



# Vibrant COMMUNITIES

## **Framing Poverty & Poverty Reduction**

### **Session #2**

### **Models and their Implications**

## *Overview of Sessions*

### **Session One - Concepts and Debates (March 28)**

- **Considered key concepts and debates related to poverty and poverty reduction, and tried to position our work in Vibrant Communities in relation to these ideas.**

### **Session Two - Models and their Implications (April 4)**

- **Will examine four different approaches to poverty and poverty reduction and consider the implications for key aspects of our work: engaging partners, developing strategies, measuring progress and communicating with others.**

### **Session Three - Common Ground with Diversity (April 18)**

- **Will focus on the challenge of framing poverty and poverty reduction within a Pan-Canadian initiative.**

## *The Challenge of Problem Definition with Complex Issues*

- Technical Complexity – Many inter-related factors
- Social Complexity – Many partners with different lenses (perspectives and priorities) for viewing the issue
- Changing Context – The environment may change in ways that significantly alters the issue
- Continuous Learning – Insights gained along the way may alter how participants understand the problem



**Problem that frequently changes shape and complexion**

### *Demands on Problem Definition*

<i>Goal</i>	<i>Concern</i>	<i>Features</i>
<b>Engaging Partners</b>	To allow partners to enter a learning process from different starting points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Broad, flexible, simple at the outset</li> <li>• More refined and developed over time</li> </ul>
<b>Strategy Development</b>	To provide direction and focus for poverty reduction work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Substantive</li> </ul>
<b>Measuring Progress</b>	To allow progress to be tracked and measured	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Precise and consistent</li> <li>• Able to accommodate learning and change</li> <li>• Practical to implement</li> </ul>
<b>Communication</b>	To ensure that the general public and prospective partners can relate to and support the work, and to support low-income residents in their efforts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clear, accessible, tangible</li> <li>• Deepens awareness</li> <li>• Affirms low-income residents</li> <li>• Inspires support from others</li> </ul>

## *Four Models*

*Note: These four models were selected for attention primarily because they represent a range of approaches. Our goal is twofold:*

- 1. To consider different approaches to framing poverty and poverty reduction and their implications for key aspects of our work;*
- 2. To provide some tools for assessing the strengths and weaknesses of any such approach.*

<b>Approach</b>	<b>General Description</b>	<b>Example</b>
<b>Low-income ('Poverty') Lines</b>	<p>Low-income lines are the most commonly used tool for defining poverty (although Statistics Canada notes that these are not official poverty lines but measures of low income). They provide thresholds below which a household is considered to be living on low income.</p> <p>The manner in which these lines are calculated has given rise to various debates. The most basic debate is over relative approaches that measure disparity of income (LICO and LIM) versus absolute approaches that measure ability to meet a set list of needs (Market Basket Measure).</p>	<p>There are several versions of low-income lines each calculated in its own way. Briefly, they are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>LICO</b> – Household income below which proportion of spending on food, clothing and shelter is at least 20% more than the average</li> <li>• <b>LIM</b> – After tax income lower than 50% of the median</li> <li>• <b>Market Basket Measure</b> – Disposable income lower than the cost of a selected basket of goods and services.</li> </ul> <p>Note: There are several different MBMs ranging from the Fraser Institute's Basic Needs model (focused on what is needed for physical survival) to others that are more generous to HRSDC's which falls in the middle.</p>

<p><b>Pathways</b></p>	<p>Pathways models map the steppingstones along which people move in their journeys out of poverty. They may be developed with respect to few or many dimensions, and may be more or less detailed in the practical milestones they identify. Typically, they allow for a high degree of customization to reflect the specific circumstances of different individuals or households.</p> <p>The scales and ladder approach to pathways mapping was developed in the US at a time when the work of community organizations was being particularly challenged to verify its ability to generate results.</p>	<p><b>Missouri Self-Sufficiency Scales</b></p> <p>This is one example of the scales and ladders approach to pathways mapping. The Missouri Community Action Agencies, along with other Community Action Agencies throughout the US, developed this model at a time when such organizations were under particular pressure to verify their effectiveness at achieving results. Self-sufficiency scales typically provide a fine-grained and multidimensional way of understanding the work of such agencies and tracking the results they are achieving.</p>
<p><b>Asset or Capacity Building Approach</b></p>	<p>Asset or capacity building models focus attention on developing the underlying resources and capacities needed to escape poverty on a sustainable basis. They depict the critical mass of assets needed to cope with stresses and shocks, and to maintain and enhance capabilities now and in the future. They recognize that everyone has assets on which to build and support individuals and families to acquire the critical mass of assets needed for long-term well-being. They may focus on a more limited (e.g., specifically economic) or a wider set of assets (e.g., personal, cultural, social, political).</p>	<p><b>Sustainable Livelihoods Framework</b></p> <p>This framework was adapted from a model developed by the UK Department of International Development, and adjusted for use in Canada. It is a holistic, asset-based framework for understanding poverty and the work of poverty reduction. At the centre of the framework is the Asset Pentagon indicating the interplay of personal, physical, social, financial and human assets. The full model also addresses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vulnerability Context – contextual and systemic factors that contribute to poverty</li> <li>• Practical and Critical Interventions – supports for individuals in building assets and interventions for systemic change.</li> </ul>

<p><b>Multi-dimensional Approach</b></p>	<p>Multidimensional models address a wide array of factors, typically considering not only the resources or capacities needed by individuals or families to escape poverty, but also the systemic changes that need to take place in order to enable aggregate poverty reduction at the level of a community or a society.</p>	<p><b>National Indicators of Community Action Performance</b>  The National Indicators of Community Action Performance were created in 2005 to report on the six national goals of the Community Services Network. These goals and indicators are reflective of the belief that change must be created at three different levels – family/individual, agency, and community – in order for poverty reduction work to be successful.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Goal 1: Low-income people become more self-sufficient. (FAMILY)</li> <li>▪ Goal 2: The conditions in which low-income people live are improved. (COMMUNITY)</li> <li>▪ Goal 3: Low-income people own a stake in their community. (COMMUNITY)</li> <li>▪ Goal 4: Partnerships among supporters and providers of service to low- income people are achieved. (AGENCY)</li> <li>▪ Goal 5: Agencies increase their capacity to achieve results. (AGENCY)</li> <li>▪ Goal 6: Low-income people, especially vulnerable populations, achieve their potential by strengthening family and other supportive systems. (FAMILY)</li> </ul>
--	--	--

## *Highlights*

<i>Approach</i>	<i>Key Strengths</i>	<i>Key Limitations</i>
<p><b><i>Low Income ('Poverty') Lines</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• LICO</li> <li>• LIM</li> <li>• MBM</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Widely understood and recognized</li> <li>• Relatively straightforward to apply</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More descriptive than explanatory do doesn't in itself provide much guidance for strategy development</li> <li>• May focus too narrowly on income</li> </ul>
<p><b><i>Pathways Approach</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Missouri Family Self-Sufficiency Scales</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Well-defined steppingstones</li> <li>• Allows for reliable and objective measurement of progress</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focusses much more on individuals/families than systems</li> </ul>
<p><b><i>Asset or Capacity Building Approach</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sustainable Livelihoods</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Comprehensive and coherent</li> <li>• Highlights interconnectedness</li> <li>• Focusses on underlying capacities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tracking process is somewhat subjective and onerous</li> </ul>
<p><b><i>Multidimensional Approach</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• National Indicators of Community Action Performance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prioritizes work at both the systems level and the level of individuals/families</li> <li>• Progress measures are fairly objective – may lump apples &amp; oranges, but not apples &amp; jackhammers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Difficult or impossible to address all elements – trying risks being “a mile wide and an inch deep”</li> </ul>

## *Approaches and Their Implications*

<i>Approach</i>	<i>Partners</i>	<i>Strategies</i>	<i>Progress</i>	<i>Communication</i>
<p><b>Low-income ('Poverty') Lines</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• LICO</li> <li>• LIM</li> <li>• Market Basket Measure</li> </ul>	<p><i>Strengths:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lowest common denominator – Income notion of poverty broadly understood and recognized</li> <li>• Low-income lines (especially LICO) widely used and accepted by people engaged with poverty issues, including government</li> </ul> <p><i>Challenges:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Could mask differences in thinking about the causes of and solutions to poverty</li> <li>• Could be significant debates over relative (LICO and LIM) vs. absolute conceptions of poverty (MBM) or over the level of income to use.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Strengths</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Applicable across a wide range of strategies</li> <li>• May tend to focus attention on areas that bear closely on income (employment, public assistance, reduced costs of goods/services)</li> </ul> <p><i>Challenges</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More descriptive than explanatory so doesn't provide much basis for strategy selection</li> <li>• May discourage attention from areas less directly connected to income (self-esteem, self-confidence, hope, relationships of support) or from non-income aspects of poverty (inclusion, empowerment)</li> </ul>	<p><i>Strengths</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clear definitions and methodologies</li> <li>• Specific measure of change (reducing depth of poverty, exiting poverty)</li> <li>• Allows for comparison with other communities</li> <li>• Recognized by government</li> </ul> <p><i>Challenges</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Only reflects progress when it translates into income change</li> <li>• Collecting income data from households can be difficult</li> </ul> <p><i>Undetermined</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May or may not be a good proxy for measuring other dimensions of poverty</li> </ul>	<p><i>Strengths</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relatively simple to explain</li> <li>• Widely recognized</li> <li>• Focussed</li> <li>• From what to what clear</li> </ul> <p><i>Challenges</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Doesn't in itself speak to other dynamics often associated with poverty such as inclusion and empowerment</li> </ul>

<i>Approach</i>	<i>Partners</i>	<i>Strategies</i>	<i>Progress</i>	<i>Communication</i>
<p><b>Pathways Approach</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Missouri Family Self-Sufficiency Scales</b></li> </ul>	<p><i>Strengths:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Speaks to a wide range of issues and concerns of potential interest to diverse partners.</li> <li>• Multifaceted approach but indicators of progress are clear and specific.</li> </ul> <p><i>Challenges:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Partners are primarily engaged for purposes of resource and referral as opposed to systems change</li> <li>• Partners are seen as mainly either a) other service providers or b) funders/supporters</li> </ul>	<p><i>Strengths:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demands that we consider integrated service provision – strategies that impact only one subscale have little impact on overall self-sufficiency</li> <li>• Supports customization of programming for the specific situation of different individuals/families</li> </ul> <p><i>Challenges:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lends itself primarily to strategies focusing on the individual or family as the unit of impact as opposed to systems change.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Strengths:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Captures incremental progress towards an outcome</li> <li>• Sensitive to small degrees of change</li> <li>• Scales are designed with examples so as to be reliable – different scale administrators will rate the same family in the same way, a “2” or a “10” means the same thing to everyone</li> </ul> <p><i>Challenges:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Requires substantial effort on the part of project partners and therefore ‘buy in’</li> </ul>	<p><i>Strengths:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Clear and specific</i></li> </ul> <p><i>Challenges:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Moving upward on a scale” only has meaning to people who are familiar with the system</li> <li>• Does not clearly “weight” the subscales – some may have more “domino effect” than others, this is not necessarily clear without additional interpretation</li> <li>• Need to establish what is meant by “self-sufficiency” – above prevention line on all categories?</li> </ul>

<i>Approach</i>	<i>Partners</i>	<i>Strategies</i>	<i>Progress</i>	<i>Communication</i>
<b>Asset or Capacity Building Approach</b>  <b>• Sustainable Livelihoods Framework</b>	<p><i>Strengths:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Speaks to a wide range of issues and concerns of potential interest to different partners</li> <li>• Shows linkages among diverse issues and partners</li> </ul> <p><i>Challenges</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Could be overwhelming for those new to the issue</li> </ul>	<p><i>Strengths:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provides a framework for identifying a wide range of strategies (on different dimensions and levels) that may be pursued over time</li> <li>• Supports customization of programming for the specific situation of different individuals/families</li> </ul> <p><i>Challenges</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identifies more areas for action than can be pursued effectively at any one time</li> </ul>	<p><i>Strengths:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provides a basis for measuring long-term capacity</li> <li>• Captures incremental progress towards an outcome</li> <li>• Sensitive to small changes</li> </ul> <p><i>Challenges:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tracking method is relatively subjective</li> <li>• Portrait research methodology is time intensive and may be better suited to nonprofit organizations than others</li> </ul>	<p><i>Strengths:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Well-developed, comprehensive and coherent perspective</li> <li>• Affirms assets of low-income participants</li> <li>• Positive goal</li> </ul> <p><i>Challenges:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Could be overwhelming</li> </ul>

<i>Approach</i>	<i>Partners</i>	<i>Strategies</i>	<i>Progress</i>	<i>Communication</i>
<p><b>Multi-dimensional Approach</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>National Indicators of Community Action Performance</b></li> </ul>	<p><i>Strengths:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Building partnerships/ collaborations is seen as necessary for success – Goal 4</li> <li>• Allows for engagement of partners at multiple levels – service providers, systems players etc.</li> </ul> <p><i>Challenges:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Could be overwhelming for those new to the issue</li> </ul>	<p><i>Strengths:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Possible to work at three levels – family, agency and community – however, it may be necessary for an organization to think about where they can get biggest “bang for their buck”</li> </ul> <p><i>Challenges:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Danger of going “a mile wide and an inch deep”</li> <li>• Necessary to perform good asset mapping in order to find your most appropriate niche</li> </ul>	<p><i>Strengths:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Addresses most, if not all, of the dimensions and levels of importance</li> </ul> <p><i>Challenges:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Data gathering can be extremely challenging, more so the more areas of the work that an agency is engaged in</li> </ul>	<p><i>Strengths:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Simple and brief presentation of wide ranging program</li> <li>• Ambitious but also accessible</li> </ul> <p><i>Challenges:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lots of information, so communication can and should be tailored well to different target audiences</li> </ul>

***Conclusion:  
Some Big Choices***

**Perhaps the biggest choice is between a tightly focussed perspective that is generally easier to implement**

***Or***

**a more comprehensive perspective  
that better supports multifaceted and integrated strategies  
but is harder to pursue.**

***Or***

**Is there a way to get the best of both worlds?**

**Session Three will explore these options with a special eye to refining the approach to poverty and poverty reduction underpinning Vibrant Communities as a Pan-Canadian initiative.**

