Promising Practices in Community Partnerships:

Lessons Learned from the Canadian Rural Partnership

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Abstract

Canadians living in rural, remote and northern regions face many challenges to their communities' sustainability and viability. The Government of Canada, in collaboration with rural communities through the Canadian Rural Partnership, has responded to these concerns by developing policies, programs and services that, among other things, help build capacity at the community level. Community capacity building plays an important role in community development because the process builds on strengths, identifies opportunities, and takes effective action. A thorough review of a selected sample of community projects funded at close to $1.8 million over a period of six years, between 1998 and 2004, has yielded many lessons learned and best practices. Key findings identify the importance of building community partnerships and networks, and of having a participatory approach that involves as many stakeholders as possible, including youth and Aboriginal peoples. The lessons learned identified in this study can be used by community stakeholders conducting similar community development efforts.

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1.0   Introduction

Rural, remote, and northern Canadians face many challenges to their communities' sustainability and future prospects. Among these challenges are declining and aging populations, problems with youth retention, limited economic and social opportunities for residents, depleting natural resources, loss of local services, and higher costs of living. The Government of Canada has responded to these challenges, through the Canadian Rural Partnership, by implementing policies, programs and services which focus on building capacity at the community level.

The overall goal of community capacity building is to work toward community sustainability in the social, economic, environmental and political realms by building on community skills, abilities, knowledge and self-management. Community capacity building is an on-going process that develops leadership in a community and engages citizens in developing a shared vision for their community. It enables a community to identify its strengths and weaknesses, to mobilize internal and external resources to meet local challenges, to develop strategies for effective action and to increase individual capacity to take advantage of opportunities. Community capacity building involves improving all aspects of community life and sharing control of community development resources, with the end result a positive legacy for today and tomorrow.

Since the creation of the Canadian Rural Partnership in 1998, four funding programs have been implemented to help build community capacity. This study summarizes the lessons learned from three of these funding programs as they relate to two key areas of community capacity building: partnerships and networks, and the participatory approach. The identification and use of lessons learned can be of value to stakeholders interested in adopting similar approaches to community development.

2.0   Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this study was to document the lessons learned from projects that worked toward sustainability and improved community capacity in rural, remote and northern communities across Canada.

The objectives of this study were:

•   to identify lessons learned on partnerships and networks, and the participatory approach; and
•   to provide a foundation of information that can be used by community groups conducting similar community development efforts.

3.0   Background to Funding Programs

The Canadian Rural Partnership, coordinated by Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's Rural Secretariat, is a focal point for the Government of Canada to work in partnership with Canadians in rural, remote and northern areas to build strong, dynamic, and sustainable communities for present and future generations. Between 1998 and 2004, four funding programs either funded through the Canadian Rural Partnership or administered through the Rural Secretariat, were aimed at supporting rural community development and community capacity building. Those program are: the Pilot Projects Initiative, the Rural Development Initiative (RDI), the Canadian Agricultural Rural Communities Initiative (CARCI)[1], and the Agricultural Rural Minority Language Community Planning Initiative (ARMLCPI). This study compiled lessons learned from the first three programs.[2]

The funding programs were developed in response to the needs identified by rural, remote and northern Canadians through a process of open dialogue with the Government of Canada. More than 600 community projects were funded for close to $20.6 million during the six years of initiatives. In addition, over $32 million were leveraged in the form of cash and in-kind contributions from within communities and through other federal, provincial or territorial initiatives. Communities generally raised one to three dollars for every dollar invested by the Government of Canada.

The Pilot Projects Initiative operated in four rounds from 1998 to 2002. A total of 307 projects were funded for close to $12 million and an additional $24 million was leveraged. Projects were required to be innovative and have local impact.[3] Furthermore, projects were encouraged to address the eleven priority areas identified by rural, remote and northern Canadians in the Rural Dialogue[4] and National Rural Workshop process as outlined in the Federal Framework for Action in Rural Canada[5].

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[1]   CARCI was funded under the Canadian Adaptation and Rural Development Fund (CARD), and was administered by the Rural Secretariat.

[2]   ARMLCPI will be reviewed in a separate study.

[3]   For a brief summary of individual Pilot Projects see:
www.rural.gc.ca/programs/sunset_e.phtml?content=pp_ps&round=1

[4]   The Rural Dialogue is a key component of the CRP designed to respond to rural development issues and concerns by engaging Canadians from rural regions in a two-way discussion with the federal government on opportunities, challenges and priorities, as well as on the role that governments, communities, stakeholders and individuals play in enhancing the quality of life in rural Canada.

[5]   The Federal Framework for Action in Rural Canada is a policy framework developed in response to what rural Canadians have said through the Rural Dialogue process. The framework has helped guide the actions of the federal government in addressing its commitment to Canadians living in rural, remote, and northern areas.

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The 11 priorities identified by rural Canadians for focussed government attention are:

- access to federal government programs and services;
- access to financial resources for rural business and community development;
- programs and services for rural and Aboriginal youth;
- rural community capacity building, leadership and skills development;
- infrastructure for community development;
- skills and technology to participate in the knowledge-based economy;
- economic diversification in rural Canada through more targeted assistance;
- access to health care at reasonable cost;
- access to education at reasonable cost;
- strategic partnerships to facilitate rural community development; and
- promoting rural Canada as a place to live, work, and raise a family.

The Rural Development Initiative was a one-year program operating from 2001 to 2002. A total of 112 projects were funded for close to $2.5 million and an additional $2.5 million was leveraged. Projects were encouraged to help rural and remote communities respond to community development challenges and to focus on the rural priority "rural community capacity building, leadership and skills development" as identified in the Rural Dialogue. The objective of the RDI was to support long-term, sustainable rural development strategies that strengthen a community's ability to build local solutions to local challenges.

The Canadian Agricultural Rural Communities Initiative was a three year program operating from 2001 to 2004. A total of 200 projects were funded for close to $6.1 million and an additional $6.1 million was leveraged.[6] The CARCI was developed to enhance the viability of agricultural rural communities affected by changes in the agricultural sector through consultations with industry and community stakeholders.

4.0   Methodology

This study summarizes some of the lessons learned related to community capacity building from a selection of these three funding programs. Projects for analysis were selected from a list of more than 600 community projects that met the following criteria:

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[6]   For a brief summary of CARCI projects see:
www.rural.gc.ca/programs/sunset_e.phtml?content=carci_ps&round=1

- the project was located in a rural, remote, or northern community;
- the project had been initiated between 1998 and 2004;
- the project helped build sustainable communities through rural community capacity building, skills, and leadership development;
- the project involved a partnership approach with one or more parties that facilitated rural community development; and
- the project yielded information on partnerships and networks and on the participatory approach that could be transferred to new locations.

In addition, there was an effort made to select:

- one third of projects with significant youth involvement; and
- one third of projects with significant Aboriginal involvement.

Of the over 600 community projects that were screened, a total of 42 projects were selected for analysis, representing approximately 6.8% of all community projects. The analysed projects constituted $1.8 million (8.7%) of total combined funding of the three funding programs. There were 21 Pilot Projects Initiative, 11 RDI, and 10 CARCI projects examined, representing 6.8%, 9.8% and 5% of the total projects per funding program. The Pilot Projects Initiative, RDI, and CARCI projects analysed comprised $0.97 million (8.1%), $0.43 million (17.2%), and $0.39 million (6.4%) of total funding per respective program. Table 1 presents this information in tabular form.

**Table 1: Number of projects analysed and funding allocated**

Program	# of projects analysed	% of projects per program	Funding allocated ($)	% of total funding per program
Pilot Projects	21	6.8	970,000	8.1
RDI	11	9.8	430,000	17.2
CARCI	10	5	390,000	6.4

Projects were analysed through a process of documentation review that examined applications, memorandums, finances, electronic database information, and final project reports. The process facilitated gathering of already existing comprehensive and historical information on projects. Chart 1 shows the distribution of analysed projects by province or territory. Although some projects contained information that was incomplete and difficult to interpret, the information gathered was appropriate for the compilation of lessons learned. Other methods of data collection such as surveys or interviews would have yielded a fuller range and depth of lessons learned, but were not part of this study. It is important to note that since this study is an analysis and synthesis of various lessons

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learned across selected projects, another selection of projects could have yielded the same or very different lessons learned.

Chart 1: Distribution of analysed projects by province or territory
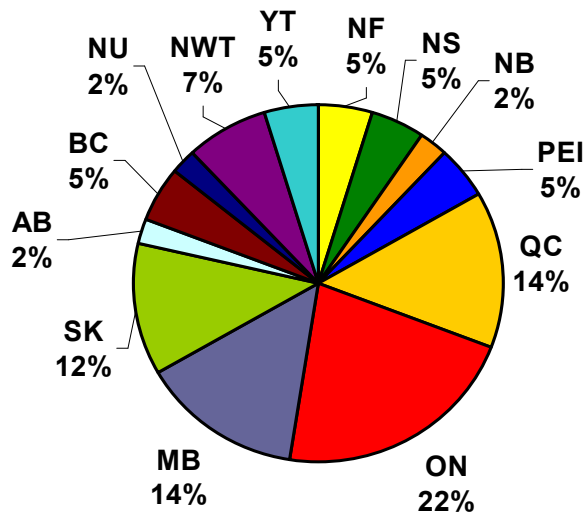
5.0   Partnerships and Networks

Partnerships and networks are considered a cornerstone for successful community development and are viewed by rural stakeholders as effective means of implementing community projects and reaching shared goals.[7] Definitions of these terms are wide and varied, largely depending on how the partnerships and networks are interpreted and used.

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[7]   Canadian Rural Partnership. (2001). "Analysis of Rural Dialogue Activities." online.
          http://www.rural.gc.ca/dialogue/sum_e.phtml. (September 8, 2005).

Given that there are varying degrees in function of and stakeholder involvement in partnerships, it is difficult to have a single definition of a partnership. From a community development perspective, a partnership is a relationship where two or more parties, having compatible goals, form an agreement to work together in a mutually beneficial manner, often doing things together that might not be possible alone.[8] In addition, there are four common elements which further distinguish and define a partnership:

- common objectives and goals among partners;
- shared risk and mutual benefits;
- contributions from all partners; and
- shared authority, responsibility and accountability.[9]

In contrast, a network can be defined as a community of individuals, groups, organisations or agencies organised around common issues or concerns, which are pursued proactively and systematically, based on commitment and trust.[10] Networks are different from partnerships in that there are no formal requirements for shared contributions, authority, responsibility or accountability. As individuals or groups establish networks both internally within their community and externally outside their community, it can be very beneficial to the work they do. Networks can be a source of information, support and feedback from individuals and organizations working in the same or a similar field. Internally, the individuals or groups in the network can be the connecting link among community service providers and can help mobilize the community in a progressive direction. Externally, the individuals or groups in the network can promote their community or project, gain expert assistance at little or no cost, and be part of a larger voice to advocate positive change for their community.

The analysis of the selected community projects funded through the Canadian Rural Partnership demonstrated that working within a framework of partnerships and networks is advantageous and contributes to project success. Most projects that concluded successfully were comprised of partnerships forged with and between the community, government, and private sector. Partnerships showed the community what can be achieved by working together and fostered a high probability of future collaboration. Essential elements of a successful partnership and network included: a common goal that is important to each partner organization; mutual respect; valuing each partner for

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8   Frank, Flo & Smith, Anne. (2000). The Partnership Handbook. Hull: Human Resources Development Canada.

9   Ekos Research Associates. Voluntary Sector Roundtable. (1998). "Lessons Learned on Partnerships: Final Report." online. www.vsr-trsb.net/publications/ekosoc98/toc.html. (June 21, 2005)

10   Child and Youth Southern Alberta Health Network. (2005). "What is a network?." online. www.sacyhn.ca. (September 8, 2005).

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whatever they may be able to contribute; dedicated resources; and good coordination. In general, partnerships and networks provided the support, expertise, and resources that enabled people and organizations to come together and work toward solving community challenges.

Working in partnership and the establishment of community networks provided:

1)   Support for the project and the community, resulting in:

•   the creation of new strategic alliances, relationships and networks;
•   strengthened relationships between business, community, and public officials;
•   the sharing of workloads and efficient progress;
•   access to educational opportunities and volunteer resources;
•   opening old and creating new lines of communication; and
•   the building of capacity throughout partner organizations and the promotion of partners both within and outside the project.

2)   Expertise that informed the project, resulting in:

•   a more cohesive approach to planning;
•   an ability to extract knowledge from community members;
•   enhanced brainstorming and decision-making;
•   an awareness of similar programs occurring in other communities;
•   remaining up-to-date on issues related to community development; and
•   the use of differing skill sets from various sources.

3)   Resources that enabled the project to move forward and achieve its intended outcome, resulting in:

•   an ability to share resources and information to avoid duplication and streamline activities;
•   the pooling of financial, human and material resources; and
•   the provision of in-kind and financial contributions.

5.1   Partnerships and Networks: Lessons Learned

The lessons learned on partnerships and networks were grouped into three categories: common values, goals and objectives; mutual benefits; and shared responsibility and accountability.

Common Values, Goals and Objectives

> **Establishing a form of agreement between partners on common goals and objectives can prevent problems occurring in the future.**

Among partners, informal agreements through dialogue or formal agreements, such as the implementation of a memorandum of understanding, are useful avenues to consider in order to ensure compliance with specific objectives and ultimate goals, because they prevent problems from occurring over the course of a project. In Newfoundland, the *Strategic Resource Development Cluster* project was able to unite four small towns that did not traditionally work together in order to create a strategic plan, including resource identification, for the region. Milestones and timelines were established and respected by all partners, which contributed to the successful implementation of the project. Consultations and workshops with business, the community, and the local governments were undertaken to identify community resources. The project developed comprehensive strategic plans for the region and also the four individual communities. As a result of this project, the duplication of planning activities in the region was minimized and it was demonstrated that co-operation and integration of efforts could achieve results for the community.

> **Partnerships built between different sectors and stakeholders work when they are based on common values.**

An inter-sectoral approach to the development of community projects recognizes the spectrum of sectors that make up a healthy and viable community and encourages working together in partnership across all sectors to contribute to the health of rural communities. In Manitoba, the *Designing a Development Plan for the Erickson Region* project brought together four small municipalities to create a regional development strategy in order to address the mutually recognized lack of opportunities in the region for business and industry. The project worked through a roundtable process with tourism, agricultural, commercial and non-farm businesses. The roundtable process involved visioning; brainstorming on strengths of the region, assets and opportunities, top regional issues and opportunities; and clarification of the strengths of each municipality in the region. A regional economic development strategy was formed based on the roundtable process. The project improved communication and cooperation between the communities in the region and provided new ideas and initiatives to improve the socio-economic well-being of the regions' citizens.

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> **Community projects and partnerships can continue into the future once federal funding has expired.**

This can be accomplished by finding additional support at the provincial government level and/or through private and non-profit funding arrangements. In Yukon, the *Yukon Volunteer Bureau* project developed a network of learning and communications resources to create and support the operations of a Yukon-wide volunteer bureau. Although there was a multitude of organizations in Yukon communities providing services through the use of volunteers, there was never any central co-ordination of volunteer resources. The project established a central location for co-ordinating volunteer services, created a database to match volunteers with opportunities, provided advertisement opportunities for groups and agencies seeking volunteers, scheduled volunteer events, provided information on volunteering and volunteer management, and provided training for volunteer management. The volunteer bureau was able to continue its work after federal funding ended by developing a funding partnership with the territorial government and through several private sector sources. Financial support was able to continue into the future because there was a benefit to all the parties involved and the service provided was seen as valuable. The project succeeded in developing a network of volunteers and clients for the entire Yukon territory, reduced duplication of efforts by other agencies, increased skill and knowledge among volunteer coordinators, and increased public awareness of volunteer opportunities.

> **Youth-targeted projects benefit from partnerships that involve youth directly.**

Partnerships built among all stakeholders in the youth-servicing sector, including schools, youth employment centres, government and volunteer agencies benefit youth because they all have the shared objective of helping young people succeed. In Ontario, the *Volunteer Youth in the Millennium* project sought to promote volunteerism among youth aged 14 to 25 and to improve the transition from school to work through career exploration and preparation. The employability skills of youth were improved through volunteerism involving hands-on and specialized projects such as volunteering with the Canadian Red Cross, seniors and the disabled. School credits were used to encourage and give incentive for active participation by youth. Youth were involved with the Ontario Association of Youth Employment Centres, and the Ontario Works and Community Service Order programs. The project raised the awareness of volunteer opportunities in the community and allowed youth to contribute to their community in a positive manner while learning about themselves. Approximately 3000 youth were reached and more than 60,000 volunteer hours of service were recorded throughout the project.

Mutual benefits

All partners add value, whether monetary or non-monetary, to community projects.

It must be recognized that every partner brings strengths and resources to the partnership process and that these must be respected and integrated into the project. In Nova Scotia, the *Rural Volunteers Project* sought to build regional networks to facilitate the development of collaborative plans for local action and the implementation of skill and knowledge development for the rural voluntary sector. The four main partners in the project provided both guidance and resources to the network development process. The project brought together community organizations and voluntary sector leaders from across Nova Scotia for a meeting on rural community action. Nine regional networks were formed at this meeting. Each network consisted of eight or more organizations from a variety of sectors engaging volunteers, and developed action plans to support their local volunteer sector. Some of the successes of the regional networks include: volunteer resource strategies, volunteer resource centres, volunteer fairs, and matching students with volunteer placements. The project has also increased the skills of voluntary sector organizations in collaborative planning.

Partnerships built between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal entities can enhance community development within, and in regions adjacent to, reserves.

In Prince Edward Island, the *Western Malpeque Co-operative Community-Based Development Initiative* developed an extension of the Confederation Trail and an eco-tourism plan to improve employment and recreational opportunities for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities in the region. The partnership strengthened the lines of communication between the two communities and helped mediate a conflict over fishing rights through co-operative dialogue and action. Public meetings were held to promote inter-community awareness, interaction, and dialogue in establishing infrastructure and creating joint economic development opportunities. A newsletter was sent to every household in the region to target those who didn't attend the public meetings. The project resulted in mutually beneficial infrastructure development and increased communication between the Aboriginal and the non-aboriginal community through the public participation process.

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> ### Staying focussed and committed to developing the first partnership often leads to others.

In Ontario, the *First Nation Economic Development Network* project brought together 27 First Nation communities to look at ways to maximize the application of their limited economic development resources, to gain the skills needed to effect positive change in their communities, and to establish a network of economic development personnel who work in rural communities. Band Economic Development Officers attended six two-to-three-day training modules, including: enabling technologies, strategic planning, business development, business partnerships and joint ventures, engaging aboriginal youth in entrepreneurship, and developing a network. The session on partnership and joint ventures was designed to expose participants to successful business partnerships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal partners. One of the speakers, who was a First Nation Chief, spoke of how the first business partnership in his community led to others. He indicated that the success of the initial partnership showed other potential partners that the community could get the job done. This project helped to strengthen the participants' confidence and provided them with useful skills. The participants also developed a network called the Obezhigojig Economic Developers Association to share information with each other and to keep in contact.

> ### Time spent on building the partnership relationship is worthwhile.

It is important to build time into every partnership meeting to nurture the partnership itself, whether it is through formal or informal means. In Saskatchewan, the project entitled *Aboriginal Communities and Sustainable Rural Development: Case Studies of Successful Rural, Agricultural-Related Aboriginal Ventures* captured the knowledge and ideas of successful Aboriginal businesses to create a best-practices handbook and a website for community stakeholders and educators.[11] The project identified and partnered with ten Aboriginal businesses to learn how they became successful. Every available opportunity to build the partnership relationship was used. Even time spent travelling with the partners was valuable for coaching and information sharing. Teaching materials were developed for educational institutions, government organizations, businesses, and others interested in rural agricultural business development. The project demonstrated the positive contribution of Aboriginal businesses to the socio-economic sustainability of rural communities.

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[11] The best practices handbook is available at: www.aboriginalbusinesscases.com.

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Shared Responsibility and Accountability

> **Shared accountability is an integral part of all partnerships.**

It is necessary to have shared accountability in partnerships because all organizations have to explain the manner in which their money is spent. Some project organisers may find it difficult to comply with the mandate and reporting requirements of multiple funding partners. Having an agreed upon strategy to deal with accountability issues among partners will help ensure that if these problems occur, they will be dealt with effectively. In Manitoba, the *Healthy Women, Healthy Communities* project provided women with information, educational resources and opportunities to participate in and develop emerging health networks at the community and regional level. Health information was distributed in the form of books, videos, and workshops in thirteen communities. Workshops were attended by both public service providers and engaged citizens and were used as the focal point for developing community health networks. The project proponents noted that it was a challenge to comply with the multiple reporting requirements of the funding partners and as such, it was recommended that future projects could be separated into distinct phases so that funding contributions could be sought for each phase of a project. The project resulted in the establishment of two regional women's health networks, improved access to and awareness of information for women, and the engagement of over 1,000 women in discussions and activities around the health of women, families, and communities.

6.0   The Participatory Approach

A participatory approach to community development is a way to move forward and make decisions that reflect all aspects of community life, including its social, economic, environmental, and political dimensions. The participatory approach can be defined as a process through which stakeholders influence and share control over development initiatives and the decisions and resources which affect them.[12] The long-term objective of using a participatory approach in community projects is to empower stakeholders through participation and involvement in decision-making and follow-up activities. Levels of participation can vary throughout the implementation of participatory approaches in community projects.

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[12]   The World Bank Group. (1996). "Reflections: What is Participation?" The World Bank Participation Source Book. Washington: The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development. online. http://www.worldbank.org/wbi/sourcebook/sb01.pdf. (September 9, 2005).

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Participation in community projects involves a continuum of activities, embracing lower, middle and higher levels of public involvement. At the lower level of participation, which is referred to sometimes as "top-down", there is a commitment from project proponents to inform and educate the public about their project. This level of participation involves an information dissemination process and is usually a one-way exchange. The highest level of participation, also referred to as "bottom-up", involves citizen engagement and decision-making in determining the direction of the project. At this level of participation, citizens among themselves come up with solutions to community challenges and help implement strategies to address them. The middle level of participation encompasses a combination of activities from the lower and higher levels. It involves a two-way dialogue with community stakeholders in which information is exchanged and decisions influencing the final outcome of projects occur. Participatory approaches to community projects become more complicated moving from lower to higher levels of citizen involvement. However, at the higher level of participation, communities are left with a sense of empowerment and control over the challenges they face.

The analysis of the selected community projects demonstrated that working within a participatory framework contributes to a community's sense of ownership and control over its future. When community stakeholders nurture and drive the participatory process it leaves them with a sense of empowerment. This effect was greater when the level of participation in the project was at its highest. Although not all community projects incorporated the highest possible level of community involvement, any level of participation was seen as a step in the right direction toward improving community sustainability and well-being. Essential elements of a successful participatory approach include: a focus on partnerships and networks; access to and sharing of information; active participation of stakeholders leading to a sense of ownership; a community-level or bottom-up focus; flexibility; and recognition that it is a long-term process.

Working with a participatory approach was found to:

- act as a catalyst for interested community members to get together, strengthen their voices and develop action plans;
- develop and share knowledge;
- create a social resource network;
- change perceptions of the community;
- increase community members' self-esteem;
- create a sense of pride, empowerment and social connection; and
- improve overall community life by fostering increased awareness and cooperation among community members.

6.1   Participatory Approach: Lessons Learned

The lessons learned on the participatory approach were grouped into three categories: low level of participation, middle level of participation, and high level of participation.

Low level of participation

> **The sharing of best-practice information with community development practitioners increases their awareness of solutions to community challenges.**

In Saskatchewan, the *Partnership Proposal for Agricultural Development* project held information workshops that brought together land managers, economic development officers, band council members, and experts from a variety of disciplines to share specific examples of some of the best land-management and resource-utilization practices occurring in the province. Eleven workshops were held, ranging from community visioning and project development to land management and aboriginal success stories. In addition, group discussions were held which allowed participants to share ideas and discuss some of the potential solutions to the challenges they were facing. The project provided community development practitioners with information and tools to enhance the impact of their agricultural land-management decisions, a better understanding of the impact of natural resources on long-term community sustainability, and a stronger relationship with other community development practitioners in the region. As a result of this project, four First Nation communities have developed community plans and furthered their land-use policies.

> **The use of information communication technologies can improve access to information and provides an opportunity for community members to work together to find common solutions to common challenges.**

In the Northwest Territories, the project entitled *SahtuNet - A Sahtu Community Web Portal* developed a comprehensive website that contained land claims participant information, community profiles, tourism details, as well as links to government and private sector websites to help improve information dissemination throughout the region. The website was developed with users in mind, optimizing the design for users with dial-up internet access and including as much written material as possible since much printed material is not available in the far north. The website was considered the first step in bringing people and the local government together to solve community challenges

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and has resulted in improved communication among elected officials, staff, local businesses and community members. Many people who did not have access to land claims participant information now have this access. Further, the project has increased the use of the internet and technology in the region and is the stepping stone for future information communication technologies initiatives.

> **The active promotion of a project can facilitate interest and participation.**

In Quebec, the *Mobilisation of Young Rural Developers* project encouraged youth to participate in developing art projects symbolizing their community to help increase their self-esteem, sense of belonging, and interest in their community. Project information was disseminated at the local level to 65 communities surrounding the site of the project through newspapers, posters and letters. Interviews were also conducted with the media to promote the project and encourage active participation. The promotion of the project resulted in the participation of seventy-six youth from eleven communities. Youth were encouraged to work with seniors and other citizens in the community when developing their art projects to showcase community life, history, living heritage, natural beauty, and local businesses and government. The community art projects were showcased at a regional exposition. As a result of this project, youth have increased their knowledge of their communities, established a social resource network with youth from other communities and between generations within their communities, changed perceptions of their community, and increased their self-esteem and pride.

Middle level of participation

> **The gathering of information from community members can help inform and shape community projects.**

In British Columbia, the *AgraRoots* project created a community network of agricultural and small, value-added agricultural businesses to help address the socio-economic challenges and declining standards of living associated with standard agricultural production in the region. Throughout the region, focus groups were held, needs assessment surveys were distributed, and workshops were provided to the public to inform and to obtain input on the project in order to influence its future direction. An action plan which outlined strategies for the project was developed in response to the input from the public. The project was successful in developing a network of 102 active members including producers/processors, retailers, organizations and consumers. A website was launched and

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included 32 member pages. Sixteen of the member businesses have come together and joined the largest internet organic foods home-delivery business in Canada, called SPUD.[13] The project has developed the capacity of the community to respond to the challenges faced by the traditional agricultural sector through the development and marketing of value-added agricultural products.

The internet can facilitate the flow of information in and between rural areas.

In Yukon, the *Yukon River Watershed - Assessment and Awareness Project* undertook a comprehensive assessment of the history, issues, and concerns affecting the Yukon River Watershed and created an educational package to enhance the awareness of First Nation governments, individuals, and organizations on these environmental issues. The project gathered and compiled information from conventional and traditional sources, including from government agencies and elders. The project used an internet forum called the Yukon River Inter Tribal Watershed Community to facilitate networking between and within First Nation communities through the exchange of files, documents, ideas, as well as a calender of upcoming events on topics related to the Yukon River Watershed. Watershed maps, a guide to understanding water quality, and a standard survey for communities to identify environmental priorities were developed as an educational package to be shared throughout Yukon. The project increased the participation of First Nations in environmental stewardship, improved community capacity to address environmental issues and encouraged networking among First Nations.

Successful community projects embrace flexibility.

In Nunavut, the *Kugluktuk Information Sharing Service* project established an electronic information-sharing service, with the help of many volunteers from within the community, to guide Kugluktuk residents and others to information needed to open doors, broaden choices, and to find and develop socio-economic opportunities. The project established an internet access facility at the Kugluktuk community library and a computer lab in the local college. Further, training in computer use was provided for local residents, an information technology guide was written, and the initial infrastructure for a community website was developed. Although the project was originally comprised of four functional phases to simplify implementation, it was found that circumstances such as personnel turnover and a heavy administrative workload did not allow the phases to be

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[13]   For more information on SPUD visit: www.spud.ca

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conducted independently of one another. In response, the project integrated a flexible approach to moving forward that involved continually revising the workplan as required. As a result of this project, residents are better able to empower themselves through knowledge, and a location for community members to access electronic information regardless of their economic situation is now available.

High level of participation

> **Project evaluations that involve all stakeholders leave the community with a sense of empowerment.**

In British Columbia, the project entitled *Bridging Services for the Aboriginal Family Program* sought to establish a networking system with health care professionals and community service providers to serve at-risk aboriginal children and their families through outreach and education. The project secured an Aboriginal Family Liaison and Support Worker who contacted and networked with143 community service providers, delivered early intervention work with families through home visits, and developed educational brochures, articles and newsletters for dissemination. The project used an evaluation strategy that encompassed all relevant community stakeholders and was designed to provide input for future initiatives. The information gathered through the stakeholder evaluation process indicated that the majority of families and service providers involved in the project found positive results for the Aboriginal children supported. The project resulted in more engaged parent-child relationships, improvements in peer relationships for children, increased self-esteem for children, improved parental knowledge on child development, and increased awareness of community services available for families.

> **Youth need to be involved in the decisions that affect them.**

In Manitoba, the *Youth Inclusion in Rural Manitoba* project conducted socio-economic research on youth inclusion and civic engagement across seven rural communities. Over 200 youth were surveyed and an additional 30 youth were interviewed. It was identified that increased youth involvement in their community's planning and decision-making process would help address youth issues. Youth affirmed that increased community involvement can be achieved by identifying personal and community benefits resulting from participation and by publicizing the process for participation in community decision-making. Furthermore, establishing a regional voice for youth through regular consultative sessions to identify their opinions and perspectives on community issues

and then using this as a guide for community planning and direction would leave youth with a sense of empowerment and control over their future. The project created a foundation of understanding and awareness around youth issues that will assist and empower the participating communities to address youth concerns and issues themselves.

> **Effective community engagement allows community members to make decisions and share ownership.**

In Ontario, the *Nishnawbe Aski First Nation Youth Council Initiative* project hosted a Nishnawbe Aski First Nation (NAN) Youth Leadership Forum to establish a NAN-wide Youth Council. The Forum was established in response to youth wanting to address youth suicide issues, among others, through direct representation and youth leadership. The Forum brought together all 49 NAN-member communities, and a Youth Council consisting of 22 youth was elected for representation at the NAN Tribal Government. The Youth Council has used the skills gained through this experience to build a network of active youth and to conduct strategic planning sessions to address youth challenges throughout the Nishnawbe Aski First Nation. Plans have been established to create a trust fund for youth group activities and initiatives. The community capacity built from this project has enabled NAN youth to directly become part of the solution to the ongoing challenges they face.

7.0 Conclusion

The Government of Canada has responded to the challenges identified by Canadians living in rural, remote and northern communities through the implementation of programs, policies, and services that help build capacity at the community level. The Canadian Rural Partnership has played an important role in this by developing and supporting funding programs that encourage community capacity building as part of any community development effort. Looking back on these programs has provided an opportunity to build a body of knowledge on lessons learned and promising practices in community capacity building. Key findings have recognized the importance of two elements of community capacity building that contribute to the overall success of community projects: partnerships and networks, and a participatory approach. Community projects that incorporate these elements of community capacity building are successful because they result in more local participation, co-operation, empowerment and a decision-making process that is based on community input and shared values. It is hoped that rural stakeholders conducting similar community development efforts can build on the knowledge gained from the lessons identified in this study.

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