



CANADA WITHOUT POVERTY
CANADA SANS PAUVRETÉ

Human Rights and Poverty Reduction Strategies

**A Guide to International Human Rights Law
and its Domestic Application in Poverty Reduction Strategies**

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Foreward

By most measures, Canada is a very wealthy nation with a stable economy. During the most recent global recession, for example, Canada weathered the storm relatively well, outperforming most other advanced economies. Canada is a successful country and yet, its successes have not benefited everyone within its borders. Serious problems of poverty and inequality persist, trends that show no signs of letting up. Since 1999, for instance, 66 cents of every new dollar of real wealth has gone to the wealthiest 20 percent of Canadians and 23 cents has gone to the upper-middle class, leaving a paltry dime for the bottom 60 percent. The rich are getting richer, and the poor are most certainly getting poorer.

Today, over 4.8 million people in Canada are living in poverty. They struggle daily to pay rent, put food on the table, heat their homes and find secure jobs that pay enough to make ends meet. Many of those who live this abject reality are from marginalized groups — immigrants, indigenous people, racialized communities, single mothers and persons with disabilities, to name a few.

Many provincial and municipal governments acknowledge the stubbornness of poverty in Canada and have come to understand that poverty itself is a costly problem. These realizations have generated numerous Poverty Reduction Strategies in communities across the country. While these strategies may boast varying degrees of success, none have proven to be transformative nor have any come close to ‘solving’ the poverty problem.

At the international level, poverty is defined as a human rights crisis. It is about people being denied their basic human rights. From this understanding has emerged a new framework for addressing poverty, one that moves away from the traditional approach of viewing poverty reduction as an act of charity to an approach that sees poverty reduction as justice.

This Guide is not intended to replace existing Poverty Reduction Strategies, but to inform their development and execution. It is designed to complement, strengthen and give greater meaning to the vital work that is already being done to address poverty in provinces and municipalities across Canada.

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At the international level, poverty is defined as a human rights crisis. It is about people being denied their basic human rights.

I. Introduction

This Guide is also for you. It helps you understand human rights issues and explains how they are relevant to your everyday work.

Who should read this guide?

Every day in communities across Canada, important work is being done to improve the lives of people living in poverty. The purpose of this Guide is to introduce the people doing this work — from policymakers to frontline workers — to the human rights approach to poverty reduction.

If you are a provincial, territorial, municipal or First Nations official, and you are in the position to advance policies that address poverty and ensure all of your constituents enjoy a good quality of life, this Guide is for you. It helps you understand your human rights obligations and explains how to incorporate a human rights approach into provincial, territorial and municipal poverty reduction plans.

If you are a frontline worker, you see the impact of poverty on a daily basis. You may be a social worker, health care worker, shelter worker or anyone else who works with low-income clients. This Guide is also for you. It helps you understand human rights issues and explains how they are relevant to your everyday work.

Examples of our intended audience:

You are a **provincial cabinet minister.**

Your government has committed itself to develop a new strategy for reducing poverty throughout the province. Your goal is to draft effective policy that ensures the best outcomes.

You are a **social worker** who works

with homeless clients. Your everyday work involves helping people in your community to find shelter space, affordable housing, mental health resources and addiction services. You want your clients to access the services they need without stigma or shame.

You are a **member of a band council**

in a northern First Nations community. Your constituents face high food costs and substandard housing. You are especially concerned that many have to travel far from the community to visit a doctor. You want everyone to be able to access their basic needs in their own community.

You are a **settlement worker for immigrants and refugees.**

Every day, you help newcomers to Canada access the services they need. You connect them with schools, health care providers, language services and other community resources. You want your clients to feel safe, welcome and respected in their new country.

You are a **representative elected to sit on your town council.**

Many of your constituents are low-income residents who are struggling to get by. You are concerned about poverty in your community and want to make positive changes to improve the lives of your constituents.

What you will learn from this guide

- What human rights are and how they are relevant to your work in poverty reduction;
- What the human rights approach is and why it is important;
- How to incorporate a human rights approach into your poverty reduction plans;

II. The Human Rights Approach to Poverty Reduction

Canada has ratified a number of Covenants, meaning that it has committed itself to take action domestically to respect, protect and fulfil the rights and obligations outlined in these agreements.

What are human rights and where do they come from?

You've all heard the term **'human rights'** before, but what exactly does it mean? While there are many definitions of human rights, one of the most thorough explanations comes from the United Nations:

Human rights are rights inherent to all human beings, whatever our nationality, place of residence, sex, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, language or any other status. We are all equally entitled to our human rights without discrimination. These rights are all interrelated, interdependent and indivisible.

The basic idea behind human rights, then, is that there are certain rights everyone is entitled to, regardless of who they are or where they come from, simply because we are all part of the human family. These rights do not just exist in theory; they are guaranteed by law. In Canada, for instance, we have the Charter of Rights and Freedoms in our Constitution. The Charter guarantees a set of basic rights that cannot be violated by government action, inaction or legislation. We also have the Canadian Human Rights Act, and every province and territory has its own human rights legislation.

There are many international agreements about human rights. Some examples include the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Canada has ratified a number of these, meaning that it has committed itself to take action domestically to respect, protect and fulfil the rights and obligations outlined in these agreements. This Guide focuses on these rights — international human rights — and how to make them a reality for people living in poverty across Canada.

How are human rights relevant to my work?

At this point you might be thinking, “what do these international human rights agreements have to do with me?” Under international human rights law, human rights obligations extend to all levels of government. This means that while Canada signs and ratifies international treaties, the responsibility to meet the obligations set forth in those agreements falls not only to the federal government, but to provincial, territorial, municipal and Aboriginal governments as well.

This point — that all levels of government are bound to uphold international human rights — is especially crucial given that international human rights law recognizes many rights that are important for people living in poverty. Currently in Canada, we have no national strategy for addressing poverty and homelessness and much of the responsibility for tackling these issues falls to provincial, territorial, municipal and Aboriginal governments.

Consider, for instance, the example of a basic right that continues to go unmet everyday across Canada: the right to housing. Many decisions that impact the right to housing, such as building social housing units, enacting rent controls, preventing evictions or constructing homeless shelters, are decisions taken at the provincial or local level — i.e. they are not federal government responsibilities, per se. Because of this arrangement, it is only with the proactive involvement of provincial and local governments that the right to housing can be realized. It is arguably also the case that local governments are better positioned to address housing needs because they are closer to the housing realities of their communities.¹

As policymakers working in provincial, territorial, municipal or Aboriginal governments, it's crucial you understand your responsibilities and the rights that are important for people living in poverty when developing poverty reduction plans for your community.

Frontline workers, too, bear the responsibility for poverty reduction, because they help to put government plans into action. As a frontline worker, you work on poverty issues on a daily basis and perform the work necessary to improve the lives of people living in poverty. It's important for you to recognize the rights that are important for people living in poverty because you play a key role in ensuring that poverty reduction plans are successful. Understanding these rights can help you to make everyday decisions that affirm the rights of the community you serve and better advocate for people living in poverty.

Currently in Canada, we have no national strategy for addressing poverty and homelessness and much of the responsibility for tackling these issues falls to provincial, territorial, municipal and Aboriginal governments.

It is only with the proactive involvement of provincial and local governments that the right to housing can be realized.

¹ For further information, see the Report of the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to adequate housing titled "The Role of Local and Subnational Governments with Respect to the Right to Adequate Housing." Available here: <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Housing/Pages/AnnualReports.aspx>.

The human rights approach focuses on meeting the needs of people living in poverty by realizing their human rights.

What human rights are important for people living in poverty?

- right to work
- right to adequate food
- right to adequate housing
- right to health
- right to education
- right to personal security & privacy
- right of equal access to justice
- civil & political rights

When people live in poverty, they lack basic necessities required for an adequate standard of living. Insufficient livelihoods, hunger, poor nutrition, homelessness, substandard housing and discrimination are among the issues faced by people living in poverty. While all human rights are important, the rights that affirm the essentials of life are especially relevant for people living in poverty. These rights are listed here. You'll learn more about these rights later in this Guide, including what they mean and how to make them a reality for people living in poverty across Canada.

What is the human rights approach?

What exactly do we mean by 'the human rights approach to poverty reduction'? As we've seen, human rights belong to everyone in the human family. Everyone has the right to housing and to adequate food, for instance. Of course, people living in poverty often do not have adequate housing or food. The human rights approach to poverty understands this lack as a human rights violation rather than the result of bad decisions made by an individual, or the failure of policies and programs. Poverty must be identified as the denial of basic human rights and once identified as such, it must be remedied as such.

The human rights approach focuses on meeting the needs of people living in poverty by **realizing their human rights**. This involves creating poverty plans that are grounded in human rights principles and that take human rights into account during its development. Part III of this Guide teaches you how to do this in your province, territory or municipality.

Why is the human rights approach the right approach?

None of the poverty reduction plans currently in place in Canada take a human rights approach. Why does this matter? Here are a few reasons:

It's our legal obligation.

Canada has committed itself at the international level to respect, protect and fulfil the human rights of people living in poverty. Poverty reduction or elimination is not an act of charity, but a legal obligation, and it's one that falls to all levels of government, even municipalities. Reducing poverty isn't only something that we should do from a moral point of view, but it's also something we must do if we are to honour our commitments as a country.

It empowers people living in poverty.

The human rights approach is centered on the dignity of people living in poverty. It encourages their participation in the decisions that affect their lives. It promotes equality and seeks to end discrimination against them. These features of the human rights approach work to ensure that people living in poverty are respected and valued in their communities.

It's effective.

Some key features of the human rights approach make it more effective in tackling poverty than traditional approaches. These features include participation in the process by people with lived experience of poverty and a focus on accountability.

When people live in poverty, they lack basic necessities required for an adequate standard of living.

III. The Human Rights Approach in Action

Now that you're familiar with the idea behind the human rights approach, it's time to translate theory into practice. The remainder of this Guide addresses two key questions:

How should you develop the plan to address poverty?

What should the plan incorporate?

These questions are important because the human rights approach is about both **process and content**. In other words, it's not just about what goes into the poverty reduction plan, but it's also about how it's developed.

The following sections discuss the features a poverty reduction plan must have in order to be compatible with a human rights approach, as identified by **the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights**.

This part of the Guide teaches you about:

1. Identifying people living in poverty
2. Incorporating international human rights standards
3. Consulting people who live in poverty
4. Promoting substantive equality and non-discrimination
5. Setting goals and timelines
6. Monitoring progress
7. Ensuring accountability

As you read through these sections, you'll learn how to develop a poverty reduction plan taking a human rights approach and view examples of success.

i. Identifying people living in poverty

Who are the people living in poverty in your province or community? At first glance, this might seem like a simple question. Surely, if poverty is about income, a person or family earning below a certain amount can be categorized as ‘poor’, right? Unfortunately, poverty is much more complicated than drawing a line in the sand. While living in poverty does mean living low income, it means so much more than this as well. This section discusses the official measures of poverty and attempts to shed some light on how diverse the experience of poverty can be.

In Canada, the question of who is poor is most often answered with reference to one of three economic measures: the Low-Income Cut off (After-Tax) (LICO-AT), the Low Income Measure (LIM) or the Market Basket Measure (MBM).

- **LICO-AT** - The LICO-AT is the level at which a household spends 63.6% of its household income on food, shelter and clothing.
- **LIM** - The LIM is a relative measure of low-income set at 50% of the median income. If household income is at 50% or lower than the median income, that household is said to be living on a low income.
- **MBM** - The MBM measures the ability of a household to purchase a basket of essential goods including housing, nutritious food, transportation, personal care and household items.

Generally, the LICO-AT and the LIM are the preferred measures because they recognize that poverty is not merely about income level, but is about the ability of individuals and families to access basic goods and services. However, even these measures fail to capture the full picture when it comes to poverty.

Poverty takes many different forms. It may mean being homeless and living in a shelter, on the streets, or doubled up with friends. It may mean receiving social assistance, working three part-time jobs, relying on a food bank to survive, or falling deep into debt to pay for much-needed medication. It may mean chronic unemployment or underemployment, being unable to locate affordable child-care services, pay tuition or access help for addiction issues.

All of the above scenarios form part of the portrait of what ‘living in poverty’ looks like. How then, will you identify who is living in poverty in your province, territory or municipality when designing a poverty reduction plan? How will you identify the signs of poverty as a frontline worker?

Poverty does not only mean a lack of resources. It means lack of capacity, choices, security and power needed to enjoy an adequate standard of living.

Poverty takes
many different
forms.

The human rights approach requires you to:

- see poverty in broader terms than just income;
- respect the dignity of people living in poverty;
- recognize the vast range of experiences of people living in poverty;
- identify the groups within your province or community who are especially and/or uniquely impacted by poverty;

ii. Incorporating international human rights standards

Part II of this Guide presented you with a list of human rights that are important for people living in poverty. These rights are highlighted because they deal mainly with the essentials of life — food, housing, work — i.e., the things people living in poverty often struggle to obtain and maintain. At the international level, there has been a lot of discussion about these rights, what they mean for people living in poverty and how they can be realized in practice. The list below provides more detail about some of these human rights.

Right to work

Everyone has the right to work and secure a livelihood for themselves. Under international law, the right to work means the right to decent² work, which means it must be safe and fairly paid. Wages are an especially important consideration for policymakers because many people living in poverty are employed (sometimes in two or three jobs) and still struggle to make ends meet. Moreover, the right to work includes the ability to access assistance — such as unemployment insurance — when a person is not able to work or when jobs are scarce.³

Right to adequate food

At a bare minimum, the right to food means freedom from hunger and should be understood as the right to feed oneself rather than to be fed.⁴ Food should be accessible, which means that a person or family is able to purchase what they need to eat without having to sacrifice other essentials.⁵ The right to food includes being able to afford food that is nutritious or necessary to maintain overall good health. Food banks should be understood as stop-gaps on the path to realizing the right to food, rather than as solutions to food security problems. Additionally, the right to food means having reliable access to safe, clean drinking water.⁶

² Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, “Principles and Guidelines for a Human Rights Approach to Poverty Reduction Strategies” Available here: “The Role of Local and Subnational Governments with Respect to the Right to Adequate Housing.” Available here: <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Housing/Pages/AnnualReports.aspx> at para 112.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid at 132.

⁵ Ibid at 135.

⁶ Ibid at 130.

⁷ Ibid at 156.

Right to housing

The right to housing is more than just the right to have a roof over your head.⁷ It also means living in a place with adequate infrastructure, such as functioning heat and plumbing, and having legal rights as a tenant, such as protection against eviction. The right to housing includes the ability to secure housing that is affordable and accessible, which is especially crucial for older people and people with disabilities. The affordability of housing should be a key concern for policymakers as people living in poverty often spend a large share of their income on rent and housing-related costs, often at the expense of other essentials.

The affordability of housing is a key concern for policymakers.

The human rights approach requires that poverty reduction plans be centered on the realization of the rights listed above, as well as other rights like the right to education, personal security and privacy, equal access to justice, and civil and political rights.

This means that a poverty reduction plan must:

- make specific reference to human rights;
- articulate goals and standards in terms of human rights;
- ensure those responsible for implementing and executing the plan are trained in human rights;

Make specific reference to human rights

A poverty reduction plan that takes a human rights approach will expressly refer to human rights in the text of the plan itself. Consider the example of Quebec's "Solidarity and Social Inclusion Action Plan", which refers to international human rights in its opening chapter as a guiding principle. It states, "[t]he Adoption of the Government Action Plan for Solidarity and Social Inclusion contributes specifically to implementation of the rights enshrined in the Quebec Charter and in various international instruments that Quebec lives by."

Articulate goals and standards in terms of human rights

Poverty reduction plans generally set goals and standards for addressing issues like unemployment, homelessness, education, etc., but rarely frame these social ills in terms of human rights. The human rights approach requires that these objectives are framed as human rights issues. For example, the Ontario government's commitment to ending homelessness in the province as a long-term goal could be articulated as a step towards realizing the right to adequate housing for Ontario's homeless population.

Ensure those responsible for implementing and executing the plan are trained in human rights

Poverty reduction is a huge undertaking that involves policymakers from different levels of government and frontline workers across various sectors. All of these actors should receive some form of human rights training prior to the implementation of the poverty reduction plan.

The human rights approach requires that people living in poverty be consulted about poverty reduction plans.

iii. Consulting people who live in poverty

The human rights approach requires that people living in poverty be consulted about poverty reduction plans. People living in poverty are often excluded from public processes due to social discrimination. Therefore, policymakers must take proactive steps to ensure that they have the opportunity to participate in the planning, development and execution of poverty reduction in their province, territory or municipality. While there are many forms this participation could take, there are a few general principles that should guide the consultation process.

Policymakers should build time and flexibility into the process. Any constraints to participation should be discussed with the participants ahead of time and possible solutions should be sought by organizers. Resulting mechanisms from these discussions could take the form of, for example, reimbursement of the costs of participation, including childcare and travel, or compensation for any loss of income.

Participation of people in poverty should:

Be active and informed.

Because people in poverty often experience intersectional discrimination and are left out of public processes, policymakers must take proactive steps to ensure participation. This includes:

- the opportunity be informed in an accessible way about the process and their role within it. Policymakers should provide complete, up-to-date and easily understandable information. Written materials, which could exclude people whose reading skills are weak, should be supplemented with other approaches. The language used should be understood by all participants, especially the most marginalized and disadvantaged;
- the opportunity and support to actively contribute experiences, ideas and opinions;
- the opportunity and support to actively contribute in decision-making;

Occur at all stages of the process.

Because people living in poverty have the best knowledge of their needs and the needs of their communities, policymakers must involve them in every stage of the process. The process often takes time, and so it is important to commit to maintaining relations with the people, group and/or community on a long-term basis. To this end, policymakers should create and support regular opportunities for the participation of people affected by planned projects or services. This should begin well in advance, with ongoing consultation. This includes:

- the opportunity and support to identify goals, targets and priority issues at the outset of the process;
- the opportunity and support to discuss and decide on policy that affects them;
- the opportunity and support to participate in monitoring and reviewing progress;

Be meaningful and effective.

Because the concerns of people living in poverty often go unaddressed, policymakers must ensure that their participation is both meaningful and effective. This includes:

- the opportunity and support to attend specific events, forums and discussion groups that are accessible;
- the opportunity and support to feel empowered to participate and that their participation in the process is valued and respected;
- A comprehensive overview of the process and a discussion of how their input will be used.

Poverty carries a heavy stigma.

The Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction in Hamilton, Ontario has developed methods of community consultation that may serve as models for other areas. While the Roundtable brings together people from various sectors, those with lived experience - i.e. those who live or have lived in poverty - form a core part of their efforts. The Roundtable ensures that people who live in poverty are included at the stage of decision-making and have a direct say in policy. They are the ones who identify which issues are important to them and their well-being. The Roundtable takes positive steps to eliminate barriers to participation by providing supports such as food, transportation and daycare services for participants, as well as hosting discussions in accessible locations.

Because many poor people are also from marginalized groups, they face discrimination not only on account of being poor.

iv. Promoting substantive equality and non-discrimination

Poverty carries a heavy stigma. People living in poverty are often viewed as uneducated, lazy ‘cheats’ taking advantage of the system, a stereotype that is deeply embedded in our culture. Because many poor people are also from marginalized groups, they face discrimination not only on account of being poor, but also because they are, for instance, single mothers, Aboriginal and/or people with disabilities. A poor person in Canada today might experience multiple forms of discrimination at the same time, making the experience of living in poverty extremely difficult.

The human rights approach requires poverty reduction plans to reflect the principles of equality and non-discrimination, often called a pillar of international human rights law. These twin principles should guide your poverty reduction plan and must be reflected in every aspect of the overall strategy.

In practical terms, this means that the plan should contain:

- **an express commitment to the principles of equality and non-discrimination;**
- **concrete, deliberate and targeted measures to eliminate discrimination and pursue equality;**
- **a means of addressing the discrimination faced by those living in poverty and special consideration for marginalized groups;**
- **an avenue for those who experience discrimination to access a remedy;**

v. Setting goals and timelines

Poverty reduction strategies set goals and establish timelines for reaching those goals. This is an essential part of any plan. It's likely that this stage of the process will require a great deal of time and discussion. Remember that setting goals must occur in consultation with people living in poverty who are in the best position to identify their needs. While the specifics of these goals will vary from community to community and from province to province, the human rights approach mandates that certain things must be contained in this part of the plan.

When it comes to setting goals and timelines, a poverty reduction plan should:

- identify immediate, short-term and long-term goals;
- set specific goals in relation to marginalized groups;
- be reflected in budgeting;
- engage others;

Identify immediate, short-term and long-term goals

Poverty reduction is an ambitious goal that can only be achieved with time. The human rights approach acknowledges this reality, which is why obligations of this sort are subject to what is called “progressive realization”.⁸ This means that while certain obligations should be fulfilled immediately, other goals require more planning, time and resources to accomplish. Poverty reduction plans must distinguish between three types of human rights obligations: immediate obligations, short-term targets and long-term goals.

Immediate obligations	Short-term targets	Long-term goals
<p>There are certain steps that must be taken immediately in order to ensure the human rights of people living in poverty. These obligations pertain to existing policies and programs, and should be listed as commitments in the poverty-reduction plan.</p> <p>Such obligations include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • eliminating discrimination in the administration of the programs and policies currently in place • meeting basic and emergency needs – such as homeless shelters • ensuring the full participation of stakeholders in the poverty-reduction process 	<p>The plan should contain a set of tangible targets that can be met in the short-term (from a few months to a few years). These commitments should be concrete and realistic. Short-term targets should be regularly updated. As earlier commitments are met, new ones should be put in place to respond to identified needs, adjust to changing circumstances and ensure ongoing progress.</p> <p>Examples of short-term commitments</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • increasing the minimum wage by a particular percentage • putting in place a new community living program within one year 	<p>The plan should express its long term goals as a commitment to realize human rights rather than as a policy commitment to reducing poverty.</p> <p>The established timeline for the elimination of poverty should be realistic in light of resources and other challenges but it should also reflect the fact that eliminating poverty is a human rights imperative to be achieved without unreasonable delay.</p>

⁸ For further information, see the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Fact Sheet No. 33 titled “Frequently Asked Questions on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights” Available here: <http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/ESCR/FAQ%20on%20ESCR-en.pdf> at pg 13

Set specific goals in relation to marginalized groups

As was mentioned in section iv, people living in poverty are often from marginalized groups. While setting general goals and timelines for the population as a whole is an important way to assess overall progress, it is also important to evaluate the progress of particular groups. A poverty reduction plan should include both broad poverty reduction targets and specific targets in relation to the groups that are most affected by poverty — Aboriginal people, people with disabilities, older persons, youth, children, racialized groups, newcomers, single mothers. In some cases, these targets may relate to particular sectors, such as access to employment for Aboriginal people or supports for community living for people with disabilities.

A poverty reduction plan should include both broad poverty reduction targets and specific targets in relation to the groups that are most affected by poverty.

Be reflected in budgeting

The poverty reduction plan must be properly resourced. Federal, provincial, territorial and municipal governments must set aside resources in their budgets for the purpose of addressing poverty. Under both Canadian and international law, budgetary constraints are not a valid excuse for failing to eliminate poverty and realize human rights.⁹

Engage others

While your poverty reduction plan might centre on a particular community or province, addressing poverty is a responsibility shared by all levels of government. The goals and timelines identified in the plan should, wherever possible, engage with other levels of government, as well as with other stakeholders.

vi. Monitoring progress

After you've settled on the overall goals of the plan, how will you determine if they're effective in addressing poverty? How will you verify that implementation is going according to plan and targets are met according to timelines?

It's important to develop a method or strategy that you can use to evaluate progress on an ongoing basis. Normally such a strategy will include gathering both quantitative and qualitative information about poverty in your province or community. This might mean reviewing statistics in combination with a more qualitative assessment through questionnaires or focus groups. It's especially crucial when monitoring progress to be mindful of marginalized groups and their unique experiences with poverty. For instance, low income measures that do not include disability related expenses will not be useful in assessing progress in reducing poverty among people with disabilities.

⁹ Newfoundland (Treasury Board) v. N.A.P.E., [2004] 3 S.C.R. 381, 2004 SCC 66 at para 72.

While your poverty reduction plan might centre on a particular community or province, addressing poverty is a responsibility shared by all levels of government.

Moreover, there should be mechanisms in place to assess the impact of new programs or policies, and there needs to be a means of ensuring that budgets properly reflect the commitments contained in the poverty reduction plan.

vii. Ensuring accountability

The human rights approach demands accountability for the commitments laid out in poverty reduction strategies, particularly because rights are illusory if no one can be held to account. Accountability is an essential element of a human rights based approach to addressing poverty and the least likely characteristic to appear in any poverty reduction strategy.

Remember, the implementation of human rights is a legal obligation. The rights of people living in poverty can only be realized if they have a way to hold government authorities accountable for the effective implementation of the poverty plan. What mechanisms can be incorporated in the plan to allow for this?

Your poverty reduction plan should establish both internal and external mechanisms for accountability. An internal mechanism — like an ombudsperson — is a useful way for local or provincial governments to review their own progress. It's important to stress that there's no weakness in admitting the shortcomings of a plan or its implementation.

An external mechanism — like an independent committee — is also necessary to provide fair and objective assessments of progress that can be shared with the public. Both the internal and external mechanisms should review the plan periodically on a basis laid out clearly in the plan itself.

Lastly, there must be a procedure available to individuals to bring complaints regarding either the failure to properly implement the plan or a particular decision that affects them. These kinds of procedures ensure that the voices of people living in poverty are heard.

IV. Checklist

Below you'll find a detailed checklist of everything you need to build a poverty reduction strategy that complies with international human rights obligations and upholds the human rights of people living in poverty across Canada.

The poverty reduction plan must:

- identify people living in poverty, including marginalized groups;
- make specific reference to human rights;
- provide human rights training to all relevant parties;
- consult people living in poverty;
- commit to the principles of non-discrimination and equality;
- set immediate, short-term and long-term goals in terms of human rights;
- set goals for marginalized groups;
- be adequately resourced;
- engage with other levels of government and stakeholders;
- monitor progress according to a detailed strategy;
- establish both internal and external mechanisms of review;
- provide a complaints procedure for individuals and groups.



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251 Bank Street, 2nd Floor, Ottawa, ON K2P 1X3

Tel: 613-789-0096

Toll Free: 1-800-810-1076

<http://www.cwp-csp.ca>

Twitter: @CWP_CSP