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GET HEARD

Regional Rural Youth Dialogue on Employment, Education and Communication

Rural Dialogue Summary Report

Castlegar, British Columbia November 19, 2005

Publication # 10128E
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For further information on the Rural Dialogue, please call 1-888-781-2222 (toll-free number).

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1. FOREWORD

This report is a summary of discussions that took place at the *Get Heard* Regional Rural Youth Dialogue on Employment, Education and Communication, held in Castlegar, British Columbia, on November 19, 2005. No limits were placed on the participants during discussions that took place. In order to present a true report of the free-ranging discussions, recommendations made by participants that fall outside federal jurisdiction are also included. Views expressed do not necessarily represent those of the Government of Canada.

2. INTRODUCTION

This event was part of the Rural Dialogue, an ongoing, two-way discussion between the Government of Canada and Canadians from rural, remote and northern regions. Launched in 1998, the Rural Dialogue is a key citizen-engagement component of the Canadian Rural Partnership (CRP). The CRP is designed to support a horizontal approach to rural development within the Government of Canada that responds to rural, remote and northern priorities. The Dialogue process helps the Government of Canada to understand local and regional priorities, and provides rural, remote and northern citizens with an opportunity to influence government policies, programs and services that affect them.

Participants (19 in attendance, 9 of which were young people between 18 and 29 years old) included: representatives of regional rural and youth organizations; academics; community, economic and social development officers; representatives of First Nations organizations or communities; and representatives of the federal, provincial and municipal governments, which includes two members of Rural Team-British Columbia (RT-BC).

The *Get Heard* Regional Rural Youth Dialogue was organized in partnership with the BC Rural Network (BCRN). This Network was formed in 2004 to link organizations in rural BC and help develop responses to rural and remote community issues. It is the goal of the BCRN to dialogue and share information with rural communities, governments and organizations across BC through a series of regional forums and through the development of a Web site, newsletter and listserv. The current Working Group is made up of people from rural organizations across BC that represent regions and rural interest groups such as youth, seniors, women, First Nations, and community economic development organizations, and the agriculture sector.

In 2000, eight (8) Rural Youth Dialogue (RYD) discussion sessions were organized across BC, involving approximately 250 young rural participants. The purpose of the RYD was to identify key challenges and opportunities for

rural youth in BC. The need for relevant educational opportunities, diversified jobs and government programs for rural youth were common issues across the province, with jobs and education being the top two priorities.

These sessions provided the Government of Canada with valuable insight, which will aid in the formulation of improved individual and cooperative initiatives to assist youth in addressing labour market and social development issues. Key recommendations from the RYD included:

- reporting outcomes back to the youth;
- developing a communications strategy;
- dialoguing with youth on a continual basis;
- developing local contacts with youth-focussed groups; and
- ensuring that community needs were considered in action delivery.

The objectives of the *Get Heard* Regional Rural Youth Dialogue on Employment, Education and Communication - building on some of the above recommendations - were as follows:

- to provide youth with information on education, job programs and skills training available in the region;
- to offer a networking opportunity to youth; and
- to solicit the input of youth and people who work with youth concerning the development of a youth communication strategy for the BCRN.

Additionally, the youth participants were given an opportunity to provide their input on themes for a youth workshop being organized as part of a provincial joint conference to be held in April 2006.

The results presented will help guide the future actions of the Government of Canada in support of rural communities and will contribute to the ongoing development of the proposed National Rural Framework (NRF). The over-arching goal of the proposed NRF, a framework to facilitate federal, provincial and territorial collaboration on rural issues, is to ensure the long-term viability and sustainability of rural communities by creating an environment in which communities and citizens have access to improved social and economic opportunities.

The proposed NRF is based on five areas of focus that affect community sustainability. The issues and priorities discussed at this event are presented under the relevant areas (section 4 of this report).

3. THE NATIONAL RURAL FRAMEWORK'S (NRF) FIVE AREAS OF FOCUS

Sustainable Livelihoods

Factors affecting how Canadians can provide for themselves and their families to live in rural communities that are economically and socially healthy.

Environmental Stewardship

Ways in which rural and urban communities can share with governments

the responsibility for good management, the benefits of natural resources and a healthy environment.

Innovative Approaches to Rural Infrastructure

Approaches allowing communities, working together with governments, to develop and maintain physical, social and knowledge-based infrastructure that addresses their needs.

Engaged Populations and Institutions

Opportunities for institutions and governments to provide the environment where Canadians can actively participate in making decisions that affect the community.

Demographic Adaptation

Openness to the range of options rural communities may need to consider in order to adapt to ongoing changes in population, economics and services.

4. ISSUES RELATING TO THE NRF'S AREAS OF FOCUS

The issues and priorities discussed at this event related to the following areas of focus: Sustainable Livelihoods; Innovative Approaches to Rural Infrastructure and Engaged Populations and Institutions. Proposed actions and solutions that could address the issues discussed are also included in this section.

4.1 Sustainable Livelihoods

The 2000 RYD found that issues related to sustainable livelihoods (e.g., employment and entrepreneurial activity) were ranked as top priorities by BC youth. Get Heard was organized to start addressing these issues and to begin the work on community supported actions.

4.1.1 Employment

Youth participants spoke to the lack of employment opportunities available to them in their communities; while employers and job councillors who attended the event spoke of a current labour shortage caused by the large aging demographic. Through discussions it became clear that while jobs were available, youth did not have the prerequisites or skills required to fill the available positions.

It was noted that many entry level jobs in the trades and apprenticeship programs now require grade twelve or equivalent English, math and physics. The youth indicated that they were unaware that such prerequisites existed. Information related to rural job markets, with attention to prerequisites (e.g. education, physical strength and endurance, drivers licence, car), is needed. Although this information is available on-line, it is not centralized. Youth agreed that regional youth dialogues that bring

together employers and youth was the most effective way of disseminating the information to interested youth.

- The Rural Secretariat and RT-BC should continue to support and organize regional youth dialogues that include an "employment" component.

4.1.2 Entrepreneurship

Participants spoke to the lack of accessible funding and support programs for young entrepreneurs. They indicated that the funding currently available was very difficult and time consuming to access. Unlike in larger centers, small communities do not have established mentorship programs that connect new entrepreneurs with people experienced in business. Participants agreed that the best way to increase knowledge and opportunity was through regional forums dedicated to entrepreneurship that would bring together potential funders, experienced entrepreneurs and interested youth.

- The Rural Secretariat, through RT-BC, should continue to support and organize rural youth dialogues that aim to build community capacity and address the needs of rural youth.

4.2 Innovative Approaches to Rural Infrastructure

4.2.1 Social Infrastructure

Participants indicated that provincially there was little or no established infrastructure (social or technological) connecting youth organizations. They expressed that a communication strategy for BC rural youth is central to initiating and coordinating smart approaches to new, efficient and more effective means of communication. The BCRN is committed to collaborating on the development of a communication strategy for BC rural youth

- The Rural Secretariat, through RT-BC, should continue to assist the BCRN. For instance, by supporting jointly organized rural youth dialogues, and by developing a rural youth communication strategy. RT-BC should facilitate access to their networks, offer in-kind support (e.g. time), provide financial support for events that build rural youth capacity and actively promote the BCRN Web site.

A communication strategy designed and maintained by youth for youth (with support from the BCRN) is an innovative, multi-purpose, forward-looking initiative that supports social infrastructure, such as education and learning, while building the community and fostering a rural youth culture. During the event, participants provided the following feedback and insights to the BCRN as to what this strategy should include:

1. a simple Web site with a message board that is easy to load when using a dial-up Internet connection;
2. an independent youth newsletter or zine¹;
3. ongoing regional and provincial dialogues; and
4. a Youth Advisory Council (YAC) that would be tasked with developing a sustainable plan to design and maintain the Web site and to create a newsletter. The YAC would also help organize regional and provincial dialogues. Two members of this Council would sit on the RT-BC's Board of Directors.

In terms of the rural youth newsletter, youth participants agreed that its overarching goal should be two-fold: (1) to foster a rural youth culture in BC; and (2) to act as an accessible communications tool for rural youth in BC.

4.2.2 Knowledge-based Infrastructure

A communications strategy designed by youth for youth supports access to communication and information technology infrastructure. Through this technology, rural youth involved in the project could have the opportunity to gain employable skills such as Web: maintenance, design, and content writing. These transferable skills can also be used to support other community projects.

The youth indicated that the proposed Web site and newsletter—sustainable technological infrastructure projects—must have on-the-ground support from rural citizens to provide them effective means of accessing information and of getting their voices heard.

4.3 Engaged Populations and Institutions

4.3.1 Collaborative Relationships

It is important for groups (e.g. BCRN) to have a voice within communities and to have direct links to networks and resources. Opportunities can be created through collaborative partnerships with citizens, organizations (e.g. community, youth, regional, provincial and federal), and federal and provincial governments (e.g. the Rural Secretariat and RT-BC members). The *Get Heard* dialogue was made possible through such partnerships.

- The Rural Secretariat, through RT-BC, should continue to actively engage in collaborative relationships with various organizations.

4.3.2 Decision-Making and Accountability

Youth participants indicated that their voices were often marginalized or silenced in their communities. They spoke of the benefits and importance of having youth represented on boards and committees at the local, regional, provincial and national levels.

4.3.3 Leadership Development

Creating opportunities for youth to network and to develop leadership skills empowers youth. Such opportunities encourage youth participation in leadership activities within communities. To this end, rural youth dialogues should continue to be supported and organized as these events provide valuable opportunities to youth.

Youth in rural and remote communities have limited access to youth leadership building activities as sessions and conferences are usually organized in large urban centers. Additionally, small communities often lack the capacity and population to organize such events. The result is that youth from rural, remote and northern communities miss out on opportunities to develop skills and collect "résumé worthy" experiences. Participation in regional rural youth dialogues should be recognized as leadership building exercises.

- The Rural Secretariat / RT-BC should provide certificates of appreciation to youth as a concrete way of expressing sincere thanks and recognizing youth involvement and participation in youth dialogues. Youth could then attach these certificates to their résumés;

4.3.4 Citizen Engagement

The youth participants spoke of the disconnect between themselves and their communities. The lack of youth representation on community planning councils and boards has left young people without an active voice and little reason to want to become civically engaged. Youth participants also indicated that volunteerism was low among their peers, but explained that youth involvement was high when projects were specifically created to support youth in the community.

- The RS, through BC-RT, should support rural dialogues that bring together community leaders and youth to discuss community capacity building initiatives that support youth.

They added that since their communities offered no places for youth to "hang out", especially after dark, many youth have resorted to hanging out on streets and in parks. These youth feel that they are targeted as trouble-makers when they get together in public spaces and that they are fighting a battle of "guilty before proven innocent".

Financial compensation, beyond travel subsidies, should be provided to young people to encourage their participation in events. The youth participants recognized that they could not receive a pay cheque like the non-youth participants who are paid to attend events as part of their work. It was suggested that gift certificates (\$10-\$20) to local businesses (e.g. restaurants, bakeries, grocery stores, movie theaters) be provided to youth participants. This would illustrate genuine appreciation for their time commitment as many youth miss a day of work to attend events.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

The *Get Heard* Rural Youth Dialogue on Employment, Education and Communication was a success. The evaluation of the event demonstrated that participants were overall, very satisfied with the event. The majority of participants also noted that they were very satisfied or satisfied with the organization, agenda, topics for discussion, panellists and outcomes of the event.

Youth participants were also asked if the event had helped build the rural youth voice. A few indicated that more youth should have been involved in the event to increase their voice. However, they noted that the event was a first step that was worthwhile and that it provided an opportunity to make new contacts. One participant noted that participation in discussions on rural youth issues seemed to create a sense of empowerment among the youth participants. Another valued the BCRN's efforts and actions in becoming more youth focussed and friendly.

A number of important issues were raised and priorities identified during the event. The following are the key ones:

- youth lack access to education and skills necessary to prepare them for the job market;
- youth lack support for rural youth-focussed community capacity building initiatives (leadership events, entrepreneurial enterprises, seats on committees) at the local, regional, provincial and national level;
- youth initiatives must be developed and maintained by youth for youth, but require the support of established organizations, both financially and also in the form of mentorship; and

- a communication strategy is needed to support youth initiatives, build social and technological infrastructure and foster a rural youth culture that youth can be proud of.

Overwhelmingly, it was agreed that these issues and priorities can be best supported through ongoing local, regional, provincial and national dialogues that aim to address issues deemed important by rural youth.

In moving forward on the issues and priorities identified during this event, the RT-BC and the Rural Secretariat's Regional Advisor for BC have committed to the following actions:

- present youth participants with certificates of appreciation;
- provide youth with a forum to showcase their initiatives - for instance during RT-BC meetings, in the RT-BC newsletter, on the RT-BC Web site;
- continue to actively support rural youth in community capacity building initiatives;
- co-sponsor and co-organize, with the BCRN and the Red Carpet Film Festival Youth Committee, a second regional rural youth dialogue on education, employment and communications; this dialogue will be held on January 14, 2006 in the Interior region of BC (Vernon) and will follow the same format;
- provide financial and in-kind (e.g. time) support towards the youth component of a province-wide rural conference to be held in Osoyoos, BC in April 2006; and
- seek to have rural youth voices represented at all meetings and events, actively promote youth issues and support rural youth initiatives whenever possible.

Endnote

¹ Zines are cut and paste self publications that require no professional formatting or layout knowledge. Creating a zine is a simple and creative process involving: the gathering of articles, artwork, sound-off pieces, poems and recipes; pasting them onto paper; photo-copying; folding; stapling; and sending. Zines are both cost and time efficient and have become an increasingly popular form of youth expression.