The Social and Economic Inclusion Project

Acknowledgements

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Social and Economic Inclusion: Will Our Strategies Take Us There?

The social and economic situations of increasing numbers of women, children, and communities is worsening in Atlantic Canada.(1) In order to address this, it is necessary first to understand what is happening and then to develop healthy public policies. The emerging analysis of the social and economic exclusion of marginalized people in both developed and developing countries can help us understand the depth of the problem and to seek appropriate policy solutions.

This project examines policy development approaches from work completed in the four Atlantic provinces. These approaches were developed by the group who came together to do collective analysis on poverty and who had a fundamental shift in thinking from a concentration on 'child poverty' to an analysis of the social and economic exclusion of women and their children. Social and economic exclusion and its implied solution--social and economic inclusion stem from an understanding of the multi-dimensionality of the causes, impacts, and structural barriers that are inherent in the lives of marginalized or excluded people.

The term 'social and economic exclusion' first appeared in 1974 in a policy paper developed in France by Rene Lenoir, Secretaire d'Etat a l'Action Sociale: Les Exclus: Un Francais sur dix. Since that time there has been much debate in the social policy development field, especially in Europe and elsewhere, about the value of what these new concepts bring to the debate. The questions are often asked: *Why confuse the issue? Are we not talking about poverty?*

In the winter of 1998, the Atlantic Regional Office of the then Health Promotion and Programs Branch of Health Canada held a Think Tank on Child Poverty. Representatives from the community and from the four provincial governments were invited to look at the data collected in the *Report on Child Poverty in the Atlantic Region* (2) and to look for common strategies for policy action. During the think tank, two fundamental shifts in understanding occurred:

1. **Children are not poor, but an increasing number of children in Canada are born and live in poor households.** The majority of these household are led by single women. Therefore, the issue of child poverty cannot be looked at in isolation from the poverty that is experienced by women.

2. **Social and economic inclusion of all women and children were seen as the end goal of future collaborative work.** Poverty has become solely an income issue. While access to income remains a key factor, the impacts, especially the health impacts, of marginal access to adequate income go far beyond this simple analysis. Children born into poor families have a higher likelihood of having a low birth weight. These babies will go on to have more health problems throughout their lives. This has a profound impact on many institutional systems, for example the long-term utilization of health services. By only addressing the income issue, the impacts of deprivation cannot be fully addressed. Consider, for example, the multi-exclusion faced by citizens of colour and aboriginal heritage. The concepts inherent in social and economic exclusion capture the multi-dimensionality of deprivation that is experienced by many people, especially marginalized women and children, immigrants, and those of aboriginal heritage. The concept also suggests a broader policy framework as a solution--that of social and economic inclusion.

The outcome of the think tank was a commitment to assert the strong links that children have with their mothers, families and communities and to explore policy actions that build towards the social and economic inclusion of all women, their children, families, and communities. This consensus happened naturally and a journey began. What do 'social and economic exclusion' say that 'poverty' fails to say? The following definitions may be useful:

Poverty: For many, poverty describes an individual's current state of deprivation and lack of access to necessary resources. There is still a strong 'charity' and 'class' bias in the concept which stems from the development of models to address 'the poor issue' in Britain in the 19th century. We hear community activists talk of the 'charity model' that articulates artificial classifications of people to distinguish the 'deserving' from the 'undeserving' poor. Much of the analysis has been at an individual level and the solutions to poverty are often seen as individually based and only income related.

Social exclusion: Monica Das Gupta states, "the real analytical utility of the concept of social exclusion is that it draws attention to the processes whereby people become deprived, and the multidimensionality of the deprivation they face."(3) To put it more simply, the concept of social exclusion allows us to look beyond the surface descriptions of deprivation and to examine some of the underlying 'exclusions' that people face. Lack of adequate income, low educational attainment, lack of access to goods and services (including health care), unsafe housing, underemployment, marginal access to the political process, and the impacts of culture, gender and sexual orientation together create a state of exclusion. These factors are compounded as they impact on an individual, family, or community *at the same time*. (4) The solutions to social exclusion can also be seen as multidimensional as they speak to developing public policies that are inclusive of all people and to dismantling policies that systematically 'exclude' and marginalize groups and citizens.

Social and economic exclusion: Social policy development has been seen in isolation from economic policy development. The 1998 Think Tank on Child Poverty participants wanted to link economic factors to the concept of social exclusion in order to link the discussion to both the social and economic determinants of health. The tradition in Canada, as in other parts of the world, has been to separate the work of community/social development from community/economic development. The social and economic sectors are seen as quite distinct. It was seen as appropriate in the Canadian context to talk about social and economic exclusion in order to begin to look at the social and economic analysis that will inform policy development that is inclusive of all citizens.

The following pages, consisting of a series of discussion papers and case studies, outline the work that has been developed in the Atlantic Region by the Maritime Centre of Excellence for Women's Health in collaboration with the Population and Public Health Branch of Health Canada and the three provincial reference groups. These reference groups were made up of key provincial government and community-based representatives.

1. The **Reference Group for Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island** focused on ways for government and community to work together to develop inclusive public policy. Their paper attempts to answer two questions:

   How do policy makers create policies that ensure social inclusion of the most vulnerable in our society?

   What are the ways for those who have no 'voice' to be included in the design and implementation of social and economic policies?

   The paper has become part of ongoing community work to find ways for working effectively with governments.

2. The **Newfoundland and Labrador Reference Group** worked very closely with the Newfoundland Strategic Social Planning Unit and with the Social Policy Council in the development of their work. The concepts of social and economic exclusion were seen as very useful in the implementation of the Strategic Social Plan. However, they learned that even when social and economic inclusion are shared goals, there are no quick and easy solutions. Recognizing that there was no comprehensive

model, the Newfoundland Reference Group explored a broad range of community development practices that validated the community's capacity for action. The concepts of social and economic exclusion presuppose a solution, that of enabling the inclusion of all members of community, including the most excluded. The Strategic Planning Unit of the Government of Newfoundland has used their paper extensively.

3.   The **New Brunswick Reference Group** paper describes the rationale for social investment and advocated for improved collaboration between the public, private, and community sectors. As several reference group members were involved in the provincial Social Policy Review Process, both formal and informal linkages were made with that process. The Reference Group concluded that government, communities, and the private sector need to work together more effectively to ensure policies support key social investments to address social exclusion. Much has been learned about collaboration and partnerships. The most important thing learned is that collaboration is not easy nor should it be treated lightly. Partnerships require trust, effort, commitment and time to establish.

There is a need for policies to mitigate against social exclusion and for policies to actually promote the social and economic inclusion of all citizens. As these papers have demonstrated, there are many different ways or strategies for action, in which political institutions, governments, communities and citizens can work together at many levels to ensure that all people are included in our society. These policies will enhance the health and well being of all citizen, develop community cohesion and resilience and lead to a better society for all.

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References

[1] Janis Wood Catano, Report on Child Poverty in the Atlantic Region. Halifax: Health Promotions and Program Branch, Health Canada, 1998.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Monica Das Gupta. "Social Exclusion and Poverty". Villa Borsig Workshop Series 1999. http://www.dse.de

[4] In fact, the concepts inherent in social exclusion are consistent with the population health framework and the determinants of health pioneered in Canada.