House of Commons
CANADA

Standing Committee on Human Resources, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities

HUMA • NUMBER 025 • 2nd SESSION • 39th PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Thursday, April 17, 2008

Chair

Mr. Dean Allison

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● (0910)

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ)): Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), we resume our study of the federal contribution to reducing poverty in Canada. I declare this meeting open.

I want to welcome our witnesses and to thank them for being here. I'm talking about the Canadian Association of Food Banks, represented by Mr. Wayne Hellquist, Chief Executive Officer, and by Mr. Shawn Pegg, Manager; the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, represented by Mr. Michael Buda, Director, and Mr. Michel Frojmovic, Consultant; and Ms. Monica Townson, associated with the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. In addition, Mr. Chris Sarlo, will testify as an individual, by videoconference.

Each group will have 10 minutes to make its comments, and then will move on to question by committee members. Before turning the floor over to you, I'm going to invite the parliamentary secretary, Ms. Yelich, to make an observation to the committee before we begin our business this morning.

[*English*]

Mrs. Lynne Yelich (Blackstrap, CPC): Thank you. It is an observation.

We agreed on a general outline provided by the researchers. We have four meetings right now, and the first three meetings were going to focus on a broad overview of poverty in Canada. So we were going to think about who, where, what, and why. Then we were going to have the fourth meeting on how to proceed with the measurements. We wanted to grasp the definition of poverty and have a broad overview.

Then we agreed to go to the second part of the study to discuss the different strategies in Canada and abroad, and different reduction strategies. We also agreed to study how the federal government could contribute to the reduction of poverty.

We went off-track the other day and didn't seem to get a lot of ideas on a broad overview. I believe we talked more about diabetes, obesity, and ATM fees. We talked about almost everything in those first three crucial meetings except helping the committee come to some way of identifying the poverty that exists and measuring it so we can find ways for the government to contribute.

Let's talk about the broad overview and how we can find a formula or arrive at some way of measuring and getting a definition of poverty. It could take a long time if we continue only hearing witnesses without sticking to our plan—and we did have a fairly stringent plan.

So I just wanted to put that out to you. Maybe we need to have more detailed policy discussions and talk more about what can be done to lead to the part on how governments can contribute.

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yves Lessard): You'll understand, Ms. Yelich, and probably other committee members as well, that it may not be very opportune to start that debate this morning. Perhaps we could do it at the end of the meeting since the people who are invited here on behalf of their groups have received invitations with very specific indications as to what we expect. I imagine they have prepared accordingly.

It is now up to us parliamentarians to direct our questions on the basis of the invitation you've given us this morning, Ms. Yelich. Is that suitable to you?

[*English*]

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: That would be really good, and if we can ask witnesses—

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yves Lessard): The invitation could first be directed to the parliamentarians.

I will hear you as well, Mr. Ménard.

Mr. Réal Ménard (Hochelaga, BQ): With all due respect to the parliamentary secretary, I think she'll also understand that connections must be made between health determinants and poverty. I also hope she understood them, but I warned the government against an excessively reductive vision of poverty. It must be understood that, when we talk about poverty, we're talking about a multi-dimensional reality. Some connections may have escaped her, but they nevertheless remain relevant.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yves Lessard): We all agree to limit ourselves to those indicators.

First, I'm going to invite the Canadian Association of Food Banks to give us its opinion. Will Mr. Hellquist or Mr. Pegg start?

[*English*]

Mr. Shawn Pegg (Manager, Policy and Research, Canadian Association of Food Banks): I'll start. I'm Shawn Pegg, from Canadian Association of Food Banks.

Today I'll give you an overview of—

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yves Lessard): You have 10 minutes, and to ensure that each of you is able to conclude, I will give you a signal one minute before the end so you aren't caught off-guard.

[*English*]

Mr. Shawn Pegg: Okay. *Merci.*

I'm going to start by giving the who, what, and why of the food banks. It's our experience that not a lot of folks know the realities of the food bank world and who use food banks.

The Canadian Association of Food Banks was founded in 1986. We're a national organization representing provincial food bank associations, food distribution centres, and food banks at the federal level. We distribute corporate food donations through our national food sharing system. In 2007 we distributed about eight million pounds of food through that system. We also perform an annual hunger count survey, which counts the number of people who are assisted by food banks and also tracks things like household characteristics of those who are assisted.

I'd like to provide some information on the number of people assisted by food banks, on the scope of food charity in Canada, and very briefly on the limitations in the ability of food banks to address the need for emergency food assistance.

First of all, in March 2007 Canadian food banks assisted 720,000 individuals at least once. As a comparison, that's about the population of New Brunswick. That was down from a high of 824,000 per month in 2005, but nevertheless 8% higher than the level in 1997. Food bank use has not dropped below 700,000 people per month since 1997.

Who is assisted by food banks? We know that 19% are either employed or on employment insurance, 51% are receiving social assistance, about 13% are receiving provincial disability income supports, and about 6% report that their primary source of income comes from a pension. We also know that about 40% of those assisted are children under the age of 18. In some regions that figure jumps to about 50%, for example, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and the Northwest Territories; 51% of households assisted by food banks are families that contain at least one child; and about 44% of those households are two-parent families.

Things get a little bit more complex in rural areas, and by "rural" I mean areas with populations of less than 10,000 people. About half the food banks we know of are located in these kinds of small towns. In rural areas, the percentage of people assisted who report being employed drops somewhat, and the percentage of people who report being on pensions, disability income supports, and employment insurance increases. So the percentage of people on benefits is a bit higher in rural areas, as are the numbers of people who report being over the age of 65.

The large majority of people using food banks are in rental housing, with only about 8% reporting that they own their own home. Interestingly, in rural areas the percentage of people who report owning their home but still needing to use the food bank jumps to about 17% of the total.

Officially there are about 700 food banks across Canada, in every province and territory, along with 2,900 affiliated agencies—for example, soup kitchens, meal programs, before-and-after school programs, and what have you. Unofficially there are dozens, and probably hundreds, of small food banks serving two, five, ten families per month out of church basements, schools, and community centres.

To give you an idea of the scope of the food bank world in Canada, I'll give you a few interesting figures. In March 2007 volunteers donated 420,000 hours of their time to food banks. That's the equivalent of five full-time staff at each location, and that's per month. During the same period, paid staff worked 288,000 hours, or the equivalent of three full-time staff at each location. For the full year in 2007, the 322 food banks that participate in the CAFB's national food sharing system distributed more than 125 million pounds of food.

● (0915)

Even though food banks have been around for more than 20 years and have become quite good at soliciting and sharing food with those who need it, it remains that there are real limitations in the ability of food banks to meet the need for emergency food assistance. This is the larger point I would like to make today.

One figure that I think highlights limitations in food banks' ability to meet the need is the difference between the number of people who report not having enough food to eat and the number who are actually assisted by food banks. We know from the Canadian Community Health Survey of 2004 that 1.1 million Canadian households containing 2.7 million individuals reported being moderately or severely food-insecure, meaning that they had compromised quality and/or quantity of food consumed or had a reduced food intake and disrupted eating patterns. These 2.7 million people are about 8.8% of the population. I compare that with the fact that food banks serve about 2.2% of the population. In other words, there are a significant number of hungry people who are not being assisted by food banks.

This brings me to just a very brief overview of our policy recommendations, which we've been making for a number of years in various contexts. They're based in the belief that we need strong support from all levels of government to address the problems I'm talking about today.

First, the CAFB supports a call for a national anti-poverty strategy with measurable targets and timelines. Given the fact that work is more likely than in the past to be temporary, part-time, and without health and other benefits, we are calling for increased EI coverage and benefit levels. In addition, we strongly recommend broadening eligibility for and increasing the levels of the working income tax benefit. We support the target of a $5,000 Canada child tax benefit. Fourth, we recommend increased and predictable support for a pan-Canadian system of affordable housing. Lastly, we recommend increased and ongoing support for a system of early learning and child care that is affordable and inclusive.

I'm hurrying a bit so that I can pass it off to my colleague Wayne Hellquist.

● (0920)

Mr. Wayne Hellquist (Chief Executive Officer, Regina and District Food Bank, Canadian Association of Food Banks): Thanks, Shawn. I think those policy positions are supported broadly by the food bank movement across Canada.

I have the pleasure, actually, of operating the food bank in Regina, Saskatchewan. We're a community of about 200,000 people, and in any given month we're serving upwards of 7,500 or 8,000 people in our community who rely on the food bank for a portion of their food supply.

Remember, of course, that food banks deal with the poorest in our communities. No one chooses to be poor, and no one chooses to use the food bank. They're there because of circumstances that have dictated that, for whatever reason, they're unable to provide food for their family or food for themselves as individuals.

Food banks are really an emergency food supply only. We certainly don't intend to be the primary source of food for all these families. But as Shawn indicated, over 40% of those assisted across the country are children; in our province it's around 47%. These are individuals, of course, who through no fault of their own find themselves dependent on a system of food banks for their nutritional needs.

As was mentioned, hunger and poverty is a multidimensional issue, and I don't think the solutions are simple either. We've been focusing our work at the Regina food bank on moving beyond simply providing emergency food to providing training and education for the people who use the food banks. We believe that in the long term the best solution is to ensure that people have access to employment, access to life skills training, access to employment training.

We've just finished a research project looking at the possibility of food banks becoming a labour force intermediary. We believe as well that food banks can be a unique portal to other agencies and other services in our community, including access to employment training and access to employment. We certainly need to find those kinds of unique and innovative solutions, utilizing not just food banks but other community-based organizations that can, I think, be part of the framework of helping to resolve this long-standing issue of hunger and poverty in our communities.

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yves Lessard): Thank you, Messrs. Hellquist and Pegg.

Now we'll hear from the representative of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities.

Mr. Michael Buda (Acting Deputy Director, Policy, Federation of Canadian Municipalities): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[*English*]

Thank you for inviting us to present on this important topic.

I'd like to briefly introduce us first. My name is Mike Buda. I'm the acting deputy director of policy at FCM. With me is Michel Frojmovic of Acacia Consulting. He works closely with FCM on our quality-of-life reporting system, which we'll be discussing in a few minutes.

Before I begin, I do want to pass on the regrets of our president, Winnipeg councillor Gord Steeves, and our CEO, Brock Carlton. Normally they would have appeared before this committee. They both had scheduling conflicts, and they asked us to appear on their behalf.

As I'm sure you're aware, municipal governments, as the order of government on the front lines, closest to the citizens, play a critical role when it comes to alleviating poverty. From housing to immigrant settlement, to community safety, to recreational opportunities, to building social cohesion and strong neighbourhoods, municipalities are usually the first order of government when it comes to poverty reduction. However, today we are here to speak about how municipalities actually measure poverty. Of course we'd be pleased to return to the committee to share some of our ideas on how the Government of Canada could partner more effectively with municipalities to reduce poverty, and some of our recommendations around poverty reduction, but again, we're here today to talk about how we actually measure poverty.

That being said, I want to turn the floor to my colleague, Michel to tell you about how FCM's quality-of-life reporting system measures poverty. And I should add, because Michel is quite modest, that he is one of Canada's leading practitioners of the measurement of quality of life, including poverty in Canada. He is an incredible technical resource from whom FCM has benefited for many years.

When Michel finishes telling you about the quality-of-life reporting system, what it does, and how it does it, I want to finish up by sharing some specific recommendations on how the Government of Canada could help municipalities improve the measurement of poverty. Ultimately, better measurement will assist municipalities in being more effective partners of the federal government in our collective efforts to reduce poverty in Canada's cities and communities.

With that, I'll turn it over to Michel.

Thank you.

● (0925)

Mr. Michel Frojmovic (Consultant, Federation of Canadian Municipalities): Thanks, Mike.

I am going to focus on this question of measurement.

We started off in this meeting talking about the complexity of poverty, and certainly that's what we grapple with, but our starting point here is trying to understand the animal we're working with. The quality of life reporting system has been around now for over a decade. One of its strong features is trying to report on what's happening within municipal boundaries. Typically when data are released, they're released nationally or provincially, and sometimes what are described as cities and communities are in fact typically something like census metropolitan areas, CMAs. CMAs are not cities. They're almost never cities or municipalities. So one thing we try to make sure of is that we are reporting on municipal boundaries.

There are two reasons for that. One is that, as Mike mentioned, in many circumstances municipal governments, whether they're mandated to do it or not, are at the front line, and so it's important for those same municipal governments to understand what's happening in their communities. How do they measure poverty and understand it? That's one reason.

The other is that what's also very apparent when you do measure a range of issues at the municipal level is that poverty takes a very different face when you're looking from coast to coast to coast.

So those are two reasons why measuring poverty at a municipal level is important: because municipal government needs to know what's happening within its boundaries, and because poverty varies very significantly across the country whether you're looking at Regina, Montreal, or Toronto.

Just by example of what I mean by a CMA not being a city, the Toronto CMA actually includes five municipalities: Peel, Halton, Durham, York, and Toronto. The face of poverty in, say, York region or Durham region, which includes places like Oakville and Burlington, would be dramatically different from poverty in Toronto. So really we're trying to break down those administrative boundaries into municipal governments. That's just a starting point.

The reporting looks at a wide range of social, economic, and environmental trends and factors. We have approximately 75 indicators, but underlying those indicators is a pretty big repository of social, economic, and environmental data. These are trends that have been going on now for about 15 years, since 1991. So we do try to look at poverty from a multiplicity of dimensions.

We don't actually use the word “poverty” all the time either. We're looking at issues and trends. We released a theme report, as we called it, in 2004 that looked at income, basic necessities, and housing. In a sense, it was our poverty report, but we weren't using those terms.

I'm going to talk mainly about the ways in which, in effect, we do talk about poverty and the way we measure poverty. Just as a final note, though, on this quality of life reporting system, it is membership-based and the members are municipal governments. At present there are 22 municipalities, and typically they are the larger communities in Canada. So the Communauté métropolitaine de Québec and the Communauté métropolitaine de Montréal would be two of the larger entities in terms of size. Ottawa, Calgary, Edmonton—there are 22 cities representing about 50% of Canada's population. Those are the members. Because it's membership-driven, we are able to ensure that the data get used. The trends that we're talking about are actually used by those municipalities. So they're used both at a local level and also, we hope, at a national level in order to report on what's going on nationally at a local level.

That 2004 report raised a few highlights that are worth noting. One of them was essentially an attempt to get a handle on the risk of homelessness, not a count of homelessness but the factors that might explain homelessness. So we looked at things like social housing waiting lists and levels of unemployment, and lone-parent families—about seven indicators in all—and we tried to understand, city by city, what was going on and what had been going on over time. So that was one example.

I'll just focus on four areas—because I assume there will be a chance to talk about these things if there's a desire for clarification—in which we are trying to measure poverty. I'll talk a bit about data, if that's okay with everybody.

We rely quite a bit on the Statistics Canada census, and we use that for the well-known LICO, the low-income cut-off. LICO is not a line of poverty; it's just an indication of where you are. If your household has an income below this amount, then you're considered to be living in poverty.

We look at LICO by city across Canada in terms of different kinds of families—single-parent families, couples with kids—and for different demographic groups, such as urban aboriginal communities, for example. There's a range of ways of looking at LICO. There will be one example using Statistics Canada census data, which can get expensive. The price is coming down a bit, but it's still expensive. That's an issue I'll come to later.

So that's LICO—the closest we have to a poverty line.

● (0930)

Another source for measuring poverty is tax filer data, the actual administrative data. This is administrative in the sense that it's not produced for purposes of policy; it's produced because you are required as a Canadian citizen to fill out your income tax form and submit it. There is a whole host of data sitting in there that is quite rich.

We use this tax filer data, again from Statistics Canada, to look at things like the income gap—the relationship between those with the highest income and those with the lowest income—in individual communities to determine how that gap is growing or shrinking. It's relative poverty.

We also use it to get a better handle on working poverty. The income tax forms tell us where you receive your money. Are you getting social assistance? Are you getting employment income? What ratio of that did you get over the year? That helps us construct an understanding of working poverty.

Again, one of the challenges we face is the cost. A single table that provides a richness of data can cost $10,000, which is pricey. But we invest in that sort of data from tax filer information.

A third source, which we consider to be a bit of value-added in the municipal world, is municipal governments and the administrative data they collect. If you've ever signed your kids up for swimming, you have to fill out a form, or at least an application form, and there is data there that gives some information on recreation. We do use recreation. But in terms of the focus we're talking about here, one thing we've been trying to get a handle on is the issue of homelessness and social housing.

Where municipalities fund emergency shelters, they have access to data on shelter usage and on the number of permanent beds by shelter type. That gives you a sense of whether there are more single women or more families going into the shelter system. The social housing waiting lists give you a sense of how many people are actually.... If you have a thousand people on the waiting list and it's been growing over the last 10 years, it gives you a sense of where you're going with social housing.

Again, the point of complexity is that any one of these doesn't really paint a very full picture. What we're trying to do is assemble a few dozen to try to understand what's happening in terms of poverty at a local level. To collect that data, we use a municipal data collection tool, an online survey, that reaches municipal staff.

I'm going to wrap up quickly.

Community-based data is the last source. As an example, FCM will work locally with food banks and seek to compile data from community organizations.

Those are just four examples of how we measure that. I'll just hand this back to Mike for the 45 seconds we have left.

Mr. Michael Buda: Chair, in the handouts we have provided to you there are a number of recommendations as to how the Government of Canada could more effectively partner with municipalities to help municipalities measure data. I won't get into them now, but if there is an interest during the question and answer period, we can, of course, elaborate.

Thank you.

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yves Lessard): Thank you, Messrs. Frojmovic and Buda.

Now we'll hear from Ms. Monica Townson.

[*English*]

Ms. Monica Townson (Research Associate, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, As an Individual): Thank you very much.

First of all, I should make clear that I'm not here representing the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. I'm a self-employed independent consultant, although with my research I am associated with the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. However, I'm not here to represent them today.

Thank you very much for inviting me to appear before you. I think you're doing some very important work here and I appreciate the opportunity to contribute to your deliberations.

As I'm sure you know, the United Nations established the period from 1996 to 2007 as the decade for the eradication of poverty. Countries around the world are now implementing anti-poverty strategies, some of them very successfully. Your work at this committee could eventually result in the development of such strategies in Canada, and I think that would be a very exciting prospect.

I was asked to focus today on women and poverty, which is what I will do. I think it's essential that we do look at that aspect of poverty if we're going to have any success in reducing or alleviating poverty. That may not be a popular aspect of poverty in some quarters, because gender-based analysis seems to have gone out of style these days. You probably remember when we used to talk about the feminization of poverty; that phrase signified that poverty was primarily an issue for women, because the inequality women faced in our society and in our economy was a major contributing factor to the high rate of low income that women experienced.

Talking about the feminization of poverty did go out of style, and what we focus on now is child poverty. I think people may have thought that women had achieved equality, so we didn't need to worry about them anymore, but we do talk a lot about child poverty. Of course child poverty is vitally important, because children who start out their lives in poverty may not be able to escape from that poverty trap, so it's a very serious issue. We should remember that children are poor because their parents are poor, and many of those parents are women who are raising children on their own.

Child poverty, when you measure it by Statistics Canada's after-tax low-income cut-off, currently stands at 11.7%, and that was a 2005 number. The low income rate of women who are lone parents using the same measure was 29.1%. The low income rate for older women—seniors—who are on their own was 20.3%. That was up by more than three percentage points from the year before. In fact, the low income rate for unattached older women has varied between 17% and 27% for the last 20 years, with no sign of a downward trend at all.

We have federal programs, of course, such as old age security and guaranteed income supplements, that have done quite a lot in bringing down the low income rate among seniors. In fact, the rate is now 6.1%, compared with 9.8% in 1996. But when you apply a gender analysis to that number, it doesn't look quite so glowing. In fact, the low income rate for senior women is more than double that for senior men. In 2005, just 3.2% of men aged 65 and older had low incomes, compared with 8.4% of women in the same age group.

It may strike you that those two groups of women who have such high rates of low income—women who are lone parents, heads of families, and senior women on their own—do not have the benefit of a spouse or partner. Could it be that women must count on the income of a man to raise them out of poverty? What happened to women's economic autonomy?

Many people seem to believe that the solution to poverty is a job—if we could only get those lone-parent mothers working, they wouldn't be poor anymore. Finding a job is not necessarily the solution to women's poverty, because you have to look at the kinds of jobs women do: 40% of women who have jobs are employed in what we call non-standard work arrangements. That includes part-time work, temporary jobs, casual work, contract work, and own-account self-employment, which is self-employment without any employees, and 40% of women's jobs are those kinds of jobs. Just 29% of men's jobs are those kinds of jobs.

● (0935)

These are the kinds of jobs that are often poorly paid, without pensions or benefits, and with little or no job security. For instance, Canadian studies of wage rates—and these are based on hourly wage rates—show seasonal workers earn 28% less than their permanent counterparts, casual workers earn 24% less, and those using employment agencies, hired through temporary help agencies, earn 40% less than their counterparts.

In case you think women are working part-time because they're caring for their families, one-third of employed women in the main child-bearing years—that's age 25 to 44—are working part-time because they couldn't find full-time jobs. About the same percentage of women in that age group work part-time because they're caring for children. Of course, women with children need affordable quality child care before they can confidently consider employment, and in many cases that's not available.

When women lose their jobs, they're unlikely to get employment insurance benefits. Back in the 1980s, 70% of unemployed women got UI benefits. Then in 1996 the rules were changed and the program was renamed to employment insurance. Now only 32% of unemployed women, compared with 40% of unemployed men, get employment insurance benefits, which replace just 55% of their usual earnings. In some cases they don't get them because they haven't worked enough hours in the previous 12 months to qualify for benefits. Some of them had exhausted their benefits before they found another job. Some had quit a previous job for reasons not allowed in the EI Act. But many of them hadn't worked in the past 12 months even though they might have been long-term participants in the paid workforce, paying into the EI program, which they are now required to do from the first dollar of their earnings.

Denial of EI benefits to women workers most certainly does contribute to women's poverty. The fact that low income rates for female lone parents who don't have a job is 82% indicates how important that is.

Anti-poverty strategies could address women's poverty in many ways. For instance, minimum wages could be increased and employment standards laws could apply to temporary workers and others in non-standard jobs. You may have seen the recent review of part III of the Canada Labour Code that was done by Professor Harry Arthurs. He explains in great detail, with detailed recommendations, how the Labour Code could apply to those in non-standard jobs to improve their situation.

In the U.K., for instance, part of its anti-poverty strategy is called A New Deal for Lone Parents. That's a special program for people who are lone parents—almost all of them women—that focuses on one-on-one counselling from a personal adviser who can provide specific advice on finding a job, arranging child care, and getting training.

Of course, many specific anti-poverty strategies fall under provincial jurisdiction. You're charged, as I know, with what the federal government can do, and there are a number of things. Let me just suggest a few of them.

It could review the EI program to see why so many people are denied benefits. The EI people claim that 80% of those who qualify for benefits according to the EI rules actually get them. But that's not the point, because if you exclude all those who are disqualified for various reasons, which is what HRSDC does, it stands to reason that most of those who are left will get benefits. What we want to know is why the EI rules exclude so many people in the first place. The EI program could be revamped, with new rules for qualifying and for calculating benefits, among other things. Detailed recommendations are outlined in the report that I did with Kevin Hayes called *Women and the Employment Insurance Program*. The recommendations in there are based very much on the recommendations that came from this committee, which did a very comprehensive report on employment insurance not too long ago.

The federal government could propose an amendment to the Canada Pension Plan to allow for a dropout for family caregiving responsibilities similar to the one that's in there for child care, so that women—and it is almost always women—who have to retire early from paid employment to care for frail, elderly, or disabled family members are not penalized when it comes to calculating their CPP retirement pension.

● (0940)

We could also look at the level of OAS and GIS combined—our basic guaranteed income for seniors—because for a single individual, the maximum amount available from those two programs is still below the after-tax LICO. Changes here could help those senior women on their own who have such high rates of low income.

I've left with the clerk a number of references to reports I've done over the recent years suggesting various options to reduce poverty among older women. And I'm sure there are lots of other possibilities.

Now I see that my time is up, so thank you very much for your attention.

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yves Lessard): Thank you, Ms. Townson.

Now we'll move on to Mr. Chris Sarlo, professor of economics at Nipissing University. You have 10 minutes to give your evidence, Mr. Sarlo.

First, since you are giving your evidence by videoconference, I want to ensure that you can hear us clearly. Is that the case?

● (0945)

[*English*]

Professor Chris Sarlo (Professor, Department of Economics, Nipissing University, As an Individual): Yes, I can hear you. Thank you.

I'm delighted to speak with you today on this very important topic. As you may know, I've done considerable research on the definition and measurement of poverty over the past 15 years and I'm hoping that research will help inform the issues you have before you at the present time. Permit me to start, though, with some critical comments.

On November 24, 1989, Ed Broadbent rose in the House of Commons to speak passionately about child poverty. Here's what he had to say:

> I repeat, while the over-all sense of well-being for most Canadians has been getting better, that of our children has been getting worse. While the rest of us have been better clothed, there are more kids going without shoes. While the rest of us have improved housing, we have literally thousands of children who are homeless in Canada. Being a poor kid means box lunches from food banks and soup from soup kitchens. Mr. Speaker, to be a poor kid means trying to read or write or think on an empty stomach. One quarter of our children are wasting away. This is a national horror, this is a national shame that we should put an end to.

At the end of his speech and after some discussion, Mr. Broadbent put a motion on the floor that Canada end child poverty by the year 2000. The motion was unanimously endorsed by the House of Commons.

I think a lot of Canadians might wonder what Parliament did to honour the commitment they made to end child poverty. Did they clarify what it is exactly that they resolved to put an end to? In other words, did they define carefully what they meant by child poverty? Did they ask Statistics Canada to precisely measure the number and proportion of poor children in Canada and track that over time? Did they set specific targets and timetables for the elimination of child poverty, so they could monitor whether they were on track with their plan? And did they even have a plan as to how they would eliminate that which they unanimously resolved to do?

These would be standard businesslike steps to the resolution of a problem, one that's been around for decades. They are essential parts of problem solving and are absolutely necessary for accountability.

So let's ask how we have done on child poverty. If we use a measure that a number of parliamentarians and many in the social welfare community prefer—and I've heard that term mentioned a couple of times this morning—the low-income cut-off, then apparently child poverty has not only not been eliminated, it has actually increased, at least up to 2003. That's the latest data provided by the National Council of Welfare.

What should we make of this episode? I believe Canadians have every right to think that either Parliament doesn't take its own unanimous resolution seriously, that it was an empty promise that looked good politically at the time, or that Parliament is incompetent, completely incapable of making realistic promises and developing plans to accomplish an objective. Either way, Canada looks bad. We look bad to ourselves and we look bad to outsiders.

Let's move forward from 1989 to 1995. There was a world summit on social development in 1995 in Copenhagen. It was sponsored by the United Nations, and one of the key issues debated at that summit was poverty. At the end of the summit, there were two very important declarations.

One was that all nations, including nations in the developed world, establish measures of both absolute and relative poverty. So everybody is clear on these terms, “absolute poverty” refers to real deprivation, the absence of some basic necessity of life. It is usually determined using some kind of fairly strict market basket measure. “Relative poverty”, on the other hand, refers to being unequal, of having much less than most others in your society, regardless of your absolute situation.

So to restate the first declaration of the summit, the summit sponsored by the UN declared that all nations should develop measures of both absolute and relative poverty.

The second declaration was that all nations should gear their national policies to “eradicating absolute poverty by a target date to be specified by each country in its national context”.

Canada was one of a host of countries that signed on to those declarations. The task they committed themselves to at Copenhagen was pretty clear: to develop measures of both absolute and relative poverty and to develop a specific plan to end absolute poverty. There's no ambiguity about that. The government couldn't argue later on that it was confused about what it agreed to do. Admittedly, it's not easy to end absolute poverty, but wouldn't it be wonderful if we could even seriously reduce the number of people who suffer real deprivation?

● (0950)

We can ask again, what did the Canadian government in fact do to keep its commitment in Copenhagen? Did we develop a measure of absolute poverty? Did we develop a measure of relative poverty? Did we determine the incidence of absolute poverty, as a first step towards a plan to eliminate this terrible social problem? Did we take any serious steps towards achieving these very specific goals? Anything at all?

Believe me, I did some checking. After a lot of phone calls, I finally managed to speak to some people in the bureaucracy who were aware of our commitments at Copenhagen. After these conversations, I concluded that we did nothing to achieve these goals. Specifically, we did not develop a measure of absolute poverty and we certainly have not eliminated absolute poverty. And there's no clear evidence, even from the research that I do, that we've even managed to reduce absolute poverty over the past 10 years.

So we didn't even have any kind of intelligent national discussion about the issue. Again, what should Canadians think of their elected representatives? I think Canadians have a right to be embarrassed. It's really shameful.

Why do governments make these commitments if they have absolutely no intention of keeping them? We're not talking about small issues here that maybe nobody will notice. We're talking about, and we're dealing with, a matter of impoverished Canadians. We're dealing with a serious social and economic problem.

Having said all of this, we recognize that governments of Canada at both levels have devoted resources to the problem. We have the Canada child benefit program that's been expanded and enhanced, and there have been other changes to put more money into the hands of some poor people, but where's the systematic approach to the problem? Where are the goals, targets, timelines, metrics, and accountability? How can we spend billions of dollars and not have a clear idea of what it is that we're trying to achieve, and not have the measurements to ensure that we're on track? To be honest with you, I don't know how you folks get away with it.

I hope you are finally going to be serious about the problem and that you're going to attack the blight of poverty in a logical and scientific manner, without pandering to special interests or political gain. I'd like to give you my advice.

Let's start with the definition. We're never going to agree on one approach or the other. Some folks understand poverty as inequality, and others, like me, see poverty as insufficiency. Let's measure both of these conceptions of poverty and get on with it. If anyone insists that we not measure absolute poverty because it's "mean-spirited", or that Canada cannot be compared to third world countries, I have some responses for you. Ask objectors if they really would rather not know how many of their fellow citizens are unable to afford the basic necessities. Ask them if Canadians in general shouldn't know this. Remind them that we compare ourselves to other nations, including poorer nations, all the time in terms of things like GDP per capita, health outcomes, environmental quality, and so on. Why not comparisons of absolute poverty? It's likely that we have much less deprivation than a lot of other countries, but we'll never know until we measure it.

Finally, ask objectors to reread Ed Broadbent's words, as he characterized child poverty in Canada. He didn't say that one-quarter of our children were unequal, or that they were excluded from the mainstream; he said that they went to bed hungry and that they were wasting away. The only way to determine this kind of poverty—the kind that Ed Broadbent was speaking of—would be to use an absolute measure.

I believe that most of us have an absolute conception of poverty when we hear the term or when we personally visualize the problem. I believe that we need to know the extent of this kind of poverty if we're going to have an intelligent policy debate about solving the problem. The folks in Copenhagen who drafted the declaration—most of them, I should say, squarely in the social welfare community—clearly thought that absolute poverty was important enough to measure and eradicate.

Next, we need to have an intelligent discussion in Canada about what our goals should be relating to each type of poverty. I happen to be much more concerned about absolute poverty than I am about relative poverty. I don't know how concerned I am about inequality of income and wealth, unless those outcomes have been the result of force or fraud. However, you'll get lots of different perspectives, lots of different viewpoints on this, and at some point the discussion has to end and the government has to decide what to do. It would be desirable if both levels of government—both federal and provincial—could agree on what they should be doing.

● (0955)

My recommendation on this would be to aggressively go after absolute poverty. Set a goal to cut it in half in 10 years, define it, measure it, get expert opinions about why it's happening, and find the best policies to bring it down to the target level. Make that commitment and keep it.

Obviously, don't stop there. We'd like to see the complete elimination of absolute poverty in Canada within 20 years. What an achievement that would be, and what a model Canada would be for other nations around the world. However, on the way to achieving these goals, there will be a number of real challenges, both technical and political. On the technical side, we really need to take a hard look at the data, particularly the income data, and what it is telling us.

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yves Lessard): Mr. Sarlo, you've exceeded the time allotted to you. Thank you. You'll probably have the opportunity to complete your remarks during the questions.

We'll now move on to the question period. Each parliamentarian will have the opportunity to ask you questions in two or three different rounds, depending on the time we have.

The first round of questions will be a round of seven minutes. We'll start with Mr. Cuzner.

[*English*]

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

To all our witnesses today, certainly know that you hold the respect of the entire committee for your commitment to the issue of poverty and for taking the time to come and share with us your experience and insight into this very important issue.

Perhaps I might start first with the food bank and some of the household characteristics that you track now. Mr. Hellquist, you indicated that specifically food banks in Regina, but I would think others as well, are looking at taking a more engaging role regarding counselling and referring and what have you. When we talk about tracking some of the clients you currently respond to, do you see an opportunity to glean additional information from this? Are we able to measure other indicators that might be of benefit to us? Our initial discussions here are about trying to get the pertinent indicators, things like those who come to the food banks who have health challenges, mental health challenges, maybe disabilities. Do you see that this might be an opportunity to further garner other information?

Mr. Wayne Hellquist: Yes, most definitely, I think it's an opportunity. As I indicated earlier, these are the types of things I think food banks are starting to investigate in a great deal more depth. Certainly we've just completed two research studies of our clientele, one of which was designed to determine exactly who they are and what issues they're dealing with, their housing situations, their health care situations, their employment situations, where their income is coming from, so we can gain a better understanding of the clientele—

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Was it specifically Regina that did this?

Mr. Wayne Hellquist: That's correct. But it's also happening in other food banks. Food banks have been around for about 25 years. We have a very good relationship with the people who use the food banks, and an opportunity, I think, to use food banks to be that portal into other services, and certainly for the collection of very relevant, on-the-ground data of people in our communities who are hungry and who live in poverty.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: You find that's a trend you're able to gain...?

Mr. Shawn Pegg: Certainly there is a network of large, well-developed food banks that are able to collect that information, because they can put the manpower into it. The trick would be getting similar information in rural areas, small towns, where food banks don't have the same kind of manpower. It's definitely something we are developing.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: And expertise, I would think, too.

For the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, with your quality of life measurement, are you specifically able...? What's been noted by the committee so far is that poverty in urban areas is different from the poverty suffered in rural areas, and certainly with where we've gone with the price per barrel now, people will be transportation poor in coming weeks and months, where driving to a minimum wage job just doesn't make a whole lot of sense. There are those disincentives.

Are you confident in your ability to measure rural poverty? Are there specific measurements for rural poverty?

● (1000)

Mr. Michel Frojmovic: Right now there aren't. The only exception is in some larger municipalities, in terms of their geography, that include rural areas. The one we're in right now is an example of that.

In principle, the framework we have would be applicable to rural communities, but there are always issues. The way Statistics Canada collects data would be slightly different. I guess it's more a question of resources. These 22 communities account for 50% of the population. FCM has a membership of over 1,700. So it would just be working with a much larger number of communities.

The answer is that it's certainly possible, but it would involve a different set of measures. Because the project is membership-driven, what we define is partly driven by what these members want to see measured. So the issue is the example you just gave. It doesn't make sense anymore to drive 30 kilometres to a job and use a tank of gas—or it won't be. That's where a variable could come up, and it's inherently measurable.

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yves Lessard): Ms. Sgro, I believe you want to speak.

[*English*]

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Ms. Townson, I'm very happy to see you here. I congratulate you for the work you do on behalf of all Canadians.

I want to specifically talk about the issue of women. One of our previous presenters, Statistics Canada, clearly outlined that women who are having children are at economic risk. Until the world changes—and hopefully it doesn't—women are the producers of the children of the future and they're naturally going to have far less time to spend in the workforce, so their pensions and their levels of education will be very much affected.

You've looked at Sweden and Ireland. How do they compensate for the fact that women are the caregivers of the children of the family or the elderly parents? From any of the work you've done, has any country recognized the difference that will always be there and come up with any innovative ideas on how to compensate for that difference from a monetary perspective—other than by giving counselling and that kind of thing?

You can call it a gender difference or whatever you like, but there's always going to be a specific difference between the amount of money a woman earns and what a man earns.

Ms. Monica Townson: Yes, the Nordic countries do that best. You won't be surprised to hear that. They have very good social support systems and they assume—as I think we should too—that women who have children are doing it on behalf of all of us. We wouldn't want them to stop doing that, so we shouldn't be penalizing them for doing something that is a contribution to the whole of society.

In Sweden, Denmark, and the Netherlands, for example, they have very extensive support systems: child care, parental leave, and all kinds of stuff like that. Many countries have laws that provide equal pay for people who are doing part-time work compared to people who are working full-time. The important point to make there is that the hourly wage for part-time workers is often much lower than it is for full-time workers who are doing similar kinds of jobs. So that's one area: countries that have succeeded in addressing the hourly wage.

As I mentioned in my presentation, the review of the Canada Labour Code that was done by Harry Arthurs makes some specific recommendations on that. Changes to the Labour Code could provide for temporary part-time and other types of non-standard workers to be paid the same hourly wages as full-time workers in permanent jobs doing the same sort of work. I think that's the important point to make there.

The child care supports and other kinds of things they do are really crucial in those countries.

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yves Lessard): Thank you, Ms. Townson.

Mr. Ménard.

Mr. Réal Ménard: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I'm going to start speaking with the representatives of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, the quality of whose contributions to our debates we are familiar with. Moreover, the City of Montreal, where I am a member, is a member of that organization. However, I'm not convinced you clearly explained the indicators to the members of this committee.

How do you evaluate the municipality's situation? I understand that the brief you tabled provides a list of the some 80 indicators. I won't ask you to explain them to us in detail as a result of the time allotted to us, but I would like to understand how they differ from the consumer basket or low-income cut-offs.

What are we to understand about the 22 municipalities, including Calgary and Edmonton, that we find in your brief and that took part in it? Provide us with a summary. How was your measure different and what are we to understand from these conclusions?

Then I'll ask Mr. Sarlo two other questions.

● (1005)

[*English*]

Mr. Michel Frojmovic: I'm glad you asked that we don't go into full detail on all the indicators.

Again, this is not an attempt specifically to measure poverty. It's not an alternative to the LICO or an alternative to the market basket measure—although I'd like to return to the market basket measure, MBM, in a second.

We are working with staff from a group of municipalities, and with their input, with their advice, their understanding of the dynamics and the issues in their respective municipalities, we are asking what would be a range of issues relevant both to them and to the Federation of Canadian Municipalities because they're of national importance. What are those issues that best capture what we're calling quality of life?

There is quite a diversity of indicators in there. We look at commuting patterns, for example. There is a whole range of health indicators; there are environmental ones, and just basic demographic ones. With some of those, you can see a direct connection to poverty. With others the connection is less clear.

We are not trying to simply and exclusively measure poverty. It's not an alternative at all; it's a menu of indicators open to a range of issues. If poverty is the issue of importance, well, then we can certainly draw on that quality of life reporting system. We forwarded a report to you that we called "Theme Report #1". The reason we have thematic reports is that we are able to pick up on different themes. There have been three since the first one. We're working on the fifth, which will deal with immigration.

So to answer your question, we can draw on poverty, but it's not designed exclusively for that.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Réal Ménard: All right.

Am I mistaken in thinking that the Federation of Canadian Municipalities adopted a resolution that went around various city councils, including that of the City of Montreal, urging the federal government to restore funding for affordable housing?

To your knowledge, how many member municipalities of your federation are dealing with affordable housing problems? We know that the federal government withdrew from affordable housing in the early 1990s and that the most recent governments have made very small contributions in that area. Are you telling us about the link between affordable housing and your federation's expectations? Be brief because I also want to ask Mr. Sarlo a question.

[*English*]

Mr. Michel Frojmovic: Just to give a thumbnail sketch on these trends, one of the points I mentioned earlier was that these issues, these trends, do vary across the country when we're looking at municipalities. We looked at—I don't know how many—maybe a dozen of those 75 to 80 indicators that dealt specifically with housing trends. One interesting example was the vacancy rates, the availability of rental units. Those vacancy rates—

[*Translation*]

Mr. Réal Ménard: That wasn't the meaning of my question.

Would you like the federal government to reinvest in affordable housing? In your fight against poverty, are you asking the major cities to circulate a resolution among their municipal councils? As a result of the federal government's irresponsibility on housing, you passed a resolution that you are circulating to your city councils. Am I mistaken in saying that?

[*English*]

Mr. Michael Buda: Well, certainly in January we released our *National Action Plan on Housing and Homelessness*, which laid out a fairly comprehensive plan on how all three orders of government could work together to reduce homelessness, to actually eliminate chronic homelessness and improve housing affordability. We released that plan in January, and many municipalities across the country have, on their own initiative, taken motions in council to support that housing plan.

One of the objectives of the action plan that we've developed is to provide a framework that can provide supportive policies and programs that individual communities are going to be able to adapt to their own realities, which Michel was just talking about. Housing and homelessness issues look very different in different communities. Our goal is to develop federal, provincial, and municipal programs that can be focused and targeted on the problems that appear in each community.

One of the key elements of that housing plan is a long-term commitment by all three orders of government to these problems. Extensive planning is required to deal with some of these. I know Mr. Sarlo spoke about that, about the need for targets. The national action plan contains very clear targets on various elements of housing and homelessness.

● (1010)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Réal Ménard: Thank you.

I'll come back in the second round.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yves Lessard): You have 50 seconds left.

Mr. Réal Ménard: You'll give me five minutes and 50 seconds on the second round. That's like equalization; you're not forced to cash it in right away.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yves Lessard): In the second meeting.

Mr. Réal Ménard: In the second round.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yves Lessard): Mr. Martin.

[*English*]

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP): Thank you very much.

I think we are certainly back on track this morning. I appreciate that. I think Ms. Yelich would agree. We've had a fairly good overview of what poverty looks like and some of the measurements that are there if we want to access them.

I really appreciated the reference to the Broadbent resolution and the UN resolution at Copenhagen on absolute and relative poverty. There's a new phenomenon—or at least words—starting to evolve, particularly in the European Union and other places, about this notion of social exclusion or inclusion.

I want to share what Richard Shillington dropped on our desk on Tuesday, which speaks to that for me, and then I want to ask you what you think:

> Poverty is...
> wishing you could go to McDonald's
> getting a basket from the Santa Fund
> feeling ashamed when my dad can't get a job
> not buying books at the book fair
> not getting to go to birthday parties
> hearing my mom and dad fight over money
> not ever getting a pet because it costs too much
> wishing you had a nice house
> not being able to go camping
> not getting a hot dog on hot dog day
> not getting pizza on pizza day
> not going to Canada's Wonderland
> not being able to have your friends sleep over
> pretending that you forgot your lunch
> being afraid to tell your mom that you need gym shoes
> not having any breakfast sometimes
> not being able to play hockey
> sometimes really hard because my mom gets scared and she cries
> hiding your feet so the teacher won't get cross when you don't have boots
> not being able to go to Cubs or play soccer
> not being able to take swimming lessons
> not being able to take the electives at school (downhill skiing)
> not being able to afford a holiday
> not having pretty barrettes for your hair
> not having your own private backyard
> being teased for the way you are dressed
> not getting to go on school trips

This is how kids themselves, grade 4 and grade 5 from North Bay, define poverty. For me it's an obvious example of this notion of social inclusion. Should that be included in this measure that we are trying to come to terms with in defining poverty?

Mr. Shawn Pegg: Social exclusion is obviously difficult to measure, but as an overriding framework, I think it's incredibly valuable. I think working towards social inclusion, however that gets defined, is a good way to go; it's a dignified way to go.

I would agree that we do need to set specific targets. There are ways you can do that when you're looking at social inclusion. You can look at things like a deprivation index, which combines measures of income poverty with lack of certain goods you would expect an average person to have in society.

I'm very much behind moving towards a model that has a lot of history in the European Union, and that is social inclusion.

Mr. Michel Frojmovic: The social—

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yves Lessard): First I'm going to allow Mr. Sarlo to speak since he also wants to answer that question, then I'll come back to you, Mr. Frojmovic.

Go ahead, Mr. Sarlo.

[*English*]

Prof. Chris Sarlo: Thank you.

The sentiments that Mr. Martin read out are familiar to all of us who work in poverty. Those sentiments are a characterization of absolute poverty as well as relative poverty. I've said that we ought to make that distinction; we ought to measure both types. There is great value in measuring both types.

I think we have to be careful. A poverty line is not a show of our compassion; it is simply a useful way to distinguish those people who are poor from those who are not. If we get that tangled up with emotion and passion, I think we're not going to serve public policy very well.

Those are fine expressions of what it means to be poor. I think we simply have to decompose those two types of measure and measure both absolute and relative. I think it would be a mistake to bulk up an absolute measure by putting in a lot of things that were mentioned, because you are not going to find out how many people are not even covering the basic needs. I think we need to know that, as students of poverty and as policy-makers, and we also need to know how many people are excluded or unequal.

That would be my answer.

● (1015)

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yves Lessard): Mr. Frojmovic.

[*English*]

Mr. Michel Frojmovic: I'll start with two short cautionary notes on the whole business of measurement.

One is that probably the most cost-effective way of dramatically reducing absolute poverty in Canada is to just move your poverty line down. That would change things dramatically, and of course there are a lot of politics around that. You can also spend an inordinate amount of time debating which measure is appropriate. If you put two people in a room together and tell them to come up with a hundred different indicators, they'll do it gladly. It's always very easy to come up with a hundred new ways of measuring things, and there are also intense politics around where you put that famous line.

Having said that, I find one of the appealing things about working with the Federation of Canadian Municipalities is that you don't need to come up with a single measure. Each of these municipalities, at some level, is grappling with its own reality. Social exclusion has been part of municipal mandates for some time, certainly for as long as I've been working with this project, so when you look at this list of indicators, civic engagement—that is, how much people are involved in their community—is one of the indicators we're looking at. It can even be voting patterns.

I mentioned we are going to be putting together a report on immigration. There's a lot of social inclusion and exclusion in Canada around the theme of immigration, particularly in Canadian cities. What you don't see in this version, because it's 2004, is a set of indicators around recreation.

That list was put together by a group of kids; I was doing my municipal checklist as you were talking, and it's getting involved in swimming programs and getting involved in a whole range of recreation programs. The capacity for municipalities to keep those programs affordable is a very important part of social exclusion and inclusion, and that language is used; if you go to some municipal websites, they use “social inclusion” and “social exclusion”.

Now that I've given my cautionary notes about measurements, I'll say it is important not to talk only in terms of income. There is much more than simple income poverty going on when you're talking about poverty, and it is happening; that measurement is taking place in Canada.

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yves Lessard): Thank you.

That's all, Mr. Martin, your time is already up.

Now I'll invite Mr. Lake to ask his questions.

[*English*]

Mr. Mike Lake (Edmonton—Mill Woods—Beaumont, CPC): What I'd like to go is give Mr. Sarlo a chance to finish his comments from his opening statement. I think you were about to speak to some of the challenges and ran out of time.

Prof. Chris Sarlo: Thank you very much. It's just about a minute.

I mentioned the technical challenges. Many of them have to do with issues surrounding unreported income; additional issues relate to data and Statistics Canada. I'll simply refer you to my latest paper, which is due to be published next month.

On the political side, I really don't have to tell you folks the kind of opposition you're going to get if you embark on a serious attempt to measure the number of people who just cannot afford basic needs. For whatever reason, some folks just don't want that to happen, and I just hope that parliamentarians have the courage and the rational arguments to resist that.

The basic needs measure that I've developed should be helpful if you decide to measure the extent of real deprivation in Canada. This measure essentially takes the cost of a basket of basic needs in different parts of Canada for families of different sizes and sets up those costs as poverty lines.

As I mentioned just a moment ago, I really would urge you to resist the temptation to bulk up the poverty line by adding things like recreation items and vacations and so on. The critical issue here is not that the poor shouldn't have these things—of course they should—the question is whether people are impoverished for lack of them. I think there's great value in determining how many people just can't afford even the basic needs; to add more onto the poverty line would simply muddy the waters. I would urge you to choose a credible poverty measure and stick to it.

Those are my comments.

● (1020)

Mr. Mike Lake: Thank you.

It was interesting to listen to Mr. Martin reading the poem. I think back to my own childhood; when I was growing up, it's safe to say that at least half the time, or maybe even more than half the time, we were what would be considered below the LICO. I was able to play hockey because my parents made a decision to drive $800 vehicles. We didn't eat out a whole lot when I was growing up. My parents had to make choices for us. I think it is important that we.... Growing up, I never actually thought of myself as poor. I was able to enjoy a good time with my family and things like that, but there were some challenges.

I want to have the folks from the food banks talk a little bit. We talked about the numbers of people who use the food banks; what I'm curious about is the percentage who would be repeat customers and how often those people would use a food bank.

Mr. Wayne Hellquist: Certainly there is a high percentage of people who rely on food banks, who are regular clients or regular customers. There is no question. However, increasingly we are seeing people who are using the food bank only periodically. And in many cases these are seniors. They're working poor, people who hold down a job or may hold down two jobs, but at minimum wage. You do the math, and you know you simply can't support your family and household on that income on an ongoing basis. So periodically they come to the food bank when they are unable to provide for their families, maybe due to an emergency that has come up, or it may be that the car has broken down, or there may be some other thing that impedes their ability to purchase food.

Certainly there is a high percentage of people who have become somewhat dependent on food banks for a portion of their food supply. Recognizing, of course, that no food bank anywhere in the country is able to supply 100% of anybody's food needs, we are only an emergency food supply.

Mr. Mike Lake: I know, coming from Edmonton, that we have a tremendous food bank there. Marjorie Bencz has done terrific work in Edmonton, and it is a very, very well-regarded organization. I commend you guys for the work you do.

Mr. Sarlo, it's interesting to hear about the Nordic countries. In a previous meeting we had Statistics Canada in, and one of the things they pointed out is that in these Nordic countries, if you measure at the tenth percentile, where 10% of the population is poorer and 90% are better off, Canada actually measures up pretty well and the Americans actually measure up pretty well at that percentile in terms of purchasing power.

Do you have any research on that, or have you done any research on that in terms of some of those measurements?

Prof. Chris Sarlo: I haven't. Any use of a particular portion of the distribution of income would be a relative measure, regardless of where it's set. There is a variety of them out there. Typically they would be a percentage of median income—that's what's used in Europe—typically 60% of median after-tax income.

The research I've done is typically on market basket types of measures, looking at the measurement of basic needs and the number of people who are unable to afford that, and trying to use comparisons with other nations.

Mr. Mike Lake: And with the one and a half minutes I have left, I'd actually like to get a comment, if I could.

I don't know if you've had the chance to read John Richards' report on poverty that came out at the end of 2007. But one of the connections he makes is to cuts that were made at the provincial level in B.C., Alberta, and Ontario to social assistance rates, cuts that the federal Liberal government made in the mid-nineties to EI. He actually says that the result of those cuts is that employment has increased and poverty has actually decreased because of some of those measures that were taken.

Have you had a chance to read the report, and if not, what are your thoughts in terms of that?

● (1025)

Prof. Chris Sarlo: Who was that addressed to?

Mr. Mike Lake: That was addressed to you. I'm sorry, I was continuing with you.

Prof. Chris Sarlo: I have only taken a brief look at John Richards' report and I did note the conclusion you mention. I don't have a lot of comment on that. Quite frankly, I have not done a lot of work on the policy side, looking at connections between cuts or increases in various government programs and the relationship between those and poverty. I've focused a lot of my attention on measurement issues, definitional issues, and relating that to common understandings of terms, and so on.

I'll leave it at that. I wouldn't have the expertise to be able to comment any more than you have with the report by Richards.

Mr. Mike Lake: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yves Lessard): Thank you.

We'll move on to the second round, a round of five minutes. We'll of course start with the Liberal Party.

Mr. Dryden.

[*English*]

Hon. Ken Dryden (York Centre, Lib.): Thank you.

I'd like to ask each of you this question individually. All of you have had a lot of experience. You've worked in the field for quite some time; you know your own area; you know how your area fits in or doesn't fit in to other areas; you know people who live in low-income circumstances. You also have had experience in dealing with governments and have watched history, have watched things happen over the last number of years.

My question for each of you is, if you assume that the Government of Canada is really serious in significantly reducing poverty in this country, what is the singular message, if you have one single piece, that you would deliver to us as crucial to making a significant difference? Knowing that it's easy to be right and far more difficult to deliver right, what is your singular message?

Mr. Shawn Pegg: I'll start. I'll make a fool of myself, and then you guys can look better.

Looking back, what sticks out for me, as far as the federal government addressing poverty is concerned, is the big things that the federal government has done, such as the Canada Pension Plan, old age security, the guaranteed income supplement, and programs such as the Canada child tax benefit. When I look at this committee, I see that the federal government has the power to do something big.

And there are lots of proposals out there. There are proposals for long-term predictable funding for affordable housing, proposals for a national disability income support program, which would take a huge load off provinces and off municipalities.

Mr. Michael Buda: My comments will be quite general. There are many existing and past very effective federal programs, and there are some good ideas for future ones. The one comment I think I'd leave, and it's similar to what Mr. Sarlo had spoken about, is that we need to get a good handle on the scope of the problem and measure it carefully and then, really importantly, set targets and then make long-term commitments.

Too often, certainly from the municipal perspective, we find excellent federal programs that end after one or two or three years. These problems, especially the problems around poverty, will not be solved in three years. They require a long-term commitment and extensive planning. From the municipal perspective, practitioners simply can't carry that planning out as effectively as they should be able to unless they know that the federal government is there as a partner not just for three years, when maybe the program will be renewed, but for the period of time it will take to address the problem. If that means a 10-year or a 20-year funding program, then we believe that's what should happen, because that's what municipal governments do.

Thank you.

Ms. Monica Townson: I wouldn't suggest any specific program, but I would say that it has to be a national strategy; it has to involve the provinces and the federal government, because so many of the initiatives fall within provincial jurisdiction; it has to be transparent; it has to involve all stakeholders; and it has to set goals and targets and timelines, and those have to be measured; and there has to be accountability for meeting those.

● (1030)

Hon. Ken Dryden: Mr. Sarlo.

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yves Lessard): Mr. Sarlo, do you want to answer the question too?

[*English*]

Prof. Chris Sarlo: Sure. I more or less said it already, but let me just repeat.

The one thing I would urge you to do is to fulfill the promise you made on child poverty, and particularly the promise you made at Copenhagen when you signed that declaration. Do it right, with clear definitions, goals, targets, timelines, metrics, and accountability.

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yves Lessard): You have 30 seconds left. Do you want to use them?

Ms. Dhalla.

[*English*]

Ms. Ruby Dhalla (Brampton—Springdale, Lib.): I'm going to come back on the next round.

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yves Lessard): You will speak in the next round? All right.

Ms. Yelich, from the Conservative Party, for five minutes.

[*English*]

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: Yes, thank you.

As I said in my opening remarks today, we really do want to try to find out what we're really trying to do here, and that is to create a plan so that we can get away from a reputation of not meeting some sort of goal of eradicating poverty and deprivation. So I do think we have to try to find a formula, and that's where some of you have helped today.

To the Canadian Association of Food Banks, specifically, you probably could help us define that somewhat. We need to know the length, the breadth, and the depth of the needs, because you are talking about basic needs. So you could see a measurement basket being a very important component, and probably the most important.

I have to agree with some of the witnesses that we can't necessarily try to measure inequalities; we have to start thinking, first of all, about the deprivation. We know there is a lot out there. That has come to our attention. Some communities are really suffering.

I just want to mention to the association of food banks something that was said by another witness, who talked about seniors and mothers and said that some of the rates at which people are stepping out of poverty have increased significantly because of some of the raises in the guaranteed income supplement—and also for some of the lone mothers, because of the education many of them are now seeking.

But we want to get back to trying to decide the best way of measuring. So would you agree that perhaps it would be a really good start to measure the level of needs of those at food banks, which we could probably measure?

And perhaps the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, and Monica Townson, and Mr. Sarlo as well would like to comment on this. I think we have to start with that. Would you agree?

I'm just thinking of the different things. Even the food banks have gone on from basic needs to training, which I think goes to show that you really are working very hard to help these people. So now we have to identify the people and then find ways to help them go on and have their training needs met. I thought it was very impressive, that this is something where you are already thinking outside the box, that it's not just about trying to keep these people fed at the food bank, but about actually helping them get a quality life.

We do know that mental illness and drugs and different addictions have definitely caused a lot of problems, and that's why the people are there—or some of the reasons why they are there. That's what we're trying to identify. Why are they there, and then how we can get them out? I say this because there are also rich people using those food banks, because they have somehow been forced to leave their homes and their families, and they end up homeless. We want to identify who these people are and how we can find strategies to get them out of poverty.

So I'd like you to please advise us on how best to make up that basket, because I'm beginning to think that “low income” isn't going to work.

Ms. Shawn Pegg: One thing that we haven't talked about today is something called the nutritious food basket. It is, I would think, an absolute measure of poverty in terms of healthy eating. It's not very widespread in Canada. There have been nutritious food baskets created for Toronto, for Edmonton, and possibly for Hamilton, and a few other municipalities across the country.

I don't want to compare it with Mr. Sarlo's way of measuring absolute poverty, but it is certainly something to look at. It's something that we use a lot in looking at the role of nutrition in health, the role of health in relation to poverty, and then we get into the whole conversation about what are the social determinants of health. That's another thing we haven't talked about today—

● (1035)

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: We'll start with deprivation. We will agree on that.

Ms. Shawn Pegg: You definitely have to look at it, yes.

Mr. Michel Frojmovic: I mentioned earlier on that I'd like to come back to the question of the market basket measure. The FCM, early on, had developed something called a community affordability measure, which at some point actually had members of this technical team in different Canadian cities going out to grocery stores and physically coming up with a basket of goods. It was trying to get at, essentially, a deprivation index.

We used that measure early on, but it proved unsustainable for these individuals in their municipalities to literally go out and come up with estimates of housing costs and food costs and a range of costs on their free time. The methodology seemed good and useful but, in terms of delivering on it, was difficult to sustain. So in that sense, absolutely a starting point is in terms of what are your basic needs, and in the case of FCM, it would be basic needs varying quite a bit across cities, which is true for you as well.

Your predecessor, Human Resources Development Canada, had developed the market basket measure and published that in 2002. We used that MBM in our previous quality of life report, in fact, in the 2004 one. That was looking at a market basket for the year 2000. We found it quite compelling, but since then we have not heard of the follow-up, and there's the sustainability of being able to measure these things.

So on the one hand, absolutely coming up with a way of measuring a basket of goods—a mix of grocery items and other basic needs, shelter, clothing, and transportation being among them—would be really helpful, but clearly there is a sustainability issue of how long you can keep measuring that in different cities. If you can get it right...and certainly at FCM, we just had a technical team meeting last week where we talked about whether we want to try to do this again, whether we want to send staff out into the grocery stores again this year.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: You're asking for a strategy. We need something we can work with. We have such a huge country. For smaller countries or for your cities it's easy, but we have very big.....

However, I think we have two others who still wanted to ask questions.

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yves Lessard): Thank you, Ms. Yelich.

Now we'll move on to Mr. Ménard, from the Bloc Québécois.

Mr. Réal Ménard: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I'm going to ask a general question, and I'll be very pleased to hear the opinion of the federation, Mr. Sarlo and other witnesses who wish to speak on the subject.

The federal government is currently intervening in a number of ways in the fight against poverty. With regard to Aboriginal people, it has a fiduciary responsibility, a department and significant budgets. The various governments have withdrawn from social housing. There are mainly revenue transfers to individuals, through the tax benefit, the old age pension and the Guaranteed Income Supplement. There are also transfers to the provinces.

Having regard to the fact that the highly determinant factors for poverty are very much related to health, education, welfare and to methods of entering the labour force, is it realistic to think that the impulse to combat poverty can come from the federal government? Is it realistic to request a national strategy? Shouldn't we now argue in favour of increasing transfers to the provinces so that, with their own expertise, they can win this battle?

Incidentally, one measure could be taken immediately. The governments have delayed in doing it. That is to state in the Canadian Human Rights Act that social condition is a prohibited ground of discrimination. That provision would have made it possible to invalidate certain acts passed by the Liberals and Conservatives.

Don't you think the best way to win the fight against poverty is to increase the transfers borne by the provinces to implement the programs?

First I'd like to hear from the federation, with your permission, then Mr. Sarlo and the other witnesses who wish to speak.

Mr. Chairman, that's a non-partisan question, like we like them.

[*English*]

Mr. Michael Buda: FCM believes that municipalities are an order of government, but they are clearly within provincial jurisdiction. However, having said that, we believe that the problem of poverty and eradicating poverty is so large, and it has such a significant impact on national prosperity, that it is going to require the participation of all three orders of government. Having said that, we are always very careful and always very clear in saying that federal support for, in this case, poverty reduction in cities and communities must always respect provincial jurisdiction over cities and communities.

In terms of how that's done, whether it's federal–provincial programs or federal transfers to provinces so they can run their own programs, we don't get involved in that because federal–provincial relations are outside of the scope of our organization. So I wouldn't want to comment specifically on that. The message I would leave is that we do believe these kinds of problems are large enough, and the impacts are national in scope, that each order of government has a very important part to play.

How those parts are played out—transfers versus federal–provincial programs—we'll leave that up to federal and provincial governments.

● (1040)

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yves Lessard): Mr. Sarlo.

[*English*]

Prof. Chris Sarlo: I would agree with the previous speaker. I think a national approach is preferable.

This is a problem because of the difficulties we've had in the past keeping our commitments. Canadians are watching, and I think other people in the world are watching. We need to take this to the national level, ideally with the cooperation of the provinces. And I would urge you not to forget another group—it's not a single group—which is the private sector and helping organizations. There are a variety of groups and an increasing number of people who could be instrumental in this process.

The other thing I picked up on from one of the speakers is the importance of one-on-one. I've urged that for a long time. The character of poverty has changed over the years, and I think part of any plan should include that kind of personal attention to individuals.

Those are my comments.

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yves Lessard): Ms. Townson.

[*English*]

Ms. Monica Townson: I think a national strategy is preferable because it focuses the energy.

Quebec is a unique case in that it was the first jurisdiction to implement a comprehensive anti-poverty strategy, and it's been going for several years now. It produces an annual report. It's doing very well. Unfortunately, there's only one other province doing the same kind of thing, and that's Newfoundland and Labrador. So the fact that Quebec is doing so well doesn't mean that everybody else would too.

Plus, there are programs within federal jurisdiction, such as the ones I mentioned—the pension system and the EI system—although Quebec is the exception there, too, in that it has its own maternity benefits program through EI.

Altogether, there are things the federal government could do, but it needs to be comprehensive and done in conjunction with the provinces and probably also with the municipalities.

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yves Lessard): I now invite Ms. Dhalla to ask her questions.

[*English*]

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: Thank you very much, all of you, for your insightful comments.

I think all of us around this table would agree that poverty is a complex issue that has multi-dimensional facets and hence requires very comprehensive and detailed solutions. I think all of us, with our desire to study the issue, really want to ensure that there are solutions and that the report is actually going to be tangible and will be used by the federal government to come up with a national strategy. I know that all of you have done extensive work in that regard.

My first question is for Shawn, whom I had the pleasure of meeting in my office last month. We had the opportunity to discuss some of the work the food banks are doing across the country to deal with the issue.

Perhaps, for the rest of the committee members, you could identify for us.... We've seen that some demographics within the country are more impacted by poverty than others—recent immigrants, the aboriginal population, single mothers, and women. Do you think that within the immigrant communities, for those who are living in poverty, there is a stigma attached to accessing food banks?

Mr. Shawn Pegg: That's a difficult question to answer.

We did discuss this. We did discuss the fact that.... There aren't really South Asian food banks, and there aren't really Chinese food banks directed at particular ethnic groups. You see the same sorts of things with other social services. Certain groups—they might not be the ones you would expect, or they might be the ones you would expect—are not going to look within their own communities for help because of the stigma that's attached.

So yes, that is definitely an issue. I don't know if that answers your question.

● (1045)

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: In developing a national anti-poverty strategy—and it's the reason I ask the question—do you think we need to take into account the stigma and perhaps the stereotypes attached to these cultural communities in terms of accessing resources?

Ms. Shawn Pegg: Absolutely. I'll give you an example of how we deal with this day to day. We get very strong feedback from our members that they don't want to ask people what ethnic group they're from or what language they speak. They don't want to stigmatize certain people. They don't want to pinpoint certain people as being more likely to be living in poverty. And I think we need to address that.

There are reasons people are poor. We need to address the fact that there are larger conditions that lead to certain avenues of stratification. We need to take the focus away from the idea that it's their own fault when people are poor.

Mr. Wayne Hellquist: I will add to that. I don't think that any particular individual, family, or group makes a decision to be poor. It's based on a set of circumstances, for the most part, that they have little or no control over. Whatever we come up with as a national strategy has to be culturally sensitive. We need to take into consideration the fact that there are cultural reasons that groups will or will not access certain services. Whatever we do in terms of a national strategy has to be comprehensive enough that it takes into consideration those issues as well. They are very important to the people who come to the food banks. They want to be served in a culturally sensitive manner, and it's a challenge to be able to do that.

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: Thank you.

My next question is for Michael from the FCM.

You've done extensive work in regards to advocating for the issue of affordable housing and homelessness. I know you came out with a report a few months ago on a national strategy and an action plan. Many of you have discussed the importance of having good social programs that are going to deal with the issue of addressing poverty. You know as well that the three major programs that are providing funding for affordable housing and homelessness are due for expiry at the end of this year: the affordable housing program, the homelessness partnership initiative, and the residential rehabilitation program, which in particular deals with providing the lower socio-economic demographic with assistance.

What would be the impact on the people who are living in conditions of poverty or who are poor, if these programs were to be cancelled?

Mr. Michael Buda: Michel could likely provide some background on some of the trends we've seen in housing and homelessness that we reported on in January, actually just prior to the release of our national action plan through the quality of life reporting system.

Broadly speaking, some positive momentum has been built. That momentum will come to a crashing halt if these programs are not renewed. It's not to say that these programs don't need to be reviewed carefully and perhaps redesigned. Surely one of the things we're very clearly calling for is a long-term extension, as spoken about before, about the need for certainty in order to allow for planning. Yes, indeed, there is a risk that some of the positive momentum that we've built over the last few years will come to a halt. What we really need to do, though, is look at how to solve some of these problems permanently rather than just having a mandate.

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yves Lessard): That's complete? Then we'll now hear from Mr. Gourde.

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

I would like to thank the witnesses who are here today. This is very interesting.

I would also like to congratulate the Canadian Association of Food Banks. It consists of individuals who are often on the front line helping people in need, who no doubt are hungry. You must often work with the municipalities and community groups that can provide you with premises, which helps you.

It can also be said that many private businesses, and even the Canadian public, are relatively generous in giving money to your groups for food banks. It is also true that the municipalities undoubtedly have to work with the provincial government and with the federal government.

In your view, to find a way to determine the poverty line, to help guide us, do you think the market basket might be a fair measure or would it be more the low-income cut-off? The fact that the situation is not the same in urban areas must also be taken into account. The cost of housing there is undoubtedly higher than in rural areas. On the other hand, travelling expenses are higher in rural areas.

Could the market basket be a fairer measure of poverty?

If you have any other advice to give us, I'd like to hear all the witnesses on that subject.

● (1050)

[*English*]

Ms. Shawn Pegg: I don't think you need to choose one. I think the market basket measure measures one thing and the low-income cut-off measures another. It is important to measure income inequality. I think it is important because income inequality is an indicator of social exclusion. My answer is, don't pick one.

Mr. Michel Frojmovic: I'd like to respond to that.

Certainly you don't have to pick one. The issue, though, is that we don't have the choice right now. We don't have the functional market basket measure to draw from, and that would be quite helpful. The LICO does that a little bit in that it allows you to distinguish between large cities versus smaller communities, but it's still not fine enough an analysis. If there was a nationally recognized, locally relevant measure of a basket of goods—it won't be easy, none of this will be easy, it will be debated no matter what you do—that at least captured the dynamics among large cities, small cities, and rural communities, that would be helpful. LICO will always be helpful. It's a great analytical tool, it's very accessible, but it's not enough. So it would be nice to have the choice.

Ms. Monica Townson: I think it's too simplistic to think it's a choice between the market basket measure and the LICO. There are all kinds of different gradations of this. For example, international comparisons are based on income less than 60% of the median, so they don't use the LICO, and they don't use the MBM to make an international comparison.

I think it's too complex to just zero in on one and say this is the one we're going to focus on. You probably need a combination of different aspects, depending on what you want to look at in terms of what poverty issues you're trying to address.

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yves Lessard): Mr. Sarlo, would you like to answer that question as well?

[*English*]

Prof. Chris Sarlo: Thank you.

First of all, I'm on record as having real difficulties with the LICO measure. I don't regard that as a very useful technical tool for measurement. I think that if we're interested in a genuinely relative measure, we ought to use something like 50% or 60% of median after-tax income or some of the social exclusion measures that have been used in Great Britain. I think those are much preferable to LICO. My understanding is that one reason the market basket measure was developed was in response to provincial dissatisfaction with the LICO.

I'm also on record, for at least 10 years, as advocating that we do use two measures, a relative and an absolute. I happen to feel that absolute captures what most people understand in terms of poverty. If we listen again to Ed Broadbent's comments when he spoke passionately in Parliament about child poverty, he wasn't talking about social exclusion. He wasn't talking about inequality. He was talking about hunger and ill-housed and ill-clothed and so on—terms that you can get at only if you use an absolute measure.

So I think that's widespread. I think people understand an absolute conception of poverty when they think of that term, so I would prefer to use that in linking poverty to the national issue that we're talking about, but continue to measure both absolute and relative, so that we have the information before us.

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yves Lessard): We'll complete our round with Mr. Martin, from the NDP.

● (1055)

[*English*]

Mr. Tony Martin: Thank you very much.

I wanted to, first of all, say to Mr. Lake that I understand some of what he's been putting on the table here the last couple of days. I don't think anybody out there who is living in poverty often sees himself as being poor, but as Mr. Cuzner said on Tuesday, we do know somebody down the road who's dirt poor. So it's fairly relative.

I know that in my own case, growing up in a working-class family with seven kids and no benefit package, I didn't realize I was having any difficulties until into my teen years, when my folks actually did get a benefit package, and I began to be able to get my teeth fixed. The cheapest option for us as a family was to just get them pulled, and after my brother had lost all his, and I was on the same track, I realized that I needed to do something different. As a teenager, there's nothing worse, in terms of social exclusion, than bad teeth.

I just wanted to go back to this idea of what we should include, what we should measure. We've heard this morning, on a number of occasions, about the issue of the basic necessities. The question I have is, what are the basic necessities?

Maybe, Monica, to give you a chance to respond to the previous question, which was the social inclusion question, we'll start with you.

Ms. Monica Townson: Social inclusion or social exclusion definitely should be measured.

You may be familiar with the United Nations definition of poverty, which is based on what they call a human rights definition, and it talks about being poor as being excluded from society, that social inclusion is definitely an issue. So we should be measuring social exclusion and not simply focusing on income or basic necessities.

Most of the jurisdictions in Europe that have developed comprehensive anti-poverty strategies do measure social exclusion. Ireland does, the U.K. does, and other European countries do.

The Irish situation, which you may be familiar with, has a whole list that says these are things people should be entitled to. Talking about basic necessities, we may find some of these interesting. They are a warm home, a warm coat, shoes, a roast once a week—things like that—the ability to invite friends over once a week, be able to go to a movie once a week. We might not consider these basic necessities, but what it says is, I think, if people are lacking more than two of those, then they should be considered to be socially excluded.

In other words, you look at some of the things that are common in your particular culture, and you say people should be able to have what other people have within reason. So social exclusion definitely should be measured, and I think we should take that into account along with income. It shouldn't just be deprivation.

There were years when we would have said having an outside toilet was fine, and then having an inside toilet became a necessity. I read somewhere recently that having a telephone is considered a basic necessity now, whereas it might not have been 50 years ago, and the suggestion was made in this article that eventually having connection to the Internet may be considered a basic necessity.

So this changes over time, depending on the society you live in, but we need to be giving thought to that, as the jurisdictions that are having success in anti-poverty strategies have done. They mostly have a combination of those basic necessities or social exclusion measures along with some kind of income measure too.

Mr. Wayne Hellquist: One of the key things that would be very helpful here is to ask poor people what they think should be included in the list.

I can tell you for sure that social exclusion or inclusion would be high on their list of items that should be measured. That's the real face of hunger. That's where it hits people hardest. That's where it keeps their kids out of activities, that differentiates them from others who don't live in poverty.

So I think if we're serious about measuring it, it isn't just about the metrics, it isn't just about income; it really is about quality of life, and those things become vitally important to individuals and families, where they live and when they live. So by all means, I think we need to be much more broad-based in terms of measures than simply some of those very simple metrics or some of those income levels. Let's look at what the face of poverty is like in our country; let's figure out what that looks like. Let's measure those things to improve the lot of life of people who every day face this issue individually and with their families.

● (1100)

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yves Lessard): I definitely can't allow any further questions.

At the end of this meeting, I want to thank you for so generously agreeing to make your contribution today. We can assure you that it will be an invaluable contribution to our work. Once again, thank you.

I also thank my colleagues who, in the past two meetings, have made my task easier in view of the fact that, as first Vice-Chair, I was replacing the Chairman in his absence.

I therefore thank you for respecting the allotted time. I wish you a good day. The meeting is adjourned.

Published under the authority of the Speaker of the House of Commons

Publié en conformité de l'autorité du Président de la Chambre des communes

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