

THE RURAL POLICY CHALLENGE

A Discussion Paper

RURAL COMMUNITIES IMPACTING POLICY PROJECT (RCIP)

Revised Edition - April 2006

AHPRC
Atlantic Health Promotion Research Centre



 **DALHOUSIE
UNIVERSITY**
Inspiring Minds

THE RURAL POLICY CHALLENGE

A Discussion Paper

PREPARED FOR

RURAL COMMUNITIES IMPACTING POLICY (RCIP) PROJECT
A PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN THE ATLANTIC HEALTH PROMOTION
RESEARCH CENTRE AT DALHOUSIE UNIVERSITY AND THE
COASTAL COMMUNITIES NETWORK

Revised Edition - April 2006



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.

Atlantic Health Promotion Research Centre
Suite 209 City Centre Atlantic
1535 Dresden Row
Halifax, Nova Scotia, B3J 3T1
Phone: 902 494 2240 Fax: 902 494 3594
Email: ahprc@dal.ca website: www.ahprc.dal.ca

Coastal Communities Network
P.O. Box 402
New Glasgow, NS B2H 5E5
Phone: 902 485 4754 Fax: 902 752 9844
Email: coastalnet@ns.sympatico.ca
website: www.coastalcommunities.ns.ca

The Rural Communities Impacting Policy Project
c/o Atlantic Health Promotion Research Centre
Suite 209 City Centre Atlantic
1535 Dresden Row
Halifax, Nova Scotia, B3J 3T1
Phone: 902 494 3094 Fax: 902 494 3594
Email: todd.barr@dal.ca website: www.ruralnovascotia.ca

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RCIP Policy Work Group

Chris Bryant, Nova Scotia Office of Economic Development
Barbara Clow, Atlantic Centre of Excellence for Women's Health
Fiona Chin-Yee, Public Health Agency of Canada - Atlantic Region
Keith Cossey, Rural Secretariat and Nova Scotia Rural Team
Linda Gregory (Chair), Coastal Communities Network; Municipality of Digby
Pam Harrison, Coastal Communities Network; United Church of Canada
Renée Lyons, Atlantic Health Promotion Research Centre
Chuck McKenna, Voluntary Planning
Linda Snyder, Atlantic Centre of Excellence for Women's Health
Rick Williams, Praxis Research and Consulting Inc.

RCIP Management Committee

Arthur Bull, Coastal Communities Network
Lynn Langille, Atlantic Health Promotion Research Centre
Renée Lyons, Atlantic Health Promotion Research Centre
Ishbel Munro, Coastal Communities Network

RCIP Staff

Todd Barr, Research Assistant and Community Trainer
Malcolm Shookner, Project Coordinator

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INTRODUCTION TO THE 2006 EDITION

As a follow-up to the February 2005 Policy Forum (for which *The Rural Policy Challenge* was created), the Policy Work Group of the Rural Communities Impacting Policy (RCIP) Project wanted to demonstrate outcomes from the Policy Forum related to the ideas presented in *The Rural Policy Challenge*.

In a fall 2005 meeting, the RCIP Policy Work Group decided to do two things: 1) Update *The Rural Policy Challenge* to reflect the proceedings of the 2005 Policy Forum (see newly added Epilogue).¹ 2) Create an action-oriented *Rural Development Strategy* for Nova Scotia - to be presented to the RCIP Management Committee (Coastal Communities Network and Atlantic Health Promotion Research Centre) for organizational adoption and circulation. It is hoped that these two documents (*The Rural Policy Challenge* and the *Rural Development Strategy*) will act as catalysts for healthy and sustainable development in rural Nova Scotia.

¹ Apart from a new Epilogue, an updated acknowledgements page and cover section, *The Rural Policy Challenge* remains unchanged.

INTRODUCTION

Background: Rural Communities Impacting Policy

The Rural Communities Impacting Policy (RCIP) Project is a partnership between the Atlantic Health Promotion Research Centre (AHPRC) at Dalhousie University and the Coastal Communities Network (CCN), with funding from the Community-University Research Alliance (CURA) program of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

The purpose of the partnership is to increase the capacities of rural organizations to conduct and use social science research to help reshape the policies that impact on them. In turn, it is hoped that this will help to bring about measurable improvements in the health and sustainability of rural communities.

Substantial evidence indicates that rural citizens often feel excluded from meaningful participation in the planning and policy processes that shape their futures. The RCIP Project is based on the idea that expanded public involvement in creating, evaluating and renewing policy can generate significant benefits:

- The policy will be better (i.e., more relevant, cost effective, etc.) if the policymakers have access to, or are influenced by, the in-depth knowledge of the people who live in the situation and whose needs and interests are being addressed;
- People will understand and support policies that they have had some meaningful part in shaping;
- People and communities will become stronger, more self-determining or more “empowered” if they feel they have had a real say in the decision-making that most affects their situations.

The major activities of the RCIP project include:

- Publication of the Rural Report.²
- Development of the RCIP Website and the Rural Tackle Box.³
- Delivery of community training workshops on policy change.
- Provision of student internships for community research projects.
- Hosting annual Rural Policy Forums.
- Supporting specific policy change projects.

The RCIP project aims to influence wide areas of policy development that impact on the health and sustainability of rural communities in Nova Scotia through two principal strategies:

- Facilitating linkages between rural communities and agencies from different levels of government to address complex healthy and sustainable policy issues;
- Connecting cross-governmental and community-based policy development processes with the research resources and capabilities of academic institutions.

Purposes of this Paper

- To identify significant threats to the health and sustainability of rural communities in Nova Scotia.
- To describe efforts by community organizations and their partners in government and academic institutions to respond to these threats.
- To set out a broad approach for communities and their institutional partners to work together to promote healthy and sustainable development in rural areas.

² “Painting the Landscape of Rural Nova Scotia” was released in November 2003 and is available in local libraries, from CCN, and at www.ruralnovascotia.ca

³ Available at www.ruralnovascotia.ca

This discussion paper and discussion questions set the stage for the 2nd Annual Rural Policy Forum entitled: "Policies to Support Healthy and Sustainable Rural Communities" - February 17-19, 2005 at the Tatamagouche Centre.

The paper has been developed by the Rural Communities Impacting Policy (RCIP) project to call attention to what participants in RCIP see as an emerging crisis in rural Nova Scotia. A combination of economic and demographic trends, driven by the wider forces of urbanization and global market competition, are pushing many rural communities to the brink of survival. Increasing social isolation, reduced access to needed services and stress associated with poverty and insecurity are population health trends that are worsening in rural areas.

There is broad public awareness that rural communities face daunting challenges. As yet, however, there is no comprehensive or intensive effort by government to address these issues through policy initiatives that match the scale of the problem. As a result, many rural citizens fear that there is a hidden policy agenda of simple neglect.

Rural communities have not been passive or defeatist, and there are many examples of community development groups achieving great things. However, with the emerging situation there may be an urgent need for such groups to come together to participate in addressing the bigger picture in rural regions through active policy and planning initiatives.

Governments at all levels have also been responsive to the needs of rural communities. Too often, however, these efforts are local and short-term in nature, or take place in departmental "silos" with insufficient coordination and collaboration. There is a need for new approaches that pool resources to achieve shared goals and cut across jurisdictional boundaries.

Perhaps most importantly, there is a need for more effective partnerships between government and rural communities to shape new policy directions that address the needs, capabilities and aspirations of rural people. Such joint efforts should also draw in academic-based researchers to help build a useful knowledge base for effective policy development.

With all of this in mind, participants at the Policy Forum will be challenged to consider the bigger policy picture in relation to specific rural issues such as rural health, coastal zone planning and food security.

It is intended that this paper will contribute to greater awareness of the emerging situation in Nova Scotia and in other rural regions, and draw attention to the need for a comprehensive policy response. It will also provide direction for the continuing work of the RCIP project.

HEALTH AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Since the overall concern of participants in the RCIP Project is the health and sustainability of rural communities, these concepts are described below.

Sustainable Development

The concept of sustainable development is quite familiar:

*Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.*⁴

The achievement of sustainable development implies longer-term planning aimed at the integration of social and economic development with environmental stewardship. The concept of sustainability is increasingly being seen as relevant to all levels of society – from grassroots community development to national and international development.

Sustainable communities are more environmentally sound, economically prosperous, and socially equitable.

Nova Scotia Sustainable Communities Initiative.

The Government of Nova Scotia has committed to a Sustainable Communities Initiative focused on:

*... supporting communities through a collaborative approach which integrates social, cultural, economic and environmental policies and programs. It's about governments at all levels working together - and with the communities they serve - toward decision-making that meets the needs of today without jeopardizing the ability of future generations to meet their needs.*⁵

⁴ UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Division for Sustainable Development. (2003). On-line: <http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/documents/agenda21/index.htm>

Such a commitment requires governments at the local, provincial and federal levels to link the policies and practices of many different departments and agencies to pursue shared goals within a sustainability framework.

Health and Community Sustainability

The World Health Organization (WHO) sees health as the unifying factor across “the three pillars of sustainable development – the social, economic and environmental”.⁶ When people are healthy they contribute more to social and economic development and to protecting the natural environment. In turn, these factors support improvements in population health characteristics. People want to live and raise their children in places where they can be healthy and productive, and where they have access to the full range of services and amenities to support healthy lifestyles.

To promote sustainable development in rural communities, the RCIP project employs a “population health approach” that recognizes that health depends on more than a good health care system. Key determinants of health include income and social status, social support networks, education and literacy, employment/working conditions, social environments, physical environments, personal health practices and coping skills, healthy child development, biology and genetic endowment, health services, gender and culture.⁷ It is these things that all interact to influence the health of individuals throughout their lives, the health of society and the natural world. The population health approach promotes

⁶ von Schirnding, Y. and Mulholland, C. (2001) Health in the Context of Sustainable Development: Background Document prepared for WHO Meeting: “Making Health Central to Sustainable Development: Planning the Health Agenda for the World Summit on Sustainable Development” Oslo, Norway. On-line: http://www.who.int/mediacentre/events/HSD_Plaq_02.6_def1.pdf

⁷ Health Canada (2003) What Makes Canadians Healthy or Unhealthy? On-line: <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hppb/phdd/determinants/index.html#determinants>

positive action on these key determinants that affect the health of the population as a whole and of specific population groups.

Rural communities face unique and substantial challenges with regard to health. To attract and hold their populations, particularly young people and skilled workers, communities have to offer services and amenities and a general quality of life that compares favorably with urban areas. With this in mind, health promotion⁸ is an integral component of sustainable development for rural communities.

⁸ For more information about health promotion, see page 23.

THE RURAL CRISIS

The term “crisis” is perhaps over-used, but it usefully describes a large-scale, rapid change that cannot be managed through the normal and established ways of doing things. It demands different behaviour, different ideas and new resources. To deal effectively with a crisis, fear and denial needs to be acknowledged and overcome as community members come to terms with the true nature and scale of the problems they face.

This section presents evidence of the nature and scale of the crisis in the rural areas of Nova Scotia, and considers the new type of economy that is emerging and the challenges that come with it.

Evidence of Crisis

The rural economy throughout Atlantic Canada was hit by major shocks in the 1990s – the closing of several military bases, the groundfish collapse, shutdown of the coal and steel industries, technological change in the forestry sector, reform of the unemployment insurance system and restructuring of other government services.

Research and consultation activities carried out by the RCIP project, and independently by the CCN, provide evidence of the challenges now faced by rural communities in Nova Scotia. A sampling of this evidence is presented here.

Economic Disparities: Table 1 shows that significant variation in employment rates still exist between small towns and rural areas and core urban areas.

Table 1. Current Labour Force Rates

| CURRENT LABOUR FORCE RATES | | |
|----------------------------|----------------------|---------------------|
| FEBRUARY 2004 | | |
| <i>Region</i> | <i>Participation</i> | <i>Unemployment</i> |
| Canada | 66.7% | 7.6% |
| Nova Scotia | 62.1% | 9.7% |
| Halifax | 68.5% | 6.6% |
| Cape Breton | 49.7% | 17.5% |
| North Shore | 59.9% | 11.1% |
| Annapolis Valley | 61.7% | 9.2% |
| Southern | 60.9% | 11.0% |

Source: NS Department Of Finance

In addition, Table 2 indicates that disparities in income persist across Nova Scotia.

Table 2. Average Incomes and Composition of Income

| AVERAGE INCOMES AND COMPOSITION OF INCOME | | |
|---|----------------|--|
| POPULATION 17 YEARS AND OLDER, 2000 | | |
| <i>Region</i> | <i>Average</i> | <i>Government Transfers as Percent of Total Income</i> |
| Canada | \$29,769 | 11.6% |
| Cape Breton Urban | \$20,480 | 29.3% |
| Coastal Rural | \$22,269 | 23.3% |
| Halifax-Dartmouth-Bedford-Sackville | \$29,971 | 11.7% |
| Non-Coastal Rural | \$23,199 | 18.7% |
| Province | \$25,279 | 16.1% |

Source: Coastal Communities Network Report, *Between the Land and the Sea: The Social and Economic Impact of Wharves and Harbours on Coastal Communities*, January 2004.

Population Change: While the population of Nova Scotia has remained stable over the past decade or more, Table 3 shows that there have been dramatic shifts in settlement patterns with increased out-migration from rural communities and the dramatic expansion of the urban core region.

Table 3. Population Change for Coastal Rural, Inland Rural and Urban Areas of Nova Scotia

| POPULATION CHANGE FOR COASTAL RURAL, INLAND RURAL AND URBAN AREAS OF NOVA SCOTIA | | | |
|--|------------|------------|-----------|
| | 1991 | 2001 | 1991-2001 |
| Canada | 27,297,000 | 30,007,000 | 9.9 |
| Cape Breton Urban | 69,595 | 62,935 | -9.60% |
| Coastal Rural | 268,095 | 251,650 | -6.10% |
| Halifax-Dartmouth-Bedford-Sackville | 266,960 | 337,283 | 26.30% |
| Non-Coastal Rural | 294,090 | 255,539 | -13.10% |
| Province | 898,740 | 907,407 | 0.90% |

Source: *Between the Land and the Sea*, CCN, 2004.

Age and Migration Trends: Between 1991 and 2001, demographic trends indicate a new reality where the population of rural Nova Scotia is measurably older than that of the urban region. (Table 4)

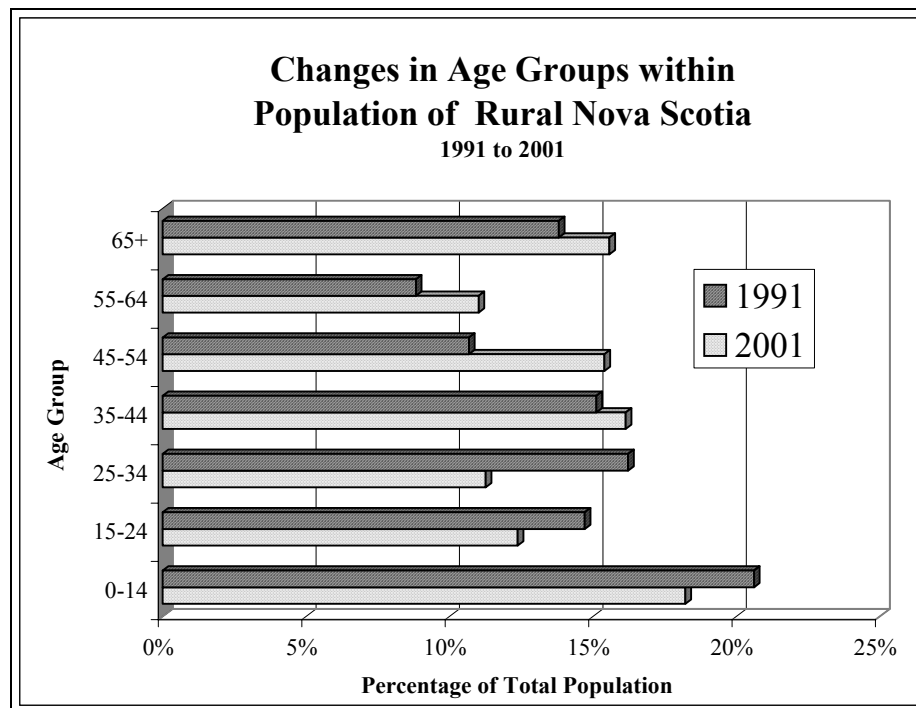
Table 4. Changes in Average Age by Zone, 1991-2001

| CHANGES IN AVERAGE AGE BY ZONE, 1991 - 2001 | | | | |
|---|-------------|-------------|-------------------------|------------------------|
| | <i>1991</i> | <i>2001</i> | <i>Change 1991-2001</i> | <i>Per Cent Change</i> |
| Canada | 34.9 | 37.6 | +2.7yrs | +7.7 |
| Coastal Rural | 36.2 | 40.2 | + 4.0 yrs | +11.0 |
| Non-Coastal Rural | 34.8 | 38.5 | +3.7 yrs | +10.6 |
| Cape Breton Urban | 36.1 | 40.1 | + 4.0 yrs | +11.0 |
| Halifax-Dartmouth | 33.2 | 36.4 | +3.2 yrs | +9.6 |
| Province | 34.8 | 38.3 | +3.5 yrs | +10.0 |

Source: *Between the Land and the Sea*, CCN, 2004

This changing age profile of the rural region is driven by out-migration of youth and an expanding population of seniors. Figure 1 reveals a dramatic decline in the proportion of young people in rural and coastal Nova Scotia over the 1991 to 2001 period. Most notable are the sharp declines in the zero to 34 age group which include the core of the future labour force and young families with children.

Figure 1. Change in Age Groups within Population of Rural Nova Scotia, 1991 to 2001



Source: *Between the Land and the Sea*, CCN, 2004

Disparities in Health: Growing disparities in health status between rural and urban regions are due to demographic and economic trends aggravated by certain determinants of health, such as low income and education levels, reduced access to health services and lack of social support networks. Table 5 presents information from the Canadian Community Health Survey 2000/2001, comparing the health status of rural Nova Scotia with health regions across Canada that have similar socio-economic status and a similar pattern of people living in rural and urban areas.

Table 5. Canadian Community Health Survey 2000/2001

| Nova Scotia Health Zone | Health Indicator Highlight |
|--|--|
| <p>Zone 1 South Shore District South West Nova Scotia</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Zone 1 has daily smoking, obesity, and heavy drinking rates that are significantly higher than the national estimates • Zone 1 - highest smoking rate of all the health zones in Nova Scotia (29%)* • Zone 1 has the highest obesity rate in all health zones (27%)* • Zone 1 does not differ from its Canadian peer group on any behavioural determinant of health or psychosocial health indicator • All health outcomes are significantly lower than national estimates. |
| <p>Zone 2 Annapolis Valley</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Zone 2 has the highest life expectancy of its peer group and also significantly higher than the Canadian average • Zone 2 has obesity rates that are significantly higher than Canadian averages • Zone 2 is one of the few zones in Nova Scotia with daily smoking, infrequent exercise, and heavy drinking estimates that are in keeping with Canadian estimates • No significant differences were found among national estimates and estimates for depression and high stress in Zone 2. |
| <p>Zone 3 Colchester East Hants Cumberland County</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Zone 3 is the only zone in its peer group with a depression rate (12%) that is above the national average. This is the second-highest depression rate of all of the health zones in the country • The obesity rate for Zone 2 is 6% higher than the average peer group estimate • [Life expectancy] is a remarkable 3.2 years shorter than the peer group estimate • Zone 3's stress rate is 6% lower than the peer group average. |
| <p>Zone 4 Pictou County Guysborough Antigonish-Strait</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Zone 4's life expectancy is comparable to Canadian estimates. • Zone 4's high stress levels are significantly higher than their peers • Daily smoking and infrequent exercise are about the same as national estimates • Obesity rates are significantly higher than peer group (22% and 15%, respectively), a rate 7% higher than the Canadian average. |
| <p>Zone 5 Cape Breton District (DHA8)</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stress and depression rates in Zone 5 are higher than any other health zone in its peer group • Zone 5 residents can expect to spend 14.3 years living with a disability, the longest period for any health zone in the country • Life expectancy in Zone 5 is 0.9 years less than for its peer group, and a dramatic 2.2 years shorter than the Canadian average • There are no significant differences between Zone 5's health behaviours (smoking, heavy drinking, obesity, and inactivity) and its peer group averages. |

*based on point estimates of the data: interpretation should be made with caution

Source: Statistics Canada (2002). *Statistics Canada health reports*.

This evidence of the dramatic economic, demographic and health challenges in the province points to the need for a comprehensive policy response. While there is a wide array of policies that address specific issues in specific places, there is no coherent and comprehensive policy response to the challenges of managing change and envisioning a healthy and sustainable future for rural communities.

The Emerging Rural Economy

Not all the news is bad for rural Nova Scotia. Rural communities are essential contributors to the province's economy. The stability and growth of the urban core depends largely on the resource industries and a rural-based workforce. Most importantly, rural people have not been passive in the face of a seemingly bleak future.

While fewer people may live and work in rural regions, those that do make a contribution to total economic activity that is stable and expanding. For example, in Nova Scotia the great bulk of our exports are generated by industries based in small towns and rural areas – fisheries, forestry and manufacturing. Just as Nova Scotians need healthy communities, the tourism industry is equally dependent on a healthy rural and natural environment and a skilled rural-based labour force.

This impending crisis of community viability stands in stark contrast to a fundamental economic reality: rural areas and small towns contain over 50% of jobs in Nova Scotia and the province depends heavily on coastal-rural regions for its overall economic growth and stability.....

Source: Between the Land and the Sea, CCN, 2004

Until the late 1980s, the rural economy consisted of many low skilled, low paid seasonal workers who relied on Unemployment Insurance during off-seasons. The rural economy taking shape today requires fewer workers, but higher skill levels, to produce the same or greater output. These jobs are better paid and often less seasonal. The labour market is globally competitive - where employers from all over the world look for workforces with the right combination of skills, productivity and availability. People are a critical factor in attracting new investment.

The emerging rural economy is becoming more accessible and fully integrated with global communications and market networks. For example, the tourism industry must offer attractions and amenities that are competitive with other regions or countries in terms of service standards, use of information technology and safety and security. Exports from the fishery and agriculture sectors compete well with products from all over the world and meet increasingly stringent standards for food safety and security.

The fisheries, mining, oil and gas, forestry and transportation equipment sectors together generate nearly 70% of all exports, and are predominantly rural-coastal based, or rely on a rural-based labour force. The future viability of these sectors, and their continuing contribution to the Nova Scotia economy, will require a skilled and committed labour force living in regions where the productive activities take place.

Source: Between the Land and the Sea, CCN, 2004

In the face of falling rural populations and the out-migration of young people, the new challenge is to attract and retain the skilled workers that are now needed. In the context of a comprehensive policy framework, communities need to be good places to live and to raise families, with high

quality education, social and health services, and transportation and communications links with the outside world.

Successful Communities

Some communities may not meet these challenges for reasons that are beyond the control of their residents. In these situations there is a need for comprehensive policies for workers who need to change their occupations, for families that must transition to better situations, and for older people who are in danger of being left behind.

But many communities can succeed in this new environment with effective leadership, access to needed capital and other development supports. The town of Annapolis Royal is one example of such recent success. The town recently won first place in the LivCom international competition for livable communities, environmental management and quality of life. Similarly, Isle Madame has won international recognition for its success in community development and the Western Valley area has been selected by Industry Canada as a national “Smart Community” demonstration project. Lunenburg, Louisburg, Ingonish, Pugwash, Antigonish, Shelburne, Wolfville and other Nova Scotian communities have world-wide reputations as travel destinations and as attractive places to live. These communities all face major social and economic challenges, yet they continually show what can be done with local organization, creativity and the right policy supports.

COMMUNITY CHANGE INITIATIVES

Nova Scotia has a remarkable history of leadership in community development and grass-roots determination to survive and grow under difficult circumstances. The Antigonish Movement in the 1920s laid the foundations for today's cooperatives and credit unions – community-based mainstays of many rural communities in the Maritimes. These traditions live on in the work of the Regional Development Authorities (RDAs) and in numerous grassroots community development initiatives taking place throughout the province.⁹

In this section, we review some current initiatives that demonstrate how rural communities and their academic and government partners can mobilize to promote policies that make a difference.

Sustaining Coastal Rural Infrastructure

The Coastal Communities Network recently released a report, *Between the Land and the Sea: The Social and Economic Impact of Wharves and Harbours on Coastal Communities*, that generated compelling evidence of the essential contribution of harbours to the provincial economy as a whole and, specifically, to the viability of coastal communities in Nova Scotia. The evidence generated by this study does not provide grounds for optimism. We have an increasingly valuable fishery and significant growth in other sectors that depend on or benefit directly from harbours, but public investment in maintaining and renewing harbour facilities continues to fall below the thresholds of sustainability. This trend is a direct and growing threat to the future viability of many coastal rural communities that already face serious demographic and economic challenges. The message needs to be forcefully communicated that

⁹ See the report *Investigating Healthy and Sustainable Community Development in Nova Scotia* by Joanne Weiss Reid, October 2004, at <http://www.ruralnovascotia.ca/internreports.asp>

harbours and wharves perform functions for coastal regions and for marine industries that are equivalent to major public infrastructure in urban areas, such as highways, bridges, airports and industrial parks.

Participants in the first RCIP Rural Policy Forum in February 2004 agreed on the need for multi-stakeholder strategies and for a new model for funding Harbour Authorities. RCIP subsequently launched a pilot project in the Upper Bay of Fundy region, making use of the information from the CCN Wharves and Harbours report and the accompanying database. The community partners are the Upper Bay of Fundy Marine Resource Centre and five community harbour authorities along the Fundy shore in Kings County. Together they are planning a strategy and building the capacity for co-management of their critically important marine infrastructure.¹⁰

Community-Based Fisheries

In the late 1970s, a policy framework was put in place by the federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) that has profoundly shaped the fishing industry and fishing communities in Atlantic Canada. The framework contains two elements: the Fleet Separation Policy and the Owner-Operator Policy.

The Fleet Separation Policy prevents processing companies from owning fishing licenses in the under 65' inshore fleet. The Owner-Operator policy establishes that inshore fishing licenses can only be fished by their owners. The combined effect of the two policies is that only active professional fishers can own and operate fishing enterprises in the inshore sector.

The rising values of lobster and crab, and the decline in the ground fish sector have increased pressure from processors and other investors to take

¹⁰ See the report *Sustaining Structures: Exploring the Collaborative Management of Wharves in Kings County* by Erica de Sousa, October 2004, at <http://www.ruralnovascotia.ca/internreports.asp>

control of shellfish licenses. Consequently, the Fleet Separation and Owner-Operator policies have been seriously undermined over the past decade by under-the-table arrangements. The most frequent abuse of the policy occurs when processors finance the purchase of licenses by individual fishers. The harvester is the nominal owner of the license, but the company takes real control through a trust agreement. This has a number of implications for coastal communities, the most negative being the consolidation of fishing activities and wealth generation in a small number of larger ports. Such trends are well advanced in the ground fish sector and have now begun in the more lucrative shellfish fisheries.

This issue was also addressed at the RCIP Rural Policy Forum in February 2004. Participants agreed to send the DFO a policy position stating that based on substantial economic and social evidence, maintaining and strengthening the Owner Operator and Fleet Separation policies is essential to the social, economic and environmental health and sustainability of coastal communities throughout the region.

In the spring of 2004, RCIP and CCN worked in partnership with the Canadian Council of Professional Fish Harvesters (a national federation of commercial fishers' organizations), to communicate this position to industry, community and local government groups around Nova Scotia and to encourage them to pass on their views to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans.

The Department of Fisheries and Oceans itself conducted seven public meetings on the Owner-Operator and Fleet Separation policies around the region in early 2004 and received numerous written submissions on the topic, the great majority of them supporting the policies. As of this writing in late 2004, DFO has yet to announce its final policy decision and industry groups continue to work hard on the issue.

Health Promotion in Rural Communities

Within the medical system, health has traditionally been defined as the use of clinical and surgical technologies to cure disease and to keep patients alive. There is another perspective – health promotion - that is gaining acceptance among health professionals, policy makers and community leaders. It focuses on the need to promote health, address causes of chronic ill health, and promote positive changes in the social determinants of health. The World Health Organization further describes strategies for health promotion: building healthy public policies; creating supportive environments; strengthening community action; developing personal skills; re-orienting health services.¹¹

Health promotion is particularly important for rural communities. As young Canadians from rural communities migrate to urban areas at a growing rate, they leave behind an aging population facing increasing difficulties in accessing adequate health services. Inadequate services lead to social isolation and financial hardship for individuals with chronic health problems, cause stress for their families, and threaten the sustainability of rural communities.

One example of health promotion at the community level is the Community Alliance for Health Research (CAHR) in southwestern Nova Scotia – known informally as the Yarmouth Stroke Project. It has developed a new model for organizing rural health systems for persons with chronic health problems. It is demonstrating how rural health services can be remodeled and sustained to enhance the quality of life of persons with chronic health problems, and to reduce the social and financial costs of chronic illness. While actually providing improved services to rural dwellers in one particular community it is also generating the evidence

¹¹ World Health Organization, Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion, Geneva, 1986.

needed to justify a new policy approach for the design and delivery of health care in rural areas generally.

Women in Community Economic Development

Study after study has shown that there is no effective development strategy in which women do not play a central role. When women are fully involved, the benefits can be seen immediately: families are healthier and better fed; their income, savings and reinvestment go up. And what is true of families is also true of communities and, in the long run, whole countries.¹²

The Women's Economic Equality (WEE) Society has been working to promote the full participation of rural women in community economic development (CED) in Nova Scotia since 1996. The organization has sponsored a range of rural initiatives to assist women to improve their economic well-being through employment and self-employment. The organization has worked with more than 5,000 women across the province to build awareness about the issues and to work toward inclusive social and economic policies and programs. In the fall of 2002, the WEE Society, in partnership with the research group Hypatia, was awarded a Status of Women Canada national research project under the policy theme, *Restructuring in Rural Canada: Policy Implications for Rural Women*.

The research for this project addressed two main questions:

- How can rural women in Nova Scotia take advantage of New Economy opportunities?
- What kind of policies do rural women need to facilitate their full participation in the New Economy?

The research analyzed a range of economic, social, rural and educational policies and identified gaps, exclusions and contradictions that together generate serious challenges and barriers to rural Nova Scotia women,

¹² Annan, K. The Secretary-General's Opening Remarks to the Panel on the Observance of International Women's Day. New York, March 2002. Available at: www.un.org/events/women/2002/sg.htm

particularly women living on low incomes. The research examined how conventional models of economics used by both levels of government are not inclusive of women. It explored the kinds of opportunities that can arise from inclusive economic policies where social and economic development are fundamentally entwined. Finally, the research identified women-centered CED models that enable the participation of marginalized rural women in Nova Scotia.

The research report, produced for Status of Women Canada and entitled *Public Policy and the Participation of Rural Nova Scotian Women in the New Economy*, will be published in 2005.

GOVERNMENT CHANGE INITIATIVES

Governments are trying new approaches to involve rural communities in policy development. Here we examine four such initiatives. The first two bring together federal and provincial departments with other levels of government and rural communities. The remaining examples take place within the provincial government and involve significant change in the interface between government and community.

Canadian Rural Partnership Initiative (CRP)

The federal Cabinet launched the CRP in 1998, and renewed it in 2003, to provide better co-ordination of government policies, programs and services for rural, coastal, northern and remote communities. It produced the Federal Framework for Action in Rural Canada in 1999 that set out the Vision for Rural Canada, eleven priority areas for action, and principles to guide the government's actions. The current phase of the CRP is focused on collaborative approaches between federal, provincial, and territorial governments towards a National Rural Policy Framework (NRPF).

The CRP also facilitates continuous engagement of rural citizens and communities through roundtables, focus groups and conferences. It promotes the application of a "rural lens" to policy development in different government sectors, and promotes rural research, and communications.¹³

The CRP works through Rural Teams in each province to support innovation in sustainable rural community development. The Nova Scotia Rural Team facilitates the sharing of information on rural issues and priorities and encourages the development of partnerships within and

¹³ For more information on the Canadian Rural Partnership, please visit the website at: <http://www.rural.gc.ca/>

between governments and between governments and rural communities across Nova Scotia. It is composed of representatives from the federal and provincial governments and six rural and coastal community representatives-at-large.

Sustainable Communities Initiative

The Sustainable Communities Initiatives (SCI) is a partnership that brings together federal and provincial departments and agencies, municipalities, First Nations and community organizations to find ways to address the kinds of complex, cross-jurisdictional issues that so often fall between the cracks. The SCI website provides the following description:

The Canada-Nova Scotia Sustainable Communities Initiative (Initiative) is an innovative plan for governments to work in a new, more integrated way with one other, and with communities, to address sustainability issues. The purpose of the Initiative is to:

- *Coordinate and improve citizen-centered programs and service-delivery across all governments;*
- *Forge new partnerships and collaborate with local citizens in their efforts to build strong, sustainable communities.*

...Many issues affecting the sustainability of a community go beyond one department, one level of government, one budget source, or one interest group. To address the complex and inter-related problems (e.g. poverty, sewage, economic viability, education and health), a broad-based approach is needed that involves many stakeholders and takes into account the inter-relationship between environmental, economic, social and cultural concerns.¹⁴

The SCI is currently working in two community sites - the Annapolis River basin and in Cape Breton Island. It recently won national recognition from the Institute of Public Administration of Canada with a

¹⁴ See: www.gov.ns.ca/snsmr/muns/plan/plandev/news.asp?cmd=view&articleid=416

second place award in the category of “horizontal management initiatives”.

A New Community Development Policy Framework

The Nova Scotia Department of Economic Development is currently implementing a new policy framework for community development that addresses “the social, environmental, and cultural futures of communities as well as their economics.”¹⁵ The policy statement and policy scope are as follows:

Policy Statement

The Government of Nova Scotia recognizes that sustainable communities are crucial to the future strength and prosperity of the Province. The Government supports the development of more collaborative approaches with communities and across Government that build on the combined skills, resources and commitment needed to address challenges and opportunities. The Government of Nova Scotia endorses and is committed to the following principles of sustainable community development:

- 1. Local Leadership:** *The community plays the leadership role in its own development.*
- 2. Government Support:** *Government actively facilitates and supports community development through the provision of information, expertise, guidance, and other resources, as appropriate.*
- 3. Collaborative Approach:** *Community development builds on cooperation, coordination and collaboration between Government and communities.*
- 4. Balance:** *Community development builds on a balanced approach that addresses and integrates economic, social, environmental and cultural considerations.*

¹⁵ Province of Nova Scotia. (September 2003) *A Discussion Paper on Community Development*. Halifax. p.1 Available online at: <http://www.gov.ns.ca/econ/publications.asp>

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- 5. Respect for Local Values:** *Government strives to understand and respect community values.*
 - 6. Social Inclusion:** *All community members, regardless of gender, age, disability, race, culture, language or social and economic status have the opportunity to become engaged in the community development process and are able to access its social and economic benefits.*
 - 7. Transparency and Accountability:** *Government involvement in community development encourages transparency, accountability, participation and evidence-based decision-making.*
 - 8. Partnerships and Shared Interests:** *Community development engages the necessary partners at the community and Government levels.*
 - 9. Common Vision:** *Community members and Government define a common vision for the future.*
 - 10. Focus on Community Assets:** *Community development is built on existing community capacity and assets.*
 - 11. Volunteerism:** *Community development values, respects, nurtures and encourages volunteerism.*

Policy Scope

The aim of the Community Development Policy is to provide a clearly defined, consistent and collaborative Government approach to encouraging sustainable community development. The Community Development Policy is a framework to guide Government's support for, and engagement with, Nova Scotia communities. The Community Development Policy does not supersede Government's legislated responsibilities and regulatory requirements.¹⁶

¹⁶ Nova Scotia - Office of Economic Development - Community Development Policy, December 2004.

Community Counts

Another example of government support for community involvement in policy development is the new Community Counts information system. Set up by the Statistics Division of Nova Scotia Department of Finance, the system is designed to generate the following outcomes:

1. Support for evidence based decision-making for social, health, economic and environmental policy and program planning;
2. Increased economic activity through provision of timely information to support investment decision-making;
3. Enabling of cross-cutting perspectives for strategic social policy approaches;
4. Strengthened community involvement and equality of access for communities to relevant information to support local initiatives.¹⁷

The Community Counts website will provide data according to several levels of geography: the provincial level, 9 District Health Authorities, 18 Counties, 37 Community Health Boards and 278 communities.

The public will have free use of the system to develop community profiles and conduct analyses of issues and trends using up-to-date information on population and demographic trends, employment and incomes, health indicators, education levels and many other issues.

All of the above initiatives represent a growing commitment in government to increase community participation in policy development and to explore new ways to address complex issues that cut across departmental silos and jurisdictional boundaries.

¹⁷ Taken from a NS Department of Finance PowerPoint presentation in fall 2004.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN RURAL COMMUNITIES

Danger and Opportunity

The current crisis in our rural communities is the product of a rapid change process driven by the ever-greater integration of local economies within regional, national and international markets for goods, services and labour.

Crisis is a time of danger, but it is also a time of opportunity. The danger is that, in a period of rapid change, valuable things are lost and mistakes are made that cannot be undone. For example, the need to maintain jobs and incomes can produce short-term decisions that damage the environment and over-exploit renewable resources. Unique cultural resources and community strengths can also be lost in the push for growth and “modernization.” In short, the atmosphere of crisis can be a threat to sustainable community development.

However, the opportunities generated by the current crisis are significant. Communities are much more open to new ideas and new people. The emerging rural economy offers the prospect of more challenging and rewarding jobs. Young people are staying in school longer and then venturing out into the wider world. If we can attract these younger people back, they will bring new knowledge and skills to help build our human capital resources. Similarly, people “from away” are moving to Nova Scotia for security and quality of life reasons, bringing their talents and energies to rural communities.

Perhaps the most important opportunity comes from a growing awareness of the value of what rural Nova Scotia has – a unique natural environment, renewable resources, rich culture and strong community life. More people are coming to understand that social and economic development is about preserving and building on these valued things rather than sacrificing them

for short-term gains. The concept of sustainable development encourages us to think of future generations and to plan and implement development policies and activities accordingly.

Communities Impacting Policy – A Broad Approach

The current crisis generates immediate threats to community sustainability. The crisis also creates a situation where community leaders and ordinary citizens re-evaluate their ideas and explore alternative perspectives.

Participation and Research

Comprehensive planning and policy development activities, which include active community participation, supported by careful research and information-sharing, are some of the most effective ways to manage dangers and make use of opportunities.

Community Capacity

By its very nature, sustainable development cannot be imposed on communities. Sustainable development implies a learning process where communities acquire new capacities to analyze, evaluate, plan and make difficult decisions while balancing short-term objectives against longer-term costs and benefits.

The Role of Government

Communities can't do everything by themselves. Without significant ongoing investments in regional economic development and the provision of adequate health, education and social services, attempts by communities to solve their own problems will not stop economic decline, population loss and social instability. In this context, community development is reduced to an exercise in people adapting to an ever-lower standard of living.

Conversely, policy initiatives by government to “modernize” rural economies by promoting certain shortsighted notions of economic efficiency and productivity may generate long-term damage to community viability. For example, efforts to locate call centres in smaller communities have been thwarted by the lack of workers with the requisite skills because so many of these people have moved away.

As stated in the federal government’s Vision for Rural Canada, government needs to evaluate policy options by making use of a “rural lens”. By conducting meaningful consultations with rural communities that cut across departmental silos and jurisdictional boundaries when necessary, government will be able to identify and assess the full consequences of any proposed intervention.

Rural Policy Forum 2005

There is mounting evidence that policies are most successful when communities have a significant role in policy development.

*Development of good policy is carried out by and with people, not on or to people. It improves both the ability of individuals to take action and the capacity of groups, organizations or committees to influence change*¹⁸

The ultimate purpose of the RCIP project is to explore and demonstrate how such approaches can work. As stated at the very beginning, this discussion paper and following discussion questions set the stage for the 2nd Annual Rural Policy Forum entitled: "Policies to Support Healthy and Sustainable Rural Communities". By bringing communities together with academic-based researchers and building relationships with decision-makers in government, sustainable development becomes a real option for rural communities.

¹⁸ World Health Organization, 1997

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

These questions will provide a focus for discussion of the issues raised in this paper at the Rural Policy Forum in Tatamagouche, Nova Scotia on February 17-19, 2005.

1. What do you see as the most serious challenges facing rural communities in Nova Scotia and in other regions of Atlantic Canada?
 - a. In the area of social conditions?
 - b. In the area of cultural conditions?
 - c. In the area of economic conditions?
 - d. In the area of environmental conditions?
 - e. Other challenges?
2. Do you agree with the view put forward in this paper on the need for a new and comprehensive policy framework aimed at the promotion of healthy and sustainable development in rural communities?
 - a. What would be the major components of such a policy framework?
 - b. How might rural communities best participate in the elaboration of such a policy framework?
 - c. What contributions should we expect from the academic community?
 - d. What changes are needed in the ways government develops and implements policy?

EPILOGUE - 2006 EDITION

The following are the proceedings from the workshop *Comprehensive Policy Framework for Sustainable Rural Communities* held at the Rural Policy Forum in Tatamagouche, Nova Scotia on February 18, 2005:¹⁹

Issues

- *There is awareness and general consensus of the need for a provincial strategy and framework for rural Nova Scotia.*
- *There are too many disconnected players and initiatives.*
- *Voluntary sector challenges must be recognized [e.g. burn-out and succession (i.e. who takes over next)]*
- *Nova Scotians need to be more self-sufficient. For example, resource management and buying local in energy, transportation and food.*

Principles

- *Beyond rural, there is the overall principle of the public good.*
- *Local, community-based decision-making is essential. This provides the community “voice.”*
- *We need to take an integrated approach that includes everything. For example, fisheries, economic development and income support.*
- *Policy is often formed as a response to crisis or catalyst. This comprehensive policy framework needs to be forward thinking instead of reacting to one crisis or another.*
- *There must be checks and balances.*
- *There must be guiding principles.*
- *A rationale needs to be provided for such a policy.*
- *Support for community self-determination is essential.*
- *The policy needs to be based on openness and transparency.*
- *It needs to be a tri-level policy process: federal, provincial and municipal.*
- *There needs to be ongoing policy evaluation.*
- *The policy needs to respect the principle of self-determination within a civil society. Communities need to be masters of their own destiny.”*
- *Community is the cornerstone of rural development.*

¹⁹ Taken from *Rural Policy Forum Report - February 17-19, 2005*, Rural Communities Impacting Policy Project. Available online at: <http://www.ruralnovascotia.ca/policyforum2005.asp>

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- *Government must recognize and support the right of rural communities to determine their own futures:*
 - *To make their own decisions.*
 - *To plan and manage their own affairs.*
 - *Make the link between democracy, civil society and rural sustainability.*

Next Steps: Potential Policy Change Strategies

- *Create political will*
 - *There needs to be political will behind a “rural” focus.*
- *Conduct research*
 - *We need to figure out what is “sustainable” and what is not.*
 - *A comprehensive policy needs to look at cumulative impacts of past policies.*
- *Improve Training and Capacity-Building*
 - *Citizens need a better understanding about how policies get made.*
- *Create an Accord between Governments, Communities and Learning Institutions*
 - *This Accord needs to address all of the above concerns.*
 - *CCN prepare and present a draft Accord - including National Rural Policy Framework (NRPF), Nova Scotia Community Development Policy (NSCDP) and the Social Economy/Social Enterprise federal initiative.*
- *Build Coalitions and Networks*
 - *Expand the role of CCN - facilitate and support community self-determination through participation and community learning.*
 - *Continue the role of RCIP.*

Rural Communities Impacting Policy Project
c/o Atlantic Health Promotion Research Centre
at Dalhousie University
Suite 209, City Centre Atlantic
1535 Dresden Row
Halifax, NS
B3J 3T1

www.ruralnovascotia.ca

ph: (902) 494-3094

fax: (902) 494-3594