

L'ÉCONOMIE SOCIALE: QUEBEC'S POLICY ENVIRONMENT

Presentation by

Nancy Neamtan

President of the Chantier de l'économie sociale

Symposium 2004: Changes...challenges..new directions

Canadian Centre for Philanthropy

September 21, 2004

It is a great pleasure to be here today to be able to present to you some of the exciting things that have been going in the community movement in Quebec over the past years. It is always an interesting and rewarding experience to be able to share with others our experiences in community building, partnerships, and socio-economic development in Quebec and to be able to discuss with others the lessons learned and to share the energy and sense of purpose that this work has given to my life and to the lives of thousands of others involved in this movement over the past decade.

But I am also particularly pleased to be able to speak to this distinguished group in the context of this conference and in the specific policy context which has evolved over the past year at the federal level. I hope that my presence here today will help to answer certain unanswered questions about the social economy, to dispel certain misconceptions that may have arisen over the past year, and more importantly to open up the doors for further exchange and collaboration.

For I am fully aware that for most of you here, the reference to the social economy in Paul Martin's Throne Speech last February and the budget announcements in the weeks following, came as a complete surprise. Why was a new Prime Minister, who has made an international reputation on fiscal responsibility, sometimes with unfortunate social impacts, talking about a new social initiative, and on top of that using a vocabulary that meant next to nothing to most Canadians? Was this an unknown disease that had hit Ottawa? Was it another plot from Quebec to destabilise the rest of Canada? Was it some of new vocabulary for further cutbacks? Or some kind of new bureaucratic spin to pretty up and confuse us all while delivering more of the same?

Six months after the initial shock, I think that the fog is beginning to lift and more and more people across Canada, inside and outside of government, are beginning to figure it all out. In that period, I have been in contact with organisations and networks in regions all across Canada - through exchanges, meetings, conferences, speaking engagements, site visits - that have allowed us to get past the initial questioning and to begin to build a common vocabulary and a common vision of what we have been calling the social economy for the past eight years in Quebec. I have witnessed the enthusiastic reactions of like minded folk working in and for communities, sharing common values of solidarity and equity, to the opportunities that this new vocabulary and these new approaches are offering. I have discovered to what

extent similar practices have developed in various regions across Canada, using a different vocabulary but just as innovative in their practices in social and economy development, as we have been in Quebec. I was speaking to a group in Saskatchewan not later than last Friday when someone commented that to a certain extent, in a province that was a birthplace for many cooperative and social initiatives, trying to sell the social economy was a bit like bringing coals to Newcastle. And yet, this person underlined, this discussion brought home how important it was to remind people of their history – and to stretch the analogy, how important it was to remind people that even if coal was no longer a primary source of fuel, there were many other ways to energize social movements today,

So today, in the context of this symposium, I will take the time to talk to you about the Quebec experience, to share with you some of the lessons learned, and most importantly to throw out some ideas on how we can move forward together in order to build more vibrant and healthy communities, a more democratic and inclusive economy and more globally, how the social economy movement in Canada can play a major role in a perspective of social transformation.

I will attempt to do all this in the time allotted to me by beginning with my own experience. This is in part because it is always easy to talk from personal experience, but it also due to the fact that I have had the privilege of being intimately involved in community organizing, community economic development and the social economy over the past twenty years and despite the wear and tear of all these years, I still have the same enthusiasm for this essential work that is being done in communities across Quebec. After describing the evolution of this movement, I will try to draw a few lessons from our experience and put forward some ideas about next steps on this agenda.

My interest in what we now call community economic development and the social economy began over 20 years ago. In 1983 I was a community organiser in one of the poorest urban communities in Canada, working for the YMCA, with a one line job description. “Find solutions to the employment problem in Pointe St Charles” Coming out of one of the deepest recessions Canada had known since the Thirties, this question of the economy and employment was on everyone’s minds. In poor neighbourhoods like ours, however, no one was talking about real economic development. In fact the only thing being offered to people in our community were some new 6 month work for welfare programs aimed specifically at

youth. The reaction in our community was two fold. On the one hand, we denounced the short term and coercive elements of these programs. That was the easy part. But at the same time, it was impossible for us to deny the fact that the people on welfare in our community wanted to work – that was what they were asking us every day. So we began a community economic development process that took as its basic postulate that our local economy was not only NOT creating opportunities for the poor and marginalised but that the very process of economic development was creating more and more marginalisation. Our logic and naiveté led us to believe that our only option was to get involved and try to turn around the very way economic and social development was being done in our community.

This in itself was a major cultural shift. Many community activists condemned the initiative. Economic development was not our business, they claimed. Getting involved would mean dirtying our hands and making too many compromises. The role of social movements was to protest not to become involved in job creation and certainly not to work with other economic actors.

But we were convinced that without this, we were abandoning our population to permanent marginalisation. And so we proceeded, through trial and error, allying at first with local labour unions concerned with saving their jobs, then local business people and local politicians, institutions and finally government. So we began a community economic development process that took as its basic postulate that our local economy was not only NOT creating opportunities for the poor and marginalised but that the very process of economic development was creating more and more marginalisation. Our logic and naiveté led us to believe that our only option was to get involved and try to turn around the very way economic and social development was being done in our community.

How did we get this initiative going? The challenge was immense, Foe in 1983, even moreso than today where it still is true, it was a very uncommon idea for social activists to get involved in economic development. We knew that we were embarking on a huge learning curve, for until then, as community organisers involved in base social service delivery or advocacy, economic development was a type of expertise that was totally foreign to our culture and our understanding. At first we looked for an easy way out – we hired an expert – a young economist, with the ink still fresh on his Masters Degree from Université de Montréal. Our request was very straight-forward, or so we thought – we asked him to analyse

the economic strengths and weaknesses of our community, we said, and then come up with an economic development strategy that would benefit the poor and marginalized in our community.

So, with all his university theories and learning, he pulled together the statistics, consulted his textbooks, reflected, scratched his head and came back with his final conclusions based on what he had learned. His conclusion: It could not be done. The only way to eliminate poverty in our community, was to get rid of the poor.

Well, we could not accept that for an answer. So we fired him and began our community learning process about economic development. A process in which we quickly learned that economics is not a pure and exact science, it is a social science based on values and choices made by human beings. And that as a social science, it was possible to change economic decisions and avoid the fatalism that many had tried to impose on our community. With this vision, we created the first community economic development corporation in an urban setting in Canada, the Pointe St-Charles Economic Program, which became RESO in 1989 to embrace a larger territory, and gave ourselves a mission, a mission of economic and social revitalisation of our community for the benefit and under the greatest control of the local community.

Twenty years later, we are no longer alone in our efforts of to redefine how economic and social development takes place in our neighbourhoods. Our local organisation in the Southwest of Montreal that was begun by community groups involved in health, housing, welfare and other issues, has become a major non-profit whose membership and forms of governance involves unions, the private sector, community groups, cultural actors institutions and local residents. This form of organisation, called a community economic development corporation in our jargon, has been developed in many other communities in urban neighbourhoods across Quebec and receives provincial, federal and municipal funding. The CDEC are involved in economic development, urban planning, training, social integration, support for the social economy and whatever else needs to be done to revitalise the community in an inclusive perspective. Other forms of civil society organisations do similar work in many other communities in Quebec.

These forms of collaborative partnerships at the community level represented a major cultural shift in Quebec over the past twenty years. This same culture is reflected in the field of labour force development policies and practice. Based on the success of our work and the networking of a wide variety of community based organisations, the community sector fought to become a legitimate partner and recognised partner in defining and carrying out labour force and social inclusion strategies. We are therefore full fledged members of what is called the Commission des partenaires du marché de travail, a body created by the Quebec government to oversee labour force development issues. This Commission made up of representatives of the major labour unions, business associations, education institutions and the community sector, works in close collaboration with Emploi-Quebec, the government agency responsible for all workforce development programs and initiatives, be they for the unemployed on UI or welfare or employed workers. The CPMT is unique in Canada in that it recognises the role of social partners in the definition and implementation of labour force development policy and even more unique because it defines those social partners not only as labour and business but also recognises the presence of community representatives whose role is to defend the interests of marginalised populations. I have been a member of that Board since its origins in 1994 and I represent, along with two other colleagues, a structured coalition of networks of community organisations that work in the field of employment services, advocacy, local and community economic development and adult education. This has become an institutionalised setting for cultural shifts in policy, for it is a governance body where a wide spread of stakeholders debate and act on issues such as welfare to work programs, continued education, workplace training, sectoral strategies, strategies for women, the handicapped etc The Commission is the main governance structure but there are also similar structures in each of the 17 regions and 26 sectoral partnership committees.

It was because of my role in this Coalition that I became involved in an event that led to the creation of the Chantier de l'économie sociale in 1996.

In that year, the Quebec government organised a Summit on the Economy and Employment, Participants included civil society representatives: leaders from big business, employers' associations, unions, municipalities, institutional networks, representatives of important social and community movements, churches etc

In its effort to find a way out of a 12% unemployment rate as well as significant difficulties with government finances and debt, the government challenged the private sector and Quebec civil society to come up with strategies that would allow for economic renewal and job creation. To do so, it proposed the creation of a working-group on employment and economic development led by actors from civil society. I was drafted to preside what became the *Chantier de l'économie sociale*. We had six months to fulfil our mandate, which was to prepare a plan of action to propose job creation strategies that would be acceptable to the participants of the summit and not too costly for government.

For many reasons, this proved to be an immense challenge. First and foremost was the fact that nobody was quite sure what we were talking about. For despite its important presence in Quebec, the term “social economy” had never been widely used; thus, it was complicated to identify and recognise. Luckily we quickly discovered that we were all part of what is defined as the social economy. For the social economy consists of an ensemble of activities and organisations, emerging from collective enterprises that pursue common principles and shared structural elements:

- *the objective of the social economy enterprise is to serve its members or the community, instead of simply striving for financial profit;*
- *the social economy enterprise is autonomous of the State;*
- *in its statute and code of conduct, it establishes a democratic decision-making process that implies the necessary participation of users and workers;*
- *it prioritises people and work over capital in the distribution of revenue and surplus;*
- *its activities are based on principles of participation, empowerment, and individual and collective responsibility.*

Based on these principles, we could see that the social economy was not a new concept, neither in Quebec, in Canada, nor in the rest of the world. In fact, the social economy had been a part of the socio-economic landscape in Quebec and Canada for over a hundred years. It is a term that refers to all forms of organisation are enterprise that are not private or public – and that means a lots of organisations some of which, like the credit unions and the agricultural co-operatives, have been around for years.

Large and inclusive, the definition of the social economy which prevails in Quebec today is principally associated with the so-called “new” social economy that emerged approximately thirty years ago, in the fields of community organisations, worker and consumer co-operatives, community economic development, etc. A portrait of the social economy in Quebec reflects its importance in the social and economic development of the province. Even without considering the Desjardins movement, nor the two largest agricultural co-operatives, the social economy accounts for over 10 000 collective enterprises and community organisations, which employ over 100 000 workers. All together the social economy represents over 8% of the GNP of the province.

But to get back to the Summit – getting the definition straight was only the first problem for our working group on the social economy. Defending the idea of democratic economic development in the current ideological context was a second one – people on the left and the right viewed us with suspicion. And the biggest challenge was convincing the diverse networks within the social economy – the network of co-operatives, community groups, local development workers, business associations and sector-based organisations – of the necessity to work together despite so much diversity, with a common goal: to achieve visible gains that corresponded with shared objectives, but particularly to demonstrate the potential of collective enterprise or organisations. This involved establishing a clear definition of the social economy, making its past achievements more visible, and proposing a series of sector-by-sector strategies that would allow for the emergence of new economic activity, able to respond to social, economic, and environmental need. It was also necessary to identify the conditions under which the social economy could emerge and flourish. The conditions established ranged from a formal recognition of the role of the social economy within the socio-economic landscape in Quebec, to the integration of local and regional development policies that would ensure support for collective enterprise, to equal access to the development incentives offered to traditional enterprise, to changes in legislation on co-operatives, which would allow for the creation of solidarity co-operatives, to the establishment of new training and funding tools. etc

This plan of action, submitted during the Summit on the Economy and Employment in October 1996, received enthusiastic support from some and suspicion or scepticism for others. But the fact is that we delivered the goods. During the past eight years, not only have the

majority of the elements discussed in this plan been accomplished, thanks to local actors involved in many sectors of activity, but many new plans, projects and initiatives have also been developed and implemented. A profound cultural change has taken place that has mobilised social actors to work closely together - unions, community groups, women's groups, environmental militants, fair trade activists, international development agencies and even some private sector actors – in a movement for a more democratic, pluralist and inclusive economy. We have not given up fighting what is wrong – only two years ago the anti-poverty movement mobilised thousands and thousands and forced the adoption on a law against poverty – and last year we were tens of thousands in the street to save our social economy daycare network when the new Liberal government tried to hand over the future development to the private sector - but even though protest movements have far from disappeared from the political landscape to criticize when criticism is due, we are working just as hard and even harder on figuring out what is right and trying to do it. And we have made many steps forward, with many more yet to come. But over the past 8 years, non-profit and co-operative enterprises have flourished, responding to a variety of challenges and needs including social inclusion, creation of jobs, creation of new accessible services, answering recycling needs, social tourism, emerging and alternative cultural production, community radio and television, jobs for the handicapped, etc. Tens of thousands of new jobs have been created, responding to a wide variety of needs identified in local communities across the province. At the same time, in Montreal and other cities, major urban projects – from the development of the Lachine Canal in the Southwest of Montréal through community efforts and collaborative partnerships, to the rebirth of the old CP yards through the work of the Angus Development corporation under community control based on the concept of a land trust, to the revitalisation that has begun in St Michel, now the poorest part of Montréal through a major development project based on culture, the environment and the social economy that is being carried out through a partnership between the community and the Cirque du Soleil and other circus organisations. In each of these projects, social economy enterprises are playing an increasingly important role. In rural areas, as communities fight for their survival, collective enterprise has once again become, as it was in the history of rural Quebec, a central tool to create economic activity and to improve the quality of life in these communities.

How has this been able to happen at such a large scale and with so much success? There is no question that the major factor has been the commitment and the innovative capacity of men

and women across the province who have not waited for a saviour, be it government or the private sector, to bring hope to their communities. But they have also been helped by increased access to new tools and new recognition of their potential through a political and policy environment that has been more favourable to these efforts. In order to create that environment, we have had to work very hard and very strategically to the point of creating a new and innovative forms of organisation, which I have the immense pleasure of heading up. For the success of the Chantier de l'économie sociale at the Summit in 1996, the partnerships it had inspired and the shifting political culture, inspired Quebec networks to transform this temporary working group created for the Summit into a permanent structure. has had long term effects. Thus, in April 1999, the *Chantier de l'économie sociale* held its first general assembly, and elected a board of directors. This board consists of 28 people elected by different electoral colleges, in order to represent the diverse realities of the social economy. Today, the membership and Board of Directors of the *Chantier de l'économie sociale* includes representatives of networks of co-operative and non-profit enterprise, of local and community economic development networks and representatives of the large social movements which share the values and vision of the social economy. The social movements involved are the community movement, the women's movement, the social housing movement, the labour movement, the environmental movement, the co-operative movement, the recreational movements in the non-profit sector and a new and growing movement in Quebec and internationally, the movement for cultural democracy.

The *Chantier* has the following mission: to promote the social economy, to support the consolidation, experimentation and elaboration of new projects and fields, to encourage consultation between the diverse participants of the social economy, and to ensure that these actors be represented within the public domain. For the most part, the *Chantier* depends on existing networks and resources – we are fundamentally a network of networks. With limited resources, we work at building stronger networks and partnerships that are based on common ideas and strategies. For example, the *Chantier* was behind the creation of a new financial instrument, called the Réseau d'investissement social du Québec (RISQ). This institution, which has ten million dollars available for investment in social economy initiatives, is the result of contributions from the private sector, including the major banks, Alcan, Jean Coutu, the Cirque du Soleil and well as from the government of Quebec. The RISQ is jointly administered by a Board appointed by the Chantier, and made up of private sector contributors as well as by social economy actors. The *Chantier* also co-directs an inter-

university research partnership, a CURA involving 4 universities and a whole series of social economy networks. As well, the *Chantier* founded the *Comité sectoriel de main-d'oeuvre de l'économie sociale et de l'action communautaire* which, in partnership with public employment institutions and the actors in the social economy, works hard to improve the management skills of workers, managers and volunteer boards in diverse sectors of activity.

Today in Quebec I think that it is fair to say that one of the strongest and most visible progressive movements in Quebec is the social economy movement. It is strong for many reasons of which the primary one is the fabulous work that is being done by what I call with much pride our social entrepreneurs in communities across Quebec. But it is also strong because we have been able to network the networks, to work on what unites us and not what divides us, and most of all to work together to find solutions by trying new ways of doing things. We don't always succeed but we learn from our errors and it has made this whole process an exciting place to be.

Perhaps one of the strongest indications of the force of this movement is the fact that Paul Martin felt that there was sufficient political traction on the social economy to be able to put it front and centre on his social agenda at least in Québec. As an MP from the Southwest, he has been a close witness and even a participant in the revitalisation efforts in the community and has seen the community transformed from the poorest urban area in Canada to a community that is working hard at managing growth. As a Cabinet Minister from Quebec, he was also witness to the rapid development of the social economy and the role public policy has played as a catalyseur. He was therefore determined to open some doors at the federal level, as you may know, made available some dollars in what Lucienne Robillard told 600 people in Trois-Rivieres last May, was a down payment, a first instalment in federal efforts to support the social economy.

But if we want to move forward together on this agenda, if across Canada, as we have seen over the past year, communities are interested and involved and want to seize this opportunity to advance more and more innovative practices, we have a lot of work still to do. That is why I want to take some time to share some of the lessons learned from the Quebec experience and see how some of it may apply to a pan-Canadian agenda for social progress.

The most important lesson we have learned over the past period is the fact that we will have trouble advancing in the 21st century if we do not break out of the box that has defined social policy and economic policy for the past forty years. For there has been a fundamental paradigm shift in the world that we are all fully aware of. Unfortunately too many of us, and particularly our policy makers have not adapted our analysis or our action in function of this fundamental shift. There is still a strong tendency to understand the world or at least Canada in a very binary and simplistic way - as a place where there are two major players – the private sector that works in the market place, creates wealth, makes our economy run and furnishes taxes to government, and the State that has the role of redistributing the wealth created and offering uniform, one size fits all, public services and programs for the common good. All the rest, the work being done by community organisations, the products and services being produced by the non-profit or cooperative sector – all this is seen as basically charitable, philanthropic and marginal. In this context, structures of governance are based on a top-down process. When there is a need to negotiate or arbitrate between partners, the discussion takes place behind closed doors, between the major players - the private sector and the labour movement. Social movements are expected to be there most of the time – but outside in the street - recognised in their role as protestors or as do gooders or as Canada's social conscience but not as full partners in social and economic debate and development.

But the fact of the matter is that this paradigm no longer exists – the world has changed. Everyone is fully aware when we look at our economy that Taylorism is dead, that modes of production have completely changed. Globalisation and new technology has made flexibility and innovation the new requirements for success, with the results that the structure of the economy has changed. These changes have meant increased poverty and marginalisation for a large portion of our population and our communities. At the same time, it has become increasingly clear that Taylorism in government doesn't work anymore either. Governments can no longer govern with wall-to-wall programs, not so much because they cost too much, but primarily because they don't work, because we don't get good value for our dollars and our communities do not get the quality of services they deserve. And of course, you know better than anyone that charities can not keep up with picking up the pieces because there are way too many pieces to pick up. Which is why new emerging realities and forms of organisation – what we call civil society organisations - are now questioning traditional political processes and traditional forms of governance and are demanding to play a more important role in shaping public policy and in carrying out social and economic development.

So when one is looking for new solutions, as we have learned over the past decade in Quebec it is essential to understand this new paradigm, to look at the world a bit differently, or take it from another angle. For example, we no longer accept that the economy and economic development is the exclusive playing field for the private sector; instead we talk about the pluralist economy in which we live, where each form of organisation has its role to play- the public economy, the private sector as well as the social economy – in producing the goods and services necessary for the well being of our communities. We no longer refer to the most important forms of innovation as being technological; we emphasize the need for massive investment in social innovation. We no longer identify ourselves as outside of the political process but insist on recognition as full partners in development. This paradigm shift, this new way of understanding the world around us, has widespread consequences in the way we work in the way we struggle to redefine the public policy environment, but also in the way we define our relationships with other social partners, be they the private sector, the union movement and other institutional actors. We are proud to be able to illustrate the importance of the social economy in the Quebec economy – over 8% of the GNP when we put it all together. We have confidence in our capacity to be good entrepreneurs with a social mission and we demand a level playing field that allows our social entrepreneurs to have access to the same types of tools as the private sector, though we insist on the need to adjust criteria to take into account social or environmental missions. We are not embarrassed about asking for public funds to support our efforts, funds that we do not perceive as handouts but as investments or often simple purchases of services that must be paid for at their true value. We are convinced, with enough evidence to prove it, that the social economy is the right choice for the delivery of certain services that are best served through collective enterprise, as opposed to public or private initiatives, while recognizing that in other areas, government services must be maintained and reinforced and in other areas, private initiative is essential. We have the confidence that comes from the knowledge that the social economy is an essential part of the socio-economic infrastructure of our society and that it must be recognised as such by all those who aspire to building healthy communities and a more just and democratic society.

This paradigm shift, this new way of understanding our world, has opened up new horizons not only in our analysis but also in the way we have been able to organise and impose, with some success, our presence and our demands within a public policy framework. It has

allowed us to create strong networks and to build a reputation as a movement that offers innovative and pragmatic solutions to a wide variety of challenges facing our communities and our society as a whole. Be it issues related to the environment, cultural expression, social exclusion, rural development or urban renewal, the social economy movement, including its community economic development component, is increasingly involved in new strategies and new development initiatives across Quebec. More and more municipal governments are beginning to understand the potential for their communities. More and more private partners are opening up on-going partnership agreements with social economy actors. And the policy environment has begun to move not only provincially but also federally as Ottawa wakes up to this growing Canadian reality.

But there is still enormous work to be done – there is no question about that. The challenges are huge, as they are in any innovative process. We are still missing key tools to help us move forward and to seize all the development opportunities we see in our communities. The problem of access to capital instruments is crucial – the federal budget has offered some hope for innovation in that area. The need to reinforce capacity through networking, training and peer learning is enormous- once again, the federal budget initiative opens up a tiny door but it is a beginning. We must also aggressively pursue the research agenda, but research that helps move forward practice, for social innovation does not take place in university laboratories or research centres – it is fundamentally a process of learning by doing and the role of research must be to help and codify in order to learn collectively from our successes and failures, Once again, the federal budget initiative opens up a small door in the field of research through investment in university-community alliances.

But there is still so much more to do to move the policy agenda forward – each of us in our local communities, each of us in our own provinces or territories, as it has been the case in Quebec but also in Manitoba, Nova Scotia and some other provinces – and finally all of us together in the context of a pan-Canadian agenda.

So I would like to take a few moments to throw out some ideas about how to move the pan-Canadian agenda forward in a significant way, in a way that makes sense for the social economy movement but also can have some positive impact on those who identify more clearly as being part of the voluntary sector. For I am fully aware that the emergence of the social economy on the federal policy agenda has provoked a wide variety of reactions –

including some questions and some negative spin in certain volunteer sector organisations. These same kinds of debates took place in Quebec as well – as some community organisations felt that this vocabulary and this approach could be used by government to pull out of funding to the sector. I think that it is important to remember firstly, that government cutbacks were a reality long before anyone had started to use this language but more importantly, that social enterprise is a growing reality in communities across Canada and includes a large part of the volunteer sector that for decades has been combining voluntary, market and government resources in all kinds of proportions to respond to community needs. My hope is that the fact that it is being named and supported, and very modestly I must underline, be seen as an opportunity for many partners within the volunteer sector to reinforce the good work already being done and to explore new opportunities for development.

But in order to get there, there are many challenges.

One of the first challenges that comes to my mind, as I learn more and more about the diverse realities across Canada, is the need to build stronger local and regional networks. With all the respect one must have for central structures (after all the Chantier in itself is a central structure in Quebec), they can only be successful in their efforts to represent a sector when they can rely on strong local and regional networks that are well rooted in every region across the country. This is not simply a theoretical or organisational question. The diversity of relationships of governance structures to territory has become an essential part of the new paradigm in which we live. National governments have no choice except to readjust their way of governing to take into account the diversity of realities in different regions. There can be no strong national agenda, from my point of view, if people have not driven strong roots into their communities and regions – not only in delivering services but on a political and organisational level. And these much needed regional and local networks must be broad, inclusive networks – united by what they have in common as opposed to concentrating on what is different. The social economy vocabulary in Quebec allowed us to do that. It may or may not work for the rest of Canada, but it has the advantage of embracing a wide reality of practices and asserting its fundamental importance in the socio-economic infrastructure of our society.

Another challenge from our experience is the need for partnerships. I know that the CCP has been a strong advocate for new partnerships – from moving from a charitable approach to a

partnership approach with the private sector- and I think that this work must be intensified and carried by the widest number of organisations possible. And this partnership approach should not, from my perspective, be limited to the private sector. It is clear to those of us involved in the social economy and community economic development movement across Canada, that discussion must be taking place with other major actors in Canadian society – be it the labour movement, various social movements, our municipal governments, our educational institutions etc – and these discussions must be translated into alliances and common practices. I know that this is already happening in many communities across Canada- but I think there are still challenges for it to manifest itself more strongly on a regional or national agenda. In Quebec, today, the major business associations and unions recognise the community and social economy sector as full partners in development. Let me tell you that these are powerful allies when we ask government to make sure that there is a seat at the table for us.

Another challenge, a challenge that I know is well identified within the voluntary sector, is the need to build our own internal capacity. The world is more and more complex, the skills required to run our organisations, to run our social enterprises, are also more and more complex- not only for staff and management but for our volunteers and volunteer boards. Peer learning is an excellent way to learn and should be intensified. But there are many ways to build capacity and the initiative to create a sectoral council is no doubt a very promising idea- I certainly know that it has made a tremendous difference for the entire community and social economy sector in Quebec and we are only beginning to understand all the opportunities that it has created for us.

Another challenge – or in many ways – another opportunity, is to maximise our learning and our exchanges internationally. We have had the incredible fortune of linking up to many similar movements across Europe, Latin America, Africa and to a lesser extent Asia. We have discovered some inspiring practices in the most unexpected places and learned so much from the social innovation going on around the world. And not only has it given us new ideas, it has also played a key role in opening our movement to a huge cohort of young people who see the world, and not the country as their scope of action. Through this international perspective, we have built strong links with a wide network of youth organisations, with environmental groups, and NGO's involved in international cooperation and development with the fair trade movement, all of whom have begun to identify themselves as important

components of the social economy. Through this, we are now confident that the next generation is more than ready to take on the task of pushing the social economy agenda forward. Let me tell you that as a very recent new grandmother, this is exciting news!

In conclusion, let me say once again that I am very pleased about this opportunity to share our enthusiasm with you and to witness the strength and the enthusiasm of the Canadian voluntary sector as it moves into the next century. I hope my remarks will help in opening more doors to dialogue and mutual understanding, because fundamentally we are all in the same business- that of building a more inclusive and democratic society for all Canadians.

Thank you.