



POLICY BRIEF

Bridging Policy and Research: Exploring Emerging Opportunities

Change is the one constant. The difference today and for the foreseeable future is the accelerated pace of change and the opportunities and challenges this brings for the world in which we live. Geopolitical shifts, changes in demographic structures at home and abroad, emerging collaborative governance models, rapid advances in information technology, the transition towards environmental sustainability. These were among the themes identified through the *Dialogue on Emerging Policy Research Issues*, a collaborative process between academics and the federal policy community over the past four months. This process was facilitated by Policy Horizons Canada (formerly, the Policy Research Initiative) using on-line collaboration methods, culminating in a face-to-face meeting between senior federal officials and academics in December 2010.

Synthesis of Emerging Issues

The outcome of these sessions are described in a synthesis paper, which outlines a range of complex policy issues with implications for Canada over the medium to longer term. While the list is not exhaustive, nor are the items prioritized, it is presented to stimulate thinking and discussion between the federal government policy community and academics in order to identify future areas of possible policy research and to enhance the ability of academic researchers to impact public policy. Sections of the synthesis paper in which specific sub-themes are identified include:

- *The changing demographic structure:* Canada will experience significant demographic shifts in the coming years. Recent trends point to an aging population, increasing rate of immigration and growing Aboriginal population. This shifting demographic brings challenges and opportunities and has implications for Canada in terms of managing diversity, facilitating sustainable growth, and addressing issues related to gender, income inequality and social cohesion.
- *Transition towards environmental sustainability:* Reconciling the environment and the economy will have future implications for Canada, as it attempts to address climate change and energy security in the transition towards sustainable prosperity.

- *Geopolitical shifts and the global commons:* The shifting geopolitical structure has implications on how Canada will operate in a changing world, how global issues will be addressed, and to what extent Canadian influence will be exerted on a global scale.
- *Shifting governance dynamic:* Collaborative governance models that address a range of complex problems are being developed at the global, national and local levels. These emerging governance structures bring in a variety of actors in the deliberation and decision-making process.
- *Rapid changes in information technology:* The pace of technological change has significant implications on local and global economies, societies and institutions. The convergence of technology with industry and the sciences will bring opportunities and challenges and raise tough questions on the future of Canadian and global society.
- *The role of resilience in addressing challenges:* Dealing with shocks requires a certain degree of resiliency on behalf of individuals and the communities in which they live. Understanding how resilience comes into play when dealing with a range of issues at the individual and community levels will be important in order to adequately address the challenges that arise.
- *Broadening conventional measures:* A holistic approach to assessing well-being involves complementing and integrating traditional measures, such as determinants of productivity and GDP, with non-traditional ones, including a host of social and environmental indicators. Momentum seems to be moving towards ensuring that these broader measures are increasingly taken into account within decision-making processes.
- *The competitiveness challenge:* Canada is considered competitive in certain sectors, while it is lagging in others. As the world continues to change and global competition increases, Canada needs to find innovative ways to keep pace in enhancing competitiveness and promoting prosperity.

Although the list is presented as individual topics within specific sections, there are obvious inter-linkages that could be examined in conjunction, some of which are outlined in the synthesis paper. The challenges lie in setting priorities on the issues ripe for further policy research and determining how horizontal policies could be developed that ensure the issues are addressed not in isolation but through an integrated lens.

Moving Forward

The *Dialogue on Emerging Policy Research Issues* is the beginning of a process that complements existing collaborations between the federal policy and academic communities. Moving forward, Policy Horizons Canada will facilitate further discussions between academics and federal policy officers to deepen understanding of some of these issues by drawing on existing research, sharpening the policy questions that need to be explored, and identifying further research needs. Collectively, we have an opportunity to strengthen the dialogue between our respective communities and create a forum of exchange that will enable us to address some of the tough policy challenges that face Canada in the years to come.