Evaluation of the Western Canada Business Service Network

Final Report

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Prepared for:
Western Economic Diversification Canada

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Executive Summary

This document presents the findings and conclusions of the evaluation of the Western Canada Business Service Network (WCBSN).

The mandate of Western Economic Diversification Canada's (WD) is to promote the development and diversification of the economy of Western Canada and to advance the interests of the West in national economic policy. These are in part achieved through WD's Western Canada Business Service Network, which includes: Community Futures Development Corporations (CFDCs), offices of the Women's Enterprise Initiative (WEIs), Canada Business Service Centres (CBSCs), Francophone Economic Development Organizations (FEDOs) and WD regional offices.

The objective of the evaluation is to assess the relevance, governance and delivery, results and impacts, monitoring and cost-effectiveness of the WCBSN. Alternatives to the current approaches were also examined.

Methodology

The evaluation findings were gathered through key informant interviews, a telephone survey and focus groups of WCBSN members.

- Nineteen key informant interviews with WD (14) and other stakeholders (5) were conducted for this evaluation. In addition, relevant field data from FEDO and WEI evaluations were used to gain additional information about the WCBSN.
- A telephone survey was also conducted among network representatives (CFDCs, WEIs, CBSCs, FEDOs). In total, 77 network members were surveyed. The overall response rate was 75 per cent.
- Eight focus groups with network representatives were held, including two in Winnipeg, two in Regina, two in Edmonton, and two in Vancouver. A total of 55 network representatives participated in the focus groups.

Evaluation Findings

Relevance

Findings indicate that that the WCBSN has potential value with respect to reducing duplication, sharing information and providing opportunities for partnership. Most network members were not sufficiently aware of the concept of WCBSN to comment on its relevance. Some community representatives indicated that the network had potential value for sharing information particularly with respect to training and best practices.

The majority of WD key informants and some stakeholders agreed that there was some overlap between members of the network with respect to business planning, training and loan services. However, they also said that this overlap is not problematic and ensures a better reach to clients. About half of the network members work cooperatively to minimize any duplication between them.

Relationships With Other Network Members and WD

- In spite of recent improvements, WD and stakeholder key informants indicate that WCBSN cannot be characterized as a network as there are few formal linkages across the organizations.
- While many stakeholder key informants and focus group participants had little awareness of the WCBSN concept, the majority of survey respondents reported regular exchanges with other network partners.
- Some community representatives expressed the need for increased awareness as to role of network members particularly FEDOs and WEI organizations (i.e., mandate, products, services, locality).
- WEI organizations have a good relationship with CBSCs and FEDOs and some CFDCs. There are some examples of partnerships with WEI and CFDCs in rural areas.
- The strength of the relationships between network members and FEDOs varied somewhat, depending on various factors such as location, region and organizational management style.

- Challenges to strengthening the WCBSN include the need to maintain local responsiveness, the need for network members to operate within a number of networks, geographic distances and lack of awareness with respect to WCBSN.
- The majority of key informants and survey respondents agree that there is an ongoing need for the CFDC Pan Western Association.
- Many WD and community representatives note that the partnering arrangement between WD and the network members is appropriate. Some concerns were expressed with respect to the lack of clarity with respect to WD's role, the need for consistent WD support for the WCBSN and the need for enhanced communication from WD.
- A major source of dissatisfaction for network members relates to financial support with only 21 per cent agreeing that WD funding met the basic operational needs of their organizations.

Success

There were mixed opinions as to the network's success. A number of key informants indicated that the network, particularly the meetings, had some impacts, mostly with respect to improved information exchange. Some key informants state that the Pan West All Partners Meetings have helped to lessen tension among the groups, thereby setting the stage for strengthened relationships. WD and stakeholder key informants also cited a number of collaboration examples.

Performance Monitoring

Many WD and community representatives felt that the reporting process needs to be streamlined. The need to collect more follow-up and results-based information was frequently cited. Many WD and community representatives, however, recognized the challenges in collecting follow-up information. Most network members agree that the quarterly reports reflect the achievements of their organizations.

Concerns were also raised with respect to consistency of reports. Community representatives indicate that there needs to be clearer guidelines as to what types of information to include in the reports.

Cost Effectiveness

WD key informants agree that community-based organizations, such as CFDCs, are cost effective given their use of volunteers and because they are uniquely placed to respond to local needs. Many key informants also noted that the FEDOs and WEI organizations provide better reach.

Recommendations

1. **Improve WD's messaging about the WCBSN to its partners.** There is a need to clarify and communicate WD's role as a regional development organization and its strategic directions to its network partners, in particular regarding the partners and the WCBSN. WD should also communicate their expectations of the network members particularly as they relate to WD's three strategic priorities of entrepreneurship, innovation, and sustainable communities. WD could also consider providing training/information packages to volunteers to help them better understand the WD system, including WCBSN. WD could play an enabling and support role to increase members' awareness as to the value of the network. WD should continue to raise awareness of other network members (i.e. delivery structure, purpose and mandate, services and products offered).

2. **Provide consistent WD encouragement and facilitation of structured and unstructured networking opportunities among network members.** WD needs to ensure that networking among the partners is encouraged in all regions to ensure maximum benefits are derived from the network's potential, ensuring that all eligible clients are served in the best possible way.

3. **Review the performance monitoring system with respect to clarifying and updating the reporting guidelines and the system for gathering information.** WD should continue to examine the feasibility and potential of developing and implementing an on-line reporting system, with automated rollups and trend analysis. Where appropriate, partners should report against identical items.

4. **Pursue ongoing improvements to WCBSN meetings**. WD should continue to facilitate WCBSN meetings and refine them to ensure that they are effective and meet both WD and partner needs. WD should continue to seek partner input to the agenda and shared responsibility with the partners for organizing the meetings. Discussions/workshops around network issues could be incorporated into these meetings. An action plan around these issues could then be developed for each meeting. There should be adequate monitoring and follow up of the actions plans.

5. **WCBSN members should seek opportunities to understand each other's mandates and activities, to refer clients as appropriate, and to share expertise among themselves and at public events.** WCBSN members had varying degrees of understanding of each other's roles and responsibilities. They should actively pursue opportunities to work more closely, and to seek opportunities of finding efficiencies by working together, and of more effectively meeting the needs of any of their clients.

1.0 Introduction

This document presents the findings and conclusions of the evaluation of the Western Canada Business Service Network (WCBSN). The overall objective of this evaluation is to assess the relevance, design, performance monitoring, and results of the WCBSN.

This section will present background information with respect to WCBSN, Community Futures Development Corporations (CFDCs), Women's Enterprise Initiatives (WEIs), Canada Business Service Centres (CBSCs) and Francophone Economic Development Organizations (FEDOs). This section also details the evaluation issues and questions used to guide this evaluation. The next section (2.0) will outline the methodology used in this evaluation.

1.1   Structure of Report

This report is structured as follows:
- Section 1 contains this introduction, background information and evaluation questions;
- Section 2 presents the methodology;
- Section 3 presents the evaluation findings by issue;
- Section 4 outlines the key conclusions; and
- Section 5 presents the recommendations.

Annex A contains the overall survey findings.
Annexes B, C, D and E contain the survey findings by region.

1.2 Background

1.1.1 WCBSN

The mandate of Western Economic Diversification Canada's (WD) is to promote the development and diversification of the economy of Western Canada and to advance the interests of the West in national economic policy. These are, in part, achieved through WD's Western Canada Business Service Network, which has over 100 points of service including Community Futures Development Corporations, offices of the Women's Enterprise Initiative, Canada Business Service Centres, Francophone Economic Development Organizations and WD regional offices.

Community Futures Development Corporations (CFDCs)

With over 90 offices across the western provinces, the CFDCs play a key delivery role for WD. The primary focus of CFDCs is community economic development, access to capital, business services and strategic planning. CFDCs are non-profit corporations run by volunteer boards of directors, supported by staff. Each CFDC delivers a variety of services, which may include:

- local strategic economic planning;
- technical and advisory services to businesses;
- self-employment assistance programs; and
- services targeted to youth and entrepreneurs with disabilities.

CFDC also provides financing opportunities to small businesses and entrepreneurs. Loans on commercial terms, equity financing, and loan guarantees are available through the CFDCs. In general, businesses seeking financing must:

- be located in a rural area of one of the four western provinces (Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta or British Columbia);
- operate, or about to operate, in a designated CFDC area;
- contribute to local economic growth; and
- be seeking financing of up to $125 000.

The CFDCs local volunteer Board of Directors assesses applications. Training and assistance on preparing business plans are also available at the CFDC offices. CFDCs also deliver the Entrepreneurs with Disabilities Program, which provide loans of up to $125,000 to entrepreneurs with disabilities (see the document Entrepreneurs with Disabilities Program).

Canada Business Service Centres (CBSCs)

CBSCs are a network of offices located all across Canada. CBSCs aim to serve as Canada's primary source of timely and accurate business-related information and referrals on federal programs, services and regulations, without charge, in all regions of the country.

In Western Canada, the centres are known locally by names such as 'Business Services' or 'The Business Link' (see Figure 1). Most of the centres have their main offices in major cities. They also support a number of other centres in smaller locations spread across each province.

Table 1: An Overview of CBSCs in the Four Western Provinces

Centre name	Business Services	The Business Link	Business Infosource	Business Service Centre
Centre location	Vancouver	Edmonton	Saskatoon	Winnipeg
Other offices	Victoria	Calgary	Regina	
Regional Access Centres	63	34	16	23

Source: CBSC Evaluation, July 2002

CBSCs were designed to give Canadian small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) a 'one-window' approach for business information. Behind the scenes, however, about 37 different federal, provincial and municipal departments work with the centres to provide the information needed by clients. In addition, the regional access centres are usually operated in partnership with local public or private sector organizations.

Women's Enterprise Initiatives (WEIs)

The objective of the Women's Enterprise Initiative is to provide customized services to help women entrepreneurs succeed. Funded through WD, offices of the Women's Enterprise Initiative provide business information and services specifically aimed at women entrepreneurs. Each WD region has set up its own component of this pan-western initiative. The WEI offices provide business loans, advice and information, as well as networking and mentoring opportunities. The non-profit groups, led by volunteer boards of entrepreneurs and business professionals, offer help to women who want to start and grow their own business.

Francophone Economic Development Organizations (FEDOs)

To further enhance Francophone economic development in French language minority communities, WD has brought FEDOs into the WCBSN. FEDOs operate in each of the four western provinces. The partners are La Société de développement économique de la Colombie-Britannique, La Chambre économique de l'Alberta, Le Conseil de la coopération de la Saskatchewan and Le Conseil de développement économique du Manitoba.

FEDOs help ensure that relevant products and services are delivered in French speaking communities. FEDOs currently provide, to the extent possible, a comparable type and level of service as other service delivery network partners. They are independent entities that have their own boards of directors with broad representation from their respective provinces. Board members are knowledgeable about business as well as the challenges facing Francophone entrepreneurs.

Support from WD enables the four provincial organizations to provide enhanced services to Francophones, including:
- training;
- business and community economic development;
- access to capital;
- information services;
- marketing advice; and
- networking and mentoring.

1.3   Evaluation Issues

The evaluation will address the following issues:

Relevance

- Is there a need for the WCBSN?
- Is there overlap between the members of the network?

Governance and Delivery

- Is the current partnering arrangement between WD and the members of the network appropriate?
    - > Is the level of financial support of WD appropriate?
    - > Are the contractual arrangements appropriate? Complete?
- Is WD the only partner to the network organizations? What is the role of the other partners?
- Are the roles and responsibilities of each member clear? Are they appropriate?
- Is the frequency and format of the communications/meetings between network members appropriate?
- Is the network fostering a consistent and cohesive approach? Are members working together? Is there a need for a regional association among partners?
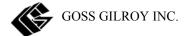
Results and Impacts

- Are the networks' activities resulting in more effective organizations? Are they improving their internal governance? Service delivery? Impacts on entrepreneurs and communities?
- Are lessons/best practices shared between network members?
- Are the results of the network meeting WD's expectations?

Monitoring and Accountability

- Do the reports provided by networks members to WD timely? Do they allow WD to effectively monitor the performance of the network? What exactly should be reported?

Cost Effectiveness and Alternatives

- Is the network approach cost effective, considering the WD investments and returns? Are there more cost effective alternatives or solutions?

2.0   Methodology

This section outlines the methodology employed in the evaluation. The next section (3.0) details the evaluation findings according to issue. The evaluation used key informant interviews, a telephone survey and focus groups to collect information. Field data from the WEI and FEDO evaluations were also utilized.

2.1   Scope of the Study

The evaluation focuses on the relevance, design, performance monitoring, success and cost effectiveness of the WCBSN during the last four-year period. The study includes information from the offices of the WEI, CFDCs, FEDOs and CBSCs. The focus of the evaluation is on the WCBSN and does not address issues related to individual network organizations.

2.2   Evaluation Methodology

2.2.1   Key Informant Interviews

Representatives from WD and other stakeholders were interviewed for the evaluation. Stakeholders included community representatives and WCBSN members. Nineteen key informant interviews with WD (14) and other stakeholders (5) were conducted for this evaluation. In addition, relevant field data from FEDO and WEI evaluations were used to gain additional information about the WCBSN.

2.2.2   Telephone Survey of Network Representatives

The WCBSN network is composed of approximately 100 member organizations. To gather views on the network's effectiveness, GGI conducted a telephone survey among network representatives. In total, 77 network members were surveyed. The overall response rate was 75 per cent. To ensure that each region was adequately represented, the survey data was weighted according to region.

2.2.3   Focus Groups

Eight focus groups with network representatives were held, including two in Winnipeg, two in Regina, two in Edmonton, and two in Vancouver. A total of 55 network representatives participated in the focus groups.

3.0　Evaluation Findings

This section presents the evaluation findings in terms of relevance, relationship with other network members and WD, success, and monitoring of WCBSN. The next section (4.0) outlines the key conclusions of the evaluation. Relevant field data from separate FEDO and WEI evaluations were also utilized.

3.1　Relevance

> **Relevance:**
> *Is there a need for the WCBSN?*
> *Is there overlap between the members of the network?*

Overall Findings

The majority of WD key informants indicated that the WCBSN has potential value with respect to reducing duplication, sharing information and providing opportunities for partnership. Most stakeholder key informants and focus group participants were sufficiently unaware of the concept of WCBSN to comment on its relevance. Some community representatives indicated that the network had potential value for sharing information particularly with respect to training and best practices. However, they questioned the feasibility of attending additional WCBSN meetings.

The majority of WD key informants and some stakeholders agreed that there was some overlap between members of the network with respect to business planning, training and loan services. However, while two-thirds of WD key informants agreed that there was some duplication, they also said that this overlap is not problematic and ensures a better reach to clients. Forty-eight per cent of survey respondents agreed that CFDCs, WEI, CBSCs and FEDOs worked cooperatively to minimize any duplication between them, with 29 per cent of respondents disagreeing with this
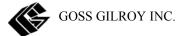
statement.

3.1.1 Detailed Findings: Need for Network

While most WD key informants see potential value to the network, some WD key informants question the degree to which the network needs to be integrated or consistent. Many WD key informants indicated that the WCBSN has the potential to reduce duplication[1], share information and provide opportunities for partnerships. However, many WD key informants also agreed that consistency is not always desirable, as organizations also need to maintain their local and regional responsiveness. As well, the WCBSN is considered an appropriate mechanism for WD to better achieve its objectives. Some WD key informants pointed out that the members themselves were not sufficiently aware of the WCBSN as a formal network. Network members would have to realize that they have shared interests and the benefits of working together before the WCBSN can operate more effectively.

WD key informants reported that the CFDCs, CBSCs, WEIs, FEDOs, as well as WD, could achieve the following benefits from the WCBSN:
- Networking activities, especially face-to-face meetings, can provide opportunities for partnerships and exchange of information. It allows the WCBSN members to work together to avoid unnecessary duplication.
- Working as a network provides opportunities for sharing best practices, tools and training between community organizations. They can learn a lot from each other – program delivery, how to partner, how to access community resources, on-line user packages, etc. However, it was noted that there is a need to identify how partners are similar and different in order to determine how and to what extent they should integrate.
- The network is key in helping WD achieve its economic development objectives. One respondent mentioned that WD could not deliver some of the services currently delivered through the network members. As another key informant noted, "the network has a far greater reach" than WD could achieve on its own.

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[1] Particularly with respect to the development of business tools and training

- The network can allow the leveraging of resources of many members to respond to specific local challenges. WD helps facilitate this leveraging.
- The WCBSN was also reported to be a useful communications tool in helping the public and other stakeholders understand the service delivery system. Potentially the public would benefit from an integrated network as it could improve access and quality of services.

The majority of other stakeholder key informants and focus group participants were sufficiently unaware of the concept of WCBSN to comment on its relevance. However, one stakeholder key informant mentioned that the network…

> "has a depth and scope exceeding any other available. It could be used to focus a variety of responses for key public issues such as closure of major industries, economic upheaval and any other matter affecting many people in a region. If we want to deliver services quickly and efficiently, this is the way to do it."

Some focus group participants felt that WCBSN had potential for sharing information, particularly with respect to training and best practices. Another stakeholder key informant noted that there is a need to build awareness about WEI to the other members, and to link members with FEDOs as the need arises. Some focus group participants perceived WCBSN as another layer that would require additional funding and administration. These participants felt that they did not have sufficient financial and human resources to participate in additional WCBSN meetings.

3.1.2 Detailed Findings: Potential Duplication

Many WD key informants and some stakeholder key informants indicated that there was some overlap between members of the network, particularly with respect to business planning, training and loan services. Only 48 per cent of survey respondents agreed that CFDCs, offices of the WEI and CBSCs work cooperatively to minimize any duplication between them.

While two-thirds of WD key informants agreed that there was some duplication, they also said that this overlap is not problematic and ensures a better reach to clients ("less clients get lost through the cracks"). As one key informant noted, the current arrangement may be the best way to reach each target group in a way that meets the "comfort level" of each target group. Offices of the WEI and FEDOs are also
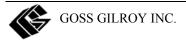
considered to provide targeted support to a widespread constituency, whereas the CFDCs have broader mandates that they apply to the specific geographic areas in which they operate. Some key informants indicate that the demand for the network's services is quite significant and can accommodate the duplication.

One WD key informant noted that the key duplication area to avoid is between the network and the private sector -- an area that should be closely monitored. One stakeholder key informant also noted that there was some overlap between the CFDC activities and the Community Economic Development Network (CCEDNet[2]), funded by the Rural Secretariat.

Many WD key informants agreed that more work could be done to reduce overlaps. Some WD suggestions include:
- Better communications and establishing more formal agreements between network organizations.
- Enhanced coordination among network members with respect to business planning.
- Consider strategies for reducing overlap of services with respect to loan funds (e.g. encourage some network members to pool resources).

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[2] The Canadian Community Economic Development Network (CCEDNet) is a national non-profit organization. The membership of CCEDNet is made up of Community Economic Development (CED) community-based organizations and practitioners from every region of Canada. The mission of CCEDNet is to promote and support community economic development for the social, economic and environmental betterment of communities within Canada.

3.2   Relationship With Other Network Members and WD

Governance and Delivery

Is the current partnering arrangement between WD and the members of the network appropriate?

- *Is the level of financial support of WD appropriate?*
- *Are the contractual arrangements appropriate? Complete?*

Is WD the only partner to the network organizations? What is the role of the other partners?

Are the roles and responsibilities of each member clear? Are they appropriate?

Is the frequency and format of the communications/meetings between network members appropriate?

Is the network fostering a consistent and cohesive approach? Are members working together? Is there a need for a regional association among partners?

3.2.1   Relationship Between Network Members

Overall Findings

Many WD key informants cite some recent improvements in relations among network members in terms of increased cooperation and lessening of tensions that initially arose with the formation of new network organizations. Some WD and stakeholder key informants indicate that WCBSN cannot be characterized as a network as there are few formal linkages across the organizations. The relationship, according to WD and stakeholder key informants, can vary by network organization, locality and region. The relationships and linkages among like member organizations are cited to be stronger and more cohesive (e.g. CF network) as compared to the WCBSN.

While many stakeholder key informants and focus group participants had little awareness of the WCBSN concept, the majority of survey respondents reported regular exchanges with other network partners. Sixty-nine (69) per cent of survey respondents agreed that the network members regularly exchanged information. The majority (64 per cent) of survey respondents stated that they meet regularly with other

network members to improve services. Sixty-one (61) per cent of survey respondents stated that the network members regularly referred clients to each other. Forty-nine (49) per cent of survey respondents agreed that WCBSN members share a consistent and cohesive approach to business and economic development.

Survey respondents in Manitoba (80 per cent) and Saskatchewan (78 per cent) also report that CFDCs, CBSCs, WEIs and FEDOs regularly refer clients to each other. Survey respondents in Alberta (88 per cent) and Saskatchewan (90 per cent) report that their organizations regularly exchange information with other network members.

Other key findings in this section include:
- Some community representatives expressed the need for increased awareness as to role of network members particularly FEDOs and WEI organizations (i.e. mandate, products, services, locality).
- Challenges to strengthening the WCBSN include the need to maintain local responsiveness, the need for network members to operate within a number of other networks, geographic distances and lack of awareness with respect to WCBSN and its members.
- There is general agreement as to the potential benefits of the Pan Western "all-partners" meetings. Many suggest improvements could be made by making meetings more strategic.
- The majority of key informants and survey respondents (91 per cent) agree that there is an ongoing need for the CF Pan Western Association.
- Many WD and community representatives note that the partnering arrangement between WD and the network members is appropriate. Some concerns were expressed with respect to the lack of clarity with respect to WD's role, the need for consistent WD support for the WCBSN and the need for enhanced communication from WD.
- A major source of dissatisfaction for survey respondents relates to financial support with only 21 per cent agreeing that WD funding met the basic operational needs of their organizations.

Detailed Findings

Many WD informants noted improvements with respect to enhanced cooperation among network organizations. Some WD key informants also report that moving the Service Partnership Secretariat (SPS) to national headquarters has the potential to improve WD coordination and oversight of SPS activities. While the administration of the program remains at the regional level, the intention is to integrate the WCBSN through strategic planning.

WD and community representatives cited the following specific examples of collaboration:
- Joint development of common tools such as loan assessment tools among CFDCs.
- Joint development of self-employment module (13 CFDCs, Alberta).
- WEIs are working with CFDCs in some rural areas to provide joint loans (Saskatchewan).
- WEI and CFDCs have shared training, financing and special events in Manitoba.
- FEDOs and CFDCs developed and delivered a Youth Entrepreneurship Camp (Saskatchewan/Alberta).
- Sharing of assessment tools between Saskatchewan and Manitoba.
- Many CF offices have responsibilities for Regional Access Centres – thereby providing client access to CBSC (Alberta).
- In some cases the network partners co-locate (e.g. CBSC and WEI in BC).
- Some sharing of booth space at events among network partners (BC).
- Some loan fund pooling.

WD key informants noted a number of challenges to building the WCBSN relating to network complexity, the need to maintain local responsiveness and geographic distances. Each network organization operates within a number of networks. There are local, provincial, Pan West and the WCBS networks. It is a challenge for each organization to operate at all of these levels particularly given time and resource constraints. The geographic spread of CFDCs and their focus on the local community also create challenges for networking beyond the local level. Some focus group participants also noted the challenges of personal exchanges between network members given the broad geographic base and the large number of organizations within the WCBSN.

Detailed Findings by Type of Network Organization

The following subsections provide more detailed findings by type of network organization:

CFDCs

Many key informant and focus group participants noted good formal and informal linkages between the CFDCs and between CFDCs and CBSCs and some collaboration with FEDOs and WEI.

Focus group participants reported that overall the CF network operated effectively with regular exchanges (both formal and informal) of information (e.g. quarterly management meetings, annual conferences, phone calls, e-mails). Participants also noted that CFDCs provide referrals to each other, particularly where communities are in close proximity. There is some sharing of resources, particularly with respect to larger projects. On the whole, participants had positive comments about the Best Practices section on the Pan West Web site. Some participants also felt that the CF network acted as a mentoring system with established CFDCs assisting new ones.

With respect to interactions between CFDCs, the majority of survey respondents report the following:

- 91 per cent report that CFDCs regularly exchange business information.
- 77 per cent report that CFDCs meet regularly to improve their services.
- 74 per cent report that CFDCs share best practices about loan management and community economic development.
- 61 per cent share best practices about client training/counseling.

Some stakeholder key informants noted the recent trend towards developing common projects among CFDCs. However, they noted that there were a number of hurdles to establishing these projects. For example, it was sometimes difficult obtaining agreement between CFDCs and other local organizations. Another key informant commented on the challenges for CFDCs to network beyond the sub-regional level. According to this key informant a framework of protocols for networking at the regional level is required. The role of the CFDC needs to be clarified when it comes to larger regional initiatives, as this role can sometimes conflict with the municipal role.

CBSCs

While some focus group and key informants noted some variations as to the strength of the relationship between CFDCs and CBSCs, many stated that the relationship with CBSC and other network members was positive and that CBSCs were a useful resource. Sixty-one (61) per cent of survey respondents reported partnerships with CBSCs. Survey findings show some reported regional variation in partnerships with CBSCs (Alberta -30 per cent of survey respondents report partnerships with CBSCs; B.C. - 57 per cent; Manitoba – 92 per cent; and Saskatchewan – 100 per cent).

Some focus group participants cited the Talk Back service provided by CBSCs as very useful. Some focus group participants reported that CFDCs regularly attend training seminars hosted by CBSCs and in turn they provide business profiles for CBSC clients. Other participants stated that the 1-800 number provided by the CBSCs was useful.

FEDOs

Key informants reported a positive relationship between FEDOs. Partnerships are maintained amongst the Francophone Economic Development Organizations (FEDO) via a western FEDO committee. The four western FEDOs meet on a regular basis to exchange information, ideas and to develop and implement joint projects. A close partnership between British Columbia, Manitoba and Saskatchewan FEDOs has resulted from the Corridor touristique francophone de l'Ouest (the Alberta FEDO is conducting a portion of this project on its own).

Stakeholder key informants and focus group participants noted that the strength of the relationships between network members and FEDOs varied, depending on various factors such as location, region and organizational management style. Focus group participants noted some exchanges between FEDOs, CFDCs and WEIs, mainly in terms of referrals. WD key informants noted that some FEDOs are still in developmental stages, which may impact on the nature of the relationship with WCBSN members.

Key informants and focus group participants cited some specific examples of cooperation:

- Sharing of database between CFDC and FEDO.
- High speed internet project in Saskatchewan.
- CFDCs and FEDOs have formed partnerships in some rural areas.

According to key informants, there are some regional differences in exchanges between FEDOs and other network members. For example, in Manitoba there is a strong FEDO/WEI/CFDC cluster. Saskatchewan was also reported to have a good CBSC/FEDO partnership. In Alberta, it was reported that there are exchanges and joint projects between WEI, FEDO and CBSC. British Columbia noted informal linkages between CFDCs and WEI. WEIs and CBSCs are also co-located in this region.

FEDO key informants note that they have some partnerships with WEIs, CBSCs and CFDCs. They note that the formation of linkages with other network members can sometimes be challenging given competition for resources. Key informants also noted that FEDOs have significant partnerships with other types of organizations, such as Francophone organizations.

WEIs

A positive relationship was reported between offices of the WEI. WEI organizations meet four times a year to discuss best practices. Stakeholder key informants indicate that WEI is more likely to partner with other network members at the local level, but less likely to partner with other network members at the regional level or across regions.

Key informants reported good relationships with CBSCs and FEDOs and some CFDCs. WEI is considering additional strategies to work more closely with the CFDCs in order to reach rural clients. Increasingly, CBSCs and WEI organizations collaborate on delivering training that includes WEI clients.

Focus group participants reported close ties between WEI and some CFDCs. Members have shared training, financing and special events. They also refer clients to each other to maximize their portfolios. Focus group participants and key informants cited good collaborative relationships among WEIs, CFDCs and FEDOs in

Manitoba. There is a good referral system and some sharing (e.g. co-lending, co-counselling) or splitting of services.

WEIs are co-located with CBSCs in British Columbia, Alberta and Manitoba. In Alberta the CBSC, FEDO, CFDCs and WEI are working on a joint proposal called "Capacity West" – detailing a pilot project for video conferencing technology to link members in the province.

3.2.2   WCBSN Meetings

WD key informants state that there are semi-annual "all partner" Pan-West Meetings that have been called on an ad hoc basis for the past two years. In the fall of 2003, WD announced that these meetings were to become an established semi-annual occurrence. These meetings bring together Assistant Deputy Ministers, WD officials, the chair and directors of each CF association and WEIs, and the managers of the CBSCs. Some regional WD key informants also report additional provincial meetings comprised of partner organization representatives at the provincial level (e.g. B.C.).

The majority of WD key informants agree that the frequency of the meetings (bi-annual) is appropriate given resources, work schedules and distances. There were mixed opinions as to the appropriateness of the meetings. Some key informants state that the meetings have resulted in some positive impacts such as decreasing tensions between network partners, identifying opportunities for partnership, providing opportunities to discuss issues and disseminating information back to the regional and local levels. Other WD key informants felt that the meetings were not appropriate because there was little buy-in from network members as to the value of the network.

While many WD key informants felt that the meetings had potential, they also felt that improvements were needed. Some WD members expressed the opinion that the meetings had been too "reactive" and were used primarily as a forum to discuss financial issues. Key informants indicate that members need to buy-in to the concept of the network. They have to see the value and benefits to being part of the network. Some WD key informants point out that this idea cannot be "forced". They suggest that WD play an enabling and support role to facilitate strengthening of the network. According to one WD key informant, responsibility for coordination of future

meetings will rest with WCBSN representatives.

WD key informants made a number of suggestions to improve the meetings. They suggested that meetings should:

- Be more strategic.
- Be action-oriented and focused on what is useful to members.
- Be supplemented by smaller working venues. Meetings at the regional level would provide opportunities for community and WD representatives to discuss issues in-depth.
- Provide more opportunities for community representatives to interact.
- Consider existing meetings, conferences to enhance network collaboration.

3.2.3   Regional Associations

The majority of WD key informants indicate that the CF provincial associations and the CF Pan West Association are necessary to coordinate information at the provincial and pan western levels. The association helps to facilitate links between WD and the CFDCs. Some WD informants, however, cautioned that WD must continue to be directly linked to individual CFDCs. A majority of survey respondents agree (91 per cent) that there is an ongoing need for a Pan Western CF Association.

A minority of WD key informants felt that there was no need for the CF Associations. These key informants believed WD could more efficiently do the coordinating and liaising function played by the CF associations. One key informant suggested that the operating budgets of individual CFDCs could be "topped up" to cover additional administrative/coordinating costs.

Some stakeholder key informants pointed out that the associations played a coordinating role (e.g. coordinate conferences). In addition, information from the provincial association provides local CFDCs with a provincial perspective of the Community Futures program. Focus group participants expressed mixed opinions with respect to the ongoing need for a pan western CF association. Some participants stated that the association had relevance with respect to exchange of up-to-date information between regions, and as an advocate for CFDCs at the pan western level. Some participants expressed concern about an additional layer or structure and that there continues to be a need to be responsive to regional and local needs.

Some suggestions were made to improve the Pan Western CF Association. These include:

- Adequate promotion and funding.
- Keep Pan West Web site up to date.
- Need for consistency in governance of association.
- Improved communication to members as to what's happening with the association.

3.2.4 Partnering Arrangement Between WD and Network Members

Two-thirds of WD key informants felt that the partnering arrangement between WD and the members of the network was appropriate because it provides accountability and allows community organizations the independence to respond to community needs. One-third of the WD key informants indicated that the partnering arrangement was not appropriate. Some key informants felt that the funder/recipient relationship was not appropriate; they would prefer an arrangement where both partners could deal with each other on a more equal footing.

Many stakeholder key informants and focus group participants stated that a positive relationship exists between WD and the network members. Some focus group participants credited WD for organizing a four-page flyer describing the partner members and the services they provide.

WEIs and WD

There were mixed responses from stakeholder key informants with respect to the relationship between the offices of the WEI and WD. While respondents felt that the relationship has some key strengths (e.g. good relationships with WD contact people), they also noted areas where improvements were needed. These include:

- Improved coordination and communication (e.g. sufficient notice of WD meetings, clear and consistent communication with respect to WD direction and rationale for changes).
- Consistent attendance of WD at Board of Director meetings.

There is also some variation as to the extent WEI file managers are involved in activities of the organization, with some attending Board meetings as ex-officio members and providing support and information to office staff. Others are less involved with little knowledge of the issues facing WEI organizations.

FEDOs and WD

Overall FEDO key informants agreed that their relationship with WD was appropriate. However, it was noted that WD project staff turnover is challenging at times. Some FEDO key informants have also voiced concerns with respect to the timeliness of project payments from WD. FEDO key informants also felt that WD should consider each FEDO as unique and facing specific challenges related to their context.

3.2.5   Roles and Responsibilities

About half of the WD key informants and some community representatives indicated that WD's roles and responsibilities require some clarification. Some WD key informants note that the role and responsibilities have been shifting and that WD's direction has shifted (i.e. sustainable communities). However, as one key informant pointed out it is difficult to develop a "common" view of WD among different community organizations, each with their own views. In addition, regional differences in WD may also contribute to differing perceptions of WD's role.

Other sources of role confusion were also noted. One key informant stated that the CBSC National Secretariat is sometimes confused with the Service Partnership Secretariat within WD. Some WD key informants indicated that the move of the Service Partnership Secretariat to the WD Headquarters would help to clarify WD's role and responsibilities. One key informant also noted that there is lack of clarity between the role of the Community Economic Development Network (CCDNet) and the Community Futures network.

A number of WD and stakeholder key informants felt that additional clarity and communication was required with respect to:
• WD's role, vision, direction, objectives and rationale for changes in policies and operations.

- WD's expectations of the network partners (i.e. Innovation? Capacity building?).
- The role and operations of other network members. For example, additional clarification of FEDOs and WEI organizations is required. It should be clear to other network members that FEDOs are responsible for the province as whole. Moreover, some stakeholder key informants expressed a lack of awareness of WEI, its mandate, services and products.
- The purpose and objectives of the WCBSN.

3.2.6   Contractual Arrangements

Most WD key informants indicate that the contractual arrangements are appropriate. Sixty-one (61) per cent of survey respondents agreed that the terms and conditions of the contribution agreement were appropriate (with 31 per cent neither agreeing nor disagreeing). Eighty-five (85) per cent of survey respondents agreed that WD staff is available to help interpret the terms and conditions of the contribution agreement.

WEI organizations in Alberta, Manitoba and Saskatchewan are suggesting that the loan limits be raised to $250,000 from the current $100,000. The rationale for this is that the larger loans would fill the gap between the WEI limit and the new program the BDC is offering to women starting at $250,000.

WD key informants noted that the move to five-year contracts had improved planning Some WD key informants noted the need for clarification with respect to ownership of assets, use of investment funds and Official Language Act responsibilities. One WD key informant also noted that it would be more appropriate to have WD review the Articles of Incorporation more carefully. At present CFDCs only have to notify WD with respect to the Articles of Incorporation.

3.2.7   Level of Financial Support

Most WD key informants agreed that the level of financial support for WEIs, FEDOs and CBSCs was appropriate. Just over half of the WD key informants indicated that CFDCs could use additional resources, with many advocating modest increases to CFDCs to compensate for increasing costs. Some WD key informants advocated

more substantial increases to CFDCs for community economic development activities.

However, only 21 per cent of the survey respondents agreed that WD funding met the basic operational need of their organizations with the majority (60 per cent) disagreeing with this statement.

Some WD key informants pointed out the difficulty of setting appropriate average funding levels given local and regional differences. One WD key informant noted that the practice of leveraging other sources has had unintended impacts. In some cases, the involvement of other partners may result in activities that are not entirely consistent with CF and WD objectives.

3.2.8   WD's Supporting Role

Many stakeholder key informants and focus group participants had positive comments with respect to WD's support to network members. Sixty-one (61) per cent of survey respondents agreed that WD was effective in providing support for the management of their organizations. Seventy-five (75) per cent of survey respondents reported that they regularly contacted WD for support and information. Some stakeholder key informants noted variations with respect to WD's role with respect to the WCBSN. It was noted that some WD representatives have taken a leadership role to bring board members and Executive Directors of the WCBSN together for networking/ familiarization events. Other WD representatives have not undertaken this activity.

About half of WD key informants had suggestions for improving WD's supporting role. These suggestions include:

- Adopting a partnership approach with community members by encouraging members to come forward with project ideas.
- Keeping current with respect to global trends, service delivery best practices and approaches.
- Continuing to improve infrastructure and management support (i.e. computer support and training).
- Clarifying purpose and objectives of the network.
- Facilitating and supporting unstructured and structured opportunities for network partners to share information.

Some specific suggestions from stakeholder key informants and focus group participants for enhancing WD's supporting role include:

- Clarifying WD's three pillars (Innovation, Entrepreneurship and Sustainable Communities).
- Reducing WD project officer turnover.
- Providing training/information packages to volunteers to help them better understand the WD system.
- Providing more information and best practices with respect to board governance.
- Regular meetings with WD Regions (i.e. 2 to 4 times a year) and increasing opportunities for face-to-face meetings with senior WD personnel.
- Increasing network member participation at WD managers' meetings.

3.2.9   Other Partners to the Network Organizations

WD is the predominant funding partner for CFDCs, WEIs, and FEDOs. CBSCs are federally and provincially funded. FEDOs also receive some funding from other federal departments such as the Department of Canadian Heritage and Human Resources and Social Development. While WD is the predominant funding partner for the CFDCs there is also some variation in the number of funding partners across CFDCs. In B.C., for example, WD key informants state that the CFDCs have a higher number of partnerships on loan funds and a higher percentage of leveraging from other sources. Some key informants attribute this difference to a number of factors such as location, tourism and other regional differences. There is also considerable variation within provinces. For example, in Alberta, CFDCs vary greatly with respect to percentage of dollars leveraged from other sources (i.e. according to one WD key informant - between 10 and 80 per cent).

Survey respondents most frequently reported partnerships with other CFDCs (91 per cent). Partnerships with business associations (88 per cent), the provincial government (86 per cent), municipalities (80 per cent), HRSD (77 per cent) and other federal government departments (79 per cent) were also frequently reported.

CFDCs partner with a number of organizations such as provincial governments, other federal departments (Human Resources and Social Development and Industry Canada), educational institutions, economic development organizations and

Chambers of Commerce. A stakeholder key informant noted that CFDCs were uniquely placed in their local communities to deliver programs and disseminate information for other organizations to the community level.

FEDO respondents also noted partnerships with various organizations such as EducaCentre, Tourism, Conseil scholaire, the Chambre de commerce, la Société historique, l'Assemblée communautaire fransaskoise, le Conseil culturel, Canadian Club and other local organizations such as les Guichets uniques.

WEI organizations also exchange information with educational institutions, non-government organizations, banks and credit unions, and other economic development organizations.

3.3   Success of WCBSN

Results and impacts

Are the network's activities resulting in more effective organizations? Are they improving their internal governance? Service delivery? Impacts on entrepreneurs and communities?

Are lessons/best practices shared between network members?

Are the results of the network meeting WD's expectations?

Overall, WD key informants had mixed opinions as to the success of the WCBSN in helping to achieve more effective organizations. Just fewer than half the WD key informants indicated the network, particularly the meetings, had some impacts, mostly with respect to information exchange. Some respondents state that the Pan West All Partners Meetings have helped to lessen tension among the groups, thereby setting the stage for strengthened relationships. Some network members also noted variation in the network's effectiveness across regions and communities. Among the supporters, one respondent expressed that the network was useful for giving members a chance to see "the big picture" and provide a "global view of operations."

Stakeholder key informants and focus group participants were not sufficiently aware of the WCBSN to comment on its effectiveness. Focus group participants, however, cited some examples of collaboration. For example, Manitoba focus group participants noted that CFDCs and WEI have shared training, financing and special

events. There were also noted good linkages between FEDOs and CFDCs in this region.

Where key informants questioned the effectiveness of the network, some respondents felt that the network was not sufficiently cohesive ("at best it is a loose alliance") to realize impacts. According to these key informants, network members do not "buy in" to the concept of the WCBSN nor do they perceive themselves as part of that network. Some key informants also suggest that meetings/activities need to be structured around network members' needs in order to sufficiently improve impacts.

3.4   Monitoring of WCBSN

Monitoring and Accountability

Do the reports provided by networks members to WD timely? Do they allow WD to effectively monitor the performance of the network? What exactly should be reported?

Overall Findings

Many WD and community representatives felt that the reporting process needs to be streamlined. The need to collect more follow-up and results-based information was also a common concern. Many WD and community representatives, however, recognized the challenges in collecting follow-up information. Community representatives also expressed concerns that the reporting process "does not accurately capture their work." Sixty-four (64) per cent of survey respondents agree that the quarterly reports reflect the achievements of their organizations. Eighty (80) per cent of survey respondents report that their organizations have the capacity to produce quarterly reports in a timely manner.

WD key informants also cited the need for additional resources to adequately roll up and analyze the reports. Another key area of concern cited by both WD and community representatives relates to the lack of consistency in reports. Community

representatives indicate that there needs to be clearer guidelines as to what types of information to include in the reports in order to enhance consistency of reports among network members.

Detailed Findings

At present information is gathered through quarterly and annual reports. Many WD key informants state that the reporting process needs to be streamlined. One key informant states that the quarterly reports includes 43 target areas. There were some mixed opinions expressed by focus group participants as to whether the reporting process was unnecessarily burdensome. While many focus group participants commented that the reporting process was lengthy and complex, some participants felt that reports had to be specific enough for accountability purposes.

There are mixed opinions as to the usefulness of reports provided to WD by WCBSN members. Some key informants suggest the number of indicators should be reduced to collect only the most useful information (i.e. results-based information). Additional information is needed with respect to outcomes such as number of jobs created (e.g. follow-up six months after loan is provided). Some WD key informants also point out that they need a better understanding of what short-term indicators are most likely to lead to longer term results. Some WD members also note that WD does not use or sufficiently analyze present information, particularly at the local level. For example, there is information available as to the extent of loan uptake. If loans are not being used, then WD should take action on this information. Some community representatives perceive that the real challenge is in "rolling up all the information" so that it is useful.

Consistency in reporting was also cited as an issue by some WD key informants and network representatives. Community representatives state that there needs to be clear guidelines as to what types of information to include in the reports in order to enhance consistency of reports. For example, the respondents state that there is a need for clarity as to what types of activities are considered to be "successful marketing initiatives." Some focus group participants also noted that there have been a number of changes to the reporting process leading to some confusion as to requirements.

Information that is cited by key informants and focus group participants as most useful includes:

- Results based and follow-up information with respect to:
  - > Number of jobs created and maintained;
  - > Loan performance activity;
  - > Loan fund turnover ratio;
  - > Number of exports; and
  - > Number of businesses established and maintained.
- Useful activity and output information:
  - > Type of CED projects;
  - > How clients are reached (e.g. advertisements);
  - > New market development;
  - > Number and value of loans;
  - > Targets of loan funds;
  - > Number of pan western activities;
  - > Number of mentoring events;
  - > Number of training sessions;
  - > Number and type of services provided;
  - > Number of marketing/visible events;
  - > Dollars leveraged; and
  - > Number of self-serve interactions/number of officially assisted interactions.

WD key informants had a number of suggestions for improving performance monitoring. These include:

- Provide more follow-up information – what happens to loans, what happens to clients (but question how feasible this is)?
- An improved understanding of how short-term results lead to longer term results.
- More consistent reporting in terms of quality and types of information to be included in quarterly and annual reports.
- More timely and accurate reporting.
- The system for gathering information could be improved. Some WD informants cite the need for better automated system, such as a database management system (benefits – ability to store information at one central location). On-line reports were cited as another option for improving data collection.
- Additional time and resources to sufficiently analyze data.

- Annual reporting from key stakeholders with respect to – top three things that they have achieved (and how can WD help them to achieve them?); and how can WD and stakeholders work together to make a difference?

3.5 Cost Effectiveness and Alternatives to WCBSN

Cost-effectiveness and alternatives
Is the network approach cost-effective, considering the WD investments and returns? Are there more cost-effective alternatives or solutions?
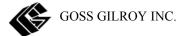
Overall Findings

WD key informants agree that community-based organizations such as CFDCs are cost effective given their use of volunteers and because they are uniquely placed to respond to local needs. Many also note that the FEDOs and WEI organizations provide better reach. While the majority of WD key informants and some community representatives see potential in the WCBSN, many WD key informants state that the network needs to be strengthened in order to provide additional value to the individual members. Some WD key informants state that the WCBSN is an effective tool for conveying the service delivery programs to clients.

A major challenge to strengthening the network lies in raising awareness of WCBSN and its benefits to network representatives. Concern was also expressed over the need to continue to build other local and regional networks while continuing to strengthen the WCBSN. Some WD key informants, however, saw a potential role for the WCBSN in building community capacity (e.g. exploring opportunities for innovation in rural areas, sharing of best practices and business information).

Suggestions for Improvement

WD suggestions:
- Clarify WCBSN mandate and objectives.
- Build understanding of members (with each other) and have discussions about what kinds of services/products they could deliver, assess how to tap into potential of network.
- Increase Aboriginal involvement in the network (consider Manitoba as an

example for providing exemplary Aboriginal programming).

- Ensure that other contributions funding that WD provides to other organizations is linked to the services provided by the network. For example, if a not-for-profit organization wants to provide e-commerce services, WD should ensure link the organization with the existing structure through the e-Business Centre.
- Set up a federal/provincial advisory committee for partner members. This would provide the partners with opportunities to broaden the network (e.g. strengthen partnerships with NRCan in rural areas and strengthen partnerships with provincial governments).
- Merge CFDCs into larger areas and /or merge partners.

Other stakeholder key informants and focus group participants:
- Utilize existing venues, meetings and conferences to ensure all network members participate.
- Explore enhancement of connections via technology. Consider increasing use of teleconferencing and electronic presentations.
- Improve and increase communication between WD and the network members.
- Consistent WD support and facilitation of networking among network members.
- Improve strategic planning among network members (would enhance allocation of project funding).
- Improved linkages partnerships between federal and provincial governments and other economic development organizations.
- Increase funding for HR and travel costs.
- Provide assistance in raising profile of network members.

4.0   Conclusions

This section outlines the key conclusions of the evaluation with respect to relevance, WCBSN relationships, success, performance monitoring and cost effectiveness. The next section (5.0) presents the recommendations.

Relevance and Potential Duplication

The majority of WD key informants indicated that the WCBSN has potential value with respect to reducing duplication, sharing information and providing opportunities for partnership. Most stakeholder key informants and focus group participants were sufficiently unaware of the concept of WCBSN to comment on its relevance. Some community representatives indicated that the network had was a mechanism for sharing information particularly with respect to training and best practices.

The majority of WD key informants and some stakeholders agreed that there was some overlap between members of the network with respect to business planning, training and loan services. However, while two-thirds of WD key informants agreed that there was some duplication, they also said that this overlap is not problematic and ensures a better reach to clients. Just under half of survey respondents agreed that CFDCs, WEIs, CBSCs and FEDOs worked cooperatively to minimize any duplication between them.

Relationships With Other Network Members and WD

Many WD key informants cite some recent improvements in relations among network members in terms of increased cooperation and lessening of tensions. Some WD and stakeholder key informants indicate that WCBSN cannot be characterized as a network as there are few formal linkages across the organizations. The relationship, according to WD and stakeholder key informants, can vary by network organization, locality and region. The relationships and linkages among like member organizations are cited to be stronger and more cohesive (e.g. CF network) as compared to the WCBSN.

While many stakeholder key informants and focus group participants had little awareness of the WCBSN concept, the majority of survey respondents reported regular exchanges with other network partners. Sixty-nine (69) per cent of survey respondents agreed that the network members regularly exchanged information. Sixty-one (61) per cent of survey respondents stated that the network members regularly referred clients to each other.

Other key findings include:

- Some community representatives expressed the need for increased awareness as to role of network members particularly FEDOs and WEI organizations (i.e. mandate, products, services, locality).
- WEIs have a good relationship with CBSCs and FEDOs and some CFDCs. There are some examples of partnerships with WEI and CFDCs in rural areas.
- The strength of the relationships between network members and FEDOs varied somewhat, depending on various factors such as location, region and organizational management style.
- Challenges to strengthening the WCBSN include the need to maintain local responsiveness, the need for network members to operate within a number of networks, geographic distances and lack of awareness with respect to WCBSN.
- The majority of key informants and survey respondents agree that there is an ongoing need for the Pan West CF Association.
- Many WD and community representatives note that the partnering arrangement between WD and the network members is appropriate. Some concerns were expressed with respect to the lack of clarity with respect to WD's role, the need for consistent WD support for the WCBSN and the need for enhanced communication from WD.
- A major source of dissatisfaction for survey respondents relates to financial support with only 21 per cent agreeing that WD funding met the basic operational needs of their organizations.

Success

There were mixed opinions as to the network's success. A number of key informants indicated that the network, particularly the meetings, had some impacts, mostly with respect to improved information exchange. Some key informants state that the Pan

West All Partners Meetings have helped to lessen tension among the groups, thereby setting the stage for strengthened relationships. WD and stakeholder key informants also cited a number of collaboration examples.

Performance Monitoring

Many WD and community representatives felt that the reporting process needs to be streamlined. The need to collect more follow-up and results-based information was frequently cited. Many WD and community representatives, however, recognized the challenges in collecting follow-up information.

Other concerns cited by key informants include:
- Community representatives expressed concerns that the reporting process "did not accurately capture their work." Sixty-four (64) per cent of survey respondents agree that the quarterly reports reflect the achievements of their organizations.
- Concerns were also raised with respect to consistency of reports. Community representatives indicate that there needs to be clearer guidelines as to what types of information to include in the reports.

Cost Effectiveness

WD key informants agree that community-based organizations such as CFDCs are cost effective given their use of volunteers and because they are uniquely placed to respond to local needs. Many key informants also noted that the FEDOs and WEI organizations provide better reach.

5.0   Recommendations

1. **Improve WD's messaging about the WCBSN to its partners.** There is a need to clarify and communicate WD's role as a regional development organization and its strategic directions to its network partners, in particular regarding the partners and the WCBSN. Members should know the "context" in which the WCBSN was created to better understand their respective roles. WD should also communicate their expectations of the network members particularly as they relate to WD's three strategic priorities of entrepreneurship, innovation and sustainable communities. WD could also consider providing training/information packages to volunteers to help them better understand the WD system, including WCBSN, as many key informants note that the purpose and objectives of WCBSN need to be clarified. WD could play an enabling and support role to increase members' awareness as to the value of the network. WD should continue to raise awareness of other network members (i.e. delivery structure, purpose and mandate, services and products offered).

2. **Provide consistent WD encouragement and facilitation of structured and unstructured networking opportunities among network members.** Some variations were found with respect to WD's role regarding support and facilitation of networking opportunities. WD needs to ensure that networking among the partners is encouraged in all regions to ensure maximum benefits are derived from the network's potential, ensuring that all eligible clients are served in the best possible way.

3. **Review the performance monitoring system with respect to clarifying and updating the reporting guidelines and the system for gathering information.** Concerns were expressed with respect to the need to streamline and clarify reporting requirements and guidelines. Some key informants expressed the need for a better automated system such as a database management system. WD should continue to examine the feasibility and potential of developing and implementing an on-line reporting system, with automated roll-ups and trend analysis. Where appropriate, partners should report against identical items.

4. **Pursue ongoing improvements to WCBSN meetings**. WD should continue to

facilitate WCBSN meetings and refine them to ensure that they are effective and meet both WD and partner needs. To address the concern of a number of key informants, who suggested that the semi-annual "all partner" WCBSN meetings could be more strategic, WD should continue to seek partner input to the agenda and shared responsibility with the partners for organizing the meetings. Discussions/workshops around network issues could be incorporated into these meetings. An action plan around these issues could then be developed for each meeting. There should be adequate monitoring and follow up of the actions plans.

5. **WCBSN members should seek opportunities to understand each other's mandates and activities, to refer clients as appropriate, and to share expertise among themselves and at public events.** WCBSN members had varying degrees of understanding of each other's roles and responsibilities. They should actively pursue opportunities to work more closely and to seek opportunities of finding efficiencies by working together, and more effectively meeting the needs of any of their clients.

Annex A - Detailed Survey Findings