Everybody Wanted It:

Collaboration between the Voluntary, Community-based Sector and the Regional Steering Committees of the Strategic Social Plan for Newfoundland and Labrador

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with
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Map 1 Former Strategic Social Plan Regions

Strategic Social Plan Regions
Newfoundland & Labrador

Legend
- Northeast Avalon
- Avalon
- Eastern
- Central
- Cormack - Grenfell
- Labrador
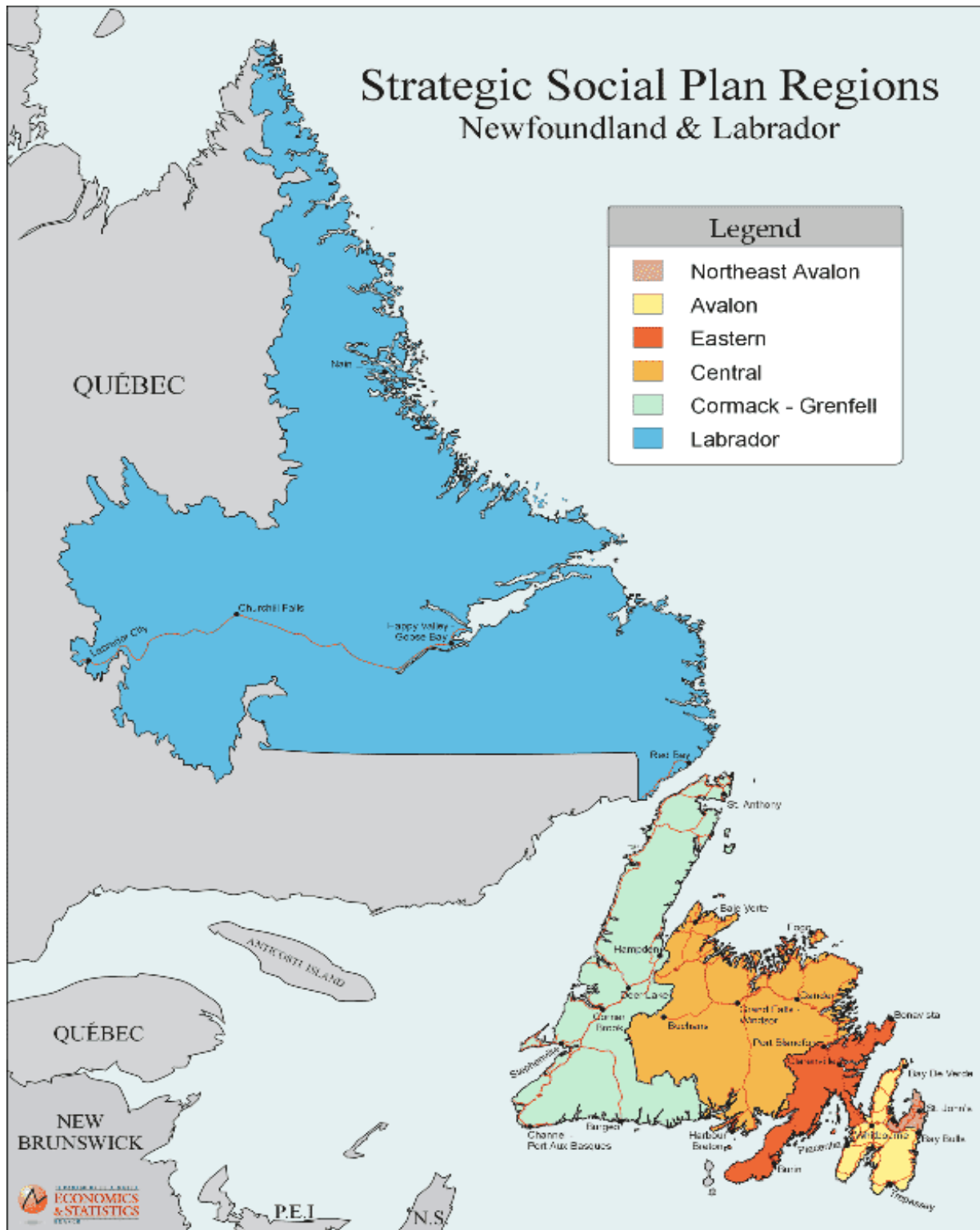
Values Added Community University Research Alliance (CURA)

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.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Strategic Social Plan (SSP) for Newfoundland and Labrador articulated a role for the voluntary, community-based sector in social development that the sector had long known was essential in achieving community and population well-being. The SSP Regional Steering Committees were to be key in fostering regional partnerships and linkages between the community and government, so were vital to the *Values Added* CURA research. The work reported here had the following goals:

- To determine the voluntary sector's engagement in regional SSP multi-sectoral partnerships
- To identify opportunities and barriers in regional, multi-sectoral partnerships
- To explore collaborative models for the voluntary, community-based sector to become involved in a partnership approach to policy dialogue, program design and service delivery
- To investigate citizen engagement in community development within the SSP framework.

Methodology

The research was undertaken in the fall of 2004 when the Regional SSP Steering Committees had been fully operational for more than 5 years. The methodology had several components: SSP Steering Committee interviews, community-based sector interviews and focus groups, and interviews with members of two Leadership Teams.

Findings

Steering Committee members agreed that the concept of involving the voluntary, community-based sector as a partner was sound, and it was suggested that community leaders are the best people to ask about problems and solutions. Many leaders in communities are engaged through voluntary, community-based organizations through which they represent community interests. But neither community groups nor community leaders had a strong grasp of the SSP or the role of the Regional Committee, so there was limited input from communities into SSP Committee processes, even though the SSP was designed to enable place-based development.

Lack of Involvement of Community-Based Sector Attempts to engage community groups were mostly passive or indirect, e.g., notifying the public of events or inviting organizations to attend SSP Committee meetings. Of 27 community groups screened for an interview, 24 had heard of the SSP, 13 had heard of the SSP Committee, and only eight had enough involvement with the Committee to be able to complete an interview. Most of these eight were aware (mainly through the Regional Planner) of some of the Committee priorities and felt these were relevant. The four aspects of the SSP that organizational representatives felt were most important were:

- Encouraging social and economic development to increase well-being
- Prevention and early intervention
- Partnerships with communities and organizations
- Reducing duplication of services and filling gaps in communities.

Groups said they themselves were working towards results in these general priority areas.

Lack of Citizen Involvement Citizens were not very engaged in the SSP implementation process. It was suggested that greater public profile was required. It was felt that citizen engagement is mainly achieved through community-based groups, but the involvement of these groups was minimal. Although the SSP Committees organized workshops, town hall meetings and other forums, the only formal structures established for citizen engagement were two Leadership Teams organized and supported in one region to undertake broad-based planning and implementation of initiatives for a group of communities in two local areas. But even they had no membership on the SSP Committee and no formal input into regional decision-making.

Service Provider – Client Relationship Involvement of community-based organizations was primarily through the Regional Planners, who helped groups in several ways to better carry out their individual mandates. The Planners sometimes became involved on the boards of organizations; they helped groups access financial support for broad voluntary sector initiatives such as workshops and training sessions; and they provided other help and advice. Relationships between SSP Committees and the voluntary sector could be characterized as a service provider – client relationship, rather than a partnership.

Impact of SSP Committees Most groups said the SSP Committee had made a difference.

- There was more information available.
- Organizations were invited to participate in some events and processes.
- Representatives of a couple of voluntary, community-based groups sat on the Committee, some sat on sub-committees, so partnerships were developed with these.
- Training and funding were provided that groups would not normally be able to access.
- The SSP Committee moved some new initiatives forward.
- The Regional Planner was a knowledgeable and helpful leader who communicated, engaged communities, drew on the resources of people and overcame territorialism.
- Turf protection was reduced through cooperation and groups were brought together to look at the region as a whole.
- There were new, innovative ways of thinking and groups working together at a community level; coordination occurred at this level with the Planner's assistance.
- Much of the leadership in the region was on the SSP Committee.

Linking with Government

Organizations interviewed had very few expectations about the purpose of a relationship with the SSP Steering Committee, so did not feel any sense of loss at not being involved, nor express any pressing desire to become more involved. However, this apparent lack of interest could be attributed to a lack of information. When voluntary organizations in the focus groups were provided with an overview of the role defined for them in the SSP, they did express interest in becoming involved and began to address the issues restraining their involvement and discussing models to enhance their ability to become engaged. Participants often spoke about the engagement of their voluntary groups and their communities interchangeably, and the broader issue of community survival was a recurring theme. They exhibited an eagerness to collaborate and find new ways of working for the greater good of their communities. Their thinking and

comments about the role and issues of the voluntary sector were very much rooted in this place-based perspective.

It was stated that the SSP Committee would not be effective in addressing community and regional issues until it found a way to involve the people and groups at the grassroots level. The Strategic Social Plan recognized that there would be a need to build capacity of the sector for it to play a significant role in regional social and economic development. When participants began to envision a model that would facilitate more meaningful engagement of voluntary, community-based groups with the SSP Committee, they talked about a multifaceted model that could also help to address some of these commonly shared capacity issues.

Good Ideas Don't Happen for Good Reasons

It is obvious from this research that the SSP Committees and the voluntary, community-based sector were not linked to one another by any formal mechanism that allowed the sector to have broad-based input into regional development. The voluntary sector was in itself not organized in a way that allowed for straightforward collaboration to happen. Without such structures, it was simpler to involve individual groups one at a time as particular issues arose.

The SSP implementation structure facilitated horizontal linkages among regional staff of government departments and quasi-government agencies, enabling them to take a more holistic approach to service delivery. However, the policy input, program planning and service delivery role envisioned in the Plan for communities themselves through the voluntary sector and citizens did not occur in any cohesive or extensive manner. This aspect of the SSP was not, and could not, be implemented in the five-year life of the Regional Steering Committees for many reasons:

- The sector's lack of knowledge of SSP processes and the role laid out for it
- The silo nature of the voluntary sector itself
- Lack of community capacity to build bridges across the silos
- The complexity of developing effective linkages
- Geography and travel costs
- Difficulty to understand the impact regional priorities would have on communities
- Competition and resentments amongst communities around government investments
- Time and resources to overcome these barriers.

Even if all of these challenges could have been met, there remained the fact that the vertical link to the upper levels of government was missing. There was no mechanism in government to manage regional advice. The SSP Committee had little direct input on public policies, programs and services to make them more responsive to regional conditions. The SSP called for partnerships with citizens and the voluntary, community-based sector to jointly undertake social and economic development – a good idea that did not happen for good reasons.

THE STRATEGIC SOCIAL PLAN FRAMEWORK

The Strategic Social Plan 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 policy directions."[4] Regional Committees were also to "provide a base from which to support local efforts and recognize local leadership."[5]

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

[2] Ibid. p. 9.

[3] Ibid. p. 17.

[4] Ibid. p. 17.

[5] Ibid. p. 18.

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.

SSP Defined Role of Voluntary, Community-based Organizations

The SSP required "broad participation at the community level. It will need to develop the capacity of communities to *act* in ways that support the overall objectives of the Plan."[7] The SSP also stated that one of the primary goals of building strong regional level partnerships was to develop the capacity for *building and supporting* local community involvement and action. The SSP Committees were to partner with the community-based sector to enable:

- Planning for integrated social and economic development
- Implementation of regional prevention strategies on a local basis
- Provision of voluntary services on a coordinated, client-centred basis
- Contracting with government to provide client services on behalf of government, where appropriate
- Employment opportunities in the sector to deliver services, implement programs and carry out social and economic development work.[8]

The SSP went on to state that to effectively participate in the SSP, "Leadership skills must be strengthened in localities where the community-based sector is underdeveloped."[9]

Examining the New Collaborative Approach

The Regional Steering Committees were the key building blocks in fostering regional partnerships and linkages between the community and government. Thus, they were vital to our examination of the construct and value of partnerships and collaborations emanating from the SSP. The involvement of multi-sectoral groups in public administration has expanded in recent years, in Newfoundland and Labrador and elsewhere, and it behoves us to explore their strengths and weaknesses, successes and failures.

The work reported here had the following goals:

- To determine the voluntary sector's engagement in regional SSP multi-sectoral partnerships
- To identify opportunities and barriers in regional, multi-sectoral partnerships
- To explore collaborative models for the voluntary, community-based sector to become involved in a partnership approach to policy dialogue, program design and service delivery
- To investigate citizen engagement in community development within the SSP framework.

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[6] Ibid. p. 32.
[7] Ibid. p. 18.
[8] Ibid. p. 18.
[9] Ibid. p. 18.

The research was undertaken in the fall of 2004 when the Regional SSP Steering Committees had been fully operational for more than 5 years, but unbeknownst to them were approaching the end of their existence, as a new government was redesigning the regional structures under a newly created entity – the Rural Secretariat.

METHODOLOGY

The research methodology had several components.

SSP Steering Committee Interviews

Members of two regional SSP Steering Committees were interviewed. Interviews were open-ended and conducted by telephone, with the exception of two that were face-to-face. They ranged from 1.5 to 3.5 hours.

The SSP Steering Committee in one region had forty local members plus two staff from the Rural Secretariat and one St. John's based Assistant Deputy Minister. Half were alternates and had minimal involvement with the SSP Committee, and two were new members. Interviews were conducted with ten SSP Committee members, the Regional Planner and two past members of the SSP Steering Committee.

In the second region, fewer interviews were conducted with three SSP Committee members and the Regional Planner to verify results across regions.

Voluntary, Community-based Sector Interviews

In one SSP region of the province, interviews were carried out with eight voluntary, community-based organizations. There are more than 400 groups listed for the region in CSC's provincial directory of non-profits. A shortlist of 56 groups was selected, to represent all areas of the region and different population groups, with the following results:

- 27 organizations of 56 were contacted and screened.
- 29 were not screened, mainly because they were unable to be contacted.
- 14 of the 27 organizations had no knowledge of the SSP Steering Committee.
- 17 of the 27 knew some of the members of the Committee that were mentioned to them.
- Of the 13 that had knowledge of the SSP Steering Committee, only 8 could be interviewed, as the others had too little involvement with the Committee to answer all the questions.

Voluntary, Community-based Sector Focus Groups

Focus groups were held in 3 communities, chosen to ensure good geographical coverage of one SSP region. Potential participants were drawn from CSC's provincial directory. Organizations were targeted that researchers thought were likely to have interest in the SSP implementation process and in social and economic policy and planning.

Representatives of organizations were contacted by telephone and invited to attend. People were asked to suggest other individuals or organizations that might be interested; thus, "snowballing" allowed invitations to be extended to few others. A total of 18 people participated, representing 17 organizations.

The main focus of the sessions was for participants to 'envision' or 'imagine' a potential model for voluntary sector involvement in the SSP process. A Focus Group approach provided a forum to generate ideas and to refine and build on those ideas through 'group think'.

The groups started with a structured review of the role that the SSP outlined for the SSP Committees and for the voluntary, community-based sector. The facilitator then guided an informal discussion.

Leadership Team Case Studies

In one SSP region, Community Leadership Teams were established in two localities to bring together leaders, enhance leadership capacity, and serve as a model for citizenship engagement in policy dialogue and socio-economic development. Five members of each of the two Leadership Teams were interviewed. This constituted half the members of one Leadership Team and a third of the members of the second Team. Interviews were also conducted with two key informants – the Regional Planner and the former Community Partnerships Coordinator. Research was conducted through one-on-one telephone interviews and one in-person interview.

Research Questions

Through the various research components, *Values Added* CURA was able to obtain the perspectives of Committee members, community-based groups and community leaders. CURA could thereby examine SSP implementation processes in two regions and determine some of the strengths and weaknesses of this experiment in regional collaborative governance. The interviews and focus groups were designed to answer the following questions.

SSP Committee Members' Perspective

- How did the SSP Steering Committees attempt to involve voluntary, community-based organizations in the SSP implementation process?
- What was the nature of this involvement?
- To what extent were voluntary, community-based organizations involved in the collaborative SSP implementation process?

Voluntary, Community-Based Organizations' Perspective

- What was the nature of community-based sector's involvement in SSP implementation?
- Was there a desire to fill the role outlined by the SSP for the voluntary sector?
- What were the opportunities and barriers to sector involvement with the SSP Committee?

- What model or arrangement would facilitate their active involvement in the planning, decision-making, and policy development activities of the SSP Committee?

Citizen Leadership Perspective

- What was the role of the Leadership Teams in policy dialogue and place-based development?

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Engaging the Voluntary, Community-based Sector: A Sound Concept

The SSP appeared to be a popular document with the voluntary, community-based sector when it was released in 1998. It articulated a role for the sector in social development that the sector had long known was essential in achieving community and population well-being. Historically, the Provincial Government had not always appeared to agree with this, until the SSP acknowledged it formally as part of public policy.
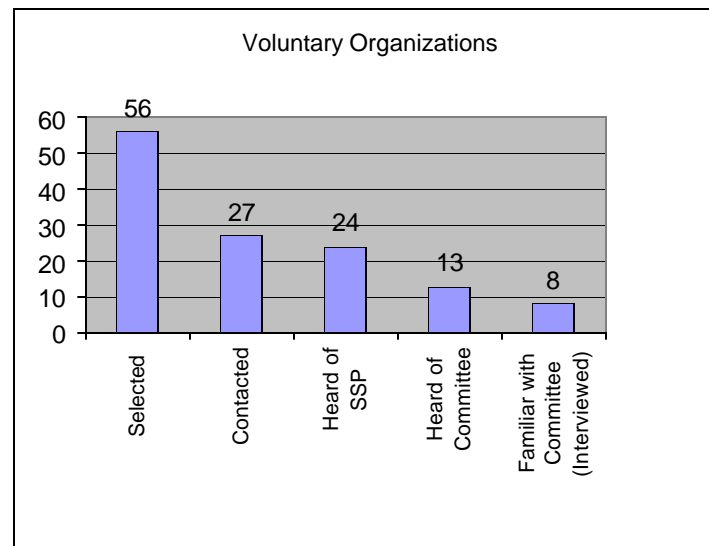
Steering Committee members in the two regions studied agreed that the concept of involving the voluntary, community-based sector as a partner was sound and that leadership at local levels was important. It was suggested that community leaders are the best people to ask about problems and solutions. Many leaders in communities are engaged through voluntary, community-based organizations. It is often through these organizations that leaders represent community interests. But neither community groups nor community leaders had a strong grasp of the SSP or the role of the Regional Committee, so there was limited input from communities into SSP Committee processes, even though the SSP was designed to enable place-based development.

It was suggested that the SSP Committee could have provided stronger leadership to better engage the voluntary sector and community leaders through the development of partnerships at the community level. Everybody wanted it, but it did not happen to any large degree.

Lack of Involvement of Community-Based Sector

The Strategic Social Plan committed to establishing a specific partnership role for the voluntary community-based sector in its implementation. However, of 27 community groups screened for an interview, 24 had heard of the SSP, 13 had heard of the SSP Committee, and only eight had enough involvement with the Committee to be able to complete an interview. Of the 13 groups that had heard of the SSP Committee, sources of information were:

- Five heard about the Committee through other organizations
- Three had attended workshops, conferences, or forums where the Committee was involved
- Two heard of the Committee through their employer
- Two organizations mentioned that the Committee provided funding to them
- One had received reports from the SSP Office in government
- One heard via SSP sub-committee involvement in Volunteer Week celebrations.

Chart I. Knowledge of SSP and Steering Committee

Voluntary Organizations

In this particular region, the Steering Committee sent invitations to organizations requesting them to put names forward for consideration for membership, but only two organizations became members of the Committee as a consequence, and they did not have sufficient involvement to complete the Committee member questionnaire. In the second region there was one community group represented on the Committee. Many of the Committee members interviewed felt community groups were not sufficiently engaged in the SSP process. It was also felt that social change could not successfully be implemented without involvement of community groups at the initial stages of SSP initiatives.

Other than this involvement of a few organizations, attempts to engage community groups were passive or indirect, e.g., notifying the public of events or inviting organizations to attend SSP Committee meetings. Of the 8 organizations interviewed, 5 said they had been involved in events held by the SSP Committee or events where the Committee had participated. Six were in touch with the Regional Planner and four were involved in the planning of activities and development of SSP Committee initiatives through sub-committees. (The responses are greater than the number of groups, as some people gave more than one response.)

Most of these eight were aware (mainly through the Regional Planner) of some of the Committee priorities and felt these were relevant. The four aspects of the SSP that organizational representatives felt were most important were:

- Encouraging social and economic development to increase well-being
- Prevention and early intervention
- Partnerships with communities and organizations
- Reducing duplication of services and filling gaps in communities.

Groups felt they themselves were working towards results in these general priority areas, as well as in the specific areas of recreation, community development, health and wellness, improving quality of life, human resource development, education, community safety and security.

Although voluntary organizations could take the initiative to come forward to the SSP Committee on their own, few did so. It was suggested this might have been because community leaders are mainly focused on issues in their own communities. The large number of voluntary, community-based organizations in each region made it difficult for the SSP Committee to directly involve them all. Groups were not well organized as a sector; thus people were not available to represent the sector as a whole as SSP Committee members.

Lack of Involvement by Citizens

Citizens were also not very engaged in the SSP implementation process. It was suggested by SSP Committee members that greater public profile was required, since few people knew what the SSP Committee was. It was felt that citizen engagement is mainly achieved through community-based groups, but the involvement of voluntary sector groups was minimal.

Although the SSP Committees organized workshops, town hall meetings and other forums, only two formal structures were established for citizen engagement. Two Leadership Teams were organized and supported by the SSP Committee in one region to undertake broad-based planning and implementation of initiatives for a group of communities in two local areas. Members of the Teams were leaders who did not represent a single constituency or issue in the community. But even when Leadership Teams were established as a mechanism by which citizens could become involved in SSP implementation, they had no membership on the SSP Committee and no formal input into Committee regional decision-making, except where the Planner brought issues to the Committee.

Attempts to Include Voluntary Organizations and Citizens

All SSP Committee members interviewed felt that involving voluntary, community-based organizations in the work of the Committee was essential. Committee members and community groups cited various methods used to include organizations and citizens. Not all of these apply to both Committees, but are a compilation from the research. However, we know from other work that all six Committees used at least some of these methods to reach out to the voluntary sector.

Invitations to Participate

- Letters were issued inviting groups to put forward nominations for the SSP Committee.
- Committee meetings were held in different locations in the region and open to the public.
- Community-based groups were invited to events such as workshops, town hall meetings and other public forums organized by the Committee to consult with community residents.
- The Committee invited groups to present on their issues, discuss their needs, and get advice.
- Outreach through the work of the Regional Planner, who made presentations to groups, sat on boards and assisted organizations in various ways.
- Community leaders were involved on SSP sub-committees and, in one region, Leadership Teams, both of which initiated projects in the areas of health, recreation, education, etc.

<u>Public Events</u>

Besides invitations to events organized by SSP Committees, community groups and citizens became aware of SSP Committee initiatives and priorities through other public events where SSP Committee members or staff were making presentations.

<u>Information was Shared with Community-based Groups</u>

The SSP Committee informed people and organizations about their decisions and activities by sending out information to those interested. Interested leaders were included on mailing lists to receive information such as minutes of meetings and newsletters.

Voluntary groups, however, felt that the SSP Committee did not consult with organizations in its decision-making. They felt there were no more consultations than there were prior to the establishment of the SSP Committee.

<u>Old Relationships with Sector Organizations Carried over to SSP Committee</u>

Organizations often related to the SSP Committee through previously established relationships with Committee members. SSP Committee members often sat on the boards of other organizations. Members sometimes knew who was in leadership positions in communities so were able to make contact directly with leaders on issues and concerns.

Service Provider – Client Relationship

Involvement of community-based organizations was primarily through the Regional Planners, who helped groups in several ways to better carry out their individual mandates. The Planners sometimes became involved on the boards of organizations; they helped groups access financial support for broad voluntary sector initiatives such as workshops and training sessions, and provided other help and advice. More specifically, in one or more regions:

- Leadership and volunteer training and other specific training were provided to help groups undertake their own initiatives.
- Social and economic profiles were prepared for local areas and shared with citizens and voluntary organizations.
- Where volunteer resource centres and networks existed prior to SSP implementation, SSP Committee staff provided support to them to carry out their objectives.

The Regional Planner worked with organizations individually and in groups. Some groups expected their individual issues to be brought to the SSP Committee decision-making process, but there was little evidence from Committee members that advice and issues of the sector were formally brought to the Committee. Some Committee members thought the issues were considered informally or on an ad hoc basis because of the involvement of the Planner and the volunteer involvement of Committee members with various organizations.

Four groups mentioned a volunteer network in their community, which was connected to the SSP Committee through the involvement of the Regional Planner, but organizations on the network did not coordinate input to the Committee.

Relationships between SSP Committees and the voluntary sector could be characterized as a service provider – client relationship, rather than a partnership.

SSP Committees Did Make a Difference in the Regions

Because there was little involvement on SSP Committees of organizations that normally represent groups such as women, children, youth, persons with disabilities, the ill, and the unemployed, these lenses were not used to determine impacts of current and new initiatives of the SSP Committee on different population groups. However, four of the eight community-based organizations interviewed stated that programs and services affecting their clients had become more flexible and responsive to local needs. Two said programs had always been flexible; and two felt government was often inflexible.

Organizations gave examples of programs and services that had improved in the past few years, particularly in the areas of employment, social assistance, access to housing, justice, and recreation, but tended to feel that in the area of education and literacy, there were problems.

Most representatives of voluntary, community-based groups said the SSP Committee had made a difference in the region. They felt Committee leadership was important and thought the Committee had adopted a collaborative approach with communities. They made these points:

- There was more information available.
- Organizations were invited to participate in some events and processes.
- Representatives of a couple of voluntary, community-based groups sat on the Committee, some sat on sub-committees, so partnerships were developed with these.
- Training and funding were provided that organizations would not normally be able to access.
- The SSP Committee moved some new initiatives forward.
- The Regional Planner was a knowledgeable and helpful leader who communicated, engaged communities, drew on the resources of people and overcame territorialism.
- Turf protection was reduced through cooperation and groups were brought together to look at the region as a whole.
- There were new, innovative ways of thinking and groups working together at a community level; coordination occurred at this level with the Planner's assistance.
- Much of the leadership in the region was on the SSP Committee.

Five of eight groups had participated in Committee-led collaborations: Safe Communities sub-committee, Peaceful Communities videoconference, or recreation workshop. Groups realized that effective collaboration requires dedicated resources, including staff support. Points made:

- Organizations felt that a representative of the voluntary sector is required on the SSP Steering Committee to represent the needs of the sector as a whole.

- It was suggested that a staff person is essential to work with all the organizations in the voluntary sector if it is to be represented effectively on the SSP Committee.
- While a few thought their human resources were stretched, most could find the human resources in staff or volunteers to play a role representing their individual organizations.
- Transportation continues to be a barrier, especially travel to remote areas.

We will say more about these issues under **Designing a Collaboration Model**.

Linking with Government

The eight organizations interviewed had very few expectations about the purpose of a relationship with the SSP Steering Committee. As a result, most did not seem to feel any sense of loss at not being involved, nor did they express any pressing desire to become more involved.

However, this apparent lack of interest could be attributed to a lack of information. When voluntary organizations in the focus groups were provided with an overview of the role defined for them in the SSP, they did express interest in becoming involved and began to address the issues restraining their involvement and discussing models to enhance their ability to become engaged. Participants often spoke about the engagement of their voluntary groups and their communities interchangeably, and the broader issue of community survival was a recurring theme. They exhibited an eagerness to collaborate and find new ways of working for the greater good of their communities. Their thinking and comments about the role and issues of the voluntary sector were very much rooted in this place-based perspective.

Many expressed frustration at their lack of involvement and stated that the SSP Committee would not be effective in addressing community and regional issues until it found a way to involve the people and groups at the grassroots level. The Strategic Social Plan recognized that there would be a need to build capacity of the sector for it to play a significant role in regional social and economic development. When participants began to envision a model that would facilitate more meaningful engagement of voluntary, community-based groups with the SSP Committee, they talked about a multifaceted model that could also help to address some of these commonly shared capacity issues.

There was consensus that voluntary, community-based groups and communities were not being engaged in the way put forward by the Plan. All three focus groups voiced concerns about the ability and / or the desire of the Committee to do this. Several participants described one-time interactions with the SSP Committee, such as doing a presentation or participating in a consultation session. Many expressed dissatisfaction with these encounters. Rather than engage participants, it appeared that these one-time encounters with the SSP Committee led participants to conclude that members of the SSP Committee were unaware of the work and issues of their groups and disconnected from grassroots issues at the community level.

Many community groups have relationships with provincial organizations (e.g., the Provincial Coordinating Committee of the Violence Prevention Strategy, the Literacy Council, the Advisory Council on the Status of Women, etc.) that represent their interests directly to the head offices of

government departments in St. John's. It is through these relationships that many receive their annual funding, address their issues, and influence the policies that affect them. Most of the eight organizations interviewed felt that the head offices of government departments were aware of their needs, concerns, and recommendations, since their provincial bodies brought their issues forward. They thought the SSP Committee was only sometimes aware of their issues, since they had little interaction with the Committee regionally.

Other means of making government aware of the concerns of organizations were:

- Sometimes these provincial organizations and sometimes the individual regional groups submit written documents and briefs to government.
- Government occasionally participates in workshops, consultations or visits where it hears about issues and concerns first hand.
- Because funding flows to organizations directly from central government in St. John's, the issues and concerns of organizations are often expressed in proposals for funds.
- Evaluations of projects are completed by organizations with recommendations that are often based on regional and provincial concerns.
- Government representatives are on organizations' Boards of Directors.

The boards or departmental offices of SSP Committee members did not directly fund organizations in the region and had minimal input into the policies of government. Few community groups interviewed knew if the regional board or office of the department they interacted with was represented on the SSP Committee. Partnerships envisioned by the SSP among agencies, departments and voluntary organizations were not cultivated. Most groups indicated that their relationship with federal and provincial departments had not changed with SSP implementation.

All organizations believed the SSP Committee's goals and objectives were relevant and similar to their own. Most organizations felt there could be advantages to involvement, including information-sharing, advocacy for the people of the region, partnerships to work towards common goals, more resources, Regional Planner involvement in organization, better ways to get messages to government, networking, representing issues of population groups, and training.

Some organizational representatives felt they might like to become involved on the SSP Committee, but more than half were non-committal because they would need to consult with their board of directors, would need to know more about what would be involved, or were unclear on the purpose of the SSP Steering Committee and its activities.

Two groups mentioned the potential disadvantage of additional work for no added advantage, as SSP information could be accessed through member organizations.

Good Ideas Don't Happen for Good Reasons

It is obvious from this research that the SSP Committee and the voluntary, community-based sector were not linked to one another by any formal structure or mechanism that allowed the

sector to have broad-based input into regional development. The voluntary, community-based sector was also in itself not organized in a way that allowed for straightforward collaboration to happen. A formal volunteer network does exist in one of the regions researched. This network was connected to the SSP Committee through the Regional Planner. The organizations on this network, however, do not coordinate their issues to provide input to the SSP Committee, but see themselves as recipients of support rather than contributors of advice. Instead of facilitating coordinated input from this voluntary network, the SSP Committee used more informal approaches to connect individual organizations to the Committee.

Without mechanisms that allowed broad-based partnerships to be formed, it was simpler to involve individual organizations one at a time as particular issues arose at the SSP Committee. For example, when one SSP Committee chose to develop and implement new programs for cancer and AIDS prevention in aboriginal communities, voluntary organizations representing these illnesses and aboriginal health groups were asked to sit on the SSP sub-committee. However, when the SSP Committee decided on this priority for the region, they could not take into account issues of the sector.

In addition to the formal network, less formal coordination among voluntary organizations exists in other areas of the SSP regions. All organizations indicated that they coordinated some of their activities with other organizations (e.g. celebrations, special events, fundraising, volunteer appreciation, and training). Coordination generally happens when one or a group of organizations takes the lead and invites others to participate.

Involving the voluntary, community-based sector in a meaningful way is a complex process. A clearer understanding by both the SSP Committees and community-based organizations of the potential role of the sector would have been required before a sound approach could be established to achieve meaningful engagement. Perhaps if, early in the SSP implementation process, the SSP Office in central government had laid out a plan of action to undertake collaborative approaches with the voluntary sector, and created a better understanding of the value of involving the sector, the partnerships required to implement the SSP might have been better defined and developed.

Building Community Capacity

The Plan called for broad participation in SSP implementation at the community level through a greater role for voluntary organizations in program design and service delivery. For this to happen, community capacity building was required. Although some communities worked to build specific service delivery capacity to undertake new initiatives, such as recreation programs in several remote coastal communities in one region and two Leadership Teams in another region, wide spread development of community capacity did not take place. All-encompassing partnerships with the voluntary sector to plan for integrated social and economic development did not occur. There was also little evidence that organizations were contracted to deliver services on behalf of either the SSP Steering Committees, Committee members individually through their agencies and departments, or regional or central governments, beyond those

services already contracted out before the SSP. Pre-SSP examples include violence prevention committees, family resource centres, and community youth networks.

Some SSP Committee members felt that community capacity building for service delivery was a major focus of the Committee. Some members saw no role for the SSP Committee in facilitating community-based service delivery beyond being a catalyst and a support for communities in resolving issues. They felt that the SSP Committee was simply an enabler to assist communities in finding their own solutions and in developing their own capacity.

Few, if any, voluntary organizations played a significant role in regional planning or in implementing the Plan at locality / community levels in cooperation with regional boards or departmental offices, as committed by the SSP. Voluntary, community-based organizations were only peripherally involved in SSP implementation processes and many of the roles defined in the Strategic Social Plan for the voluntary sector were not realized.

DESIGNING A COLLABORATION MODEL

Values Added CURA research interests are rooted in issues related to the community-based sector and citizen engagement. Models for inclusion of voluntary organizations and citizens in the new processes for social development are, therefore, of particular importance to CURA. As a consequence, CURA decided to explore the views of voluntary, community-based organizations on how best to engage the voluntary sector in the collaborative governance approach implemented through the SSP Steering Committees.

The researchers held focus groups in three localities of a region where the SSP Committee had made it a priority to build community capacity, and had carried out several capacity-building initiatives, such as training, leadership development and volunteer recognition activities. The Committee had also recognized the need to enhance networking among the many voluntary organizations in the region.

The focus groups were structured to

- Review the role outlined by the SSP for the voluntary sector and for the SSP Committees
- Discuss whether there was a desire to fill that role
- Identify opportunities for and barriers to the sector's involvement with the SSP Committee
- Envision some kind of model or arrangement that would facilitate their active involvement in the planning, decision-making, and policy development activities of the SSP Committee.

The earlier interviews with eight community groups from another region pointed to a lack of awareness about the specific roles that the SSP outlined for the voluntary sector and for the regional SSP bodies themselves, resulting in an inability to answer many of the interview questions. The focus groups began with a structured review of those roles, thus providing a level of knowledge and context to better define a new model for collaboration.

A model could be described as a mechanism to facilitate the involvement of voluntary, community-based organizations with the SSP Steering Committees and enable them to have input into regional decision-making processes. The findings are relevant to the broader debate around community collaboration, and on how to engage the voluntary, community-based sector in meaningful, ongoing collaborative relationships with government.

Need for Collaboration

First, it is important to note that comments from focus group participants around extent and nature of involvement in SSP processes confirmed what was reported earlier from interviews with community groups and SSP Committee members. However, the organizations participating in the discussion groups felt a sense of urgency to work collaboratively with government towards the advancement of rural communities. Their views may be summarized as follows:

- Voluntary organizations are making vital contributions to the survival of their communities. Volunteers are actually providing many of the essential services that people in more urban areas take for granted.
- Identification of problems at the community-level and planning and decision-making around problems could not happen effectively without the involvement of community groups. This was said to be especially true of organizations doing work in social development.
- Voluntary organizations work on the 'front line' and know community needs first hand.
- Their involvement would ensure that the 'lens' of many different population groups would be taken into consideration when planning and decision-making is happening.
- Collaboration minimizes duplication and maximizes efforts.
- Organizations have input at the provincial department level but not at the regional level to effect the kind of practical changes required to make a difference at the community level.
- The makeup of the SSP Committees should change to incorporate this kind of involvement. Some participants suggested that the Committee lacked the resources to include voluntary organizations, or that Committee make-up resulted in lack of awareness of the issues and relevance of the voluntary, community-based sector.

Barriers Within the Sector to Meaningful Involvement

Lack of Communication

Organizations recognized that there is currently a lack of communication among groups and that the capacity to communicate amongst themselves first is essential. Enhanced networking and dialogue is required within the voluntary sector to

- Enable it to identify issues of common concern
- Bring forward in a coordinated way issues and recommendations to the SSP Committee
- Help to address other challenges and capacity issues through increased sharing of information, best practices and resources.

All felt that community organizations would be able to work in a more collaborative fashion despite the uniqueness of their individual mandates. There was no evidence of a sense of competition among groups.

Accessing Paid Staff

There is a 'stigma' around the notion that voluntary organizations require paid staff, as many people do not recognize the need for staff to provide support and coordination, maintain momentum and maximize volunteer contributions. It is extremely difficult if volunteers have to take on this core role. Regarding staffing:

- Frustration was expressed about the federal Job Creation Partnerships[10] (JCP) program as a primary option for groups to access staff, since placements are temporary.
- Temporary staff leaves organizations in a constant state of instability.
- A collaborative model was cited where four or five paid staff people provide support to a thousand volunteers involved with a variety of voluntary groups in one area. They recruit and help retain significant numbers of community volunteers, develop projects and proposals, and manage employment for fifty to sixty people.
- Groups expressed the need to work with government to explore innovative employment programs that would better meet the unique needs of the voluntary, community-based sector.

Unstable Funding

Community groups have difficulty obtaining funds to support their basic staff and operations needs. There are limitations on what can be done with short-term project and program funds.

- Longer term funding would provide groups with stability and allow community-based programs and services to be provided more effectively, without constant disruption.
- The ongoing struggle for staff and funds makes the work of volunteers very challenging. It is difficult to keep volunteers motivated and involved.
- There is a desire to work with provincial and federal government to explore solutions. Family Resource Centres were cited as examples of organizations that receive ongoing funds to cover basic staffing and operational costs associated with a range of community-based programs.

Volunteer Burnout and Recruitment Problems

Many people are willing to volunteer, but volunteers can only be expected to contribute to a certain level. When volunteers have no ongoing staff support and coordination, they eventually burn out. Participants felt this to be especially true for rural volunteers who are increasingly being required to organize and deliver essential services.

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[10]Job Creation Partnerships (JCP) is a program of the federal Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSD) through which eligible participants maintain or enhance job skills through work on a specific project for up to 52 weeks. At the end of their participation, it is expected that clients will have enhanced ability to find long-term employment.

- The volunteer base is dwindling and it is more and more difficult to find new volunteers.
- Several participants indicated that their organization could use assistance in finding new volunteers. A collective approach could be effective.

<u>Accessing Information and Resources</u>

Frustration was expressed at not knowing where to access information or resources. Participants felt that opportunities were being missed in rural areas due to this lack of awareness. All spoke about the need for a 'one stop' point of access that would save time and duplication of effort. Organizations need information on things like:

- Training opportunities
- Volunteer supports and resources
- Funding information
- Public sector programs, regulations and opportunities.

Expectations of a Collaboration Model

<u>Purpose</u>

All three focus groups felt that the mechanism or approach used should serve more than one function and provide opportunity to address many of the challenges of voluntary organizations. They wanted a mechanism that could do all of the following:

- Facilitate strategic partnerships among voluntary groups, and with the SSP Committees
- Identify needs of local groups and develop collaborative response
- Provide a forum from which to select representatives from their local voluntary, community-based sector to sit on the SSP Committee
- Be a channel for information sharing and dialogue between the local voluntary sector and the SSP Committee
- Protect the freedom and autonomy of individual groups

<u>Activities</u>

Many activities to support voluntary organizations could be incorporated into the model, such as

- Facilitating partnerships among groups doing similar kinds of work
- Regular convening of groups
- Writing and circulating a newsletter for and about voluntary groups in the area
- Developing a local calendar of all events relevant to voluntary groups
- Developing and maintaining online resources for groups (e.g., database, discussion forum)
- Promoting volunteerism in the area
- Matching of volunteers with appropriate organizations
- Collecting and sharing of information, best practices and resources relevant to the sector

- Facilitating the sharing of skills and expertise of groups with other groups who need it
- Providing assistance to groups (e.g., proposal writing, funding sources, etc.) as needed
- Developing and planning workshops, building on local expertise where possible
- Fundraising to build an endowment fund and future sustainability.

Required Elements

Several elements were deemed necessary for a successful collaboration model:

- Dedicated staff to coordinate activities, perhaps three people in the region in question
- Adequate and secure funding to cover salaries, travel, and other basic costs
- Buy-in from voluntary organizations and communities
- Incorporation of information technology
- Building on existing opportunities
- Learning from existing collaborative models.

Staffing It was generally thought that regional coordinators should be well known and respected in their community and possess strong leadership skills, an ability to gain and build trust, background in the local community-based sector, understanding of and experience with volunteerism and related issues, knowledge about resources for community groups, 'street smarts', good communication, facilitation, organizational and delegating skills, and the ability to take a project and run with it. One person was concerned that someone already known in the community might bring past baggage to the coordinating role.

Funding Short-term project funding would not be adequate to support the coordinating positions and associated expenses. Although participants suggested that fund-raising could be done and an endowment fund established, they pointed out that working collaboratively with all levels of government would be essential and that government would have to be committed to exploring innovative and collaborative approaches to making this investment in communities. A provincial / federal partnership could support the voluntary sector and create meaningful employment at the same time.

Buy-in Community politics can hinder collaborative efforts. Also, people involved with the voluntary sector are already being pulled in many directions and they may not be inclined initially to take a new initiative. People have become cynical and worn out from participation in forums and consultations since the cod moratorium in the early 1990s. Participants seemed optimistic that these challenges could be overcome, and made suggestions:

- Identify and promote the benefits upfront – sell the concept.
- May require a 'workshop' session in communities to talk about the proposed model.
- Start small and build.
- Always seek new members to keep growing, trying to be inclusive.
- All organizations should have opportunity to give input and agree to terms of reference.
- Encourage open dialogue among all members to build respect and trust.
- Commit to consensus building.

- Fewer meetings might be preferable, i.e., every two months.
- Local leadership will have to take an active role in supporting the efforts of staff.
- Leadership abilities and patience of staff person will be important.

Technology The model would have to combine in-person and online communications to be most effective. Face-to-face contact is important. A mailing list and newsletter could complement online resources. Training in the use of online tools could be provided to youth, who could then work with older generations. There is community access to computers through CAP sites such as schools and libraries. Videoconferencing is also a possibility.

Building On Opportunities Participants suggested the following resources that might help the development of the model and emphasized the importance of building on what already exists.

- Community Access Program (CAP) sites would allow volunteers and representatives of voluntary organizations to access computers and online resources. There may be opportunities for resource-sharing and further partnership with these sites.
- enVision.ca, an online service of the Community Services Council Newfoundland and Labrador, is a 'virtual resource centre' for voluntary, community-based organizations in the province. A wide variety of information and resources can be accessed through this site.
- *Collaborating with Community: Introduction, Rationale and Guide for Government*, a resource developed through the province's Violence Prevention Initiative might be useful to ensure effectiveness of this new model. It gives examples of government / community collaborations and outlines some values to guide those kinds of partnerships.
- Work of the SSP Steering Committee. A recent initiative (with enVision.ca) saw a web-based approach to recruiting volunteers for voluntary organizations in the region. The new model could collect and promote volunteer opportunities in the region and lay the groundwork for the development of a voluntary sector network in the region.
- People who have a commitment to staying in their communities would have to take responsibility for, and support, this model. The desire on the part of people to enhance and advance their communities would be an important resource to the success of this model.

Existing Collaborative Models Several initiatives were mentioned as worth examining.

- A network functioning well as an umbrella group that brings together heritage and culture groups in the area to work collaboratively
- A Zone Board, an umbrella-type group that brings together groups from agriculture, resource industries and tourism with a focus on economic development
- A Regional Development Association, an umbrella organization that brings groups together to focus on economic development
- Voluntary Sector Field Worker was in place for a six-month term to provide information, resources and coordination for voluntary groups in the area
- Violence Prevention Initiative includes a broad representation of groups under a website model for setting up online interaction among groups and providing individuals and groups with links to resources available from all sectors.

Desired Results

Mobilizing and linking groups in a local area would increase efficiencies for volunteers and voluntary organizations, strengthen the sector as a whole, and support meaningful engagement with governance structures like the SSP Committees. The model should enable

- Extended reach to people in communities
- Heightened profile of volunteerism and voluntary groups
- More volunteers to become involved
- A more informed and better skilled voluntary sector
- Enhanced ability to identify local and sector problems and issues
- Improved planning at the regional level
- Improved programs and services at the community level
- Improved ability of voluntary groups to access funding dollars.

Accountability

Participants agreed it would be important to have checks and balances in place to ensure maximum benefit for voluntary groups and to demonstrate value to funders. It would need oversight by some sort of Steering or Advisory Committee that could include representatives of sub-sectors such as women's groups, seniors, etc. Goals should be set and reviewed regularly.

Continuity

Participants feared that continuity might be a challenge, and emphasized the importance of ensuring that it would be a long-term initiative. They suggested the model would require:

- Patience, as it would take time to grow
- Government involvement and buy-in from the start
- Possibly getting politicians involved
- People in communities to take responsibility.

Role of SSP Committees

Several roles were suggested for a body like the SSP Regional Steering Committee to support a working model for collaboration:

- Coordinate with government partners to access required resources
- Help access in-kind support for the model from government, boards, private sector and others
- Work with voluntary, community-based organizations to develop and implement a mechanism for their input to the SSP Committee
- Allocate seats on the SSP Committee for representatives of the voluntary sector
- Use this model to share information with voluntary groups around SSP implementation
- Attend meetings of voluntary, community-based groups.

It is telling that focus group participants were able to work together to develop a very detailed description of how a collaboration model would look and work. The deliberations on the type of model needed were strikingly similar in each of the three groups.

The next section of this report examines the structure and operations of two 'Leadership Teams', a model for community collaboration that was tried in one of the SSP regions.

FACILTATING COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS: A PILOT PROJECT

In one of the regions researched, the SSP Steering Committee attempted to develop mechanisms to connect with communities and build community capacity. It first hosted town hall forums to help understand challenges rural communities were facing, which showed communities need to:

- Build leadership capacity to tackle major challenges
- Build cooperation and cohesiveness among communities
- Work together in localities[11], rather than as individual communities.

The SSP Committee therefore undertook a Community Partnerships pilot project. This was an innovative approach to engaging leaders to work together on community issues by facilitating and supporting the implementation of two Leadership Teams. The intended purpose of the pilot project was to build leadership capacity to:

- Assess the status of social and economic development
- Determine needs within localities
- Help communities within localities identify solutions to core common challenges
- Create a forum for stakeholders to work towards resource sharing rather than competition
- Help communities recruit and retrain volunteers.

The CURA case studies were to document and analyze the two Leadership Teams as a possible model for citizen engagement in policy dialogue and place-based social and economic development within the wider context of multi-sectoral partnerships and regional governance.

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[11]Localities refer to a group or cluster of communities in a geographical region that are considered within "drive to work distances", or where social and economic development initiatives impact them as a group, or where they are close enough to access services provided in one community.

Overview of Leadership Team Areas

	Leadership Team A	**Leadership Team B**	**Province**
Number communities	5	9	532
Population (2001)	1,150	3,140	512,930
Population Decline (1996-2001)	-14.8%	- 8.5%	-7%
Age 20 + without high school	59.5%	53.6%	40%
Average Per Capita Income	$12,300 to $17,600 (Range by community)	$13,100 to $17,300 (Range by community)	$18,100
Employment Rates	65% to 74% (Range by community)	59% to 83% (Range by community)	74%

Source: Newfoundland and Labrador Statistics Agency, www.communityaccounts.ca.

Notifying Citizens

The SSP Committee returned to communities to report on the findings of town hall forums. Citizens were provided with a locality profile, including synopsis of information on social indicators such as health, education, self-reliance, and crime. The Committee used this approach to create awareness of the Leadership Teams pilot project, determine the interest of people in communities, and invite local groups to submit letters of intent. 'Developmental Teams' were formed to take the lead in submitting the letters of intent, and when the request for proposals was made, Developmental Teams were to develop project proposals.

Call for Proposals

The Committee provided concise guidelines and requested full proposals from Developmental Teams in five localities. The Community Capacity Building Subcommittee of the SSP Steering Committee developed Terms of Reference, and the Regional Planner assisted each of the five Developmental Teams with proposal development. The SSP Committee had to clarify for the five Developmental Teams its role as a partner in development and implementation of the pilot projects, as some proponents thought SSP Committee would simply be a funding agency.

Selection

Leadership Team A (best fit)

- Focus on partnership building
- Sharing resources between communities highlighted
- Thorough research on issues in locality completed
- Proposed solutions that could be achieved through community cooperation
- Demonstrated understanding of the Strategic Social Plan
- Priorities in line with the SSP Steering Committee's priorities
- Contained all necessary background information that demonstrated participants knew what they wanted to focus on and achieve.

Leadership Team B

- Genuine desire and passion to host the pilot project
- Strong identification of Team membership
- Broad development focus
- Demonstrated need for a leadership team
- High benefits since some communities traditionally not working well together.

Membership

Although individuals on the Developmental Team selected the Leadership Team members, the SSP Committee played an advisory role. Formation of teams began during proposal development stage when the SSP Committee provided a framework for the types of members needed:

- Broad representation of groups and diversity of backgrounds and viewpoints
- Individual and organizational representation to fulfill long-term objectives
- Community representation
- Representatives from organizations such as Regional Economic Development Boards, Community Development Associations, schools and school councils, youth groups, private sector companies, and voluntary organizations.

Team A was more satisfied with the composition of their Team than was Team B. One suggestion for an addition to Team A was a healthy living representative. The majority of Team B felt other organizations / individuals should be added, including representatives of the health sector, churches (especially because of their role in youth programming), youth, parents, local municipalities, service agencies, and each of the communities in the locality.

Role of Community Leaders

Having a community 'champion' was considered important in the beginning of the process. Both Teams had key individuals who were the driving force on the Team. However, there were differences between the two Teams. The driving force of Team A was an individual who was seen as having credibility and respect, enabling a smooth coordination of the network and community partnerships. Team B faced challenges at the outset of the project. Historical relationships and personality conflicts between the key individual and other group members had a negative impact. The SSP Committee had to intervene by helping the Team resolve these issues and encourage members to be conscious of the objectives of the project.

Links to the Voluntary, Community-Based Sector

Team members were not selected to represent voluntary, community-based organizations, although half the members saw themselves in that light. Members were selected because they had a range of volunteer and other experience. All those interviewed considered themselves community-based volunteers. None considered their involvement to be an extension of their paid

work. Only two respondents indicated that they reported back officially to their organization. Members generally shared information informally with anyone interested.

Relationships among Members

All felt there were good or excellent working relationships among members. Important attributes included frank and open communication, the ability of all to contribute to discussions, respect for opinions, commitment of the members, level of comfort with all members, and contribution made on an equal basis. Many were enthusiastic to join the committee, saw potential benefits of the project for communities in the locality, and said positive relationships were built over time.

Stability of Membership

There were differences in the two Leadership Teams from a stability perspective. The Team A core group had no significant membership changes and it expanded its membership as new projects and programs were undertaken. On the other hand, members dropped off Team B or were no longer actively participating. Many reasons were cited for this:

- Some felt people were too busy
- Team B did not have a clear enough focus
- People lost interest because they were not seeing immediate results
- Little had been accomplished for amount of time contributed
- Initial reluctance to accept using the Job Creation Partnership program at HRSDC to fund a staff person, as jobs were temporary and non-insurable
- Some members were frustrated with delays; the process was stalled in the first year
- Some did not fully understanding the purpose of the team. Members said that no specific instructions were provided by the SSP Committee on the orientation of team members and thought that the SSP Committee should provide clarification on purpose and objectives.

A significant change that affected both Teams was the departure of the Community Partnerships Coordinator who was employed by the SSP Committee to assist the Teams in their organization.

Leadership Training

Self-assessments were completed by both Teams to ascertain strengths and needs for leadership skills development. Team A had attended sessions in leadership development to enhance their capacity to work on the Team and members were interested in further training in several areas:

- Effective time management
- Proposal writing
- Leadership skills
- Effective presentations
- Meeting facilitation.

Team B had not completed leadership training. In fact, the self-assessment results had not been analyzed because of a lack of human resources. Members were interested in enhancing skills in:

- Proposal writing
- Accessing funding
- Strategic planning
- Data analysis
- Group dynamics.

Planning

Planning started in the proposal development stage with an outline of the project's purpose and objectives. Team A had held a facilitated planning session to clearly set out the objectives, priorities and means for reaching goals. A work plan was subdivided to allocate tasks to individual members. Several planning meetings had been held to revisit goals and set priorities. Team A, with the assistance of the SSP Committee, undertook a needs assessment to identify pressing concerns and key areas of need in the communities. Team B was carrying out an assessment to identify the needs of youth and to plan programming. Team A was satisfied with the planning process and Team B frustrated.

Operations

The two Teams talked about different operational issues and procedures.

Team A	Team B
Non-hierarchical operation approach - Non-hierarchical structure / no one dominated agenda - Exploring possibility of a more formalized structure	**Team difficulties resulted in a slow start** - Team was slow starting / experienced 'growing pains'.
Consensus building approach - Consensus-based format adopted - Stakeholders represented interests of own group but focused on needs of locality - Large number of people around table but manageable	**No program priorities yet set** - Focus on youth but still awaiting completion of needs assessment - Monthly meetings to discuss what team wanted to accomplish
Work completed in subcommittees - Team divided into subcommittees to work in specific areas and report back to larger Team - Enabled Team to undertake / manage multiple projects but retain overall Team focus on objectives - Combined community resources to benefit initiatives	**Variety of backgrounds of committee members** - Differences initially challenging but beneficial in longer-term - Members needed to focus on the 'bigger picture'.

Focus and Activities

Their focus and activities also differed, as illustrated in the next chart.

	Team A	Team B
Main Focus	• Decline of volunteerism • Lack of delivery of social programs in locality • Community networks • Need for local economic development • Levels of literacy • Delivery of health care • Need for self care	• Focus on youth issues to create opportunities for young people • Enable youth engagement in volunteerism and community development • Improve community services for youth through municipal cooperation and resource sharing
Objectives	• Increase intercommunity cooperation and build volunteer networks • Assist volunteer groups to meet their goals and objectives • Improve literacy and employability levels • Support economic development • Improve health through education • Monitoring and physical fitness programs	• Develop a strong volunteer base to enhance the quality of life for youth • Engage community partners to focus on the needs of youth • Build capacity among community leaders and stakeholders

Central Concept	• The local school was to act as the centre of social development in the region, to be used as
	  o a meeting space for community groups
	  o a resource centre
	  o a recreation centre
	  o headquarters for community outreach and development programs
		• Build capacity in community partners by establishing programs for youth
		• Build on existing community partnerships to impact on the well being of youth

Main Activities	• Creation of a seniors' club to meet social and recreation needs • Establishment of a CAP site that allows residents free computer services • Family literacy program to promote and increase literacy in the area • Lobbied for Licensed Practical Nurse to work from the school • Employability programs for youth • Healthy and active living program • Local school utilized as a community centre	• Completing needs assessment on youth

Resources

Human Resources

Members felt there was extensive expertise on the Teams. They had access to the people and information they needed to work effectively. Members had excellent contacts within the

localities through a wide variety of networks, but finding time to expend effort was a problem for some members.

Staff resources are necessary to achieve the objectives of such a project. The initial proposal from Team A called for a program director and several coordinators, with different skill sets to implement programs to meet each of the five objectives. The SSP Committee could not fund this.

The Committee originally committed core financial resources with an upper limit of $50,000 to cover a staff person, meeting expenses, travel and office costs, but this money did not materialize, as a new government cut funding to the Committees. The SSP Committee provided administrative and staff support, but there was a desire on the part of the Committee that Teams would not become dependent on SSP staff in building leadership capacity and partnerships. The Committee opted for a Community Partnerships Coordinator to be based at a central site between the two Teams. This position ended as well when funding was cut.

The Teams, in partnership with the SSP Committee, turned to other sources of funding. Team A hired a staff person through JCP funding to coordinate the day-to-day activities of the Team. Team B was successful in securing JCP funding for a staff person to carry out the needs assessment. These were short-term contracts.

The staff people had different levels of importance and impact on the overall success of the Teams. In Team A, the role of the staff person was important but not integral. The success of Team B was based significantly on the work of the staff person, who was considered the 'face and voice of the team' in the locality.

Financial Resources

The Teams were not provided with the financial resources they needed to realize their potential. The SSP Committee knew in the beginning that one hundred percent of funding for all programming was not available and so intended to position itself to facilitate links between the Teams and external funding sources. Building connectivity to other resources and developing leadership capacity were seen as primary goals of the pilot project.

Team members repeatedly said there was a need for sustained core funding for a permanent staff person to meet day-to-day administration needs, rather than funding based on short-term contracts. Teams generally felt disappointed, misled and betrayed when resources from the SSP Committee were not forthcoming, although some felt the financial resources they required were available though JCP. Funds for specific project needs were also a concern (e.g., exercise equipment for recreation programs, literacy initiative expenses, program personnel), but Teams did not want to be a burden on other voluntary groups by asking for money. They wanted to be an asset to the community.

Engagement and Collaboration

Team A engaged other citizens and community organizations primarily through the work of subcommittees on specific projects that would benefit from a wider network of resources. All felt

there were other partnerships within and outside the community that should be developed, for example, with municipal governments, although not all communities represented had a town council. Members felt contact with Health and Community Services and Memorial University were needed to add expertise and value to their programs.

Team B contacted youth groups and other organizations they felt would be interested in the results of the needs assessment, but most members agreed Team B was not ready to develop extensive community partnerships. Greater emphasis could be placed on partnership development once programming objectives became clearer. Church groups and municipal councils were mentioned as possible partners.

Input into Local and Regional Decision-Making

Municipal

Team A had the potential to participate in municipal planning and decision-making, as several members had regular contact with town councillors or were councillors themselves. Thus Team A had informal influence. More time is required to forge a formal connection as a group. Team A members had discussed the concept of shared regional service delivery in the locality to make better use of resources and enhance community cooperation. There was a feeling that councils do not have the financial resources or the personnel to be involved with activities other than town management of the community infrastructure.

Team B had no involvement in municipal decision-making. Members felt it would be useful to have input into planning and decision-making at the municipal level, but currently the initiatives of the Team are not similar to issues of municipalities. Several felt the results of the needs assessment could eventually be useful for municipalities.

Regional

All respondents were familiar with, and indicated they maintained an ongoing relationship with, the SSP Committee, but there was no formal structure for the Leadership Teams to have input into the Committee. There was consultation with the Teams on a case specific basis and plans for the Teams to meet with the committee and present their work. SSP Committee staff felt a mechanism for input was important and that that this would likely evolve.

The relationship between the SSP Committee and the Teams was primarily through the Regional Planner and the former Community Partnerships Coordinator. The Coordinator was to conduct leadership assessments and evaluations, track and document progress of the two Teams, and act as main organizer and motivator for the Team meetings. These responsibilities then fell to the Regional Planner, whose role also included educating the Teams on SSP Committee objectives, ensuring the objectives of the Teams and individual members were consistent with the vision of the project, and obtaining sufficient funding for the Teams to fulfill their objectives.

Progress

Teams expressed a need to feel they are making progress. It is essential that:

- Teams feel they are fulfilling their objectives
- Project activities are numerous
- Rapid success be made to motivate members, as slow progress reduces commitment
- Realistic goals are established on what can be accomplished in a set time frame
- Teams recognize many results will not be seen immediately
- Teams be reminded of goals and purpose and new goals developed as required
- Tangible results of programs and services can be determined and built upon.

Structure and Operations

Some members felt improvements could be made to the structure and operations of the Leadership Teams. These included:

- Increased communication among members
- More meetings
- More formal structure
- Regular committee meetings when delivering multiple programs.

The lessons learned by the members of the Leadership Teams tended to be focused internally on operations, relationships, activities of the group and local needs. Only when specifically questioned did Team members comment on their external relationships, and these appeared to be thought of as service provider-client connections. This corresponds to our findings on the relationship between individual community-based organizations and the SSP Committees.

The Strategic Social Plan provided a framework for the types of relationships communities and community-based organizations should have had with the Regional SSP Steering Committee process, but the responses we received from both Leadership Team members and community groups were generally made in the absence of expectations about the purpose of external relationships beyond the funding of initiatives and programs.

The foundation of the new framework for social development as laid out in the SSP was the switch from "delivering services to individuals, often in isolation from the larger context in which they live", to a place-based approach which would focus on "addressing the underlying causes of problems by considering people's needs in the context of their communities and their socio-economic environment."[12] The Plan recognized that place-based development would "require strengthening existing regional and community capacity and resources."[13] It acknowledged that there were "challenges associated with helping rural communities build on

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[12] SSP, p.8.
[13] Ibid, p.9.

their strengths and find long-term solutions…"[14], that "community-based organizations play a vital role in both personal and community development"[15], and that "a community's capacity to work together effectively in collective action depends on leadership, experience, knowledge and preparedness."[16] The SSP referred to this capacity to work together as social capital.

Collaboration and Social Capital

Social capital can be defined as the value that derives from the networks through which people connect with one another. Through these networks, people can "work together to achieve things they could not achieve by themselves, or could only achieve with great difficulty."[17]. Robert Putnam speaks of two kinds of networks – those among homogeneous groups of people (bonding social capital) and those among socially heterogeneous groups (bridging social capital).[18]

Social capital is developed largely though through voluntary, community-based organizations, but without a linking mechanism and resources dedicated to making it happen, bridges across heterogeneous groups will be ad hoc. The voluntary sector is well organized in a vertical manner in silos representing population groups (e.g. women, children, youth, persons with disabilities, etc.). Organizations have developed mechanisms for input on policy and service delivery through provincial and national bodies, which in turn represent their issues to governments. This can be an ambiguous approach in itself, since governments are organized in their own silos (e.g. health, education, income support, labour market, etc.), which do not neatly match the population silos. And often, several different departments have policies and programs that have an impact on a particular population group.

Cornelia Flora says, "While there is room for subgroups with high levels of social capital (communities of interest within communities), communities of place require diversity. The best approach to diversity is… "Whose viewpoint is necessary as we move forward toward our goals?"[19]

Flora lays down several "characteristics of networks creating social capital:

1. *Horizontal — Lateral learning is critical in networks. Communities learn best from each other. Social capital is built in the course of that lateral learning, both among communities and within communities.*

2. *Vertical — It is critical that communities be linked to regional, state and national resources and organizations. However, it is also critical that there is not just one gatekeeper who makes that linkage. Elected officials and members of organizations need to attend those regional, state and national meetings so that one person is not saying:*

[14] Ibid.
[15] Ibid, p. 10.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Field, John. *Social Capital: Key Ideas*, Routledge, 2003
[18] Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia
[19] Flora, Cornelia. *Building Social Capital: The Importance of Entrepreneurial Social Infrastructure*, North Central Regional Center for Rural Development, 1997, p.2.

"Well, the rules won't let us." Other points of view that are still within the rules can uncover alternatives.

3. *Flexible — Being part of a network should not be a lifetime commitment. People are willing to participate where they can make a difference. Participation goes up and burnout goes down when people are asked to participate in a network that has a finite life span. People are asked to participate primarily in things in which they have real interest, although care must be taken that the larger vision is shared. Flexibility means that more people have the opportunity to become leaders.*

4. *Permeable Boundaries — The community of interest is expanded and the community of place grows larger as new partnerships and collaborations are formed. On the other hand, when something very local is required, the boundaries can become temporarily narrowed. Permeable and flexible networks are critical for community sustainability."*[20]

The SSP implementation structure and processes appeared to make some headway in terms of horizontal linkages among regional staff of government departments and quasi-government agencies. Being brought together on the SSP Committees enabled them to take a more holistic approach to service delivery. Most of the Committee members interviewed felt that the priorities established by the SSP Committee guided their actions, and that the right people were at the table – people with "resources, contacts and authority to get things done".[21] In addition, the Committee developed proposals to outside sources for funding of new initiatives.

However, the policy input, program planning and service delivery role envisioned in the Plan for communities themselves through the voluntary sector and citizens did not occur in any cohesive or extensive manner. The Strategic Social Plan's intention was to link existing social capital to the collaborative processes for regional development being established through the SSP Steering Committees, for two reasons:

1. Governments do not develop communities; citizens develop communities. Since social capital materializes primarily through community-based organizations, any approach to developing communities and enhancing the well-being of people must include mechanisms for collaboration with the voluntary, community-based sector.

2. Governments invest in communities to enhance their development, but ad hoc investments and programs that are not delivered strategically create a "hit or miss" approach. Matching government programs, services and investments to community needs defined by the voluntary, community-based sector could make government investments more effective.

This aspect of the SSP was not, and could not, be implemented in the five-year life of the Regional Steering Committees for many reasons:

- The sector's lack of knowledge of SSP processes and the role laid out for community groups in SSP implementation

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[20] Ibid, p. 3.
[21] Quote from Committee member.

- The silo nature of the voluntary sector itself
- Lack of community capacity to build bridges across the silos
- The complexity of developing effective linkages
- Geography and travel costs
- Difficulty for citizens and community organizations to understand the impact regional priorities would have on their communities
- Competition and resulting resentments amongst communities around government investments; and time and resources to overcome these barriers.

Furthermore, even if all of these challenges could have been met, there remained the fact that the vertical link to the upper levels of government was missing. There was no mechanism in government to manage regional advice. The SSP Committee had little direct input on public policies, programs and services to make them more responsive to regional conditions. Regional agencies continued to relate to government in traditional ways, e.g., the regional Health Board to the Department of Health and Community Services, the School Board to the Department of Education, etc. The Committee also related to government to some extent through the SSP Office, through an Assistant Deputy Minister who was appointed to the Committee, and through joint discussion with government departments on some issues.

Government did not organize itself horizontally in a manner to hear and understand the needs of regions and communities, to make integrated and coordinated decisions about policies and programs or to take action to support place-based approaches to service delivery. Government did not consult directly with SSP Committees on policy decisions.

Effective multi-sectoral collaboration requires the development of connections on several levels, and community-based solutions require an inclusive approach. The building of linkages within communities, across silos within the voluntary sector, across clusters of communities, with a regional governance structure like the SSP Committees, and from there to the upper echelons of government would require committed financial and human resources over an extended period, along with the political and bureaucratic will at the highest levels, including the means to listen and to act.

The SSP called for partnerships with citizens and the voluntary, community-based sector to jointly undertake social and economic development – a good idea that did not happen for good reasons.