

SUMMARY

The Poverty Challenge: A strategic research and knowledge transfer plan for the fight against poverty

2008

CONTEXT IN WHICH THE STRATEGY WAS DEVELOPED

The research and transfer strategy on poverty is part of phase II of the *Perspectives STS* project (science, technology, society) conducted by the Council for Science and Technology. This original and ambitious project, launched in 2003, takes a forward-looking approach and comprises several consultation stages. Its goal is to determine the need for new knowledge to address the major socioeconomic challenges facing Québec over the next two decades. One of the objectives of *Perspectives STS* is to foster closer ties between scientists and those who use the new knowledge and technologies. The fight against poverty is one of the seven major issues selected during the consultation process. The challenge can be defined as follows: “Adopt innovative measures for fighting poverty and the factors that generate and sustain it, and for staving off the consequences poverty engenders: marginality, feelings of powerlessness, inequity, and violence.”

THE STEERING COMMITTEE’S MANDATE

In 2006, a steering committee comprising researchers and research users from different backgrounds was given the mandate to develop a research and knowledge transfer strategy to meet this challenge. Representatives from partner organizations associated with the project had observer status at committee meetings. The committee met six times over a period of 18 months between January 2006 and June 2007.

The strategy goes beyond simply defining research themes — it organizes the research in its entirety and emphasizes knowledge transfer. It is designed to have a real impact on poverty in Québec by contributing to make diagnoses, identifying the various determining factors and their interaction, and helping develop solutions. In this regard, the committee’s work is in line with the 2002 Act to combat poverty and social exclusion and the 2004 government action plan addressing these issues.

STEPS

Over the 18 months, the committee:

- Assessed the state of knowledge on poverty-related challenges and issues in Québec
- Did an inventory of researchers, research groups and projects in this sphere
- Surveyed organizations involved in transfer and development of knowledge on poverty

- Defined the strategy's objectives, priority targets, the main approaches to take, the necessary instruments and knowledge sharing requirements
- Determined key issues in researcher training, research development, and the utilization of knowledge
- Identified courses of action for the research and knowledge transfer strategy and the necessary tools for implementing it

APPROACH ADOPTED BY THE COMMITTEE

The strategy aims at increasing research efforts in order to improve our understanding of poverty in all its aspects and help develop sustainable solutions. It emphasizes the importance of knowledge transfer and appropriation, and the need to disseminate research results and make them readily accessible. It adds value by aiming to provide an original and decisive contribution that rallies stakeholders, supports the creation of new knowledge, and ensures that this knowledge leads to action.

ASSESSMENT OF THE CURRENT STATE OF RESEARCH

Strengths

- Québec has a research capacity and a body of knowledge on poverty
- Research teams have expertise in several fields
- Many prevention and intervention organizations are potential partners in knowledge transfer and development

Weaknesses

- Some areas of research are still not very well covered
- Many research results remain poorly known or poorly disseminated
- Available databases are underexploited
- Player synergy remains weak
- There is no mechanism of sufficient scope for dialogue on poverty

GOALS AND COMPONENTS OF THE STRATEGY

Priority objectives for research and knowledge transfer

The strategy has four objectives. In the case of the first three, the strategy suggests that current knowledge be assessed, and that a knowledge transfer plan adapted to user needs be developed. It also calls for the creation of a research program on the dynamics of poverty and on nongovernmental initiatives (participative research) and emerging themes. These objectives, which were identified after an assessment of Québec's research system and information requirements with respect to the fight against poverty, are as follows:

- Trace a general portrait to improve our understanding of the dynamics of poverty and the methods of combating it
- Better understand anti-poverty measures, programs, and policies implemented in Québec by various levels of government, and help improve upon them
- Develop emerging research themes:
 - Social perceptions of poverty
 - Economic and social costs of poverty
 - The geography of poverty
 - Links between poverty and human rights

Priority research approaches

Research on poverty has reached a level of sophistication that allows for broad, long term projects. The strategy also seeks to encourage the development of innovative but as yet little-used research methods that can significantly increase our understanding of poverty. These include longitudinal, multidimensional, intersectoral, evaluative, comparative, experimental and participatory studies.

Effective tools

To take advantage of the databases and the powerful processing devices now available to researchers, innovative and effective tools must be used to draw a more precise picture of the factors that generate poverty. To conduct collaborative research using databases hosted in a variety of locations, we must continue to share and facilitate access to this data by building lasting partnerships.

Synergy among players

The strategy emphasizes the need to improve the sharing, transfer, and appropriation of knowledge by supporting the following actions:

- Research partnerships: support partnership projects and practice community involvement therein
- Knowledge transfer and valorization using methods appropriate for the projects and their clientele: organize intelligence gathering and set up a one-stop center for collecting data and disseminating research results
- Networking among researchers, stakeholders, and decision-makers: setup tools for virtual communication and networking using classic methods (expert seminars, talks, etc.), organize an annual forum
- Information and awareness: organize the dissemination of information

Implementing the strategy

The steering committee recommended establishing a followup committee comprising the strategy's funding partners. This committee would periodically assess the progress and reorient certain aspects, as needed. It would include a working group responsible for implementing and monitoring the strategy that would provide the leadership necessary to ensure the work advances and report to the funding partners on the strategy's progress. With the help of existing management tools, the strategy would be managed using a collaborative approach and would rely on a broad alliance that encourages partnerships and the transfer and exchange of ideas.

Members of the working group would be chosen by the followup committee and would include funding partners, representatives of the research community and front-line anti-poverty workers. The working group would be responsible for encouraging research and knowledge transfer, setting objectives and priorities, coordinating activities, and deciding on the necessary support measures. The work's progress would be presented using a live map of the research, on which strategies could be adapted as the situation evolves. The implementation of this strategy over ten years would require annual funding of about \$2.5 million to start. This amount should increase gradually to reach \$6 million per year by the end of five years.

IN CONCLUSION

The strategy document was the object of a very broad consultation with the research community and people involved with poverty issues to test its external validity and to make any necessary corrections. The final document includes the viewpoints of researchers and experts in the field of poverty, as well as research users, both anti-poverty workers and government decision-makers.

