



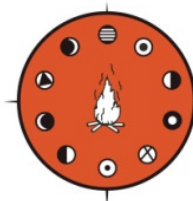
BRIEF POVERTY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION AMONG FIRST NATIONS

Summary Portrait
and Recommendations

Presented to the Ministère du Travail, de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale
Direction des politiques de lutte contre la pauvreté et de l'action communautaire



FIRST NATIONS OF QUEBEC
AND LABRADOR HEALTH
AND SOCIAL SERVICES
COMMISSION



Assembly of First Nations
Quebec-Labrador

Brief jointly presented by the:

Assembly of First Nations Quebec-Labrador (AFNQL)

and

First Nations of Quebec and Labrador Health and Social Services
Commission (FNQLHSSC)

To the: Direction des politiques de lutte contre la pauvreté et de
l'action communautaire [Fight against poverty and social action
policy directorate]

*Based on consultations held to develop a third governmental
action plan in the fight against poverty and social exclusion in
Quebec*

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ABBREVIATIONS

AFN	Assembly of First Nations
AFNQL	Assembly of First Nations Quebec-Labrador
CEPE	Centre d'étude sur la pauvreté et l'exclusion (centre for the study of poverty and exclusion)
CMHC	Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation
CRÉ	Conférence régionale des élus (regional council of elected officials)
CWI	Community well-being index
RHS	Regional Health Survey
FNQLHSSC	First Nations of Quebec and Labrador Health and Social Services Commission
FQIS	Fonds québécois d'initiatives sociales (Quebec social initiative fund)
GPS	Groupe des partenaires pour la solidarité (partners for solidarity group)
INAC	Indian and Northern Affairs Canada
INAC	Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada
ITA	Integrated territorial approach
MESS	Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale (Quebec Ministry of Employment and Social Solidarity)
MTESS	Ministère du Travail, de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale (Quebec Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Solidarity)
PSOC	Programme de soutien aux organismes communautaires (community organization support program)
REEES	Regional Early Childhood, Education and Employment Survey
SACA	Secrétariat à l'action communautaire autonome (autonomous community action secretariat)
UN	United Nations

PRESENTING THE ORGANIZATIONS

Assembly of First Nations Quebec-Labrador

The Assembly of First Nations Quebec-Labrador (AFNQL) was founded in May 1985 and is the occasional meeting point for the chiefs of 43 First Nation communities in Quebec and Labrador. The AFNQL holds chiefs' assemblies about four times a year, at which time it obtains different political mandates.

Mission and objectives

- Affirmation and respect of First Nations' rights
- Recognition of First Nation governments
- Increased financial autonomy for First Nation governments
- Development and creation of a First Nation public administration
- Co-ordinate the mechanism for the First Nation decision-making process
- Represent positions and interests in various forums
- Define the strategies to advance common positions
- Recognition of First Nation cultures and languages

First Nations of Quebec and Labrador Health and Social Services Commission

The First Nations of Quebec and Labrador Health and Social Services Commission (FNQLHSSC) is a non-profit organization responsible for supporting the First Nations of Quebec and Labrador in, among other things, planning and delivering culturally adapted health and social service programs with a focus on prevention.

Mission

The FNQLHSSC's mission is to promote the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual well-being of First Nation and Inuit individuals, families and communities and improve their access to comprehensive health and social service programs adapted to their culture. These programs would be designed by First Nation organizations recognized and endorsed by local authorities in a manner that respects both culture and local autonomy. The FNQLHSSC also assists willing communities to develop, implement and promote comprehensive health and social service programs and services adapted and designed by First Nation organizations.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past few months, First Nations have regularly made headlines. Here are a few examples: the Val-d'Or crisis, the initiative on “the link between the living conditions of Aboriginal women and sexual assault and spousal violence,”¹ the inquiry on missing or murdered Aboriginal girls and women or the decision rendered by the Canadian Human Rights Commission stating that the federal government is discriminating against First Nation children under the care of the Youth Protection Directorate.

Granted that this increased media coverage sensitizes the general public and political authorities to the living conditions of the First Nations in Quebec, it also highlights the need to pursue the fight against poverty and social exclusion in order to eliminate systemic discrimination.

Yet, there is nothing special about this media coverage. Despite the progress made across the board, the news stories about First Nations over the past ten years underscore the persistent gap between the living conditions of First Nations and non-First Nations: tensions with the non-First Nation police; the over-representation of First Nations in the correctional and youth protection systems; chronic health problems; the increasing number of First Nations and Inuit homeless; the chronic underfunding of education and the high dropout and unemployment rates; the large number of social assistance recipients; difficult housing conditions both inside and outside communities; complaints and recriminations by a fringe of the non-First Nations population regarding land claims and other actions to defend Aboriginals' interests and promote their rights; and so forth, not to mention the persistent stereotypes and bigotry towards First Nations. Of course, success stories also make the news. Yet, what do all of these distressing observations have in common? It seems that the root of these social phenomena is poverty, social exclusion, systemic discrimination and racism against First Nations.

Scenes from the film *The Invisible Nation* on the living conditions of the Algonquin and footage of the community of Kitcisakik, regularly featured in the news, draw attention to the extreme poverty in some First Nation communities. This contrasts sharply with the image parts of Canadian society has of First Nation communities, namely that of people whose affluence is funded by generous government grants. The footage of overcrowded, ramshackle houses lacking both running water and electricity could have been taken in a community other than Kitcisakik, though the situation there is critical. Unfortunately, this example is not unique, by far. Many First Nation communities, including several in Quebec, are faced with chronic poverty. Located in the Abitibi-Témiscamingue region, Kitcisakik is one of the poorest communities in Canada and testifies to the existence of a “third world in our own backyard,” which contrasts strikingly with public perception of Canada and Quebec.

All too often, news stories, articles and commentary reveal an utter lack of knowledge of First Nation history and reality, which can sometimes lead to dangerous generalizations. This ignorance, observed in both Canadian society and governmental entities, must neither be minimized nor dismissed.

¹ Commission des relations avec les citoyens (citizen relation commission), National Assembly.

While it is acknowledged that the government of Quebec has made progress in its relations with Aboriginal peoples, there remains much work to be done. We can applaud the improvements to education programs with regard to Aboriginal history; the partnerships among provincial ministries, regional organizations and First Nation communities; and increased governmental involvement in and recognition of certain files.

At the federal level, the speech by Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau during the extraordinary chiefs' meeting at the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) seems to herald a new era leading to the integration and recognition of First Nations. In this context, the government of Quebec has the capacity to pursue its efforts to reduce the gap between First Nations and the rest of the population.

1. Initiative in the fight against First Nation poverty

Where poverty and social exclusion are concerned, the First Nations of Quebec are still the segment of the provincial population with the most disturbing indicators for social health factors. When considered from the perspective of the initial goals of the *Act to combat poverty and social exclusion*, these indicators reveal the complexity of poverty and social exclusion among First Nations, as well as the need to continue the work done in this area over the past few years.

1.1 Context: meaning of the Act and the governmental action plans aimed at fighting poverty and social exclusion

In 2002, the National Assembly of Quebec adopted the *Act to combat poverty and social exclusion*, R.S.Q., c.L-7. Initially, this Act was intended “to guide the Government and Québec society as a whole towards a process of planning and implementing actions to combat poverty, prevent its causes, reduce its effects on individuals and families, counter social exclusion and strive towards a poverty-free Québec.”² (section 1) Poverty is defined as:

“[T]he condition of a human being who is deprived of the resources, means, choices and power necessary to acquire and maintain economic self-sufficiency or to facilitate integration and participation in society.”³ (section 2)

“The Act is based on the recognition of economic and social rights under the Quebec Charter of Rights and Freedoms and aligns with the international movement that considers the fight against poverty and social exclusion a fight for human rights. The concept of social exclusion being associated with material poverty is not explicitly stated in the Act. The CEPE proposed a definition that has been confirmed by the work undertaken with individuals living in poverty.”⁴ [translation]

“Social exclusion is the result of an aggregate of often interdependent economic, political, institutional and cultural processes whereby individuals or groups are marginalized in society.

When social exclusion and poverty become intertwined, they tend to reinforce one another over time. Social exclusion combined with poverty can result in the restriction of an individual’s options (and consequently those of his family and community) to maintain his economic autonomy and compromise the integrity of his social identity, health, education, participation in the labour force and ability to maintain social and family relations. These consequences may, in turn, make it difficult to break the cycle of poverty.”⁵ [translation]

This Act has led to the creation of two governmental action plans comprising a number of measures to fight poverty and social exclusion in Quebec. The goal of the government through this Act and the

² <http://www.canlii.org/en/qc/laws/stat/cqlr-c-l-7/latest/cqlr-c-l-7.html>.

³ *Idem*.

⁴ *Idem*.

⁵ CEPE, 2014, *L'exclusion sociale: construire avec celles et ceux qui la vivent*, p. 18.

measures set out in these action plans was to make Quebec the industrialized state with the fewest individuals living in poverty by 2013. This goal could not be met, due to the widespread poverty in most Aboriginal communities. First Nations are among the groups in Quebec most at risk to experience poverty and social exclusion, both inside and outside of their communities.

In December 2005, the AFNQL and MTESS⁶ signed an agreement to develop and implement, jointly with First Nation communities, concrete means to fight poverty and social exclusion that are respectful of each community's culture.

1.2 Main points of the socioeconomic portrait

Despite the adoption of this Act and the implementation of the initiatives arising from it, the social and health gap between First Nations and non-First Nations continues to widen. Although we should be concerned about this, it would be more pertinent to focus on updating public policies developed by the government to accommodate First Nation poverty. In 2005, Daniel Salée stated that despite the political and institutional progress over the past few decades, the socioeconomic divide separating Aboriginals from the rest of the population remains considerable.⁷ Ten years later, this still holds true. Despite certain advances, much is left to do if both the Canadian and Quebec governments wish to maintain a guiding hand in their relationship with First Nations. Salée added that this power-based social rapport is practically immutable insofar as it is enshrined in Canadian and Quebec culture and traditions.

It is crucial that change be accelerated. First Nations are facing significant challenges that are basically linked to their political, social and economic exclusion, as suggested by the main indicators available.

The observations below give an idea of the extent of the work that remains to be done.

1.2.1 Social and economic conditions

Among the world's most industrialized countries and regions, Canada and Quebec are considered to have excellent living conditions. Social and health services, education, housing support programs and the social safety net are all measures taken by governments to support the personal and professional development of the population. However, the First Nations' experience is altogether different.

According to the UN Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples, James Anaya, the statistics are striking. In 2013, he noted that of the 100 Canadian communities at the bottom of the

⁶ Formerly known as the Ministry of Employment and Social Solidarity (MESS).

⁷ Salée, Daniel. *Peuples autochtones, racism et pouvoir d'État en contextes canadien et québécois – Éléments pour une ré-analyse*, Nouvelles pratiques sociales, 2005, vol. 17, no. 2.

community well-being index (CWI), 96 were First Nations,⁸ and only one Aboriginal community was included among the 100 communities with the highest CWI.

The conditions in some First Nation communities are similar to those of third-world countries: overcrowded and unsound dwellings, drinking water problems, outdated schools, low employment, etc.

Although the actual number of Quebec First Nation community members living under the poverty line is not known, poverty is widespread in those communities, and is even endemic in some regions. First Nations living in communities in Quebec are more likely to be low-income earners than those living outside the communities. According to Regional Health Survey (RHS) data (2008, chapter 1), 34.2% of adults in First Nation communities in the reference year 2007 lived in a household with a total combined revenue of under \$20,000. The data for 2001 indicate that 24.7% of adults lived in a household with a combined income of under \$20,000. There are also significant differences among the communities themselves.⁹ The dependency on social assistance, unemployment rate and average income among the First Nations in Quebec demonstrate that the social and economic conditions are much lower than for the rest of the Quebec population. For example, INAC data for 2008 reveals that some communities had a social assistance rate of nearly 50%, which rose to nearly 60% six years later. REEES figures for 2014 indicate that 38% of community households had an annual income of under \$20,000,¹⁰ 50% of adults were unemployed and 58% of these individuals were seeking employment. This data makes it hard to imagine that the socioeconomic conditions of these people will improve.

Poverty among First Nations, like in non-First Nations communities, affects women more than men. In this regard, the situation of single mothers is worrisome: 32.2% of children live in a single-parent household, for which a woman is the head in most cases (RHS, 2008). According to Statistics Canada, the average income of Aboriginal women was \$13,300, compared to \$19,350 for non-Aboriginal women.¹¹

1.2.2 *Community well-being index (CWI)*

INAC has finalized a community well-being index based on the UN human development index. The CWI comprises four components: housing conditions, revenue, level of education and labour force activity. The index threshold is “zero,” and the ceiling is “one.” As illustrated in the table below, there is a significant divide between First Nations and the rest of the Quebec population. Note that this is the

⁸ Human Rights Council, (2014) Report of the Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples, James Anaya, Addendum The situation of indigenous peoples in Canada*<http://unsr.jamesanaya.org/docs/countries/2014-report-canada-a-hrc-27-52-add-2-en-auversion.pdf>.

⁹ Sauvé, Mathieu-Robert (2011). Les autochtones ont de meilleurs revenus hors de leur réserve. Journal Forum, < <http://www.chaireconditionautochtone.fss.ulaval.ca/documents/media/pdf/-2011-Meilleurs-revenus-hors-reserve.pdf> >.

¹⁰ Regional Early Childhood, Education and Employment Survey (REEES) des First Nations du Québec, 2015.

¹¹ Khosla, Prabha. *Women's Poverty in Cities: Women in Urban Environments*. Canada-wide network on women's health and their environment. 10 p.

average for all communities. Other data, including those from the First Nation RHS,¹² underscore the gap in living conditions and health between First Nations and Quebecers.

Table 1:
CWI: comparing Aboriginals with the rest of the Quebec population

CWI components	Cree (Eeyou Istchee)	Inuit (Nunavik)	Kawawachikamach First Nation	Non-treaty First Nations	Average value in Quebec
Revenue	.62	.58	.64	.47	-
Education	.65	.59	.28	.68	-
Housing	.77	.62	.74	.69	-
Labour force activity	.78	.81	.74	.69	-
Average	.68	.67	.54	.66	.79

Sources: Martin Papillon, *Aboriginal Quality of Life Under a Modern Treaty: Lessons From the Experience of the Cree Nation of Eeyou Istchee and the Inuit of Nunavik*, IRPP, Montreal, IRPP Choices, August 2008, Vol., 14, no. 9, p. 12, and Erin O’Sullivan, *The Community Well-Being (CWI) Index: Well-Being in First Nations Communities, 1981-2001 and into the Future*, Indian Affairs and Northern Canada (INAC), Ottawa, 2006, p. 43.

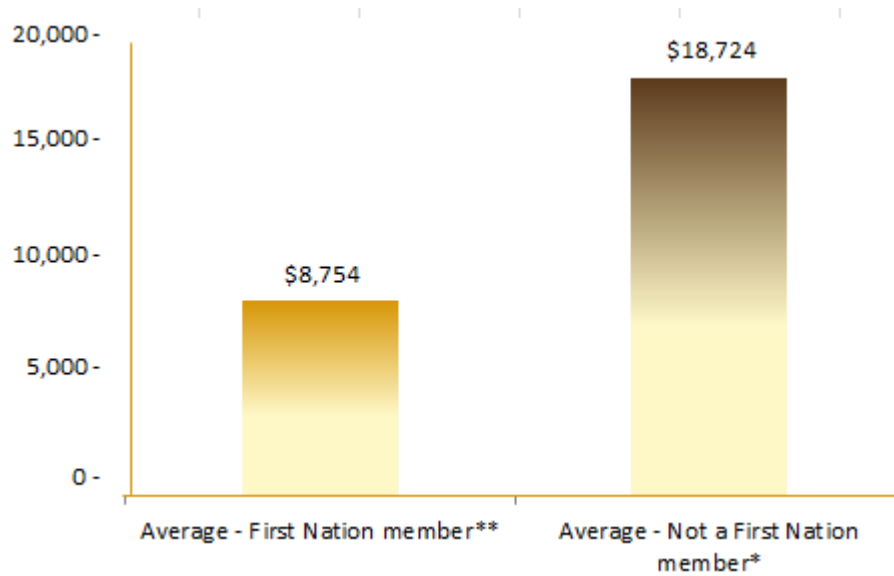
One reason for such an imbalance is one of the central factors of First Nation discrimination: the underfunding of the programs and services for Aboriginal peoples. Several reports by the Auditor General of Canada issued over the past ten years have confirmed this situation, which has also been criticized in a visit to Canada and Quebec by the UN Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples, James Anaya, in October 2013. These reports indicate that the chronic underfunding of certain programs – including child and family support services, housing assistance and education – results in inferior First Nation services.

1.2.3 Comparing Aboriginal peoples and the Canadian population

In this context, it is not surprising that there is such a wide gap between First Nations and the rest of the population regarding living conditions. According to a recent estimate by the AFN using Statistics Canada and INAC data, considerably less public money was spent on First Nations on average than on the rest of the population. A First Nation individual living in a community receives, on average, about \$10,000 less than the average Canadian citizen, all levels of government confounded (Figure 1).

¹² Regional Health Survey (ERS 2008), www.cssspnql.com.

Figure 1:
Total funding per person by all levels of government, 2010



Sources: Statistics Canada, *Consolidated federal, provincial, territorial and local government revenue and expenditures, 2009*; *population per province and territory, 2010*. INCA, 2009–2010 forecast; population of registered Indians (estimate).

These figures indicate that, despite all the difficulties faced by Aboriginals, the total financing per Aboriginal person, all levels of government confounded, is less than half that provided to non-Aboriginals. This disparity hinders the integration of First Nations into the economic and social development of their respective territory.

1.2.4 Access to employment and education

According to the First Nations and Inuit Labour Market Advisory Committee, the employment rates of First Nations and Inuit are lower than that for the population of Quebec, while the unemployment rates are higher. The situation is even worse for those living in an Aboriginal community or with a criminal record. The unemployment rate, which is more than double for Quebec's interprovincial standards programs (15.1%) than for the entire population (7.2%), also has a significant gap of nearly eight percentage points.

One of the major obstacles for employment integration is generally the low academic success rate among First Nations. According to a 2008 study, the level of schooling attained by First Nation adults suggests that the low income and employment levels of this segment of the population risk being ongoing if no significant action is taken.¹³ More than half the adult respondents to this survey stated they had not obtained a secondary school diploma, a percentage proportionally higher than for the general Quebec and Canadian population.

¹³ Regional Health Survey (ERS, 2008), www.cssspnql.com.

Many youth find it difficult to continue their studies without leaving the community, since there are so few training centres in or near communities. However, we would like to point out that Kiuna College was recently opened in Odanak, and two adult training centres were opened in Sept-Îles and Abitibi. There are now six such centres, with the other four in Listuguj, Kahnawake and Wendake. These resources still do not meet all First Nation adult training needs. Furthermore, the chronic underfunding of community schools, high personnel turnover rates and programs not adapted to the culture and lifestyle of many nations results in a quality of instruction not equivalent to that of other Quebec schools. In addition, the painful period of Indian residential schools, repeatedly referred to as cultural genocide, has certainly contributed to First Nations being uninterested in education.

For First Nations looking for work, prejudice, discrimination and racism on the part of employers and the general Quebec population are significant obstacles. These attitudes often arise from ignorance of Aboriginal values and culture.

1.2.5 Food insecurity

Aboriginals in Canada have a rate of food insecurity four times higher than the Canadian population, namely 33% for Aboriginals and 8.8% for non-Aboriginals (Health Canada, 2007, p. 20). A hungry child will have problems concentrating at school, which compromises his social development and reduces his chance of breaking the intergenerational poverty cycle. Most community frontline workers point out that hunger is very much present in First Nation communities in Quebec. Few communities have recognized resources, such as food banks and collective kitchens, to effectively deal with the problem. The RHS reveals that 24.8% of adults lived in a household with moderate or serious food insecurity,¹⁴ while in Quebec in 2004, 8.1% of adults experienced moderate (5.8%) or serious (2.3%) food insecurity.¹⁵

1.2.6 Housing crisis

Aboriginal peoples are currently experiencing significant demographic growth and are among the three such rapidly expanding groups in Canada (SCHL, 2007, p. 24). The First Nation population is growing at a rate nearly twice that of the rest of the Canadian population: 1.9% for First Nations to 1% for non-First Nations (Government of Canada, 2008, p. 22¹⁶).

The First Nations of Quebec are facing a serious housing crisis. This problem, common to most Aboriginal communities across Canada, is structural, since the First Nation community housing financing program is not adapted to the current demographic boom. In other words, federal government programs are not meeting housing needs because of the strong demographic growth of

¹⁴ Regional Health Survey (ERS 2008), page 63, www.cssspnql.com.

¹⁵ Institut national de santé publique du Québec, 2011.

¹⁶ Government of Canada. Fact sheet – *Aboriginal Housing*. INAC, Ottawa. Consulted online at: www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/2002-templates/ssi/print_e.asp.

the First Nation population.¹⁷ “Therefore, the overcrowding situation not only has the effect of reducing the longevity of the home, but also of aggravating the social problems such as poor hygiene conditions, family tension and violence” (INAC, FNQLHSSC, 2008, p. 13). As for the lifespan and cleanliness of these dwellings, the FNQLHSSC, in its 2002 health survey, noted that 54.8% of adults in First Nation communities in Quebec claimed that their dwellings needed urgent maintenance and repairs, and that 35.8% lived in dwellings contaminated by mould (FNQLHSSC, 2008, p. 14).

Table 2:
Overview of the housing inventory of the First Nations of Quebec

Total number of houses	12,500
Number of overcrowded houses of this total	4,200
Number of houses requiring renovations or decontamination of this total	6,700

Source: AFNQL (2007).¹⁸

1.2.7 Racism, stereotypes and systemic discrimination

Racism, stereotypes and systemic discrimination towards First Nations are all obstacles to overcome in the fight against poverty and social exclusion.

The persistence of bigotry and stereotypes about First Nations leads to, among other things, discrimination in jobs, health, social services, education and housing. Preconceived notions and other acts with a racist connotation are part of the everyday life of many First Nations individuals, no matter where they live, and only reinforce their isolation and socioeconomic marginalization.

The legal conflicts over the obligations of the different levels of government regarding access to public services sometimes lead to discrimination, which further reinforces First Nation poverty and exclusion. Many communities still lack basic infrastructure to meet their members’ basic needs in health and social services, and community organizations are few.

Family violence and a lack of sensitivity to these problems constitute another form of discrimination.

1.2.8 Synthesis

The health of a population or community depends on their living conditions and the systems that help maintain their members’ health or support them through illness. The expression “social determinants of health” refers to the many intertwined social conditions that, through their interaction, influence people’s health. These conditions also comprise revenue and social status, social support networks,

¹⁷ Government of Canada. *Homelessness*. Consulted online at: <http://www.loppar.gc.ca/content/loppar/researchpublications/prb991-e.htm>. January 1999 and Government of Quebec. *Économie sociale: Pour des communautés plus solidaires*. Affaires municipales et Régions, 2008, p. 28.

¹⁸ Assembly of First Nations of Quebec and Labrador. *The housing needs of the First Nations of Quebec and Labrador* (2000 and 2006). AFNQL-GSP, Wendake, 2007, 10 p.

education, employment and working conditions, social settings, physical settings, personal health practices and the ability to adapt, safe childhood development, identity and culture.¹⁹

The book *Social Determinants of Health: The Canadian Facts*²⁰ identifies fourteen interrelated factors that influence people's health: a handicap, early childhood, education, employment and working conditions, food insecurity, health services, sex, housing, revenue and income distribution, race, social exclusion, social safety net, unemployment and job security. These determinants are formed by other major forces in our society, such as the economy and politics. None of the health determinants are isolated from the others; all interact and have a cumulative effect.

Poverty and insufficient revenue are crucial determinants of physical, mental and spiritual health, and it is important to consider measures to counter them as a social investment. Individual development potential involves having people shift away from the survival mode in which they find themselves, as they are unable to meet their basic needs when in that mode. Being able to rely on adequate assets and a basic income encourages workforce reinsertion and other activities constructive for society. Unfortunately, this is not well known, or at the very least, not much recognized, especially by those living in poverty.

If, by their status, First Nations form a group systemically at risk in the Quebec population, their situation reveals the magnitude of their multifactorial poverty. Given these worrisome observations, the government of Quebec, different provincial actors, and public and community organizations are faced with both the responsibility for people's well-being and a major challenge: the urgent need to continue the work already underway and take cohesive action on these determinants.

¹⁹ According to the National Collaborating Centre for Determinants of Health: <http://nccdh.ca/resources/about-social-determinants-of-health/>.

²⁰ Mikkonen, J., Raphael, D. (2010). *Social Determinants of Health: The Canadian Facts*. Toronto: York University. April 4, 2012, http://www.thecanadianfacts.org/the_canadian_facts.pdf.

2. Questions by the GPS: an evaluation tool by the Solidarity Alliance between the FNQLHSSC and the MTESS

2.1 About the Solidarity Alliance

In June 2010, the government of Quebec launched its second action plan to fight poverty and social exclusion. Called the *Plan d'action pour la solidarité et l'inclusion sociale 2010–2015*, this plan included additional investments in the FQIS, a special social initiative fund to finance local, regional and provincial measures in the fight against poverty and social exclusion. By investing 115 million dollars in the fund over five years,²¹ the government of Quebec increased the credits allocated to the FQIS in its first action plan. While implementing its strategy to fight against poverty and social exclusion, the MTESS worked with the FNQLHSSC to adapt measures to accommodate First Nation communities. The result of this work was the establishment of a strategic alliance between the MTESS and FNQLHSSC that included the creation of a fund to finance measures in the fight against poverty. The Alliance concluded between the FNQLHSSC and MTESS covered 29 communities. As a signatory to the Solidarity Alliance with the MTESS, the FNQLHSSC conducted a preliminary evaluation of the FQIS projects developed in First Nation communities (FNQLHSSC, 2014). The findings of this May 2012 survey are enhanced by data gathered in the field.

From the outset, the FNQLHSSC stood out from other organizations that entered into an alliance with the government of Quebec, owing to the fact it works with all band councils and their affiliated organizations. But band councils, by their very nature, have more responsibilities than Quebec cities or towns; they must also deal with chronic underfunding, a structural problem arising from the fiduciary relationship between the federal and First Nation governments. Many studies and reports have cast light on the underfunding of the federal programs band councils are required to administer, such as housing, education, child and family services, childcare services, employability and economic development.

Another element that distinguishes communities from municipalities is the few community and charitable organizations working with First Nations. This problem is explained by the near-total absence of funding programs for First Nation community organizations, which cannot, for example, receive funding from the SACA-MESS (Secrétariat à l'action communautaire autonome/autonomous community action secretariat) or PSOC-MSSS (Programme de soutien aux organismes communautaires/community organization support program) to assist in the development of community organizations. This is essentially a recognition problem. The implementation of the integrated territorial approach (ITA) revealed a characteristic of First Nation communities. The near-total absence of independent community organizations, the timid involvement of charitable organizations in the communities, the precarious state of socioeconomic organizations, the communities' geographic location and the economic reality of the most disadvantaged communities

²¹ Note that the fund was extended for a year without any additional investment.

further complicate the implementation of the ITA. Despite this situation, the approach has produced interesting results. The Alliance has indeed allowed communities to become mobilized and take action in the fight against poverty.

2.2 FNQLHSSC survey findings

A total of 26 communities participated in the survey (18 French-speaking and 8 English-speaking). The comments and data below come from this survey. Note that some critical elements were not necessarily shared by all respondents. This was more a survey to gauge opinion rather than a formal research exercise.

2.2.1 Range of respondents

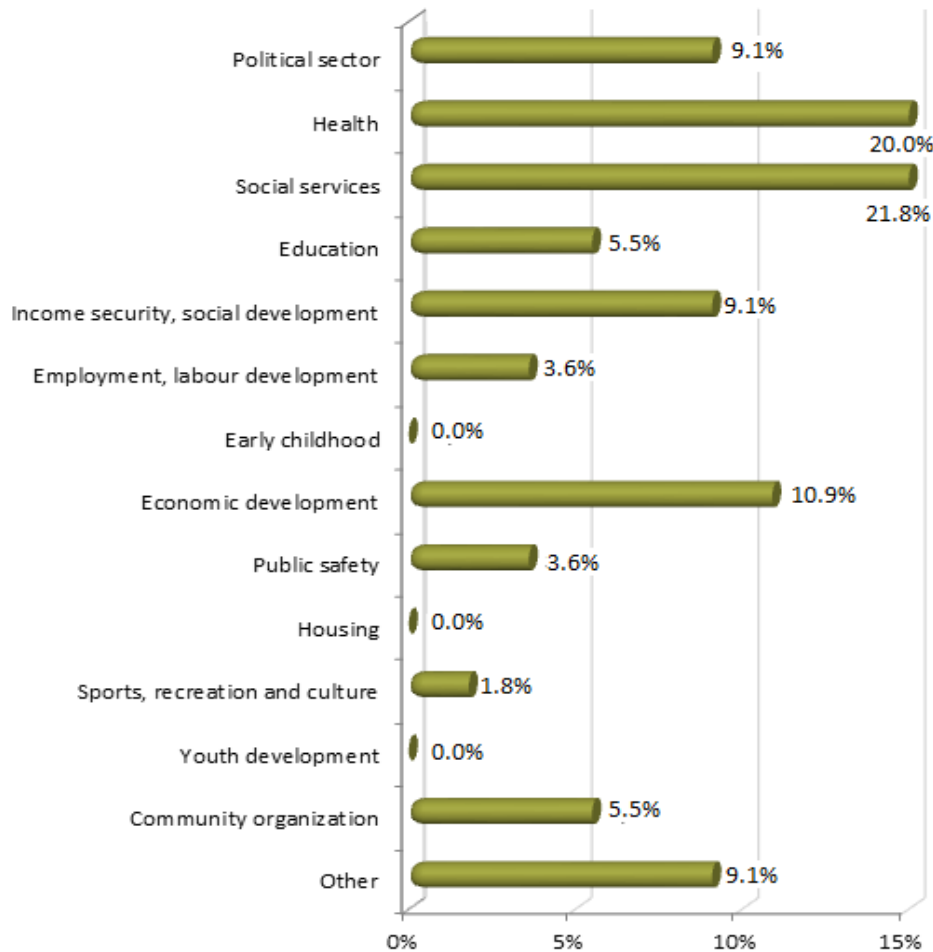
A number of different actors participated in the survey: political sector representatives (grand chiefs, chiefs and political advisors), service and program directors, and frontline workers. The “other” category included community economic development officers, community organizers, professionals and project co-ordinators. The many types of participants reflected the diversity of the actors involved in the mobilization and issue tables or committees created in communities in association with First Nation initiatives.

2.2.2 Sectors of activity involved

The projects finalized in the scope of the FQIS – First Nation Component are managed by different community service sectors. Figure 2 illustrates the range of the intervention sectors involved in the initiatives to fight against poverty and social exclusion in communities. This reflects the multisectoral approach developed by the communities to resolve the different problems they face, as well as the degree of success regarding the development of the ATI in the fight against poverty and social exclusion.

The data collected underscores the importance of the role played by the health, social service, income security and economic development sectors in the fight against poverty within communities, as the repercussions of poverty have a great impact on each of these sectors.

Figure 2:
Activity sectors involved in the initiatives to fight against poverty and social exclusion



Source: FQIS Survey, FNQLHSSC, summer 2014.

Key questions by the GPS (Groupe des partenaires pour la solidarité)

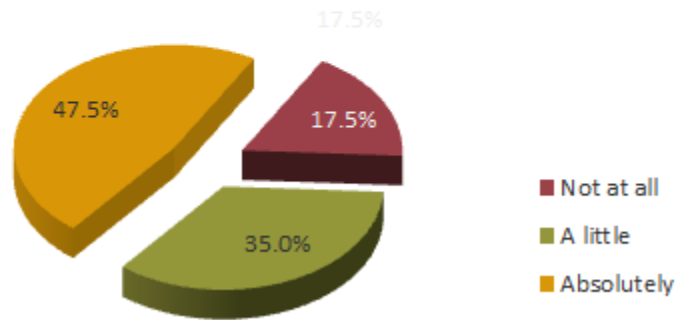
Below are the four questions developed by the GPS for the survey and the responses for each:

1- Empower communities and bolster local decision-making capacity

Nearly 50% of respondents (47.5%) stated that the Solidarity Alliance contributed to empowering their community and bolstering its decision-making capacity. If this percentage is added to that for the respondents who felt the Alliance contributed only somewhat (35%) in these areas, we get a total of 82.5%. The remaining 17.5% of respondents stated that the Alliance had had no impact on their community's empowerment and decision-making capacity.

Figure 3:
Solidarity Alliance between the MTESS and the FNQLHSSC

Do you think the Solidarity Alliance between the MESS and the FNQLHSSC will empower your community to make decisions and take action in the fight against poverty and social exclusion?



Source: FQIS Survey, FNQLHSSC, summer 2014.

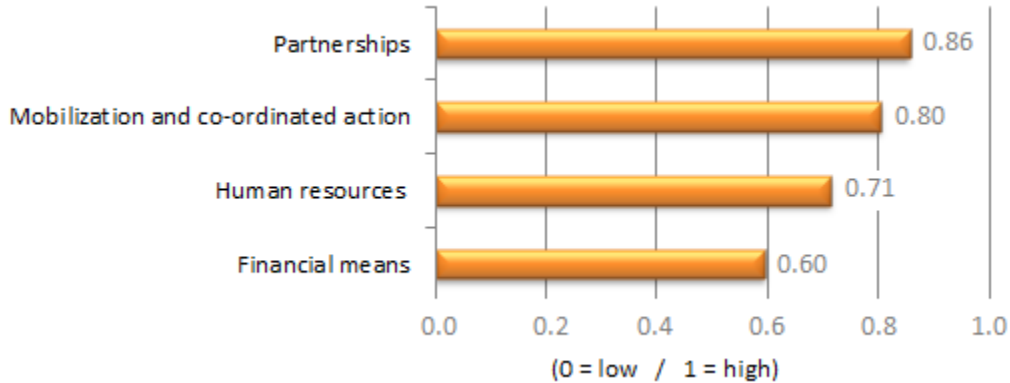
2- Strengths of, weaknesses of and difficulties with the Alliance

This survey not only identified the strengths and weaknesses of the Solidarity Alliance, but also the degree of appreciation for the levers established under the FQIS projects. The purpose here was to know the primary benefits of the projects aimed at the target population.

Figure 4 clearly illustrates the degree of appreciation for the means perfected within the framework of the initiatives for fighting poverty and social exclusion in communities. Four indicators were defined to assess this degree of appreciation: partnerships; mobilization and co-ordinated action; human resources; and available funding. The threshold was set at “zero,” and the ceiling at “one.”

Figure 4 indicates a fairly high degree of satisfaction with the partnerships established under the project, as well as for the mobilization and co-ordinated action arising from the implementation of local structures (round tables, committees, etc.). The involvement of human resources proved beneficial when developing and implementing the projects. Of the four indicators, the one most criticized was that of available funding. This will be discussed further under point 4.

Figure 4:
Assessment of the levers available in the fight against poverty and social exclusion



Source: *FQIS Survey*, FNQLHSSC, summer 2014.

Here is a brief overview of the comments on the strengths and weaknesses associated with the implementation of the Alliance on behalf of the communities.

Strengths

The FQIS – First Nation Component – fostered social innovation within communities, which had never had access to this type of funding to fight against poverty and social exclusion. Basically, communities welcomed the creation of a financial tool to meet the needs of their most vulnerable members (families, children and elders).

Pooling resources, mobilizing actors and increasing co-ordination within the communities were also positive elements arising from the implementation of the Alliance.

Weaknesses

The weaknesses included the dearth of local expertise in the fight against poverty. There is a significant need for training in this area.

The length of the process for creating and implementing the Alliance locally was criticized. The little time available for doing so and the tight timeline hindered efforts to finalize structuring projects.

Effects on the target population

While it is still too early to clearly identify the impacts these projects had on those living in poverty or experiencing social exclusion, several respondents stated that the projects in which they were involved contributed to improving the living conditions of the target population. The support

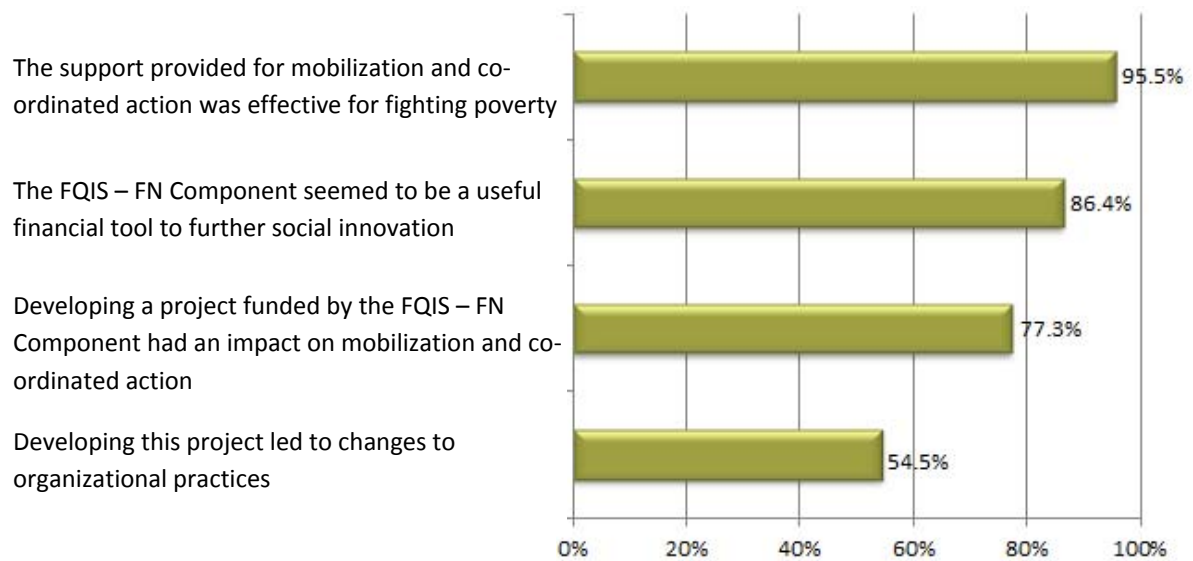
received from the Alliance was not negligible for ensuring socioeconomic and personal development in the communities hardest hit by poverty.

3- *Mobilization and co-ordinated action in the fight against poverty*

Figure 5 eloquently describes the impact of mobilization and co-ordinated action in the fight against poverty. Over 95% of respondents stated that mobilization and co-ordinated action developed in their communities proved to be an effective manner to deal with poverty and social exclusion. Nearly 80% (77.3%) of respondents declared that the Alliance had an impact on mobilization and co-ordinated action in their community. Consequently, most mobilization and co-ordinated action structures developed within the scope of FQIS projects were dynamic.

Over 85% (86.4%) of respondents considered that the Alliance played a beneficial role in dealing with social innovation. About half (54.5%) of respondents indicated that FQIS projects resulted in changes to organizational practice.

Figure 5:
Impact of mobilization and co-ordinated action in the fight against poverty



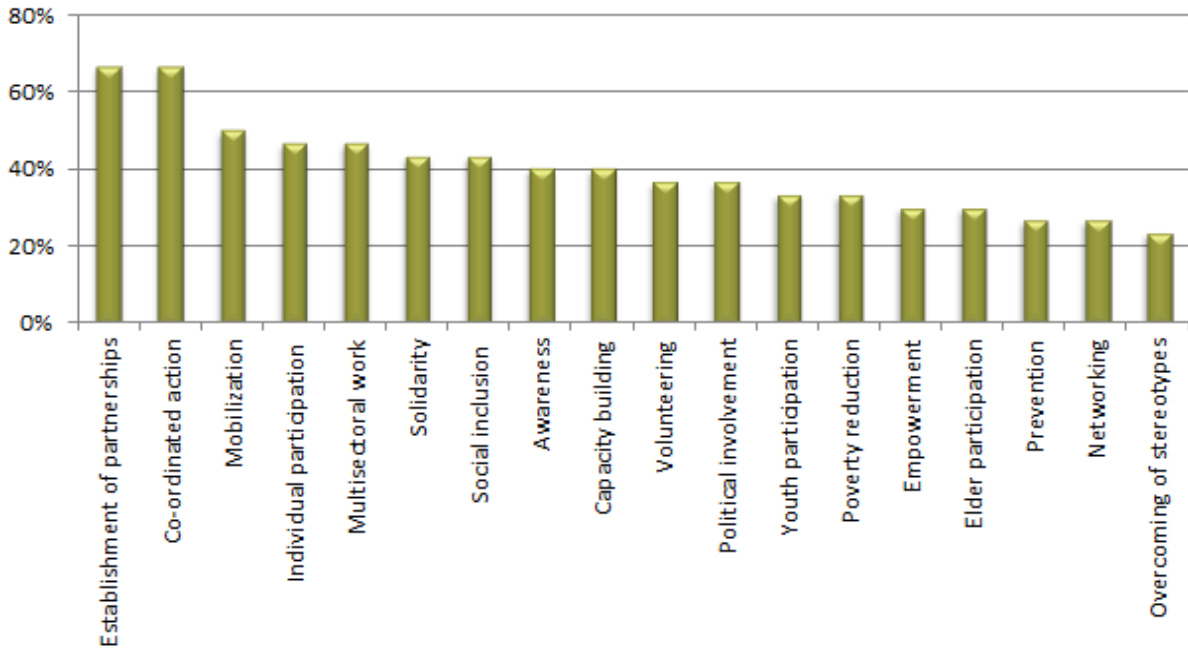
Source: FQIS Survey, FNQLHSSC, summer 2014.

4- *Impacts linked to the implementation of the Alliance between the MTESS and the FNQLHSSC, and the areas to improve should the Alliance be renewed*

As illustrated in Figure 6, the Alliance had a major impact on several issues in the fight against poverty and social exclusion and played a particularly significant role in partnership establishment and co-ordinated action. A number of partnerships were formed with different community service sectors as a result of FQIS involvement, and these partnerships will be discussed later in this document.

**Figure 6:
The Alliance’s impact on solidarity**

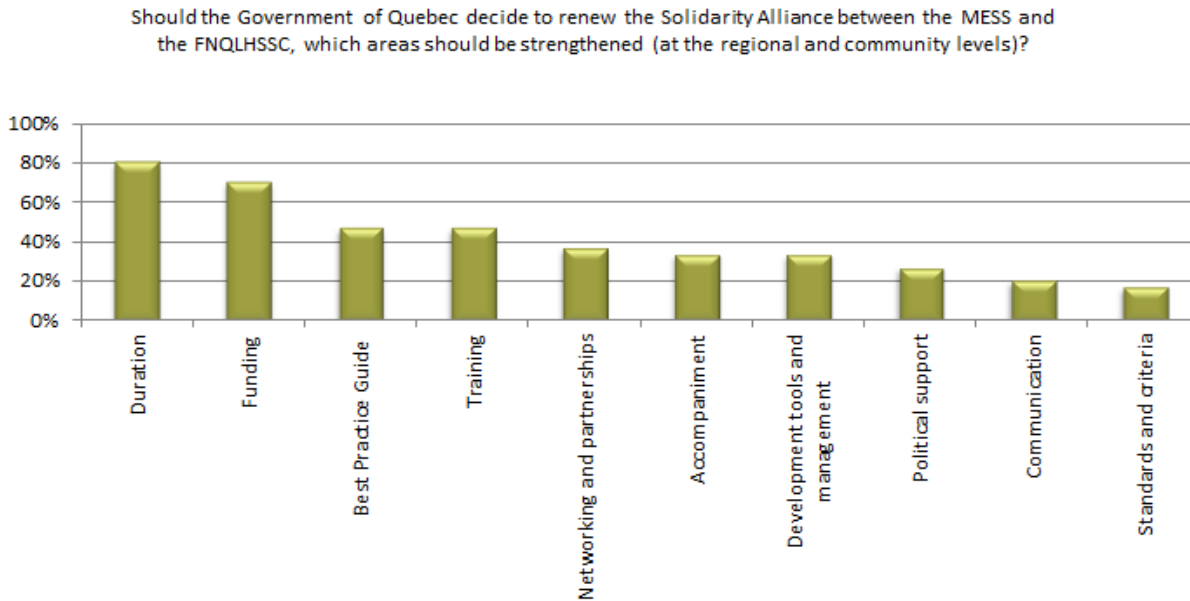
Has the Solidarity Alliance between the MESS and the FNQLHSSC had a major impact on your community in the fight against poverty and social exclusion?



Source: FQIS Survey, FNQLHSSC, summer 2014.

Despite the challenges and trip-ups, the communities clearly wanted the Alliance to be renewed. Several respondents mentioned that abandoning the Alliance would have negative impacts, mainly on vulnerable individuals and the frontline workers involved in projects. However, a number of elements intrinsic and extrinsic to the Alliance should be improved, as indicated in Figure 7.

Figure 7
Renewing the Solidarity Alliance – Areas for improvement



Source: *FQIS Survey*, FNQLHSSC, summer 2014.

In the survey, 80% of respondents stated that the duration of the agreement should be extended and that middle- and long-term funding should be secured to ensure the continuity of the initiatives implemented. Seventy percent of respondents wanted the funding to be increased, given the magnitude of the problems associated with poverty in their communities. Organizational capacity building was also considered important. In addition, respondents expressed their needs for training, management tools and overall support.

External partnerships

There is much work to be done regarding external partnerships, even if certain projects resulted in co-operative success between First Nations and non-First Nations organizations. In this regard, the Alliance functioned as an innovative lever for progress. Renewing the Alliance would allow communities to build on the collaborative efforts with non-First Nations organizations and take the extra step towards finalizing projects aimed at fighting poverty and social exclusion.

Here are a few examples of partnerships established with organizations located outside the communities:

- Université Laval (CIÉRA): Projet de recherche-action sur la pauvreté à Opitciwan
- Club des petits déjeuners
- Déjeuners pour apprendre
- CRÉ de Lanaudière

- CRÉ Centre-du-Québec
- CLD de la Minganie
- MRC Domaine-du-Roy
- BDCAS-Gaspésie

Organizational capacities and coaching

If the Solidarity Alliance were renewed, the coaching aspect of the FQIS – First Nation Component should be reviewed. In light of the comments received, the communities would be able to obtain additional coaching to ensure the follow-up of initiatives to fight against poverty and social exclusion, build frontline worker capacities and improve local governance.

Some respondents mentioned their needs in the areas of the finalization and management of projects in the fight against poverty and social exclusion, training (especially for project finalization and management) and the preparation of funding requests. Note the creation of a new fund to finance projects to fight against poverty and social exclusion in First Nation communities. There are very few community organizations or charities²² dedicated to First Nation social development, so it is normal that some communities had difficulty securing funding for projects and activities in the fight against poverty. Consequently, efforts must be doubled to support communities seeking to network or establish partnerships with social development organizations (public establishments, community organizations, foundations, etc.). According to some respondents, this was an environment with which they are unfamiliar given the historical gap between First Nation communities and the rest of society. In this regard, a lot of work remains to be done to raise awareness among the actors of Quebec civil society.

The data gathered reveal the impact of the social health factor strategies implemented. As the Alliance did indeed originally play a significant mobilization and sensitization role in the fight against poverty and social exclusion, it is important that the effect of this lever be supported over the long term. These dialogue sessions, arising from the orientations and issues proposed by the government in the fight against poverty and social exclusion, point in this direction. The following chapter discusses the courses of action to prioritize.

²² The FNQLHSSC has created a social development foundation, New Pathways, which is now independent of the FNQLHSSC. However, as this foundation is new, its financial resources are limited. http://nouveauxsentiers.com/index_e.html

3. Developing the third governmental action plan

3.1 Background of the consultation

In October 2015, the government of Quebec launched a public consultation and asked the population, organizations and provincial and regional partners for their comments on the main issues associated with the fight against poverty and social exclusion. The government's objective was to get input that would serve to guide the development of the third governmental action plan on the fight against poverty and social exclusion, as well as to identify the lessons learned from the second plan.

The sections below list the observations and recommendations made by different community actors during the dialogue sessions with First Nations (initiative on the fight against poverty and social exclusion) held in January 2016.

Thirty-three individuals from eight communities (four English-speaking and four French-speaking) took part in these dialogue sessions. Some communities that could not take part submitted their written observations and recommendations instead.

3.2 Current situation and recommendations on the five proposed orientations

The discussions on the orientations proposed by the government of Quebec started with observations on the effects the previous action plan had on the fight against poverty and social exclusion, as well as the obstacles to overcome.

It cannot be stressed enough: the reality of each First Nation community is different. Geographic location, infrastructure, and cultural and socioeconomic situations are all factors that have an impact on the quality of life in the community. Therefore, the strategies adopted in the fight against poverty and social exclusion must be developed jointly with local actors in order to resolve the specific problems of each community.

In retrospect, it seems that the financial levers put into place are limited, given the magnitude of the needs defined. Providing funding per project is apparently a hindrance to developing a sustainable vision in the fight against poverty and social exclusion. Since First Nation funding is only provided to specific or limited-time projects, it is difficult to ensure their sustainability. Legal conflicts among the various levels of government (First Nation, provincial and federal) are described as especially problematic. The fragmentation of services and confusion about roles, responsibilities and accountability result in basic services not always being available to community members. The issues and solutions in the fight against poverty and social exclusion must be clearly described and structured. The elements for harmonizing the implementation of strategies, measures and programs must be carefully weighed and prepared.

Certain segments of the population, such as elders, women and social assistance recipients, are said to be particularly vulnerable and require special attention.

3.3 Two transversal premises: *societal involvement and coherence and consistency of action*

The government of Quebec proposed five primary orientations to guide the process for developing a new action plan in the fight against poverty and social exclusion. The observations gathered and the summary of the activities conducted indicate that the first three orientations pertain to goals to be implemented in the fight against poverty, while the remaining two are premises about the first three. Thus, the orientations on societal involvement (orientation 4) and coherence and consistency of action (orientation 5) are transversal and prerequisites for the realization of the first three. To ensure the third action plan is effective in the fight against poverty and social exclusion, namely by fostering individual development potential (orientation 1), enhancing the social and economic safety net (orientation 2) and stimulating economic development and improving access to and enhancing employment (orientation 3), concrete steps must be taken for each orientation in the fight against the systemic social discrimination observed.

Several issues would need to be prioritized to realize orientations 4 and 5.

3.3.1 Encouraging societal involvement (orientation 4)

Societal involvement in the fight against First Nation poverty and social exclusion is crucial, as First Nations are still the subject of racism and stigmatization. Sensitization of public opinion must continue in order to reduce prejudice against First Nations.

Considering the degree of social exclusion observed, support must be provided to communities faced with revitalizing themselves and encouraging the financially disadvantaged to become socially involved in their living environment (work, school, culture and language, community, sports, recreation, information technology and communications, territorial access, etc.). These seem to be mandatory prerequisites in the fight against poverty and social exclusion.

3.3.2 Ensuring coherence and consistency of action at every level (orientation 5)

Given that work is often done in silos, with little sharing between different governments or between different bodies within the same government, coherence and consistency of action should be prioritized in the fight against poverty and social exclusion.

To ensure the coherence and consistency of the action taken to fight poverty and social exclusion, it would appear necessary to create issue and mobilization tables in each community. Implementing these tables was described as the strategy of choice to realize the different orientations. Workshops or training should also be organized more systematically to meet the needs of these individuals and ensure consistency of action.

Work remains to be done to ensure the public, decision-makers and local and outside actors are aware of the programs, measures and services at their disposal in the fight against poverty and social exclusion. The purpose of doing so is to support the effectiveness of the partnerships established and collaborative efforts made to meet the needs of the population. It would be equally important to systematically adapt these programs, measures and services to First Nation culture.

It is also important that frontline workers co-operate among themselves to take into account the range of causes for social exclusion.

To this end, the forming of frontline teams or regional First Nation adult education centres would appear to be innovative solutions for ensuring coherence and consistency of action. Both of these structures would lead to the creation of a safety net in which the actors involved could pool their knowledge and skills.

3.4 Three key orientations in the fight against poverty and social exclusion

This section re-examines the first three orientations proposed by the government by focusing on the observations collected for each orientation, the issues to take into account and good practices.

3.4.1 Orientation 1: Preventing poverty and social exclusion by encouraging individual development potential

Observations

Though the first orientation and the affiliated recommendations seem to be priorities, an in-depth examination should be done to eliminate systemic discrimination that could lead to poverty and social exclusion among First Nations.

Some frontline workers claim there is a need for harmonization between laws and local and governmental policies, as well as among existing programs and services, given the lack of cohesion between governmental measures and local orientations. How can people develop their potential if basic health services are unavailable to them? How can cultural reappropriation be supported as an individual development strategy if the local measures observed must be aligned with governmental orientations that do not necessarily correspond with this reality (for example: employment assistance for hunters and trappers)? Some communities facing chronic poverty are incapable of meeting their members' basic needs and cannot contribute to their individual development potential.

Other issues to prioritize

Given the gap between First Nations and the rest of the Quebec population and given the inflation rate, it would appear necessary to increase the financial resources allocated to those living in poverty, as the funds they are currently receiving does not allow them to meet their basic needs. Some

respondents suggested systematically offering budget planning training to help people prepare their family budget.

Given the high unemployment rate and low academic success rate in the communities, updating training and progressive social reinsertion strategies was considered as important.

Prioritization of the proposed issues

The respondents identified the following challenges as the ones they would prioritize:

- Make high-quality health and social services available;
- Make parenting programs available;
- Make high-quality early childhood educational services available;
- Increase educational perseverance for youth from disadvantaged environments;
- Reduce obstacles for participating in training;
- Implement coaching and support strategies for those interested in acquiring skills, taking training or finding work.

Education, training, and capacity and skill building among First Nations are key intervention levers in the fight against poverty and social exclusion. Most participants feel that cultural tradition and recreational activities are indispensable for individual development potential and ensuring social inclusion for all members of the community, especially elders. The social reconstruction of communities can only be accomplished by changing the mentality at the local and governmental levels. Respondents added that governments must be more flexible when integrating culture into local programs and projects to address the First Nation identity crisis, particularly among the younger generations.

Examples of good practices

Some good practices about this orientation were proposed.

The creation of mobilization and intersectoral action committees on social development plays a crucial role in communities when it comes to sensitization activities and joint interventions so helpful in the fight against poverty.

In the area of the individual development potential, the support for healthful lifestyle habits, the screening of children aged 0 to 5 and parenting skill acquisition seem to have been beneficial in several communities. The guidance and structure provided for traditional handicrafts or cultural validation are considered a bridge between tradition and modernity. The participants were unanimously concerned that good practices about culture did not receive specific government funding. It seemed that the government did not appreciate the benefits such cultural activities would have in the fight against poverty.

3.4.2 *Orientation 2: Enhancing the social and economic safety net*

Observations

This orientation draws attention to the fact that some communities are unable to meet the basic needs of their population, be it for access to drinking water, electricity or decent housing. The food security of the poorest members is still an issue. The legal conflicts and language barriers (for English-speaking communities surrounded by French-speaking communities) constitute major obstacles for social and economic security. Community employment and employability strategy development remain problematic issues.

Other issues to prioritize

As the social and economic safety net does not seem to satisfactorily meet the needs of people, especially those in greatest need, some respondents again expressed the urgency of increasing the financial assistance provided to these individuals by allocating prevention or promotional funds to tackle the source of these problems outside the community, or ensure the control of resources for stimulating local wealth, thereby enabling communities to achieve a degree of financial autonomy. It would seem worthwhile to ease and adapt the eligibility requirements for different programs. The issue of infrastructure, particularly for those communities with limited access by road, cannot be ignored.

Prioritization of the proposed issues

The respondents identified the following challenges as the ones they would prioritize:

- Food security for people in their community and the availability of sufficient quantities of affordable, nutritious food, including traditional food;
- Improve the financial capacity of low-income earners to meet their basic needs;
- Improve the continuum of health and social services for community residents, especially those living in remote communities and low-income earners.

Examples of good practices

Over the past few years, different community initiatives sought to bolster the social and economic safety net: collective kitchens, food banks, multipurpose community centres or frontline health and preventive service plans. All of these community initiatives seem meritorious and worthy of support. Issue tables on these topics also seem to be bearing fruit. Social housing construction initiatives are certainly beneficial, but there are not enough of them to meet the desperate need for such housing in many communities.

3.4.3 *Orientation 3: Encouraging access to and enhancing the value of employment*

Observations

It is important to note that First Nations face two major hurdles where economic development and access to employment are concerned. Living conditions, in particular the quality and accessibility of road infrastructure, limit economic development and employability potential. It is not surprising that nearly 70% of community members with jobs are band council employees. Yet, band councils do not necessarily have the means to create enough jobs for all their members. There are few jobs available in communities for those looking for work. Furthermore, the stigmatization and discrimination to which are subjected First Nation individuals outside the community also limit their employability. This systemic discrimination is even worse for English-speaking communities, as the language barrier does not allow members of those communities to easily integrate the workforce in neighbouring communities where the dominant language is French.

Other issues to prioritize

Overcoming the socioeconomic situation prevalent in communities and the challenges facing job creation requires that different social innovation strategies be explored. The creation of social economy businesses are another promising option. Consequently, the different initiatives aimed at promoting the social economy must be maintained more explicitly by the government to favour the emergence of a mixed market economy (social economy, collaborative economy, etc.). Creating jobs by improving access to natural resources and territory is another path worth considering.

The shortage of work in the community and the challenges of integrating the workforce outside the community should be studied to better correlate the training offered with the available jobs. It would be important that different economic development and employment actors provide greater support to individuals in the job market to identify their needs, but also that the incentives for integrating the job market be enhanced. Existing degree and certificate requirements are too high, given the poor graduation and training rates among First Nations. Better guidance for students and the easing of academic restrictions should be considered.

Prioritizing the proposed issues

The issues proposed below are unanimously considered to be priorities. However, First Nation skill and capacity building are a transversal issue affecting both socioeconomic development and access to jobs. The following issues were prioritized:

- Improve conditions leading to low-income earners getting and keeping a job;
- Develop and/or improve the skills of First Nation low-income earners to help them integrate the job market;
- Support work experience for individuals experiencing poverty and social exclusion in association with business needs;

- Reduce obstacles to the workforce integration of Aboriginals experiencing poverty and social exclusion;
- Create financial levers and tools for social economy businesses.

Examples of good practices

Given that the economic development potential in communities remains limited, the mobilization of internal and external partners in studying new economic development options should be encouraged. Not only is it important to remove obstacles to professional development, but providing more holistic support to those coping with a mental illness or addiction should be considered as well. The fragmentation of the services available to these individuals impedes their full reintegration into the workforce. Entrepreneurial training or other employment reinsertion or integration programs are certainly beneficial. Having reserved daycare spaces for the children of parents taking courses or training is a particularly appreciated incentive. For the moment, however, the biggest challenge is finding sufficient daycare spaces for these parents.

CONCLUSION

The data presented herein on poverty and social exclusion in First Nation communities reveal the magnitude and complexity of the situation. Despite the work done in this area by the government of Quebec over the past few years, there is still an urgent need for action.

The indicators retained testify to the significant gap between First Nations and the Quebec population. The social determinants of health about First Nation living conditions are worrisome and indicate that a “strategy to fight against poverty and social exclusion must not only deal with poverty, inequality and exclusion, but also on their causes and consequences.”²³ [Translation]

The systematic discrimination observed against First Nations leads to the prioritization of societal involvement and ensures coherence and consistency of action at every level. These two proposals are considered transversal to the implementation of the action required. Consequently, public policy should guarantee the social inclusion of First Nations by ensuring the programs and measures are culturally and geographically adapted to each community.

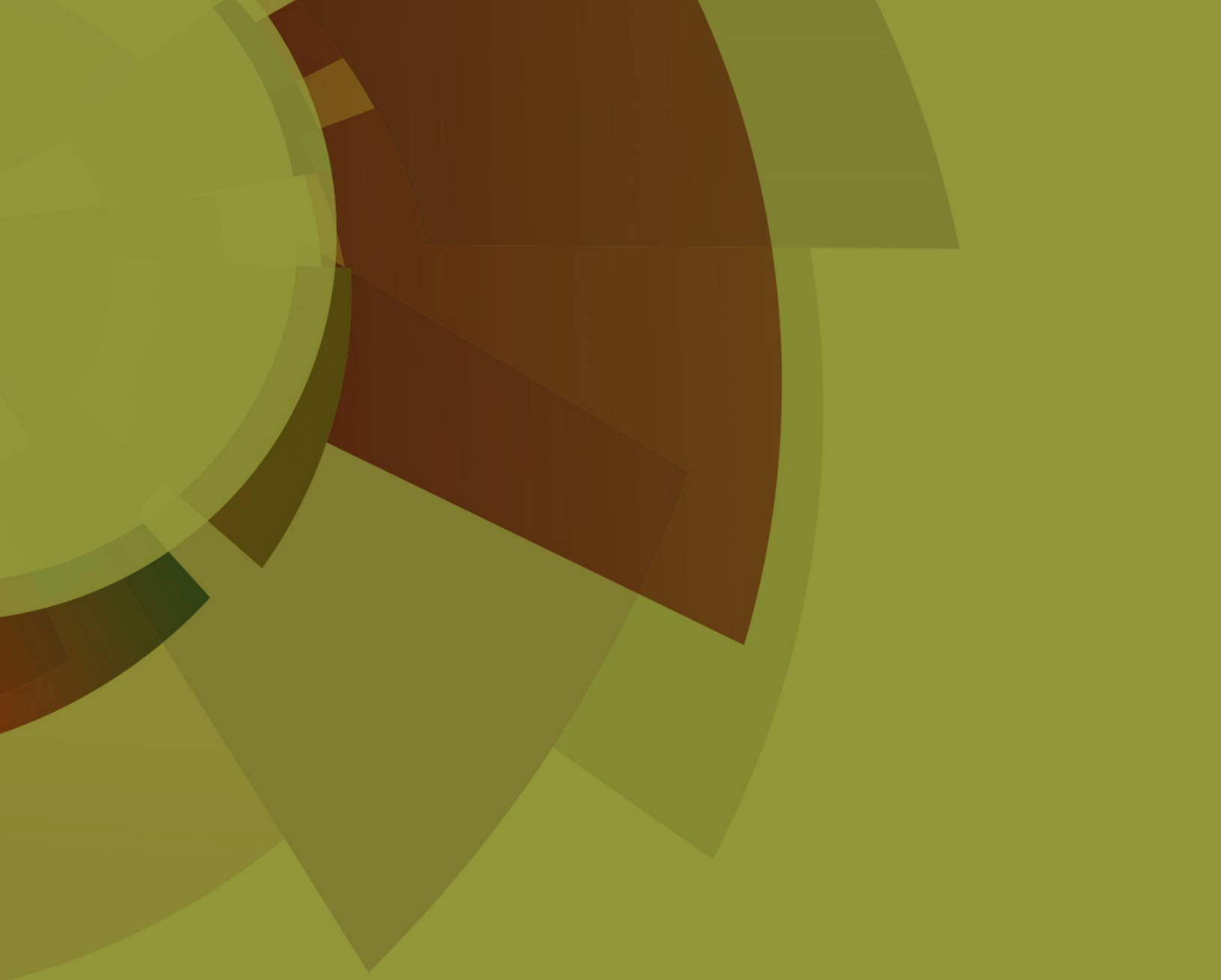
Considering the impacts of the FQIS-backed projects, the AFNQL and FNQLHSSC underscore the need and relevance of such support strategies. Social change in general and the fight against poverty are lengthy processes. Achieving concrete results requires a long-term vision and the ongoing support of the different levels of government. Existing sociopolitical intervention paradigms need to be examined. Community coaching proved that investing in education, cultural enhancement, mobilization and community empowerment are critical to enabling First Nations to be fully capable of participating in the socioeconomic expansion of their territory.

²³ CEPE, 2009, *Prendre la mesure de la pauvreté*, p. 12.

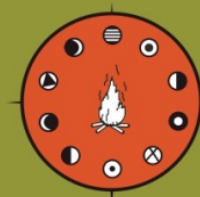
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