

# INVESTIGATING HEALTHY AND SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IN NOVA SCOTIA

## SUMMARY REPORT



PREPARED BY  
Joanne Weiss Reid  
RCIP SUMMER STUDENT INTERN

October 2004



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COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IN NOVA SCOTIA**

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The Atlantic Health Promotion Research Centre  
The Coastal Communities Network and  
The Rural Communities Impacting Policy (RCIP) Project

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***The mission of the Atlantic Health Promotion Research Centre is to conduct and facilitate health promotion research that influences policy and contributes to the health and well-being of Atlantic Canadians.***

***The Coastal Communities Network (CCN) of Nova Scotia provides a forum to encourage dialogue and share information that promotes the survival and enhancement of our rural coastal communities***

***The goal of the Rural Communities Impacting Policy (RCIP) Project is to increase the ability of rural communities and organizations in Nova Scotia to access and use social science research in order to influence and develop policy that contributes to the health and sustainability of communities. RCIP is a 5-year research project, funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council and co-sponsored by the Atlantic Health Promotion Research Centre and the Coastal Communities Network.***

This summary report has been prepared for:

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I would like to acknowledge and thank the RCIP Community Development Project Advisory Team and Chris Bryant (NS Department of Economic Development) for their contributions during the course of this research. I am indebted to the many representatives of community development associations who took time out of their busy lives to participate in this research. Their work, optimism and vast amounts of time and effort devoted to improving the quality of life in rural communities is truly inspiring.

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*Cover photo credit*

*Annapolis Valley, Nova Scotia*

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# Project Advisory Team

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“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”.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Torjman, S. (December 2001). Reclaiming our Humanity. Caledon Institute of Social Policy. In partnership with Coalition of National Voluntary Organizations Canadian Council on Social Development United Way of Canada-Centraide Canada. p.3-4. Available at: <http://www.ccsd.ca/pubs/2002/humanity.pdf> Accessed August 28, 2004.

# 1. Summary Report

This report summarizes the main findings from the report entitled *Investigating Healthy and Sustainable Community Development in Nova Scotia*. Interested parties are encouraged to review the full report for a more detailed account of the research project.

## *Background*

The Coastal Communities Network (CCN) and the Atlantic Health Promotion Research Centre (AHPRC) at Dalhousie University, partners in the Rural Communities Impacting Policy (RCIP) Project, co-hosted a Rural Policy Forum and RCIP Project Planning Session on February 26-28, 2004 in Truro. One of the major issues identified at the forum was the manner in which non-profit and voluntary sector community organizations in the province are funded. CCN and people in partner communities reported that the lack of core funding for community groups erodes the capacity of communities to address issues that affect them and develop plans for their future.<sup>2</sup>

In response to this issue and other issues affecting the decline of coastal and rural communities across the province, the Government of Nova Scotia has proposed a Community Development Policy to better coordinate the provincial government's work with communities. This provincial policy provided an opportunity to gain insight from people in communities regarding their views on healthy and sustainable community development. The issue of core funding was addressed in the greater context of healthy and sustainable community development.

The Government of Nova Scotia has defined sustainable community development as “a process in which a community enhances its environment, social, cultural and economic resources to create positive outcomes for its current and future members. It is based on mutually beneficial, interdependent relationship among community members and with neighbouring communities, community-based decision making, and respect for social inclusion.”<sup>3</sup> This process depends on the ability of organizations to work together on common goals. Community development associations (CDAs) exist as organizations that enable, facilitate, and coordinate agencies such as regional development bodies and self-help, locally controlled projects that encourage cooperation.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Barr, T. and M. Shookner. 2004. Rural Policy Forum Report, February 26-28, 2004. Atlantic Health Promotion Research Centre at Dalhousie University: Halifax, NS.

<sup>3</sup> Province of Nova Scotia. (September 2003) A Discussion Paper on Community Development. Halifax, Nova Scotia. p.7

<sup>4</sup> Lotz, J and G. A. MacIntyre. 2003. Sustainable People: A New Approach to Community Development. UCCB Press Inc. Sydney, NS.

## *The Research*

The main purpose of this study was to identify CDAs across the province, explore views of healthy and sustainable communities, better understand the role(s) of CDAs and the perceived challenges in this pursuit, and seek input for recommendations regarding the development of the proposed community development policy in Nova Scotia.

In the early stages of this research, informal consultations and meetings were held with community representatives, Regional Development Authorities, CCN, the Community Development Project Advisory Team, the RCIP Policy Work Group and government representatives to develop a research schedule and methodology that would best serve the purpose of this research.

Over 150 community development organizations were identified from public sources (the Registry of Joint Stocks, Regional Development Authorities, CCN and community partners). In order to qualify as CDAs, groups with the words “community development” in their title, mission statement, organizational objectives or guiding principles were selected. Business development groups, special interest groups and private organizations were eliminated from the list. From this refined list of over 80 groups (see Appendix 1), 12 organizations were purposively selected according to the following criteria: a geographically diverse range of CDAs that were community-led, operating at the community level and claimed to represent the broader health and sustainability interests of communities (i.e. social, cultural, environmental and economic). In total, 13 CDA representatives were interviewed. The findings were generated from the interview data and subsequent recommendations were developed based on the interview data and discussions with the Community Development Project Advisory Team.

This summary report captures the thoughts and ideas of only a small portion of the community development associations across the province. It is by no means the summary of a comprehensive study that represents the voices of all community development associations across the province. Rather, with wide provincial circulation, this summary report is meant to initiate a process where community development organizations are given an opportunity to provide input towards future policy developments.

The key findings and recommendations (in no particular order) included:

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### **Key Finding 1: Views on Healthy and Sustainable**

**Communities** Respondents described characteristics of healthy and sustainable communities, including: the existence of economic and

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recreational opportunities, satisfaction of basic needs, community support networks, appreciation of diverse skills in the community, and respect for community culture and the natural environment.

### **Recommendation:**

**Principles of sustainable communities should be added to the NS discussion paper:**<sup>5</sup>

- **Wide-spread community participation:** Everyone, including youth, Come-From-Aways (CFAs) and immigrants, should be able contribute to the development of a healthy community.
- **Adaptability to change:** Communities must be able to respond to new challenges presented by socio-economic, political, and environmental conditions.
- **Community support system:** Community members need to be encouraged and supported by each other through support networks, especially in times of crisis.
- **Respect for the natural and cultural environment:** Communities and government must work together to ensure protection of the natural environment and the way of life in rural communities.
- **Satisfaction of basic needs in the community:** Communities and government should work together to ensure that all community members have access to basic needs, such as affordable housing and running water.

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### **Key Finding 2: Characteristics of Community Development**

**Associations** Respondents defined Community Development Associations as not-for-profit, community led groups - typically comprised of volunteers. These groups exist in many forms across the province. Some organizations chose to leave out the word “development” in their name. They saw their role as providing opportunities in their communities rather than encouraging more “development.” Many CDAs worked independently while others worked on county-wide planning initiatives with other communities. All CDAs had a board of directors comprised of volunteers from various groups and committees. The CDAs that took part in this research have been in existence from five to 30 years and operated at various levels of capacity, depending on the issues that

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<sup>5</sup>Province of Nova Scotia. (September 2003) A Discussion Paper on Community Development. Halifax, Nova Scotia.

they were addressing. The majority of CDAs interviewed had conducted informal visioning or long-term planning.

### **Recommendations:**

**Develop a database of CDAs in Nova Scotia:** A database with the names, description of projects and contact numbers of CDAs would be useful for government (for consultation purposes) and for other community development groups (to share information at the regional and provincial levels). In searching for these community organizations, one would have to speak to people familiar with the local community. As noted above, these groups are not necessarily called “community development associations.”

**Build CDA capacity for long-term planning:** Many respondents indicated that cooperation with other CDA groups was fairly limited and that limited resources or initiatives exist to help develop long-term planning and vision-building in these communities. This is an area where government can provide support.<sup>6</sup>

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### **Key Finding 3: Roles of Community Development**

**Associations** Respondents suggested that community development associations applied many of the principles of healthy and sustainable community development through their work with local communities. Respondents also identified various roles that a CDA fulfills: 1) Represent a united voice for the community; 2) Disseminate information; 3) Engage in community outreach; 4) Provide training & skills development; 5) Coordinate community planning; 6) Help build community capacity; 7) Raise funds; 8) Monitor and advocate for the interests of the local community; 9) Maintain community spirit; 10) Build on community values; and 11) Provide local leadership.

### **Recommendation:**

**Community Development Associations as “community entrepreneurs”:** Government needs to recognize the valuable contribution of community development associations in the province as “community entrepreneurs” who work collectively with other individuals and groups in the community in an effort to resolve problems locally. Support for their work in this capacity should be facilitated.

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<sup>6</sup> For an example of a government attempt to coordinate CDA groups, see *A Report of the Workshop on Implementation of a Plan for Community Development for the Municipality of the County of Inverness*. May 10, 2003.

#### **Key Finding 4: Challenges of Building Healthy and Sustainable Communities**

Some of the biggest challenges that faced community development groups were: 1) Relationships with Regional Development Authorities; 2) Volunteer burn out; 3) Limited access to resources; 4) Infrastructure issues (such as roads and transportation); 5) High cost of insurance; 6) Limited employment opportunities; 7) Competing interests for funding; 8) Resistance to change; 9) Low community participation, and 10) Retention of rural youth.

#### **Recommendation:**

**Build community capacity:** All levels of government must provide coordinated support to communities so that they have the necessary tools and resources to deal with these challenges.

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#### **Key Finding 5: Responses to Government Programs**

Respondents noted that they have worked closely with federal bodies and programs such as HRSD (Human Resources and Skills Development) and C@P (Community Access Program). However, these programs have had limited success, as basic needs of the community have still not been met. At the provincial level, some Regional Development Authorities worked effectively together with community development initiatives. However, some criticisms regarding RDAs included: 1) RDAs focused only on economic issues; 2) RDAs are too large to understand community needs and interests; 3) RDAs spend most of the money conducting studies rather than taking action; 4) For community groups, it requires more effort to apply for funding than what it is worth; 5) RDAs provide limited access to resources and funding.

#### **Recommendation:**

**Examination of the Regional Development Authority model:** Mixed reviews from the research findings reflect earlier criticisms regarding the role of RDAs. As RDAs approach a 10-year anniversary, it is an appropriate time to examine the role and effectiveness of RDAs in relation to local CDAs and the principles of healthy and sustainable community development. Additionally, in the context of the proposed Community Development Policy, there is opportunity to gain inclusive public input from local community perspectives about best practices for RDAs in support of local community development.

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#### **Key Finding 6: Volunteer Burn Out**

Respondents noted a great dependence on the work and skills of core groups of volunteers. Many suggested that balancing volunteer work, professional and personal obligations was exhausting for themselves and

their members. Very few CDAs have paid staff, which made it difficult to achieve goals in a timely fashion.

**Recommendation:**

**Evaluation of the volunteerism infrastructure:** Government and communities need to develop a strategy for recruitment and retention of volunteers. Government also needs to recognize the instrumental role of volunteers in community organizations by maintaining an adequate volunteerism infrastructure – such as providing resources and paid staff.

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**Key Finding 7: Community Pride/ Support Networks**

One of the most prominent and powerful findings was the community pride expressed by a number of the respondents. In most interviews there was a strong sense of optimism and good spirit. When respondents were asked about the strengths of their communities, most believed that they had outstanding leadership, recognized the efforts of volunteers and expressed confidence that, with a little support from government, there was strength and a will in the community to take control over matters and find solutions to their own problems.

**Recommendation:**

**Support community pride and innovation:** Government needs to develop action-oriented policies which recognize the innovative interests and abilities of individuals in communities to take control of their situations.

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**Key Finding 8: Roles of Government in Support of Healthy and Sustainable Community Development**

Respondents suggested that there was good leadership within the community. It was stated that the role of government should be a peripheral one. For example: To help communities better organize themselves and to provide support for linkages between organizations.

**Recommendation:**

**A supportive role for government:** New government policy needs to be developed that states the role of government is to provide complimentary leadership support to communities.

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**Finding 9: Communities as Leaders in Building Healthy and Sustainable Communities**

Respondents felt that the local community is best able to find solutions to local problems, as they are most familiar with the culture and history of the community. However, community leadership should not equate to the

downloading of more responsibilities to communities by government without providing the required resources.

**Recommendation:**

**Government recognizes communities as leaders:** New government policy needs to be developed that recognizes and adequately supports Nova Scotian communities as leaders in building healthy and sustainable communities.

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**Finding 10: Overall Principles of Good Community**

**Development Policy**

The overarching themes regarding the role of communities in community development were: 1) communities must be the decisions makers in determining the future of their communities; and 2) local solutions are best to solve local problems.

**Recommendations:**

1. Government should recognize that communities are able to play a leadership role;
  2. Communities must set the agenda in policy discussions;
  3. Community development efforts should be more decentralized from regional to local levels;
  4. Government needs to provide easier access to government services;
  5. Funding should be accessible to communities who need it;
  6. There must be more investment in social infrastructure;
  7. Government should recognize that it takes time for communities to organize;
  8. Government programs need to build on existing community initiatives;
  9. Government and communities should develop a process where community interests can be heard; and
  10. Regional forums or networks must be created: a place where community development groups can work together to promote rural community interests.
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## 2. Next Steps

The findings of this research are meant to complement the consultation work undertaken by the Government of Nova Scotia in regards to the proposed Community Development Policy. They are also meant to serve as a discussion piece for those involved in community development including local, municipal, regional, federal and international groups.

It is with regret that I was able to capture the thoughts of only a small portion of the community development associations across the province. This report is by no means a comprehensive study that represents the opinions and thoughts of all community development associations across the province. Rather, with wide provincial circulation, this report is meant to initiate a process where community development organizations are given an opportunity to provide input to future policy developments.

Possible next steps in this project include:

- Convene the Community Development Project Advisory Team on September 22, 2004 to direct the next phase of research or action;
- Present research findings to the executive director of the Nova Scotia Association of Regional Development Authorities (NSARDA);
- Present research findings to the Nova Scotia Department of Economic Development for consideration in the context of the proposed community development policy;
- Present research findings to Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency (ACOA);
- Present research findings at the next RCIP Rural Policy Forum (February 2005);
- Distribute research findings to RDAs, CDAs, Community Health Boards (CHBs), provincial Deputy Ministers, CCN membership and municipalities across the province.

### 3. Potential Future Research

The research undertaken during the course of this internship comprises a small segment of the potential research opportunities on this issue. Other possibilities include:

- Explore best practices of community development policy elsewhere in Canada and throughout the world;
- Conduct more extensive consultations with community groups who were not included in this study;
- Evaluate the role and performance of Regional Development Authorities in Nova Scotia in supporting healthy and sustainable community development;
- Develop a process or structure at the regional and provincial levels where community development associations can meet and share information;
- Develop a CDA database for Nova Scotia with corresponding contact information and descriptions.

# Appendix 1: Initial Listing of Community Development Associations in Nova Scotia

Antigonish/Guysborough Black Development Association  
Argyle-Glenwood Community Improvement Society  
Atlantic Community Development Association  
Balfron Community Association  
Baxters Harbour Community Association  
Bay Of Island Sustainable Development Association  
Bay of Fundy Marine Resource Centre  
Beechville Community Development Centre  
Black Rock Community Association  
Brookfield Community Association  
Brooks Haven Recreation & Community Development Organization  
Carmel Centre Community Development Corporation Inc.  
Centreville Development Association  
Centreville District Community Development Commission  
Cheticamp Development Commission  
Colchester Community Development Network, Incorporated  
Coldbrook Community Development Association  
Community Collaboration for Development (CCD)  
Credit Union Atlantic Community Development Association  
Digby Neck Community Development Association  
Downtown Dartmouth Community Development Commission  
Freeport Community Development Association  
Goldboro / Isaacs Harbour Community Development Association  
Grand Lake Road Community Development Association  
Greater Chebucto Community Development Association  
Hall's Harbour Community Development Association  
Hubbard's Point and Area Community Development Association  
Inverness Development Association  
Johnstown Community Development Co-Operative Limited  
Judique Community Centre Development Association  
Kings County Agency For Black Community Development

Kingsport Community Development Association  
Lake Ainslie Development Association  
L'ardoise Enterprise Initiative Centre  
Le Conseil De Développement Économique De La Nouvelle-Écosse (Cdene)  
Lemoine Development Association  
Lincolnville Community Development Association:  
Little Dover Community Development Association  
Little Narrows Community Development Association  
Lochaber Community Development Association  
Mabou District Community Development Association  
Mabou Development Association  
Main-A-Dieu Community Development Association  
Marble Mountain Community Association  
Margaree Area Development Association (Mada)  
Marion Bridge and Area Community Development Council  
Meat Cove Development Association  
Milford and Area Community Association  
Middle River Business & Community Development Centre  
Mordon Community Development Association  
New Dawn Community Development Educational Foundation Inc.  
New Deal Development  
New Glasgow African Nova Scotian Community Development Association -  
New Glasgow Black Community Development Office  
North Preston Community Development Association  
North Shore Community Development Association  
Orangedale Improvement Association  
Pleasant Bay Community Development Association –  
Pleasant Bay Development Association  
Point Aconi Road Community Development Association  
Port Hastings Community Development Association  
Rear Monastery Community Development Association  
Resource Opportunities Centre-Community Development Association Serving  
Prospect Road Area  
Sackville Community Development Association

Shore Drive Community Development Association  
Shubenacadie Community Development Association  
South Colchester Community Development Association  
Southend Community Development Association  
St Ann's Bay Development Association  
St. Michael Junior High Community Development Association  
Victoria Mines Community Development and Recreation  
Vision: Community Initiatives for Regional Development  
West Bay Road Community Development Association  
West Colchester Community Development Association  
West Hall's Harbour Development Association  
West Queens Coastal Community Development Association  
Weymouth Falls Community Council  
Whycogomagh Development Association  
Women for Community Economic Development In Southwest Nova



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