

And No One Heard:

**Regional Horizontal Management and Government Silos
in the Implementation of the Strategic Social Plan
for Newfoundland and Labrador**

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with

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Values Added Community University Research Alliance (CURA)

Values Added CURA is a partnership of researchers from the Community Services Council Newfoundland and Labrador (CSC) and Memorial University of Newfoundland (MUN). *Values Added* CURA was designed to explore a new approach to social development undertaken by the provincial government, beginning in 1998 with the release of *People, Partners and Prosperity: A Strategic Social Plan for Newfoundland and Labrador* (SSP).

The SSP endorsed the concepts of place-based social and economic development, prevention and early intervention, and measuring the effectiveness of government programs to increase the well-being of people and communities. After the release of the Plan, a shift in style began to occur, based on greater collaboration and increased partnerships involving communities, voluntary organizations and the various levels of government, and leading to some policy formulation and changes to program design and delivery. This produced many challenges for government as well as for stakeholders in community and regional development.

Values Added CURA has undertaken research on processes stemming from the implementation of the SSP, from the perspectives of academic learning, community-based planning and policy development. With the advent of a new provincial administration, a different set of structures has been put into place under the auspices of the Rural Secretariat, creating further opportunities for research.

Values Added CURA has created an innovative partnership linking academic and community-based research, providing an avenue for academic research to inform public policy, and allowing community-based research to be placed in an academic domain. *Values-Added* CURA aims to

- Establish infrastructure to marry features of academic and applied research
- Create a framework for research, information sharing and knowledge mobilization
- Train students and recent graduates
- Analyze concepts related to collaborative, placed-based approaches to social development.

Community Services Council Newfoundland and Labrador

The Community Services Council is an independent voluntary organization dedicated to promoting social and economic well-being. CSC's mission is to encourage volunteerism and citizen engagement, promote the integration of social and economic development and provide leadership in shaping public policy. It achieves these goals by

- Advancing the voluntary sector
- Conducting leading edge research
- Pioneering innovative programs and services
- Building bridges and cultivating collaboration.

The CSC played a role in the development of the SSP from its conceptualization to the present.

- 1980s and 1990s – CSC promoted the need for a framework for social policy development.
- 1993 – the Premier established a Strategic Planning Group chaired by his chief of staff, bringing together deputy ministers from numerous departments and government agencies to work on the development of a social plan. The CEO of the Community Services Council was the only non government-affiliated representative on the deputies' committee.
- 1996/97 – Government appointed the Social Policy Advisory Committee (SPAC), a non-governmental group led by the CEO of CSC, to convene public dialogue with key organizations and the general public, and make recommendations to government for the development of a social plan.
- 1997 – SPAC submitted a report, *Investing in People and Communities: A Framework for Social Development*, which provided the foundation for the SSP.
- 1998 – *People, Partners and Prosperity: A Strategic Social Plan for Newfoundland and Labrador* released by the Provincial Government.
- 2002 – CSC and MUN began examining new approaches to social development through CURA.
- 2005 – CSC's CEO was appointed a member of the Provincial Council of the Rural Secretariat.

INTRODUCTION

People, Partners and Prosperity: A Strategic Social Plan for Newfoundland and Labrador provided a framework for a shift in focus from remedial social programs for individuals to “place-based” social development. Social programs, investments and initiatives were to be matched to community and regional social and economic needs. Public services were to move from “treating individual problems to addressing the underlying causes of those problems by considering people’s needs in the context of their communities and their socio-economic environment.”¹ The SSP was to simultaneously support people, strengthen communities and regions, and enhance opportunities for economic development.

Within this new framework, the SSP employed three inter-related strategies:

- Building on community and regional strengths
- Integrating social and economic development
- Investing in people.²

Multi-Sectoral Partnerships in the Strategic Social Plan

To implement these new directions in social development, the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador committed to building partnerships among existing regional boards. These included Health Institutions Boards, Health and Community Services Boards, School Boards and Regional Economic Development Boards. The regional partnership approach was also meant to accommodate other community partners such as municipalities, voluntary sector, community-based groups, and provincial and federal government direct service providers.³

These partnerships became what we now refer to as the Strategic Social Plan Regional Steering Committees (SSP Committees, for short). They were formed in six regions of the province: Labrador, Western, Central, Eastern, Avalon and Northeast Avalon. They were to apply collaborative, flexible, place-based strategies to

- The delivery of government services to better meet the needs of people and communities
- The coordination of initiatives and integration of social and economic investments
- The articulation of the needs of regions to government for policy and program development purposes.

The provincial government expected these regional Committees to “form a strategic link between government and community. They have been established to ensure that public policies, programs and services are responsive to local conditions while remaining consistent with overall provincial

¹ *People, Partners and Prosperity: A Strategic Social Plan for Newfoundland and Labrador*, 1998, p. 8.

² Ibid. p. 9.

³ Ibid. p. 17.

policy directions.”⁴ Regional Committees were also to “provide a base from which to support local efforts and recognize local leadership.”⁵

Each region was to develop an SSP implementation strategy that reflected regional priorities.⁶ The SSP Committees were expected to adhere to all the goals, objectives and actions of the SSP.

Horizontal Management Approach

The Strategic Social Plan (SSP) called for more coordination and integration within government through the development of partnerships among departments, in regions and with the voluntary, community-based sector. It aimed to enhance the coherence of policies so that one department was not undermining the efforts of another and to ensure that voluntary, community-based organizations, which often knew the needs of particular population groups, regions and communities, were able to inform public policy and program development to make it more responsive to people and places.

In addition, the SSP called for coordinated service delivery. It aimed to enable holistic, client-centred approaches, emphasizing prevention and early intervention, integrated across departments and agencies, and involving the voluntary, community-based sector. This vision was very different from the traditional remedial model, rigid programs, and separate departmental jurisdictions. Services were to be delivered within the context of the needs of clients and the places in which they lived. Interventions and investments in people were to be tied to social and economic development efforts in regions and communities or localities (clusters of communities). This could be considered a horizontal equity issue; program flexibility was required to allow responses to fit the needs of people in different places and different circumstances.

Under the auspices of the SSP, Regional Steering Committees were established to undertake this new way of doing business. The SSP Committees were comprised of representatives of service delivery agencies such as health boards, school boards, regional government offices and postsecondary institutions, as well as municipalities, economic development boards and voluntary, community-based organizations. They were meant to work together to:

- Deliver coordinated, client-centred services
- Adapt or implement new programs to fill unmet needs
- Advise government on the policy changes required to better address issues in the region and communities.

The regional, horizontal model included both the public and voluntary sectors and many domains (health, education, employment, etc.) to undertake a new method of service delivery. Although remedial approaches continued to be required for those who were disadvantaged, community development was a key component of the SSP. A few SSP Committee member organizations,

⁴ Ibid. p. 17.

⁵ Ibid. p. 18.

⁶ Ibid. p. 32.

such as Regional Economic Development Boards, were by nature focused on development, but most of the member organizations were delivery agents in areas such as health, education, employment, income support, etc. These agencies were a critical aspect of the regional horizontal management model being espoused by the SSP, as they controlled most of the government expenditures that could form the potential investments in people and communities. Together they were meant to reach down into communities to invest their resources and deliver their services in a coordinated, client-focused manner that was relevant to the particular circumstances in communities.

Under the SSP, the upper levels of Government itself also made a commitment to a new way of working, with a focus on "...developing links among the many departments and agencies...[to] ...build on the efforts of front-line, public sector professionals who have promoted the importance of holistic and multi disciplinary approaches."⁷ Through a special Cabinet Committee, mirrored by a Deputy Ministers' Committee, and through interdepartmental partnerships, Government was to hear and understand the needs of regions and communities to aid in the design and regional delivery of public services. Coordination, integration, harmonization, and strengthening capacity within regions to support community action were key concepts that defined the role of Government in the implementation of the Strategic Social Plan.

It is this horizontal management aspect of the SSP, both in the regions and at the central level of Government, that we explore in this paper. We will look in depth at how one Committee operated and the challenges of linking with head office of Government.

Methodology

Values-Added Community-University Research Alliance (CURA) completed a case study on one Regional SSP Steering Committee through interviews with 10 Committee members, two past members, and the Regional Planner, and validated the research through interviews with three members of a second Committee and the Regional Planner. Interviews were conducted by telephone, with the exception of two with past members that were conducted face-to-face. They were open-ended and ranged in length from 1.5 hours to 3.5 hours.

A list of interview questions can be found in Appendix A.

SSP Committee Operations: Partnerships and Leadership

The SSP Committees were established to undertake a regional leadership role. As delivery agents, however, their leadership seemed to be confined to meeting needs through the coordinated delivery of existing programs and services and the development of some new programs in the region. Most of the members of the SSP Committee interviewed felt the leadership of the Committee was effective. The foundation of this leadership was the members of the Committee as most were leaders in their own organizations.

⁷ Ibid. p. 16.

Many members of the SSP Committee, however, thought that partnerships were even more important than leadership. This is not surprising given the coordinated and client-centred, holistic service requirements of the SSP. For the SSP Committee to develop regional partnerships, it was essential that the relationships among the Committee members be sound, that they work together and not compete. Some stated that the “process works like magic”. Members described the Committee as:

- Collaborative
- Cohesive
- Inclusive
- Mutually supportive
- Open
- Tolerant
- Respectful
- Committed

Although integrated and coordinated approaches had not been discussed in a formal way at the SSP Committee, a few members agreed that the Committee took a coordinated approach to its work. As one member said, “Pretty much everything the SSP Committee does has been through a coordinated approach. We have done things at a sub-committee level collectively. For example, strategic partnerships are part of our [member organization’s] mandate and the SSP Committee helps us to achieve our mandate.” It was suggested by two members that the SSP Committee is a different way of doing business from years ago.

Several members felt that the process had continuity, an ability to resolve differences, good governance, authority from the status of its members, and good communications. Several said that members were committed to the region and its communities as well as to the work of the SSP Committee.

Committee Priorities

Most of the SSP Committee members interviewed indicated that they were guided by the vision and principles of the SSP. However, many also said the Committee set its own priorities. As one member said, “We identified our priorities, and as long as they fit with the SSP guidelines... we would continue on and do our own thing.” The priorities became the main guide for the work of the SSP Steering Committees. One committee member felt that the Planner kept the work of the SSP Committee in-line with SSP goals by reminding the committee members to stay on track.

Only three strategies emerged consistently when Committee members were asked about the specific components of the SSP that the Steering Committee adhered to. The most common responses were:

Partnerships. “The collaborative partnership approach is important – we have identified common areas of interest and brought people together to tackle issues.”

Evidence-based decision-making. “We follow strictly on evidence-based decisions.” This was reportedly done through reports such as *From the Ground Up*, community consultations and experiences of members ‘on the ground’.

Planning. The Committee had had three planning sessions to develop priorities. This involved looking at the challenges in the region, prioritizing those challenges, and having a process in place to address them. Committee members said, “We take a holistic approach to social planning.”

The priorities were based mainly on a consensus of the views of SSP members themselves. They also took into consideration the community consultations and workshops held throughout the region, as well as research, data from the Community Accounts, and various reports prepared on the region. The priorities of the case study Committee were: recreation, health and wellness, human development, including human resource development and recruitment and retention of professionals, and community safety and security.

Almost all the members felt that the priorities guided their actions. A few felt that some of the priorities had not advanced as far as they should have but indicated that this may have been because the issues were broad and very challenging, and the initiatives undertaken were meant to achieve tangible results. In addition, the Committee often had to find outside funding to carry out its initiatives.

SSP Committee Resources

Most Committee members interviewed felt that, given the budgetary restrictions of government, the Committee had sufficient tools and resources to achieve its mandate, although some felt more resources would have been helpful. The Committee appeared to have some of the authority that was required, although some members thought more authority was needed. Most felt they had access to adequate levels of expertise – from the Committee members themselves, within member organizations and through consultants contracted when necessary, though some members identified several areas where more expertise was needed: aboriginal and cultural issues, community development, integrated social and economic development and how to influence public policy. Members were also of the opinion that there was ample access to information through the Community Accounts and regional research reports.

Operations within SSP Committee Member Organizations

Not only did the SSP expect that government departments, boards, institutions and other key organizations would work together, but each individual member organization was to be influenced by the SSP Committee in the way it carried out its own work. Our findings indicate that this was by no means fully realized.

Many of the Committee members interviewed indicated that the priorities identified by the Committee were in line with those of their organization. This could be because the

organizational priorities of member organizations became the Committee priorities. Several members felt that the SSP Committee was expected to adopt their organization's priorities rather than the reverse. As one member stated, "Our organization has its own mission statement, objectives, and strategic plan and we have identified our own goals. We would like to think that the priorities identified by the SSP Committee are in line with the priorities of our organization. If they were not the same then there would be something wrong." Some felt there was reciprocity among member organizations, "As an organization, we have shared with SSP, we have adopted some suggestions from SSP. We certainly have responded to the initiatives and recommendations of SSP, just as the SSP has responded to our recommendations. This to-and-fro relationship is good."

One SSP strategy that all the partner organizations agreed they had adopted was evidence-based decision-making. Agencies had begun to use evidence better. Program evaluation was considered more important than it used to be. Organizations were looking at root causes, and all partners were more interested in research and gathering evidence.

A few non-government member organizations significantly changed the way they operated. For example, the Regional Economic Development Boards began to concentrate on linking social and economic development, compared to their mainly economic focus in the past. The SSP Committee, however, had little involvement in economic development. One of the SSP objectives was for the Committees to build their plans on the economic plans of the development organizations in the regions. This appears not to have happened in any formal or explicit manner.

Other quasi-government member organizations (e.g. health and school boards) often undertook the implementation of SSP Committee initiatives, for example, cancer and AIDS prevention programs developed by the SSP Committee were delivered by the regional health board through their public health nurses.

Regional offices of government departments seemed to change their way of doing business the least. However, these members did consider what resources they and others had to bring to the table. In one instance, several departments and boards were considering joint contributions for one of the member organizations to provide career counseling. This was in the works shortly before the SSP Committee was disbanded.

Regardless of the absence of fully implemented horizontal management, the benefits of such a model were espoused. One member said, "We are all serving one client, the issues of that client are issues for all departments. Often there is a common theme and common approach." It was felt by members that when organizations became involved in the SSP Committee process, everyone became more open to collaboration. There was more flexibility to make a joint effort, to work together to make communities better.

Several other government and quasi-government members felt that their organization's ability to re-profile activities in a horizontal management way was difficult for a number of reasons:

- Budgetary restrictions and limited resources of boards and departments hampered their ability to contribute to the SSP Committee process. It was suggested that regional resources were needed to implement an integrated / coordinated model.
- Government organizations had a set of programs to deliver that had little flexibility, which restricted the organization from participating fully.
- Some member organizations had a community focus rather than a regional one and therefore had difficulty relating to the priorities. It was suggested that it was difficult for people to understand the impact regional priorities would have on their communities.
- Sometimes priorities of government organizations pit one community against another. For example, a decision by government to invest in an economic opportunity in one community rather than another may cause resentments.
- Collaboration is a slow process.

It was also suggested that the role of the SSP Committee could be expanded from that of facilitation to one of coordination.

Relationships between Regions and Head Office of Government

Under SSP implementation, changes were meant to occur to relationships between head office of Government and the regions. Despite the fact that the Regional Committees had regular communications with the SSP Office, which was housed in Executive Council, traditional ways of relating to Government prevailed:

- Committee members mainly related to Government through the departments responsible for their agencies or regional offices (e.g. regional Health Board members related to the Department of Health and Community Services, School Boards to the Department of Education).
- One SSP Committee member was from a department that had a mandate to represent the region and this department reported to Executive Council and advised Cabinet on regional issues directly through its Minister.

Although regionally, SSP Committee priorities had become part of the planning of some member organizations, such as Human Resources and Employment and Health Boards for example, they were not incorporated into Government head office priorities. Members of the Committee generally felt that regional input to Government by the SSP Committee was important, but few thought this input was sought or provided. Government did not consult on its policy decisions directly with the SSP Committee. The main way consultation occurred was through the Regional Planner, who sometimes brought to the Committee issues of interest to government, or informed the Committee after decisions had been made. Some felt that the lack of consultation hurt the credibility of the SSP Committee within the region.

Members suggested that for the SSP Committee to effectively influence policy, a mechanism was required in Government to manage regional advice. In addition, the SSP Committee did not have the authority it needed to advise. It was suggested that legislation would have given the Committee this authority. It was also suggested that public servants on the SSP Committee may

have preferred an informal approach to advising Government on policy. Members also suggested that they could advise on policy through written correspondence, by channeling input through individual government departments, or by Government consultation with the Committee.

The Regional SSP Committees were to relate to Government through what had been the SSP Office (and by then had changed its name to the Rural Secretariat, though the extent and nature of the new structure was not yet outlined). About half the members felt the relationship between the Committee and the SSP Office (SSPO) was a good one. Staff from the SSPO, such as the Assistant Deputy Minister and the Manager of the Regional Planners, attended SSP Committee meetings. A member of the Executive of Government sat on each SSP Committee. Chairpersons of all the Committees regularly met, together with the SSPO. The Committee also related to the SSPO through the Regional Planner who was paid by Government but took direction from and reported to the SSP Committee. A couple of members felt they did not need the SSPO to do regional work, and one said that direction from the SSPO was not always welcome. There were also some concerns about the change to Rural Secretariat. Relationships seemed to be deteriorating and there was confusion about the future of the Committee.

Few SSP Committee member organizations had played a significant role in policy development before the implementation of the SSP. Although the SSP had defined a role for the SSP Committee to advise on policy, this component of the Plan remained unrealized. It appears that this was, in part, because of the traditional service delivery role of member organizations, and in part because government had not established a mechanism to hear and respond to their “place-based” policy advice.

Operations within Head Office of Government

In promoting a horizontal management approach in Government, the SSP was advocating a development model of social policy, program and service planning. This was meant to increase the likelihood that policies would be adaptable to better serve regions and that budgets and programs would be adaptable to meet local needs, thus achieving better outcomes for people and communities.

The Provincial Government, rather than implementing a horizontal management model, continued to work in a hierarchical silo system in its head office in St. John’s. By silos we mean government’s standard way of working in departments organized by domains of interest such as health, justice, education, human resources and employment. SSP Committees in regions, however, had begun to move to a horizontal management style. Regional government departments, boards (quasi-government agencies), and other organizations delivering programs and carrying out social development activities were coordinating their efforts in some areas and implementing new initiatives together.

While the SSP Office was the mechanism that was expected bring place-based issues to Government, its hands were tied by the lack of a horizontal management structure in head office. It is difficult to determine the root of this problem. Leadership for SSP implementation was the responsibility of the SSP Office, so one might ask if the SSP Office neglected to undertake

efforts to make the new way of working a reality, or if the complexity of such a task was overwhelming (head office restructuring to a fully horizontal management style would have been a massive undertaking), or if there was resistance by the Executive of Government. There is some evidence that it may have been a combination of all factors. Regardless of the reason, Government was not organized in a manner to hear or respond to issues and requests flowed to the SSP Office by Regional Planners and / or SSP Steering Committees.

Head office departments continued to do their business in the traditional way with only minor efforts to integrate approaches across departments. When integrated approaches did occur it was generally on blanket policy development rather than on responses to regional needs and initiatives. Little action was taken on requests for flexible, adapted and / or new programs and interventions, partly because a horizontal mechanism to hear and understand a place-based request was absent. Furthermore, even if head office of Government could hear the request, its capacity to respond in an integrated place-based manner was minimal.

On one hand, the silos that remained in Government proved to be barriers, but on the other, this lack of horizontality within Government allowed the SSP Committees a freedom they might not have had otherwise. A mechanism within Government may have tried to manage or block efforts of the Committees. An integrated mechanism to respond to place-based issues could have given government more control over local decision-making, which was a fundamental underpinning of the SSP. Without a mechanism to interact with SSP Committees, it was more difficult for the Executive to reject the decisions of the Committees, even though these decisions may have had an impact on several departments. As one member said, “There is strength in numbers.”

Conditions to Meet Regional Goals

SSP Committee members did feel that some of the conditions to assist them in meeting regional goals were established by government. Many felt that important elements and support were provided, mainly through the SSP Office:

- Commitment to SSP goals and values
- Establishment of the SSP implementation process and Steering Committees
- Structure, resources and operational funds for SSP Committee
- Support and information from SSP Office
- Willingness of Government to adjust some regulations and procedures
- Advice to SSP Committee
- Guide to process from a provincial perspective
- Committee members were encouraged to put aside their individual agendas.

Nevertheless, Committee members clearly felt that Government did not establish all the conditions to meet regional needs. Members suggested a range of things Government should have done to better enable the achievement of regional goals and objectives:

- Articulated the new approach more clearly

- Reduced program rules and provided flexibility to be responsive to creative solutions in regions
- Consulted and shared decision-making
- Used the same model in government as in the SSP Committees
- Matched government policies to needs in regions
- Provided more authority to regional SSP Committees
- Provided special funding to support SSP Committee initiatives
- Coordinated the merger of social and economic development
- Influenced government departments better through the SSP Office
- Reviewed membership on SSP Committee regularly to determine if the right members were included
- Valued regional input and regional development
- Been more inclusive and open
- Been more willing to change.

Other barriers to the success of the SSP Committee mentioned by those interviewed were: inconsistent engagement of Aboriginal groups, change in Government and shift away from the principles of the SSP, uncertain mandate for the SSP Committee, large geography and travel costs, vagueness of the SSP, too many government departments on the Committee, communities at different stages of development, and too few meetings.

Several members talked about strengths of the process:

- The SSP Committee had more strength than organizations would have alone.
- The SSP Committee enabled the bureaucracy in regions to engage communities, which was difficult prior to its establishment.
- Barriers are reduced when organizations work together.
- The SSP Committee was to some extent able to seek flexibility in program delivery to be responsive to regional needs, often difficult to do in individual organizations.
- The SSP Committee created more awareness among agencies, departments and organizations of the goals, programs and initiatives of each.

Conclusion

There is little doubt that the SSP Committees hit a “brick wall” when they attempted interactions of an advisory nature with Government. Equally, the lack of a horizontal management structure in government thwarted the efforts of the SSP Office. The region studied was even more equipped to provide horizontal advice to Government as it had a viable alternative to approaching Government through a place-based department, which represented the issues of the region. Nevertheless, in many cases the SSP Committee still resorted to approaching Government through its silos. It should also be pointed out that some member organizations, mainly representatives of regional government offices, thought that this was the appropriate way to interact with Government. It seems some preferred the traditional patterns of partnership and government relationships.

It is unclear whether a horizontal management approach within the head office of Government would have strengthened the regional SSP Steering Committee process. There is some evidence that a mirrored approach may have weakened the effectiveness of the SSP Committee. Conversely, a horizontal approach based on an equal partnership with SSP Committees might have made for better decision-making by Government, making policy and program development more relevant and effective for regions and communities.

While the implementation of the SSP through regional horizontal structures was an interesting public management experiment, its half-hearted execution provided evidence of some success in only one aspect of the process. Most of those involved on the SSP Committee studied felt the process was very successful at the regional level, but this may have been different had a new management structure in Government's head office been implemented. The SSP had suggested that horizontal management at both levels might strengthen the process. Our results lead us to question that conclusion or, at the very least, to suspect that more conditions than horizontal management structures should have been established for meaningful partnerships with regions to be realized.