

A plan of action and budget that coordinates initiatives within and across governments and other partners.

In Canada, this means that federal, provincial/territorial, municipal and Aboriginal governments, as well as agencies outside of government, are all important players. They must work towards common objectives and provide adequate and appropriate human and financial resources to implement their actions. Government mechanisms to ensure coordination and cooperation among departments and ministries will be essential. Within a comprehensive plan, specific focus may be needed on factors such as gender, racism, illness and injury that put some Canadians at greater risk of poverty than others.

A) WHY IS THIS CORNERSTONE IMPORTANT FOR CANADA?

Coordination is especially important in the Canadian context. There are many programs at federal, provincial/territorial and local levels that can assist Canadians living in poverty and prevent people from becoming impoverished. But they do not necessarily work together for the individuals who need them and there are still large gaps. Different programs have different objectives and the interaction among them can sometimes have unintended and undesirable consequences. Applying for programs can also be complicated and time-consuming, so that people have trouble accessing them. Improved planning and coordination could help existing policies and programs work better and fill in the gaps.

The other reason that planning and coordination are so important, especially in Canada, is because we are a highly diverse population with multi-dimensional realities. For example, an immigrant might also be a lone parent and a

member of a visible or a language minority. In addition, our circumstances change over our lifetimes and as society and the economy evolve. With aging, for example, our odds of developing a disability increase. At the same time, Aboriginal peoples face the unique challenge of a much younger and growing population. Poverty in Canada is located within these realities, and the solutions must be as well.

A coordinated, integrated plan of action, therefore, is more likely to be effective at combating poverty than having different plans for different population groups. An integrated plan would take into account diverse realities and focus on correcting the root causes that disadvantage people and make some more vulnerable to poverty than others.

Most anti-poverty strategies are expensive and involve major investments. They are the result of having calculated how much more expensive it was to have persistent high levels of poverty and how much is to be gained economically and socially by reducing poverty and enabling people to improve their lives.



B) WHAT ARE SOME EXAMPLES OF PLANNING, BUDGETING AND COORDINATION?

EUROPEAN UNION: the many countries of the EU have designed a way to coordinate across different languages and cultures to agree on a common set of objectives, based on international commitments (see separate fact sheet on *Canada's Commitments to Solving Poverty*), to develop plans of action according to their particular situations and to report within a common framework to ensure progress.

As of 2007, 27 countries have developed a National Report on Strategies for Social Protection and Social Inclusion for 2006-2008.¹ These are the most recent of a series of plans. In 2001, all 15 Member States submitted National Action Plans on Social Inclusion for 2001-2003 and as new countries join the EU, they also begin submitting regular plans.

UNITED KINGDOM AND IRELAND:

these two EU countries face similar issues. Their action plans, therefore, have similar priorities: eliminating child poverty, improving access to quality services and increasing access to employment. They have also each identified particular needs: the UK priorities include tackling discrimination in general (an ongoing issue) and Irish priorities include the integration of immigrants (a significant new challenge in Ireland's soaring economy). In both countries, a number of strategic actions have been developed focusing

on lone parents, people with disabilities and the unemployed.

Both countries have also made major investments to carry out their plans. For example, spending on education in England is set to rise by over 12 billion euros in the next three years.² Ireland increased its spending on social protection, from 5.7 billion euros in 1997 to 15.3 billion euros in 2007.³

SWEDEN: provides a good example of coordinated, continuous planning. Its Strategy Report for Social Protection and Social Inclusion for 2006-2008 begins by outlining the origins of a common EU strategy in 2000 on issues related to fighting poverty and social exclusion. It explains how review and experience led to "streamlining cooperation in the social area", making it "possible to see more clearly synergies between the different areas of policy". It then evaluates trends and how much progress has been made towards long and shorter-term goals and sets out objectives and actions for the current planning period. Its planning integrates all relevant objectives, such as the national action plan for human rights 2006-2009 to ensure greater protections against discrimination.⁴

FRANCE: develops regular plans as Sweden does, the most recent for 2006-2008.⁵ France has also had a law against exclusion since 1998⁶ based on three principles: guarantee effective access to all fundamental rights (employment, health, housing, minimum income, recreation and culture); a multi-dimensional integrated policy and cooperation among all parties; and, participation of people most in need.

AROUND THE WORLD: the UN Secretary General reported that as of August 2005, a total of 155 Millennium Development Goal reports had been published by 139 countries, including 17 donor countries.⁷

NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR:

the commitment to a comprehensive, government-wide poverty reduction strategy was made in 2005, both in the Speech from the Throne and the Budget. A Ministerial Committee to ensure coordination and intense interdepartmental work then resulted in an Action Plan and a set of integrated initiatives announced in the 2006/07 budget. One major investment was the expansion of the prescription drug program to include more low-income people, representing an investment of \$8.3 million in 2006/07 and \$32.8 million annually thereafter.⁸

The Action Plan outlines goals, objectives **and a process** for ongoing work. Its three key directions are prevention, reduction and alleviation of poverty and it is guided by eight principles, that include “finding the right policy mix, taking an integrated and coordinated approach, addressing rural and urban differences, and consideration of gender and ... Aboriginal issues”. There are also five goals to guide action: improved access to and coordination of services for those with low incomes; a stronger social safety net; improved earned incomes; increased emphasis on early childhood development; a better educated population.

QUEBEC: The preamble of the 2002 Quebec law highlights that, “(...) persons living in poverty and social exclusion are the first to act to improve their situation and that of their families,

and (...) such improvement is linked to the social, cultural and economic development of the entire community.”⁹ In addition, the law also specifies that, “(...) actions must also, in their conception and implementation, take into account realities specific to women and men, in particular through gender-based analysis, as well as the greater incidences of poverty in certain regions or areas and the specific needs of certain groups in society having particular difficulties”.

The actions are backed up by sizeable investments, such as the nearly \$2 billion under the new refundable tax credit, which covers the basic needs of dependent children under 18, an increase of \$550 million over 2004 amounts.¹⁰

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

- The two elements of a strategy rated of highest importance were:
 - 1) an action plan with goals, commitments and accountability for results, and
 - 2) better coordination across governments.
- 94% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that a poverty strategy must specifically benefit people who are the most disadvantaged and living in deepest poverty.

IN THE WORDS OF RESPONDENTS:

"... some actions would alleviate poverty and could be taken now; other initiatives would take longer and would involve more process and planning resources. Let's begin now!"

"Don't make us choose youth over the disabled or the elderly. Every Canadian is worthy of support... "

"I have worked in two very different provinces and in both provinces (...) With the lack of support they receive, those experiencing poverty and mental illness often land in the care of the health care system while many of their health ailments could have been prevented had they had proper prior access to medications, services, and support."

"... Canada needs federal intervention to unify a response and implement an action plan to deal with not only the increasing depth of poverty experienced by an increasing number of Canadians but to manage the increasing gap between the rich and poor in Canada. The piecemeal provincial programs that currently exist to target specific populations are guaranteed to increase the current direction and depth of poverty."

¹ http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/social_inclusion/naps_en.htm

² UK National Report on Strategies for Social Protection and Social Inclusion, 2006-2008, http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/social_inclusion/docs/2006/nap/uk_en.pdf

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

⁴ Sweden's Strategy Report for Social Protection and Social Inclusion 2006-2008, 2006 http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/social_inclusion/naps_en.htm

⁵ http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/social_inclusion/docs/2006/nap/france_fr.pdf

⁶ *Loi no 98-657 du 29 juillet 1998 d'orientation relative à la lutte contre les exclusions*, <http://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/WAspad/UnTexteDeJorf?numjo=MESX9800027L>

⁷ *Review of the First United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty 1997-2006*, Report of the Secretary General, December 2005 <http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N05/608/34/PDF/N0560834.pdf?OpenElement>

⁸ *Reducing Poverty: An Action Plan for Newfoundland and Labrador*, Appendix A: Key Budget Initiatives for 2006/07, 2006 <http://www.hrle.gov.nl.ca/hrle/poverty/poverty-reduction-strategy.pdf>

⁹ R.S.Q., chapter L-7, *An Act To Combat Poverty And Social Exclusion*, http://www2.publicationsduquebec.gouv.qc.ca/dynamicSearch/telecharge.php?type=2&file=/L_7/L7_A.html

¹⁰ *2004-2009 Government Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion*, Year Two Report, 2006, Quebec, http://www.mess.gouv.qc.ca/publications/pdf/ADMIN_bilan-plan-action_annee2_en.pdf

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