

**Third Party Monitoring of Canada's
Promises for Children**

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**To the National
Children's Alliance**

November 13, 2003

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1.0 Introduction

The National Children's Alliance has persistently advocated for the establishment of effective third party monitoring, believing that it is critical to successful social policy. As a collective, the Alliance cares about good social policy because it is critical in turn to improving outcomes for children, youth and families.

At the March 2002 Symposium, we discussed the Alliance's participation in third party monitoring of the Early Childhood Development Initiative (ECDI), embracing the idea in principle and resolving to pursue the matter further. Third party monitoring is best positioned in relation to the broad spectrum of government commitments to children. Recent events, such as the United Nations Special Session on Children, have emphasized the importance of ensuring that governments keep all their promises. As an influential collective, the National Children's Alliance could be instrumental in advocating that governments act on their commitments.

The paper presented at the 2002 Symposium, *Third Party Monitoring of the ECDI*, pointed out that the Social Union Framework Agreement (SUFA) requires governments to monitor and publicly report on social policy activities and outcomes and to involve third parties in assessing progress. The paper argued that, "It is up to the voluntary and community sector to ensure that third party monitoring is an influential force in Canada."

This project represents an opportunity to broaden the discussion about third party monitoring. During the November 2003 Alliance Meeting, it forms the basis for discussion and debate and supports efforts to work together to develop the strategies that will permit the Alliance as a collective and the member organizations as individuals to participate to their greatest capacity in creating "a world fit for children¹."

1.1 Project Goals

The National Children's Alliance has commissioned this paper to generate discussion around its potential roles in monitoring (a) child health, rights and well-being and (b) government expenditure and activities articulated in their commitments. Or, in other words, how children and their families are doing and how well they are being supported by their communities and society.

The goals of the paper are to:

- Make a compelling case for the value of third party monitoring
- Demonstrate the current vulnerability of third party monitoring initiatives
- Delineate federal and federal/provincial/territorial commitments to children

¹ This expression stems from the United Nations document, *A World Fit for Children*.

- Highlight the pitfalls in current government accountability approaches
- Propose options for how the National Children's Alliance could add value to third party monitoring
- Stimulate a discussion of the feasibility of sustainable monitoring mechanisms

Every effort has been made in this paper to take into account the many views that were presented at the 2002 Symposium and to move the initiative forward.

This paper is also firmly grounded in the principles of the National Children's Alliance to ensure that any proposed courses of action respect the strengths and history of the Alliance. A recent paper commissioned by the Alliance² summarized the principles as:

- Respect for independence and collaboration
- Focus on issues that can be better addressed collectively, rather than individually
- Focus on outcomes
- Maintain an open table with respect and goodwill
- Keep room at the table for critical thinking and disagreement
- Speak as a collectivity only when a consensus has been reached
- Keep government and media interventions strategic
- Manage input and consultation effectively

When considering possible roles for the National Children's Alliance in relation to third party monitoring, these principles are important guides.

1.2 Third Party Monitoring and the National Children's Alliance

In one way or another monitoring underpins the work of National Children's Alliance members.

Broad monitoring efforts, such as *The Progress of Canada's Children and How does Canada Measure Up?*, serve as important resources to the member organizations of the National Children's Alliance. These broad monitoring initiatives are pursued by only a few national organizations. Regional and local monitoring efforts, such as any one organization's efforts to better understand its constituency or the local policy scene, also serve as an important resource. This kind of monitoring is undertaken by virtually all member organizations across the country in one form or another.

National monitoring reports are used across the country to support research and proposal writing, policy and program development and advocacy. Regional and local monitoring information is used directly to improve organizational policies

² Hanvey, Louise, *Telling the Story: The National Children's Alliance*, March 2003

and practices and to inform local and regional advocacy. Through the work of the National Children's Alliance, local and regional monitoring supports the development of national, collective policies, practices and advocacy positions. share information, learn from each other and reach consensus on important issues.

Broad, regional and local monitoring initiatives all seek the same goal – improved outcomes for children, youth and families through the development of effective policies and practices in all sectors – voluntary, public and private.

1.3 Outline of Paper

In accordance with these goals, this paper will:

- Summarize government commitments to children, the provisions for third party monitoring and the opportunities for the voluntary sector.
- Describe governments' monitoring activities and their limitations, focusing on the National Child Benefit (NCB) and the Early Childhood Development Initiative (ECDI).
- Demonstrate the added value of a collective voice in key areas.
- Propose potential roles and responsibilities for third parties.
- Outline the requirements for a data strategy
- Delineate the building blocks for various sustainable monitoring mechanisms.

Discussion questions are found at the end of each section of the report. These questions are intended to help us arrive at a point of common understanding and to build consensus about future actions.

2.0 The Value Of Monitoring

This paper is predicated on two overlapping operating assumptions. First, it assumes that third party monitoring is necessary to voluntary sector efforts to promote the health, rights and well-being of children, youth and families. Monitoring supports public accountability, policy change and improvement of practices. Second, the paper assumes that monitoring how children are doing and how society is supporting them is critical in ensuring the implementation of international and domestic obligations. Arguably, if Canada and other nations fulfilled all of their current obligations, the status of children, youth and families would be considerably improved.

2.1 Collective Strategies for Monitoring, Knowledge Brokerage and Advocacy

Many organizations in the voluntary sector have monitoring, knowledge brokerage and/or advocacy strategies. These strategies underlie their independent efforts on behalf of children, youth and families. This paper describes a funding crisis in the voluntary sector in general and independent voluntary sector monitoring initiatives in particular. One response to this unsustainable situation is to have the Alliance members develop consensus around a collective voice and coordinated approach to monitoring, knowledge brokering and advocacy.

What would a **collective** approach to each of these activities look like? The key questions that frame the development on these strategies are about cooperation and coordination. Debate around coordination and cooperation is complicated because the Alliance must keep government, and possibly knowledge institutes, in the picture as key players in monitoring and knowledge brokerage. However, by adhering to its guiding principles, the Alliance can address these issues with more confidence.

This section examines, through the lens of the Alliance's guiding principles, the questions that need to be addressed toward developing monitoring, knowledge brokerage and advocacy strategies. It begins with an overview of the uses of social indicators in public accountability, identifying issues relevant to the development of monitoring, knowledge brokerage and advocacy strategies.

2.2 Using Social Indicators in Public Accountability³

Brown and Corbett (1997) outline five different uses of social indicators in public accountability: description, monitoring, setting goals, outcomes-based accountability and evaluation.

The first three uses are straightforward and often very effective tools in monitoring, knowledge brokerage and advocacy activities. Description is the simplest use of social indicators. It plays an important role in illuminating the lives of children, youth and families in particular contexts. Monitoring is the process of tracking social indicators to determine areas for social action. It tends to be a relatively uncomplicated and effective use of social indicators. The use of social indicators to establish benchmarks and determine social goals for a given time period is more challenging, but valuable.

The latter two uses of social indicators require far more caution and sophistication. Outcomes-based accountability is the use of social indicators to hold governments (or other agencies) responsible for improving health and well-being and achieving their stated goals. As many factors can influence a change in social indicators, outcomes-based accountability is difficult to do in a compelling way. Evaluation requires demonstrating a relationship between activities and outcomes. Social indicators are generally not well-suited for evaluation, also as a consequence of attribution problems.

Based on this framework, social indicators could support monitoring, knowledge brokerage and advocacy strategies by:

- describing and monitoring social indicators relating to children, youth and families
- advocating for the setting of appropriate social goals at the government level
- holding governments accountable for improving outcomes for children, youth and families

The fourth possible use is not recommended. This is the use of social indicators to evaluate social programs established to support children, youth and families

Ideally, social indicators would be able to demonstrate the effects of specific programs and services over time on specific outcomes. However, constructing these kinds of indicators would be a major research project. It would likely require the development of research-quality administrative data bases that are comparable across jurisdictions and time. Administrative data bases are essential because they relate directly to programs and policies.

³ The information presented in this section originally appeared in the 2002 Symposium paper, Third Party Monitoring of the Early Childhood Development Initiative, prepared by Scott, Kidder and Burke.

How well positioned is Canada to use social indicators as part of public accountability processes? According to the Final Report of the Joint Working Group of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council and Statistics Canada on the Advancement of Research Using Social Statistics⁴, Canada has “very little capacity to conduct social policy research, evaluate social policy programs or monitor progress towards achieving social aims.” This problem is attributed to:

- A lack of trained researchers working in government
- A lack of access to government collected data for researchers working outside government

These concerns were echoed by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, which made specific recommendations in its Concluding Observations regarding Canada’s monitoring capacity, touching on issues such as the need for greater federal, provincial and territorial cooperation, comparability across jurisdictions, and the ability to address all areas in the Convention.

2.3 Monitoring Strategy

What value could the Alliance add to the efforts of its members? What is it that we cannot do separately, but could do collectively? The collective voice of the Alliance could speak more effectively in advocating that governments support third party monitoring initiatives by:

- enhancing their statistical capacity to collect, analyze and disaggregate data
- reducing barriers to voluntary sector use of survey data
- improving comparability of information across jurisdictions
- developing an evaluation framework that complements information on activities and expenditures
- creating a position within federal government that reports directly to Cabinet on all issues pertaining to children

The guiding principles of the Alliance emphasize supporting organizations to achieve their specific goals, collaborating and working on issues that are best handled collectively. Accordingly, the Alliance is well-suited to serving as a negotiating, facilitating or coordinating mechanism, supporting a community-driven approach.

⁴ December 1998

2.4 Knowledge Brokerage Strategy

From the perspective of the Alliance, what would be the most effective way of distilling and disseminating knowledge and ensuring its uptake? What value could the Alliance add to the efforts of its members?

- Some organizations produce and disseminate materials.
- Some organizations play an intermediary role, supporting other organizations as they produce and disseminate materials.
- Some organizations use the materials produced by other members to support their policy and program development and other activities.
- Some organizations fit into more than one of these categories.

There could be strong mutual benefits to collaboration between the Alliance and scientific research institutes and other organizations, such as Statistics Canada, in the area of knowledge brokerage. Would the Alliance play a role in building relationships with these institutes? How can the Alliance facilitate the efforts of producers, intermediaries and users of knowledge products, within the voluntary sector and in other sectors? Could greater coordination help organizations overcome challenges relating to time, energy, resources and expertise? How can the Alliance contribute to the knowledge brokerage products? Would the Alliance take the lead on producing and disseminating any of these kinds of materials? Would the Alliance help to coordinate the work of Alliance members on these kinds of products? The range of products could include:

- Comprehensive publications about child health, rights and well-being.
- Report card-style publications about key issues
- Report card-style reports on government program activities and expenditures
- Web-based reports
- Fact sheets presenting survey information
- Social marketing materials
- Public workshops

The guiding principles of the Alliance highlight the importance of speaking collectively when there is consensus on issues, and building consensus on important issues. As such, the Alliance could feasibly play a role in producing key stories for sharing across the sector. Another Alliance principle, managing input and consultation effectively, suggests that the Alliance could serve as a mechanism for building and maintaining relationships across organizations and sectors.

2.5 Advocacy Strategy

From the perspective of the Alliance, what would be the most effective way to advocate for change? What value could the Alliance add to the efforts of its members?

- Individual organizations advocate independently to government based on their mandates
- Organizations advocate collectively around common issues and messages
- Organizations advocate for more mechanisms for direct consultation with governments (sitting at the same table)

Obviously, the Alliance decided at its inception that a collective voice in advocacy was valuable to all the members so long as the Alliance spoke as a collective only where there was consensus. Further, the Alliance has always focused its advocacy on strategic interventions aimed at government bodies or the media:

- Briefs to Standing Committees
- Reports to government departments
- Strategic directions and policy positions
- Submissions in public consultations
- Newsletters and bulletins
- Messages to media

While continuing to operate within this code of conduct, decisions made in relation to the monitoring and knowledge brokerage strategies may necessitate changes in the advocacy strategy. These decisions may also open up possibilities for collective advocacy that had previously not been part of the Alliance's activities.

Summary

The Alliance is in a position to contribute meaningfully to voluntary sector monitoring, knowledge brokering and advocacy, while respecting its guiding principles and without competing with its member organizations or becoming more bureaucratic. All of the choices have consequences for the Alliance, the member organizations and the monitoring process itself.

Discussion Question

1. How can the Alliance add value to the monitoring, knowledge brokering and advocacy activities of voluntary sector organizations, while respecting its own guiding principles?

3.0 Government Commitments to Monitoring Children

There are federal government and federal/provincial/territorial commitments that represent windows of opportunity for the voluntary sector and the National Children's Alliance to advance and expand the work that they already do on behalf of children, youth and families. This section overviews the following commitments:

International:

- the UN Convention of the Rights of Children (UNCRC)
- the National Action Plan for Children (NAP)

Federal and Federal/Provincial/Territorial:

- the All-Party Resolution to End Child Poverty
- the Social Union Framework Agreement (SUFA)
- the Voluntary Sector Initiative (VSI)
- the National Children's Agenda (NCA)
- the Early Childhood Development Agreement (ECDA)
- the Multi-Lateral Framework Agreement (MLFA)

Federal/provincial/territorial agreements are a central strategy within the social union initiative, which holds that reform and renewal are best achieved through cross-jurisdictional partnerships. Funds flow from the federal government to the provinces and territories to support programs and services aimed at shared goals and objectives. Often there is a shared framework for government monitoring and public reporting.

There are two purposes to this review. First, to understand the scope of federal government and federal/provincial/territorial promises to monitor child health, rights, and well-being as articulated in the goals and objectives of their commitments. Second, to establish the extent to which the voluntary sector is a formally-recognized part of the federal/provincial/territorial system of social policy development and monitoring. Provisions in these agreements create roles for the voluntary sector and place burdens on governments to ensure the capacity of the sector to fulfill these roles.

3.1 The Commitments

United Nation Convention of the Rights of the Child

Canada has signed and ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. This convention:

“holds governments responsible for supporting families and communities, and ensuring the rights of children are provided for in laws, policies and programs. Parents are responsible for providing for the rights and best interests of their children. Children are responsible for respecting others’ rights. Society is responsible for respecting the rights of children and for supporting programs that provide for children’s rights.⁵”

Society is represented by citizens, civil society organizations and by the democratic associational networks that speak collectively on behalf of their members.

The principles that guide the interpretation and application of the Convention in diverse circumstances are:

- Non-discrimination and equality of opportunity
- The best interests of the child
- Life, survival and development
- Participation

Because Canada has signed and ratified this Convention, these principles and the articles of the Convention are necessarily part of the overall federal government vision for children in Canada.

Canada’s National Action Plan for Children

In May 2002, Canada committed to building a better world for children. This commitment emerged from the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on Children at which Canada and other participating countries agreed to prepare national action plans for children. These plans are to be very concrete, with specific, measurable targets and goals. The Ministers of Health and Human Resources Development are jointly responsible for Canada’s National Action Plan for Children (NAP)⁶.

The priorities of the NAP are:

- Promoting healthy lives
- Promoting quality education
- Protecting against abuse, exploitation, violence and neglect
- Enabling social engagement and collaboration

Senator Landon Pearson is assisting with public consultations to support the development of NAP and has called upon “civil society organizations” to

⁵ Canadian Child Care Federation website, www.cccf-fcsge.ca

⁶ Description of NAP at www.sen.parl.ca/pearson/specialsession/documentation.htm

participate in the processes that will lead to set of goals. The National Children's Alliance is a collective voice for many of these organizations.

The 1989 All-party House of Commons Resolution

The 1989 all-party House of Commons resolution "to achieve the goal of eliminating poverty among Canadian children by the year 2000" should not be forgotten, even if the target year has come and gone. Certainly, it should be assumed that, until this outcome has been achieved, government policies and programs for children and families have not been fully successful. This resolution is a key aspect of Canada's vision for and promises to children. Child poverty was identified as one of two priority areas in the social union initiative and is addressed in its policy initiatives, such as the National Child Benefit.

The Social Union Framework Agreement (SUFA)

The social union initiative is an effort to "renew and modernize" Canadian social policy. It is characterized by connections between social and economic unions and federal, provincial and territorial partnerships to accomplish social goals. The two priority goals relate to children living in poverty and persons with disabilities. The National Children's Agenda, the Early Childhood Development Initiative, the National Children's Benefit, and the Multilateral Framework Agreement on Early Learning are all policy initiatives that have emerged through SUFA. The initiative is guided by the Federal, Provincial, and Territorial Council on Social Policy Renewal.

SUFA ⁷ addresses four areas:

1. All Canadians are Equal

- Treat all Canadians with fairness and equity.
- Promote equality of opportunity for all Canadians.
- Respect the equality, rights and dignity of all Canadians.

2. Meeting the Needs of Canadians

- Ensure access for all Canadians, wherever they live or move in Canada, to essential programs and services or reasonably comparable quality.
- Provide appropriate assistance to those in need.
- Respect the principles of medicare.
- Promote the full and active participation of all Canadians in Canada's social and economic life.
- Work in partnership with individuals, families, communities, voluntary organizations, business and labour, and ensure appropriate opportunities to have meaningful input into social policies and programs.

⁷ see www.socialunion.ca

3. Sustaining Social Programs and Services

- Ensure adequate, affordable stable and sustainable funding for social programs.

4. Aboriginal People's of Canada

- For greater certainty, nothing in this agreement abrogates or derogates from any Aboriginal treaty or other rights of Aboriginal peoples, including self-government.

The Voluntary Sector Accord

The Voluntary Sector Initiative (VSI) is a joint initiative intended to strengthen the capacity of the voluntary sector and enhance the relationship between the voluntary sector and the Government of Canada⁸. The Voluntary Sector Accord presents a framework for transparent and collaborative action, when governments and the voluntary sector work together.

The Accord is based on six values:

- Democracy
- Active citizenship
- Equality
- Diversity
- Inclusion
- Social Justice

And five principles:

- Independence (voluntary sector and public sector both autonomous)
- Interdependence
- Dialogue
- Cooperation and collaboration
- Accounting to Canadians

Until now, all the commitments discusses in this paper have described government roles and responsibilities. The Accord is unique in that it includes shared, government and voluntary sector commitments that should be respected when governments and the voluntary sector work together.

⁸ www.vsi-isbc.ca

The National Children's Agenda

The National Children's Agenda (NCA) is a commitment to:

- new, cooperative approaches to supporting healthy child development
- coordination across jurisdiction and departments
- partnerships with voluntary sector and community groups
- monitoring and public reporting

It is a pioneering program, putting into action the principles of the Social Union Framework Agreement (SUFA). The Early Childhood Development Agreement (ECDA) and the Multilateral Framework Agreement for Early Learning and Child Care (MFA) are policy initiatives that have emerged from it.

The National Children's Agenda clearly articulates a vision for children in Canada⁹. We want children to be:

- healthy
- safe and secure
- successful at learning
- socially engaged and responsible

The Alliance has argued for a collaborative strategy for the implementation and monitoring of the NCA policy framework, taking the position that the active participation of both government and the voluntary and community sector is critical to success. This position is consistent with the overarching policy context expressed through SUFA.

The Early Childhood Development Agreement (ECDA)¹⁰ :

The Early Childhood Development Agreement is a federal, provincial and territorial agreement. Building on the SUFA framework and the NCA goals for children, the ECDA details a set of five principles to guide investments in the area of early childhood development:

- focused in prevention and intervention
- intersectoral
- integrated
- supporting the child in family/community
- inclusive

The four key action areas are to:

- Promote healthy pregnancy, birth and infancy

⁹ www.socialunion.ca

¹⁰ Text available at www.socialunion.gc.ca/ecd/2002/reporta.pdf

- Improve parenting and family supports
- Strengthen early childhood development, learning and care
- Strengthen community supports

Federal, provincial and territorial governments have agreed to develop a shared framework to assess progress and to report publicly on an annual basis.

Multilateral Framework Agreement on Early Learning and Care (MFA)

In 2003, the Ministers responsible for Social Services reached agreement on a framework for improving access to affordable, quality, provincially and territorially regulated early learning and childcare programs and services. Building on the NCA and ECDA, the MFA represents additional investments specifically in early learning and child care.

The objective of the initiative is to further support early childhood development and support the participation of parents in employment or training. The preponderance of investments will be in direct service provision.

3.2 Provisions for Third Party Monitoring

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC and Canada's National Action Plan for Children

The participation of governments, non-governmental organizations and youth has been encouraged in terms of the implementation of new or transformed social policies and programs, monitoring progress and reporting to the public. The UN has reiterated its recommendation that governments support third party monitoring in Canada.

Canada has submitted two non-governmental reports, the first five year report to the UN Committee and a report to the UN Special Session on Children. The Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children, through the research and publication of reports, has served as a collective voice, representing the views of many and diverse organizations working on behalf of children and youth.

Canada's National Action Plan for Children, emerging from process of implementing the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child¹¹ is likely to include provisions for third party monitors, given the UN recommendations. In *A World Fit for Children*, Canada commits to "strengthen our national statistical capacity" and "build community capacity for monitoring, assessment and planning."

¹¹ United Nations, *A World Fit for Children*, UN Doc. A/RES/S-27/2, para. 60, May 10, 2002

The 1989 All-Part Resolution to End Child Poverty

The voluntary sector, through Campaign 2000 and others, has taken on responsibility for tracking progress towards achieving this goal and for advocating that governments renew and improve their efforts to eliminate child poverty.. Although not designed specifically as a program to end child poverty, the National Child Benefit initiative is a vehicle through which governments can assess their progress towards this goal.

Social Union Framework Agreement (SUFA)

The Social Union Framework Agreement (SUFA) ¹² includes provisions regarding the voluntary sector's role in social policy development and the assessment of social progress. For the purposes of this paper, the voluntary sector's opportunities include commitments to involve "Canadians" as well as those to involve "third parties". Organizations such as the National Children's Alliance act as a collective voice for Canadians working in the area of children and youth.

According to SUFA, governments will:

- "work in partnership with individuals, families, communities, voluntary organizations, business and labor, and ensure appropriate opportunities for Canadians to have meaningful input into social policies and programs."
- "monitor and measure outcomes of its social programs and report regularly to its constituents on the performance of these programs"
- "use third parties, as appropriate, to assist in assessing progress on social priorities."
- "ensure effective mechanism for Canadians to participate in developing social priorities and reviewing outcomes."
- "provide for the appropriate use of third parties for expert assistance and advice while ensuring democratic accountability by elected officials"

What these provisions mean is that third parties should not be on their own in their efforts as third party monitors. They should, in fact, have the practical and financial support of governments. These mechanisms have failed to materialize; there is a clear role for a collective voice in advocating for their creation.

Voluntary Sector Agreement

The following points are particularly relevant to this discussion of third party monitoring:

- The joint commitment to "develop the mechanisms and processes required to put the Accord into action."

¹² Full report available at www.scics.gc.ca/cinfo99/80003701_e.html

- The government commitment to “recognize its need to engage the voluntary sector in open, informed and sustained dialogue in order that the sector may contribute its experience, expertise, knowledge and ideas in developing better public policies and in the design and delivery of programs.”
- The voluntary sector commitment to “continue to identify important or emerging issues and trends in communities, and act on them or bring them to the attention of the Government of Canada.”
- The voluntary sector commitment to “serve as a means for the voices and views of all parts of the voluntary sector to be represented and heard by the Government of Canada.”

Organizational structures (located in government and in the voluntary sector), effective mechanisms to achieve goals, and codes or standards of good practice are all necessary to move forward on these commitments.

National Children’s Agenda

The National Children’s Agenda is an initiative that has emerged from SUFA and, as such, is framed according to SUFA principles.

Early Childhood Development Agreement

In the ECDA, First Ministers agreed to report on investments and their progress in improving and enhancing programs and services.

- “Governments will ensure effective mechanisms for Canadians to participate in developing early childhood development priorities and reviewing outcomes.”
- “First Ministers agree that governments will consult third parties to assist, as appropriate, in developing indicators and assessing progress on early childhood development.”

Although the language around the latter provision is not especially strong, it still recognizes a role for third parties and opens the door to the voluntary sector to participate.

Multilateral Framework Agreement on Early Learning and Care

In terms of third party monitoring, the MFA follows an approach consistent with SUFA, NCA and ECDI, committed to transparent public reporting and a shared evaluation framework.

- “Governments will ensure effective mechanisms for Canadians to participate in developing early learning and child care priorities and reviewing outcomes.”

- Ministers commit to reporting annually on progress, starting with a baseline report 2002-2003.

The MFA fills an important gap, identified by the voluntary sector and others, following the launch of the ECDA.

Summary

The National Children's Alliance considers monitoring one important means to developing better policies and better practices – policies and practices that more effectively improve outcomes for children, youth and families. It is immediately clear from this review of agreements that the voluntary sector is already deeply enmeshed in new federal, provincial, territorial social policy development and assessment processes, at least in theory. Third party participation is critical if governments are to fulfill their obligations in terms of consultation, program implementation and public accountability. The voluntary sector roles supported by these agreements include:

- Ensuring that Canadians have meaningful input into social priorities, policies and programs
- Assessing progress on social priorities
- Monitoring social inputs and child outcomes
- Sharing experience, expertise, knowledge and ideas with governments to support policy and program development and implementation

There are real challenges in performing these roles.

- Governments have been directed to use third parties “as appropriate”. This phrase leaves room for a great deal of discretion.
- There are inadequate funding mechanisms to support the voluntary sector in performing these roles.
- The promised organizational structures and mechanisms to support voluntary sector participation have not materialized.
- Adequate mechanisms within government to support comparable monitoring across jurisdictions are not in place

The opportunity to participate is before the Alliance, but the shape it takes will depend on the choices that are made now. It could sputter into nothing, or worse yet become a weighty burden on the community organizations we collectively represent. We need a shared strategy for action. As an essential first step, we need to collectively pressure governments to “allocate funding for the development of a sustainable monitoring mechanism to track the health and well-being of children in Canada in order to meet the commitments made in Canada's international and domestic agreements.”¹³

¹³ National Children's Alliance, Brief to the Standing Committee on Finance, October 7, 2003, p.11.

Discussion Questions

1. What are the implications of the government's commitment to monitor children's health, rights and well-being?
2. How should the Alliance interpret/act on the provisions for third party involvement in monitoring progress towards social goals?

4.0 The Monitoring Landscape

The full burden of establishing and maintaining a system for monitoring Canada's progress towards social goals cannot reasonably be assumed by the National Children's Alliance or any other individual third party. Further, as described, governments have clearly articulated commitments in this area.

This section discusses what governments are currently doing to monitor their progress towards social goals, focusing on the NCB and ECDI. It also raises some issues around what governments could and should be doing. The National Children's Alliance needs a collective view on the roles for governments and how those roles intersect with and support the roles of third parties in the voluntary sector. Finally, this section briefly highlights the current monitoring activities of different organizations within the voluntary sector and identifies areas where the National Children's Alliance could add value.

4.1 What Governments are currently doing.

Internationally, the Government of Canada has committed to implementing effective mechanisms for monitoring the progress of the National Plan of Action for Children. Domestically, under SUFA, federal, provincial and territorial governments have committed to monitoring and measuring activities, expenditures and outcomes of social programs. Governments have committed to working together to monitor the ECDI, the Multilateral Framework Agreement for Early Learning and Care (MFA) and the NCB. Finally, governments have committed to involving third parties. **The National Children's Alliance must build on these commitments, demanding the promised mechanisms for effective third party involvement before carving out a fair and appropriate role for the voluntary sector.** Consequently, the National Children's Alliance must look critically at what governments have done to date to uphold their end.

The NCB and ECDI, two central initiatives of the National Children's Agenda, both require federal, provincial and territorial governments to ensure accountability through monitoring and public reporting. An overview of the monitoring and reporting activities of governments in relation to these initiatives is instructive.

The National Child Benefit

The NCB has been in place longer, and an Auditor General's report is available to help us consider the effectiveness of its accountability mechanisms. The information in this section is taken primarily from this 1999 report¹⁴.

¹⁴ www.oag-bvg.gc.ca

In the 1997 Speech from the Throne, the federal government committed to address the problems of low income families with children in a cooperative way. In 1998, the NCB was implemented. The initiative is led by a federal, provincial, territorial working group. Although consistent with the principles of the “social union”, the NCB was negotiated outside the context of SUFA. The NCB combines two trends: the delivery of social programs through tax benefits and shared initiatives across federal, provincial and territorial governments. The goal of NCB is to reduce the depth of child poverty, increase parental attachment to the workforce, reduce administrative overlap. The key mechanism for demonstrating accountability is public reporting.

Comments from the Auditor General that Should Ring Warning Bells¹⁵

- Most of the Ministerial meetings leading up to the NCB involved public consultation. However, consultations were not generally interactive and iterative in nature. HRDC set up the NCB Reference Group with representatives from non-governmental organizations.
- Some governments thought that the public reporting approach to accountability legitimized “minimal administrative reporting” – this would undermine accountability. Administrative data are essential for reporting both outputs and performance outcomes. Currently, it is not clear that data will allow for comparison of the outcomes of different reinvestments.¹⁶
- Smaller provinces may not have the resources to obtain comparable data. Although larger provinces are in a position to build the capacity of their smaller neighbours, they are not required to do so.
- Each partner is responsible for obtaining assurances from other partners that all information is relevant and accurate – what has been audited or otherwise independently verified must be clear to everyone. Currently it is not clear to what extent information submitted by all parties will meet this criterion.
- Reinvestments must meet NCB objectives and also must represent new programs or enhancements to existing ones (no independent assurances of this as yet).
- No mechanism other than mutual agreement for settling disputes; the federal government has no direct means to influence provinces.

These concerns raised by the Auditor General also tend to support the need for advocacy for improved government monitoring and reporting as well as third party monitoring to complement government activities.

¹⁵ www.oag-bvg.gc.ca/domino/reports.nsf/html

¹⁶ the Market Basket Measure (specific, transparent basket of goods and services) has been developed to complement other measures of low income. It supports reporting on reinvestments.

The Early Childhood Development Initiative

According to Human Resources Canada¹⁷, as of November 2003 all jurisdictions had released their annual report on activities and expenditures related to early childhood development programs and services. These annual reports build on the earlier baseline ones. As of November 2003, ten jurisdictions had released documents on child well-being, reporting on a common set of measures. Nunavut and the Yukon were not required to report on the same measures because they do not have access to comparable data¹⁸.

Aside from the fact that the majority of governments consistently miss deadlines for reporting, three issues are particularly relevant to this paper: comparability across jurisdictions and independent verification of information, clarity about the allocation of funds, and strategies for assessing improvement and enhancement of programs and services.

The capacity to compare across jurisdictions, an important aspect of third party monitoring, has not been made any easier by governments at this time. The baseline reports on early childhood development activities and expenditures were not comparable because of significant differences in the starting points for each jurisdiction. The populations, the social priorities and the current mix of programs and services were different in each province. Comparability was also diminished by variability in the data systems in each jurisdiction and their capacity to report. The annual reports are not comparable for the same reasons. In addition to the need for comparable data, there is the need for independent verification of the information.

According to the Canadian Council on Social Development¹⁹, there is a notable lack of clarity about how ECDA funds are being spent and how governments will report back to Canadians about it. As the funds flow through CHST²⁰, a block funding mechanism, it difficult to monitor allocations. The concerns raised by the Auditor General about independent verification of expenditures are likely to be equally relevant from these funds.

The FPT Committee on Knowledge, Information and Effective Practices reports to the ECD working group. Its primary focus is to improve the quality of reporting. The committee has recognized the needfor:

- increased public awareness
- a central website for all reports
- increased consistency and comparability of reports

¹⁷ Personal correspondence

¹⁸ The principle data source for the measures is the NLSCY.

¹⁹ www.ccsd.ca

²⁰ CHST is being split into two separate funding mechanisms, the Health Transfer and the Social Services Transfer.

The Committee has also identified another issue around coordination. They note that Government of Canada reports should consider establishing links with reports on progress of the National Plan of Action for Children.

4.2 Government Initiatives Do Not Replace Voluntary Sector Activities

The purpose of this section is not to overview the work done by these organizations. Rather, it is to take a critical look at them as one possible government means to the end of voluntary sector involvement in social policy development and assessment. It is for this reason that these organizations were selected to review in this paper. Could governments view these initiatives as evidence that adequate funds have been allocated to third parties?

The Centres of Excellence for Child Well-Being

The Centers of Excellence were established as part of the National Children's Agenda²¹. Their mandate is to ensure that knowledge about the health and well-being of children is shared across all sectors of society. They are time limited projects and their activities include:

- Collecting and analyzing health and well-being information
- Conducting focused research on key topics
- Providing advice to government and others
- Communicating knowledge

The Centres of Excellence play an important role in consolidating knowledge on children and youth and working to transform "common knowledge" across Canada. They can and do play a consultative role to governments, although they do so primarily from the perspective of academic and scientific knowledge. The participation of the voluntary sector through the Centres of Excellence has been limited.

In terms of third party monitoring, the Centres of Excellence for Child Well-Being:

- Do not have monitoring government activities and expenditures or trends in child, youth and family outcomes as part of their mandates
- Are less-well connected with communities, without a collective constituency like that of the National Children's Alliance.

Even if they were restructured with monitoring and public reporting as part of their mandate, their lack of an extensive community-based constituency would

²¹ <http://socialunion.gc.ca>

still present a significant barrier. To overcome this barrier would require the development of many strong partnerships with voluntary sector organizations.

The Canadian Institutes for Health Information

The objectives of the 13 Canadian Institutes for Health Research are to excel, according to internationally accepted standards of scientific excellence, in the creation of new knowledge and its translation into:

- Improved health for Canadians
- More effective services and products
- A strengthened Canadian health care system²²

To fulfill their mandate, it will be necessary for CIHR to find the most effective mechanisms to build strong relationships with many sectors, including the voluntary sector. CIHR has always been presented as an opportunity for collaborative, cross-sectoral work. The Institute Advisory Boards include representatives from different sectors, including the voluntary.

Summary

The Centres of Excellence for Child Well-Being and Canadian Institutes for Health Research (CIHR) have not been designed as mechanisms for voluntary sector involvement in the development of social policy or research programs or the assessment of progress. Both organizations would have to make significant changes before they could take on roles as third party monitors or legitimately represent the voices of the community. It is more effective for national associational organizations with strong internal democracies to speak for communities.

4.3 What is the Voluntary Sector Doing and What Barriers Do They Encounter?

The Voluntary Sector Initiative defines the sector as “organizations that exist to serve a public benefit, are self-governing, do not distribute any profits to members, and depend to a meaningful degree on volunteers.” The way in which organizations rely on volunteers can vary from hands-on program delivery to participation on boards of directors or steering committees²³. Universities, hospitals and research Institutions are adequately distinct from the other players to be considered a separate sector or separate component within the sector²⁴.

²² www.cihr-irsc.gc.ca

²³ Katherine Scott., Funding Matters, www.ccsd.ca

²⁴ *ibid.*

From this definition, it is clear that the organizations that make up the National Children's Alliance are collectively members of the voluntary sector and have opportunities, and possibly obligations, through the Voluntary Sector Accord to engage in monitoring and public reporting. Used here, monitoring refers to any of a broad range of activities engaged in by national, regional and community organizations.

National, regional and local organizations within the voluntary sector play roles in monitoring and public reporting. At the national level, five National Children's Alliance member organizations that have broad, national monitoring as a major component of their mandate are:

- Campaign 2000, publishing the annual Report Card on Child Poverty in Canada, drawing on the Statistics Canada Survey of Consumer Finances, among others.
- Canadian Coalition on the Rights of Children, publishing How Does Canada Measure Up, drawing on a wide range of sources.
- Canadian Council on Social Development, publishing the Progress of Canada's Children annually, drawing on a wide range of Statistics Canada surveys and other sources.
- Canadian Institute of Child Health, publishing the Health of Canada's Children: A CIH Profile every four to five years.
- Canadian Policy Research Networks, publishing a variety of diverse research.
- Vanier Institute of the Family, publishing Profiling Canada's Families, approximately every six years, drawing on Statistics Canada census and survey data.

As a consequence of the lack of sustainable, predictable funding streams, these monitoring initiatives may not all be continued or may become sporadic sources of information. They have traditionally been excellent resources on child and family outcomes and the diverse influences that contribute to those outcomes.

For many organizations within the National Children's Alliance, monitoring may not be an explicit part of their mandate. However, monitoring is very likely a key component of most organizations' practices. Regional and local monitoring encompasses a broad range of activities, including:

- Tracking policies at the local and regional level
- Maintaining a database on clients and their outcomes
- Evaluating programs by tracking activities, expenditures and outcomes
- Reports to funders on activities, expenditures and outcomes
- Assessing community service needs
- Examining area-specific demographic, social and economic factors
- Identifying service gaps in the community

Organizations engage in these activities in order to (a) inform their advocacy efforts, (b) enhance their policies, program designs and models of service delivery, (c) improve child, youth and family outcomes and/or (d) meet government reporting requirements.

The National Children's Alliance builds on the monitoring work of local, regional and national member organizations, acting as a catalyst for further actions. It has become clear that what is learned at the local and regional level often affirms and fleshes out what is learned at the national level. The Alliance is a medium through which organizations operating at the different levels can exchange knowledge and find common ground. The potential of the Alliance to move knowledge up from the community level to the national level has not been realized.

Collectively, the member organizations of the National Children's Alliance are hampered by data access issues. Barriers to data have increased over the last few years. These barriers relate to factors external to the National Children's Alliance:

- The cost of data sets from Statistics Canada is prohibitive for voluntary sector organizations.
- Government approaches to data have become more proprietary. Statistics Canada and Human Resources Development Canada are less willing than ever to make alternative arrangements to the purchase of data, such as on-site access.
- The Statistics Canada Data Liberation Initiative is designed to benefit academia. It offers no access to non-governmental and community organizations.
- As the longitudinal surveys have grown, more and more suppressions reduce the utility of the public use datasets. There are, consequently, serious limitations to provincial and territorial breakdowns for surveys like the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth.

There are also factors within the National Children's Alliance:

- The capacity to use data is limited in many organizations (e.g. lack of technical expertise, lack of resources)
- Funds are lacking to purchase the datasets, to acquire technical expertise or to conduct related work.
- Many organizations are not convinced that these datasets offer them any immediate value in their own work.

The Canadian Council on Social Development (CCSD) has developed a Community Social Data Strategy to assist regional and local organizations in monitoring the social and economic trends in their areas. It addresses data needs by purchasing data and facilitating data access, training people to analyze

data and facilitating dissemination²⁵. This model could be used to address other issues, such as child, youth and family well-being and/or government activities, expenditures and progress towards social goals.

The principles of the National Children's Alliance must shape its response to:

- the monitoring issues facing its members
- the need for third party monitoring to ensure progress for Canada's children, youth and families.

Looking at the monitoring situation through the lens of the National Children's Alliance raises a number of questions for discussion.

Questions for Discussion

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

²⁵ Canadian Council on Social Development Community Social Data Strategy, Statistics Canada Products Description, Prepared by Marie Anderson, Statistics Canada, September 2003

5.0 Why Should the National Children’s Alliance Play a Role in Third Party Monitoring?

As stated in the National Children’s Alliance’s October 7, 2003 Brief to the Standing Committee on Finance,

“The need for monitoring how children are living and how society is supporting them to flourish is critical in ensuring implementation of our international and domestic obligations to children ... The roles of the voluntary/NGO sector as the third party in monitoring implementation is recognized in {many} agreements.”

As stated, one of the main operating assumptions of this paper is that monitoring underpins the work of voluntary sector organizations. It is an essential support to public accountability, improved policies and improved social programs. In these ways, it helps us all achieve better outcomes for children, youth and families.

In *Securing Our Future*²⁶, the Standing Committee on Finance accepted the recommendation of the National Children’s Alliance to actively support the work of the voluntary/NGO sector as a third party monitor. However, the necessary funding and support mechanisms to see this concept through have not been forthcoming.

This section presents five arguments for moving forward as a collective in supporting third party monitoring of social policies relating to children, youth and families. Trends in the social context support these arguments. This section summarizes the positions taken at the 2002 Symposium regarding the principles of the National Children’s Alliance and its strengths and limitations supporting third party monitoring. It does not, however, make any arguments regarding the form that third party monitoring might take.

5.1 Monitoring is Essential to Research, Practice, Policy and Advocacy. We Have an Interest in Monitoring and Must Have Some Practical Plan in Mind To Ensure It Gets Done.

Data-based or evidence-based advocacy is viewed as more credible, compelling and influential than other forms of advocacy. It parallels a move in government, at least on paper, towards data-based decision making. When the stories that organizations communicate are based in evidence, in data, the audience (including governments, professionals and the general public) has more confidence in the interpretation of the problem and the solutions proposed.

Various monitoring underlie the four basic activities of the National Children’s Alliance: research, practice, policy and advocacy. As such, the National

²⁶ Standing Committee on Finance, *Securing Our Future*, November 2001, p.108.

Children's Alliance already has an interest in monitoring. Although member organizations participate in these activities to varying degrees, they share in the need for the information gathered through monitoring efforts, utilizing it in activities such as program development and advocacy.

Monitoring publications produced by Campaign 2000, the Canadian Coalition on the Rights of Children, the Canadian Council on Social Development, the Canadian Institute of Child Health, the Vanier Institute of the Family and others fill a well-documented need. Needs assessments and evaluations of some of these projects have clearly established that these publications are critical to a variety of activities engaged in by organizations in the voluntary sector. Further, it is clear that these documents do not provide all the information that organizations and individuals would like.²⁷

5.2 Provisions in Federal and Federal, Provincial and Territorial Agreements and Initiatives have created Monitoring Opportunities for the Voluntary Sector. Given Our Reliance on Monitoring, We Must Decide How to Respond to These Opportunities.

As described, provisions in federal/provincial/territorial agreements have created opportunities for third parties from the voluntary sector with an interest in child, youth and family social policy, to become stronger and more effective as contributors and monitors. These provisions commit governments to involve third parties in developing social policy and in monitoring and assessing progress towards social goals. The National Children's Alliance is in a position to use its collective voice to push governments to establish and maintain supportive mechanisms that would promote meaningful third party participation in social policy development and monitoring. These mechanisms might fall into a number of different categories from funding mechanisms to relationship-building mechanisms.

Federal public consultation exercises are not adequate mechanisms for voluntary sector involvement. They are generally episodic and are primarily designed to obtain information needed by government at a particular time. Government maintains control of process.

²⁷ CICH Profile III Needs Assessment, CICH Profile II Evaluation

5.3 Recent Events Have Clearly Demonstrated that Voluntary Sector Monitoring Projects are Very Vulnerable. We Need to Take A New Approach to Ensure the Continuation of Third Party Monitoring.

Recent events have underscored the vulnerability of child, youth and family monitoring projects in the voluntary sector. The Vanier Institute of the Family, the Canadian Council on Social Development, Campaign 2000, the Canadian Institute of Child Health and the Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children have all produced major monitoring publications. However, finding the funds for these projects has always been a difficult, time consuming and sometimes disappointing task. Currently, due to the tight funding environment, there is the possibility that these monitoring initiatives might not all be continued. Nor is it likely that new monitoring initiatives from other organizations will emerge to replace them.

With funding crunches in Health Canada, Human Resources Development Canada and other sources, it may continue to be difficult for individual projects in the voluntary sector to secure funding for monitoring. It is not clear that monitoring projects would be given priority over other projects. The capacity for research, practice, policy and advocacy work in the sector would be undermined.

In addition to funding crunches, there have been changes in funding approaches and mechanisms. Katherine Scott covers this topic in detail in her paper, *Funding Matters*. In brief, she describes:

- A shift away from core funding models
- An emphasis on short-term funds for targeted projects
- New funding models that increase government control over what organizations do and how
- Reluctance to fund administrative costs
- An increase in reporting requirements
- An emphasis on diversification of funding sources, partnerships

As a worst case scenario, these funding patterns may result in voluntary sector organizations that are jumping from one short-term project to another, dedicating considerable time and energy to reporting procedures, but having little time or resources available for watching the big picture.

5.4 Our Collective Access to Data and Data Analysis Skills a is a Fundamental Concern, Impacting on Our Capacity to Reach Our Individual Goals.

Given the acknowledged barriers that organizations face in relation to data access, there is a clear need for action. This action could be taken on a proposal

by proposal, organization by organization basis. This description characterizes the approach taken in the voluntary sector traditionally. When the Canadian Institute of Child Health, for example, seeks to produce a new edition of *The Health of Canada's Children: A CICH Profile*, it must devise a number of strategies (as none are likely to be entirely successful) for purchasing or otherwise arranging access to data. Other organizations go through similarly challenging processes.

A different approach would be to work collectively for data access and to build the capacity in the voluntary sector to analyze and use data. Such an approach has the potential to support all Alliance organizations in reaching their goals for children, youth and families. The Alliance would be acting well within its principles if they were to take on some role in this effort: it would not be competing with any member organization and; it would be focusing on a topic best managed collectively.

5.5 There is Substantial Untapped Potential in the Voluntary Sector that Could be Brought Forward to Inform Policy and Practice at the National Level

Organizations generate new knowledge in the course of monitoring their activities and their communities. This knowledge is currently used to inform policy and practice at an organizational local or regional level. The National Children's Alliance could play an important role in consolidating and synthesizing knowledge that is generated at the community and regional level and bringing that information forward to inform policy and practice at the national level.

5.6 Summary of Positions Put Forth at the 2002 Symposium.

In general, participants at the 2002 Alliance Symposium supported the idea of the National Children's Alliance taking a role in third party monitoring. Participants gave four main reasons for taking this position.

1. They believed in holding governments accountable to their commitments and considered third party monitoring key to achieving that goal.
2. They knew that they needed monitoring information in order to advocate for appropriate activities and expenditures to support children, youth and families in the community.
3. They knew that monitoring raises awareness of children's issues and increases the profile of the efforts of children's advocates and service providers.
4. They hoped that third party monitoring would prove an effective tool for pressuring governments to respond to the *actual* needs of children.
5. They recognized that if the members of the National Children's Alliance did not take this on, there were no likely alternative candidates waiting in the wings.

The strengths of the National Children's Alliance were identified as:

- Collective voice for organizations
- Knowledge of what is working in communities
- Connections with organizations in communities
- Connections with partners and potential partners in the public, private and voluntary sectors

The three "top-of-mind" problems identified by members of the National Children's Alliance were:

- Time
- Expertise
- Resources

Perhaps more telling are the other problems that emerged in discussion:

- Will – Monitoring is not part of the mandate of many Alliance organizations even if monitoring initiatives by other organizations support their work. Many organizations are already working to capacity and cannot take on additional tasks.
- Resistance to any new bureaucracy – the National Children's Alliance was never envisioned as another "institute".
- Concern that finding fault with initiatives, like the ECDI, might undermine these initiatives – Even though these initiatives are imperfect, they are important steps forward.

Ultimately, Alliance members need the government to live up to their commitments. The only way to ensure this is to (a) track child health and well-being indicators and (b) examine expenditures and activities and (c) assess the impact of these on local level services and programs. None of the problems identified at the Symposium are insurmountable. What is needed is an open discussion about all the potential functions of a monitoring mechanism and all the potential ways of carrying out those functions. This, in turn, would lead to a discussion of the different models for monitoring that could be supported by the National Children's Alliance.

The remaining sections of this paper provide the framework and initial building blocks for this discussion.

Discussion Questions

- 1.** How should the National Children's Alliance strategically respond to the monitoring crisis in the voluntary sector?
- 2.** How can the National Children's Alliance best make use of the opportunities for third parties created through government agreements?
- 3.** What role should the National Children's Alliance play in improving data access and building data analysis capacity in the sector?

6.0 Roles and Responsibilities/How Could the National Children's Alliance Add Value to the Current Monitoring Situation in Canada?

The discussion of the principles, strengths and history of the National Children's Alliance addressed questions about roles and responsibilities in very broad terms, highlighting the ways in which the National Children's Alliance could add value to current monitoring activities.

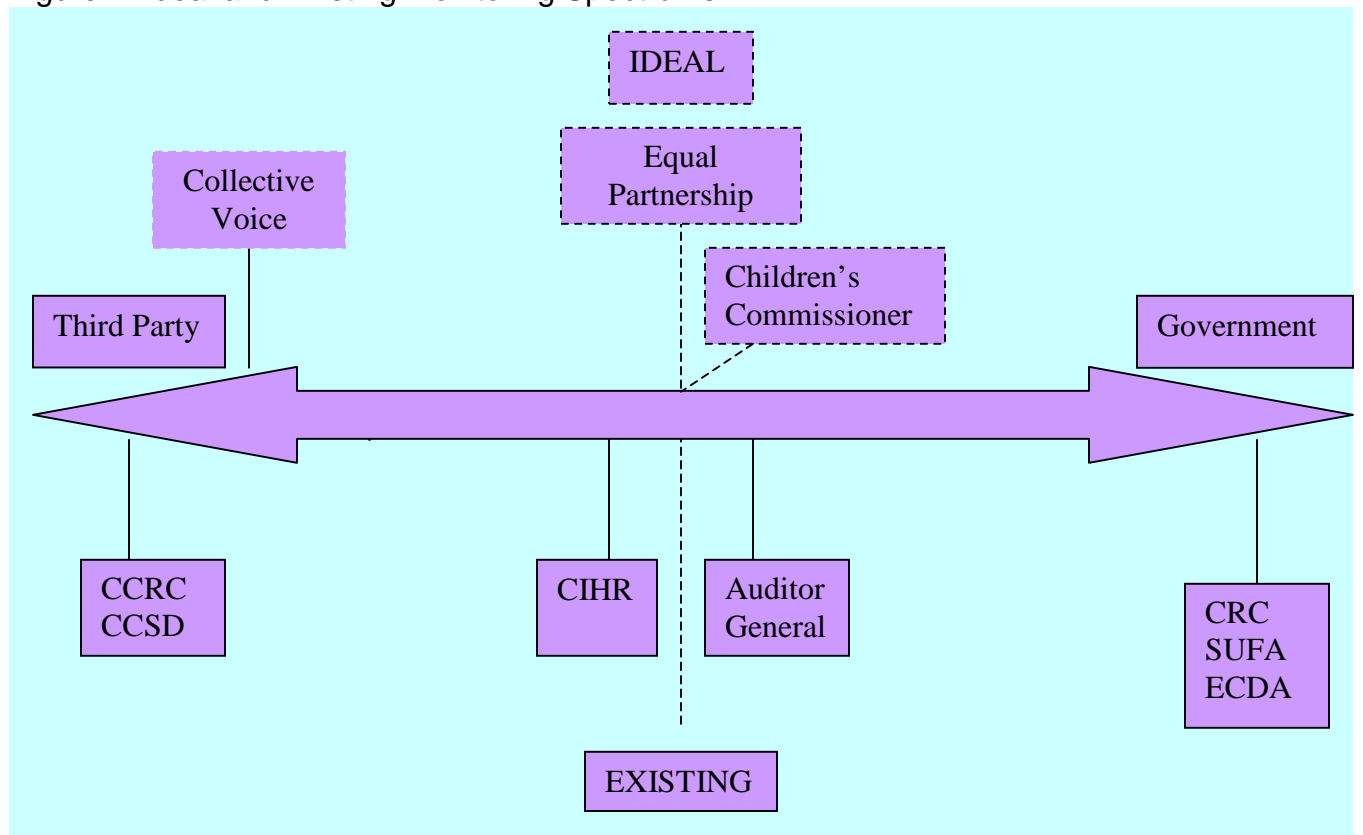
- benefits from a collective approach can be realized in areas such as data access, data utilization, and public reporting. Past experience has already demonstrated the value in developing common messages around key issues.
- monitoring is already an essential component in the work of the Alliance and that a more strategic, collective approach would not necessarily be more time or resource consuming.
- the Alliance is a credible vehicle for discussion, critical thinking and, in many cases, consensus. The Alliance has created trust through its open, transparent processes, and could realistically take on a role in coordination.
- the many challenges that cannot be overcome without government actions.

The principles, strengths and history of the National Children's Alliance are important considerations in the development of a detailed, specific plan for sustainable monitoring mechanisms.

Figure 1 (page 36) illustrates a view of the monitoring spectrum, with the bottom half of the figure representing existing monitoring models and the upper half representing ideal monitoring models. The far left side of the figure represents third parties from the voluntary sector and the far right side represents governments. The vertical dotted line represents a hypothetical point of true, equal partnership between third parties and government. Obviously, many more points could be established on this continuum that have been presented here. The examples that have been included are intended to initiate discussion of:

- what would constitute the ideal mix of mechanisms and models
- how the Alliance could play a role in moving from the existing mechanisms and models to the ideal

Figure 1: Ideal and Existing Monitoring Spectrums



Moving forward on this issue would likely involve:

- the development of data strategy that clearly delineates the spectrum of current resources, roles and responsibilities
- the articulation of a spectrum of ideal resources, roles and responsibilities
- the proposal of a range of mechanisms for sustainable monitoring.

The remainder of this paper provides a framework for discussion and later research on a data strategy and on sustainable monitoring mechanisms.

Questions for Discussion

1. How can the National Children's Alliance add value to the current spectrum?
2. What role is there for the Alliance in achieving "ideals"?

7.0 Data Strategy and Monitoring Mechanisms

Three things must happen to move forward on this issue. The first is the articulation of a clear direction for the National Children's Alliance to pursue in relation to third party monitoring. The second is the development of a data strategy and the third is the development of sustainable monitoring mechanisms.

7.1 The Need for a Data Strategy

The Symposium Paper of 2002 argued that, bottom-line, the voluntary sector needs a social indicator system that measures progress towards Canada's social goals for children, establishing benchmarks and setting goals. Indicators should clearly establish the health, rights and well-being of children. They should demonstrate how governments have supported improvement in the health, rights and well-being of children. They should form a seamless, comprehensive set, without gaps or jurisdictional incompatibilities. They should be respectful of child development, child rights and the principles of inclusion.

Currently, there is an opportunity to discuss the possible contributions of the National Children's Alliance in response to:

- The lack of funding mechanisms
- The lack of mechanisms for orchestrating monitoring across sectors
- The lack of mechanisms through which governments and the voluntary sector can regularly learn from each other
- Gaps in the monitoring landscape
- Barriers to data access
- Limits to the capacity of individual organizations to use data to reach their goals
- Barriers to strong relationships with institutional knowledge brokers

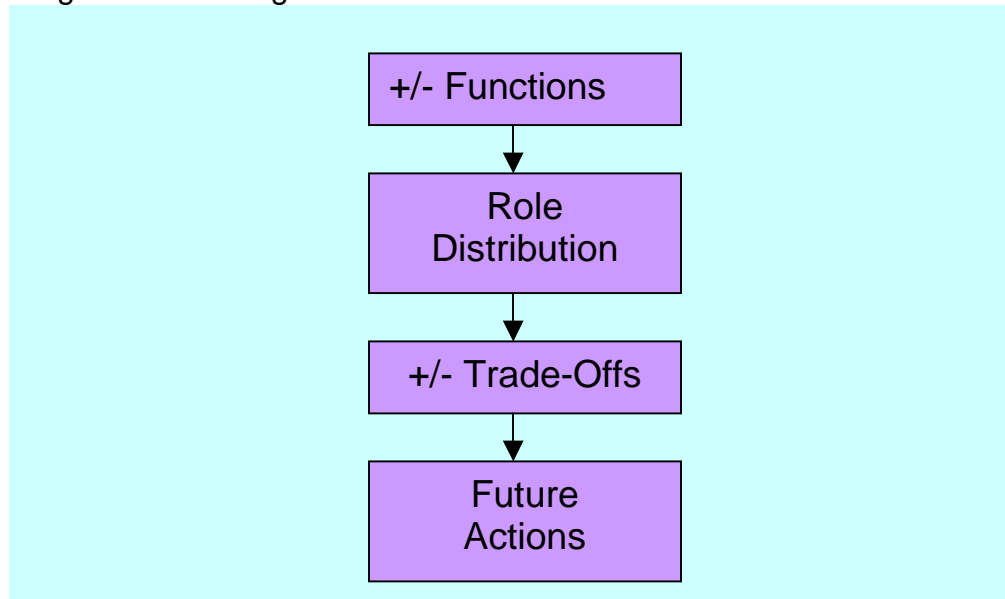
The Alliance's response to these issues will help to reshape the monitoring landscape. Developing a clear data strategy, that articulates the roles of the Alliance, individual Alliance organizations and other players, will be key.

7.2 Sustainable Monitoring – The Building Blocks

Aside from the obvious goal of successfully monitoring social progress, a monitoring mechanism should maximize opportunities for all interested parties to participate in the process. This section divides the process of devising a monitoring mechanism into four steps: selecting functions, distributing roles, assessing trade-offs, determining future actions.

Building Blocks

Diagram 4: Building Blocks For Collective Action



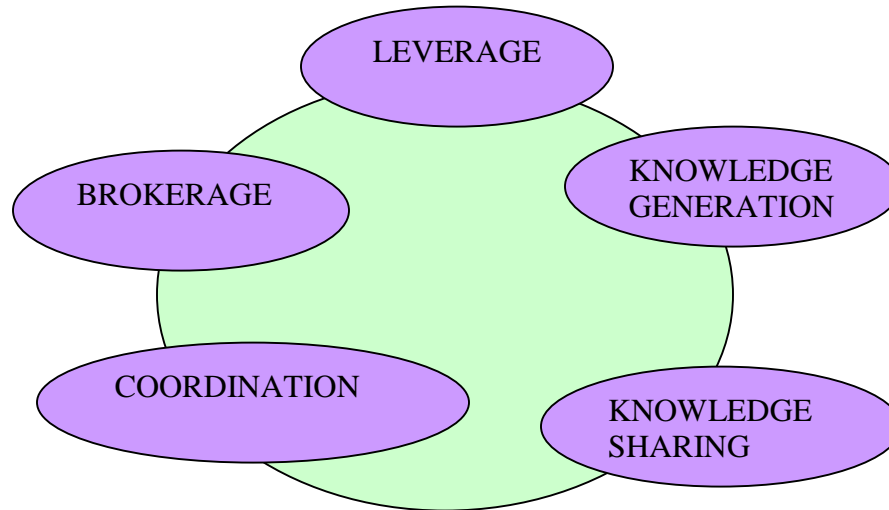
The decision to include (+) or not include (-) a particular function and decisions about roles will result in different models, each with its own advantages and disadvantages. It will be important for the Alliance to examine the trade-offs between models to determine how best to move forward. Settling on a model without closely examining the trade-offs could lead to frustration in practice.

The Functions

- Leverage Function (catalyst for data access, knowledge brokerage and/or research)
- Brokerage Function (facilitators, offering leadership, such as CCSD facilitating common access to information)
- Coordination Function (implementers, ensuring that all organizations involved are working together efficiently and to the best benefit of all)
- Knowledge Sharing Function (consolidators, producing and disseminating materials that share the knowledge acquired through monitoring)
- Knowledge Generation Function (generating new knowledge, materials, stories)

These functions can be illustrated as a wheel of interventions, rather than a ranked list :

Figure 2



Distribution of Roles

Once you begin to look at each function in greater detail, it is important to be clear what the more effective distribution of roles would be. Governments have traditionally had one perspective while the voluntary sector may have another. The players that have been identified in this paper include the National Children's Alliance, voluntary and community organizations, research institutions and governments. The National Children's Alliance is in a position to make and implement decisions about the distribution of roles and responsibilities within its membership. It is in a position to prioritize and forge connections with research institutes. However, The Alliance is not in a position to assign tasks to governments.

In considering the distribution of roles, the National Children's Alliance must keep in mind the governmental actions that would support third party monitoring. Clearly, governments could be doing more to and better monitoring and public reporting. They could also do more to support third party monitoring as per their commitments. Action could come in the form of:

- creating new government positions and/or offices
- ensuring excellent survey data on child outcomes
- finding ways to coordinate and advance current efforts
- developing new funding mechanism or altering existing ones to finance third party monitoring
- developing mechanisms to open and maintain dialogue with the voluntary sector
- finding ways to ensure comparable data across jurisdictions

Advocating that governments take on specific roles and responsibilities in relation to monitoring and public reporting would require a strong, collective voice.

Trade-Offs

One way of assessing the trade-offs between different approaches and mechanisms is to return to the five challenges most strongly mentioned by National Children's Alliance members at the 2002 Symposium:

- Time
- Resources
- Expertise
- Will
- Impact

How do various models respond to these challenges? These questions could be used to critique potential approaches and mechanisms.

7.3 Future Actions

What specific next steps are priorities for the National Children's Alliance? Discussions at the 2003 Symposium will address this question in detail; however, this paper has argued for two central activities.

- First, it has recommended the development of a detailed and concrete **Data Strategy For Third Party Monitoring**. This strategy would include coordinated plans for accessing and interpreting data, enhancing capacity to work effectively with data and identifying and addressing data gaps. The strategy would also include a flexible, community-responsive system of social indicators for monitoring Canada's progress towards its articulated goals for children.
- Second, it has encouraged the National Children's Alliance to reach consensus on the desirable functions of **Sustainable Third Party Monitoring Mechanisms** and the roles and responsibilities of National Children's Alliance and member organizations in implementing and maintaining sustainable third party monitoring. It has highlighted as much as possible the importance of agreeing on the areas where a collective voice can add value.

These activities fit within and expand upon the six steps for future action identified in the 2002 Symposium paper and should be considered within this broader framework.

1. Build consensus on what to monitor and how.
2. Build effective partnerships, across sectors.
3. Create political will.

4. Obtain financial resources.
5. Obtain data.
6. Enhance and improve advocacy strategies.

Questions for Discussion

1. What functions are essential to sustainable third party monitoring mechanisms for the National Children's Alliance?
2. What is the most desirable yet feasible distribution of roles and responsibilities?
3. What future actions are priorities?

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