Consultation Paper
on Land, Local Governance, and Rural Development

Prince Edward Island Advisory Council on the Status of Women

Submitted to the Commission on the Land and Local Governance and to the Rural Development Strategy

July 2009
Cover art: “A View of Stanhope,” by Lisa Murphy
Acrylic on canvas, 2008

Report Author: Jane Ledwell, on behalf of the
Advisory Council on the Status of Women
Contents

Introduction .................................................................................................................................................. 4
The Idea of “Rural” ..................................................................................................................................... 7
Women’s Contributions ............................................................................................................................. 9
The Value of “Land” .................................................................................................................................... 12
Coastal Land and Development .................................................................................................................. 15
The Question of Jurisdiction ...................................................................................................................... 17
The Issue of Incorporation .......................................................................................................................... 20
Governance Beyond Governments ............................................................................................................... 23
Women and Under-Represented Groups in Local Governance ................................................................. 25
Beginning with Our Differences .................................................................................................................. 29
Tradition, Change, and “Modern” Development Models ............................................................................ 30
Appropriate Rural Development ............................................................................................................... 33
Land, Development, and Environmental Health ....................................................................................... 36
Seasonality and Public Consultation ........................................................................................................ 39
Common Ground on Land, Governance, and Development ..................................................................... 40
Summary of Consensus Points .................................................................................................................... 43
Appendix A: Notes on Methods and Participants ...................................................................................... 46
Appendix B: Related Reading ..................................................................................................................... 47
Appendix C: Consultation Agenda and Questions ..................................................................................... 49
**Introduction**

In May and June of 2009, the Chairperson and staff of the PEI Advisory Council on the Status of Women (PEIACSW) consulted with twenty women from diverse walks of life about their views on land, local governance, and rural development. The Advisory Council’s key questions were about what is particular in women’s experience of land, governance, and rural development, and how government and its consultative processes could incorporate women’s insights in the processes of the Commission on the Land and Local Governance and the Rural Development Strategy. The women we spoke to saw overlap and continuity between land, local governance, and rural development, and this summary paper from our consultations contains a dynamic account of the relationship among all three.

The consultation made one thing clear: the lived, felt, and experienced effects of land use and development planning affect women deeply on emotional, economic, social, cultural, political, familial, and community levels. The quotations you will read below from consultation participants were expressed with thoughtfulness, erudition, anger, humour, hope, hopelessness, and despair. The Advisory Council has put a priority on telling their stories, in their words, with respect for their voices. The women we spoke to articulated *Island* stories that they felt strongly should be at the heart of legislative and policy change regarding land use, local governance, and rural development. Significant themes emerged, often repeatedly. Some of the most important are listed below:

- Food production and food security are essential to Prince Edward Island economy, landscapes, livelihoods, social interactions, wellness, and sustainability and must be regarded as central to land use and development planning. Primary producers on land and sea must be supported to make a living from food production.

- Environmental protection is essential to our co-survival with the plants, animals, and organisms with whom we share the Island. Sustainability must be a fundamental principle in land use and development planning, and the environmental health of humans and others must be considered in decision-making.

- Negotiating the line between primary production and environmental protection will require new and better models for collective decision-making and shared “ownership” in the decisions we make as Island citizens. New models should acknowledge and take as a starting point our
differences and our diversity and then develop inclusive, clear-sighted processes to determine common public interests.

- Constraints on land use and development, especially along the coastline, are needed. Stronger provincial regulation and expanded municipal powers could both contribute meaningfully to addressing development issues. However, these should be focussed on community needs, citizens’ wellness, and community-based consultative processes to create collective, multi-faceted visions and solutions.

- Women’s unique role to look to the past (to carry on tradition and memory) and to orient themselves to the future (by giving birth to, nurturing, supporting, and educating children) gives them an integral role in present consultations on land use and development. These processes must build from the best of the past and must look to the future. Solutions and shared interests become clearer when we look clearly and critically at where we have been and consider where we hope our children and children’s children may go.

- Women have a great deal to contribute to local governments and local developments, but structural change must take place to reduce barriers to their full and equal participation in political processes. These barriers range from lack of childcare to lack of collaborative models for decision-making to lack of meaningful jurisdiction over local issues.

- Models for development in rural Prince Edward Island should be particular to the Island. They should not be cut-and-pasted from other jurisdictions, but adapted with discretion. We must bypass development approaches that appear to be “modern” but that can be seen to be failing in jurisdictions similar to ours.

- Finding the right models for land use, local governance, and development will begin with finding the right consultation processes to include women, diversity groups, and under-represented or under-served groups in planning and decision-making. Policies, programs, and legislation should

---

**About the PEIACSW Mandate**

The Prince Edward Island Advisory Council on the Status of Women (PEIACSW) is a provincial government advisory body dedicated to supporting women’s full and equal participation in social, legal, cultural, economic, and political spheres of life.

The nine-member, government appointed Advisory Council regularly works in collaboration with government and community groups, undertakes research on issues of concern to women, offers analysis and recommendations to policy-makers, responds to media, and creates public education resources.

The Advisory Council has a legislated mandate to recommend legislation, policies, and practices to improve the status of women on Prince Edward Island.
consider their particular perspectives and respond to their sometimes different needs.

The Prince Edward Island Advisory Council on the Status of Women identifies “steps to ensure that women will benefit equally from government’s proposed economic development plans” (including the Island Prosperity Agenda and the Rural Development Strategy and related processes) as an area for priority action by the provincial government to advance women’s equality, an essential element of “Making Equality a Priority.” Government action to include women in development planning will again be assessed as part of the Status of Women’s next Equality Report Card in 2011.
**The Idea of “Rural”**

The Advisory Council on the Status of Women had termed its consultation on land, local governance, and rural development questions a consultation on “rural issues,” and even before the consultation officially began, the participants were beginning to question the meaning of “rural.” Several agreed that Prince Edward Island may usefully be considered entirely “rural.” One woman defined “rural” as “any land outside boundaries of a city” – but only when the city was fully urbanized, with “no primary production industries at work within its structure.” This seemed to hold out the possibility of Charlottetown and Summerside as kinds of rural “cities” that could continue to promote and nurture primary production industries on a small scale within their structure and that could embrace a more fluid relationship with the outlying countryside and surrounding water.

Others defined “rural” inclusively because of the far-reaching effects of “rural issues”: “I don’t think the message has gotten out about how important rural issues are and how much the whole Island is affected,” one woman said. “This message needs to get out.” Another expressed a common sense that “rural PEI is the unique feature of PEI.”

The rural landscape and lifestyle of Prince Edward Island are unique and distinctive features of Prince Edward Island, and sustaining the role of primary producers on land and sea, as well as the working landscapes of land and sea, must be central to planning for all land use, local governance, and rural development.

According to participants in our consultation, the core values of rural PEI are expressed in the work of primary producers. But farmers and fishers are, and are seen to be, under strain. A farmwoman said, with profound grief, “I feel sorry for all the young and old in an unfunny, dramatic, and difficult situation in rural PEI.” Another agreed, saying with equal emotion, “My family’s farm foreclosed in the 1970s. I did well as an individual since then, but now I see the same thing happening again to my best friends. Little has changed. I see an intentional disintegration of the rural community by governments in power.” Everyone had their own story. One woman said, “In my community, there are four dairy farms that will be gone in ten years. They have no encouragement and big debt.”

Concern about this is acute among the women we spoke to. “Food production has to be primary,” one woman forcefully stated. Another agreed, “Farmers struggle, and there are ripple effects.” And another added, “Supporting agriculture is so important. If we lose that, we lose so much
more than that.”

“What happens to PEI when the farmers and fishers go?” one woman asked. Another noted, “Tourism is not all about seeing city shops. It’s all the rural stuff that gets promoted. What will happen when tourists come and see no boats in the harbour, when they see weeds in the fields and no animals on them? Government is selling a vision of PEI that won’t be there.” One woman imagined the effects of all the Island’s tourist routes being lined with farmers’ protest signs.
Women’s Contributions

The women we spoke to were passionate in expressing why women’s views on land, local governance, and rural development are crucial to be heard. One emphasized, “Government has not heard fully from women, and women haven’t felt they have a sound line into government to be heard. Women in communities need to review how to build solidarity and get word to government. Women need support to meet and communicate, and [they need] processes to get ideas to government in a meaningful way. That’s why an initiative like today’s consultation is important.”

Others insisted on the centrality of women’s influence. One reminded participants that women make the majority of household purchase decisions in North America: “Women affect the economy for good or ill. Who shapes decisions based on consumption is a gender issue.” She went on to argue that women need to take responsibility for this themselves.

Participants spoke with deep respect about women elders, mothers, and grandmothers whose role in communities was to sustain memory, tradition, morality, and emotion: to ensure that their families and communities were mindful of the land and water. One recalled aunts and grandmothers, attached to the land, whose role was to “make sure the men remembered.” Another said, “Women are the moral compass, the ethical base, and the connector in many families. Changes in land use can take away women’s power and influence.”

Participants noted that many family and community traditions were associated with primary production and centred on food. “Historically, farming and fishing enterprises didn’t run without women,” said one participant. “They kept the tables and made sure food was brought out. A highlight of the harvest was meals. I worry what will happen to those traditions. How do we value food, the traditions of food, and the production of food, and how food brings families together now?”

One participant pointed to the reality-television show The Week the Women Went as a contemporary example “of the invisible work of rural women. Both seasons [were] from small communities and showed that women’s place in rural development was not valued” across a wide range of family situations. Making women’s work more visible was important to others, as well. “A community map of women’s activities would show how many [women] take in kids, are professionals who commute, are volunteers in the community, or work seasonally or in the service industry,” another participant suggested.
Planning for land use, local governance, and rural development should all apply specific indicators and measures that make visible and give value (economic and otherwise) to women’s activities in their homes and communities and identify the value of unpaid, underpaid, and voluntary work.

Numerous participants talked about the importance of women’s work on and off the farm in support of agriculture, or on and off the boat in support of fisheries. “Women provided more than was realized or counted in dollars and cents,” said one woman. Yet another participant cited the example of the National Farmers’ Union which “has long recognized the role of women in ‘farm families.’” She suggested this awareness needs to apply in the fisheries as well, “where women are needed to co-sign loan guarantees and are working in increasingly wide array of jobs in the fisheries.” One participant noted that we women ourselves need to change our language and take better credit for the roles we play: “We don’t hear these people call themselves fisherwomen or farmwomen enough,” she said.

And yet, participants widely acknowledged that “women’s jobs outside of the home often prop up fishing or farming enterprise. They subsidize all of that.” A farmwoman recalled, “My husband used to joke that his money was ‘pin money.’ My income sent the kids to university and fixed the house when it needed it.”

Current economic trends were of great concern to some participants. As one said, “They generally say PEI will be later to feel the effects [of the recession], but holy Hannah look what’s happening to our primary producers. Add a mentally challenged child to deal with, and how do people deal with it?” (Interestingly, another participant in a separate conversation spoke precisely about her reduced ability to play a role in a farm organization she was involved in when she took on new caregiving responsibilities for a person with a disability.)

Economics is a limited part of the equation for many women. “Farmers were never in it for the money,” said one participant. “What would [a farmwoman participant]’s hourly rate be for her work on the farm? They do it for love. What happens when the love and desire are gone?” Speaking hopefully, though, a farmwoman said, “I still think farming is the best life in the world.”

As one woman noted, many people work on the land or the sea as a “vocation,” deeply connected to their spirituality. Another pointed out that this choice is not without value or economic consequence. One woman said, “In post-War society, when science was seen as the activity that would bring prosperity to everyone, the concept of science asked us to set aside emotion and spirit, to set
them aside for strict rationality and ‘pure’ intellect. But current research shows that emotion and feeling are essential to good decision-making. A decision based only on rationality is not always a good decision. If people had decided about careers in farming or fishing over the years based on this type of thinking alone, few might choose to do it. Emotional factors must be considered, and there are often emotional benefits to living on – and from – the land.”

What is often unrecognized, she said, is that “through their emotional connection to occupations on land and sea, women contribute to the emotional well-being of this place. This is one factor in seeing this place as ‘welcoming,’ and ‘friendly.’

“As well, in terms of economic benefit, this friendliness and the landscape both affect tourism. If not maintained, we will not be able to draw people to visit the Island. Emotional well-being keeps Islanders at home and keeps people coming back. It is part of our special character that has a connection to land and sea.”

Another said, women may be more “emotional, passion-driven,” and that “women can express emotion – this is part of women’s role,” especially because it is a role that our culture has too often denied to men.
The Value of “Land”

First, there was a strong feeling that “land use” on Prince Edward Island is not simply about the “land.” As one woman put it, “We live on an Island, and the sea is an extension of the Island.” This is already evident in the ways land use affects watersheds, from the land outward; it may grow increasingly evident in the ways encroaching waters affect land use from the shoreline inward, especially as sea levels rise in response to global warming. The eventual effects of changes to land and sea as a result of climate change – and how these changes will influence land’s value and land-use planning – are not yet known.

Women frequently reflected on the changes they had witnessed in land use over their lifetimes. Their observations suggested changing “values” (interpreted both narrowly and broadly) attached to the land: “When I was growing up, I don’t remember ever seeing a ‘For Sale’ sign on land,” one woman said. Land changed hands sometimes, she recalled, but through independent personal negotiation, and often only as a “last resort.” “Now, land is highly commodified. There is high turnover in ownership where I live.”

Others made a more explicit link between “property values” and current development trends: “In addition to health concerns, the effects of high-voltage transmission lines, cell towers, and wind farms [are] having a dramatic effect on property values. In West Prince, they have in writing confirmation that their property has been devalued by 10 to 20% since the windmills have been placed near their property. People are reporting they are suffering negative health effects of wind farms but cannot sell their homes.”

Several participants talked about the sociological changes that arrive with changing land use: “There is change as farmland is forced out of production and subdivisions and houses grow,” one woman said. “People commute and are not as invested in the community. On my road, there are no working farms. Most [people] drive to Charlottetown. This changes the complexion of the community, when we force people out of this way of living [farming].” Another commented on uncontrolled ribbon development (development spread out narrowly along roads outlying a town or village) and the way it affected her sense of “community” growing up. She said, “Both of my parents grew up in villages on Prince Edward Island. I grew up on a road. We had to drive to work, to church, to the library, to town to get groceries, and we were bussed to school with other children who lived on roads. When we didn’t or couldn’t drive somewhere, we mostly played by ourselves. Our parents’ stories about their childhoods
full of neighbours sounded romantic but impossible.” She described her experience as a good reason to raise her children in a town, where they can walk to the library. “That would have been a dream for me when I was little,” she said.

There was common concern about farm-owners forced to sell to developers or to subdivide their own land in order to make a livable income, and there was irony expressed in the problem many farmers face that unsustainable development practices had so much economic value compared to something as essential as food production: “There’s a social problem,” one said pointedly, “in not having retirement income. We need land use planning. A different solution is needed.” She was echoed by others: “How do you make agreements about the land and use it to support people who are old and have a lot of land and need a succession plan? We want to work with people so they are taken good care of.” Another concluded that “to keep the price of land up where it should be something has to change. There has to be political will to pay the dollars and cents.”

Women spoke about possible solutions, from supported succession planning to public land trusts. One woman strongly urged support for the Federation of Agriculture’s recommendations on public land trusts in their submission to the Commission on the Land and Local Governance. She had seen a well-developed example of a public land trust in the United States: “They put the farm in trust,” she remembered. “The government has bought the land, but farmers are using it, and it has to be in agriculture to the end of time. The government has to be putting their money there. A young farmer can then invest in improving their life and making a half-decent living growing food. And this affects farmwomen, too.” Local examples of land trusts such as the L.M. Montgomery Land Trust and the Island Nature Trust point to the possibilities, potentials, and challenges land trust models would face in the economic and regulatory environment of Prince Edward Island. Lack of crown land was noted as a limiting factor.

**Going into the future, legislation and supports for agriculture must ensure a substantial portion of the Island’s land is protected for food production, and farmers must be supported to grow food. This will require many tools working together: local and provincial consensus-building around land use, investment in agriculture that makes food central and growing food sustainable, and financial support models for current farmers who wish to retire to be able to do so without being forced to sell their farms into development.**

A farmwoman noted, “My grandchildren love the farm. I look at these kids, and I think maybe
they will be farmers if the political will is there to preserve the land in food production. I don’t want my grandkids working for the tourists. I want them working for themselves." Her comments about future generations were strongly echoed when the discussion focussed on the particular problems associated with high-value coastal land.
Coastal Land and Development

One woman told the story of the small community association that formed in her coastal community. Originally, her group came together to save the one-room school structure: “That was the beginning of organizing and looking at where we would be down the road,” she said. Getting people to come to meetings was hard. Still, the issues they collectively wanted to address were large. Ambulance and fire services are at a distance (and time) from their community. “There is nothing in the community for seniors or young families,” she said. There’s a shared concern that children growing up will have to leave. “Our community is surrounded by big houses of non-residents who hire people around them to work for them,” she said with worry. She talked about social historian David Weale’s warning that without controls on coastal land development, year-round Islanders would be pushed into the centre of the Island, handing on a servant culture to our children’s children.

“I live on the water,” this woman said, “and the subdivisions are terrible to see. We’re losing hedgerows and green spaces to gated communities.” Another participant continued the critique of uncontrolled development by saying, “Housing distribution on PEI is unsupportable,” pointing to “rich houses on the coastline occupied only two weeks a year” as a special cause for concern. Many of these coastal housing developments are owned by non-residents: “Since the Bridge went in,” one woman said, “coastal land has been too expensive for Islanders to own or to buy.”

Some of the coastal development is seen as inappropriate; some is seen as despoiling. As one woman stated, “Underneath the Not-in-My-Backyard attitude, there is something real. The shore is beautiful, peaceful, and pristine. There are shared values about our coastline. We’re defined by it, and we will defend it against ugliness.”

The women suggested we have some tools already in place to protect and sustain coastal land: “We need to use our discretion and our jurisdiction,” one woman said.

To protect and sustain coastal land, we must assess the jurisdictional and constitutional tools we already have as a province, apply them with intelligence, and add to them as necessary to address specific current and foreseeable challenges we collectively agree are important.

Several participants were alarmed by a recent news report that several applications for
development along the shore were denied by the Island Regulatory and Appeals Commission, but that these decisions were overturned by the provincial government and all the applications were ultimately approved. This led to further confusion among participants about who, ultimately, has jurisdiction over what aspects of land, land use, and development.
The Question of Jurisdiction

Lack of clarity about jurisdiction was seen as a problem spanning land use, local governance, and rural development issues. A touchpoint for the discussion of jurisdiction was the recent protest against a cell tower development close to homes, schools, and protected green space on Mount Edward Road. Local residents were successful in convincing Charlottetown City Council to deny a building permit for the tower, but this local decision was overturned by Industry Canada.

The gender dimension of this issue was heightened in participants’ minds by the cell tower’s proximity to Mount St. Mary’s, a residence for the Sisters of St. Martha and the cloistered Sisters of the Precious Blood. “What the Marthas have contributed to the community over the years in service is inestimable,” one woman said. She pointed also to their tradition of environmental stewardship and their efforts to live sustainably on their small patch of land and to restore and protect an urban wetland area beside their residence. She was dismayed that their well-considered protest with their neighbours against a corporate cell tower in their backyards resulted in support from the community, but the decisions made by local, elected officials did not hold in the face of corporate pressure from the telecommunications giant Rogers Communication.

Said one woman, “What disturbs me is that Industry Canada had the power to overturn an elected government supported by their citizens, in favour of well-paid lobbyists on a red-carpeted track.” This was seen as inhibiting participation in local government: “Why volunteer as an elected councilor knowing at the end of the day you can be overruled by an anonymous federal agency?” one woman asked. Another said, “There are too many examples of top-down crushing of local democracy that is disempowering to women.”

One participant asked, “Who among us doesn’t have threats upon us?” Participants pointed to a tangled web of land use and development decisions recently overturned by out-ranking agencies or governments: Industry Canada overturned City Council in the Mt. Edward Road case; but in another case IRAC overturned City Council decisions about development that would force residents out of a nearby trailer park. At the same time, the residents of Mt. Edward Road are hopeful that the fact IRAC can overturn a City Council decision will provide a legal opening for overturning Industry Canada. And, as already noted, the Province overturned IRAC’s decisions about coastal land purchases. No wonder citizens are unsure where to turn.
For effective land use and development planning, governments must clarify who has jurisdiction over what kinds of decisions. As a general principle, the democratic decisions of local governments should take precedence on local issues.

Prince Edward Island itself is small enough that “local” can sometimes mean “provincial,” and establishing good and workable land use regulations probably should begin with strong provincial legislation. This legislation, however, can be made to function more effectively to value and protect the land and support stewardship of the surrounding sea if its provisions are echoed and expanded in local governance initiatives and rural development plans. In one participant’s words, “It takes a broad range of tools to protect land, water, and the pastoral and natural features of the Island’s landscape. This ranges from regulatory tools like the Environmental Protection Act to developing a set of incentives and mechanisms that enable protection of important areas without unduly penalizing landowners where these occur.”

Another participant articulated a shared question about shared values: “What could be a view of Prince Edward Island? Perhaps some green areas, some with development. Uncontrolled development with no vision or plan is not the answer. We need vision, laws, and plans that protect, for example, from public-access land being made private, with blocked access.”

There was an interest in creating “a picture of development from input all over the Island about where there can and can’t be development.” This must include “compensating people whose land will

**Tiny Resources**

*One Woman’s View from a Small Municipality*

One participant with experience on her local council in a small community summed it up: “My village is grappling with issues around being a municipality with no capacity to govern anything due to few resources.” She described her community as “170 people in 80 households, with seven volunteers on the local council. They take in $12,000 a year, plus $6,000 for a municipal grant to support a hall, a park, a library/CAP site, and kindergarten infrastructure. There is no staff, no bookkeeper. In terms of governance, the community wants people and groups to move in. We want infrastructure to provide services. The volunteer community council wants to make things available so that other volunteers can take advantage of them.”

There is one by-law unique to the community, but no by-law enforcement officer. “The municipality has a responsibility to respond [for instance, to a dog bite] but has no capacity.” They contract $5,000 for fire services but cannot afford to contract with the Humane Society. “There’s no effective way of governing,” she says.

In spite of challenges, she insists on the importance of local governments, “People living on land need to have collective input on decision-making... Local governments need power to make decisions, and resources. Decisions about the use of taxpayers’ dollars should be based on being elected.”
remain ‘green’ if that is part of the vision.” And it must be based on strong citizen-based democratic processes that have the potential to build community around diversity. As one woman said, “People living on the land need to have collective input in decision-making. It should never have to happen that an individual has to decide to subdivide their land and be ostracized for the decision.”
The Issue of Incorporation

One woman said, succinctly, “Rural PEI is effectively ungoverned.” Another worried that “we have 60 incorporated communities that cover 30% of the land.” Still, there was no consensus among women in our consultation on whether unincorporated parts of Prince Edward Island should all become part of municipalities. Some women had strong views in favour or against incorporation; others wanted to see a proposed model before deciding on its merits or demerits. “We need inclusive processes to work through these issues,” one woman said, noting that commissions are not elected.

There was a strong sense that the current consultation through the Commission on the Land and Local Governance should be a first – not a final – step towards greater incorporation. Women expressed that they wanted to see the Commission’s recommendations followed up with more intensive and inclusive local consultation, including elected representatives, to tease out the implications of any proposed models for increased incorporation.

Several women spoke in favour of all the Island’s land being incorporated. “I have a very strong view on municipalities being extended everywhere on PEI,” one woman said. “I live in a non-incorporated area. We use the services of a nearby incorporated community. Last summer, we watched a bull-dozer working and realized we have no say in land use near our home. We have no sense of belonging to [a community]. There’s at least some organization in a municipality with a little town council. There is more ability to engage in local governance.”

The advantages of “municipalizing” the whole province would include working against ribbon development and limiting building outside “coherent villages with sustainable services,” preventing further development of the kinds of isolated houses that make life so hard for elders, people with disabilities, people who need mental health and medical support, and people at risk of violence. There was a sense that greater incorporation may also be “sensible in terms of resources.”

Participants also recalled that there have been battles in the past over proposed incorporation in currently unincorporated areas, and these battles often boil down to how much it would cost households in annual taxes. If the benefits of incorporation can be convincingly established, and if municipal governments can be given sufficient tooth to protect and sustain local resources, one woman said, “It may be up to women within families to say that ecological integrity, sustainability, responsibility
Local Infrastructure

Some of the local infrastructure that people specifically mentioned as having great value:

- Libraries and CAP sites
- High-speed Internet
- Family centres
- Parks, walking trails, and recreation facilities
- Small rural schools
- Small hospitals
- Seniors’ housing close to supportive services
- Specialized transit services for people with disabilities
- Community halls
- Information and service delivery in accessible rural locations (such as Access PEI)
- At-home and close-to-home health services, such as home care for seniors, supports for pre- and post-natal care, addictions services, and mental health help

Support workers mentioned who could potentially be shared among several small municipalities:

- By-law enforcement officers
- Youth support workers
- Elder support workers
- Recreation coordinators

for the future, and social well-being” are more important than small increases in taxation.

However, in some economically challenged households, the argument against incorporation may necessarily begin and end with money. A number of participants knew of households on the brink, where even $100 extra a year may make a difference to their ability to meet basic needs. The needs of these households must not be dismissed.

The arguments against incorporating the whole Island were still about “value” when they weren’t about money. The chief concerns related to “poor governance or problems in governance”: “You see tax dollars going to pointless stuff when the community is falling apart,” one woman said. There were concerns about overspending on bureaucracy, over-emphasis on investment in sports facilities that were only used by privileged groups in the community (and in some cases mostly males), and spending on infrastructure and services that many would be unable to access due to limits on their income, transportation, and time.

Participants felt planning for incorporating municipalities would have to reckon with the question of what constitutes “community.” One participant asked, “Are ‘communities’ self-sufficient spots or geographic spots?” Some participants questioned whether some of the localities we currently call “communities” really are such.

Defining “community” will require local input about what features people use, appreciate, and identify with in their communities (from family centres to walking trails to parks to harbours). This survey of community-defining resources should necessarily include both services that support self-sufficiency and geographic features people use to define
boundaries, such as roads, vanished and existing landmarks, forests, coastlines, green spaces, or hedgerows.

Some work on community asset-mapping has been ably done through community development groups across the province, another important link between processes that support both land and local governance planning and rural economic development planning.

Undemocratic and unaccountable planning processes were another central concern among some participants. A concern came up among several participants about some communities’ “Official Plans,” where these plans have been developed by consultants rather than by consultation. “They hold supposedly public meetings to pass their ‘Official Plans,’ and then the by-laws are written according to this plan,” one woman said. She continued on to say her community’s council has committees, “but people are not sure who is on them.” These committees may have a limited capacity to consult or a limited understanding of consultation: “They may check in with the business community, but not residents or fishplant workers,” she said. This is not in her view “an enlightened approach” to planning.

Numerous women who participated in our consultation were interested in exploring possibilities of sharing resources among small municipalities, but they did not want to lose what they valued about smallness and locality. One woman praised the Kings County initiative taken by three mayors to pool their resources to hire a by-law officer as “a good start.”

**Any models that propose increased incorporation or are based on regional models should balance the benefits of local engagement and local governance with regional cooperation to meet shared needs. The priorities for regional services should be determined by local governments through consensus-building processes and should not be centrally dictated.**

“A village [like mine] with an active council doesn’t want to lose that, or its attachment to local infrastructure. We still need place,” one woman with experience on a local council said. She asked, “How can we honour small groups plus give the benefit [for instance] of regional youth or eldercare workers going from place to place?” Several others expressed a strong desire for local empowerment balanced with shared resources for regions.

“People know what they want and what they need,” one woman said. “Thinking must go into mechanisms for community participation. There are lots of ways we participate in communities. Maybe one answer would be to regionalize a bit to support local communities. It’s not an impossible challenge.”
Governance Beyond Governments

While women insisted on the importance of democratically elected governments leading decisions about development, key resources, resource-sharing, and infrastructure, they also called for an examination of governance beyond governments. One participant called for “a shift in the way government sees community organizations and values them, and respects local, community-based organizations and the wisdom they have.”

Another added, “Governance also includes the community organizations that are doing so much,” commenting as well that most of the labourforce in the voluntary sector is women, though in her view women again tend to cluster in the organizations with the fewest resources: “Even where we are dominant in the labour force, we put a glass ceiling over our own heads and bump around underneath,” she said.

Watershed groups were touted as having “wonderful models for getting input on environmental issues.” Home and School groups and denominational women’s groups such as the UCW and CWL were cited as influential in communities. The Women’s Institute was named as a vital example of rural women coming together in empowering and influential ways. “When local issues come up, [these groups] are all there, in whatever capacity they can be,” a participant said. Another struck a more elegiac note: “The institutions where women used to be paid attention to in the communities, the churches and the schools, are closing, too. Women had a vocal, active role, and now there is a gap there.”

While participants strongly emphasized the importance of community organizations as partners and advisers in democratic and decision-making processes, they clearly saw the work of creating structural supports for community organizations as a responsibility of elected governments. One woman described these supports as important to families as much as to community groups: “We’ve been downloading responsibility for social production from governments to households,” she said. “Government is responsible for social infrastructure and the structures to support these.”
Another participant said, “There are good ideas across Prince Edward Island. We need to be creative to find a way to match community input with the regulatory part of it” – to express public ideas in legislation and policy through good governance.

On the whole, the women we spoke to were hopeful about the role of municipal governments. “If we give up on local government, we may make it worse. We can’t give up on local government,” one said. Another said, “It’s easier to bring people to the table at a local level. It’s easier to bring different interests together, and this has a lot of potential. But systems change is needed. The lack of respect for people needs to change. We need better processes around accessibility, inclusion, and collaboration – processes that are good for women,” but this work is worth doing, with a focus on developing the inherent potential in local processes, organizations, and governments.

Discussion circled back to the need for feedback from both municipalities and unincorporated “satellites” towards a more comprehensive incorporation plan. These groups “might meet for discussion,” one participant suggested. “Government could meet with these groups to determine co-governed structures and planning for coastal areas, internal areas, and so on.”

---

**Power Lines**

**One Woman’s Story from an Unincorporated Area**

“We have a family cottage [near the north shore and in an unincorporated area]. Thirty years ago, there was nothing to the east or west of us. In the last ten years, there have been ten or so cottages put up. Suddenly, one of the non-resident cottage owners sends electrical lines down the shoreline to power her cottage, ruining the sightline. Later, she says, ‘I didn’t realize they would be so ugly.’ Then other cottages want electricity, and Maritime Electric runs the lines across our property. They got an easement through the best-producing part of our blueberry patch.

“They could have buried those power lines. Why mar my space so someone can be there in her cottage with electricity two weeks a year? Before the power lines, other [cottagers] came up with alternatives to electricity. They used generators or solar panels or did without.

“But, again, the cottage was outside an incorporated area. There are opportunities with municipal governments – as well as possible risks of lousy governments.”
Women and Under-Represented Groups in Local Governance

During the 2006 municipal elections across Prince Edward Island, the PEI Advisory Council on the Status of Women published an election guide for voters focused on areas of municipal responsibility that the Council members of the time felt were essential to women. Highlighted topics included safety, including prevention of violence against women; recreation, including equal opportunity for women and girls in local sports; culture, including public art, cultural diversity, and welcoming newcomers; environment, including promoting the ecological health of land, sea, people, plants, and animals; housing, including adequate, appropriate, affordable shelter; transportation, especially Island-wide accessible public transit; development, including support for women-led businesses; and more women in government and decision-making in local governments, community associations, community development groups, and First Nations bands. These topics and others remain of central interest to women across Prince Edward Island.

The consensus that “we need choices for the common good” is made complicated by the ongoing under-representation of women and diversity groups in elected government. As one woman asked, “How could women’s interests be advanced by involvement in local governance? It is important not to double women’s responsibility, but we have to insist on their voices and perspectives being heard.” Participants suggested women “bring in the voice of the community and family well-being, as well as a future orientation.”

According to the PEI Coalition for Women in Government, women held 30.1% of seats in municipal government following the 2006 municipal elections. Importantly, the number of women vying for seats in municipal government has been steadily increasing over three elections since 2000, from 13% of candidates in 2000, to 19.9% of candidates in 2003, to 25.2% of candidates in 2006.

In order for the number of women candidates and councillors in municipal elections to continue to grow, any proposed changes to municipal structures must be analyzed with an eye to potential gender differences in outcomes under new models.

Not all models are created “equal.” In April 2006, the PEI Advisory Council on the Status of
Women noted that the Municipal Legislative Reform report recommended that electing mayors and chairpersons at large may be a valid model. However, the Coalition for Women in Government’s analysis of the 2003 and 2006 municipal election results demonstrates significant gender differences in the results of different kinds of elections, and further analysis is needed to determine if new models could have a negative impact on the number of women elected as chairs in smaller municipalities.

The Coalition for Women in Government’s research showed that women are more likely to be elected as municipal councillors in communities which do not hold election polls. In 2003, women held 33.8% of the seats in communities that hold special meetings, though this lowered to 30.8% in 2006. In 2003 women held just 17.9% of council seats in larger municipalities which hold election polls, and though this increased dramatically to 27.6% in 2006, the reasons remain unexplained and further research into gender effects of the different election types remains important.

The participants in our consultation voiced diverse opinions about the barriers to women’s full and equal participation in their local governments. There was concern about acclamation, especially for “horrendous” positions in local governments: “No one wants the job [of mayor in my small municipality]. Who wants that kind of flak? It’s a 24/7 job for $4,000 a year for a mayor. And as a woman, you are much more of a target, without the respect.” Lack of respect for women in leadership was seen as a significant barrier.

Others also saw psychological, social, and cultural barriers to women running for office. One woman said, “There is a fear of governing among women.” Another noted, “People are exhausted and overcommitted. There’s complacency, and there’s worse. You are threatened by personal challenge when you express an opinion on anything.”

Due to lingering sexism, public attacks that focus on the person – and the personal – may be especially harsh on women. Participants observed that community criticism of outspoken women can be quick, scathing, and brutal. One woman reported hearing it said of a female official, “That old nag always has something to complain about.” Others agreed that the perception remains among some that an outspoken woman makes a man look bad: the attitude expressed to the male partner by sexist members of the community is, “You can’t keep control of your woman.” Corporate control and influence were significant barriers to women’s activism, as well – with male partners enforcing codes of silence on behalf of corporate interests, usually to protect their contract-dependent livelihoods. A primary producer reflected on her experience with an advocacy group for farmers: “Many of our women who were involved with Cavendish Farms and McCains literally had a gag order on them, with their husbands saying, ‘Be careful what this group says and does, it could affect our contracts.’”
Whether elected to local government or just active in local causes, women told us, “It’s hard to be an activist on PEI. And it’s hard for some women to speak in their own families.” One woman said her (supportive and caring) husband still asked her, “Why did they call you? Why do you have to be involved in everything?” One participant commented that “plenty of women don’t have the power or support in their homes, let alone their communities.”

Participants suggested solutions that could start at home and in their communities. One said, “We can do a lot just by helping a woman who is so under control [that is, controlled by her partner] – just by taking her out somewhere once in a while, helping her take a risk.” Another suggested the value of leading by example: “The outspoken ones get other women in the community more involved. There’s a personal value you feel when your opinion is valued. And I believe another woman would value that, too, if she got involved and spoke out.”

Still, the problem remains, according to participants: “Fewer women offer [for government] because it is too stressful in their family.” A key question that came up in multiple ways was this one: “How do we get the structural changes so that there is always childcare [or eldercare] for a meeting?” “Women must insist on structurally accessible consultation processes,” one participant expressed. Child and elder care are essential to improving access to local consultation and decision-making. “Women work on the farm and another outside job and have children. It’s hard to get out to meetings. If you can’t afford to hire childcare, you can’t get to the meeting,” one mother said. “I had a meeting last night and came to this consultation today, and I had to line up four other people to do the jobs I usually do.”

“When you have children or seniors to care for, it takes major coordination just to be able to do your own work,” a woman said. And yet, “There’s a travel allowance form for meetings, but none for children. Gas is important, but not child [or elder] care.” Women have a role to play in demanding childcare, and demanding that men ask for these services, too. “When key meetings come up, if women and men were together on it [demanding childcare], that would be a revolution in itself,” one participant urged. Again, women felt the solution had to begin with women: “Who else is there to tell them but us?” they asked.

To achieve more diverse and inclusive local governments, a key element of municipal reform must include structural, adequate financial support for child and elder care for elected municipal officials to participate in meetings. Whenever possible, times for meetings, consultations, and public hearings should privilege the schedules of people with caregiving responsibilities.
Attitudes, as well as structures, might be ripe for change. During the 2006 municipal elections, Coalition for Women in Government coordinator Kirstin Lund suggested that attracting more women into local government could be achieved by a real “focus on improving problem-solving and decision-making... Municipal governments could encourage more women to run by investing in learning how to be more collaborative and respectful in their decision-making processes and by expecting elected members to commit to working together instead of against one another.”

Examples of collaborative work on municipal councils are sadly needed. One participant in the consultation despaired, “It’s hard to even say where there would be an example of good local governance, to know how to build momentum.” Before more women volunteer to participate in local government, this sense of futility has to be overcome. “Women decide where to put their energy, and they probably prioritize family over local government, especially if they feel it’s really powerless, fruitless, or meaningless.”

The women we spoke with said with conviction that, however it is defined or delimited, municipal jurisdiction has to be meaningful. The decisions of local governments on issues of local interest must have power, and valid, democratic local regulation must be respected and must hold sway.
Beginning with Our Differences

The complex issues that face Islanders are numerous, and divisions can seem intractable between groups with different interests. One woman poignantly asked, “How can we come to agreements when [one participant in this consultation is] a potato farmer and [another participant in this consultation] fears potato farms and farm chemicals? There are so many small brush fires, there’s no chance for a concerted attack on what is happening.” However, the women we spoke with had inspiring insight into acknowledging difference and diversity as a starting point for finding common interests.

“Prince Edward Island has always been divided,” one said. “In past times, it was a Catholic/Protestant divide... We need to build from a point of difference. Our vision has to listen, not to silence those voices. The very large structural problem is that we have ‘monovision’ – we will thrive if we just do potatoes or just do pigs or just do chickens . . . When in fact, we thrive on plurality. Crafting a vision among difference is complicated, but it is the necessary way.”

A consultation process that starts from acknowledging differences – for instance, a process based on a model of deliberative dialogue – is an essential part of creating a multi-faceted plan for land, governance, and development that serves the shared interests of many.

Women talked about the importance, and the complexities, of families: the individuals in families are different from one another, and yet successful families have values and vision in common. As one participant said, “Women are now at a point of having some equity,” but, she added, “We have to strive in our immediate surroundings as well as government, and this supports building a rural development model in which the large community is a macrocosm of the smaller community and of the family. The whole relies on the diversity of the individuals within it. A model has to be built on hearing those voices.”
Tradition, Change, and “Modern” Development Models

Participants in our consultation were intent on finding models that were appropriate for Prince Edward Island and responsive to locally identified needs such as environmental sustainability, maintenance of food production, diversity and plurality of experience and points of view, and public access to land and sea.

“I’m worried about the way this economy is going for agriculture, food, and the world,” one woman said. The way land is valued in “modern” culture may be antithetical to this goal, and several participants in our consultation urged that Prince Edward Island should reject development trends that have already proven ineffective elsewhere. A participant with international development experience spoke about land and landlessness: “When I lived in India, it was very clear that the landless poor are the poorest of people. In the South Pacific, in Melanesia, the collective right to land is accepted as part of lineage. People who live there have a right to access to land. And yet aid agencies are trying to get them to be ‘modern.’” She reached back into PEI tradition for parallel examples of the importance of access to land for self-sustaining families and communities. “We’re used to inequity,” she said, but pointed out that in the past, “households were in poverty, but they had no debt. They had salt fish, a pig salted, and they had land with vegetables. Where is the place for these stories?”

A large number of the women we spoke to were deeply concerned that contemporary federal, provincial, and municipal governments are approaching rural development by applying globalized economic strategies that have already failed, are failing, or are likely to fail soon. “Several governments have assumed a straight line progression from rural economies to industrialization,” one participant said. “They assume primary industries will collapse and secondary industries will take over, and technology will save us. This is an old paradigm that sweeps across many parts of the world.”

They saw no reason to participate in these globalized failures and took seriously the old saying about Prince Edward Island that “we’re so far behind, we’re ahead.” One woman said, “We’re not corporate America, nor do we want to be.” Another pointed out, “In many parts of the world, globalization is almost passé, and the idea of ‘local’ is being rethought. Many around the world are redefining these terms.” Prince Edward Island’s responsibility is to challenge prevailing thinking, in its own interests and for its own preservation.

“We have young people on Prince Edward Island who couldn’t crack the service industry, and now we’re expecting them to crack biotechnology?”
Appropriate models for development for Prince Edward Island should reflect changing relationships between the “global” and the “local” and complex understanding of how “tradition” and “modernity” meet in the contemporary context of Prince Edward Island’s social, cultural, political, and environmental landscape. Development planning should come from a deep sense of what we do well, what we can do better, and what we uniquely have to offer in our Island geography and demography.

“The local and the global are always both at our doorstep, and we need a new relationship with them,” one woman said. “We need to collapse and control them. What’s needed is clear‐sighted analysis of the changes we’ve seen. But if we clear out the ‘local,’ the global won’t work. We won’t be able to go back when we are landless poor servants and providers of all‐the‐same‐size potatoes for fast food chains. It is daunting.” Someone else observed, “[We] must resist the globalization. [We’re] told to buy local, yet PEI shuts down pork [and maybe in the future] beef plants and imports from Europe and Japan.” “We want safe, healthy, good local food,” reiterated another participant.

One participant touted old-fashioned values: “Working together as a family, learning the values of cutting up a pig: these are old-fashioned values, old-fashioned stories that instill responsibility in kids” – but another rejected the dichotomy between “tradition” and “modernity.” She said. “Tradition was already modern; tradition is still present in what is modern,” she said. “Tradition and modernity co‐exist. PEI has always been globalized – think about Prohibition. How much more modern could you get than [smuggling rum]? We’ve never been old-fashioned.” However, discontinuity in tradition – the inability
to pass on land and knowledge of land-ways and sea-ways to children was an important theme for several participants. “I’m retirement age, but still farming. We have land, buildings, and farmland, and enough work for a hired man. We planned to leave the land to the children, but they are non-farmers. My husband and I used to joke we made the mistake of sending our children to [post-secondary education] in Charlottetown.” Participants expressed fear that when a farm is gone, it is truly gone and unrecoverable, for the farmers themselves as well as for their children. A participant whose family farm operation raises animals for meat said, “I am torn in my own life – loving the rural nature of our home and knowing that it was hard work for two parents to provide the kids the opportunity to be involved in extra-curricular and social activities. My kids love their Island home, but it is only a place for holidays for them, and I do not know if I and others like us can maintain the family seat. Will I have to go when the turkeys go?”

Participants who were mothers were clear that they wanted their children to have the best choices possible available to them. However, they saw the areas targeted for “opportunity” potentially narrowed (not broadened) by short-sighted development planning. “We have to question the idea of ‘modernity,’” one participant said. “We have young people on Prince Edward Island who couldn’t crack the service industry, and now we’re expecting them to crack biotechnology?” Another agreed, “We need to think in a different mode, in a different way. The Minister of Agriculture told [one farmwoman nearing retirement], ‘Don’t worry, there will be lots of high-tech jobs. You can get a better education to take advantage of them.’ Where is the hope if that’s their attitude?” Another woman echoed this: “Rural women sew a quilt of income together from many pieces,” she said. “They are not going to go to do a university degree for bioscience – especially without childcare.”

As an alternative, the women we spoke to saw potential in models that are based on what we have done and continue to do well and distinctively: “We need to demonstrate to the rest of Canada that the world will soon want what we already have here: the example here of what agriculture and community really are.”

The value of Island natural areas and undeveloped ecosystems as a respite from “modernity” were something another participant valued strongly: “Conservation of natural areas like sand dunes, salt marshes, and old-growth woodlands are obviously important for environmental reasons, but also important for people. We need areas where we can seek the solitude of nature and refresh ourselves away from the fast-paced world.” A development model based on difference, not on sameness, was again essential to the women we spoke to.
Appropriate Rural Development

As one woman asked, “Why live here if not for love of the land, the culture, and the community?” On a less encouraging note, she added, “Our industries are going nowhere.” In her view, provincial government plans are for “a future based on urban life and urbanization.” Another woman said, “For people who live in the country, it’s a choice – but it is not an economic choice.” Employment strategies are needed for people who live and want to stay in rural communities. Yet again, another participant said unequivocally that “rural development is about how you support primary producers.”

While there was skepticism among participants about the role of biotechnology and the current focus on high-tech jobs as the “answer” for Island prosperity, access to technology was still seen as potentially fundamental to a good rural development strategy. “Technology will help bridge the divide between the rural and urban,” one woman said. “With my own computer and high-speed Internet, I could effectively work from home. But it also needs to be affordable – then the ‘globe is your business.’ You can make money globally and spent it locally.” She noted the need to be able to live where you work and gave examples of “so many communities decimated by loss of services and amenities.”

Women saw wraparound services as essential to enable women and under-represented groups to participate fully in the economy, culture, society, and political life of rural PEI – and to take advantage of employment opportunities. Without policies and programs that support such things as sufficient childcare, eldercare, affordable transportation options, freedom from violence, and livable incomes, many vulnerable women and groups will be able to benefit from even the best-planned and best-funded rural development programs.

Questions for Appropriate Development

*Shared by Participants from a PEI Working Group for a Livable Income document, adapted from the PEI Food Security Network*

- Does this new strategy make sure that all citizens will have meaningful labour market engagement?
- Does it ensure that women will benefit equally with men from the new opportunities?
- Does it ensure that this proposed development does not deepen the gender gap?
- Will there be inclusive and accessible educational opportunities for people with disabilities?
- Will there be accessible transportation and infrastructure for all Islanders?
- Does this strategy respect Island heritage and traditional values, as well as emerging constructive insights and points of view?
- Does it address the needs of our primary industries or have an integrated plan focussed on revitalizing our rural communities?

“Rural women sew together a quilt of income from many pieces.”

Essential, supportive services that enable women and vulnerable groups to benefit
more equally from economic development include transit and transportation, child and elder care, violence prevention services, supports for food security, literacy development, and livable wages and incomes. Policies and programs that address these wraparound services support women and others to take advantage of training, education, and employment opportunities, and to benefit more equally from economic development.

A participant who has worked with unemployed rural youth talked about the value of investment in these kinds of wraparound services to get youth job-ready. A participant who has worked with people with disabilities said, “We know people with disabilities thrive in rural communities where they can manoeuvre with emotional and physical support.” The need for these supports and services was a primary argument that “development needs to cluster around services and groups of people” – and not be clustered in undeveloped, barren areas far from easy access by citizens. (The exception to this would be developments with potential negative health effects for nearby

---

**Getting There**

**One Woman’s Reflections on Prenatal Care**

One consultation participant talked about women’s access to pre- and post-natal supports as a lens through which to see some of rural women’s challenges in accessing basic public services such as healthcare and in participating fully in rural communities. Her reflections flowed from her experience of hearing healthcare providers’ stories of women showing up to have a baby without having had any prenatal care at all.

“Women have distances to deal with,” she said. “There are services they can’t access if they don’t drive. Transportation is a major issue. How do people get there to receive health care? Isolation is a big concern. The hard-to-reach people are the ones [the healthcare providers] are always concerned about.

“When I think of young mothers, I also think of the ‘forgotten fathers,’ who need to be there to support a young mother. And [the healthcare system and community] need to reach them so they can be supported, too. Their presence has huge impacts on supports, mental health, and breastfeeding decisions. But [no one knows] how to get hold of them. They are transient. They are here, there, and everywhere.” (She was not able to account for the factors that might allow these males the freedom of movement to be “transient” while some of their partners might be stranded without access to a car for doctors’ appointments.)

She continued, “It’s all fine and dandy for young women to show up for prenatal care or a parenting course, but there are all these other factors in her life: what’s going on in her home? For some, no one really knows it, but they are really homeless. They may have low income and can’t pay rent. They may have illness through their pregnancies, or job loss as a result of illness during pregnancy. Sometimes there’s good family support, and sometimes there isn’t. And especially if you are ‘working poor,’ you are betwixt and between. You might seem okay to others, but they don’t know what’s your struggle.”

A new struggle arises if a baby has special needs or a unique medical problem in rural PEI: “Those parents might have no other person near them in the same boat to share their experiences with. There is no support group because of lack of numbers.”
residents; these evidently require undeveloped, barren, uninhabited spaces.)

Some participants suggested a strong need to reframe our thinking about what constitutes a “valuable” contribution to work and society. For instance, one woman suggested we consider the positive aspects of an economy based on seasonal work, which is often assumed to be a negative in our work-driven society and culture (which nonetheless takes a narrow definition of “work.”): “There can be opportunities from seasonal work for women,” one participant said. “[Seasonal work] supports caregiving, for example. If seasonal work is institutionalized and adequately funded as a dynamic way to support income in rural communities, it can support volunteer opportunities, [including] support for libraries, for children’s activities.”

A woman with experience working with at-risk youth also recognized skills and values that are under-recognized and under-developed, though she first painted a bleak picture of the situation of the youth she had worked with: “The barriers they faced were so much greater, even in the last five-year span,” she said. “If you had your wits about you at all, you went West. Those left behind are broken. They are experiencing lack of education. Many have addictions, sometimes from the effects of violence.” But, she insisted, these young people have skills that (like seasonal work) are not being valued, even though they might provide a firm basis for self- and community development. “You see a caginess about money that is valued in business people but not in income-gathering people. [The youth I worked with] know to the minute when the UCCB cheque, their ‘Stephen Harper money,’ is deposited in their bank accounts.” Their economic knowledge and savvy budgeting could be built on. “We don’t want them to only know how to ‘work the system,’” the participant said. “We don’t want them ‘left behind’ like the economic Rapture has come. That would be a terrible vision.”

In one community, someone who is not active on her local development group said that there are still a lot of functions in her community around children, and that volunteers tend to be moms, and “this makes it a nice place to live.” But even with strong volunteerism in communities, and perhaps because of the reliance on volunteers, struggle remains an essential part of the story: “We struggle in our tiny own spheres with tiny amounts of money to maintain tiny infrastructure so volunteers can provide services. That’s community development in [my community].”
Land, Development, and Environmental Health

Throughout our consultation, the theme of negative health effects on women from environmentally deleterious practices, inappropriate development, and lax regulation was important. The women we spoke to were passionate about preserving both the Island’s environment and Islanders’ health. They were acutely aware of land use and development’s potential health effects on women and children. “It will be important to conserve the Island’s environment as part of future land use and local governance processes,” one woman said. “This is important for all people, but obviously very important to women and their children, as we are the ones whose health is most impacted by negative things that happen in our environment.”

It is established, for instance, that the effects of some pesticides are particularly significant for women and children, particularly pregnant women and fetuses. Nitrates are known to have potentially serious effects on infants. Some studies have suggested exposure to electromagnetic fields can increase risk of miscarriage for pregnant women and increase the incidence of childhood leukemia.

Yet some of these arguments are dismissed as alarmist or are attacked as scientifically unestablished. Nevertheless, it is also the case that these environmental factors cannot ethically be scientifically tested directly on pregnant women’s or infants’ bodies. It is also the case that Prince Edward Island’s small population, wide population distribution, and relatively low density make epidemiological studies almost impossible for some conditions (such as relatively rare cancers). It is not scientifically defensible or ethical to allow women and children and other Islanders to be forced to be guinea pigs in their home environments for the long-term effects of chemicals and other agents in the environment.

A flashpoint for discussion of environmental health was the development of wind energy in rural PEI: “The issue which is at the forefront in my awareness re: development is electromagnetic pollution,” one woman said. “In West Prince the landscape has been turned into an industrial farm with the construction of windmills which will never be taken down long after they have served their purpose. The health effects of high voltage transmission lines, wind turbines, and cell towers [have] been studied (in the case of high-voltage transmission lines since 1979) and many countries in the world have developed
regulations to protect citizens.”

Women saw evidence of encroachment even into areas seen as safe, healthy, and to some extent protected by appropriate development. “You can smell spraying, that chemical smell, when you go on rails to trails,” one said. Another said, “High voltage transmission lines have been placed along 26 kilometres of the Confederation Trail… a place that people think is a healthy place to exercise.”

It is perhaps for these reasons that women have been at the forefront in insisting on use of the precautionary principle and application of the Earth Charter in local decisions about land use and development. The precautionary principle states that if an action or policy might plausibly cause harm to the public or to the environment, until scientific consensus exists that harm would not result, the burden of proof falls on those who would advocate taking the action. Women in localities across Prince Edward Island – from Gowan Brae to Caledonia to Mt. Edward Road to Millvale to Miscouche to North Cape – have called for best-practice standards (especially those based on international experience and comparison) rather than minimum standards for use of chemical fertilizers, pesticides, and genetically modified organisms; and for placement of power lines, wind turbines, and cell towers or other wireless hubs. As noted above, groups have had some significant success in making these arguments at the local level (for instance, Charlottetown City Council) but have been overturned at “higher” levels of jurisdiction with apparently “lower” standards. Concern about corporate control is not insignificant among the women we spoke with. The women we spoke to expressed passionate resistance to the unearned and unelected power and influence of transnational wind developers, telecommunications companies, utility corporations, and vertically integrated agricultural companies.

Where issues of rural development may have different health impacts on women and children compared to men, the precautionary principle should be applied. Proximity should be privileged in decisions about land and development: people should have the power to make decisions at the local level about issues that potentially affect the health of citizens in their locality. Decisions made at a distance should not overrule democratic local decisions.

The need for change in development planning and land use policy was seen as urgent. As one woman said, “While industries like agriculture and forestry are needed, they can be managed in a more environmentally friendly way. Some efforts have been made in this regard, but unless we pick up the pace, the effects of nitrates in our rivers and ponds [are] getting dangerously irreversible.”

There was strong acknowledgment that some primary producers (especially conventional
farmers) will need income support to be able to adopt more environmentally friendly practices. “There are concerns about chemicals on the land, but for farmers to switch over and to make a profit government must help them and support them to make a change.” Of a local organic farmer, she said, “He’s not makin’ ‘er big.” Another participant agreed: “If a farmer is doing okay and is asked to do it a different way, there has to be bridge funding. Farmers would probably like to change, if they could make a living.” In the fisheries, participants suggested the best means to support environmental stewardship among less-conservation-minded fishers was to open up fisheries management organizations to include more women, and especially conservation-minded women.

Support for primary producers was seen as important by participants for another very important reason: the link between food, food security, and good health. Supporting food producers was seen as integral to supporting the physical health and wellness of Islanders. “We are in a state of ill health on Prince Edward Island,” one woman said. “We see rare cancers, obesity, and children not eating properly. This is related to the state of the rural economy. We see how our diet has changed, and how our taste has change, in real, qualitative ways.” Another said, “I’m worried about chronic disease and the effects of years and years of fast food.”

Alongside chronic diseases such as diabetes and health factors such as obesity as significant health concerns with ever-expanding effects stand mental health issues. One participant made a clear link between changes in the rural economy and mental health: “First of all, you have to have a person healthy and of clear mind,” she said. “When people experience depression and develop unhappy ways of looking at things, they can’t advocate for themselves.”

She saw mental health problems, especially depression, as a factor that will only increase with deepening effects of recession: “One thing that is impacting is the economy,” she said. “You’re looking for work, trying to keep your head on your shoulders. How do you cope with the impact of all these stressors? How do [unemployed people] view the world in a hopeful, happy state? I spoke to someone who was going down to sign up for EI because their job status changed. They couldn’t get ‘up’ enough to get there on that day, to sit in a chair and answer 50,000 challenging questions. They just couldn’t face it.”
Seasonality and Public Consultation

A strong message that we were asked to convey is the inappropriate timing of the current consultations on land, local governance, and rural development. The economic activities in rural Prince Edward Island are reaching their peak in June and July. Primary producers, in particular, are busy on land and sea and may be less able than others to have their say on issues that affect them directly and significantly. Several primary producers were unable to take part in our consultation because they were farming or fishing. Those who participated made extraordinary efforts to be available.

The absence of a more representative number of primary producers was keenly felt among participants. “Timing is a symbolic but important thing,” one woman said. Said another, “It says something about values.” Yet another felt, “It shows how little government understands or cares about rural communities. Consultation has just become a word to add to it.” Another participant framed access to consultations in gender terms, saying, “We have to think about effects on women and families, but it’s hard for women to get to consultations.”

In future, public consultation processes on land, local governance, rural development, and similar issues that touch rural people and rural economies should be held from November to March, and never in the high seasons for primary production and seasonal employment.
**Common Ground on Land, Governance, and Development**

When the Advisory Council on the Status of Women planned a consultation on rural issues, our immediate goal was to engage the voices of a diversity of Island women in the current questions about land, local governance, and rural development and to compile women’s insights and points of consensus for the Commission on the Land and Local Governance and the Advisory Council on Rural Development. The ultimate value of the consultation turned out to be both richer and deeper. In speaking among each other, we put into practice some of the principles we see as essential to true consultation. (See text box.) Other important elements of consultation were impossible to offer with limited resources: for instance, support for childcare and elder care, or honoraria for participants, to reimburse their volunteer time. Still, we wanted to share these principles and better practices of consultation with you as commissioners and advisers, because they represent a model that is inclusive and yields richness.

When they discussed next steps to support sustainable land use, good local governance, and visionary rural development, the women who participated in our consultation spoke first of what they and other women could do. One woman talked about ways to encourage male partners to be allies in bringing issues forward in the public sphere. Another talked about the children’s play groups she hosts as an opportunity for consciousness-raising: “Now I’m thinking that when I [have a play group with children and other mothers], there’s an opportunity to try to talk about these issues, and [using play groups in this way] may work for others.”

---

**More Inclusive Consultation**

**Processes We Used to Compile the Information in This Report**

- gathering around a table – but also going out of our way to employ other means (including technological ones) to include those who for whatever reason could not get to the table
- hearing and challenging each other’s ideas, with respect for diverse experience
- beginning from a point of acknowledging difference among ourselves
- admitting the possibility that even common interests still can contain multiple points of view
- acknowledging power imbalances and their effects to silence voices with less power, then working to bring those voices out of silence
- asking questions that allow us to tell stories that are at the centre of our identities, histories, and passions
- creating space for self-education and consensus-building
- valuing the consultation itself as a means to collectively increase awareness, share views, and increase empowerment
Women imagined ways to collaborate as “Women in Support of Rural Communities,” or “Women in Support of Rural Families” on a decentralize model, gathering to work around kitchen tables to address essential issues. Women acknowledged the ways this work was already in progress, and the ways this work has been approached in the past, especially respected past models such as Women in Support of Agriculture and Women in Support of Fisheries. One woman had a recommendation for future action by the PEI Advisory Council on the Status of Women: “I would like to see a workshop of rural island women to move this forward with the ACSW,” she said.

While the women we spoke to had talked feelingly about women’s role in preserving and carrying on tradition in families and communities, there was a strong sense that women can equally contribute to change when they are included and consulted. One woman said, “For change to happen, we may have to let go of things. We need to be consulted and to own the change, though. If you help develop the vision, if you buy in, then you own the change.” This woman championed women’s potential for active and activist roles in local issues: “When an issue affects someone, they want something to do,” she said. Rural women’s challenge, then, is “to make [the whole Island] see it does affect them, whether they have a farm or a boat or a kid in school.”

A strong consensus emerged that Prince Edward Island requires new and better public processes to develop agreements on what our shared interests are. Vision and broad consensus must come from the grassroots, but leadership and commitment must come from the top. As one participant put it, “There need to be many facets to a plan so it works for many people in many different ways. Any official plan for PEI needs to have legislation and power behind it, and it needs to be from the ground up.” Another described the “missing pieces” of our “common ground” being a sense of “public benefit and common well-being.”

Finally, one woman bridged past, present, and future across the wide field of land, local governance, and rural development and concluded, “The idea of ‘rural’ needs to be queried. The idea of ‘development’ needs to be queried too. Currently eroded communities had developed. Someone cannot decide we are starting with a clean slate. Farming and fishing are not finished. It’s time to look at what other small jurisdictions are doing and make plans. We must not talk as though we’re finished.”

The public phase of the Commission on the Land and Local Governance is complete, but the participants in our consultation were hopeful that thoughts about consultative processes would help to inform planning for local governance. The public consultation on the Rural Development Strategy has just begun, and the plans are encouraging so far, with a background document in circulation, a balanced Advisory Council, public hearings (unfortunately scheduled for summer), an online questionnaire, and
plans to follow up with focus groups. We hope at least one of these focus groups will look at gender impacts of the proposed Rural Development Strategy.

In any event, we must keep talking about issues of land, local governance, and rural development in a purposeful and directed way which leads to effective actions and regulatory changes that respond to inclusive, broad-based, and diverse consensus-building processes among citizens – especially those citizens most affected by change. We must be especially sure to consider the particular needs and interests of women. We must talk about the issues of land and sea, but we must not talk as though we’re finished.
**Summary of Consensus Points**

- The rural landscape and lifestyle of Prince Edward Island are unique and distinctive features of Prince Edward Island, and sustaining the role of primary producers on land and sea, as well as the working landscapes of land and sea, must be central to planning for all land use, local governance, and rural development.

- Planning for land use, local governance, and rural development should all apply specific indicators and measures that make visible and give value (economic and otherwise) to women’s activities in their homes and communities and identify the value of unpaid, underpaid, and voluntary work.

- Going into the future, legislation and supports for agriculture must ensure a substantial portion of the Island’s land is protected for food production, and farmers must be supported to grow food. This will require many tools working together: local and provincial consensus-building around land use, investment in agriculture that makes food central and growing food sustainable, and financial support models for current farmers who wish to retire to be able to do so without being forced to sell their farms into development.

- To protect and sustain coastal land, we must assess the jurisdictional and constitutional tools we already have as a province, apply them with intelligence, and add to them as necessary to address specific current and foreseeable challenges we collectively agree are important.

- For effective land use and development planning, governments must clarify who has jurisdiction over what kinds of decisions. As a general principle, the democratic decisions of local governments should take precedence on local issues.

- There was a strong sense that the current consultation through the Commission on the Land and Local Governance should be a first – not a final – step towards greater incorporation. Women expressed that they wanted to see the Commission’s recommendations followed up with more intensive and inclusive local consultation, including elected representatives, to tease out the implications of any proposed models for increased incorporation.
Any models that propose increased incorporation or are based on regional models should balance the benefits of local engagement and local governance with regional cooperation to meet shared needs. The priorities for regional services should be determined by local governments through consensus-building processes and should not be centrally dictated.

In order for the number of women candidates and councillors in municipal elections to continue to grow, any proposed changes to municipal structures must be analyzed with an eye to potential gender differences in outcomes under new models.

To achieve more diverse and inclusive local governments, a key element of municipal reform must include structural, adequate financial support for child and elder care for elected municipal officials to participate in meetings. Whenever possible, times for meetings, consultations, and public hearings should privilege the schedules of people with caregiving responsibilities.

A consultation process that starts from acknowledging differences – for instance, a process based on a model of deliberative dialogue – is an essential part of creating a multi-faceted plan for land, governance, and development that serves the shared interests of many.

Appropriate models for development for Prince Edward Island should reflect changing relationships between the “global” and the “local” and complex understanding of how “tradition” and “modernity” meet in the contemporary context of Prince Edward Island’s social, cultural, political, and environmental landscape. Development planning should come from a deep sense of what we do well, what we can do better, and what we uniquely have to offer in our Island geography and demography.

Essential, supportive services that enable women and vulnerable groups to benefit more equally from economic development include transit and transportation, child and elder care, violence prevention services, supports for food security, literacy development, and livable wages and incomes. Policies and programs that address these wraparound services support women and others to take advantage of training, education, and employment opportunities, and to benefit more equally from economic development.
Where issues of rural development may have different health impacts on women and children compared to men, the precautionary principle should be applied. Proximity should be privileged in decisions about land and development: people should have the power to make decisions at the local level about issues that potentially affect the health of citizens in their locality. Decisions made at a distance should not overrule democratic local decisions.

In future, public consultation processes on land, local governance, rural development, and similar issues that touch rural people and rural economies should be held from November to March, and never in the high seasons for primary production and seasonal employment.
Appendix A: Notes on Method and Participants

This consultation paper is based on focus groups, interviews, and e-mail exchanges with twenty women and additionally incorporates research by staff of the PEI Advisory Council on the Status of Women and experience and points of view from the government-appointed Advisory Council members.

Twelve women (including Council and staff participants) took part in a three-hour focus group at the Council of People with Disabilities Boardroom in Charlottetown. In addition, four women offered input by e-mail; another four were interviewed in person or by telephone. The Advisory Council offered to host a second focus group in Summerside, but the proposed timing did not accommodate enough women, so interested participants were interviewed by telephone or e-mail or both.

The Council heard from women who live in communities in Eastern Kings, Central Kings, and Southern Kings; rural North, South, and Central Queens; East Prince and West Prince, as well as a small number of women who currently live in the cities of Charlottetown or Summerside and towns such as Stratford. The participants were invited based on suggestions by members and staff of the Advisory Council on the Status of Women and then from additional suggestions by confirmed participants.

For reasons described in the brief, some groups of women are under-represented in this consultation, since June is crucial work time for many women workers and their families.

The women who participated in this consultation include women with experience in parenting, caregiving, and household management; farming, fishing, tourism; writing and songwriting; community development and international development; education and libraries; public health and mental health; policy research and industry-based research; biology, anthropology, historical conservation, and comparative island studies; violence prevention; and entrepreneurship – among other things.

The participants are active in their communities with their community councils or associations; with primary producers’ organizations including the National Farmers’ Union, the Federation of Agriculture, and Women for Environmental Sustainability (a fisheries group); with volunteer service organizations such as Home and School, 4-H, Women’s Institute, and religious women’s organizations; with environmental, watershed, and conservation groups; with cultural and historical organizations; and with groups that represent and advocate for rural people and services, for people with disabilities, for youth, for diverse and under-represented populations, and for women’s equality.

The Advisory Council members who are presenting this paper include senior women and young women, rural and urban women, women from the First Nations and Acadian communities, women who have experienced violence or who work with women who experience violence, and women with diverse kinds of families.
Appendix B: Related Reading

From the Prince Edward Island Advisory Council on the Status of Women


From the PEI Coalition for Women in Government


From the PEI Food Security Network

- **Notes from Sowing the Seeds: Food Security in PEI** (March 2009). *Notes from a workshop exploring the breadth of perspectives on food security issues on PEI.* Available
Notes from Policy Directions Workshop on *Growing the Island Way: The Next Chapter for the Agriculture and Agri-food Economy of Prince Edward Island* (April 2009). Available

From the Atlantic Social Economy and Sustainability Research Network

- At the Table: Exploring Women’s Roles in the PEI Fishery. Charlottetown: Institute of Island Studies, 2009
Appendix C: Consultation Agenda and Questions

PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND ADVISORY COUNCIL ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN
CONSULTATION ON RURAL ISSUES
To inform a submission to the Commission on Land and Local Governance
and the Rural Development Strategy

Tuesday, May 26, 2009 ~ 1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.
Council of People with Disabilities Boardroom, 5 Lower Malpeque Road, Charlottetown, PEI

AGENDA

1:00 Welcome and Introductions

What makes you interested in land and rural issues?

1:20 Roundtable Discussion of “Land” and Land Use

What is particular about PEI women’s relationship with and to land and land use in the province, in historical and contemporary terms? What is the role of women in relation to the land in PEI, especially in rural PEI? Does legislation and regulation reflect women’s relationship and role? Why or why not?

1:50 Roundtable Discussion of Local Governance

Why is local governance important to the land and to the women and men, plants, and animals that live on it? How does good or bad local governance affect women in particular and diversity groups as well? Are women and diversity groups fairly represented in local governance processes? If not, how could changes to local governance improve women’s inclusion and promote full participation?

2:30 Roundtable Discussion of Rural Development

What do the lives of rural women look like today on PEI? How do rural women’s realities affect the way our rural communities look today on PEI?
What kinds of models of rural development you see evidence of in your communities? Are these effective or not? Do they fully include women or not? Why or why not?
What would a more fully inclusive rural development model look like? What wraparound supports and services would it include? How would it actively demonstrate the value of equality, inclusion, and diversity? What could our communities look like?

3:30 Conclusions and Other Ideas

[NOTE: These questions were also shared with women who participated in the consultation by telephone and e-mail interviews.]