast, allowed Ottawa to share 50 percent of provincial and territorial costs for welfare and social services.

Over the years, the federal government had been making changes to these two financing arrangements. The 1986 federal Budget limited the indexation of the EPF transfers to the annual increase in GNP minus two percentage points (the formula used to be the full increase in the GNP). The 1989 Budget reduced the indexation of the EPF formula by yet another percentage point. The 1990 Budget froze federal transfers for 1990-91 and 1991-92. The 1991 Budget extended the freeze through 1994-95, after which the GNP-less-three percentage point formula was to kick in [Battle and Torjman 1995a].

In 1990, the federal government also brought in a freeze on sharing the cost of the Canada Assistance Plan (the infamous ‘cap on CAP’) for the three ‘have’ provinces of Ontario, Alberta and BC. The freeze took effect just prior to the recession of the early 1990s – the most severe economic trough since the Great Depression of the 1930s. Welfare caseloads were poised to skyrocket in response to the economic slump.

In the 1995 federal Budget, the government announced its intent to dismantle these two pieces of legislation and replace them with the Canada Health and Social Transfer (CHST). The CHST is a block fund that provides federal support to the provinces and territories for financing health, postsecondary education, welfare and social services. The new legislation would allow more flexibility for the use of federal funds. But there would be less money to spend. The CHST cut nearly \$6.2 billion from federal transfers in its first two years alone.

The removal of the legislative base of the Canada Assistance Plan was especially troubling. There would be fewer funds for social services in particular [Torjman 1995]. The new arrangement has ended up hurting the people who most need help.

The services delivered under CAP helped people move off welfare by offsetting work-related expenses. CAP represented an investment in children through child care and child welfare services for those who require protection from neglect or abuse. CAP services afforded support to families and protection to children who might otherwise end up on the street – involved in drugs, prostitution or violent crime.

The various forms of assistance and services funded under the Canada Assistance Plan also provided essential supports to help people with disabilities and seniors live independently in communities. CAP shared the cost of a range of homemaker services that enable the elderly to live at home by helping them with shopping, cooking, cleaning and other household tasks. CAP helped support attendant services that provide assistance with the activities of daily living – eating, bathing,

dressing and grooming. It also paid for wheelchairs, special eyeglasses and prosthetic appliances for households unable to purchase this disability-related equipment.

The Canada Assistance Plan funded services that help families care for young children while parents complete their education, participate in training, seek employment or go to work. CAP supported occasional relief for parents caring at home for children with severe disabilities.

CAP shared certain costs to assist the unemployed enter or re-enter the labour market. These included start-up expenses for self-employment, such as the purchase of tools, or job search allowances for transportation or clothing. CAP helped offset the cost of medically prescribed diets and supplies for low-income families.

The cost of services providing protection to women and children fleeing family violence and abusive relationships was covered under the Act. CAP shared in counselling for personal, health-related or employment problems. It assisted parents facing a difficult time with children and adolescents; it helped young people having trouble at home with their parents.

The Act allowed claims for information services – where to obtain care for elderly parents, counselling for problems with adolescents, suitable training programs or housing for persons with disabilities, or emergency financial support in the event of a family crisis.

But it was not only families that bore the brunt of the loss. The service deliverers themselves – most of them voluntary agencies – were affected by the withdrawal of CAP. Many agencies had to cut programs and services and have been left to operate on shoestring and shaky budgets.

Another fallout of the February 1995 bombshell is that the lump sum represented by the CHST now is intended to pay for health, postsecondary education, welfare and social services. The reality is that the lion's share of these funds goes to health care and the remainder is divvied up among the other three areas with welfare and social services the true poor cousins of social policy. The social sector has been badly squeezed as a result of this block fund arrangement.

Yet another problem: The end of the Canada Assistance Plan coupled with the tightened rules for Employment Insurance eligibility effectively mean that the federal government has protected itself from economic downturns in the economy. It no longer has to pay 50 cents of every dollar spent on welfare benefits. It pays out less money in unemployment benefits than it collects in premiums. The provinces and territories are left far more vulnerable to the pressures of rising unemployment as they have to pick up the tab for rising welfare in the event of an economic downturn.

With the loss of CAP went the loss of federal moral authority as a leader in social policy. The withdrawal of the Act was significant not only because it destabilized the funding base for

important services that assist low- and modest-income Canadians. Its dismantling hit hard because it symbolized a retreat from caring and compassion in Canadian society.

Social factors determine health

The dismantling of the social sector also is significant in light of what we know about health. In recent years, there have been endless studies, reviews and consultations about health in Canada. But the debates have focussed not upon healthy citizens or communities but upon a healthy medicare system. The discourse typically is concerned with the treatment services that are (or should be) in place. It deals little with the best ways to avoid treatment or ensure the presence of active and engaged citizens.

Health care services actually contribute in only a small way to overall health. Clearly, these services are essential and their contribution to a high quality of life is undisputed. Medicare guarantees access by all citizens to comprehensive medical care. With medicare a cherished social program, it is essential to protect its health through adequate investment.

Health is attained only partly through the provision of health care services, which are basically a form of remedial intervention. Several factors are far more important than treatment in shaping the state of health. These so-called determinants of health include socioeconomic status, lifestyle and the environment.

Social determinants are the social factors that influence health: income disparities, safe housing, adequate nutrition and supports embedded in caring communities. There are significant differences in both health and mortality for individuals in different income and education groups. Men and women with the lowest level of education, for example, can expect to live two to three years less than those with the highest level of education [Policy Research Initiative 1999: 17].

The evidence also shows a gradient in the rate of disease from the top of the social hierarchy to the bottom for almost every disease that has been studied, practically everywhere in the world [Syme 1994: 84]. Higher-income people tend to live longer than lower-income people. Moreover, people on one rung live longer than those below them, on the entire socioeconomic ladder.

The bottom line? Improvements in medical care, whether better access or new treatments, have little chance of reducing inequities in health. Improving health lies in improving factors outside of health. But this is difficult when the funding is directed away from social supports in favour of formal health care treatment.

The national vision is blurred

Provincial governments did not leave unanswered the federal blow. They responded to the Canada Health and Social Transfer by forming the Ministerial Council on Social Policy Reform and Renewal. In 1996, the Premiers issued a joint report (except for Quebec) that effectively became a blueprint for the agenda they wanted to pursue with the federal government. Their report put forward several social policy proposals including a national child benefit, a national disability benefit and labour market initiatives. There is no question that these proposals were intended to shift some costs back to Ottawa. But at least the recommendations opened the door to renewed federal-provincial activity subsequently pursued under the social union umbrella.

The Premiers called for action around three key areas: children, disability and labour market. These three areas have been marked by vision and action, vision and no action, and no vision and substantial action, respectively.

The 1997 Throne Speech committed the federal, provincial and territorial governments to work together to develop a National Children's Agenda, a comprehensive strategy to improve the well-being of Canada's children. The National Children's Agenda is intended to promote collaborative action to ensure that all children have the best chance to develop to their potential as healthy, successful and contributing members of society.

Two key federal-provincial/territorial arrangements comprise the National Children's Agenda. The National Child Benefit took effect in July 1997. It involves a restructured and increased federal payment – the Canada Child Tax Benefit – paid to 80 percent of Canadian families with children (slated to reach 95 percent of families by 2004-05) and a set of associated investments made by provinces and territories. These investments include cash benefits, such as provincial income-tested child benefits and earnings supplements, early childhood development and supplementary health care.

In September 2000, the federal and provincial/territorial governments signed an Agreement on Early Childhood Development Initiatives. Under the Agreement, governments made a commitment to invest in four streams: promoting healthy pregnancy, birth and infancy; improving parenting and family supports; strengthening early childhood development, learning and care; and strengthening community supports for families with children. But the federal investment is too modest to help the provinces and territories build a comprehensive and effective array of initiatives worthy of the name 'system' throughout Canada. There are no mechanisms for promoting integrated or fundamental changes to the early childhood development system. Investments have varied widely across the country and certain services, such as child care, have suffered from lack of funding in some provinces.

The disability front is also marked by clear vision (and plenty of hindsight). What's missing is action. In 1998, all governments except Quebec signed a vision paper entitled *In Unison: A Canadian Approach to Disability Issues*. The principles of citizenship and inclusion comprise the foundation of this paper. The commitment to these concepts was reinforced in the follow-up report, *In Unison 2000: Persons With Disabilities in Canada*.

In Unison describes three building blocks – disability supports, employment and income – in which changes must be made to promote inclusion. Each building block sets out objectives and associated policy directions. There must be greater access to disability supports and assistance with disability-related costs. Employment opportunities for persons with disabilities should be enhanced. The disincentives to work in existing income programs must be removed.

In Unison commits all governments in Canada to work toward these objectives. Equally important, it encourages all governments to work *together* to reach these objectives. There have been some significant improvements in recent years to various tax measures intended to assist persons with disabilities and their families. The federal government also introduced a small Opportunities Fund to support employment-based community initiatives. But major investments in desperately needed personal supports (described later) have not been forthcoming.

On the labour market front, the federal and all provincial governments, except Ontario, have signed Labour Market Agreements. These agreements allow a portion of Employment Insurance premiums to be turned over to the provinces in respect of employment benefits set out under the Employment Insurance Act: wage subsidies, earnings supplements, self-employment assistance, job creation partnerships, and skills loans and grants.

The agreements focus primarily upon the types of labour market activities that provinces may undertake. But the agreements are purely instrumental. They provide no vision for what such a system might look like and how it might evolve. They set out no framework for the development of an employment *system* in Canada. The agreements simply hand over authority for employment measures from one administrative level to another.

In short, governments' record in the three areas designated as priorities within the social union context is decidedly mixed – with some progress on children, minimal progress on disability and negative changes in the area of labour market policy. And there has been very little action in other areas of national priority such as affordable housing, recognition of immigrant credentials, healthy Aboriginal communities, literacy and local economic development. Blurred government vision and limited action have created serious pressures for the voluntary sector.

The voluntary sector is under pressure

The voluntary sector in Canada is composed of some 180,000 nonprofit groups and organizations concerned with social, economic, cultural, environmental and political issues. These organizations range from small, unstaffed groups that meet around a specified, often single, interest to large complex organizations, such as agencies that deliver a range of home-based care. They include faith-based organizations that provide services, such as counselling, and the church movement, known as 'Jubilee,' that has advocated the need to forgive the debt of developing countries.

It should be noted that the concept of voluntarism has a different meaning in the Aboriginal community than it does in the Western/European view. For Aboriginal Canadians, voluntarism is basically a way of life – a cultural expectation that teaches individuals to support their community and family [Voluntary Sector Initiative 2001: 4].

Organizations in the formal voluntary sector play three key roles: delivering services, testing innovative models and providing ethical leadership. Individual groups and organizations may be involved in one or several of these activities. Equally important, voluntary organizations provide the opportunity and the 'space' for citizens to engage in community and public issues.

Many voluntary organizations deliver various health and social services, including child care and elder care at home, school breakfasts, mentoring and literacy, employment and training, recreation and settlement services for immigrants. Sometimes these services are provided on behalf of governments; child care, home care and various training programs typically are paid for by governments and delivered by voluntary organizations.

But there are thousands of services throughout the country initiated by the voluntary sector itself, such as big brothers and sisters programs, and alternative food programs, such as good food boxes. The increasingly active role of the voluntary sector in service provision has raised profound questions like: Where should government end and where should the voluntary sector begin? Where should the borders be drawn?

The voluntary sector is at the forefront of innovation. It is in an ideal position to play this leading-edge role. Many voluntary organizations are flexible and are not bound by the heavy rules and hierarchical relationships that characterize – and often paralyze – governments. Voluntary organizations can work across sectoral boundaries and move flexibly in areas where governments cannot go (or so they say). The voluntary sector can provide the impetus and sites for public problem-solving, skill building and experimentation. Its leading-edge capacity also includes an important research and demonstration role in which new models can be tested on an experimental basis to determine whether they are worth broader investment.

While most voluntary organizations are recipients of government and/or private dollars, the voluntary sector itself finances various forms of community activity. The United Way, for example, funds a broad range of community services. Private foundations support research and ground-breaking work that tests new models for addressing key issues. Community foundations create endowments to invest in local activity in the social, cultural and environmental areas.

Voluntary organizations are highly disparate in their activities. But they are linked by a common thread: They have been under serious pressure in recent years.

Government cuts to social services have destabilized the voluntary sector. As governments cut back on publicly funded social programs, the voluntary sector is left to pick up the slack. They feel a responsibility to do something about the children who go to school hungry, the homeless who sleep on icy streets in winter, the new Canadians who cannot afford to pay for postsecondary education and the far-too-many adults who lack basic reading skills. Someone has to pay attention because governments appear to have limited interest in these issues.

The apparent loss of interest has opened the door to increased private provision of services, particularly in the areas of child care and home care. There is growing competition between the private and voluntary provision of services. The fear is that for-profit organizations will focus on just that – the profits – with the quality of the service a secondary consideration. There are concerns, as well, that the further liberalization of trade on the international stage will open the door to wholesale privatization of health and social services [Sanger 2001].

The pressures that have arisen in response to government cutbacks can divert the voluntary sector's own efforts from developing innovative approaches and promoting awareness of pressing public issues. This pick-up-the-slack expectation is unrealistic and inappropriate. The voluntary sector can never replace a strong public sector. The 'communitization' of responsibility for such problems as unemployment, poverty and family violence is not the answer.

But there is more to cuts than cuts. Also at issue is the type of funding now available to the voluntary sector. The federal government used to provide core funds to voluntary organizations in the social sector through a modest program, known as National Welfare Grants, housed in the former Department of National Health and Welfare. The program was dismantled several years ago and was reconfigured in the Social Development Partnerships Program within the Department of Human Resources Development. Grants for the core funding of many voluntary organizations have been cut dramatically, although several federal departments continue to provide modest sustaining funds to selected national voluntary organizations.

Government dollars now tend to be directed to voluntary social organizations in the form of project money with clearly prescribed activities and outcomes. There is precious little core financ-

ing to sustain organizational operations from one year to the next. Yet it is core funds that permit organizations to act independently; project funds effectively tie their hands – and their efforts – to precise, measurable, preferably quantifiable results and ‘deliverables.’

Core funds also permit voluntary organizations to participate on an ongoing basis in the policy development process. They are a source of intelligence that contributes immeasurably to intelligent policy-making. The formulation of policy proposals, the development of well-researched responses to government initiatives and participation in public consultations are basic elements of democracy. These functions all need a strong organizational base. The development of a social infrastructure requires a social infrastructure to develop.

Neither does project funding promote the sustainability of a given effort. Some programs have had to introduce or raise fees, an arrangement that threatens to destabilize the organizations providing service. This development is also disturbing because many services are geared toward low-income households that cannot afford these payments.

Another pressure for the voluntary sector arises from the requirement to ‘lever’ government dollars. Leverage means that a certain proportion of the requested financing is provided by government and is intended to secure the base from which to harness additional contributions from other sources.

There are several positive aspects to this requirement – including the fact that it can be an effective way to engage additional partners in a given project. But it also has a price: the time and resources it takes to secure and retain additional funders. There is typically no support for this convening role; the efforts simply are expected with no recognition of the possible burden to the organization.

Yet another pressure arises from government discomfort with the voluntary voice. There appears to be no problem with a voluntary sector that quickly and effectively delivers services. But if the organizations dare cross the line and move into an advocacy mode, governments often react by withholding or withdrawing funds. In fact, these organizations actually threaten their own charitable status; the Canada Customs and Revenue Agency places clear limits on advocacy.

In short, the news on many fronts has not been good. Neither has it been entirely bad. The voluntary sector already has begun to reorganize itself in the wake of myriad contextual pressures. It has started to work together in new ways to forge a different approach. It has begun to take significant steps on the path of social development. It is starting to see things in a different light – beginning with a new vision.

A vision for the future cannot be shaped only by negative views of the past. A vision for the future must be confident and optimistic. It must clearly affirm the kind of society we wish to create. And it must put forward the many possible routes to get there. The first step: to recognize the wide-ranging ingredients for social development.

Ingredients for Social Development

Many ingredients can be harnessed for social development

The traditional view of the resources available for social development tends to be narrowly defined: dollars. In fact, the social development vision sometimes has been as myopic as the narrow economic vision it rejects.

The body of work on community assets and capacity building has opened the door to many more possibilities [Kretzmann and McKnight 1993]. There are far more resources than typically acknowledged for tackling social, economic and environmental problems. There are far more ingredients than generally recognized for promoting the health of citizens and caring communities in a positive sense.

This is not to minimize the importance of government funds for social investment. Public programs are at the core of ensuring healthy citizens in caring communities. But we should consider ourselves wealthy when we take stock of our range of collective assets – financial, natural and built, cultural, human and social capital. The social development challenge is to identify and harness these resources – to mix and match these ingredients into a new recipe for social well-being.

Financial capital helps support social development

Financial capital refers to money. Adequate financing is crucial for sustaining a social development vision. Financial capital provides the funds that enable individuals and organizations to deliver services, convene groups and act as watchdogs. Governments are the primary source of funds for promoting economic, social and environmental well-being.

But there are other sources that can be tapped for social development, including individual donors, private foundations, community foundations and corporations. The National Survey on Giving, Volunteering and Participating found that individuals contribute the bulk (74 percent) of

total donations while corporations and foundations granted 14 percent and 12 percent, respectively, of private capital.

Natural and built capital are valuable community assets

Natural and built capital refer to the natural resources and the physical assets in communities: land, parks, schools, community centres, libraries, public housing, shopping malls and other physical properties.

These are the obvious sources; there are also innovative forms of natural and built capital. Community land trusts are one example. These trusts are nonprofit corporations that separate the ownership of land from the ownership of buildings and other improvements to the land. Their purpose is to hold a body of land permanently in trust for the benefit of the community. They help communities gain greater control over local resources and expand access to these resources for lower-income residents [Concordia University 1995].

Social housing is an atypical example of built capital. Social housing often is viewed as a liability to a community because housing projects purportedly reduce the value of the neighbourhood property. However, some communities have begun to use their social housing stock as the foundation for substantial community investment. They are counting their public housing stock as equity to obtain bank loans for community economic development and additional affordable housing.

Cultural capital helps create social bonds

Cultural capital helps link members of a group through the bonds rooted in common values, language, customs, traditions, beliefs and arts. It also can provide protection from outside groupings and can be drawn on in times of hardship. Our system of beliefs, values, attitudes, customs, institutions and social relations shapes the way we perceive the world and how we interact with it [Patel 1998].

Cultural capital in the form of language, music, dance and stories is particularly significant in Quebec. The Québécois define their common identity not so much through social programs, as in English Canada, but through their common culture. Similarly, Aboriginal culture creates strong bonds and defines the identity of First Nations and Métis communities.

The concept of cultural capital is becoming increasingly important in a global world. The more integrated we become in an economic sense, the greater the pressure to assert individual and local distinctiveness through cultural expression – the greater the value of our cultural capital. This phenomenon has been named the ‘global paradox’: “The more people are bound together economically, the more they want to otherwise be free to assert their own distinctiveness” [Naisbitt 1994: 10].

But culture plays a key role not just in terms of the individual and group identity that it confers. It also provides an effective means of helping communities come together to achieve common goals. The central role played by arts and culture was evident, for example, in the *Our Millennium* program initiated by the Community Foundations of Canada to mark the new century. *Our Millennium* was designed as a nationwide public engagement program. Its purpose was to use the occasion of the millennium as an opportunity to strengthen and celebrate community. The program invited Canadians to make lasting ‘gifts’ to their community – group projects or activities that make their communities better places. Canadians were encouraged to make their gift within one of 11 theme areas: youth and children, arts and culture, environment, heritage, connections, recreation, learning, safety and crime prevention, care and support, global citizenship and other.

If there was any single theme which stands out as noteworthy in this national gift-giving effort, it was the fact that a disproportionately large number of projects employed various forms of arts and culture to achieve their ends – not just those listed in the arts and culture formal category [Torjman and Leviten 2001]. This key finding speaks to the engagement methods that Canadians believe are effective. Arts and culture often are viewed as the purview of the elite or of privileged citizens who can afford to engage in these activities. However, the *Our Millennium* projects showed just how central were the arts and cultural activities in engaging youth, seniors, members of visible minorities – virtually all Canadians.

Human capital is embedded in the knowledge and skills of individuals

Human capital refers to the wealth inherent in human resources – the time, energy, skills, interest and commitment – for promoting economic and social well-being. A central dimension of human capital is the recognition that every person, household and community, no matter how apparently ‘impoverished,’ has strengths, resources and capacities. These assets can be developed through strategic investment in human capital.

Nations today increasingly are being categorized according to their ability to produce, apply and create new knowledge. Industrialized countries are being referred to by the catchphrases ‘information society’ and ‘knowledge economy.’

The 2001 Speech from the Throne stated the federal commitment to building a world-leading economy driven by innovation, ideas and talent. It pointed out that Canada could realize its potential only by investing aggressively in the skills and talents of people, and that building a skilled workforce must be a national effort. It committed the federal government to work with provinces and territories and with nongovernmental organizations to ensure that all Canadians achieve their learning goals.

At the international level, many countries have developed economic plans focussed upon improving their human capital. For example, the Dutch social and economic plan entitled *Towards an Innovative Economy* identifies knowledge as the “foundation upon which a better social and economic performance can be built: higher value added, a higher rate of productivity, more jobs and less environmental pollution” [Social and Economic Council 1996: 6].

The central role of competence and knowledge in stimulating economic growth has been widely recognized in recent international literature. The OECD asserts that changing economic and social conditions have given human capital an increasingly vital role in the economic success of nations and individuals [OECD 2001: 17]. But what is particularly interesting about recent OECD publications is the reference to social capital as a *foundation* for the production of human capital. Human capital is created in cultural and social settings and is mediated by human relationships.

Social capital embodies networks that enable collective action

Social capital refers to the relationships, networks and norms that enable collective action [Helliwell 2001: 6]. Social capital is created when people come together out of a shared purpose or goal that goes beyond individual benefits. It is the resource which arises from interactions between people and very much incorporates the idea of connectedness. It results from the bonds that unify people in common purpose and the trust and security arising from the ongoing relationship.

Social capital can be expressed in many ways – especially through various forms of civic engagement. Engagement in civic life is marked by active participation in public affairs, with an emphasis on shared rather than personal interest. Social capital typically is expressed through participation in associations or social structures of cooperation. These include churches, political parties, neighbourhood associations, sports or cultural clubs, and co-operatives, and active participation in civic activities, such as volunteering or voting [Putnam 2000].

In addition to providing access to a variety of resources, community relationships create connections among separate and diverse parts of the community. Generating social capital often

requires building new relationships among segments of the community that typically do not interact with each other.

Social capital has been found to contribute to the health and well-being of individuals and communities in several significant ways [Guy 2000]. People with strong networks of relationships tend to be more successful in their careers and live longer.

The same holds for communities and societies in which there are strong and overlapping networks of formal and informal relationships; individuals in communities and societies with strong social capital tend to be more prosperous, healthier and experience less crime [Helliwell 2001: 6]. Social capital – through the network of bonds and trust that it creates – contributes to social cohesion, especially in light of economic developments that are driving a wedge between the rich and poor families as well as rich and poor nations [Blakely and Suggate 1997].

Economic studies also are finding that the presence of social capital has a positive impact upon the business climate [McCracken 1998]. Countries with a high level of social capital have been found to perform better economically than countries in which this resource ranks low.

Social capital is not an end in itself; it is the means to an end. It provides the foundation for human capital development. And it is an essential ingredient in enabling communities to make things happen collectively. It is through the process of bringing people together and forming relations and networks that social, economic and environmental challenges can be most effectively tackled.

The creation of social capital implies that many different actors must be involved in articulating and realizing a social development vision. Who are these players? Citizens, governments, business and labour, and the voluntary sector – taking action, alone and together.

Key Actors

Citizens are the foundation of communities

Strong and caring communities start with the citizen as the base. In fact, citizens effectively create the threads of caring communities when they invest their time and resources in community.

Many of the bonds created in communities arise from informal contacts and relationships formed among neighbours on the same block and parents of school children in the same classroom. The social capital created through these networks adds to the resilience of individuals and families.

Canadians also have many opportunities for formal engagement – through membership in political parties and voluntary associations, special issue campaigns, public demonstrations and representations to parliamentary committees. But confidence in traditional institutions and in traditional methods of influence has declined in recent years [Policy Research Initiative 1999]. And certain groups, such as new Canadians, tend to have low participation in formal political processes, either through mistrust or deliberate exclusion.

Some of the mistrust may be due to the fact that traditional methods of civic engagement, such as consultation and polling, can be used as tactics to delay substantive change. The flurry of activity around consultation, for example, often replaces actual progress. Citizens must be engaged in processes that are genuine and substantive, such as community-based problem-solving, discussed below.

Governments play a central role in social development

Governments play a central role in social development. They help shape the context, make strategic investments and collect information.

Governments help shape the context for social development through exploration, regulation, voluntary action and exemplary behaviour. At the exploratory level, governments provide support for research around public policy issues and for formulation of policy options to tackle those issues. They may hold consultations for public input and examine proposals through various stages of Parliamentary review.

Regulation involves laws that require, encourage or discourage certain behaviours. Regulation has two key functions. It can encourage certain behaviours through rewards, such as tax breaks, public recognition or incentives. It also can discourage or even punish other behaviours through penalties such as negative publicity, fines, withdrawal of license or even imprisonment. These measures include, for example, economic and social areas such as minimum wage legislation, occupational health standards and environmental benchmarks, such as the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions and the elimination of toxic waste.

Voluntary action refers to activities undertaken because these are deemed to be the ‘right’ thing to do – whether the motive is based on commitment and evidence or on image, reputation and

marketing potential. For example, minimum wage laws set a clear bottom-line payment for work. But many companies move voluntarily beyond these limits, especially if they are trying to attract or retain certain skills. Voluntary action may supplement but cannot replace basic regulation, particularly around occupational health, safety and social standards.

Governments also can shape the social context by modelling desirable behaviour. They should consciously assume the role of exemplary employer with respect to hiring practices, wages, benefits and working time. As employers, governments can act as a model for the rest of the country by cutting back on early morning, evening and weekend meetings. They can show greater consideration for family time – which they trumpet as crucial but which they rarely respect. Governments can provide internships for young people and can ensure a diverse and inclusive workforce. In short, governments as employers can set the pace for all employers throughout the country.

In addition to exemplary social behaviour, governments can have a major environmental impact by cleaning up their own operations and encouraging similar practices by their suppliers. They can pursue green procurement in which they purchase only from businesses that are environmentally sound.

Through their powers of regulation and ability to influence behaviour by incentives and example, governments are effectively the instrument for achieving collective goals. They provide as well as enable the provision of ‘public goods’ that benefit all citizens. But governments do more than ‘create the box.’ They also determine what is ‘in the box’ through strategic investment – in citizens, social infrastructure and community capacity.

Governments can invest in individuals through support for skill development, direct transfers of cash and indirect assistance through tax reduction. Governments have the means to translate into reality the basic rights embedded in international covenants.

Governments are also the primary builders of social infrastructure. They do this by providing funds for built capital such as hospitals, schools, community centres and social housing, and through services such as health care and child care. But governments cannot build social infrastructure on their own. They need to work with other stakeholders – including parents and community members, voluntary organizations, municipalities, employers, trade unions, schools and service providers.

The primary responsibility for financing and overseeing the construction of vital social infrastructure must reside with governments. As it did in the past with medicare, postsecondary education, welfare and social services, Ottawa must create this ‘commons’ in partnership with other levels of government, the voluntary sector and the private sector. Government as the agent of society must remain the prime actor in the financing and overall design of the social infrastructure.

Governments also can help build the capacity of communities. This process involves rethinking the use of community resources and building relationships among these resources for mutually beneficial problem-solving.

Local governments have an especially important role in building community capacity. They can invest resources in several key assets and processes: citizen problem-solving, the formulation of community plans and economic development. Local governments can foster social capital by acting as a bridge among neighbourhoods, community organizations and social institutions and by convening citizens and representatives from diverse sectors in local dialogue. They can encourage the building of a shared vision for the community.

Finally, governments at all levels are at the heart of the knowledge-based world. They collect, store and analyze information (sometimes it seems like that is all they do). Information is crucial not only for understanding the current context. It is essential for tracking trends and determining whether progress has been achieved over time – all part of a pervasive accountability agenda.

Social issues are also the business of business

A vision for the future would be incomplete without considering the role of the private sector which can invest in social development, act as exemplary corporate citizens and participate directly in the community. The private sector can bring information, expertise and resources to the table. But its involvement is crucial for another reason: to help redress the problems for which it is directly responsible.

The policies and practices of many companies – both large and small – effectively have created difficult social, economic and environmental problems. These include large or unexpected layoffs, the provision of part-time work with no associated benefits and hiring policies that allow little flexibility in respect of personal needs, such as the care of young children or sick parents.

Current laws and policies allow corporations to concern themselves primarily with financial returns to their shareholders. But there is increasing recognition of the importance of corporate social responsibility [Walker 1999].

The burgeoning corporate social responsibility movement seeks to promote responsible behaviour around employment standards and business practice. There is growing awareness of the power of social investment to influence corporate performance. Investors can choose to support companies that pay attention not only to the financial bottom line but also to their social and environmental records.

To help assess corporate performance, the social investment movement has developed screens to monitor employee relations, community commitment, ethnic and gender diversity, environmental performance, and job training and employee development. Positive screens in the area of employment policy include good relations with workers and a range of benefits such as pensions, employee assistance, health promotion and supplementary health care plans. Negative screens take account of practices, such as the exploitive use of women's bodies in advertising and the creation of environmental problems through pollution or rainforest destruction.

Governments also can require corporations to act in the public interest – for example, through occupational health and safety codes and environmental standards. Rather than causing damage that then must be repaired by others, the private sector can actively foster support, inclusion and learning.

Organized labour has played a key role in social development through its influence upon the private sector. Labour has negotiated private benefits that later have been generalized to other workers and sectors. It has helped establish a wage floor and has sought the compression of wage differentials. Labour has fought for safe and healthy working conditions and has promoted democratic decision-making in the workplace. It also has been an active player with the voluntary sector in supporting community action.

And the private sector actually has become involved in many important community initiatives. This involvement is increasingly significant. The time crunch that households are experiencing has meant a significant decline in volunteering. As noted, the 2000 National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating reported that the total number of hours volunteered fell by five percent from 1997. There is growing interest in employee voluntarism in which corporations give employees paid time off to volunteer in community activities. And with good reason.

The voluntary sector is the heartbeat of democracy

The groups and organizations that comprise the voluntary sector are highly diverse and play many important roles. But together, they make an invaluable contribution to social well-being. The voluntary sector is the lifeblood of the community. It helps tame unfettered markets. It threads together the individual pieces of communities into a coherent social infrastructure. It is the heartbeat of democracy.

The voluntary sector can provide ethical leadership. It can take a long-term view, a perspective extending beyond truncated political horizons. Voluntary organizations can articulate a vision of society – it is free to work towards creating a vision of the 'ideal world' without fear of lost votes or campaign dollars.

The voluntary sector can urge governments to move beyond immediate political agendas and can present an holistic view that reflects the needs of all citizens. Equally important, it gives a voice to interest groups – such as persons with disabilities or immigrants and refugees – often overlooked in the public discourse, even though they occupy a central place in a pluralist democracy.

Voluntary organizations can act as intermediaries between citizens and governments by writing letters, making presentations to parliamentary committees and participating in policy-related discussions. They help turn private troubles into public issues – private concerns into public causes. Part of this role involves carrying out research, either on behalf of governments or independent of governments, and developing proposals for reform.

But the voluntary sector does more than talk. It acts. The Children's Alliance, for example, helped move along the key pieces of the National Children's Agenda, including the National Child Benefit and the Agreement on Early Childhood Development Initiatives. In fact, it would like to see far more action on both these fronts.

As noted, voluntary organizations deliver services and have initiated thousands of community programs. They do this because of gaps they have identified. Until the signing of the Agreement on Early Childhood Development Initiatives, for example, there was precious little national discussion – let alone investment – in parent resource centres. Voluntary groups took it upon themselves to fill this gap.

Public provision through the nonprofit sector can make services more responsive to the needs of clients and communities (e.g., state funding for transition houses, run by volunteer boards.) Community-level planning requires coordinated interaction of voluntary, profit and public providers in ways that are difficult to accomplish if services are delivered solely by 'stovepipe' national or provincial agencies.

Yet voluntary organizations are more than just 'doers.' They also are in a position to get things done. They help make things happen by acting as convenors that can bring together the diverse players – e.g., private business and sectoral council representatives, labour, the education/training sector, social organizations and anti-poverty groups, and federal and provincial governments, where appropriate.

Just as the voluntary sector makes things happen, it also can keep things from happening. It helped put the brakes, for example, on the Multilateral Agreement on Investment, which potentially could have had a serious impact upon health and social services [Jackson 1997].

And the voluntary sector watches. With accountability the watchword of the 'new' federalism that comes with fewer strings and conditions attached to financing, the voluntary sector will have a stronger watchdog role to play in future.

There are partners ...

A civil society encourages partnering and collaborative work arrangements. These alliances among disciplines, sectors and community members help promote comprehensive solutions to economic, social and environmental problems. Collaborative relationships create new value by bringing new resources, insights and expertise to the table.

Partnerships are voluntary arrangements between two or more parties that agree to work cooperatively towards shared and/or compatible objectives and in which there is shared authority and responsibility for the management of the work. There is joint investment of resources, including time, effort, funds, material, expertise and information.

Partnerships provide a means of cross-sectoral bridging, important in light of the growing sense that bureaucracies and the compartmentalized way in which governments typically address social needs often create more problems than they resolve. Governments are organized to deal with human problems as if these can be segregated into distinct social, health, education and economic needs. Because complex human problems are not readily separated into neat compartments, groups often are refused financing because their project does not meet the narrow funding criteria.

Current government structures have little capacity to address problems in holistic and preventive ways. Most public spending is directed towards a component of a particular issue or towards the alleviation of crisis in the form of remedial intervention after a problem has occurred. Partnerships that involve different sectors represent an important step in trying to address issues in ways that reflect the complexities of most social, economic and environmental problems.

And partnerships themselves embody a clear and important message: Problems such as unemployment, poverty and family violence are the concern of the entire community – not simply of governments or the social sector. All sectors are responsible for addressing these problems, preferably through a planned and coordinated approach that combines resources and expertise in innovative ways [Torjman 1997b].

Despite the strengths of partnerships, many problems potentially could arise. Social partnerships are not a panacea for solving all community concerns, nor should they be viewed as a replacement for government intervention. Private action is no substitute for a solid public sector.

Moreover, there are serious power imbalances inherent in partnerships, especially those that involve the private sector and nonprofits. There are questions related to the inordinate power and control that come with the ability to purchase entry into a field under the guise of ‘partnership.’ Many nonprofit organizations question their ability to be equal players with business partners who may wield substantial economic power and political influence.

While this problem cannot be eliminated, it can be mitigated somewhat through an approach which recognizes the invaluable contribution of the nonprofit partner. Nonprofit groups involved in successful partnerships with the private sector attribute their success to the explicit acknowledgment of their own worth.

Nonprofits bring a wealth of resources to a partnership. They can contribute knowledge and understanding of an issue that is important to the business objectives of the company, the community within which the business operates and the company's employees. Local organizations also can provide knowledge of and access to a geographic community or target group. In fact, knowledge and information are sometimes more important contributions than money. While funds can be obtained from a variety of sources, knowledge and skills are unique and scarce. Nonprofits often are seen by the public as trustworthy sources of information and can speak credibly on issues within their areas of expertise.

Perhaps the most serious problem arises from the view that partnerships involving the private sector are seen by some members of the voluntary sector as a sell-out – the ultimate 'dance with the devil.' But working directly with the private sector is one way to encourage awareness beyond the fiscal bottom line. Lack of attention to broader social, economic and environmental issues can be bad for business. If the community is healthy, it will thrive physically, socially and economically. High unemployment, on the other hand, does not make for a vibrant economy.

And then there are partners

The term 'social partnership' has assumed formal meaning in some parts of the world, notably Europe. While the term varies across countries, "social partnership comprises cooperation between key players in the making of economic and social policy. In particular countries and at particular times, this cooperation might refer mainly or wholly to wage fixing, in other countries and at other times it might embrace a much wider range of topics from management of the economy to provision for retirement. In addition, in different countries, at different times, and according to the scope of the issues upon which cooperation is sought, the key actors might comprise a narrower or wider spectrum" [Casey and Gold 2000: 9].

Since the early 1990s, social pacts have been negotiated among governments and social partners in a number of European Union member states covering not just labour market issues but also areas like social security contributions and taxation. In some countries, dialogue has a statutory basis; in others, custom and practice determine the relationship.

In Austria, for example, the economic success of recent years – measured in terms of growth, low inflation and unemployment, and stable industrial relations – can be attributed largely to the

country's system of social partnership, a system of co-operation among government, employers and labour across virtually all fields of economic policy. It is effectively a consensual approach to policy formulation. Close cooperation between the major parties and organized economic and industrial interests has served as the foundation for future progress toward peace and prosperity [Casey and Gold 2000: 23].

Over the past decade in Ireland, social partnership has assumed the form of a series of social pacts that cover wages, taxation, social welfare, education and health. The government, faced with high levels of inflation and unemployment, serious trade deficits and a large government deficit, involved organizations representing business and labour in the search for solutions. Agreements have been drawn up at three-year intervals under the titles Programme for Economic and Social Progress and Partnership 2000 for Inclusion, Employment and Competitiveness [Casey and Gold 2000: 31].

Agreements on pay and conditions between employers and workers are developed into wider documents of understanding involving a range of interest groups, including the voluntary sector. In the preambles, there is consensus on the need to restrain public spending and to strengthen economic and social solidarity. There is discussion of tax cuts in return for wage restraint and for elements of the social welfare system, the promotion of enterprise, jobs and business formation, individual and collective rights, and the reduction of poverty.

The Irish partnership agreements are basically statements of common understanding and intent. They have no status beyond that accorded them by the parties that attended the talks or signed the agreement. They require ratification by all the unions associated with the Irish Congress of Trade Unions.

Other nations have different forms of dialogue, such as the structure embedded in the Economic and Social Council in France. While established by Constitution, its influence nonetheless has been fairly limited. By contrast, the Foundation of Labour in the Netherlands plays a key role in policy-making and its input is widely sought on major decisions [Casey and Gold 2000: 31].

Here in Canada, the Quebec government convened the Conference on the Social and Economic Future of Quebec. There were many innovations at this meeting, not the least of which was the involvement of new partners around the table [Ninacs 1998: 1]. These new partners included leaders from the women's movement, the voluntary sector, religious groups and community-based coalitions.

The Voluntary Sector Initiative between the federal government and the voluntary sector is another important formal partnership. In March 1999, the Government of Canada and the voluntary sector launched a joint initiative to forge a more effective, strategic relationship to better serve

Canadians. The federal government committed more than \$90 million over five years to develop its relationship with the voluntary sector to enhance quality of life in Canada. The first objective of this initiative is to improve government service delivery and to increase the effectiveness of government programs. The second objective is to strengthen communities and enhance the capacity of the sector to meet its growing demands. The centerpiece of the Initiative is the development of an accord between the government and the voluntary sector, designed to build a new foundation for its ongoing relationship.

But partnerships do not always run smoothly. Problems often arise between the parties involved in the collaborative process. In France, for example, business and labour were invited to an employment summit in October 1997 focussed upon job creation for young people, early retirement and social security reform. Employers walked away from the talks because they were opposed to reductions in working time. Over their objections, the government introduced the statutory 35-hour workweek in June 1998.

Another caveat arises from the concern that the growth of partnerships could encourage a retreat from the public sector. Multisectoral partnerships can never replace a strong public sector. They are an important complement and supplement to a strong public core. But they can never supplant solid public programs that contribute to and nurture the public good [Torjman 1998b]. The exemplary partnerships described below illustrate the possible but do not mean that communities can do it alone.

In short, the major actors – alone and together – can harness various ingredients for social development to carry forward a new vision for the future. This is a vision that sees, and seeks to create, vibrant communities which actively promote social well-being.

Vibrant Communities

Vibrant communities ensure support, inclusion and learning

This is a vision of vibrant communities. They provide support to all members. They include all members. And they promote opportunities for learning at all ages and stages.

Vibrant communities provide support that meets basic needs. Vibrant communities promote inclusion to enable all members to participate actively in social, economic, cultural and political life. And vibrant communities afford opportunities for the lifelong acquisition of knowledge and skills.

The three dimensions of vibrant communities are discussed here as though they are distinct entities. In the real world, these dimensions are intrinsically linked. The provision of support is concerned with meeting basic needs as well as providing opportunities for skills development – also a fundamental component of learning. Inclusion encourages all members to participate to the best of their ability and interest, but requires an essential foundation of support. The learning focus on early childhood development also links to support for families; community-based learning requires citizen engagement that creates inclusion.

In a nutshell: No social development framework has conceptually discrete categories. Nor should it. Social development is both rich and multifaceted; any framework or vision must embody this complexity. While the overlaps may appear messy, they should not be understood as a problem. They simply reflect the reality of interlocking themes that profoundly affect human well-being and development.

Support

Vibrant communities meet basic needs

Vibrant communities ensure that basic human needs are met. There is no mystery here. These are clearly set out in the international covenants to which Canada is a signatory.

Unless basic needs are met, there is no point talking about inclusive or learning communities. A person without a home is effectively a person without citizenship. An individual worried about feeding the kids will have a hard time focussing upon acquiring new skills. It is near impossible to set up a business if an eviction notice looms large. It is equally difficult to concentrate on employability enhancement if physical security is imperiled by actual or threatened violence. And it is unlikely that those involved as primary caregivers of aging parents will find the time to participate in local decision-making.

So basic needs are both physical and emotional. But basic needs involve more than warm meals. They also involve warm hearts. At some point in their lives, most families require some form of assistance or support to help them through various life stages. It may be in raising young children. It may be in relieving the exhaustion of caring for a child with a disability. It may be in looking after a sick or aging parent.

So where to start in this big agenda? Where is the ‘beginning’?

Reducing poverty is the crucial first step

A vision of social development must begin with meeting the needs of the most vulnerable citizens. The primary focus should be on reducing poverty, called the “greatest threat to political stability, social cohesion and the environmental health of the planet” [United Nations Development Programme 1994: 20].

Poverty is both caused and exacerbated by the unequal distribution of land as well as other resources and assets [World Commission 1987: 29]. In addition to labour market and broader economic factors, family structure contributes to poverty. Yet poverty alone is not the sole cause of marginalization. Income inequality, lack of knowledge, political rights and capacity, recognition and power are also key contributing factors [Jenson 2000b: 1]. Clearly, more than economic solutions are required to counter marginalization; these solutions are discussed under inclusion.

Another complication arises from the fact that some observers do not view poverty as a serious problem in the developed world. They would argue that its prevalence has been exaggerated and that its face is far less severe than in the developing world. It is true that citizens of the developed world may not face absolute deprivation – although many do. One has only to look at the numbers of homeless persons lining the streets of major urban centres. But the fact that poverty may be manifested differently between Northern and Southern parts of the world does not make the problem any less serious at home.

Employers can reduce poverty dramatically by paying adequate wages and providing associated benefits, such as pensions. Communities can remove barriers that prevent participation in training programs, the labour market and broader functions, such as recreational and cultural events. They can tackle poverty by building language, educational and job skills. And governments have the fiscal levers to alleviate – if not eradicate – the problem.

Supportive communities tackle hunger and housing

Recent data from Statistics Canada show far too many hungry Canadians in rich Canada [Che and Chen 2001]. For the most part, senior governments and the business sector have had no appetite for tackling this problem. It is simply assumed that nutritious affordable food is available to all [Toronto Food Policy Council 1995]. Wrong. Fortunately, there are some exceptions. Action has been taken by some local governments and voluntary organizations that see every day the devastation from poor and no food.

The Toronto Food Policy Council, for example, partners with business and community groups to develop policies and programs that promote food security. It seeks to connect community groups, give them a voice in developing food policy and set up local projects, such as a nonprofit food distribution company.

The Agincourt Community Services Association in Scarborough, Ontario, created the Alternatives Program, which includes a cooking club, Good Food box distribution, community garden and 'Pick Your Own' trips. Workshops on budgeting and cooking also are offered. While the program does not eradicate poverty, it is an important step in helping low-income households regain their health and become food self-sufficient [Biglar 1998].

The lack of affordable housing is also a serious problem in many communities. In 1996, the latest year for which national data are available, 18 percent of all Canadian households were in core housing need, an increase of 47 percent from five years earlier. 'Core housing need' means that the housing was lacking in one or more of three areas: the number of bedrooms per family size, the safety of the dwelling and the payment of more than 30 percent of household income for housing [Pomeroy 2001].

A major problem is the lack of modest rent units. Following a building boom in the late 1980s, the level of private rental development had slowed by the 1990s. The federal government withdrew support for social housing in 1993 and there has been no new funding for development aside from small programs in BC and Quebec. The lack of investment has been made worse by the barriers faced by lower income renters. Landlords seeking to rent out a vacant unit generally will try to minimize risk – they typically prefer tenants perceived to be more likely to pay the rent.

Governments need to get back into social housing. There are generally two approaches. First, they can help reduce the cost of production of affordable housing. Second, they can help increase households' ability to pay through rent supplements or simply providing income assistance. There is a need both to build more affordable housing and to help low-income families pay for housing [Pomeroy 2001].

Governments are now talking again about housing. The federal and provincial/territorial ministers responsible for housing met in August 2001 to hammer out a housing deal; they met again in November to consider ways to spend the \$680 million Ottawa put on the table.

The involvement of higher levels of government is essential to offset the steep cost involved in new building. But while necessary, governments are not sufficient. The private sector must be actively involved – both as builders and landlords. Local governments and the voluntary sector are crucial players as well.

At the local level, municipal governments can encourage and support the development of secondary suites. Such suites have been created in basements or by subdividing the upper floors of existing homes. Distinct from a rooming house, secondary units typically are created in homes in which an owner/occupant is resident [Pomeroy 2001].

The voluntary sector also has been active in filling the gaps. The World Vision Canada Aboriginal Council, for example, met with members in Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Northwestern Ontario to identify their most critical needs [Simpson 1999b]. All the communities agreed that the lack of affordable housing was a top priority that required new and creative solutions. World Vision Canada developed a self-help approach through which community members could construct their own housing using alternative, low-skill techniques that are affordable and energy efficient.

Three First Nations communities participated in the project and built several houses using an innovative low-skill method, known as straw-bale construction. The Council also has set up a housing co-operative; it raised initial capital for this venture through the construction of two homes using donations of labour, materials, land and capital. The houses then could be used as equity for raising additional funds from financial institutions.

The Quint Development Corporation in Saskatoon is another example of pioneering voluntary action for affordable housing. Quint's efforts focus upon enabling minority or low-income groups to pool their talents and resources in order to create ownership, opportunity, jobs, training, income, stability and self-worth [Usiskin, Szejvold and Keeling 2001].

Job creation and work sharing are important for all

Most Canadians derive their economic security from paid employment. Work opportunities are created primarily by the private sector. Taking social development seriously means that the key priority of economic policy must be full employment and the quality of jobs. But job prospects throughout the world do not look rosy in the early aftermath of September 11. In times of crisis, governments can act as a stabilizer to the economy and also can provide direct opportunities for employment.

The reduction in formal workweek and redistribution of existing working time are other tools. The labour force currently is divided between those with too much work and those with not enough.

Several European countries have tried to tackle this problem by reducing the formal workweek. Most full-time Dutch employees work 36 hours, although 32 hours is the new emerging

standard. As noted, France introduced the mandatory 35-hour week. Employers must pay overtime for work carried out beyond the statutory limit. Ideally, economics alone would encourage employers to hire new workers rather than pay higher overtime costs (although there are often additional costs associated with training new employees).

A related option that can be achieved even in the absence of a legislated solution is to redistribute the existing work. Sharing work does not create new jobs. But it tries at least to apportion existing work more equitably between those working and the un/underemployed [Advisory Group 1994]. Governments and private employers can redress current imbalances by cutting down on excessive overtime and providing more work for those who struggle with barely enough hours for a three-meal day.

Social enterprise provides another option. Quebec has led the way in recognizing its potential. In March 1996, the Quebec government convened the Conference on the Social and Economic Future. One of the task forces set up as part of this process focussed upon the social economy; it proposed 25 projects in a wide range of fields that had the potential of creating up to 20,000 new jobs over three years [Ninacs 1998]. British Columbia also has formally recognized the job creation potential of the social economy; it has developed legislation to support local economic development.

The social economy is a distinct form of economic organization that includes co-operatives and various forms of activity known as 'community economic development' (CED) or social enterprise. Private enterprise risks capital to bring an appropriate financial return to investors. Social enterprise, by contrast, puts capital at risk in the service of social objectives, such as reducing high unemployment, helping marginalized workers such as persons with disabilities and assisting economically depressed regions [Quarter 1992: 3].

With the exception of several provinces that recognize its intrinsic value, social enterprise is not taken seriously as a viable economic activity. It is seen largely as a marginal solution for marginalized individuals and communities. To some extent, this view is a self-fulfilling prophecy. The lack of serious investment makes it difficult for some of these enterprises to succeed. Governments and the private sector can invest in the basic infrastructure of social enterprise – including community economic development organizations and voluntary agencies. In fact, the latter actually embody a wealth of job opportunity if only the service needs of the population were seen as more important [Rifkin 1995].

But if we look only at the role of the higher levels of government – federal and provincial/territorial – we miss an important piece of the puzzle. Local governments can support the development of microenterprise through entrepreneurship centres and mentorship programs in which local business people teach skills to prospective entrepreneurs. Mentorship is proving to be a particularly effective way of helping certain groups, such as young people and new Canadians, find and retain employment [Silowska-Masior and Szajkowski 1998].

Take Halifax. The Human Resources Development Association (HRDA) was created in 1978 with \$275,000 from the Halifax welfare budget [Lewis 1999]. HRDA is now a successful venture capital and business development group set up primarily to serve welfare recipients. The subsidiary, HRDA Enterprises Ltd., has created small businesses that have placed several thousand welfare recipients in newly created jobs.

Microenterprise also can be supported through various forms of micro lending – providing small loans to creditors considered too high risk by the ‘big five.’ The Montreal Community Loan Association, for example, works with borrowers, individual and institutional lenders, and financial institutions to bridge the gap between those who need financial capital and those who wish to invest in community development. Welfare recipients, single mothers, immigrants and refugees, and unemployed youth usually are denied access to capital by conventional financial institutions. Loan recipients are provided with technical assistance to support the development of business plans and the repayment process [Evoy 1997].

And the voluntary sector has been at the forefront of raising capital not only for loans. It is also has begun to help households build assets to afford them some choice – and hope.

Opportunities 2000, for example, was launched by the Lutherwood Community Opportunities Development Association to reduce poverty in Waterloo Region. Organizers mobilized the entire community to create economic opportunities involving training, access to funds for business startup and the development of community enterprise.

One of the projects involved the creation of individual development accounts [Self-Employment Development Initiatives 1997]. These accounts give low-income households an opportunity to save and accumulate assets over a period of time. For every dollar that a welfare household is able to save, the project deposits three dollars into a designated account [Rail 2001]. (The Co-operators Insurance Group of Guelph contributed the funds.) The savings are then directed toward a specific goal – such as education, job training or investing in a small business – that increases income or employability. Most important, these assets help bolster households’ sense of self-esteem. The federal government currently is providing support for a pilot project to test this model in ten communities throughout the country.

But while microenterprise and other ventures in the social economy open the door to job opportunities, they may be precarious forms of work. Small businesses often are associated with low wages, uncertain income and few associated benefits, such as pensions. The redistributive role of government has become all the more important with the growth of innovative, but unstable, employment.

The redistribution of income provides security

The voluntary sector, local governments and private business all can play a role in creating economic opportunities. But at the end of the day, an increasingly insecure labour market underscores the vital redistributive role of the state for all citizens. This redistributive role is crucial, given the wide and growing gaps in market income – i.e., income from wages and salaries, self-employment, savings, investments and other private sources.

Poor, modest-income and middle-income families actually have experienced a decline in their market incomes since 1989. Upper-middle-income and high-income families, by contrast, have seen their market share increase somewhat in recent years. Strong social programs and a fair tax system are needed more than ever to narrow the wide inequalities in earnings created by the changing labour market and the growth of nonstandard employment – i.e., part-time, casual and contractual work.

The federal government is the lynchpin here. It can make a direct dent in poverty through improvements to the income security programs that fall within its mandate: the Canada Child Tax Benefit, Employment Insurance, the Canada Pension Plan (Quebec runs the twin Quebec Pension Plan) and elderly benefits – Old Age Security, Guaranteed Income Supplement and Spouse's Allowance. Provinces and territories, for their part, can reduce the absolute deprivation for social assistance recipients.

But governments can reduce financial instability through more than redistribution-of-income-after-the-fact. They can enhance prospects for opportunity by helping individuals acquire the skills they need to find reasonably paid employment. Investment in skills development is discussed below, under learning.

While support for education and skills development contributes to learning, it is also an important means of reducing poverty throughout the world. The evidence on population growth suggests that educational level and birth rate are inversely related; higher levels of education typically correspond with fewer children. Several international reports emphasize the need to improve the status and education of women as the principal routes to poverty reduction and environmental protection [World Commission 1987; Independent Commission 1996; United Nations 1994].

Families need formal and informal supports

Families need the basics. But they also require a wide range of supports – social, health, education and training – to help parents balance responsibilities at home and work, and assist them

deal with problems that income alone cannot solve. All families with children need help at some point, given the problems they face that are rooted in profound changes in the economy and society, as well as the age-old burdens of childrearing.

Among the more traditional child-related social services are adoption, foster care, child welfare and family counselling. To date, most of the spending on children, youth, the elderly and persons with disabilities goes toward ‘after-the-fact’ services – after child abuse, family breakup, youth have run into trouble with the law or institutionalization.

While formal social services are important, caring communities also seek to ensure the presence of a social infrastructure whose purpose is to provide natural forms of support. These include family resource centres, parent education, respite care, co-operative babysitting arrangements, parent matching programs, foster grandparenting and neighbourhood support groups. A strong social infrastructure also includes child care and early childhood programs that promote a head start on learning and development during the critical early years.

Most Canadian parents – including single parents and those with preschool children – are now in the labour force. But the lack of affordable, high-quality child care has been a major barrier to training and workforce participation. Only a minority of Canadian families with children – typically affluent families with enough money or (some) poor families lucky enough to find government-subsidized care – can obtain regulated child care provided in day care centres or caregiver homes. Only well-off households can hire nannies to care for their children in their own homes.

Yet even for many middle-income families, cost is not the only issue. Equally serious is the lack of high-quality child care. Regulated child care is typically superior to unregulated care. However, regulatory requirements vary from one province to another, and generally are not up to the standards associated with quality child care. This problem ideally should be addressed through direct investment in the supply of regulated child care that meets the highest of standards.

Families with children with physical or mental disabilities have special needs that rarely are adequately met. Special needs include technical aids and equipment, such as wheelchairs, hearing devices, specialized computers and software. They also involve specialized services to assist with daily living, health-related conditions or communication and learning problems. Finally, special needs include respite to give parents some relief from their caregiving responsibilities.

These services are not accessible to many families that desperately need them. The required supports simply may not be present in their community. Or if they do exist, they may have to be purchased at a price many families cannot afford. They are forced to pay dearly for these services, a burden that stretches even comfortable incomes perilously thin. These supports are essential not only for economic participation but also for inclusion in communities.

There is a growing body of literature on the importance of delivering services in an integrated or holistic way, rather than through the piecemeal approach typically used [Browne et al. 1998]. Moreover, recreation is emerging a central piece of the puzzle, particularly for families and children deemed to be ‘at risk.’

A recent study found that “recreational services alone help psychologically disordered children on welfare maintain their social, physical and academic competence at a level equal to that of a non-disordered child. Without the services, the child’s competence level actually drops. Recreation appears to pay for itself through reduced use of health and social service, such as child psychology, social work and probation. The impact of providing recreational services alone resulted in a 10 percent greater exit from social assistance compared to parents of children who did not receive this service” [Browne et al. 1998].

Participation in sports, recreation and other leisure activities is important because it promotes inclusion, and it is associated with an enhanced quality of life through the acquisition of new skills and improved physical and psychological well-being. Data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth found that children who participate in organized activities outside school such as sports, music, the arts or clubs tend to have higher self-esteem, interact better with friends and perform somewhat better in school. The Laidlaw Foundation currently is supporting research in this area [Beauvais 2001; Jackson, Roberts and Harman 2001].

Inclusion

Research points increasingly to the negative effects of exclusion in terms of anti-social behaviour, violence and unsafe neighbourhoods [MacKinnon 1999]. In response to this concern, some communities are making a conscious effort to ensure that all members feel they ‘belong.’ In Prince Edward Island, for example, communities from across the province came together on United Nations Day on October 24, 1998, to commit themselves to what they called ‘A Promise of Inclusion.’ The commitment is a promise to strengthen communities by working to accept difference and promote respect for the dignity of all people [MacKinnon 1999].

The inclusion agenda is broad in scope. It can begin by efforts to open the door – literally.

Physical barriers should be removed

Inclusive communities are built on a strong foundation of supportive communities. Inclusion means ‘being there’ – not just in mere physical presence but also in the deeper sense of commitment and engagement.

Some groups face barriers that exclude them from participating in communities – both physically and socially. The first step toward building inclusive communities is to ensure that all members are able to move freely and engage in all aspects of social, economic and cultural life.

Barrier-free design is the starting point for inclusion. This design is relevant not only for persons with disabilities but for all community members. As the population ages, barrier-free design will become increasingly important. In fact, it should be the norm – not the exception. Ramps and curb cuts are helpful for seniors, for persons who need help walking and for caregivers pushing baby strollers. Low telephones can be accessed not only by persons in wheelchairs but also by young children. Large typeface is accommodating for all – including the growing numbers whose eyesight and hair colour are fading.

Barrier-free design can cost a great deal when it involves after-the-fact retrofit. But it costs little or nothing to design accessible spaces from scratch. Hence the importance of a lens of inclusion to meet the needs of an aging population. This means accessible transit, appropriate lighting and signage, adapted housing and universal design standards. Real estate developers, architects and municipal planners must be involved at all stages of barrier-free design.

While accessible public space is important for all, certain groups face further barriers that physical design alone cannot overcome. Many persons with disabilities require additional supports in the form of equipment and services to help them meet the physical, procedural and attitudinal barriers that appear woven into the physical and social fabric of communities.

There is discussion under way in the country about the possibility of a National Disability Supports Initiative [Torjman 2000a]. Under this proposal, federal funding would help lever associated provincial and territorial dollars into the supply of disability supports. The Agreement on Early Childhood Development Initiatives provides a prototype for this investment. Such an initiative would be especially important to ensure communities’ ability to promote deinstitutionalization and enable community living.

But accessibility is far more than a government issue. It should be understood as a societal project [Godfrey and McLean 1999]. The Community AccessAbility program in Ontario, for example, was established to encourage nonprofit community organizations to enter into partnerships with local businesses, service organizations and persons with disabilities to make their communities more

accessible. The Community ACCESS-ability program in Nova Scotia provides grants to municipalities and nonprofit organizations for wheelchair ramps, automatic doors and other improvements to community facilities throughout the province.

Sometimes exclusion is the result not of stairs but of stares – and discriminatory practices that close windows of opportunity.

Skill barriers should be reduced

As noted, visible minorities in Canada experience higher rates of poverty than white Canadians. In 1996, individuals from visible minorities had pre-tax average earnings of \$19,227 compared to \$25,069 for white Canadians. Average after-tax income of visible minorities groups was \$16,053 in that year compared with \$20,129 for other Canadians, a 20 percent gap [Galabuzi 2001].

This despite the fact that members of these groups have higher levels of education, on average, than other Canadians. Seventy-two percent of skilled workers from visible minority groups had university degrees, a rate about four times higher than Canadian households. Several recent reports attribute the problem to racism, arising from many factors including employers' often-questionable requirement for 'Canadian experience' [Galabuzi 2001; Ornstein 2000].

Yet it is often not easy – or at times even possible – to get Canadian experience. Immigrants often find that skills acquired offshore are not recognized here by educational institutions, trade and professional associations, and employers. The solution lies not in acquiring new skills but in recognizing or simply upgrading the credentials they already have.

This solution is easier said than done. Its resolution requires the involvement of governments at all levels, professional associations, postsecondary educational institutes, organized labour, trades associations and employers. If ever there were an issue that requires many players at the table, it is this one. And there are many components of the problem that must be tackled, starting even before individuals arrive in Canada [Alboim 2001]. These actions are required not only to ensure inclusion but also to address the impending labour shortages, earlier discussed.

But the don't-hold-your-breath scenario is in order here. It will take years to break down the vested interests that hold the current system in place. In the meantime, the voluntary sector can achieve a lot. For example, it can support mentorship programs that have been so successful in opening doors – especially for those involved in professions and skilled trades. The Skills for Change Mentorship Program matched employed engineers with immigrants seeking work in that field [Silowska-Masior and Szajkowski 1998]. The mentorship pairs met regularly in an attempt to

link prospective employees to job opportunities that can be accessed through networking and contacts.

Work costs should be lowered

Barriers can arise not only from non-recognition of skills. It may not be possible for some people to work or participate in communities. The cost of participation keeps them out.

Work costs, in particular, include transportation for job interviews, work clothing, license to drive a vehicle for employment purposes or to operate equipment, professional dues or license fees, and equipment such as tools or protective gear. Right now, the voluntary sector helps fill this gap. The Lutherwood Community Opportunities Development Association in Waterloo Region, for example, helped offset some of these costs through an Innovation Loan Fund. But the federal and provincial/territorial governments certainly can play a more active role by providing some funds for this purpose. Local governments could help set up a labour force transition fund, for example, to offset some of these one-time or temporary costs.

The cost of health- and disability-related special needs also can be a barrier to employment in particular and participation in the community more generally. The special assistance budget within welfare provides for these needs in the form of wheelchairs, hearing aids, prosthetic equipment, medications and assistive devices for independent living or work. Because special assistance items are intended primarily for welfare recipients, the provision of this aid virtually ties many individuals to this income program. When recipients try to move off welfare, they may lose access to vital assistance.

Some jurisdictions are taking steps to redress this problem. They are continuing to ensure support during the transitional period in which welfare recipients are establishing themselves in the workplace. The Healthy Kids program in BC, for example, provides basic dental and vision care benefits for children in low-income working families not already covered by an employer-sponsored insurance plan. At the local level, municipalities along with voluntary organizations and labour could create a special fund to help offset health and disability costs.

Inclusive communities enable mobility

The lack of accessible, affordable transportation can be a barrier to inclusion and full participation in the economic, social and cultural life of the community. Persons with disabilities and new Canadians, in particular, rely heavily on public transit.

Local governments must take the lead in enabling mobility. Temporary transportation subsidies could be provided to help those trying to move from welfare to work. Bus passes could be made available for distribution through selected community agencies, as in the City of Victoria. Other options include transportation subsidies, carpools for certain individuals (e.g., accessible taxi service for persons with disabilities if there is no parallel transit system) and support for home business or workstations. Fares might be reduced during off-peak hours, making public transit more affordable for all.

But some regions face transit barriers beyond physical access and affordability. The problem is simple: You can't get there from here. Because local governments run the bus companies in some communities, there are major gaps in transport throughout a given region. In theory, it is possible to respond by encouraging prospective workers or students to move closer to their work or school. The crisis of affordable housing in many centres makes this proposal easier said than done. Cross-regional solutions are required to ensure a seamless ride.

But transportation issues move beyond cost and access. They relate as well to investment in public transportation that is environmentally friendly. And here's where municipalities come smack up against barriers of their own: the ability to pay.

User fees should be restricted

Inclusion involves both physical inclusion and fiscal inclusion. The lens of inclusion checks for more than physical entry. It also checks for the ability to pay. Programs and facilities must ensure participation by all members.

Increasingly, user fees are being charged for community festivals, cultural events, recreational paths and sports facilities. Activities billed as 'community events' often exclude many members.

Community events and celebrations, such as festivals, parades and block parties, are important not just because they are fun. They help keep people in touch with each other and reinforce important networks and associations. Communities inadvertently may be reducing their social capital by charging fees that permit only certain segments of the community to participate.

Local governments can again take the lead on this front. One option is to allow free or substantially reduced rates for public facilities during off-peak hours. A municipal pool not used during certain times can be open to the public at no charge.

Local governments can make in-kind contributions of space and facilities to support nonprofit activities concerned with poverty reduction, local economic development and cultural enrichment.

But the user fee problem is not simple to resolve; its roots lie deep. User fees are merely the tip of a fiscal iceberg. Many local governments find themselves in a financial bind and are plagued by problems. The streets of numerous major cities are lined with homeless people. There are far too many unemployed and underemployed workers. Poverty remains high, especially in major urban centres. Large municipalities face settlement pressures related to federal immigration policy; Ottawa accepts new citizens but does not provide sufficient funds to assist with required housing, language, skill and family supports.

Municipal governments also face substantial challenges to putting in place the infrastructure that ensures a clean environment. A move to 'green' transportation – whether through fuel cell buses, electrical cars or light rail transit – costs money.

Local governments are constrained in their ability to tackle these complex social, economic and environmental challenges [Federation of Canadian Municipalities 2001]. Municipalities in most provinces have only limited sources of revenue: property tax, payments from higher levels of government in lieu of taxes and fees from various sources such as development charges, permits and admissions (and parking tickets!). Neither do they have any say in the key levers – interest rates, international trade agreements and global currency trading – that have a major impact upon some of the problems, such as underemployment and homelessness, with which they must cope.

Another constraint is the fact that municipalities are not permitted to run deficits on their operating budgets [Slack 1999]. Local governments must pay for all their operating costs without 'borrowing from the bank.' They either must raise property taxes or cut programs in order to hold the line on spending.

Municipalities in Ontario, in particular, face the added problem of a rising cost burden. This millstone is partly the result of provincial disentanglement, or the 'who does what' exercise, undertaken in 1996. Regions now must pay a greater portion of welfare, social housing and home care. Costs for the latter are expected to rise steadily with an aging population. To help offset the cost burden, they must choose between raising taxes – not a popular option – or cutting programs.

The federal government provides no direct funding to municipalities which, constitutionally, are deemed to be a provincial responsibility. Only recently has the federal government begun to get back into this area through the national infrastructure program announced in the 2000 federal Budget. But these funds are being used primarily for the physical hardware in communities – roads,

water works and sewers. Federal funds are not going toward investment in social infrastructure at the municipal level. The US, by contrast, makes major investment in municipal environmental and social infrastructure, such as light rail transit and public housing.

There have been calls in Canada for fundamental fiscal reform that would allow more transfers to municipalities or that would permit local governments to introduce new means to raise revenue [Jacobs and Broadbent 2001]. Some provinces, such as Alberta, have acted to address the problem. The City of Calgary has a range of fiscal instruments at its disposal to generate revenue. The first meeting of the so-called 'C-5' in Winnipeg sought to bring attention to the imbalance between responsibility and the capacity to raise funds. The Prime Minister recently announced a caucus working group to explore the federal role with respect to the broad range of urban issues.

Citizens need to be meaningfully engaged

Inclusion involves more than physical presence. The active concept of inclusion means that citizens have an opportunity to make contributions – to participate in addressing the needs of the community and in the decisions that affect them.

As noted, Canadians already have many avenues for formal political participation – membership in political parties, voluntary associations, special issues campaigns, public demonstrations and representations to parliamentary committees. But there are signs of declining confidence in the traditional paths of political influence. Voter turnout is down, especially among younger Canadians. Poll results showed declining confidence in formal institutions.

Some of the traditional methods of citizen engagement, such as consultation, often delay substantive change. The flurry of activity around a consultation process can mask the fact that no real progress on a given issue is being made. Consultation inadvertently (or perhaps deliberately) becomes a substitute for action.

But some interesting methods have emerged to encourage meaningful engagement. Study circles, for example, convene small groups to learn about, discuss and develop options and preferences on a policy issue. Citizen juries bring together selected people for a short period to deliberate and render a decision on a particular issue. Search conferences, involving 20-30 people working in large and small groups, help facilitate strategic planning [Abele et al. 1998: 17-18].

Deliberative dialogue is another method of engaging citizens. This technique was pioneered by the National Issues Forum and the Kettering Foundation in the US. The process involves bringing together people from a variety of backgrounds and perspectives to work through different

approaches to dealing with an issue. There are generally three or four possible choices – not just one or two alternatives. The creation of balanced choices promotes a better understanding of complex issues and the range of potential options [Simpson 2001a].

Substantial work on citizen engagement is under way in the European Union. The planning cell offers “an important means of developing a more inclusive and democratic society” and for “resolving hardened conflicts and producing consensual outcomes” [Dienel 1999: 81]. A planning cell is a group of 25 people from across the social spectrum who work together for a strictly limited time. With the help of two moderators, they learn about an issue delegated to them by a commissioning body and they consider a number of alternative solutions [Dienel 1999: 83].

Generally, planning cells have been only implemented “when a commissioning body has been unable to resolve a problem itself and has felt compelled to involve the public. The task to be undertaken by the planning cell is then formulated by negotiations between the commissioning body and the organizing institute, although with some bigger projects it has been carried out by separate coordinating committees or an advisory council plus an accompanying board of trustees” [Dienel 1999: 87]. This method has been used 155 times in 39 separate locations across Germany since 1972.

In order to lend legitimacy to planning cells, “these have been designed to feed directly into the wider policy-making process. As a starting point, all planning cell projects must have an official commissioning body, be it a local authority or a central government ministry. This provides an addressee for each citizens’ report, a body with power and authority to act upon the recommendations” [Dienel 1999: 86].

These various forms of deliberative process are important not just for democracy. They also contribute to communities’ capacity to solve problems and learn.

Learning

Communities should provide opportunities for lifelong learning

Despite the lifelong talk about lifelong learning, few concrete measures have been taken – by governments or other sectors – to make real this ideal. But putting in place a system of lifelong learning moves beyond the current decision-making and financing infrastructure. Present modes of learning are rooted in formal institutions funded primarily by governments and individuals. Most of the learning takes place in formal settings through structured programs.

Required are new mechanisms that can provide opportunities for many types of learning and for people of all ages. Councils that represent various industrial sectors can play a role in supporting industry-relevant training. The federal government is studying the possibility of individual learning accounts. These are based on the idea that if an individual decides to set some money aside for continuous learning, Ottawa would provide some top-up into those accounts, as in Canada Education Saving Grants.

It should be noted that the idea has faced mixed reviews. The Canadian Labour and Business Centre reports that labour representatives generally do not like the idea of individual learning accounts. They prefer a training grant and tax levy system, effectively a national version of the one percent tax that the Quebec government levies upon business in order to support training. The Centre reports that business opposes any new tax and prefers the learning account concept.

The European Union provides a prototype for promoting learning at all stages through private, public and voluntary partnerships. In fact, there is an active ‘learning communities’ movement overseas. It evolved as a result of the Conference on Learning Communities in Sweden in 1992. In the UK, a learning community is “any city, town or village, and surrounding area that, using lifelong learning as an organizing principle and social goal, promotes collaboration of the civic, private, voluntary and education sectors in the process of achieving agreed upon objectives related to the twin goals of sustainable economic development and social inclusiveness” [Faris and Petersen 2000].

Investment in early childhood development is essential

In today’s knowledge economy whose primary resource is human capital, cradle-to-grave lifelong learning is a national imperative. It is not a luxury for the fortunate few. Yet Canada, outside of Quebec, continues to pretend that ‘education’ begins at age 4 or 5. Parents must shoulder most of the financial burden and responsibility for the ‘care’ of their young children until they are old enough to attend kindergarten or elementary school [Battle and Torjman 2000]. Lifelong learning ideally should begin in the cradle, if not before.

There is growing evidence that early childhood experiences have long-term effects on educational and work performance. They also affect the risk for disease later in life. Yet apart from Quebec, Canada underinvests in this area, relative to other developed nations. Many European nations, for example, have comprehensive family policies.

The root of Canada’s inadequate provision for early childhood lies in the artificial and outmoded distinction between care and education. In the Leave-It-To-Beaver worldview that has long

been *passé*, fathers knew best and went to work. Mothers cared for their young children at home until they were old enough to go to kindergarten (if available) or elementary school, when ‘education’ began [Battle and Torjman 2000].

This model, whose influence in Canada lingered long after Wally and The Beaver grew up, is out of touch for two reasons [Battle and Torjman 2000]. First, the large majority of mothers, including those with infants, now work in the paid labour force, so most families must find care for their preschool children. Second, research as well as commonsense observation show that learning begins at – perhaps even before – birth. The first few years of life are critical for brain development and affect children’s subsequent performance at school and, eventually, in the job market [McCain and Mustard 1999]. Public funding is aimed mainly at school-age children and ignores the formative period of learning: the early years.

We now know that children who do not receive the nutrition and stimulation necessary for good development in the earliest months and years of life may have difficulty overcoming deficits later on [McCain and Mustard 1999]. Investment in early childhood nutrition, stimulation and development is a crucial preventive measure.

There is also evidence of significant stress on families and early childhood development during times of profound economic and social change. Supports for parents should be in place in communities as early as possible – not just for low-income households but for families at all income levels.

Crucial investments in early childhood development, literacy, and education and training are also essential for ensuring the success of a knowledge-based economy. Because society as a whole benefits when these essential needs are met and suffers from their neglect, society must assume responsibility through its principal institution for collective action – government [Battle and Torjman 2000].

In September 2000, the federal and provincial/territorial governments signed the Agreement on Early Childhood Development Initiatives. The governments agreed to four major streams of investment: promoting healthy pregnancy, birth and infancy; improving parenting and family supports; strengthening early childhood development, learning and care; and strengthening community supports for families with children. But the \$2.2 billion over five years will not stretch far over these four areas – and there likely will be precious little additional funding still required for expanding the supply of licensed child care and providing respite for caregivers.

It should be noted that Quebec did not sign this agreement. But its non-signature is no reflection of its commitment to this area. In fact, Quebec is well ahead of the pack when it comes to providing family supports, including affordable licensed child care.

While governments must be the key investors in early childhood development, communities also play an essential role. Indeed, the voluntary sector has long been at the forefront of activity. So it comes as no surprise that the Agreement on Early Childhood Development Initiatives requires the cooperation and active involvement of the voluntary sector.

There are thousands of child-focussed programs throughout the country, largely the result of voluntary organizations that have taken the initiative to help fill the gaps left by piecemeal government programs and support. In recent years, these individual programs have begun to work more closely in many communities in an attempt to consolidate their respective contributions. One example is Success by 6, now in place in more than 200 communities throughout North America [Nolté 1999].

Initiated by the United Way, Success by 6 is not a single program and is neither funded nor owned by a single organization. Rather, the initiative builds partnerships among the public, private and voluntary sectors to raise awareness of the importance of early childhood development. It seeks to enhance collaboration among service providers. It raises money over and above United Way campaigns in order to increase investment in services known to make a difference in child development.

Learning means skill development

Education and skills development are key to economic security. Nations today are being categorized according to their ability to produce, apply and create new knowledge. As noted, industrialized countries are being referred to increasingly as ‘information societies’ and ‘knowledge economies.’

More attention is being paid as well to the ‘digital divide’ between the North and South – in recognition of the fact that the developing world falls well behind in its capacity to generate and apply information. The digital divide also is used to characterize the inequities in access to knowledge and information technologies between the have’s and have-not’s within developed nations. There is a gap between the information rich and information poor [Kaul, Grunberg and Stern 1999: 484].

Higher levels of education have long been known to be linked with enhanced worker productivity and the ability to generate higher incomes. In order to compete in a rapidly changing knowledge-based economy, nations must invest heavily in education, training and skill formation. But sharp increases in postsecondary tuition fees in the 1990s and higher level of student indebtedness have raised concern about accessibility to postsecondary education, especially for lower-income students.

Yet in a knowledge economy, education is intended not only for a small elite. Education, literacy and skills development are particularly important for the unskilled whose economic marginalization often leads to social exclusion [OECD 2001].

Building skills includes academic upgrading and job training – e.g., computer training, data processing and trades, such as carpentry or electronics. Training may lead some participants to immediate jobs; in other cases, they may seek financial or technical assistance to create their own jobs. The apprenticeship system must be improved – both as a way to help young workers make the transition from school to work and as a means to tackle the skills shortage being felt now in selected sectors and looming large in most areas of the economy.

Local governments can support the development of an appropriate skills base in their respective regions. They can promote cross-sectoral approaches to training by ensuring that educational institutions work more closely with business to develop appropriate training. This approach is known as ‘customized training’ – a form of skills development that is short term and targeted toward precise job-related needs [Torjman 1999].

Customized training differs from traditional training that tends to take place over a relatively long period and can be costly for the participant. Courses offered by community colleges or private institutes typically take at least several months to complete and most unemployed workers cannot go without a source of income for so long.

One of the most advanced models of customized training has been developed by the Winnipeg-based Opportunities for Employment. Under this program, job vacancies are sought by job developers who have extensive contact with local employers. The employers for which training programs have been developed in that city include furniture and building component manufacturers, hotels, insurance firms, call centres, food services, and food producers and manufacturers. Training in computer software also is offered to help participants fill administrative positions in a wide range of firms.

Nearly 70 percent of recruits placed in full-time work are still employed. Its solid results are due primarily to the fact that this nonprofit group collaborates closely with the private sector. There is no guarantee that the trainees will be hired by the firms involved in the project. But it is clearly in their interest to employ workers with job-ready skills. These individuals have been trained explicitly to fill the precise requirements that the employers themselves have identified.

Based on this and other successful local models, the City of Ottawa engaged community groups, trainers and the private sector in a similar customized approach. Welfare recipients were trained in market-relevant areas and for firms that required designated skills.

The concept was expanded recently to a region-wide employment partnership called TalentWorks and turned over for implementation to the Ottawa Centre for Research and Innovation. What began as a small project for training the hard-to-employ has evolved into a comprehensive initiative for addressing skill shortages in the major clusters of the local economy including high tech, biotech and photonics. This project is considered unique in the world and likely will become a model for human capital development in future.

Customized training programs have not been supported by government or industry in any consistent or systematic way. These programs have had to operate on shoestring budgets. Moreover, training funds are tied to individuals and there is little investment in the infrastructure of the programs trying to deliver the service. This lack of core support makes it difficult to serve the entire community. There are many unemployed – young people, new Canadians, those involved in the corrections system and the underemployed – who do not come with training dollars ‘attached’ to them from various income programs, especially Employment Insurance.

One solution to this problem is a community skill development fund to which private employers would contribute. Because the money would be directed into a common pool, the respective contribution of individual employers, especially that of very small businesses, would be relatively modest.

In fact, all the actors in the labour market – governments, workers, unions, employers and educational institutions – have a role to play in training and skill development. They also can contribute to workforce planning to help ensure the transfer of knowledge from older workers to the younger generation of workers. Governments can promote this transfer through several measures, including tax credits for training or mentoring between older workers near retirement and their younger successors.

This training gap is recognized internationally as well. The Social and Economic Council in the Netherlands, for example, calls for strategic dialogue between public knowledge institutes and companies in which the latter express their needs with regard to educational and research programmes [Social and Economic Council 1996: 20].

Learning communities engage in problem-solving

Learning is far more than an educational process in which individuals or groups acquire new knowledge. Rather, it is understood more broadly as a form of community development in which community members engage actively around issues that affect them. “They learn through group activity to define problems affecting them, to decide upon a solution and to act to achieve the solution. As they progress, they gain new knowledge and skills” [Faris and Petersen 2000].

Community problem-solving is effectively a form of learning in which members struggle with the possibilities, trade-offs and options around a given issue. The problem to be solved may be a negative one – such as high rates of unemployment, poverty, domestic violence or crime. But it also may be a positive one, such as promoting appreciation of the arts, beautifying a neighbourhood or developing an ecological plan.

Community problem-solving does not mean that any one person or group has the answer to a certain problem. Rather, it is a process of finding a reasonable solution or approach acceptable to a broad range of interests. That solution is found by engaging key players from different sectors in helping to make the decisions that ultimately will affect them. There are many positive examples from which to learn – especially in the environmental field. Canada has substantial experience in encouraging multisectoral dialogue through roundtable discussions [Bell 1998].

Sustainable communities encourage local planning and decision-making. The City of Guelph is but one example. In the early 1990s, the Works Department staff asked the City Council to develop a plan that would focus on the city's diverse environmental goals [Étienne 2001]. Council decided to take a 'bottom up' approach by asking residents to come forward with their goals and objectives for a healthier environment.

Hundreds of community members submitted ideas, effectively setting the plan for the city. The subsequent Green Plan recommended how the City should proceed with respect to land use, waste minimization, water, transportation and energy. The City of Guelph, Environment Canada, the Ontario Ministry of the Environment and Energy, and more than 20 local sponsors donated funds toward the implementation of the Plan. Since its inception, there have been dramatic results, including a 14 percent reduction in municipal waste diversion, an 11 percent decrease in per capita wastewater generation and a 25 percent rise in the use of public transit.

Journey Forward, sponsored by United Way Winnipeg, is a community involvement initiative. Its purpose is to engage Winnipeggers in identifying and building consensus around the issues they feel are most important. It seeks to bring together representatives from varied networks and sectors to spark discussion and debate around major social concerns. The initiative helps build connections among key sectors to learn, share knowledge and "celebrate solutions already occurring in the community."

On another front, the federally funded National Crime Prevention Centre actively supports the concept and practice of local problem-solving. It bases its work on support for community mobilization, a strategy that coordinates the efforts of various partners. Communities must work collaboratively to identify an issue of interest or a problem of concern.

Conflict resolution programs are particularly important because they seek nonviolent solutions to social, economic and environmental problems. By trying to avoid violent confrontation,

these initiatives not only find constructive solutions but also reduce costs related to court appearances, police work and imprisonment. Many Canadian communities have established special councils to oversee the development and implementation of crime prevention strategies.

The City of Calgary, for example, initiated a Removing Barriers project to address the concerns of members of the Aboriginal residents. In the early stages of the project, focus group consultations were held with members of the Aboriginal and Métis communities and then with front-line workers and service agencies. Listening circles subsequently brought together 175 members of the community, service providers and agency leaders to discuss barriers, issues and solutions, and to develop a strategy for action.

Inclusive communities create links

Finally, it is not possible to talk about learning without mention of information technology. There is mixed news on the IT front.

On the negative aside of the ledger, as noted, the digital divide is intensifying the gap between the have's and have not's – both in developed countries and between North and South. There needs to be concerted action to close this gap.

Moreover, a screen is no replacement for a human face. At the end of the day, information technology can only complement, but not displace, the far more beneficial atmosphere created by direct, interactive, collaborative, personal contact in learning [Brown and Duguid 2000]. Even the promoters of Community Learning Networks, which rely heavily on information technology, acknowledge that there is “no substitute for a supporting environment with a human face” [Faris and Petersen 2000].

But there are some important examples in which technology, far from isolating members of the community, effectively have acted as a window on the world. Rankin Inlet, for instance, is a community of about 2,000 people, about 80 percent of whom are Inuit [Simpson 1999a]. It is located 1,000 kilometers north of Winnipeg and is accessible only by air. The community suffers from many serious problems, including high unemployment, substance abuse and suicide. But it also has substantial resources, including more than 100 small and large businesses.

An elementary school computer teacher took the initiative to build the community in a positive way by harnessing local resources. He was convinced that its geographic isolation, in particular, could be reduced through technology. He set up a partnership with a local investment corporation to create ‘Igalaaq’ – the Community Access Centre. The Centre was located in the

computer room of the local elementary school in order to provide Internet access to staff and students during school days and to community members during evenings and weekends. The Centre sought support from local businesses and governments; 52 business and government stakeholders and 61 individuals have become Partners in Education with the school.

The Centre has created links to communities both within and well beyond Canadian borders. It has helped reduce the sense of isolation and created a feeling of community pride. “Sometimes our students get the message from traditional media that their lives are somehow less than those of others ‘in the South’ because they don’t live in an urban area or hang out at shopping malls. When our students get e-mail from others around the world who are amazed that our kids see caribou and polar bears and go on dog sled trips, *our kids feel an increased sense of pride and appreciation for their culture, their language and their special place in the world*” [Simpson 1999: 6; italics added].

To have a sense of dignity and an appreciation of our special place in the world:
Perhaps that’s the essence of reclaiming our humanity.

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