

A national anti-poverty strategy with a long-term vision and measurable targets and timelines.

Because Canada has a federal system, solving poverty requires a **national** strategy and a leadership role for the federal government. Canadians could select a comparative target and aim, for example, to have the lowest poverty rate among the G8 or OECD countries. On the other hand, there could be a specific target such as halving the poverty rate in ten years. There could be progressive short, medium and long-term targets. There could also be targets for segments of the population that are most at risk.

A) WHY IS THIS CORNERSTONE IMPORTANT FOR CANADA?


Canada has a large and persistent poverty problem, and our governments have made commitments to resolve it. Commitments to the well-being of all Canadians exist in the Constitution and in human rights acts, providing a vision for Canada as a place where rights matter. In international treaties and agreements, commitments and a vision for eradicating poverty are more specifically spelled out, along with international targets and timetables (see the fact sheet in this kit called *Canada's Commitments to Solving Poverty*). Disappointing results, however, show that good intentions are not enough.

A pertinent dictionary definition of the term “vision” is **statesmanlike foresight**, while “target” means an **objective and result aimed at**. However, despite signing agreements over many years, Canada has not developed a specific vision, targets or timelines to ensure progress for Canadians. It is important that our governments have statesmanlike foresight, so that as elected officials change every few years, the long-term

vision and targets are not lost. Canada has examples in the past where its governments had long-term vision and worked to achieve it—reducing seniors' poverty and establishing a national, universal health care system are good examples.

Not just about money: The United Nations has identified the problem of poverty as “a human condition characterized by the sustained or chronic deprivation of the resources, capabilities, choices, security and power necessary for the enjoyment of an adequate standard of living and other civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights”.¹

Canada has never had a national anti-poverty strategy. Two provinces have strategies, however, and they offer good examples of long-term vision, targets and timelines. Provincial examples follow examples from other countries below.



Canada does have one landmark experience with vision and targets that offers a good lesson. In 1989, federal parliament adopted a vision, with a target and timetable **to eliminate child poverty by the year 2000**. It produced little result. It was a federal government initiative rather than a fully national one and it did not have any of the other essential cornerstones in place. It might have achieved some success if it had paid attention to those cornerstones, and if it had viewed children's poverty within a wider context of the roots of poverty and exclusion.

B) WHAT ARE SOME EXAMPLES OF STRATEGIES WITH VISION, TARGETS AND TIMETABLES?

The following are illustrative examples. There is a wealth of promising practices and results to draw upon, and, without endorsing any particular model, the Council applauds them all for their efforts and the lessons we can learn from their experience.

UNITED KINGDOM: its strategy against poverty and exclusion in 1999 included the target and timetable of **halving child poverty by 2010 and eradicating it by 2020**.

The UK vision included several desired outcomes, in addition to eradicating child poverty, that are also relevant to Canada: help working-age people into work; provide older people with security in retirement; and, narrow the gap between deprived communities and the rest. Another similarity with Canada is that the UK has to collaborate across different levels of government.²

IRELAND: its **new target is to reduce the number of those experiencing consistent poverty to between 2% and 4% by 2012, with the aim of eliminating consistent poverty by 2016** under the revised definition.³

With its **National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS)**, it was the first EU country to adopt an official target and to set new ones when targeted results were achieved. Already in 2001, Ireland noted a favourable policy context for tackling social exclusion, including strong economic growth resulting in strong employment growth and active engagement of the community and voluntary sector.

SWEDEN: its vision is **to become the world's best country in which to grow old**.

FRANCE: its vision is grounded in **three principles** focused on a guarantee of effective access to all fundamental rights, the prevention of social exclusion and the urgency of mobilizing society to combat social exclusion.⁴

ELSEWHERE AROUND THE WORLD: a 2007 World Bank report concludes that **the world can and likely will attain the goal of halving the mass poverty rate between 1990 and 2015**.

The target above is part of the global vision, targets and timetables established by the United Nations in the Millennium Development Goals. The track records of countries that are meeting the targets, including Guatemala, Mauritania, China, Indonesia, Mexico, Honduras and India, should provide hope and lessons for the many others not there yet. Poverty in industrialized countries is not of the same nature or magnitude as in the developing world, but the goal for everyone is to make progress, no matter where the starting point is.

QUEBEC: its *Act To Combat Poverty And Social Exclusion* “is intended to progressively **make Québec, by 2013, one of the industrialized nations having the least number of persons living in poverty**, according to recognized methods for making international comparisons.” ⁵ (Emphasis ours.)

A key feature of Quebec’s vision is that it is safeguarded in legislation. A further description of its vision is found in a 2002 Policy Statement specifying that the strategy “...offers a vision of the future, of a fairer, stronger, and more caring Québec, where everyone has a place: a vision of the future that speaks to us all.”

NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR:

the overall goal of the Poverty Reduction Strategy is **to transform into the province with the least poverty in the country.**⁶

The vision is “... of a prosperous, diverse province where all individuals are valued, can develop to their full potential and have access to the supports they need to participate fully in the social and economic benefits of Newfoundland and Labrador.” “Further, because poverty is a complex, systemic social issue, a sustained and long-term approach is necessary to make true progress.”

The origins of vision: While a government strategy obviously requires that government adopt a vision, the vision often originates elsewhere. In Quebec, for example, the Act that was adopted was very strongly inspired by the work of **The Collective for a Poverty-Free Québec**, a broad-based citizens’ movement formed in 1998 involving provincial organizations and regional groups whose aim is to fight poverty and social exclusion at their root causes, and to propose major social reform. According to the Collective, one of the three principles guiding government action on the Program for the Elimination of Poverty should be that “the improvement of incomes of the poorest fifth of the population takes precedence over the improvement of the incomes of the richest fifth.” ⁷

The **Assembly of First Nations**, through its Make Poverty History for First Nations⁸ campaign, is creating a vision to eliminate poverty and create opportunity to respond both to great social injustice and a significant impediment to Canada’s competitiveness in the global economy.

Campaign 2000, a non-profit, cross-Canada coalition of over 120 organizations committed to working together to end child and family poverty in Canada, urged all Ontario political parties to commit to a comprehensive Poverty Reduction Strategy in the run-up to the 2007 provincial election. Campaign 2000’s proposed strategy has a target to reduce the number of children living in poverty in Ontario by 25% within 5 years, and 50% in 10 years. This is in line with UNICEF’s proposed targets for rich nations.

C) WHAT DID CANADIANS RESPONDING TO THE NCW QUESTIONNAIRE HAVE TO SAY?

- 95% of individual respondents and 93% of organizations either agreed or strongly agreed that the federal government should take a leadership role in developing an anti-poverty strategy.⁹

IN THE WORDS OF RESPONDENTS:

"Clearly any solution will have to involve the Governments throughout Canada on local, regional and national levels."

"We would like to see an acknowledgement that true poverty exists in Canada. Once that is in place, the provinces and federal government need to acknowledge their own responsibilities in alleviating poverty through support, compassion and understanding. As well, they need to acknowledge how their own policies contribute to higher rates of poverty for those people who are more likely to experience poverty e.g. single mothers, First Nations people. Finally, Canada as a whole must acknowledge its vast resources and their ability to alleviate poverty. We must not be willing to accept poverty."

¹ This text is from the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, http://portal.unesco.org/shs/fr/ev.php-URL_ID=4936&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html

² "...following the constitutional reforms of 1999, many of the key areas of policy responsibility in the field of poverty and social exclusion rest with the devolved administrations. Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland all have different devolution settlements, which have implications for the structures and strategies that have emerged to deliver solutions for their particular circumstances." http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/social_inclusion/docs/napincl2001uk_en.pdf

³ *National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2016*, Government of Ireland, 2007, <http://www.socialinclusion.ie/documents/NAPinclusionReportPDF.pdf>

⁴ http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/news/2001/jun/napincl_fr_en.pdf

⁵ R.S.Q. chapter L-7, *An Act to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion*, 2002, c. 61, s. 4. http://www2.publicationsduquebec.gouv.qc.ca/dynamicSearch/telecharge.php?type=2&file=/L_7/L7_A.html

⁶ *Reducing Poverty: An Action Plan for Newfoundland and Labrador*, 2006, <http://www.hrle.gov.nl.ca/hrle/poverty/poverty-reduction-strategy.pdf>

⁷ http://www.pauvrete.qc.ca/IMG/pdf/traduction_anglaise_de_la_version_finale_de_la_proposition.pdf

⁸ <http://www.abolissonslepauvrete.ca/e/take-action/e-alerts/2006-11-20.html>

⁹ MiroMetrica, *Report on Responses to the Poverty and Income Security Questionnaire*, 2007, <http://www.ncwcnbes.net/documents/researchpublications/ResearchProjects/NationalAntiPovertyStrategy/2007Report-ResponsesToQuestionnaire/ReportENG.pdf>

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