

Vibrant Communities Pan Canadian Gender and Poverty Project



**Presentation to VC
Convenors**
March 8, 2004



Gender and Poverty Project

- Collaborative effort of Caledon Institute, Tamarack Institute, and 6 local communities involved with VC
- Arose from VC Policy Dialogue convened by Caledon Institute
- Funded by Status of Women Canada



G and P Project Team

- Project leads: Cathy Lang, Toby Goldberg-Leong
- Project team included Eric Leviten Reid, Caledon Institute, Mark Cabaj, Tamarack Institute
- Gender Analysis advisors and researchers: Chandra Budhu, Marina Biasutti
- Pan Canadian Working Group – reps from each of 6 communities



Project Report

- Presentation provides preliminary analysis and findings from Gender and Poverty Project
- Final report to be disseminated as of end of March 2004
- Local community research and workshop reports, and Gender and Poverty tools and resources will continue to be posted on the Vibrant Communities Web Site: www.vibrantcommunities.ca



Purpose of Project

- To enhance the capacity of participating Vibrant Communities, and the overall Vibrant Communities initiative, to recognize and address gender dimensions of poverty
- To contribute to more comprehensive and relevant work in poverty reduction



Project Strategies

- Formation of Pan Canadian Gender and Poverty Working Group
- National research on tools and resources
- Local research on the gender dimensions of poverty in 6 communities
- Local workshops in 6 communities
- Analysis and reporting on results and sharing learning



Project Strategies

- Strategies were multi-layered
- Process as important as content - laying the building blocks for capacity building at local and Pan Canadian level
- Policy implications – e.g. in developing programs that ensure inclusion, laying foundation for comprehensive analysis and action, enabling multi-sectoral involvement



Participating Communities

- Capital Region, B.C.
- Halifax, N.S.
- Saint John, N.B.
- Saskatoon, SK
- Surrey, B.C.
- Trois Rivieres, Quebec



Pan Canadian G and P Working Group

- At least 2 reps from each participating community plus project team
- Encouraged and facilitated representation of low income community participants
- Conduit for local leadership and co-ordination
- Members responsible for championing gender lens in VC, sharing learning in Pan Canadian learning community



Local Work – The Challenge

- Each community differed in:
 - Relationship to, and progress in, Vibrant Communities
 - Staffing support vis a vis Gender project
 - Demographics
 - Capacity for gender analysis
 - Objectives for workshop based on context, work to date, and goals of sponsoring group



What Did We Learn About?

- Process (Working Group capacity; inclusion of low income persons; diversity; accessibility of tools and resources; approaches to local work; local context, capacity and commitment)
- Content (how local women and men experience poverty; policy and program implications)



Working Group Capacity

- Levels of understanding of gender concepts and how they impact poverty work varied widely
- Language of gender viewed as barrier
- Strong commitment of Working Group reps did not necessarily reflect buy-in of local Vibrant Communities



Working Group Capacity

- Tensions between women-centred and gender focused work
- Working group, with exception of 1 local rep and project team members, were women – implied “women’s work”
- Little room (funding/time) and capacity to learn together and explore deeper connections, e.g., between race and gender



Inclusion of Low Income Participants

- Working group included low income women, while others had past experience of poverty
- Advisory groups formed at local level in 3 communities – 2 of these facilitated involvement of low income persons
- 4 of 6 communities held focus groups prior to workshops with persons on limited incomes



Inclusion of Low Income Participants

- Workshops had varying participation of persons on limited income
- Stipends were available to offset costs of transportation, child care, and other costs
- Working Group affirmed importance of inclusion and accommodation strategy, in particular access to stipends for childcare, transportation, etc.



Diversity Participation

- Local communities offered option of focusing on particular equality seeking groups or diverse group – most opted for diversity
- Diversity included cross sectors (government, business, social services), people from diverse racial and ethnic communities, the disabled, youth, elders
- Representation of business and government was low



Diversity Approaches

- Trois Rivieres – workshop with Francophone women
- Capital Region – offered 2nd series of workshops with disability community
- Capital Region, Surrey, Saskatoon – included First Nations and some new immigrant participation



Diversity Approaches

- Halifax – geared to African Canadians in inner city neighbourhood
- Saint John – special focus on issue of access to education and training



Tools and Resources

- Most gender analysis tools found in field of international development and from government
- No case studies on use of gender lens in CCI's, nor on race or disability; VC forging new territory
- Found examples of gender analysis in poverty reduction work in UK and south



Local Resources

- Very limited access to local statistics on gender and poverty – costly, inaccessible to community groups
- Little co-ordination of data collection and analysis at local level
- Data does not take into account persons “lost” to system – those cut back, unwaged, unpensioned, recent immigrants, youth



Project Tools and Approaches

- Tools initially collected for workshop packages – became background resources for Working Group and VC Round Tables and Learning Community
- “The Wall” popular education workshop process chosen to try to bring coordinated, grass roots approach to all 6 communities



“The Wall” Popular Education Approach

- workshop approach most appropriate in integrating low income persons experience into analysis
- viewed as too “women centred” in multi-sectoral, mixed gender groups
- process gave analysis greater priority over action planning
- Some adaptation by communities to meet local needs



Project Tools and Approaches

- Learnings

- Integrating deeper analysis with planning for action and policy change requires longer time frame, more incremental approach
- Strategy of preceding workshop with focus groups, and following up workshop with presentation of “Wall” to VC Round Table, very effective



Local Context for G and P Work

- Links between poverty reduction and women's organizations varied in 6 communities
- “Traditional” feminist organizations suffering from cut backs and shifts in women's movement; less advocacy due to restrictive regulations and no core funding
- Poverty alleviation services for women represented at workshops



Local Context for G and P Work

- Work on Gender and Poverty locally primarily research and project based
- Most of VC Round Tables had not specifically identified gender as key focus of plans prior to Gender and Poverty Project (Capital Region B.C. is exception)



Gender and Poverty Issues

- Workshops and research raised many issues on recent changes to jobs and social programs and effects on men and women, boys and girls – in home, community, and workplace
- Rich, detailed information and experience sharing
- Workshop summaries will be included in local reports on VC Web Site



Gender and Poverty Themes

- Culture of fear in home, community, workplace due to cutbacks, job loss, insecurity – less personal and community based advocacy
- Isolation due to triple role – experienced by men, women and children
- Few gains – many more losses; stress passed on to next generation; leads to impossible choices, significant physical and mental health issues



Gender and Poverty Themes

- Erosion of basic public services; change in role of government vis a vis social equality and access
- Little take up of business community, though some movement toward Corporate Social Responsibility



Gender and Poverty Themes

- Increasingly difficult for individuals to “fit” into programs; bureaucratization and less accessibility of services/benefits
- Removal of services from local neighbourhoods
- More working poor using extra services where available (e.g., food and clothing banks, transportation supports)



Gender and Poverty Themes

- Lack of work experience keeping people poor; few openings in job market
- Skills not recognized, need qualifications “on paper” to get jobs
- Revolving door in job and social programs – no sustainable gains, programs leading to false hopes



Gender and Poverty Themes

- Young men and women turning to sex trade to meet basic needs, and to pay for education
- More underground economy activity “just to survive”



Gender and Poverty Themes

- Current environment creates perception of “deserving and non deserving poor”
- Growing gap between those with higher incomes and those with low/no incomes
- Leads to invisibility of poor and/or mass desensitization to poverty and distress



Gender and Poverty Analysis

- Men – role of breadwinner eroding with lack of access to jobs, opportunities; bore brunt of cutbacks in primary industry jobs; forced to leave home/communities to find work
- Men feel disposable, unlikely to seek help, use services
- Women feeling pressure of added roles – child care, income earner, caring for sick parents



Gender and Poverty Analysis

- Women significantly impacted by cuts to public services – experienced greater job losses due to cutbacks in public sector jobs as well as loss of important services; reversal of earlier gains
- Children and youth increasingly taking on roles as income earners – legislation changing lowering working age



Gender and Poverty Analysis

- Removal of services from neighbourhoods, program silos, mean added work for women to qualify for assistance for selves and families
- Sexual and physical violence against women, young men and women, and children – leads to increased fear, isolation, incapacitation



Gender and Poverty Analysis

- Womens' unpaid work effects time available/flexibility needed for paid work; juggling part time jobs to fit in other responsibilities, few home/work supports
- More women in the workforce for longer – lower wages, informal economy activity, no access to pensions
- Social programs do not take into account need for flexibility to accommodate women with families



Gender and Poverty Analysis

- Men who have lost jobs due to disability or downsizing feel stuck; cannot use skills/education
- Little gender equity in pay; men still earn more than women for equal work
- Men and women both making less in lower paying jobs that require higher or more specialized qualifications



Gender and Poverty Analysis

- Few resources tailored for single dads, few personal supports for men living in poverty
- Single parents, particularly single moms (who have more children on average to care for) have difficulty accessing jobs that accommodate parenting schedules; lack affordable childcare
- Single mom's experience more prejudice in access to housing



Gender and Poverty Analysis

- Homelessness programs tend to focus more on men's experience of homelessness; women tend to "couch surf"
- Very little help for men or women to transition out of poverty into living waged work
- "Beauty-ism" or judgement of person based on appearance affecting men now as well as women in accessing jobs and promotions



Gender and Poverty Analysis

- Stereotypes influence public – men in street are “lazy”, “dangerous”; poor women (with exception of sex workers) are invisible, poor caregivers (e.g. “kids are fat”)
- Race, culture, age, ability, appearance deepen dimensions of discrimination and experience of poverty



Proposed Actions

- Living wage campaigns
- Quality, affordable, and accessible day care – 24/7
- Affordable housing and community building in public housing



Proposed Actions

- Recognition of foreign trained professionals' qualifications; and support for newcomers to practice professions and trades
- Cost coverage and support for those seeking GED (high school equivalency)
- Greater access to training and social supports while in workforce



Proposed Actions

- Better, more integrated “transition to work” programs
- More comprehensive supports and interventions for youth – addressing educational needs, safety
- Programs responding to different needs of single moms and single fathers



Proposed Actions

- Increased and continuous dental and eye care coverage for homeless/those at risk of homelessness, persons on social assistance, and working poor
- Work with provincial dental hygienist association to improve access to services for street involved persons
- Educational campaign on dental services and access designed by low income/street involved people



Proposed Actions

- Regulations and enforcement around “dead beat dads”, spouses who can afford support
- Pay equity legislation and enforcement in private sector and public sector



Proposed Actions

- Removal of stringent “labour force attachment” rules for social organizations
- Support for policy and solidarity based employment approaches



Proposed Actions

- Programs to address stress and flexibility around family responsibilities in workplace (HR policies)
- Research on youth in the workplace
- Continuing support to address personal experience of poverty – build self confidence, social support



Proposed Actions

- Community education on “rights and responsibilities” around poverty
- Mobilization of persons living in poverty to address issues – poor people’s congress
- Communicate success stories from the community
- Efforts to make poor people’s vote count – municipal, provincial, federal



Proposed Actions

- Reduce duplication in community services
- Break down silos in government programs and departments dealing with issues related to people on low/no income



Policy Implications

- Next steps – analysing and planning how policy could effect change in areas discussed in research and workshops – beyond scope of current project
- Input of VC Policy Dialogue and VC Leadership Roundtables would be helpful



Policy Implications

- Local action may require further understanding of policy change process – how, where, and with whom to effect policy change in CCI's



Outcomes and Impacts

- Local impacts still to be discussed with local communities; will be enumerated in final report
- General agreement that project initiated/extended gender analysis capacity at local level VC



Outcomes and Impacts

- G and P communication plan developed by Tamarack
- Presentations made at 2003 VC Face to Face and VC Policy Dialogue
- Presentation with VC Convenors – International Women’s Day – March 8, 2004



Outcomes and Impacts

- Web Site features Gender resources, research, and reporting – sharing learning more broadly
- Growing commitment within VC; may lead to Tamarack recommendation that groups seeking funding consider gender in their plans
- VC Poverty Matrix will be revised to take into account gender lens



Outcomes and Impacts

- Still much work to do to integrate capacity into local planning and action – need resources and local VC commitment
- Still much work to do to integrate gender lens into VC program and Pan Canadian learning network



Preliminary Recommendations

- Support gender analysis training with local working groups and VC reps
- Time and capacity to build in learning; in particular, explore connections between race and gender, and disability and gender, in poverty
- Local training on how to creatively effect action and policy change, and on partnerships to effect policy change



Preliminary Recommendations

- Importance of continuing support and accommodations for inclusion of low income participants
- More data gathering, inclusion, and giving voice to new immigrants, First Nations, and African Canadians on issues related to gender and poverty



Preliminary Recommendations

- Continued support for local gender and poverty analysis and action – critical ongoing work
- Encouragement or requirement that VC Roundtables consider gender in poverty reduction research, planning, action
- Application of “gender lens” on VC tools and programming



Possible Project Extensions

- Build on mobilization of low income voice from first phase
 - Document inclusive processes
 - Case studies and tools development for CCI's for involvement of low income persons
 - Further resources for work of grass roots anti poverty groups
 - Continue to enable low income participation
 - Inclusiveness and outreach with equality seeking groups



Possible Extensions

- Strengthening partnerships
 - Exploring links between women's organizations and poverty reduction groups and coalitions
 - Building partnerships with women's groups at national/Pan Canadian level
 - Engaging business and government sectors in discussion of gender and policy action
 - Partnerships with diversity groups at local level



Possible Extensions

- Improve research capacity and data collection to “make case”
 - Group purchase of gender segregated data to build better picture of the gender and race dimensions of poverty
 - Partnership at Pan Canadian level with Canada Council on Social Development Urban Poverty Project



Possible Extensions

- Going deeper – exploring the connections of gender, race, and disability
 - Tools research and adaptation
 - Case studies and training
 - Further action research, analysis, planning and action at local level



Possible Extensions

- From gender analysis to action
 - Work in planning towards action at local level – follow up and support
 - Local capacity building and training for policy change
 - Local and national collaboration to change policy with cross sectoral engagement
 - Including public education and outreach strategies



Possible Extensions

- Integration in Vibrant Communities
 - Full review of existing VC tools and processes using gender lens
 - Recommendations for change and commitment to adopt change
 - Documentation of process and sharing with learning community – how does a program like VC learn?
 - Consider how to do same with race, disability



Possible Extensions

- Global connections
 - Building links between groups in other parts of world working on gender and poverty reduction
 - Sharing learning and strategies for action
 - Further mobilization and cross sectoral sharing – full circle



Next Steps – G and P Project

- Report with final recommendations – March 2004
- Further funding possibilities for extensions to be researched and followed up
- Ongoing work by Tamarack and local Vibrant Communities on G and P
- Inclusion of learnings in Pan Canadian Learning Community approaches

