

INCLUSION FOR ALL: A Canadian Roadmap to Social Cohesion

Insights from Structured Conversations



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Insights from Structured Conversations



Policy
Research

Recherche sur
les politiques



Department of Justice
Canada

Ministère de la Justice
Canada



Canadian
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Introduction



Objectives

Social cohesion is frequently referred to and discussed, but it is rarely the focus of a structured conversation among leading authorities from different sectors. This report reflects the results of such a dialogue. The path that led to this report began when the Social Cohesion Network (SCN) of the Policy Research Initiative (PRI) engaged federal policy researchers in conversation about social cohesion in 1997. The Department of Justice Canada and Canadian Heritage have co-led the Network since that time.

In the winter of 2001-02, PRI asked Morris Rosenberg, the Deputy Minister of Justice Canada and Deputy Attorney General of Canada, to take on the role of Champion. Hélène Gosselin, the Assistant Deputy Minister of International and Intergovernmental Affairs at Canadian Heritage was asked to assume the role of lead Assistant Deputy Minister. They agreed to launch a renewal of policy research in the area of social cohesion. In response to this challenge, they decided to take stock and also to bring fresh insights to the task of setting the direction for future policy research in this area. To achieve these goals they developed a consultative process based on the Delphi approach to learning and information gathering. Other key objectives were to better link the research into the policy process, broaden the horizontal network, and enhance capacity and understanding.

The process entailed a series of consultations to help clarify what people meant by social cohesion in Canada, the social conditions and issues that raise policy research questions, and some directions for future policy research efforts. If the consultations revealed widespread agreement about the elements of social cohesion and the issues, this would provide a strong basis for improving the links between the research and policy and front-line practices. Identifying concrete measurable elements of social cohesion would allow policy researchers to measure or assess changes in the state of social cohesion in Canada. This, in turn, could provide a more clear evidence basis for policy.

The consultations were also designed to enhance the project's horizontality and engage new partners across government, academia and community organizations. By identifying how community-based and front-line agencies are building social cohesion from the ground up, policy makers can better understand how to promote that work and link it with government initiatives to enhance capacity.

Organizations such as the World Bank as well as many countries and the Council of Europe are employing the concept of social cohesion to frame policies related to jobs, homelessness, and other issues. However, not surprisingly, the concept is understood differently in different countries and organizations. It was hoped that this exercise would help identify a distinctively Canadian approach that could be widely supported.

Why the interest in social cohesion at this time?

The rapid expansion of science and technology in recent decades has been accompanied by a dizzying set of social changes. These include new health challenges, increased population mobility and changes in the structure of the global economy. Related to the pressures of globalization are new “haves” and “have nots,” while many older forms of disparity continue. High population mobility and diversity create wealth and opportunity. However, they can contribute to social pressures given the difficulty of ensuring inclusion for new and mobile members of society. As people in society increasingly follow diverse paths in terms of belief, perspective, and culture, analysts wonder if forging collective social projects may become more difficult in the future. It may be necessary to modernize governance models and social policy approaches in order to hear all voices. We will need to continue to develop ways of bridging different views and achieving widespread inclusion. These multi-faceted changes have often been cited as reasons for the recent widespread interest in social cohesion.

Who participated?

Approximately 130 experts and acknowledged leaders participated in the consultative process. They brought to the conversation the benefits of their extensive experience from four communities:

- senior policy makers in the federal government;
- senior federal government researchers and research directors;
- front-line and community agency practitioners and researchers; and
- non-governmental research organizations and academic researchers.

Participants from umbrella organizations with broad representation engaged in workshops and plenary discussion with theorists and empirical researchers who study issues such as the role of rights in promoting the inclusion of the disabled or economic development projects in Cape Breton.

How were the sessions organized?

The consultative process, based on the Delphi model of qualitative research, entailed a structured conversation conducted in five cross-sectoral sessions held between May 2001 and February 2002. After each session, reports were sent to participants so that they could comment or add to what had been said. This document then fed into the next session. The process was iterative and interactive.

Each participant was asked for their thoughts on:

- the key factors which make for social cohesion,
- key issues or challenges, and
- the research and collaboration that may be needed.

This report synthesizes the advice received in the course of that conversation and received in written materials from the participants. It does not reflect the views of the Government of Canada or participating departments.

Each session made a unique contribution:

- A full-day retreat with the Social Cohesion Network produced an excellent summary of key elements of social cohesion in Canada, social conditions that should be monitored and recommendations for research.
- Senior policy makers were then able to respond and identify a short list of key issues from their perspective.



Deputy Minister Rosenberg addressing a session with community organizations and academics, commented:

Experienced policy makers have valuable knowledge of how to get things done in government, while the front-line workers, generally from non-profit organizations, contribute a lot of practical skill and insights into the implications of different approaches for the populations and communities involved. Their experience is vital.

- Three subsequent sessions with front-line workers, leading voluntary sector and non-governmental organizations, academic experts, and youths confirmed the high level of agreement on the key elements of social cohesion and related social concerns. The rich dialogue at these sessions also added insights from non-government perspectives.

The Process of Dialogue and Distillation

The Social Cohesion Network, representing approximately 20 departments, first generated a list of almost 50 social conditions related to social cohesion and then voted to rank the 10 items they considered the most important. These fell into four areas:

- the nature of connections and participation, as well as issues related to social engagement, volunteering, individualism, high rates of mobility, changes in family and work, and time pressures;
- communities at risk of exclusion, especially increased need for integration services given continuing high rates of immigration, as well as the needs of Aboriginal communities, victims of crime and other vulnerable groups;
- increased economic disparity, persistent poverty, and changes in social supports; and
- globalization, information technology, cyber-communities, international agreements and trade agreements, and possible subsequent changes in connections, multiple identities, environmental degradation, resource depletion, exclusion, and strains in regional relationships.

This list was further refined through subsequent dialogues with senior policy makers across the federal government and then with three multi-sector groups of practitioners and researchers. It is noteworthy that there are substantial similarities between this initial input and the final synthesis of all the discussions. This is evidence of strong agreement across sectors in terms of the issues related to social cohesion.

Social Cohesion in Canada



Social Cohesion Defined

The consultations provided a vision of a socially cohesive Canada based on broad participation and inclusion. This is an equitable and democratic cohesive society—one in which diversity is understood as a strength and in which an infrastructure of accessible institutions supports the quality of life of all citizens.

Social cohesion requires economic and social equity, peace, security, inclusion and access. Diversity and differences are conducive to social cohesion because they contribute to a vibrant political and social life.

Consultation participants identified the following four key elements as necessary and interactive parts of social cohesion.

The Elements of Social Cohesion

Participation

Widespread participation in community and social life is fundamental to social cohesion. Full participation requires access to economic, political, and cultural opportunities and involves active engagement with other members of the community and society. Being involved must be a free choice. Society and its members benefit when more citizens are involved in setting and working toward collective and community projects.

*There is no one description of a Canadian. Being unsure about what is a Canadian is a good thing. It leaves more space to be who we are.**

There needs to be a dual focus on the national level and on communities.

* Most comments from the consultations are not attributed. Often, they were on flip charts or were stated by one person and supported by others. In some cases, they have been edited for sentence structure. The comments capture the flavour of the interventions that earned wide support. In some cases we have indicated that a quote comes from a particular group or individual.



We need to understand three things:

- *the objective, concrete connections that bind us;*
- *the equity, justice, or access those connections or activities reveal; and*
- *the adequacy of our social institutions in understanding those social conditions and promoting the kind of social cohesion we want.*

Bonds

Trust, connections, networks, and bonds with others (elements of social capital) may be necessary for participation and engagement. However, they are also created and strengthened through participatory activities of various kinds.

Bridges and institutions

Institutions and policies such as official languages policy, multiculturalism and the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* mediate differences and encourage understanding and mutual respect. Infrastructure such as transportation and communications provide necessary public support for involvement.

Income distribution, equity, inclusion, and access

These are key to a Canadian understanding of social cohesion. As the Prime Minister has stated, central to “the Canadian way” is a thriving new economy that provides benefits for all Canadians and leaves out none.

These four elements are components of social cohesion that can be measured, researched, and promoted. They provide a lens for assessing research, policy, and programs. Several social conditions and changes were identified as important to maintaining social cohesion in the future. Each is described in the next section of this report.

Social Conditions and Social Changes that Warrant Policy Research



Summary

Several social conditions were identified as central to understanding Canada's future social cohesion challenges. These are rapidly evolving areas that need to be researched and better understood because they are likely to raise future policy questions. Most of the issues raised fit within the following six areas:

- participation, citizenship, and governance;
- income distribution, equity, inclusion, and access;
- immigration, integration, and respect for all forms of diversity;
- capacity building in Aboriginal communities;
- peace, safety, and security; and
- information technology, the new economy, globalization and integration.

These broad domains can be thought of as “umbrellas” or thematic clusters that encompass many other elements of social change. For example, the importance of key institutions, such as health and education, for inclusion and participation was raised repeatedly. Concerns were expressed about the condition of participation and inclusion in major cities and other communities in the face of rising levels of disparity, high mobility, restructuring and cuts to services. Are people in remote communities experiencing inadequate access to services or to economic opportunities? Are particular demographic communities or groups such as the homeless, people with disabilities, or those in remote areas, prone to being excluded from social development?

There was overwhelming agreement that both the local and national levels are involved in social cohesion, and considerable interest in better understanding how these two levels interact. Communities were identified as forming the backbone of social cohesion where most connections, bonds and bridges are built. At the same time, participants recognized that social, global, and technological changes are changing the nature of “community” and of connecting.

Relationships across borders are more common and, to varying extents, Canadians identify with the continent, with their country or countries of origin,

Assistant deputy ministers and senior executives put a strong focus on participation as the following quotations from their lively discussion indicate:

People need the capacity to participate in their community; this requires institutions—but the institutions may need to adapt to changes. An emerging issue is how to facilitate participation for all in an increasingly diverse society. Beyond formal institutions, we need to understand positive new forms of participation. Who participates? Who are leaders in engaging others? What encourages participation?

We need to go to the grass-roots level and see how citizens get together; policy research should focus on the social and civic and the nature of community and community participation. Key questions are: “Are communities cohering?” and “Are there vehicles for mediating between communities?”

or with the world as a whole. As well, global pressures on trade, competition and security may influence the quality of life of Canadians. Some participants expressed concern that economic and trade pressures could unduly influence domestic policies or jeopardize the sustainability of some of the institutions and programs that have traditionally connected Canadians.

1. Participation, citizenship and governance

Participation was identified as being at the core of social cohesion for Canadians. Both the capacity and the desire to participate and be involved in a network of relationships are necessary foundations for a citizen’s sense of belonging and attachment. As a nation of many cultures, languages, and regions, we have developed practices based on accommodation and mutual respect that allow different groups to retain their identities without being marginalized for being different. Political and economic participation are important, as are volunteering, helping, caring, and the simple “guardianship” neighbours provide for each other. In the course of the dialogue, the values usually associated with participation in Canada were reiterated – values such as inclusion, equity, fairness and acceptance. It was suggested that the Canadian model of cohesion is marked by widespread and inclusive participation in establishing and working toward collective and community objectives.

How are Connections, Community and Participation Changing?

Those consulted conveyed the message that policy research should explore the modern nature of participation and not rely upon outdated models of how people connect and participate socially and politically. The national fabric of participation and connection may be changing with modifications in communication technologies, work and other aspects of society.

For example, infrequent contacts may be more prevalent in our fast-paced and digital culture. Long-lasting or face-to-face relationships may be less common.

Families, personal relationships and neighbourhoods, participants said, are the places where individuals learn to coexist, compromise, trust, and share. Childhood was seen as a critical stage of life for building inclusion, self-actualization and social capital. If this does not occur in childhood, opportunities may be lost forever. That is why, participants insisted, we need to ensure that all Canadians share in those opportunities for early social development in the face of transformations in family and community relationships.

Institutions Provide Vital Infrastructure

At each session, participants stressed the importance of institutions, policies and practices that have long been central to the “Canadian way,” especially health care, education, transportation, communications, housing, protection of rights and freedoms, and the social safety net. These shared institutions come from, and reinforce, a sense of the common good, common expectations, and mutual responsibility. The concern, widely expressed, was that universal and equitable access to these institutions may be under threat. Reduced access to pillars of well-being such as health care in the community was thought to cause great stress and isolation for vulnerable populations and for their informal caregivers. Also, groups that particularly rely on those services may feel that they are not valued. For example, senior Canadians may feel that cuts to health care reveal a lack of concern for their quality of life.

Young participants expressed anxiety about access to affordable education and indicated that many young people view cuts in that area as a sign of disregard. In addition, they argued, reducing access to higher education threatens inclusion since education is an important way to “level the playing field” and increase opportunities for those who are not from affluent backgrounds.

How can we build a sense of justice and fairness—that all people are valued?

Social cohesion has to do with many senses of community. One perfectly Canadian example is understanding Aboriginal communities in a multicultural world; the research should address distinctively Canadian issues.



A village can be cohesive but isolated.



We need to think about citizenship and what it means for governance, power and ethics; we also need to understand rights and social responsibility.

The young people consulted supported education on civics and citizenship and the promotion of knowledge of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* and the *Canadian Human Rights Act*, as well as programs that encourage civic and community work. They stressed that all young people, including those who are hard to reach and outside the mainstream, should be able to play a role in shaping society.

As members of a very large and diverse nation, we share institutions, values, activities, and connections with people who may live far away geographically or whose experiences have been very different.

Participants stressed the importance of bridging activities that recognize and involve people and communities such as Aboriginal and diaspora communities, communities of Francophones living outside Quebec, and disengaged youths. They recommended that research identify good models or best practices that recognize, respect and acknowledge differences and facilitate working together. At the fourth consultation with representatives of Francophone communities, participants referred to issues related to regional fragmentation, alienation and the limits of political representation. They emphasized the need to include and promote minority linguistic communities. Language and culture were identified as critical aspects of social cohesion for Canadians.

Governance

Both government and non-government participants emphasized that much of what governments do affects social cohesion and its constituent elements. Policies or programs that are not directed toward social cohesion may have unintended, perverse consequences on some element of social cohesion due to their structure or implementation. The fairness and humanity with which public services are provided and programs implemented was said to be extremely important. Senior executives stated that programs and service delivery must be credible. Subsequent sessions with civil society representatives clarified that, in their view, the focus should be on building good governance practices of inclusion and participation.

One poverty worker noted that when policy belittles marginalized people and suggests they are a problem, or when it reduces the capacity or number of community organizations, that sends a message that is counter to social cohesion. Social cohesion benefits when actions, policies and programs send the message that all Canadians are valued.

Both government and civil society participants, young and old, expressed concern about a “disconnect” between citizens and governments. Youth participants described themselves as cynics and expressed alienation from judicial, educational, and parliamentary institutions; youths from visible minority groups indicated that they particularly distrusted the police. While trust in government is often taken to be a measure of social cohesion, some participants felt that there are advantages to the fact that a highly educated Canadian public may be reluctant to trust authorities and experts to make decisions for them. Evolving ways of sharing more of the decision making with those outside of government could address this issue in a positive way. More collaborative and inclusive ways of governing may be needed to facilitate partnerships with the private and non-profit sectors. There was support for building understanding of what works in practice through pilot projects and studies of existing efforts. Participants were interested in efforts to identify best practices in Aboriginal governance and capacity building for leadership in Aboriginal communities.

A Social Cohesion Lens

Many participants believed a social cohesion lens could usefully be applied to all government policies to ensure they do not deplete or diminish social capital, communities, solidarity or equity. A social cohesion lens could be used to consider how to promote participation and inclusion through our existing policies such as multiculturalism and official languages policy. Sometimes, fairness and inclusion do not require new programs but rather full and prompt action on existing legislation, rights, or entitlements. In other cases, new models and policies may be needed.

Senior government executives engaged in a discussion about trust in government and the concern about disengagement. They noted the following:

Government should not define values for citizens – we could drive people apart with our interventions. You have raised [from the first session] the issue of trust in government. Trust is a problematic indicator. I worry that we gravitate to what we know, we are in government, so we see problems there. Are we defining the problem through our lens? What do citizens think the issues are?

Given what we know about the increase in cynicism, there are things we can do now – without all the research – we can work on connecting with people and encouraging participation. We (in government) need to do what we say we will do.

A social cohesion lens could usefully be applied to the development and impact analysis of all policies and programs.



As well, a social inclusion/cohesion lens may cast a different light on activities such as some forms of political protest. Young people who participated in session five stressed that democracy is enhanced by dissent. They said that criticism of policies should be recognized as participation and concern for the country. Inertia, not criticism, is the greater threat, they said.

A social cohesion lens might also help policy makers consider how best to promote caring, mutual concern and responsibility, as well as connections between communities. Participants suggested that research on how social cohesion is built from the ground up could help ensure that policies and programs support social cohesion rather than threaten it.

2. Income distribution, equity, inclusion and access

Canada's strong tradition of income redistribution, social programs, health care, and relatively good record in regard to social and gender-based disparities was considered to be central to social cohesion. However, participants were worried about increasing polarization of wealth and income and the rising number of poor neighbourhoods in our cities.

Mediating institutions and programs foster access for all and bridge gaps different groups. The *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, the multiculturalism policy, and the use of two official languages were seen as important for protecting equity and access. Policies that promote peace, security and safety were also identified as part of the infrastructure allowing for participation and involvement in communities and national society. Inclusion for Canadians means having access to resources and opportunities at the community level and being able to access them in safety. Violence is one of the worst enemies of inclusion.

Poverty and Disparity

No topic evoked more widespread concern than the persistence of poverty in contemporary Canadian society. The experts consulted recognized that some groups are consistently more vulnerable to poverty and exclusion. Children, street youths, seniors and people with disabilities, as well as immigrants, were seen to be particularly at risk of underemployment, poverty and exclusion. The term “social exclusion” is used to draw attention to the social dimensions of poverty. Those who live in poverty have constraints on their ability to participate fully in the community. As well, economic need often accompanies and exacerbates other forms of marginalization. Others may experience social marginalization that is unrelated to their economic status. For example, victimization and child abuse represent extreme instances of exclusion from social safety and protection. The response, then, needs to link economic well-being with social inclusion. A final difference between a focus on poverty and a focus on inclusion recognizes that all of society is harmed when specific groups are not able to share fully in the national goals of equity, access and participation.

Participants noted that on the one hand, economic disparity between well-off and vulnerable groups is increasing, while, on the other hand, more middle class Canadians are exposed to economic insecurity. Frequent lay-offs or irregular work without benefits are becoming more prevalent. Families and children also experience the drop in economic security that often follows divorce, separation and other family changes. Risks to children and youth from economic or social pressures on the nuclear family can be countered by extended family or community supports. The consultations stressed that children and young people need community supports.

Changes in society and in public policies interact with economic changes in shaping the evolving structure of disparity and poverty. For example, the current job market requires ever-higher levels of literacy, numeracy and skills.

Tuition fee increases mean less access to higher education; education is becoming a privilege for the wealthy only....People in poor neighbourhoods need health services more, but they access them less.

We are contributing to the problem when we agree to international trade policies that may hurt our institutions... The Americanization of our processes and values can mean adopting practices that may reduce cohesion, like racial profiling.



Social cohesion is about collective action, how people deal with each other, whether society is fair, reasonable and inclusive. As society becomes more diverse and fragmented, how do we deal with that?

Groups that have been marginalized should be empowered and involved in institutions and positions of power.

The tools used before—the institutions and the social safety net—may not be available in the future.



Yet the income differential between families is increasing so that some children have excellent early access to technology and early learning opportunities while others have very limited access. At the same time as family and market opportunities are changing, public support for education may not be keeping pace with the growing level of need.

Multiple Forms of Exclusion

High rates of migration and mobility raise the spectre of economic insecurity as well as the probability that informal networks of support from friends, neighbours and the extended family may be weakened. Communities with few long-time residents are less likely to have a network of supportive connections. Cuts to social spending and regional economic failures can cause dislocation. The work of the Canadian Rural Partnership raised questions about the social deficits emerging in rural Canada, which are linked to poverty, illiteracy and higher rural infant mortality. Being at risk of violence and victimization can also lead to social exclusion. Most problematically, many Canadians suffer from multiple forms of exclusion. For example, those who are poor and disabled are more likely to be victimized and to lack access to services when they are. The poor are less likely to use community health care even though their need may be greater. Youth and representatives of community organizations noted that poor communities may lack access to resources such as community spaces, money, housing and a clean environment. Poor children may find it harder to afford education with increases in tuition fees. Federal researchers, youth and front-line workers noted that new data from the National Longitudinal Survey on Children and Youth demonstrates that students are better prepared for school and better able to get along with others when they live in communities with resources such as parks, libraries and preschool programs.

Participants looked at these issues through a social cohesion lens and emphasized the effect of economic exclusion on social exclusion – on participation and connections, and the sense that one belongs to a society.

According to the executive director of a food bank, her clients were unlikely to be active participants and engaged citizens because they were discouraged about the prospects for having any effect on decision making. The challenge is to address marginalization in a way that promotes efficacy, involvement and social capital.

3. Immigration, integration and respect for diversity

At each session, participants emphasized that diversity and immigration are positive elements of Canadian cohesion and identity. However, participants also stressed that inclusion, access and participation for new Canadians cannot be taken for granted given established links between visible minority and immigrant status and economic and social exclusion. There must be active policy responses to ensure successful integration. This, in turn, is essential to ensuring that Canadian society continues to be strengthened by immigration and enthusiastic about diversity.

The social condition of new Canadians, immigrants, visible minorities and other economically disadvantaged communities was identified as an important focus for policy research. Specific issues raised included the overrepresentation of new Canadians and visible minorities among those excluded from equal economic opportunities, the key role of education and training, and the recognition of credentials and degrees from other countries. Participants said that one of Canada's strengths has been the lack of "enclaving" of visible minorities or the poor, but there was concern that this may be changing. Concerns about racism, stereotyping and lack of access were also raised. Some young Canadians said that from their perspective, inequality and discrimination were embedded in society. They saw systemic discrimination in racial profiling by police and the disproportionate number of young black males and Aboriginal people charged with offences. They also criticized the media for playing on insecurities about different cultures or ways of life.

Our demographic future is such that "minorities" will become the majority.... Diversity is not a problem, but the intersection of diversity or minority status with poverty and exclusion is.... Everyone in our diverse society should be able to participate and get involved.

We do not want a monochrome society.

Why tell people the criteria for getting into the country is a Ph.D. and then not let them use it?





Senior executives said:

Improving the socio-economic condition of Aboriginal people is key for social cohesion.

I visited two northern communities with significant Aboriginal populations 50 miles apart. One had no sports activities or signs of community leadership or active parenting. The other was a strong and healthy community with kids participating with their parents and lots going on. How do you foster leadership if it is not evident, when it has been stripped away? Where should that community start?

These young people noted that the word “tolerance” is still sometimes used and that, as others have said, the term suggests the need to “put up with” people rather than the goal of involving and respecting them.

Promoting Bridges and Opportunities

Canada’s cultural and social diversity was identified as a strong point of Canadian society. Many Canadians have multiple attachments based on geography, culture and interests. Those consulted called for respect for diverse cultural, religious, ethnic, linguistic, demographic or ideological identities. The public sphere needs to be populated with a variety of spaces that welcome people from all walks of life and encourage cooperation. Youths put a priority on initiatives that increase Canadians’ opportunities to work together, to know each other, and recognize and validate all our talents and experiences rather than looking for a commonality of view. Part of “bridging” is to ensure that all neighbourhoods and organizations welcome everyone. Promotion of our two official languages remains an important bridge.

4. Capacity building in Aboriginal communities

Participants recognized that the condition of Aboriginal Canadians is an area where social cohesion research would be particularly apt. Government researchers noted that the overall Aboriginal population is becoming much younger than the rest of the Canadian population – a trend that presents challenges as well as opportunities to enhance social cohesion and inclusion for this demographic group. The high percentage of Aboriginal youth under the age of 15, coupled with continued low educational attainments, suggests that some socio-economic conditions may worsen as this group matures and experiences limited access to the labour market.

Many reasons were cited for concern about the participation and sense of efficacy of Aboriginal people.

Those in urban centres face particular challenges. However, participants involved with the Canadian Rural Partnership noted that, as well, social deficits in rural Canada are particularly intense in Aboriginal communities. Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation and the Homelessness Secretariat, among others, are conducting research that points toward poor performance for many Aboriginal people on various social-economic indicators. The overrepresentation of Aboriginal people in the criminal justice system is a case in point, and addressing this problem was identified as a national goal in the last Speech from the Throne. Research is looking at why some Aboriginal communities are faced with crisis levels of violence, while others are relatively safe.

Participants expressed the view that Aboriginal people have a strong interest in capacity building and self-realization. Choices for Aboriginal Canadians to participate in the Canadian economy and society were thought to be limited. One Aboriginal participant noted that Aboriginal peoples sometimes feel that they are “shut down, shut up and shut out.”

Aboriginal participants said they did not want their issues to be subsumed under the issue of multiculturalism; nor did they want to be considered an ethnic minority. Further, they said they would not be comfortable with any conception of social cohesion that suggests it is a search for homogeneity. It is important for all Canadians to accept and listen to non-mainstream perspectives and, in particular, to recognize the major contribution which Aboriginal culture and people have made, and continue to make, to Canadian society. While the issues of Aboriginal people are unique in Canada, they are not consistent across Aboriginal communities. One Aboriginal participant cautioned against assuming that Aboriginal communities are models of social cohesion or that they all share the same point of view. On the contrary, they vary greatly; a better understanding of the dynamics of different Aboriginal communities is needed. Building capacity and promoting leadership through action-oriented research was recommended.

Senior executives said:

We need to distinguish the more positive ways of intervening and identify how we can work well with communities and other levels of government.



We don't have to worry about people walking around with guns.

People have a legitimate lack of trust if they belong to a group that has been the target of discrimination.

Social cohesion is about a just society—what Trudeau stood for.



A great deal of research has already been done in this area, and the focus, those consulted advised, should now be on demonstration projects and pilot projects that involve communities, rather than waiting for new research results before taking action. While knowledge of what works may be incomplete, participants suggested that demonstration initiatives and other work should begin now to allow for learning through practice.

5. Peace, safety and security

The consultations affirmed that these Canadians hold dear the safety, security, peacefulness, civility, and rights that are a mainstay of our quality of life. Peace, peacemaking, safe communities and the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* were all rated as among Canada's top social cohesion strengths by government researchers. These characteristics were identified as central to how we distinguish ourselves from Americans and to our international reputation.

Participants in the youth session underscored that immigrants and visitors frequently mention peace, safety and civility as among Canada's greatest attributes. These participants also stressed that we have long distinguished ourselves from Americans by our higher level of personal safety and security. In particular they noted the lower level of gun ownership and of assaults with weapons in this country. The young people we heard from also reported pride in our history of accommodation and acceptance of diversity. We are not asked to join a "melting pot," they said, but are encouraged to celebrate our differences, confident in the knowledge that rights and rights-based institutions exist to support that freedom. Youth consulted also mentioned the importance they attribute to justice and non-discrimination.

How can we address fear and insecurity through a social cohesion lens?

When looking through a social cohesion lens it is clear that victims of crime and violence, as well as victims of discrimination, are being excluded from full participation in society. As with all our strengths, our peace, safety and security should not be taken for granted. Some groups, such as young black males in Toronto, do not always feel safe when they see police or security forces. They are among those groups in society who do not have a sense of complacency about rights and protections. Others, such as women who rely on restraining orders, may see the police as vital to their security. Not everyone is equally vulnerable or will feel secure under the same conditions.

Existing research on victimization and the fear of victimization tells us that fear is not a straightforward response to risk. Rather, it is a complex cultural phenomenon. To reduce fear and its negative effects, we must understand the sense of vulnerability felt by different groups in society, and these groups' different responses to our security and justice institutions.

The terrorist attack of September 11, 2001 had a dramatic effect on Canadians' sense of peace, safety and security. Conditions we may have previously taken for granted suddenly were seen to warrant attention. These conditions include the freedom to move about as we wish and to participate and to be in public spaces without concern for our physical safety. Physical and emotional security and confidence have become more evident as elements of social cohesion. Canadians of Arabic or Muslim origin, as well as Canadians thought to be Arabic or Muslim, felt vulnerable to the effects of the public's fear. As a result, they need to see bridges that connect them with other Canadians, and evidence of acceptance and inclusion. There is a need to identify the bridges and connections that best address racialization and the divisions exacerbated by anxiety and fear. For visible minorities, indeed for all Canadians, connections, bridges and participation have more significance since September 11, 2001.

Mobilize resources.... Do it differently, by increasing the density of existing networks that foster collaboration and partnerships, reciprocity and mutuality.... Do trans-disciplinary, cross-sector, bridging research. Get good people and build networks.



Inevitably, there will be debates and discussions about the interconnections between social cohesion, security, freedom and justice. The insights from these consultations can enrich discussion and research into the effects of terrorism and fear on participation, bonds and links, equity and access. If we fail to address these issues quickly and appropriately, and if the climate of war and fear persists or re-occurs, there was some concern that it may be difficult to maintain immigration at the level the country needs.



*Take away the roadblocks.
When dissension comes out
about an issue, listen, don't
squash it with riot police.*

Another relatively invisible effect of the terrorist attacks was the redeploying of police and security services. Research may be needed into the impact of this reaction. Another effect has been a realignment of our attitudes towards, and relations with, the United States. Subtle shifts in how Canadians understand and experience security warrant research. The links between this set of social changes and those related to immigration, globalization and North American integration warrant analysis.

6. Information technology, the new economy, globalization and integration

A prevailing theme of the dialogue was the significance of economic transformations on the social sphere. Social impacts, it was noted, result from the increasing globalization of business and growing North American linkages, as well as changes in industrial structures, investments and global markets. Domestic impacts mentioned were changes in the structure of work and social welfare as well as influences on social, cultural and political policies and institutions.

It was noted that impacts were divergent in different regions and urban centres across the country. While some places saw more benefits, others were experiencing a loss of jobs or economic development and associated loss of the working-age population.

Cities, as well as other jurisdictions, were reported to be experiencing increasing pressures to reduce, or at least not raise taxes, which was leading to cuts in social programs and community spaces that provide much of the glue for social cohesion. The flip side of the pressure on cities is rural depopulation with its negative effect on the quality of rural life.

Participants identified the need for constant communication and mobility in a knowledge-based economy and society. High rates of migration and mobility within cities, provinces, the country and internationally are an integral element of globalization and more porous boundaries. People move between jobs, schools and even families more frequently than in the past. Economic and mobility pressures on families should be seen in the context of an ageing population and the mounting pressure for social support from private households and the informal sector.

The Internet

New information and communications technologies, and in particular, the pervasive influence of the Internet, was said to be having a multitude of effects on social relations and equity. On the positive side, it provides new means for participating and connecting with others. New research raises questions about whether people substitute interaction in “cyberspace communities” for face-to-face contact with their neighbours and family or whether virtual contacts augment previous social relations. Concerns were raised about the emergence of a “digital divide” between those who have access and those who do not. Participants also spoke of new questions about who has a voice in the digital age. On the Internet, public safety, e-government, e-commerce, e-politics, and networks all depend on trust and co-operation among people who are strangers. The internet world of virtual reality also raises policy challenges such as how to deal with inappropriate content and contacts made with children as well as other harms and cyber-crimes.

I am heartened to hear so much about the federal government supporting, not replacing or overburdening, the community. The federal government has a strong leadership role to play in social cohesion.



Concerns about International Economic Changes



Participants voiced concern that global competition and integrated markets placed pressures on national, sub-national and civic institutions. They mentioned the growing influence of international bodies and agreements, such as the G8, the International Monetary Fund, the World Trade Organization and the North American Free Trade Agreement as well as multinational corporations and transnational crime. There was concern that putting the economy first could lead to policies that unintentionally hurt our communities or equity. Further, non-governmental organizations and civil society could be left to address social needs without the required infrastructure and resources. Civil society participants urged governments to strive for both economic productivity and social inclusion. Young participants called for government to focus its social cohesion efforts on reducing poverty, homelessness and hunger by investing in affordable housing and ensuring basic needs are met.



Young people, in particular, noted the high level of cynicism among their peers about the effect of globalization on both society and the environment. Young Canadians, they said, are deeply concerned that international trade practices and agreements may threaten the health of the environment and the inclusiveness and well-being of communities.

Youths and front-line workers also felt strongly that the principle of participation means that protest should be met with listening. People should be allowed to empower themselves, and activism and dissent should be permitted. Policy research in this area should pay attention to emerging forms of non-traditional political participation and community, including virtual communities and communities of interest. Participants urged the federal government to work with other levels of government, as well as with community and non-profit organizations, to develop an understanding of the new mechanisms of social cohesion and how to promote them.

New scientific and technological activities, such as genetically modified food and genetic treatments, also raised the fear that some concerns were not being heard. Such social changes could provide opportunities to include citizens and promote participation. However, they also present potential fault lines if public principles and anxieties receive short shrift.

Research Issues



Participants contributed their expertise on policy research and analysis, translating research into policy, and enhancing collaboration with front-line practitioners, community agencies and scholars.

Research Strengths

The research strengths identified during the consultations include high and increasing availability of data as a result of excellent national surveys and many community-based projects. In addition, coordination, as well as horizontal and cross-sectoral work is increasing. This enhances efficiency by reducing the amount of research being done in a vacuum.

Relevant policy research is under way at Statistics Canada, federal social policy departments, universities, centres of excellence, horizontal research projects such as Metropolis, and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC). Connections could be improved with the ongoing community-based research of organizations such as social planning councils, community and non-profit foundations. Other important sources identified are program-based research and that of front-line organizations such as police or community health departments, shelters for the homeless, women's shelters, and food banks.

There is a very good body of knowledge on several of the issues identified, including economic disparity and the causes of moving into and out of poverty. There is community-based as well as national research on the condition of Aboriginal communities, the integration needs of immigrants, and public health needs. Consistent with the recommendations in these consultations, there are studies that allow analysts to understand the connections among different factors such as being a member of a visible minority group and unemployment or the factors contributing to the likelihood of experiencing violent victimization. Synthesis and identification of key findings might be helpful.

In addition, knowledge of the links among community supports, capacity and social objectives, such as early childhood development and resilience for poor families, has been recently acquired. Good longitudinal studies are increasing researchers' confidence in determining the causes of marginalization.

Tightening the links between research and policy is crucial... Often the lack of time means that studies are not known or taken into account [in policy making]. Brokers are needed to monitor developments in research and produce useable products [for policy makers].

We are data rich and analysis poor.

Funding from Treasury Board is “vertically oriented,” with few points and no resources given for collaboration.



At the same time, studies and evaluations of demonstration projects and community projects are helping to identify what works in building community cohesion, leadership and capacity.

Enhancing the effectiveness of horizontal policy research

Participants underlined the need to build research capacity within government and in communities, identify the policy implications of research findings, better connect results found in different sectors, and undertake demonstration projects and synthesizing studies to identify major findings and lessons learned.

Link Research, Policy and Implementation

Senior executives stressed the need to better communicate the policy implications of research findings to policy makers. This would require developing clear, agreed-upon terms and consistency in defining key concepts and linking them to indicators. Another need was to connect concepts and indicators, to ensure that what is measured is meaningful and operational. In this area, we are “data rich and analysis poor.”

Address Resource and Skill Limitations

Senior executives and researchers in government emphasized the need to increase the capacity of policy departments to use research to develop policy options. In their opinion, the greatest need is for careful analysis of existing data. Too often policy is based upon correlations between factors rather than a clear indication that one factor causes another. Longitudinal studies are particularly important for untangling the causes and effects among interconnected conditions. Analytical skills, they said, were in short supply because of earlier cuts to federal government research and a lack of statistical and analytical expertise and experience among university graduates.

Resource limitations in the community and non-governmental sector were perceived as a weakness. Civil society experts noted there were few research institutes in Canada and their government funding was inconsistent from one budget to the next, making it difficult to commit to projects.

Partner with Community and Front-Line Organizations

The federal government was urged to work with other levels of government and community and non-profit organizations to develop an understanding of the mechanisms of social cohesion and how to promote it. Attention should be given to building capacity, identifying best practices, and disseminating results. Participants from civil society said they should be at the table when priorities are set. They asked the government to act as a facilitator, supporter and knowledge broker. Senior executives in the federal government also cautioned against a top-down approach and said that government should support community and citizen initiatives.

Share Knowledge and Link Research with Action

Experts from non-government sectors asked that governments facilitate community capacity building. Accordingly, there should be more efficient partnering with grass-roots organizations. Knowledge sharing and dissemination were seen as important ways to reduce waste by ensuring that agencies build on a base of knowledge rather than “reinvent the wheel.” Co-creation, providing spaces for dialogue, and seconding personnel across sectors were identified as valuable approaches. Priority was placed on using existing knowledge and acting now to help those in need.

Participants strongly favoured action-oriented research approaches that help build community and organizational capacity. They recommended inclusive and participatory processes such as participatory action research. In this way, researchers could both learn from, and help, front-line organizations, such as settlement agencies, which want to be more involved in research but do not have the resources to do so.

The government already conducts so many studies—you should use what has already been done and synthesize the results.



Senior executives said:

There is an important continuum between research, policy and delivery. It is not enough to come up with the right research questions and the right policy levers. We too often ignore the element of delivery and implementation; we need to think about the links to delivery. Implementation is important. Do demonstration initiatives; work on involving communities in finding solutions.

We need practices that promote a sense of belonging, usefulness and capacity for everyone.



Youth participants suggested that representation was key to inclusion. They recommended a consultative, holistic approach to empowering marginalized people through engagement and connecting clients with issues. They thought government research and policies should be aligned with the needs and priorities of the people they serve, and the people most affected by the issues should establish the priorities and be part of the solution.

Conclusion



The social cohesion consultations with experts and practitioners identified broad agreement about the elements of social cohesion and the issues of concern. Participants said that a cohesive society is an inclusive society with a web of bonds and connections facilitating participation. They further said that such a society requires public spaces, institutions, and programs that act as bridges across distance and difference. The concrete and measurable elements of social cohesion and related social policy issues identified, provide a blueprint that make it possible to track trends in the relevant social conditions and assess how we are doing in building the inclusive Canadian society we want.

Several social conditions were identified as central to understanding Canada's future social cohesion challenges. These rapidly evolving areas warrant policy research and action:

- participation, citizenship, and governance;
- income distribution, equity, inclusion, and access;
- immigration, integration, and respect for all forms of diversity;
- capacity building in Aboriginal communities;
- peace, safety, and security; and
- information technology, the new economy, globalization and integration.

The consultative process engaged partners across government, academia and community organizations. The framework proposed herein calls for enhanced connections between policy research and front-line practices in this area. By identifying how community-based and front-line agencies are building social cohesion from the ground up, policy makers can better understand how to link those initiatives with those which originate with government in order to enhance capacity. These consultations provide a blueprint or shared understanding for departments to come together to address their policy research needs as well as a source of advice on research approaches and potential collaborators across the three sectors.

Appendix



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