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“RURAL COMMUNITIES AS THE CORNERSTONE”

QUARTERLY REPORT

**Roundtable Discussions
January to March 2004**

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For further information on the Rural Dialogue, please call 1-888-781-2222 (toll-free number).

Canada

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
1 FOREWORD	1
2 INTRODUCTION	1
3 SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION TOPICS	2
4 METHODOLOGY	5
4.1 Roundtable events, participants and background	5
4.2 Format of the Roundtable Discussions	6
4.3 Overview of Part 1 topics	6
4.4 Overview of Part 2 topics	6
5 RESULTS AND ANALYSIS: PART 1 TOPICS	7
5.1 Community capacity building	7
5.2 Youth	9
5.3 Infrastructure	11
5.4 Entrepreneurship	12
6 RESULTS AND ANALYSIS: PART 2 TOPICS	13
6.1 Intergovernmental Partnerships	14
6.2 Urban/Rural Relationship	14
6.3 Resource Industries	15
6.4 Human and Social Capital	15
6.5 Quality of Life	16
7 CONCLUSION	17

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1. FOREWORD

This report is a summary of discussions that took place during the Roundtable Discussions entitled “Rural Communities as the Cornerstone” held in Alberta and Quebec in March 2004. In order to present a true report of the free-ranging discussions, recommendations made by participants that fall outside federal jurisdiction are also included. Views expressed do not necessarily represent those of the Government of Canada.

2. INTRODUCTION

The two Roundtable Discussions summarized in this report, hosted by Georges Farrah, Parliamentary Secretary for Rural Development, were the most recent in a series of cross-Canada stakeholder roundtables which began in Summer 2003. The Roundtables held from the summer to the fall of 2003 were hosted by the Honourable Andy Mitchell, the former Secretary of State (Rural Development) (Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario), and presently the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada.

The Roundtable series is part of the Rural Dialogue, an ongoing, two-way discussion between the Government of Canada and Canadians from rural, remote and northern regions. The Rural Dialogue, initiated in 1998, helps the Government of Canada to understand local and regional priorities, and provides rural, remote and northern citizens with an opportunity to influence government policies, programs and services that affect them. Since the beginning of the Rural Dialogue initiative, over 16,000 citizens from rural, remote and northern Canada have participated in activities held across the country. These activities have included regional meetings, national and regional rural conferences, surveys and town halls.

The Rural Dialogue is a key component of the Canadian Rural Partnership, an initiative that supports a cross-government approach to rural development within the Government of Canada. The input from roundtable participants will help inform the Government of Canada on future actions, and contribute to the development of a national rural policy framework that will guide the actions of the federal, provincial and territorial governments. The over-arching goal of this federal-provincial-territorial collaborative effort is to ensure the long-term viability and sustainability of rural communities by creating an environment which will ensure that communities and citizens have access to social and economic opportunities.

Stakeholders at these roundtable events were invited to propose community-based strategies and actions designed to meet specific challenges and advance a number of priorities identified through the Rural Dialogue process. They were also encouraged to suggest the role governments can play in assisting communities to advance priorities and implement some of the strategies and actions. It is hoped that these discussions will be instrumental in determining how rural, remote and northern communities can better position themselves, with the ongoing support of all levels of government, to ensure that they participate in and benefit from local and national prosperity.

The Roundtable Discussions proposed several objectives in order to facilitate the exchange of information and assist in the identification of community driven development strategies and actions. The objectives of the Roundtable series were to:

- Continue the Rural Dialogue with rural communities by engaging key community stakeholders;
- Discuss key rural priorities identified through the Rural Dialogue and with other rural networks;
- Discuss how communities can position themselves to benefit from changes in the socio-economic base of rural Canada;
- Identify the capacity that communities have to develop strategies and actions, with government and other stakeholders, and to engage their citizens in bringing about local solutions to the challenges they face; and
- Identify strategies and means to be supported by governments to assist communities in adapting to changes and build a sustainable socio-economic base.

This report provides an analysis of the discussions that took place during the two most recent Roundtable Discussions. It identifies specific strategies and actions that can be implemented by rural communities and includes a suggested course of action. Furthermore, the results presented will serve as a means to assist the Government of Canada in formulating policies and strategic directions that meet the needs of rural, remote and northern communities as they pursue their development.

3. SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION TOPICS

Participants were given the opportunity to discuss key rural priorities identified through the Rural Dialogue process (outlined in Section 5, Part 1 topics) and on other issues of regional relevance (outlined in Section 6, Part 2 topics). The following identifies some of the strategies and actions discussed by roundtable participants that could be implemented by rural communities, governments or both. These are presented in further detail in Section 5 and Section 6 of this report.

Community Capacity Building

Many rural community challenges can more effectively be addressed on a regional basis where rural communities come together to share and maximize their resources. Greater flexibility in the design of government program criteria to account for the diversity of circumstances in regions across Canada would facilitate rural communities and regions working together to utilize resources more effectively to meet regional needs.

Active, productive dialogue, valuing the rural community and its achievements, and developing a sense of pride and belonging are essential elements to maintaining the viability of a community.

Youth

In addition to facilitating the return of young rural people who leave their communities to pursue their studies, communities can benefit from broadening their focus to also include the development and engagement of youth who choose to stay.

Rural leaders can create greater awareness in the business and volunteer sector about the importance of offering internships or various incentives (e.g. scholarships, bonuses) to attract and retain young people. Rural leaders can also focus on providing the type of community amenities and services that will help to attract and retain youth.

Infrastructure

Physical infrastructure is a major challenge currently facing small communities. More financial resources need to be made available to maintain and/or replace aging infrastructure. A funding allocation formula, based on geography and population, should be developed to facilitate a more equitable distribution of funding dollars.

Broadband

The broadband network in rural areas is indispensable, especially for isolated and remote communities. Access to broadband networks for the provision of business and public services, and related skills development is required to foster community development.

Housing

Solutions need to be developed to address the diversity of housing challenges in rural, remote and northern Canada. Public housing is virtually non-existent in rural areas. Programs should be designed to allow people to remain in their homes longer, by providing financial assistance to adapt their residences to their changing needs, e.g. as they grow older.

Entrepreneurship

Ways to strengthen and encourage entrepreneurship in the community should be explored; however, the cooperative approach should also be recognized as a powerful development tool that emphasizes community collaboration and should be given greater consideration as a development option. Because of their flexibility, cooperatives can be adapted to effectively provide products and services that meet the particular circumstances of rural communities.

Intergovernmental Partnerships

The Government of Canada should give greater consideration to the potential impact of its decisions on rural communities. All levels of government should better coordinate their initiatives that either impact or provide support to rural communities. Greater government collaboration will improve access to and delivery of services in rural communities.

Urban/Rural Relationship

While relationships between urban and rural communities have their share of friction, the participants recognized that considerable benefits can be derived by both rural and urban communities through the development of strategic partnerships. It was noted there is sometimes a high degree of tension among rural communities. Improved regional governance would provide a framework for rural communities to work more collaboratively to satisfy mutual priorities and challenges, as opposed to working in isolation at cross-purposes.

Resource Industries

At both roundtables it was noted there is a need to diversify local and regional economies by encouraging the development of value-added industries to capitalize more effectively on the existing primary resources.

Human and Social Capital

Various ways of engaging rural citizens in community development should be explored. For example, participants suggested investigating new ways of transferring knowledge and experience between generations and helping youth develop an interest in their communities through new approaches that create awareness about the community characteristics, assets and potential.

Social Development

“Standard” measurement or assessment tools are often inadequate to evaluate the unique nature of development issues that are experienced in rural, remote and northern communities, with many rural citizens feeling that Government programs and services do not adapt well to rural needs.

Quality of Life

Employment is increasingly viewed not just as a means of providing for necessities, but also as a means to access improved quality of life. Therefore, the types of employment available in rural, remote and northern communities may be insufficient to attract or retain people if they do not offer opportunities for growth or development in the long term.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1 ROUNDTABLE EVENTS, PARTICIPANTS AND BACKGROUND

This quarterly report covers the two Roundtable Discussions that were held in Alberta and Quebec in March 2004, identified in Table 1 below.

TABLE 1 – ROUNDTABLES HELD IN MARCH 2004				
Province or Territory	Region	Type of region	No. of Participants	Date
Alberta	Peace River	rural/remote	23	March 16, 2004
Québec	Louiseville (Mauricie)	rural	15	March 30, 2004

A total of 38 residents from these rural regions participated in the two Roundtable Discussions. To ensure that participants may fully participate in the discussions, each Roundtable is normally held to a maximum of 25 participants.

In contrast to previous dialogue activities which obtained views and input from a cross-section of rural citizens, the Roundtable Discussions involved the gathering of input from key rural community stakeholders aimed at obtaining a broad representation of major stakeholders involved in rural, remote and northern community development. Roundtable participants included, but were not limited to: representatives of regional rural and youth organizations; academics; community, economic, and social development officers; representatives of First Nations and Inuit organizations or communities; and members of the federal, provincial, territorial and municipal governments.

4.2 FORMAT OF THE ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSIONS

Both roundtables were half day events, and were structured in two parts. For Part 1, participants discussed four topics that were identified from previous Rural Dialogue activities as important priorities for rural, remote and northern communities needing action across Canada. For Part 2, the roundtables dealt with topics that were pre-selected by participants as being relevant issues and preoccupations in their respective regions. All discussion topics were detailed in background material sent to participants in preparation for each roundtable.

4.3 OVERVIEW OF PART 1 TOPICS

Roundtables were designed to not only discuss issues, but to propose community-based strategies and actions related to roundtable topics. Topics for Part 1 of the roundtables were:

- Community Capacity Building
- Youth
- Infrastructure
- Entrepreneurship

To stimulate discussions on strategies and actions to be implemented by community groups, participants were provided a set of questions related to each of the four topics. The analysis of the discussions on these topics and questions are outlined in Section 5 of this report.

4.4 OVERVIEW OF PART 2 TOPICS

In the second part of the Roundtable Discussions, participants selected two to four themes from a list of proposed topics submitted to them as part of their invitation package or other relevant topics of their own choice. Proposed topics for Part 2 of the roundtables were:

- Broadband
- Immigration
- Intergovernmental Partnership
- Urban/Rural Relationship
- Northern and Remote Issues
- Resource Industries
- Human Capital
- Social Capital
- Recreation and Culture
- Environment

Table 2 provides an overview of selected Part 2 topics for each roundtable.

TABLE 2 – SELECTED PART 2 TOPICS			
Province or Territory	Region	Type of region	Topics Selected
Alberta	Peace River	rural/remote	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intergovernmental Partnerships • Urban/Rural Relationship
Quebec	Louiseville (Mauricie)	rural	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intergovernmental Partnerships • Urban/Rural Relationship • Resource Industries • Human and Social Capital • Quality of Life

Participants of both Roundtables selected intergovernmental partnerships and urban/rural relationships as important concerns that need to be discussed and addressed.

In order to facilitate discussions on Part 2 topics, a series of questions applicable to each topic were provided to all participants. These questions helped to define community assets and tools that can be applied to the specific challenges discussed during each roundtable. In addition, participants were asked to identify the types of partnerships and actions that would best address the issues discussed under Part 2. The analysis of the discussions on these topics and questions are outlined in Section 6 of this report.

5. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS: PART 1 TOPICS

This section includes the analysis of both Roundtable Discussions for the Part 1 topics: Community Capacity Building; Youth; Infrastructure; and Entrepreneurship. Overviews of each discussion topic and the questions posed to participants are provided.

5.1 COMMUNITY CAPACITY BUILDING

Community capacity building can be described as a continuous process that develops local leadership and encourages participation in achieving a shared vision. It enables a community or region to identify its strengths and weaknesses, to mobilize internal and external resources to meet local challenges, to develop strategies for effective action and to increase its ability to take advantage of opportunities. An integrated and systematic approach to community capacity building will help individuals and organizations better communicate their ideas and goals, and make complex, integrated decisions.

How can governments and communities work together to ensure that rural communities remain vibrant?

Participants noted that many rural issues can be addressed more effectively by communities working together. The need for a “critical mass”, defined as *the minimum amount (of something) required to start or maintain a venture*, of people and/or resources to ensure sustainable levels of community support was cited. Participants indicated that government should play a catalytic role in developing the community leadership capable of initiating collaborative approaches.

- The Government of Canada should encourage communities to work together on a regional basis to more effectively address their issues.

Participants also noted that the cost and complexity of applying and accounting for government funding was a challenge. It was suggested communities need to develop more expertise in the preparation of proposals to facilitate access to funding. A shared network of resource officers could help facilitate regional collaboration and access to government programs. Governments should find ways to make it easier for communities to access their programs, with the level of administrative responsibilities required of communities adjusted to reflect the amount of funding involved.

- Rural, remote and northern communities should be able to benefit from leveraging resources on a regional basis, thereby facilitating access to programs and funding to address shared priorities.
- Government funding allocation formulas should include geographical considerations along with population criteria.
- Governments should design greater flexibility in program requirements to ensure that application processes are tailored to the level of funding being delivered.

Participants indicated that strong leadership is key to community viability. Encouraging dialogue and facilitating an understanding of the differing priorities among the various community groups and communities in a region are also important. Increased cooperation between orders of government is also needed. Participants suggested that governments should design better tools such as “single window” delivery points to facilitate access to information and services.

How can communities renew their leadership base?

It was recognized that one of the principal roles of a leader is to encourage governments to respond to their needs by effectively advocating their community’s interest. Participants noted that the development of community consensus around the identification and validation of community priorities benefits those assuming the leadership role.

What can communities and organizations do to welcome, empower and actively engage citizens?

Participants expressed that promoting active and productive dialogue, valuing the rural community and its achievements, and developing a sense of pride and belonging are essential elements to engaging a community's citizens. They added that people and their communities should make the transition from working in isolation to working in collaboration. Rural Canada has a significant opportunity to capitalize on disenchantment with urban life and communities would do well to become more aware of their own potential to offer a viable alternative to urban living.

5.2 YOUTH

Rural youth have expressed that they want to be more involved in their communities, but they need support to do so. Youth want educational opportunities (either real or virtual) in their own communities or, at a minimum, better access to education. They also want the opportunity to apply their learning locally or find employment in their own communities so that they do not have to move elsewhere. They would like their voices to be heard and respected, and to have their potential recognized.

What are the assets and skills that young people can bring to rural communities?

Participants noted that rural youth can bring a fresh perspective to the discussion of many community issues. They further added that youth are already more engaged than many people realize and their efforts should be more appreciated in order to sustain their enthusiasm for being involved in their communities.

What actions can communities take to fully benefit from these assets and skills?

In addition to encouraging the return of young people who leave their communities to pursue their studies, participants suggested that communities should also focus on the development and engagement of youth who stay. The potential of all youth should be explored and acknowledged. For example, youth volunteers should be encouraged and supported. Governments should provide support and incentives to help and encourage youth involvement in community development. Participants further stated that young people need affordable housing, meaningful jobs and sufficient access to amenities and services to compete with the real and perceived benefits of living in an urban community.

What are some of the models you have come across that represent a good example of youth engagement?

Participants identified the following youth engagement models:

- The work of *Place aux jeunes*, a Quebec organization which makes young people aware of the potential of their communities and encourages them to either return to those communities or to relocate outside of major urban areas.

- The National Rural Youth Network, a mechanism to actively engage the participation of young rural Canadians on federal government initiatives targeted at youth. [www.ruralyouth.ca]
- The activities of *Carrefour Jeunesse-emploi*, a Quebec organization which develops, promotes and supports a community approach adapted to local needs, and which also supports the integration of young Quebec adults into the socio and economic community life.

How can governments and communities increase the economic, social and cultural options for youth in rural, remote and northern communities?

Participants suggested a number of ways to counter youth out-migration — a major issue in rural communities. It was suggested that efforts should be made to help young people develop a sense of attachment to their region. It was also noted that a lack of educational or employment opportunities are not the only reasons young people leave. As was noted in other roundtables, regardless of their reasons for leaving, youth need a reason to return. Specific suggestions were noted by participants:

- Youth should be motivated to stay in school.
- Aboriginal youth should be encouraged to develop stronger entrepreneurial skills.
- Governments could play a bigger role in providing start-up funding and capital for youth enterprises.
- Governments should increase tax credits for Registered Education Savings Plan (RESP) contributions and tuition expenses.

It was also stated that increasing the number of education-related internships in rural businesses could make it easier for young graduates to move or return to rural communities. Rural leaders should strive to make businesses and organizations more aware of the importance of offering internships or various incentives (scholarships, bonuses, etc.) to attract and retain young people. Various forms of coaching and support, such as mentoring, can facilitate the integration of a new generation of workers into businesses, organizations and communities in general, while fostering the intergenerational transfer of expertise and experience. It was noted, however, that these measures necessitate organizational, promotional and financial support from governments. Such measures could also prevent or alleviate projected labour shortage problems in many rural areas.

5.3 INFRASTRUCTURE

Creating opportunities for rural communities to maintain and develop infrastructure for community development is a priority for Canadians living in rural, remote and northern regions. Basic traditional infrastructure is needed for successful community development and diversification. Through the ongoing Rural Dialogue, rural Canadians have told the Government of Canada that the lack of reliable and affordable transportation is a key barrier to community development. This challenge impacts on other priority areas, such as access to education and health care facilities and services.

Investment in modern infrastructure is also vital to the quality of life and the long-term sustainability of rural, remote and northern Canada. New transportation and communication infrastructure in rural, remote and northern Canada is critical for participating in the global and knowledge-based economy. Access to technology and the information highway is viewed by rural Canadians as an essential element that can help address other priority areas, such as opportunities for youth, capacity building and access to education, health care and programs and services offered by all levels of government.

How can communities collaborate to access and lever infrastructure funds for mutual benefit?

Participants advised that the cost of infrastructure maintenance and improvement is a major challenge currently facing rural communities. Consequently, resources should be increased to allow communities to maintain and/or replace aging infrastructure and build the new infrastructure required to realize their development strategies. They also expressed that a new funding formula, which incorporates geographic criteria with population criteria, should be developed to improve access to funding dollars.

It was noted that communities should work together to utilize existing and new infrastructure more effectively and efficiently to reduce and enable communities to pool their resources for mutual benefit. It was also stated that communities cannot always afford to sustain many services due to costs and/or administrative requirements which exceed the available resources of individual communities. One example noted by participants was the need for public transportation within regions which they feel is essential, but difficult to organize.

Broadband

Participants expressed that access to a broadband network is indispensable in rural areas, particularly in the most isolated remote communities. Access to both skills and equipment is required, as well as appropriate training to maximize use. Increased access to broadband networks would improve access to education and healthcare, provision of public services, and facilitate business development.

Housing

Participants noted that rural communities have their own unique housing challenges. Young people, for example, are often forced to live with parents or relatives due to the limited supply of affordable housing suited to their needs. Furthermore, couples without children, people living alone (divorced, seniors, etc.) and people with disabilities are experiencing difficulty finding appropriate housing. One suggestion was to establish home renovation programs designed to provide financial support to address housing adaptation challenges which are the result of changing demographics in rural, remote and northern Canada (e.g., intergenerational houses, subdivided houses, etc.).

If you were to choose one area for infrastructure investment in your region, what would that area be?

Participants identified the following as key infrastructure investments in their regions:

- Peace River - Increased investment in **roads and other transportation** systems to facilitate trade was identified as the main requirement. One of the issues is that roads in the northern regions run north-south instead of east-west. Poor road conditions were also mentioned as an impediment to inter-provincial trade.
- Louiseville - Access to the **broadband network** was identified as being the essential need, particularly in the most isolated areas. In addition to requiring access to technology, appropriate training is necessary to make optimum use of the technology.

5.4 ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Some of the many qualities of an entrepreneur are creativity and innovation. Research shows entrepreneurs fare better in supportive communities with dynamic business support organizations. Entrepreneurship can help to improve the quality of life of rural, remote and northern communities.

What can communities do to attract and retain businesses? How can communities help existing businesses expand?

Participants recognized that local economic development organizations are essential to address the challenges associated with business promotion and retention. They also indicated that the creation of wealth requires three pillars: the private sector, the public sector, and the cooperative sector. Participants agreed that cooperatives should be promoted as a powerful development tool that brings people and communities together to deliver products and services that respond to local needs. This is especially true for communities which have to cope with the “cost of distance” from larger markets, and which lack large local markets to generate sufficient demand to achieve sufficient economies of scale.

- Communities should identify their assets and competitive advantages, and focus their community development efforts to capitalize on them.

How can governments help communities turn their ideas into action?

Participants expressed a desire for increased flexibility in government programs that would enable communities to more easily address their issues. Due to a lack of expertise or resources communities and community organizations often require assistance to develop project proposals that comply with complex terms and conditions of programs.

- Governments should facilitate access to specialized technical or professional expertise.
- Governments should improve access to knowledge and capital and other financial assistance to facilitate succession planning in the agricultural sector.
- Governments should promote the development of cooperatives.
- Governments should promote improved business collaboration on a regional basis.

6. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS: PART 2 TOPICS

This section includes the analysis of the two Roundtable Discussions for the Part 2 topics. These topics were selected by participants in advance of the meeting. In order to facilitate discussions, questions applicable to all topics (listed below) were proposed to participants. These served to define community assets and tools that can be applied to the specific challenges discussed during each roundtable. This section also includes **an overview of each discussion topic** and the types of partnerships and actions that could address the issues discussed.

For each of the topics chosen, participants were asked to consider the following questions:

What are the resources (human, financial and natural) and tools available to communities, internally and externally, which they can use to advance these priority issues?

What are the necessary skills and expertise communities must develop to help them take advantage of opportunities and develop local solutions to local challenges?

What are the strategic partnerships that need to be created within the community, among communities, with governments and the private sector to help address these priorities?

What are the actions to be taken by the various players involved (governments, stakeholders, communities and individuals) in the process?

6.1 INTERGOVERNMENTAL PARTNERSHIPS

Intergovernmental partnership refers to joint or collaborative actions involving the federal, provincial, territorial, First Nations and municipal governments.

The Government of Canada is committed to working more closely with provincial, territorial and municipal governments to help create an environment, with communities as the cornerstone, where rural Canadians have access to economic and social opportunities.

Participants noted that a certain amount of collaboration already exists between different levels of government, which they hope will continue to improve. It was suggested that a standardized “Government of Canada” template should be developed for use by communities to apply for all federal government programs. This would reduce the need to provide duplicate information to multiple government departments. In addition, Quebec participants expressed their concerns about difficulties stemming from complying with the *Act respecting the Ministère du Conseil exécutif* (RSQ, c. —30), which prohibits municipalities from receiving funds directly from the Government of Canada without the prior approval of the *Conseil exécutif* [executive council] of Quebec.

- There should be better coordination of programs and services between Government of Canada departments.
- Introduction of “Single-window” delivery would facilitate the provision of government programs and services in rural, remote and northern Canada.

6.2 URBAN/RURAL RELATIONSHIP

Urban and rural communities are inter-related and inter-dependent. Issues initiated in one community will often impact on other communities. Homelessness, pressures on health and long-term care, unemployment and unplanned growth are examples of topics that affect both urban and rural communities.

The communication gap between “urban” and “rural” communities appears to be shrinking; however, outlying communities would benefit by becoming more involved in what’s going on in urban centers and identifying areas of mutual benefit. In fact, it was noted there is sometimes a higher degree of tension between neighbouring rural communities than between urban and rural centres.

The concentration of economic and employment opportunities in urban communities is negatively impacting the economic fabric of smaller communities. It was felt that improved communication and the development of mutually beneficial strategies would help avoid the pursuit of conflicting priorities.

There is concern that large businesses and services (corporate chains, etc.) which previously focused their activities in “urban Canada” are now expanding their operations into rural Canada, and jeopardizing the viability of smaller local businesses.

Participants also expressed that tension between urban and rural communities exists in land-use planning and occupation, although efforts have been made in recent years to adopt land use by-laws that strike a balance between new development opportunities and the protection of traditional uses such as agriculture.

Additionally, the issue of regional governance is an underlying factor in the urban-rural dynamic which reflects the need to reach a suitable equilibrium. Such a balance could only be struck by carefully assessing and valuing rural issues in all areas of social and economic development. Participants indicated that each area must be able to defend its interests to ensure that rural issues are not diluted due to the greater demographic weight of urban areas.

6.3 RESOURCE INDUSTRIES

Resource industries (fishing, forestry, agriculture, energy and mining) are the economic base of many rural, remote and northern communities. Many of these communities are facing challenges as a result of the cyclical nature of these industries and are developing opportunities to renew their economic and social base, which in turn create jobs.

Participants in the Mauricie stated that the forest industry is currently unable to fully meet the raw material needs of the region's large, well-developed furniture industry. In order to replace lumber currently being imported from the United States, a commitment of financial resources to research and develop the cultivation of high-end commercial hardwood species is required. Participants at both roundtables also expressed the need for rural communities to diversify their economies by encouraging development of value-added industries, and new industry sectors.

It was further indicated that niche market development in the agri-food industry is creating new opportunities for young people that could help retain or attract them to rural communities. New ways to help young people become established in farming should be found, particularly for young people who are unable to secure the necessary start-up capital.

6.4 HUMAN AND SOCIAL CAPITAL

Human capital refers to individual people in a community, who, given their training, skills education and experience, are considered an important resource. Such individuals form the labour market available to communities. They also provide leadership and mentoring abilities to youth, local businesses and volunteer organizations, and help to motivate the community's members to develop and execute their plans. Human capital contributes to a community's capacity to plan its future, and to identify social, economic and cultural opportunities for the community and its members in order to achieve self-reliance and long-term sustainability.

Social capital refers to the collective abilities, skills and knowledge of the members of a community. There are four key collective qualities that are crucial for communities to grow and prosper:

- **the capacity to develop, maintain and act through networks;**
- **the capacity to resolve local conflicts;**
- **the ability to develop an inclusive approach to local development, demonstrated by the community's ability to listen to all voices in order to achieve consensus on decisions that are vital to its future; and**
- **the ability to lever support and financial or human resources for local initiatives.**

Participants expressed that rural communities should be more valued by rural and urban residents alike and by governments in general. Supporting various forms of creative self-promotion activities, for example "show your pride" activities, would help to address this issue. They also recognized that ways to revitalize engagement in the community should be explored.

- The approach to volunteering should be simplified. Most volunteer organizations are not equipped to deal with current government accountability requirements and more reasonable requirements should be established. This is compounded by a disproportionate exposure to liability.
- Government support should be provided to volunteers, many of whom are women, to enable them to deal with competing responsibilities, such as childcare.

Roundtable participants noted that various ways of engaging community members should be considered. Exploring new ways of transferring knowledge and experience between generations would be one way to help youth develop an interest in their communities through new approaches that create awareness about the community characteristics, assets and potential.

Social Development

Participants expressed that they have inadequate access to social development programs and services which are often only available through limited points of service in rural, remote and northern Canada. It was suggested that these programs could be decentralized to an enabling or delivery agency that would coordinate activities with multiple rural and regional community agencies. The need to deal with government programs and services remotely often contributes to unnecessary delays and complications.

6.5 QUALITY OF LIFE

In a context where work is viewed not just as a means of providing for necessities, but as a way of gaining access to improved quality of life through advancement or professional development, participants indicated there is a shortage of the types of employment that are attractive to young people who would otherwise be interested in settling in rural communities. Generally speaking, the benefits of living in rural areas are not viewed as sufficient to attract young families or retain older people when compared to the advantages, both real and perceived, of urban living.

It was noted that the focus on quality of life manifests itself at several levels, including family life (particularly for women), and the availability of recreation and local services. Access to health care, the internet, and library services, in particular, are considered essential in attracting and retaining people in rural communities. It was mentioned that one of the key reasons many people prefer to live closer to urban areas is because of convenient access to the services they will need as they grow older. Public transportation is also considered a key quality of life factor in that it provides the mobility necessary to provide access to services.

7. CONCLUSION

This quarterly report of the two most recent “Rural Communities as the Cornerstone” Roundtable Discussions has highlighted important solutions and actions that rural communities identified to respond to their challenges.

In terms of community capacity building, participants expressed that solutions to some challenges are better addressed on a regional basis than by individual communities, noting that simply obtaining funding is no assurance of reaching objectives, unless adequate levels of collaboration are also achieved. Youth out-migration also remains a serious and persistent concern. Participants suggested that strategies to address this issue not be limited to encouraging departing youth to return, but expanded to attract new youth and provide opportunities for the development of youth who do not leave their communities. With regard to infrastructure, they indicated that consideration should be given to a new funding formula which better balances geography and population. It was also suggested by some participants that broadband networks will be a key driver of economic and social development in the 21st century. Finally, on the topic of entrepreneurship, they mentioned that value-added industries should be developed to facilitate greater regional retention of the economic benefits of their primary resources.

When discussing intergovernmental partnerships, participants suggested there should be an emphasis on improved collaboration between government departments and levels of government as a means of more seamlessly supporting rural development both in communities and on a regional basis. On the subject of urban/rural relationships, it was observed that both urban and rural communities can benefit from fostering a greater understanding of each other and by collaborating on regional development strategies rather than working in isolation.