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Combatting the Social Exclusion of At-Risk Groups

Research Paper

November 2005

Meyer Burstein

PRI Project

**New Approaches for Addressing Poverty
and Exclusion**

Canada

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About This Report

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This paper was commissioned by the PRI in the context of its project, *New Approaches for Addressing Poverty and Exclusion*. Meyer Burstein is an international consultant working primarily in the field of migration and integration. During his career in the Canadian public service, Mr. Burstein co-founded Metropolis, a major international project in the area of migration. The main focus of the paper is on policy, particularly on new approaches making an appearance in North America and Europe.

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The paper is organized into four sections:

- *Section 1* introduces some concepts and approaches that are finding favour with researchers and policy makers.
- *Section 2* describes the predicament facing at-risk groups in Canada: lone parents, older unattached individuals, Aboriginal individuals living off reserves, recent immigrants, persons with work-limiting disabilities, and children from low-income households.
- *Section 3* notes key strategic considerations that need to be taken into account in devising poverty and social exclusion policies for at-risk groups. As well, the section includes a taxonomy of measures used in both Canada and Europe.
- *Section 4* looks at what is new and innovative in recent efforts to help at-risk groups. The focus is on co-ordination and new methods for creating strategic direction and policy cohesion.

1. CONCEPTS AND NEW APPROACHES

In recent years, it has become increasingly common for the terms “poverty” and “social exclusion” to be linked. Sometimes, they are used interchangeably to refer to a state of deep deprivation while, other times, exclusion is invoked as an explanation – albeit a partial one – for the inability of both individuals and groups to gain access to the good life.

Definitional clarity is important for many reasons, not least theoretical development, measurement (ensuring congruence between instrumental policies and results) and ordinary discourse. Of course, the broader the concept, the more difficult it is to confine its footprint, hence the inevitable tension between scientific and rhetorical uses of socially charged terms. This is the case with social capital and so it is with social exclusion.

This essay avoids the debate surrounding definition in favour of a brief reflection on how changes in scientific understanding and social morality change the way we think and respond to persistent deprivation.

The rising incidence of long-term unemployment coupled with the persistence and concentration of low income over the last two decades (HRDC, 1999), much higher in Europe than North America, has created an impetus for closer study of poverty and a desire to understand better its characteristics and antecedents. Until recently, this could only be done at a micro-level. Now the situation has changed. To quote from a recent publication by the CD Howe Institute (Finnie, 2000): “Understanding poverty...suffered in the past from a lack of information about the dynamics of low income – how many people enter and leave low income each year, how long people stay poor [and] what circumstances accompany

entry into and exit out of low income.” The appearance of several new sources of information on labour market and immigration dynamics, both in Canada and elsewhere, has begun to provide new insights into poverty. In particular, longitudinal data allow researchers to distinguish between individuals whose transit through poverty is relatively brief and persons who remain mired in poverty for extended periods. This shift from a static, point-in-time snapshot to a dynamic appreciation of poverty leads to a reappraisal of strategies and policies throughout the OECD (Voyer, 2003b).

Equally fundamental in creating new perspectives is the fact that income and employment no longer enjoy the hegemony that characterized older poverty studies. In a speech at a conference hosted by the Queen’s International Institute on Social Policy, Cynthia Williams (2004) asked rhetorically whether we had “fallen into the trap of viewing the operational definition [of poverty] (inadequate income) as the thing itself.” According to Williams, researchers and policy makers need to look beyond employment to understand that persistent poverty has root causes that go far deeper than the mere absence of income, hence, her call for holistic approaches.

The increasing frequency with which poverty and social exclusion are joined suggests that Williams is not alone in wanting to emphasize causes rather than symptoms. But the shift in terminology also reflects an ideological shift that sees poverty as largely imposed, a function of institutional arrangements, global forces, and powerlessness. In all these contexts, the term “social exclusion” aptly conveys the involuntary nature of such deprivation, coupled with its pervasive impacts and immutability.

Amartya Sen provided an especially rigorous and well-reasoned discussion of these issues.¹ Sen pointed out that the term social exclusion is of recent origin, and he situated it alongside the older, and broader, concept of capability deprivation. Social exclusion, Sen argued, is both constitutively and functionally related to capability deprivation. In other words, social exclusion represents an important loss of capability in its own right as well as being a cause of other deprivations which further remove the individual or group from access to the good life or the means to acquire it (Sen, 2000: 6). In Sen's words, "poverty must be seen in terms of poor living, rather than just as lowness of income... [It is essential, he states, to] look at impoverished lives, and not just at depleted wallets" (Sen, 2000: 3). These ideas are especially useful for creating a taxonomy of policy responses to poverty and social exclusion. They are developed in greater detail in Section 3.

2. CANADIAN AT-RISK GROUPS

Recent work by Statistics Canada and Social Development Canada offers a much better picture than has heretofore been available of the groups at risk of social exclusion, characterized by persistently low income and heavy reliance on social assistance.² As noted below, these are lone parents, chiefly single mothers, older unattached individuals before they reach pension age, Aboriginal people living off reserves, recent immigrants, and persons with work-limiting disabilities. Augmenting these groups are children who live in poverty and whose prospects for healthy, productive lives are impaired.

It is the concentration of poverty among these groups, along with its persistence, that has led policy makers to conclude that universal programs, while necessary, cannot on their own cope with social exclusion. This view is bolstered by the prevalence of similarly constituted groups (except for Aboriginal individuals) in other countries. Before turning to policy, it would be useful to review briefly the predicaments of at-risk groups in Canada.

Lone Parents

Lone mothers accounted for 93 percent of lone parents. Of these, nearly 250,000, or 40 percent, had incomes below the poverty line (Low Income Cut-Off or LICO) and a majority did not have paid employment (55 percent). As a result, social assistance rates for the group were both high (68 percent) and persistent. Nearly one in five poor mothers remained poor in all six years covered by the longitudinal panel of the Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics (SLID). Ross Finnie (2000) reported a similar result in the C.D. Howe study.

Poor mothers, especially those who relied heavily on social assistance and experienced long-term poverty, were far more likely to have preschool children, to be alone (i.e., not in a union) when the child was born, to live in an area with limited economic opportunity, be a student and belong to another high-risk group. Given this state, it is not surprising that, apart from job-related improvements, economic better-

ment resulted chiefly from acquiring a partner or having someone else become the main income recipient. Low levels of education, especially dropping out of high school, were significantly related to long-duration poverty, but not to the length of social assistance spells. The results for higher education, on the other hand, while positive, were not particularly robust.

An important consideration for policy design is the fact that poverty among lone mothers is more a function of low employment rates and low working hours than low hourly earnings.

Unattached Individuals Aged 45 to 64

Nearly 40 percent of unattached older individuals between 45 and 64, some 350,000 persons, were found to be poor, a percentage that rose with age. Without government transfers, this percentage would have risen even higher, above 50 percent. Noteworthy is the fact that transfers reduced the risk of poverty less in this group than any other, perhaps because the proportion of individuals who received assistance was lower than that of other groups.

As in the case of lone parents, the decisive factor in producing low income was the absence of work. Older individuals who did not work comprised more than 80 percent of the poor in the category of unattached 45 to 64 year olds (in the final survey year). And, while gender itself was not a factor in producing low income, women who had raised children were nearly twice as likely to be poor.

Other important factors involved low education and disability. Nearly half those who were poor did not possess a high school diploma, a proportion that was twice as high as that for individuals with post-secondary education. Much the same story occurred in regards to persons with disabilities. Again, nearly half the population of poor, unattached, older individuals suffered from a work-limiting disability which doubled the likelihood of poverty.

As with lone parents, persons living in high employment areas were less likely to experience poverty, suggesting that the macro-economic environment has a significant impact on social exclusion.

In the near term, the opportunities for policy intervention, beyond social protection, are scant. Over the longer term, however, policies that create incentives and opportunities for investing in new skills and for boosting private savings are desirable.

Aboriginal Individuals Living Off Reserve

Aboriginal individuals tended to be significantly younger, single and less educated (less likely to have a high school education or a university degree). In consequence of this (and other factors that the survey did not touch on, such as discrimination), they were twice as likely to be poor and in receipt of social assistance. They were also less likely to have paid employment and tended to work fewer hours. Nearly two thirds did not work at all in 1998. As a result, roughly 125,000 Aboriginal people (off reserve) had incomes below the LICO in that year. Government transfers produced a significant improvement in incomes, dropping the incidence of poverty from roughly 40 percent to a little over half this figure.

Two factors played a decisive role in producing poverty among Aboriginal people living off reserve – being unattached, including being a lone mother, and having a work-limiting disability. Once these factors were taken into account, the incidence of persistent low income among Aboriginal persons tended to be the same as that of the low-risk population. Consistent with this, Aboriginal individuals generally experienced shorter episodes of low income, roughly half the length of other groups.

Significantly, nearly one third of the off-reserve population lives in the Prairie Provinces and is more highly concentrated in non-metropolitan areas than are other Canadians. This distribution will likely raise the cost of delivering services. The association of poverty with social and health factors suggests that non-economic policies will

need to figure strongly in measures to address social exclusion among Aboriginal people living off reserve.

Recent Immigrants

Recent immigrants (defined in the SLID study as persons who have been in Canada for less than 10 years) tended to be younger than the Canadian born and to be married. They also had comparable levels of education and were less likely to suffer from disabilities, an observation that is consistent with the workings of Canada's immigrant selection process. Nearly three quarters of sampled immigrants were visible minorities and seven out of eight spoke a mother tongue other than English or French.

As has been well documented in work by the Research and Statistics Division³ of Citizenship and Immigration Canada, recent immigrants have experienced lower incomes and considerably lower returns to both education and foreign work experience. This has affected poverty rates. Without social assistance, more than one in three recent immigrants would have been poor in 1999. Social assistance reduced this by a quarter. Over the entire six-year period, roughly 25 percent of recent immigrants experienced persistent low income.

Compared to earlier cohorts, recent immigrants in the SLID sample were three times as likely to have low incomes and twice as likely to be in receipt of social assistance. Not being able to obtain employment, living in an area with poor employment opportunities, having low education, being a visible minority, and coming from a non-English, non-French speaking background were key factors closely associated with poverty. Social assistance, while important, was less used by recent immigrants than by other high-risk groups, likely for reasons of eligibility.

Immigrant economic performance has declined among successive entry cohorts since the 1980s. Especially worrying is the fact that starting incomes have fallen to the point where many recent immigrants will no longer be able to catch up to the Canadian average. Various reasons have been advanced for the decline in immigrant

economic fortunes: racism, the loss of educational advantage (in relation to native-born Canadians) enjoyed by earlier immigrants, a lack of experience in western labour markets, language difficulties, and employer reticence in accepting immigrant credentials and qualifications. The real explanation likely involves some combination of all these factors.

Policy makers have been concerned that the size and sustained nature of immigration may significantly affect low-income rates across the board. Whether this materializes is, however, uncertain. Over the SLID survey period, 1993 to 1998, the incidence of low income among immigrants declined by a third. This amounted to a significant improvement but, with poverty rates still hovering in the neighbourhood of 20 percent, remained far higher than the rate for the Canadian-born. More recent data suggest that immigrant catch-up rates have continued to rise though, given how far entry wages fell, it appears that Canadian-born income norms will not be achieved by a significant proportion of immigrants, especially those who did not enter the economic stream.

The coupling of immigrant poverty with visible minority status constitutes a significant threat to the long-term viability of Canada's immigration program. Policy responses will need to pay particular attention to work-related language skills, credential and skill recognition, discrimination, and the strength (and assets) of immigrant communities.

Persons with Work-Limiting Disabilities

Work-limiting disabilities affect nearly 10 percent of Canadians, some 1.8 million persons (though the rate at which individuals incur disabilities from which they recover after a relatively short time is far higher, with 40 percent of persons reporting disabilities in only one sample year). Of these, nearly half a million found themselves in poverty in 1998.

Individuals with work-limiting disabilities were nearly three times as likely to be poor and four times as likely to be in receipt of social assistance as were individuals without disabilities. This accords with the finding that main income recipients with disabilities experienced far higher poverty rates (43 percent), across the six years measured by the sample, than any other at-risk group.

Not surprisingly, older people, especially those who were unattached, and persons with low levels of education reported higher levels of work-limiting disability. Other risk factors that combined with disability to produce poverty included being a lone mother, being Aboriginal and being a recent immigrant. Offsetting this tendency were higher education and having a partner. In the case of university graduates, the incidence of low income was reduced by a quarter.

It should be noted that improving the employability of Canadians with disabilities is a key strategic goal embraced by federal, provincial, and territorial governments, along with a number of Aboriginal organizations, under the Social Union Initiative. Among the measures being considered are legislative responses, technological supports, targeted training, additional health and educational interventions, and stronger social protections.

Interactive Effects

It is instructive to compare the incidence of *persistent* low income – defined as *cumulative income* over the 1993-98 period that falls below the cumulative LICO total for that period – between groups with multiple at-risk factors and statistically adjusted groups whose at-risk factors are mutually exclusive. This comparison is shown for individuals as well as for main income recipients.⁴

**Chart 1: Incidence of Persistent Low Income 1993-98^a
Characteristics are NOT Mutually Exclusive^b**

Characteristics in 1993^c	All Individuals %	Main Income Earners %
With work-limiting disabilities	23	35
Lone mothers (with children under 18)	30	29
Unattached persons 45 to 59	35	33
Recent immigrants	25	25
Off-reserve Aboriginal individuals	15	19
Any of the above characteristics	22	28
None of the above characteristics	5	6
All persons	8	10

Notes:

- a Persistent low income means that the cumulative income over the six-year period for the group in question falls *below* the cumulative LICO for that period.
- b Multiple at-risk characteristics are permissible for all groups that are *not* mutually exclusive.
- c Persons are classified throughout the period according to their "status" in 1993.

**Chart 2: Incidence of Persistent Low Income 1993-98
Characteristics ARE Mutually Exclusive^a**

Characteristics in 1993	All Individuals %	Main Income Earners %
With work-limiting disabilities	23	35
Lone mothers (with children under 18)	28	26
Unattached persons 45 to 59	24	23
Recent immigrants	25	25
Off-reserve Aboriginal individuals	8	5
Any of the above characteristics	22	–
None of the above characteristics	5	–
Youth 25 or under	–	16
Less than high school	–	9
Rest of main income recipients	–	3
All persons	8	10

Note:

- a The characteristics shown here are mutually exclusive. For example, those with work-limiting disabilities in 1993 were identified first, then among the remaining individuals/earners, those who were lone mothers were identified, and so forth.

Three things stand out in these tables. First, is the far higher incidence of poverty among disabled, main income earners as compared with individuals. This reflects the fact that disabled persons who were not the principal earners were, in some cases, able to count on substantial income support from either partners or others. The second and third points concern the powerful influence of work-limiting disabilities in terms of pushing older, unattached individuals and off-reserve Aboriginal persons into poverty. The poverty rate for unattached elderly persons falls by nearly a third when the influence of disability is removed while that for Aboriginal people is halved for individuals and cut down to a quarter its size for main income earners.

Children

Some 16 percent of all Canadian children and 35 percent of the children from lone-parent families live in poverty (below the LICO). As a result, they are more likely to experience physical impairment and disabilities, suffer accidents, exhibit lower vocabulary development and, as teens, drop out of school or be unemployed.⁵ They are also – according to a national study of poverty, family stress, parenting, and neighbourhood social capital – prone to exhibit hyperactivity and inattention and to score lower on mathematics tests (Jones et al., 2002).

For these reasons, federal, provincial, and territorial governments, working under the umbrella of the Social Union Initiative to reform Canada's system of social services, have agreed that children in poverty should be one of two initial priorities (the other being persons with disabilities).

3. STRATEGIC CONSIDERATIONS

Given their characteristics, a number of strategic considerations will need to be taken into account in devising poverty and social exclusion policies for Canada's at-risk groups. Most are obvious but they are, nevertheless, worth highlighting.

- Successful strategies to address poverty and exclusion require sustained investments that target not just income and employment but abilities, assets, attitudes, and aspirations. The last three are relatively new on the policy scene.
- Neither the problems nor the remedies are simple. Once the focus moves beyond income to exclusion, complexity enters in the form of wider goals, a correspondingly broader range of interventions, overlapping jurisdictions, and scientific uncertainty regarding causes, effects, and mediating variables.
- Objectives will need to be framed carefully (not just in terms of outcomes) to accommodate varying perspectives and avoid engineering singular, middle-class appreciations of what constitutes the good life.
- No matter what clever new policies are devised, income supports will continue to play a crucial role in alleviating deprivation and poverty. Research shows that transfers produce sizable reductions in long-term poverty among all five at-risk groups.
- Universality in the form of tax relief, national child benefits and (passive) information/education strategies, needs to be complemented by active policies targeting individual circumstance and focusing on at-risk groups.
- Community-based policies may be appropriate for some at-risk groups. The utility of such policies will depend on the spatial concentration of the target group, on the extent to which group members behave as a community, and on the resources available to the group.
- Different at-risk groups require different policies. These policies engage different levels of government, different public agencies, and different civil groups. As a result, consultation, co-ordination, and delivery strategies will also differ.
- Poverty reinforces and reproduces itself, scarring individuals and families. Because of this, early intervention constitutes an essential policy response.
- Because of complexity, uncertainty, and the need for holistic solutions, research, measurement, and experimentation prove especially important in designing and testing policies to combat social exclusion.

These considerations, and others, need to inform the poverty and exclusion strategies taking shape in North America and Europe. The emergence of these strategies is both hopeful and worrisome – hopeful because they suggest that renewed effort will be invested in the struggle against deprivation; worrisome because it is not clear that policy makers or social scientists fully understand the challenge. Serious analysts have expressed concern about the lack of focus and the fact that policy and political ambition run far ahead of research and coherent planning. Amartya Sen (2000: 2) quipped: “The literature on social exclusion is, obviously, not for the abstemious.” As he pointedly noted: “The concept of social exclusion is seen as covering a *remarkably* wide range of social and economic problems” (Sen, 2000: 1). A similar difficulty occurs with regards to poverty. While discussions of poverty have generally been more measured (notwithstanding Sen's description of poverty as referring to impoverished lives rather than impoverished wallets), the growing tendency to link social exclusion with poverty has undermined this parsimony.

The range of policies engaged by the less “abstemious” descriptions of exclusion are daunting. At their widest, they cannot be distinguished – except in their targeting – from social policy in general. This has led some policy makers to urge caution. In a recent speech to a conference organized by the Canadian Council of Social Development and Human Resources Development Canada, Jean-Pierre Voyer (2003a), the Executive Director of the Policy Research Initiative, noted: “As we broaden our policy objectives, we increase the number of tools that must be taken into account and the number of players that need to be involved.” This leads to his suggestion that we “face a delicate balancing act.... We must aim high so we are addressing the real issues, but not so high that implementation becomes impossible.” This view is undoubtedly shared by a large number of practitioners.

The following (incomplete) taxonomy of measures to combat poverty and social exclusion is derived from a review of policies and policy discussions taking place in Canada and the European Union. The list of measures and examples illustrates the challenge of developing, co-ordinating, and managing a comprehensive strategy aimed at combatting poverty and social exclusion.

Measures to Combat Social Exclusion and Poverty⁶

1. Macro-stabilization and framework measures

- macro-fiscal and monetary policy, tax benefits and credits, asset policies, pensions, etc.;
- universal child-care benefits;
- measures, such as citizenship education, aimed at promoting social cohesion and solidarity; and
- framework legislation establishing rights and freedoms.

2. Protective measures aimed at maintaining a safety net

- targeted transfers, social assistance, employment insurance, social housing, in-kind support, means-tested income supplements, etc.; and
- rights-based remedies (to enable claims by individuals and by non-governmental agents acting on their behalf).

3. Measures to promote work incentives and to support labour market entry and participation

- provision of information and active counselling measures;
- education, skills training, literacy and numeracy training, language training, orientation and settlement, information technology training; and
- measures design to enhance work incentives, including work income supplementation, and asset-based policies.

4. Measures aimed at creating/expanding/maintaining economic opportunity

- job creation, employer job subsidy measures;
- support for self-employment; and
- measures to promote the social economy.

5. Area-based measures targeting local economies and neighbourhood quality

- measures targeting community social and economic development, community development corporations, neighbourhood renewal, rural sustainability, safe communities, etc.;
- local support for culture, sports and recreation; and
- social capital measures.

6. Measures to reform and open up institutions

- measures to promote better access to public and private services and programs (including access to health services, educational services, training facilities, financial institutions, and so on); and
- adaptations focusing on where services are located, transportation, cultural training for staff, availability of translators, outreach, etc.

7. Measures promoting quality of life, well-being and personal development

- investments in health, including measures to address drug issues, teen pregnancy, and mental health; and
- investments in quality of housing and education.

8. Measures aimed at enhancing receptivity by the community at large

- anti-discrimination measures, etc.; and
- measures to promote solidarity, including citizenship education, cross-cultural sensitivity, education, etc.

Even casual inspection of the categories and contents of this list makes several things clear, the most obvious being that the list is both long and varied, confirming the observations by Voyer and Sen. Less obvious, perhaps, is that the instruments are not new. They are drawn from three sources: from mainstream policies that are part of the current arsenal, from fringe policies that have been around for some time but have seen limited use, and from experimental policies with long histories that have not progressed beyond the demonstration stage.⁷ Furthermore, many of the cited policies already target disadvantaged recipients, particularly members of the at-risk groups.⁸ This applies to health, housing, education, and training to name but a few.

But if social exclusion policies are simply retreads and ramped up versions of older anti-poverty, pro-development policies, should we dismiss social exclusion strategies as being, for the most part, hype, an effort at re-branding old goods? After all, if the measures themselves are not new, is there anything compelling about recent developments in regards to poverty and social exclusion policies?

Paradoxically, the answer would appear to be yes. There is something new, but the novelty does not lie in the policies.⁹ Instead, it resides in a broader understanding of the problem, in a different emphasis and a shift in focus from income to well-being. This produces greater emphasis on co-ordination and partnering, new methods and new machinery for promoting policy cohesion, and new devices to create a sustainable vision and to maintain focus. A discussion of these innovations occupies the rest of this essay.

4. CO-ORDINATION, STRATEGIC DIRECTION, AND POLICY COHESION

This final section is devoted to examining four recent mechanisms that have significant long-term implications for the evolution of social exclusion and poverty policies. Rather than constituting new interventions, these developments exert their influence by promoting co-ordination.

By focusing analytic attention on specific measures in the struggle against poverty, more important developments relating to the manner in which interventions are linked, managed, and formed into strategies are ignored (or not given sufficient attention). This would appear to be inconsistent with the view that social exclusion is a multi-dimensional problem that requires multiple interventions. If it is true that the success of these interventions requires a holistic approach, then it should also hold true that the real focus should be on the mechanisms that promote this wholeness. Below, a number of such mechanisms are described. What they have in common is a capacity to convert policy compilations into integrated, holistic strategies.

In the past, the main impetus for co-ordination was the promise of greater efficiency. This is not, however, the prime driver of social inclusion policies today. Instead, the new emphasis on co-ordination has several parents, chief among them being a shift in focus from symptoms to root causes. Policy makers no longer feel that income supplementation and market forces can adequately reduce long-term poverty and exclusion. Having said this, efforts to probe more deeply into the conditions that give rise to exclusion have revealed them to be highly entangled and circular. Thus, poor health excludes people from work, while lack of work, in turn, contributes to poor physical and mental health, and so on. It has become increasingly clear to policy makers that significant progress can only be achieved through remedial action across a broad policy front.

At the same time as policy approaches are being re-examined, stakeholders have also begun to question the current program delivery model.

In particular, the notion that programs should be offered to clients in much the same way as goods are offered to shoppers in supermarkets is being rejected. The burden of accessing multiple services from multiple suppliers operating under different rules and creating trajectories of services to address the needs of different life stages is simply too great for disadvantaged clients, especially those suffering from deep poverty and exclusion. Under such circumstances, the onus for co-ordinating services cannot be placed on recipients but must, instead, be assumed by the service providers themselves.

The third major impetus for co-ordination comes from the realization that there exists a substantial gap between what is desirable and what is politically possible, insofar as social exclusion policy is concerned. This makes it all the more important that a long-term co-ordinated vision be developed so policy opportunities can be seized if and when they arise. The existence of such a vision allows multiple stakeholders to fit themselves into a coherent plan and identify allies. Without a vision, policy inevitability remains fragmented.

Vision is, however, only one of the elements needed. Also required is some sort of co-ordinating machinery that facilitates intellectual and practical exchanges. Other essential elements include measurement and feedback, that is, a reflective capacity whereby stakeholders are able to assess the effects of their own actions in relation to, and in combination with, others. Finally, there is the question of stewardship in the absence of any single agency owning the policy area. Some form of collective leadership, if not over the entire field then over particular domains, is needed to set strategic directions and move ahead. The four devices described below address one or more of these requirements and, in so doing, contribute to the shift from policies operating in silos to the formation of poverty and social exclusion strategies.

Framework Agreements

High-level framework agreements, because they undergo periodic review and are subject to extensive scrutiny by governments and stakeholders, can provide an especially powerful lever for producing policy change.¹⁰ Under the social union initiative and social union framework agreement (SUFA), federal, provincial, and territorial governments, along with Aboriginal representatives, have agreed to work together to address a range of social and economic issues. The goal is to improve program efficiency and effectiveness, to eliminate service duplication, and to strengthen policy design capacity. The significance of this for social exclusion and poverty arises from the fact that three of the six at-risk groups – Canadians with disabilities, children, and Aboriginal individuals – are specifically targeted by the framework agreement.

A good idea of how the framework agreement has contributed to the development of social exclusion and poverty policies can be had by comparing the work relating to early childhood development with the conditions set out above for differentiating between disconnected policy lists and true strategies. Over the past 10 years, a long-term strategic vision has been enunciated under the agreement, culminating in shared principles and common design parameters. Measurable goals have been established, common indicators focusing on outcomes and effectiveness have been agreed, and a permanent body has been created to help set policy directions, implement programs and conduct evaluations. In short, an organization with stewardship interests has been created.¹¹ This is where the novelty resides. The specific program elements are not (at least for now) conceptually different from pre-existing measures. But the mass, diversity and co-ordination of programming, all situated within a long-term vision, constitute a new approach to social exclusion.

Observatories

Observatories are used extensively by the European Union to monitor a variety of situations and issues including cultural policies, family policies, rural development issues, and racism and xenophobia. The stated goals of observatories or monitoring centres include promoting co-operation, facilitating the exchange of information and helping to co-ordinate policy. Despite this ambitious language, in practice, the agencies operate primarily by acting as a moral voice or conscience and by drawing attention to issues or situations that need to be corrected. Similar organizations exist in Canada, such as the Canadian Race Relations Foundation.

Perhaps a more interesting example is provided by the UK's Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) which is charged with assessing trends, conducting evidence-based policy reviews, and identifying best practices in regards to poverty and exclusion (UK, nd). What makes the SEU interesting is the fact that it is located within the Cabinet Office and enjoys direct access to the prime minister. This gives it enormous clout within the UK system and ensures interdepartmental collaboration and ministerial support for social exclusion policies. Recent directions (September 2004) expand the work of the Unit into health, education, and housing. Target groups are similar to Canada's. In some respects, chiefly because of its location, the SEU serves the same function as the social union framework agreement in Canada.

A Canadian example worth studying can be found in the Office for Disability Issues (ODI) within Social Development Canada. The Office delivers programs (to those with a disability, to employers and to non-governmental organizations or NGOs), but the most interesting parts of its mandate concern its horizontal undertakings. In this area, the ODI provides leadership, establishes strategic directions, and works to improve horizontal management and collaboration in respect of policies and programs affecting those with a disability. The organization's span extends to the entire Government of Canada and to key partners, including national disability organizations (to build their capacity), provinces and territories (to foster policy and program coher-

ence), and the research community (to build and disseminate knowledge). The overall aim is to create an integrated, client-centred approach that transcends jurisdiction boundaries.

In her speech at Queen's cited earlier, Cynthia Williams (2004) saw in the creation of Social Development Canada, an opportunity to create a framework for understanding poverty from an integrated economic, social, and cultural perspective. Specifically, she argued that the poverty agenda and the social inclusion agenda, two policy interests that were managed by different institutions at the federal (as well as the provincial) level, needed to be combined. The ODI would appear to address this concern in terms of its mandate, the different interests it brings to the table, and the range of organizations it serves. It is worth noting that disability is a specific concern of the SUFA and that the ODI operates in this larger context.

Rights Driven Policies

The equality provisions of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* and federal and provincial human rights legislation offer protection against discrimination based on physical and mental disability, age, gender, race, and ethnicity. Potentially, these measures apply to four of the six groups identified as being at risk of social exclusion and long-term poverty. The legislation offers protection not only against blatant, direct acts of discrimination but also against more subtle discriminatory practices whereby disadvantaged groups can be shown to be systematically excluded from certain benefits or services.

While the equality and anti-discrimination provisions offer remedies for particular causes that produce exclusion, they do not generally have much to say about the broader social and economic factors that underlie and sustain the condition. To this end, recent legislation, in a number of jurisdictions has sought to tackle long-term poverty and exclusion more directly. In Quebec, Bill 112, adopted in December 2002, is aimed specifically at combatting poverty and social exclusion. Especially interesting is the fact that

the new law makes reference in its preamble to Quebec's Charter of Rights and Freedoms and, in this context, establishes for Quebec society the task of improving the social and economic situation of marginalized people. Proposed areas for action include education, skill development, income, work opportunities, and housing (Noel, 2002: 14). The Bill requires the government to develop specific action plans (see the next section regarding the EU) and promises to establish an observatory to monitor progress, and develop and share knowledge. The responsible minister will be required to report on a regular basis. It remains to be seen how the link between Charter rights and action plans will be interpreted by the judiciary and whether the preamble carries legal force.

The link between rights and protection against exclusion is still stronger in Europe. Thus, the European Union's new constitution and Charter of Fundamental Rights includes, alongside basic human rights, the right to education, to training, to placement services, to the integration of persons with disabilities, and the right to housing and social assistance to combat poverty and social exclusion. Again, it is not clear how these rights will be implemented or exercised but they will certainly have implications for the development and organization of national policy. Legal instruments should not be conceived exclusively in a private, litigative mode. They have, in the past, proved effective in advancing a variety of policy agendas.

Two points need to be made in this regard. The first is that the steady expansion of rights into the social and economic policy arena, in this case targeting social exclusion and poverty, places an onus on government to develop effective and legally defensible strategies for doing just that. Rhetoric alone will not suffice. The second point is that the expansion of rights typically invigorates a significant constituency of national and international academic and NGO advocates who pursue an activist agenda, wielding the new rights to challenge policy and compel public action.

The extension of rights to the arena of poverty and social exclusion, by empowering private groups, forces governments to pay more attention to strategy and co-ordination than would otherwise have been the case. What no one knows at the moment is how powerful the rights approach will turn out to be.

European Union National Action Plans

In 2000, the European Council adopted, as a major policy objective, the goal of significantly reducing poverty and social exclusion within a decade. In support of this, all member states agreed to develop two-year national action plans (now in their second round). These plans had four main objectives: facilitate participation in employment, lower the risk of exclusion, help the most vulnerable, and mobilize all relevant institutions to assist in these goals. Indicators of exclusion were also agreed, the main ones being persistent low income after transfers, joblessness, and jobless households, an income gap vis-à-vis median earnings, low education and early school leaving, and poor health (EU, SPC, 2001).

In their original plans, “most Member States... focused their efforts on improving coordination, refining and combining existing policies and measures and promoting partnership, rather than launching important new or innovative policy approaches” (EU, 2001: 8). As well, notwithstanding differences “as regards the extent to which the NAPs [national action plans]...frame their policies in a longer-term strategic perspective and evolve from a purely sectoral and target-group approach towards an integrated approach” (EU, 2001: 9), most national action plans were little more than lists of policies and programs which, to varying extents, served disadvantaged clients. Despite this, the EU’s experiment shows signs of turning into something much more interesting. Three planning features are noteworthy: the emphasis on integration, the involvement of civil society, and the system of open co-ordination backed by evaluation.

A key element of the national action plans is their emphasis on co-ordinating different levels of policy making and delivery. Most member states complemented national plans with integrated regional and local approaches. In an independent study of the UK National Action Plan, the Social Policy Unit at the University of York concluded: “Before the NAP, that kind of cross-cutting review had not been done and, partly as a result of the work...it is now being continued more systematically” (Bradshaw and Bennett, 2003: 3). This will likely focus greater attention on the need to co-ordinate and target services to excluded populations. “The NAP process has...required the different jurisdictions to get back together again, a process that may eventually lead to a much less detached and more productive relationship between the UK national government and devolved administrations – both in policy and monitoring” (Bradshaw and Bennett, 2003: 3). The devolved administrations are those of Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland.

In addition to provoking governments to work together, the national action plans have also intensified the dialogue between government agencies and civil society organizations (UK, nd). This has led to the formation of mixed working groups and has generated much closer relations with the voluntary and community sectors, especially at the local level. The involvement of civil society (including the affected target populations) has stimulated bottom-up policy and program design which, in turn, has led to a more holistic appreciation of client needs.

The final element of the EU’s approach that is singled out in this essay concerns the system of open co-ordination, which was agreed at the Lisbon Summit. The open co-ordination method was adopted because of the impossibility of producing a common European plan to combat social exclusion. Different institutional and governance arrangements, different programs and different contexts all stand in the way of a common template. In its place, the system of open co-ordination allows states to design policies and measures that are appropriate to their needs but also introduces two mechanisms that promote learning and exchange. The first mechanism involves formal, comprehensive evaluations

aimed at identifying best policy and program practices. The second relies on the participation of civil society organizations and members of excluded groups to introduce a critical perspective by drawing on lessons from across the EU and ensuring that best international practices are considered in the development of biannual, national action plans. In effect, the system of open co-ordination facilitates the development and integration of both horizontal (transnational) and vertical (national) communities of stakeholders.

Because the system of open co-ordination was developed with a view to policy co-ordination under asymmetric social, economic, and institutional conditions, it may prove interesting for Canada in areas, such as social exclusion, that require policy and program involvement by all three orders of government.

5. CONCLUSIONS

This paper began by considering the concept of poverty and how it relates to the newer concept of social exclusion. This was followed by a brief statistical description of six groups at risk of falling into deep poverty and suffering from social exclusion. The paper scans various policies that are being employed or are under development. A taxonomy of such measures is presented, but suggests that most of the remedies are already familiar to policy makers and social activists, notwithstanding some of the newer tweaks and innovations. Instead, the paper argues that the most interesting innovations are not to be found in the measures themselves (that is, in the technological components of policy) but rather in their co-ordination and management and in the machinery that supports this integration. That this is so, is hardly surprising given the complexity of the concepts (social exclusion) and the remarkably broad range of responses advocated. What is surprising is that insufficient attention has been devoted to how individual policies and programs can be forged into comprehensive strategies. If there is a general conclusion that flows from this analysis, it is that more effort should be assigned to studying various forms of co-ordinating machinery, such as the examples discussed at the end of this paper. This would include studying the partnerships required to manage interdependence and the accountability relationships necessary to produce trust.

NOTES

1. Sen (2000). This essay was influenced by Sen's treatment of social exclusion and his definition of the concept.
2. See Kapsalis and Tourigny (2003a,b,c; 2004a,b). See also Heisz and McLeod (2004).
3. See, for example, Green and Worswick (2002).
4. The charts are extracted from the SDC reports by Kapsalis and Tourigny on Aboriginal Canadians (page 21) and unattached individuals (page 30). The reports provide a more detailed treatment of the subject.
5. Ungerleider (2004). NCB (nd) reports that only 11 percent of Canadian children lived in low-income situations in the year 2000.
6. Some measures appear under more than one heading reflecting their multiple roles.
7. Examples of the first are labour market training and social assistance; examples of the second are community development corporations and safe-community programs; examples of the third are work income supplementation and certain asset-based programs.
8. The manner in which these programs or services are directed to disadvantaged groups may fall short of what is referred to as mainstreaming – directing, managing, and measuring mainstream programs with a view to serving distinct populations – but, at the very least, most programs are sensitive to the needs of at-risk groups.
9. In actual fact, there are a number of social exclusion policies/strategies that introduce new (or “newish”) ideas though, in the majority of cases, the real novelty centres on delivery and co-ordination rather than content. Five such policies are listed below.
 - (a) Social capital policies: Policies affecting social capital already exist. Furthermore, concerns about social capital play an important role in guiding local policies, such as housing, transportation, and zoning. What is new is the interest (a larger claim would be premature) by governments in building social capital, thereby strengthening communities, to complement and assist public policy.
 - (b) Asset-based policies: Such policies promote the accumulation of assets with a view to shaping behaviour over extended periods of time and across major life transitions, such as retirement or school enrollment. Many such policies already exist (e.g., Registered Retirement Savings Plans), but the extent, application, and complementary roles envisioned for asset policies are new. (See Exploring the Promise of Asset-Based Social Policies: Reviewing Evidence from Research and Practice, Conference on Asset-Based Approaches, Policy Research Initiative, December 2003, Gatineau, Quebec)
 - (c) Child development policies: The essay argues that the novelty of child development policies lies in their ambitious co-ordination; however, the additional attention that parenting, child care and early development are receiving can be seen as leading to a new policy set.
 - (d) Rights-based policies: Anti-discrimination policies have a long history in Canada and Europe. What is new, however, are instruments such as Quebec's act to combat poverty and social exclusion. See Noel (2002) or Eliadis and Leduc (2003) and the European Union's new constitution and Charter of Fundamental Rights, which enshrines new rights (including II-74: the right to education and access to vocational and continuing training; Article II-86: integration of persons with disabilities; Article II-89: right of access to free placement services; and Article II-94: entitlement to social benefits and services as well as the right to housing and social assistance in order to combat poverty and social exclusion).

- (e) Social economy policies: The social economy refers to financially viable corporations that produce goods, services, and jobs, but are primarily oriented to helping their members or communities realize social ends that would not otherwise be met by public or private enterprise. Included in this category are economic development corporations, which do not target profit or market share, but jobs and neighbourhood betterment. The roots of the social economy go back to Depression era co-operatives and credit unions, but recently the social economy has seen renewed interest, experimentation and growth. Hence, its mention in the Throne Speech.

10. Cynthia Williams (2004) argued that the SUFA was needed because trust had broken down. Rather than focusing on the framework, per se, she focused on the conditions that make frameworks work, namely, trust, common purpose, transparency, and reciprocity. She also advocated paying close attention to how issues are framed to create the widest possible “space” for collaboration. Her example referred to the children’s agenda, which was framed in terms of child development.

11. See SDC (nd); also, Social Union (2004).

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