

Public policy and the participation of rural Nova Scotia women in the new economy ^[1]

Author: Manicom, Ann; Rhymes, Janet; Armour, Nan & Parsons, Doreen

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Abstract:

Public Policy and the Participation of Rural Nova Scotia Women in the New Economy is the final report of a research project that addressed two main questions: How can rural women take advantage of new economy opportunities, particularly those linked to new technologies? And, what kind of policies do rural women need to facilitate their full participation in the new economy? The research, carried out in Nova Scotia between April 2003 and January 2004, employed multiple methods (literature review, documentary analysis, interviews and statistical analysis).

A significant number of federal and provincial public policies and resultant programs were examined to identify the key contributors to women's economic status. Consultations with service providers and with those involved in the policy process at provincial and regional federal levels explored issues facing rural women in the new economy, and barriers resulting from policies and policy implementation.

The greatest challenges to women's full participation in the new economy are found in economic policies that do not pay attention to rural women, social policies that are inadequate and exclusionary, and the lack of widespread integration of social and economic policies. Inclusion will only be a reality if these policies are constructed within a system-wide framework of gender awareness and accountability. Overall system-wide policies and strategies must be implemented to identify places in the inter- and intra-governmental systems where the needs of particular groups of women are not met.

Women are invisible in economic policies in Nova Scotia and Canada. In fact, policymakers discount the very notion that gender has anything to do with economic policy. This infers that economic policy is unrelated to issues that fall within a social policy framework, such as child care and income assistance levels. The evidence demonstrates quite the opposite. The preference for gender-neutral policies has actually neglected women and worked against women's economic progress.

A range of policy reforms must be considered for rural women to participate fully. The report includes recommendations for federally and provincially mandated gender analysis in decision making and program accountability in economic and social policy processes, as well as suggestions for particular economic, social and rural policies.

The research was conducted as a Nova Scotia case study, but many of the findings have broader application to women in rural areas in other provinces and territories.

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