

## Rural Canada: challenges and opportunities<sup>1</sup>

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**Bill Reimer, May 2009**

Rural Canada presents new opportunities for productive policy investments. Urbanization, international trade, immigration, environmental stress, and past political agendas have created a legacy of significant change to the organization of rural society – often creating hardship and anxiety as livelihoods are undermined and traditional support networks prove inadequate. But these changes have also opened new opportunities for reversing those misfortunes on behalf of all Canadians. Policy adjustments are needed to build and exploit those opportunities.

Mechanization and improvements in transportation have placed considerable stress on many of our remote places by decreasing population levels – but these changes have also sustained our national accounts and kept our standard of living among the highest in the world. Immigration has largely reinforced the urban-centric face of population growth but there are instances of spectacular integration of new Canadians in rural places. Failing fish stocks, spruce budworm, the mountain pine beetle, extreme weather, and the warming of our northern regions are all indicators of environmental stresses that directly affect rural areas, but they have also demonstrated the remarkable capacity of rural communities to organize in the face of these challenges.

New policies and programs are required in order to take advantage of the opportunities that are emerging with these changes. To match the new conditions, those policies should be developed for circumstances which are more complex, fluid, and global in scope – in both rural and urban areas. A comprehensive approach is required since the issues cut across sectors, departments, and levels of scale, the processes are complex, and the best strategies are unclear. A coordinated approach is required since action in one area is likely to impact many others, both directly and indirectly.

Dealing appropriately with these conditions can have significant positive returns for urban centres. Urban economies continue to rely on rural areas for natural resources, food, water, waste management, carbon sequestration, and recreation. It makes sense, therefore, to consider these new policies as urban investments as much as rural ones.

This report provides evidence and reflections related to the current conditions of rural Canada. They arise from 20 years of collaboration with the *Canadian Rural Revitalization Foundation* (CRRF), including 10 years of intensive research within the *New Rural Economy* (NRE) project initiated by CRRF. Over this period we have been driven by three questions: What are the changes taking place in rural Canada? What are the drivers of those changes? and How can rural people and communities best position themselves for the future, in the light of those changes? Although there have been many different answers proposed to all of these questions, this paper outlines my own – heavily informed by the insights and contributions of my colleagues.

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## The challenges facing rural Canada

### Urbanization

Continuing urbanization and its drivers have shifted the relative importance of rural Canada (Figure 1). Our commitment to international commodity trade and the increasing value of human time have driven the mechanization of all production. This has had a significant impact on rural places since the population has decreased as production has increased – in agriculture, fishing, forestry, mining, and petroleum sectors. As a result, our natural resource commodities have become the major supporters of our balance of trade (Figure 2) but our rural communities have been depopulated, particularly in those that are strongly integrated with the global economy (Figure 3).

\*\*\*\*\* Figures 1 to 3 about here \*\*\*\*\*

At the same time rural areas close to urban centres have been growing. In the process, prime agricultural land has been threatened (Hofmann et al. 2005) and our dependence on automobiles and trucks has grown since we have adopted an approach to land use that encourages urban sprawl. The associated increase in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions has added to the environmental stress created by fossil fuel use in our commodity production, further exacerbating the challenges of climate change and global warming.

Urbanization has also dramatically shifted the concentration of political and economic power and influence, moving it away from rural-derived concerns to those of larger centres. In general, rural voices in parliament have been populist and suspicious of centralized government. This has blended with the neo-liberal rhetoric and policies of corporate Canada, reinforcing the regionalization of government services in the name of efficiency, client-driven services, and representation by population. As a result, sensitivities to local conditions, the special needs of small places, and the challenges of distance and density have diminished, as our private and public sector institutions have become more rationalized and centralized.

The rural voice in parliament has been further fragmented by the strong sectoral organization of political agendas. Most of the rural challenges such as population decline, reorganization of property rights, poverty, services, and local governance are multi-sectoral in nature, especially as they are manifested in specific places. Building a strong local economy, for example, requires diversification on at least a regional level. This places the interests of agriculture and forestry, fishing and tourism, energy and environment, or mining and health in potential conflict as they struggle to fulfill their mandates or even survive in difficult conditions.

If there is no place where these conflicting interests can be identified, debated, and accommodated, we are often left with short-sighted policies and disastrous outcomes (Federal Family on Community Collaboration 2008). In the process, the integrated rural voice is diminished.

#### **Investing in Urban-Rural Interdependence**

The City of Edmonton and its surrounding regions (Northeast Alberta Information Hub) have entered into an agreement to share resources for economic, cultural, and social objectives [[www.albertahub.com](http://www.albertahub.com)].

When senior governments failed to take initiative on declining fish stocks in the Miramichi River, regional NGOs, urban and rural municipalities, and businesses organized themselves to deal with watershed challenges ([www.mwmc.ca](http://www.mwmc.ca)).

Too often the policy responses to these challenges are represented as a struggle between urban and rural interests (Savoie 2008). This does not recognize the pervasive interdependence between them and the opportunities it affords. Policy investments which build on that interdependence have a much better chance for sustaining both types of regions in the long term (Reimer and Nagata 2008) (see Box: **Investing in Urban-Rural Interdependence**).

## Immigration

Our current patterns and future expectations for immigration promise to exacerbate the challenges of urbanization. Canada's historical dependence on immigration will continue into the foreseeable future. In fact, immigration overtook natural increase as the major source of population growth in 2001 and is projected to become virtually the only source by 2020 (Figure 4). Most of these immigrants settle in or near urban regions (Bollman et al. 2007). This means that rural experiences, challenges, and perspectives will be placed in jeopardy without proactive efforts to communicate and represent those interests. Japan has already recognized this problem – initiating a national program of rural-urban exchanges, communication, and representation directed to its urban population.

\*\*\*\*\* Figure 4 about here \*\*\*\*\*

There are also challenges created where the immigrants' destinations are rural areas. Rural communities tend to be more homogeneous than urban centres with respect to the immigrants' country of origin – and (except for remote centres) they are also more homogeneous with respect to ethnic diversity (Reimer et al. 2007). This can create barriers to social inclusion for potential immigrants where differences in cultures and life-styles conflict.

Recognizing this challenge and initiating appropriate policy changes has already proven to have many payoffs. The Provincial Nominee Program and Quebec's immigration initiatives have provided fertile ground for community partners to take advantage of local conditions and assets in effective ways (see Box: **Immigration in Southern Manitoba**). As a result of such targeted initiatives, Manitoba, Quebec, BC, Alberta, and Ontario have all increased their levels of rural immigration (Reimer, 2007).

### Immigration in Southern Manitoba

Citizens in the Winkler region of rural Manitoba were faced with a labour shortage for their growing local economy. They realized that their roots in Mennonite culture and religion provided important connections with fellow citizens in Central and South America. Using the Provincial Nominee Program they negotiated special arrangements with the Manitoba government, established a large number of support programs in their communities, and created a rate of immigration that rivals that of Toronto and Vancouver.

## Social Cohesion

As a multi-cultural and diverse society Canada has always been faced with the challenge of social cohesion. We do not have an exemplary record in dealing with this challenge – as demonstrated by the treatment of Aboriginal Peoples, Japanese-Canadians, and Third World immigrants – but we have managed to address these failures in a way that gives some hope for the future. Both the failures and the successes have a strong rural component which promises to become just as important in the future.

Aboriginal Peoples, for example, are the fastest growing rural population in Canada – particularly in the West (Figure 5). A relatively high proportion of that growth is among young

people. Statistics Canada, for example, projects that in 2017, young aboriginal people will provide 30% of the new workers in Saskatchewan (Statistics Canada 2005). Policy initiatives that ensure the integration of aboriginal people in all labour, social, and cultural opportunities are likely to be particularly productive – especially those which are sufficiently flexible to match the education and training demands required.

\*\*\*\*\* Figure 5 about here \*\*\*\*\*

The integration of aboriginal peoples, immigrants, visible minorities, and diverse cultural groups has traditionally been driven by a focus on labour market integration in Canada. This is reflected in our immigration preference for those with marketable skills, the public support for job and language training, and affirmative action programs targeting access to jobs. There is good reason for this emphasis, since an adequate income is a key element for a high quality of life that supports social cohesion. However, there is also evidence that the availability of services, amenities, and social support are equally important for the sustainability of communities and the integration of diverse people and culture (Halseth and Ryser 2006). Ensuring these services means providing a policy environment where innovations in services can thrive, local collaboration is supported, and the important contribution of informal groups and organizations is recognized. This often means adapting program requirements to meet new forms of accountability and representation.

#### **Welcoming Strangers**

Cap-St-Ignace greets its newcomers by assigning them ‘Godparents’ from among the local citizens. The Godparents visit the newcomers, invite them to a local community dinner, and introduce them to the community as part of that event. This initiative serves to reduce anxiety on the part of community members, provides essential information to the newcomers, and facilitates the establishment of more long-term relationships within the village.

Building this cohesion across ethnic, cultural, and language differences is a particularly important objective for rural areas. As diversity grows, it challenges the traditional homogeneity of many communities, often creating fear and anxiety in the face of change (Amor, 2007). But there are also many instances where communities have embraced this diversity – seeing in it the potential for new assets that can add to both the economic sustainability of the community and their quality of life (see Boxes: **Immigration in Southern Manitoba** and **Welcoming Strangers**). Policy initiatives that support and enhance these initiatives are likely to be worthwhile investments (Reimer, 2007).

#### **Health and Education**

A recent national study of rural health concluded that “rural residents of Canada are more likely to be in poorer socio-economic conditions, to have lower educational attainment, to exhibit less healthy behaviours and to have higher overall mortality rates than urban residents.” (Canadian Institute for Health Information 2006) (Figure 6). Besides providing a unique insight into the comparative advantages and disadvantages of rural versus urban centres, the report is innovative in that it investigates the special characteristics of *place* that contribute to health-related behaviour and health outcomes. Rather than treat health solely as a result of individual characteristics, it attempts to identify how place of residence contributes to their health. In doing so, the report highlights the ways in which distance, density, transportation demands, and community relationships make important contributions to key elements of health such as life expectancy, injury levels, quality of food, and access to services. It reinforces the point that

good health does not depend on an individual's behaviour alone, but where they live can have a significant impact on their health outcomes as well.

\*\*\*\* Figure 6 about here \*\*\*\*

The authors of the report suggest that there are many points at which government or collective intervention can be used to reduce the rural-urban health gap – many of them place-focused with strong recognition of the special circumstances faced by people in relatively isolated locations. Consistent with the characteristics of rural places, policy interventions must be multi-sectoral and multi-level to recognize the complexity of health promotion and prevention, include initiatives relating to the income inadequacy, uncertain employment, special occupational hazards, and long distance travel that are endemic to rural places. These policies should also be research-driven in order to improve our understanding of the complex relationship among individual behavior, place, and health. Emergent innovations such as telehealth can be matched by less technical approaches rooted in social initiatives such as the *Healthy Communities* initiatives ([www.rgvvs.qc.ca](http://www.rgvvs.qc.ca); [www.ohcc-ccso.ca](http://www.ohcc-ccso.ca); [www.bchealthycommunities.ca](http://www.bchealthycommunities.ca)).

## Environment

As our scientific knowledge grows, so does our recognition of human interdependence with biological and physical environments. This has been most often brought to public attention by major disasters and crises that we have faced: from the collapse of the cod fishery and desertification of agricultural land to the spread of the mountain pine beetle and melting ice caps. The complexity of interdependence should not be seen only in these widespread crises, however, for they are just as prevalent in more local events such as the location of garbage dumps or urban sprawl.

Most of these environmental stresses have direct effects on rural areas since they affect the condition of most of our natural resources. Rural areas are also vulnerable to urban lifestyles that indirectly affect the more general environment. The ecological footprint of Toronto, for example, extends well beyond its urban regions to include about a third of the province (Wilson and Anielski 2005). Canadians in general have an ecological footprint of about 7.1 hectares each – the seventh highest in the world (Living Planet Report 2008). Concerted action is required by both urban and rural citizens if the complexity of this interdependence is to be adequately addressed.

Policy investments that organize and build upon this interdependence are likely to pay off in both the short and long term. Preserving and expanding the carbon sequestration of rural Canada in our forests, water, agricultural, and mineral resources is an obvious direction – both for direct enhancement and for the technological developments to support it. Integrating the direct and common property costs into business and national accounts would go a long way to make them visible and reduce the current tendency to dump those costs on already stressed environments and populations (see Box: **Recognizing Environmental Interdependence**).

### **Recognizing Environmental Interdependence**

New York City recognized the value of an alliance with the communities in the Catskill Mountains – the region from where it receives its drinking water. In exchange for maintaining those sources in good quality, New York provides funds for community development (<http://www.epa.gov/owow/watershed/ny/nycityfi.html>).

At a national level, Japan charges a surtax on water use that goes to rural development in recognition of that interdependence while France does the same on food.

## Fiscal Crises

The current fiscal crisis has reawakened us to the boom and bust cycles of international finance. In spite of the relative security in our banking system, the crisis makes clear our vulnerability to world (and especially USA) economic conditions. Rural areas are particularly affected since they are so highly dependent on the international trade associated with our commodity economy. When the construction industry falters in the USA, we feel the effects on our forest industry; when their manufacturing sector declines, so does the demand for our metals; and when their economy shrinks, our energy producing industries face declining demand and revenues. All of these global changes have direct rural impacts.

The bust part of the trade and business cycle also has important indirect effects that are particularly detrimental to rural areas. The job loss and declines in GDP typically produce public pressure for action on employment and business support – often justifying the relaxation of environmental and commercial regulations, reductions in social spending, and protectionist responses by our sector-based agencies, communities, and urban centres. All of these jeopardize our rural places, since they are most directly affected by environmental impacts, place the greatest per capita demand on social spending, and are least capable of defending their interests due to distance and population.

Economic diversification is most frequently suggested as a means to avoid the negative impacts of boom and bust cycles. This is particularly difficult for rural areas since they are often dependent on one or two resources – tied to geography and technology. Policy investments that serve to overcome these limitations by supporting value-added initiatives, market development opportunities, and basic infrastructure would be a good choice to mitigate these fluctuations.

Our research has shown that the development of social cohesion is particularly important for managing the boom and bust of economic uncertainty (Reimer 2006a). In those communities where people have established strong social bonds and commitment, a downturn in the economy is more likely to be met by increased efforts to find new markets, to reorganize local assets in a more sustainable manner, and to support the most vulnerable in the population. This is why policy that supports the building of social infrastructure during the boom periods is just as important as that which maintains the physical infrastructure within a community (see Box: **Managing Boom and Bust**). We need only to point to the resiliency of many communities and regions throughout rural Canada to see the value of social cohesion for sustainability.

### **Managing Boom and Bust**

As a result of living intimately with the stresses of booms and busts, the city of Inuvik has learned that investing in social infrastructure is as important as physical infrastructure for managing these stresses. When they built a new arena, rather than demolish the old one, they converted it to a community greenhouse which now serves as a social centre while providing sorely needed vegetables in the northerly climate.

## Rural poverty and income

It is instructive to note that the final report of the Senate Committee on Rural Poverty includes the discussion of a wide range of rural issues typically investigated outside of poverty studies (Senate Standing Committee on Agriculture and Forestry 2008). This is because the issues of

poverty and income are intimately integrated with a wide range of economic and social factors – from employment and education to housing, transportation, infrastructure, and social support.

Rural poverty is relatively invisible by comparison to urban poverty, but it is no less devastating for the men, women, and children who face it on a daily basis. Unfortunately many of the programs designed to provide a safety net or additional help for the poor are hampered in rural areas by increased distances or low population. In urban areas, public transportation is relatively cheap and available, making visits to the doctor, day care, training sessions, employment insurance office, or welfare appointment a relatively minor burden on the poor. In rural areas, however, one must have access to a car or truck to take advantage of these services and likely as not a family member or neighbour to manage children or chores while one has gone (cf. Box: **Access to Rural Services**).

These more informal services are most often provided by neighbours, family, and friends as part of the informal economy in rural areas. Policy options that recognize the value of these informal activities would be beneficial for the formal and informal economy alike. Our research shows how informal and formal economic activities and services are intimately related in rural areas – with informal activities providing training opportunities, trust development, and an economic buffer to the operation of the formal economy (Reimer 2006b; Pamelita and Taylor 2008). Rather than trying to minimize the contribution of the informal economic activities, therefore, policy initiatives that recognize its contribution are likely to be more fruitful.

### **Rural governance**

Since the 1970s, federal and provincial governments have been reorganizing local and regional governments in significant ways. For the most part, this has meant the amalgamation of smaller jurisdictions into larger ones while downloading responsibilities to these new entities. Various approaches to amalgamation have been taken by different provinces, from imposed to self-selected structures, but in all cases they have involved considerable local resistance as community members became concerned about loss of influence or maneuvered for advantage in the new structures.

Rural areas are particularly affected by these trends since their low population density and higher cost of service provision make them prime candidates for regionalization. At the same time, amalgamation has been particularly onerous for rural areas since it includes downloading the burden of travel to local citizens, a loss of autonomy for most small centres, and a major challenge to their community and personal identities – sometimes developed over many generations.

The process has been especially difficult on the modes of governance that rural communities have traditionally used to guide their decisions and actions. Most smaller centres have evolved systems of governance that blend informal and formal norms in somewhat unique yet effective ways. Amalgamation required local leaders and citizens to modify those procedures, usually to accommodate the bureaucratic norms of formal government organizations. This often undermined local systems of trust and shifted the players of influence in unfamiliar ways. As

#### **Access to Rural Services**

“First, you have to be able to get to Grey County social services to apply, which is a central location in Owen Sound. You have to view a film on the first day, go back another day for an interview and another day to see if you get it. Therefore, you have to be able to get there three times and then they send you a cheque if you get it, or a letter of denial. If you get a letter of denial, you then have to go to a tribunal, which could take months.” Nancy Shular, Vice-President of the National Anti-Poverty Organization. evidence, September 28, 2006: Interim Report: --

demonstrated in our research, it has meant that the assessment of government effectiveness declines as one moves from the local, to regional, to the national levels (Figure 7).

\*\*\*\*\* Figure 7 about here \*\*\*\*\*

It has taken rural people considerable time to adjust to these changes, with mixed results according to the nature of the structures imposed. Increased autonomy for local and regional entities does not always mean improvements in programs and action – particularly where capacity is low (Jacob et al. 2008). Both delivery and accountability can be jeopardized where resources and capacity are inadequate – as reflected in the Walkerton tragedy (O'Connor 2002). Communities that have traditionally organized themselves on the basis of informal leadership, volunteer groups, unofficial accountability, and multiple forms of contribution are hard pressed when faced with demands for by-laws, formal accountability, strategic plans, and regional collaboration. This is especially onerous where the pool of volunteers and potential leaders is small (Hanlon and Halseth 2006). Building these new forms of capacity takes time and in most cases some external support. Without them, these places are liable to face significant disadvantage in the short term and external dependency in the long term.

Regional and central government policies can support local governance in two major ways. The first is to facilitate the transition to more formal ways of governing through training, resources, and information-sharing, especially where they accommodate the extra demands of distance and density which rural places face. The second is through the recognition and accommodation of the many innovations in governance that have emerged in response to local conditions. The emergence of new forms of representation and accountability that we see in Nunavut, community-based justice, and new governance relations provide strong examples of the capacity for innovation in governance that are able to reflect local or regional idiosyncrasies in a constructive fashion (see Box: **Innovative Governance**).

#### **Innovative Governance**

When the Carcross/Tagish nation in the Yukon successfully negotiated self-government, they decided they wanted to reorganize their policies in a manner which reflected their traditions and culture. They began with their stories – told to them by their elders and conveying the principles and values they held dear. Using these stories, they formulated the values in the more formal terms required by the Yukon and Federal governments. They then prepared a dance to represent that new policy [[www.ctfn.ca](http://www.ctfn.ca)].

#### **What do we need to meet the challenges?**

These challenges must be addressed at multiple levels and across sectors since the processes involved are multi-level and multi-sectoral ( Reimer and Markey 2008). Both community development research and practice inform us about the strategic options that are most effective: building capacity at the local level, organizing collaboration regionally, and establishing institutional champions at highest levels (provincial and federal). Concentrating at one of these levels may produce short-term improvements and successes, but for a sustained enhancement, all three must be addressed and developed.

#### **Local capacity-building**

Local capacity can be built in a number of ways. In some cases this involves rudimentary initiatives to get people talking – especially in those locations where long term animosities, entrenched isolation, or community marginalization have created demoralizing or unhealthy conditions. In most cases it involves support for community action to reassess local conditions,

develop objectives, identify assets, link them to opportunities, and mobilize groups or individuals to achieve the objectives. Years of research have identified the basic principles for building capacity at the local level (Baker 1993; OECD 2006) and we have several programs that have demonstrated how they might be put in places but the implementation requires regional or national contexts that are sensitive to rural and local dynamics (e.g. EU-LEADER Program, Community Futures Program, SRDC-Community Employment Innovation Program).

### **Regional capacity-building**

Rural places must develop visions that are regional in nature but they often face significant structural impediments to the implementation of those visions. Regional collaboration in rural areas means more time on the road, on the phone, or on the internet than in urban regions. It means more elaborate negotiations with family and neighbours to manage child and elder-care obligations and it means more time away from businesses and employment to attend distant meetings. Under conditions where volunteer activities and multi-sectoral demands are usually higher, regional collaboration faces many competing demands. Without the resources, supports, and legitimation of regional collaboration, it is likely to be given a low priority.

For these reasons, regional collaboration requires structural reorganization in order to work – especially in rural locations. Laissez-faire and sectoral-based approaches as found in some of our provinces have tended to support the high capacity regions at the expense of the low. On the other hand, regional reorganization that places economic, social, political, and environmental representatives around the same table, grounds the rules of collaboration in transparency and compromise, provides representatives with the resources to meet and initiate action, and respects the decisions emerging from the collaboration, has shown how these bodies not only build capacities at the regional level, but contribute significantly to local capacity-building in the process. As a result of their regional participation, local leaders not only learn the skills required for operating in formal organizations, but they discover how compromises and trade-offs can be made when trust has been developed by long-term interactions.

### **Central capacity-building**

Quebec's approach to rural revitalization demonstrates the importance of central government infrastructure to sustain local and regional capacity-building (Quebec 2006). It is not enough for rural municipalities to be strong or regions to be strong, if they are not included within the central government organizations in an integral manner. Having institutional support in the centres of power provides access to information which is critical to the economic and social opportunities of local communities. In order to prepare for the future it is necessary to have information about current trends, potential policy initiatives, and specific programs that are likely to affect that future. Central institutions with a mandate to inform regional and local organizations about these initiatives are critical to that process.

A central ministry would also provide a channel for the representation of rural interests and idiosyncrasies. It would mean that the special characteristics of rural people, groups, and places, are considered while new legislation is being formulated and policies are being imagined. What is perhaps even more important, the assets and opportunities that exist in rural places would be more visible in these centres – assets and opportunities that would otherwise be overlooked or misrepresented as urban experiences and demands become more prominent in our central governments.

### **Multi-sectoral collaboration**

Recognizing and representing these local assets and interests requires collaboration across all three levels: local, regional, and central. It is the local citizens who know the assets and liabilities that exist in their place and they are critical participants when looking for new economic and social alternatives in a rapidly changing environment. It was the citizens of Warner, AB who recognized their failing arena could become a central asset for a hockey school that would eventually become a year-round international education centre for young women. It was the people of Springhill who realized they could use their abandoned mines as a source of geothermal heating for businesses and houses in their town.

The realization of these initiatives would not have been possible without regional and central coordination. Building codes, insurance assessments, financial support are all necessary elements of their accomplishment – all features of regional and national organization. In turn, the assessment of risks and accommodation of local capacities requires accurate and appropriate knowledge at the provincial and national levels. This has not always been the case – reinforcing the necessity for good communication among all three levels.

Multi-sectoral integration is also critical at all of these three levels. Locally, the relatively small population and multiple demands for governance mean that most community decisions have implications for all sectors. The delivery of services, for example, typically involves a wide number of government departments – from health and education to industry and environment. A similar pattern can be found at the regional level. If regional bodies are established only for business interests they are in danger of overlooking the environmental or social implications of their decisions – often with disastrous results. Regional health boards are also in danger if they do not integrate the challenges of education, employment, and poverty that impinge on the health of individuals and communities. Central governments face the greatest challenge to appropriate integration since they are typically the least connected to places and most committed to vested interests represented by departmental differences. (Federal Family on Community Collaboration 2008).

## Conclusions

Rural Canada provides new opportunities for productive policy investments. Many of these are shared with urban places, but the special characteristics of distance, density, and identity mean that special attention needs to be given to rural people and places in order to take full advantage of these opportunities.

Rural-focused policy initiatives should be wholistic in nature. The capacity of rural communities for specialization in services and organization is lower since the population pool is smaller, creating a fertile context for cross-sector initiatives. The proximity to the natural environment means that economic, social, and environmental issues are more intertwined, requiring policy and programs that support inter-departmental collaboration.

Policy initiatives also need to be coordinated among local, regional, and national levels. We now have considerable evidence that this is both possible and productive. Broad-based inter-sectoral and multi-level policies and programs such as the *LEADER* program in Europe, the *Community Futures* program in Canada, and the *Rural Pact* in Quebec all provide models for how institutional structures at a general level can support useful action at the local level. They all recognize the importance of local knowledge for the identification of assets and the necessity of building local capacity to make it happen. They also create regional institutional structures that

facilitate cross-community collaboration and distribute knowledge and services for local capacity-building.

Finally, all of these models make use of central or national institutions with the vision, power, and resources to motivate, inform, and coordinate the many people, departments, and organizations involved. It is a vision rooted in the recognition of the special characteristics of rural places, their contributions to the national economy and society, and the many opportunities they provide for current and future generations. Constructing such a vision for rural Canada remains a pressing objective for both rural and urban places (Apedaile and Reimer 1996).

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## Figures

Figure 1: Canadian Urban and Rural Populations, 1851 to 2006

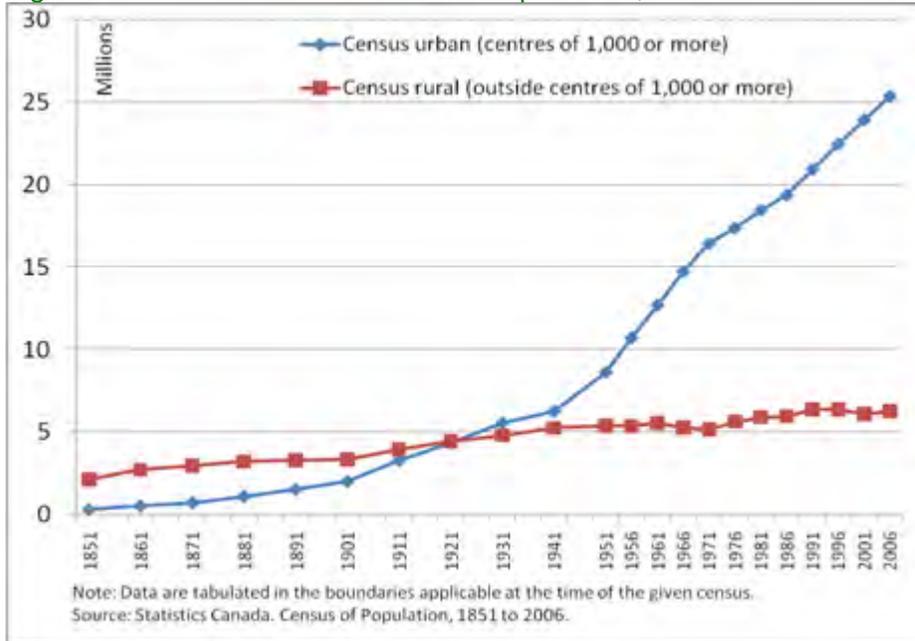


Figure 2: Canadian Balance of Trade, 2007 (CANSIM Data)

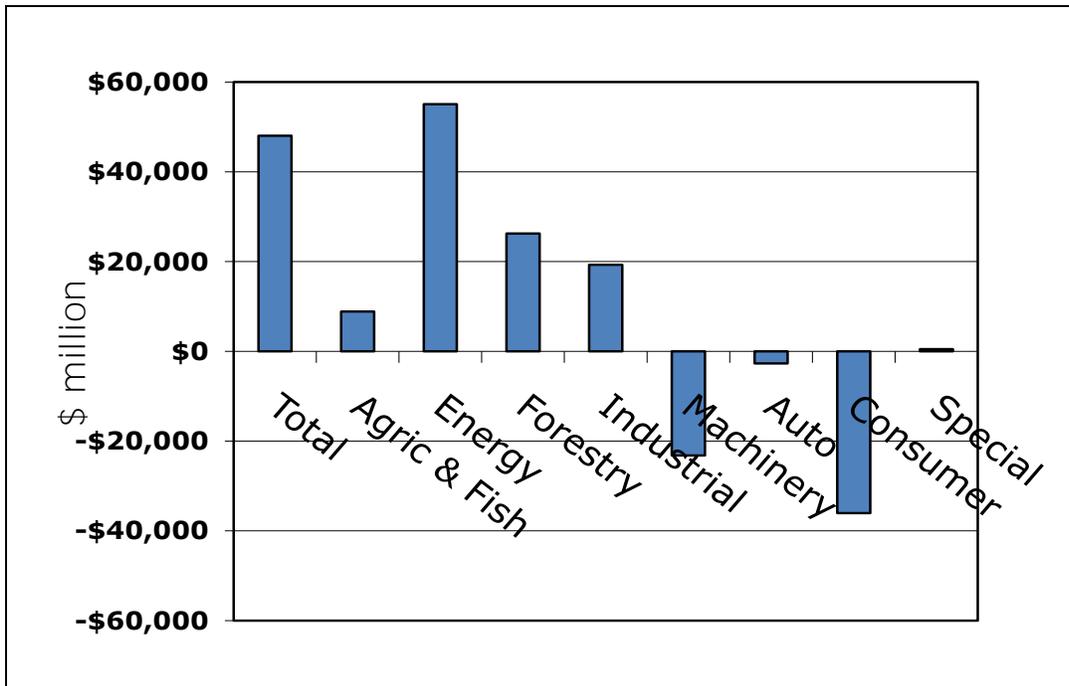
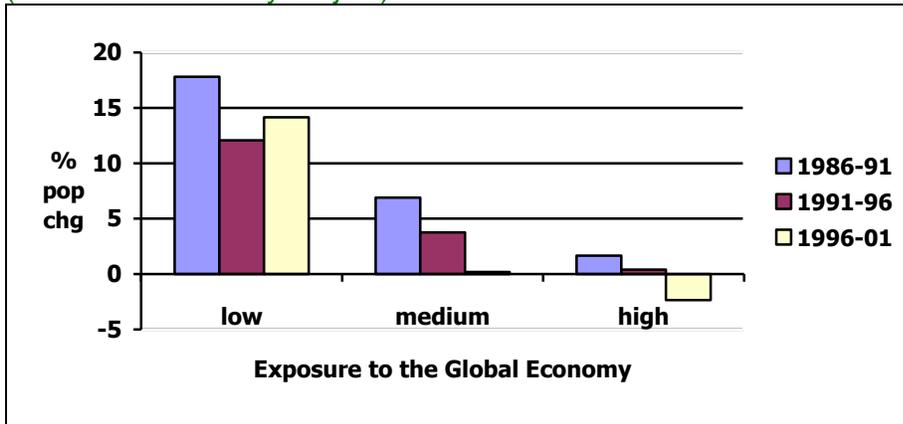


Figure 3: Percentage Population Change by Exposure to the Global Economy, 1986 to 2001 (New Rural Economy Project)



Statistics Canada, Based

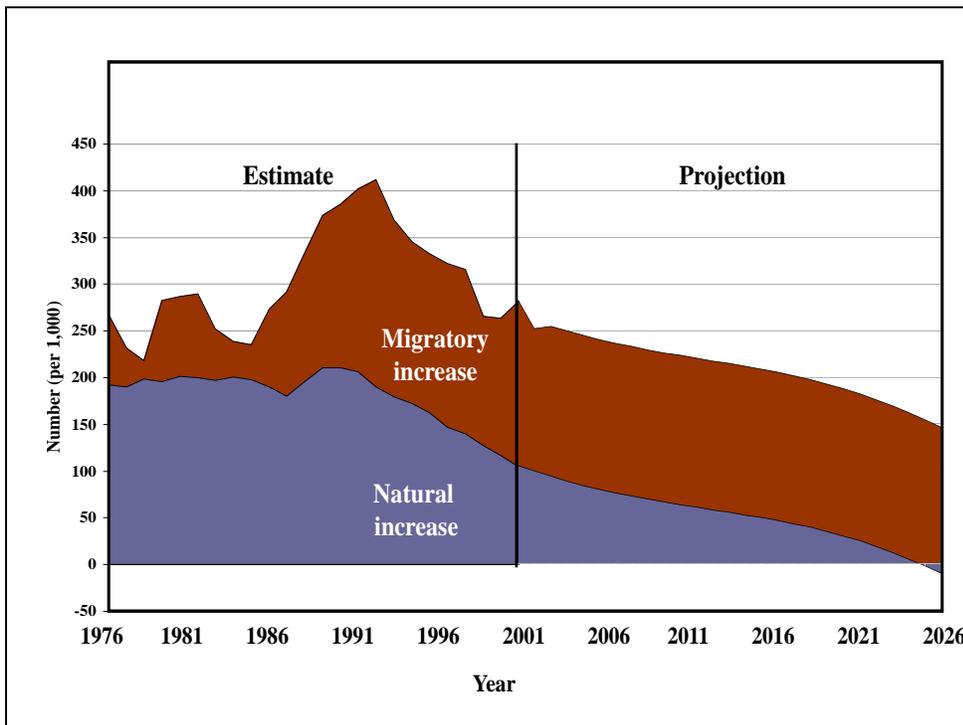


Figure 5: Projected percentage share of population that will be Aboriginal in 2017

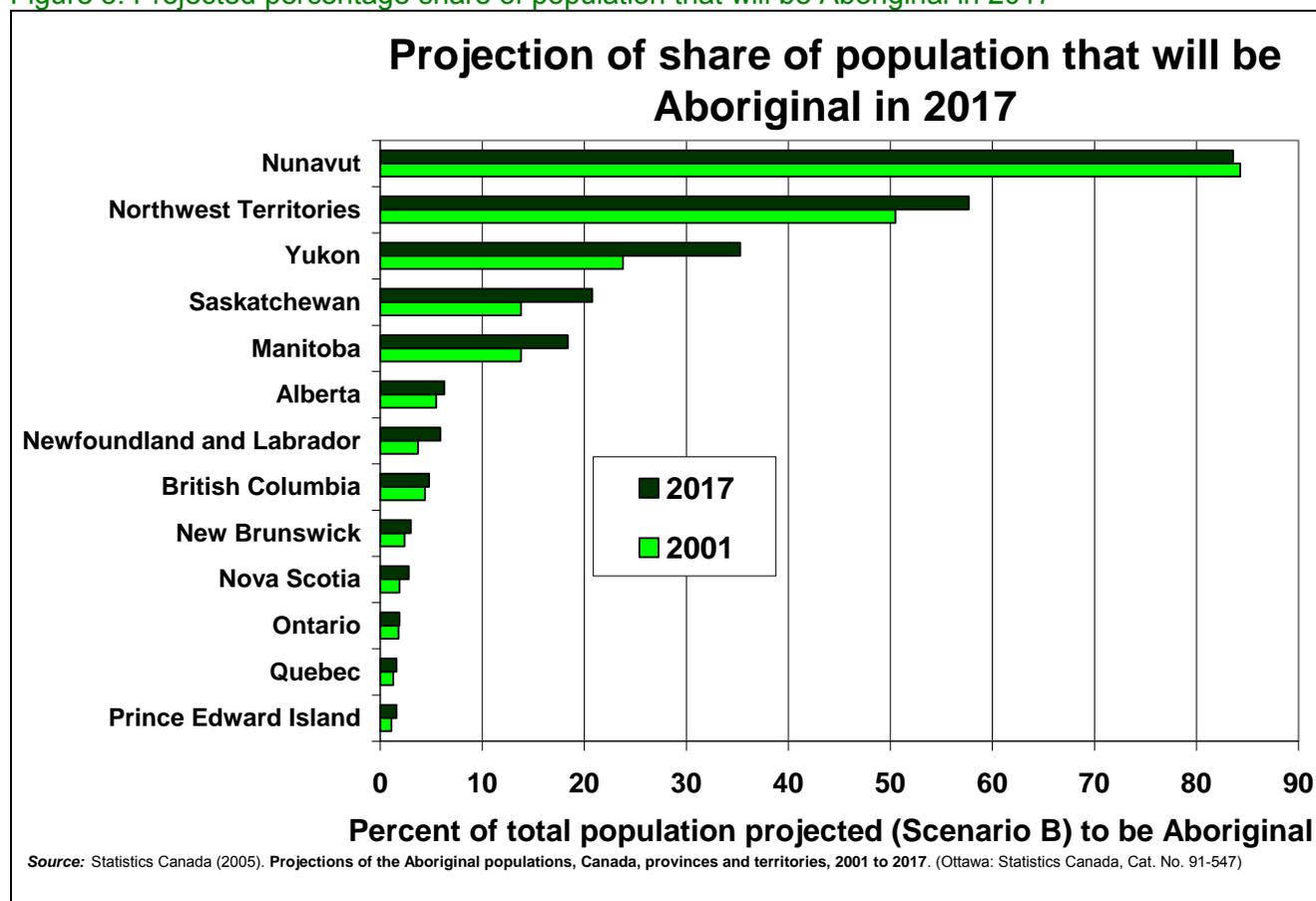


Figure 6: Health Status for Rural and Urban Canada

HEALTH STATUS INDICATORS	URBAN AREAS	RURAL AND SMALL-TOWN AREAS			
		Strong MIZ*	Moderate MIZ	Weak MIZ	No MIZ
Life Expectancy at Birth (years)					
Males	76.77	77.36	75.71	75.02	73.98
Females	81.43	81.49	81.44	81.29	81.44
Health-Adjusted Life Expectancy at Birth (years)					
Males	67.91	68.74	67.21	66.21	65.47
Females	70.55	71.30	71.05	70.70	69.89
Aged-Standardized Proportion of Population Aged 20–64 Who Reported Being Overweight/Obese					
Males	54.7	60.7	60.1	62.5	64.5
Females	38.8	46.2	45.5	47.9	48.7
Total Mortality Rate (age-standardized rate per 100,000)					
Males	908.0	838.9	946.3	940.7	1,010.4
Females	542.4	515.2	563.5	557.7	585.1
All Circulatory Disease–Related Deaths					

(age-standardized rate per 100,000)					
Males	354.5	339.8	368.6	366.9	377.7
Females	214.1	215.1	226.5	221.9	229.2
All Cancer-Related Deaths (age-standardized rate per 100,000)					
Males	247.0	221.3	245.4	238.7	250.1
Females	155.1	140.8	152.2	149.9	150.1
All Respiratory Disease–Related Deaths (age-standardized rate per 100,000)					
Males	88.8	79.8	93.2	92.1	91.8
Females	42.1	37.8	42.6	44.8	43.2
All Unintended Injury–Related Deaths (age-standardized rate per 100,000)					
Males	61.9	79.2	97.3	101.2	142.5
Females	25.6	29.0	33.3	34.0	48.5
Suicide Mortality Rates (age-standardized rate per 100,000)					
Males	19.3	21.4	27.3	27.1	38.4
Females	5.7	4.0	5.1	4.9	7.9

Source: Canadian Institute of Health Information (2006) as presented in Senate (2008: 270)

MIZ = metropolitan influenced zone, a classification developed by Statistics Canada to distinguish between

urban and different types of rural communities. The MIZ categories are based on population density and

distance, but also consider the share of the workforce that commute to metropolitan areas as follows: strong

MIZ: between 30% and < 50%; moderate MIZ: between 5% and < 30%; weak MIZ > 0% and < 5%; no

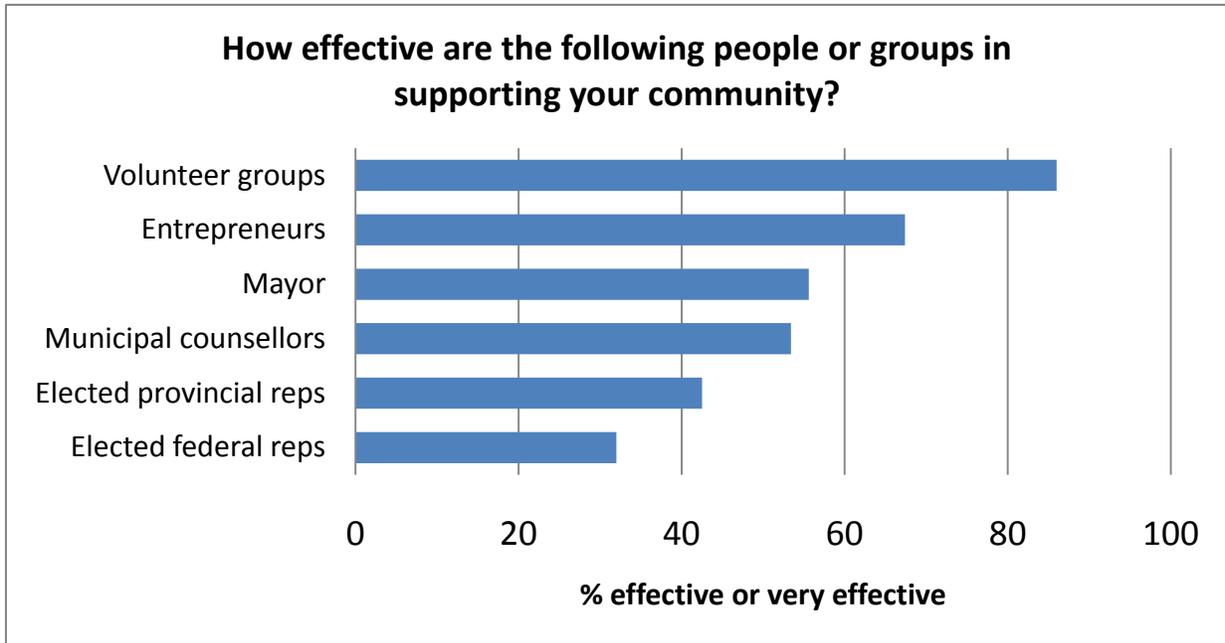
MIZ: no commuters.

HALE = Health-Adjusted Life Expectancy, incorporates both the quantity and quality of life; it represents

the number of expected years of life equivalent to years lived in full health, based on the average

experience in a population.

Figure 7: Assessment of Effectiveness



Source: New Rural Economy Project, 2001 (22 NRE field sites)