

**Challenges and Strategies
Towards Women's Equality and Inclusion
Western Newfoundland
Women Speak**

**Report on Roundtable
Facilitated By
Provincial Advisory Council
on the Status of Women**

Corner Brook, Newfoundland and Labrador

January 27 & 28, 2005

Reflections

The Equality Forum that occurred in Corner Brook on January 28th was much more than women simply getting together to talk. For me, it was women engaging in a true dialogue with the clear expectation of being heard. Our main goal as organizers was to examine (and then announce!) the true state of equality in our province in 2005. In some ways, our worst suspicions were confirmed: women have fallen off the political agenda, and equality work is slowly being buried. Is this a new reality, or one which will stop us from pushing forward? No. Women left the meeting feeling empowered, energized and ready to challenge. I am proud to have worked with the Advisory Council to bring our equality agenda to the forefront, and proud that women were prepared to keep on keeping on!

Heather Davis
Coordinator, Corner Brook Women's Council /Centre

For me, it was a wonderful opportunity to be in a room of women who understand our struggles. There was lots of energy and hope that we can make a difference in the lives of women. We need to get together, face to face, to laugh, to cry, to discuss, to plan, and to take action. For those of us who work with abused women daily, we feel isolated and unheard, we rejoice in small victories just to see them clawed back.

Lorraine Sheehan
Coordinator, Bay St. George Women's Council /Centre

It was wonderful to have the opportunity to meet with women from the region and to meet the Advisory Council Board.

For me, this was a chance to put our voices together and talk about what we need to do and how that will roll out. We all know the issues...we need to focus on a strategy to ensure that women's equality is heard, understood and accepted. Our strength and commitment to this loud and clear. We are tired of repeating ourselves, attending consultations, writing reports. We have said it all...now is the time for action.

We need more funding to do our work, especially since government cutbacks means we are doing more service delivery. How to get governments to listen...that is our challenge.

Susanne Ingram
Coordinator, Gateway Women's Council /Centre

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*This report was compiled by the
Provincial Advisory Council on the Status of Women
February 2005*

Forward

On a cold, wintery January day in western Newfoundland, women from the Port Aux Basques, Bay St. George and Corner Brook communities came together for a discussion. The roundtable, *Challenges and Strategies Towards Women's Equality and Inclusion*, was an opportunity to examine how well our agenda for women's equality is doing in our province and country. When the United Nations Committee on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) issued serious criticisms around Canada's progress towards women's equality in 2003, what women long suspected was validated: women's equality has taken a backward spiral, and our province and country are not living up to their obligations to women. During our January roundtable women from western Newfoundland along with the Board of the Provincial Advisory Council on the Status of Women were able to hear first hand how government decisions are negatively impacting women, families and communities. Through a series of panel presentations and facilitated roundtables, women discussed their experiences, needs, concerns, issues and the everyday realities of living and working in both urban and rural communities in Western Newfoundland.

In this report, we have attempted to capture the challenges to moving forward on women's equality as well as the strategies to dealing with these challenges. In our analysis of the notes and minutes we have identified the major themes. A real sense of sisterhood and friendship was obvious as women listened attentively to each other and validated the experiences of individual women and women's equality-seeking organizations. The previous evening, roundtable participants were joined by approximately one hundred women from Corner Brook to celebrate 99 years of work toward women's equality and inclusion. 99 years is a culmination of the time that the Bay St. George, Gateway, Corner Brook Status of Women Councils and the Provincial Advisory Council on the Status of Women have been working collectively to advance women's equality in Newfoundland and Labrador.

A very warm thank you to the Corner Brook Women's Council for working with the Advisory Council to organize both the evening celebration and the roundtable discussions. Thank you to the women who traveled over the snow-filled highway to participate. To the panelists, facilitators and presenters, thank you for your thoughtful words and candour. We look forward to continuing our work on advancing women's equality, equity and inclusion in Newfoundland and Labrador.

In Sisterhood,

Joyce M. Hancock

Summary of Key Recommendations

Require the application of gender inclusive analysis within all stages of the development and implementation of all policies, programs, budgets, practices, services and legislation:

- Government needs to apply gender based analysis to all policy and programs as they develop. Ignorance of women's issues and concerns is unacceptable.
- Awareness of gender equality issues needs to start earlier. The development of school curricula should be done in a gender inclusive way. Women's equality issues need to be introduced into curricula as early as junior high.

Provide opportunities to enable women's equality-seeking organizations to meet, learn from each other and share analysis and strategies for advancing women's equality:

- The provincial women's community needs to set our own agenda, not have an agenda imposed on us or predetermined by governments.
- Women's organizations should build relationships with groups who do not always see a connection between feminism and community, meaning groups not normally associated with the feminist community. This would assist in understanding the links between women's equality and the issues that face families and communities.
- Women have to develop a plan of action that all women's equality-seeking groups can connect and become involved with, i.e., the formation of a provincial women's coalition.
- We need to provide opportunities for women to meet on a regular basis, share experiences and strategize through annual pan-provincial women's conferences.

Develop mechanisms collaboratively with women's organizations to ensure women's equal representation in all governments, agencies, boards, commissions and institutions:

- Governments could work towards the advancement of women by doing more gender analysis and ensuring equal representation of females in position of authority.
- We need to encourage and support more women to be in leadership roles. As women, we need to recognize that we have power, and use it to advance women's equality in our province.

Improve Government accountability and transparency for improving the status of women in Newfoundland and Labrador:

- Women's Centres are delivering more and more of the services that used to be provided by Government. They are increasingly unable to carry out critical policy/advocacy work because they are consumed with service delivery. Yet, the services that the Women's Centres provide daily is not captured or reflected in Government's statistics.

Key Recommendations (contd.)

- There is great difficulty in gathering data on women and the justice system in the province. In this environment of public accountability and evidence-based decision making, what are the measures for the status of women in NL? How do we measure our status from a judicial context to understand whether women are being served by the judicial system?
- We need current statistics that reflect the true reality of the status of women in Newfoundland and Labrador collected by front-line, equality-seeking women's organizations, such as Women's Centres / Councils, Transition Houses, Shelters, etc.
- We need to continue to challenge all levels of government to implement the *5 Demands for Women's Equality in Canada*.

Challenge Government decision-making that is hurtful to women, families and communities:

- Women need to take a stand on decisions that are hurtful to women, families and communities. It is felt that problems stemming from decisions made by Government need to be challenged. This means showing low tolerance for inequality and changing the political process by bringing to light problems such as the lack of government accountability.
- Women need to be politically astute and look at every issue with an eye to how government decisions impact women's equality. The Atlantic Accord discussion is a good example of government and media garnering and managing public sentiment. Although everyone agreed with our province's position, few people questioned the plan for the extra revenue and how women's equality, social issues or rural Newfoundland and Labrador would benefit.
- It is critical that equality-seeking women's organizations name the everyday reality of women's lives and the impact government decision making has on women, families and communities. Women need to be aware that governments have big "communication machines" at their disposal. This type of message managing can make the general public believe that "things are fine."

Fully implement the recommendations of the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW):

- We need to advocate for the United Nations Committee's recommendations around the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) to be implemented at all levels of government.

**Roundtable : Challenges and Strategies Toward
Women’s Equality and Inclusion
Friday, January 28th
Time: 8:30 - 2:00 (lunch provided)
Location: Holiday Inn, Corner Brook**

A roundtable discussion examining the progress on issues of women’s equality in Newfoundland and Labrador. The Provincial Advisory Council on the Status of Women and the Corner Brook Status of Women Council are bringing together women who live and work in Western Newfoundland and who are concerned about issues which affect women, families and communities.

Many women and women’s equality-seeking organizations are feeling that equality issues are falling off the agenda regionally, provincially and nationally. Through presentations, panels and roundtable discussions, participants will have an opportunity to reflect upon the progress in our collective work toward women’s equality, equity and inclusion.

Agenda

8:30 a.m.	Registration
9:00 a.m.	Welcome and Introductions Chair - Joyce Hancock
9:15 a.m.	An Overview of Women’s Equality Jean Bishop, Women’s Policy Office Michelle Smith, Provincial Advisory Council
9:45 a.m.	Panel Presentation Terry LeDrew / Susan Hollett / Juanita Brake / Susanne Ingram
10:45 a.m.	Nutrition Break
11:00 a.m.	Roundtable discussions
12:00 a.m.	Feedback: Key Themes ~ “Challenges” Chair - Susan Hollett
12:30 p.m.	Lunch
1:00 p.m.	Reconvene ~ Feedback ~ “Strategies”
1:30 p.m.	Closing Panel: Chair, Dorothy Fewer Heather Davis / Joyce Hancock / Holly Pike Chair - Dorothy Fewer

A Statistical Overview of Women's Equality in Newfoundland and Labrador

The statistics presented below provide some evidence regarding the status of women in Newfoundland and Labrador. In the public environment where the electorate is demanding evidence based decision making, the collection, use and improvement of data in policy information systems is important. The Women's Policy Office welcomes feedback on the measures and indicators presented in its annual report and used in identifying problems and developing interventions to achieve gender equity.

- Average total income takes into consideration earned income as well as income from other sources. In 2000, women's average income was 66% of men's and in 2002 it rose to 68%. In 1980, a woman's total income was only 56% of men's.
- Women comprise over 60% of full-time undergraduate enrolment at Memorial University. Women now comprise over 50% of enrolment in business and medicine. Enrolment at the Marine Institute has grown from 18% in 2001 to 37% in 2003. Enrolment in forestry has grown from 39% in 2001 to over 55% in 2003. However, in engineering, women comprised almost 22% in 2001 and only 18% in 2003.
- Enrolment data from the College of the North Atlantic for 2003 indicates that women are concentrated in business and health education and participate much less in industrial trades, information technology and engineering programs.
- The measure of low income families used from Statistics Canada identifies families in low income after tax using 1992 as a base year. This means that dollars are adjusted to maintain the value of 1992. Since 2000, the number of low income families in the province has decreased from 30,000 to 26,000 in 2002. As well, the percentage of women heading low income families has decreased from 63% to 61.5%.
- Statistics from Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation indicate that almost 93% of the single parent occupants in Newfoundland and Labrador Housing units are women, and over 70% of their one person occupants are women.
- The statistics on violence used in the annual report are received from the Royal Newfoundland Constabulary on an annual basis and reflect the situation for areas within their jurisdiction. These are certainly not the only indicators of violence in our society and it certainly does not claim to fully quantify violence against women. They are simply an indication of the types and prevalence of violence against women. The Women's Policy Office is working on obtaining statistics from other sources, such as the RCMP, shelters, crisis lines, etc. The RNC statistics however, are reflective of the national statistics regarding violence against women.
- Similarly, the vast majority of individuals performing unpaid work in caring for seniors are women.

- Women contribute to society and the economy in unpaid work. The majority of those who are performing unpaid childcare are women and of those individuals who are providing 60 hours a week or more unpaid childcare, over 70% are women.
- While the actual number of reported sexual assault victims has decreased from 257 in 2001 to 187 in 2003, the percentage of sexual assault victims who are women has actually increased from 75% in 2001 to over 80% in 2003. This may be a reflection of the increased reporting activity.
- The number of criminal harassment cases has decreased from 100 in 2001 to 69 in 2003. In 2002, approximately 86% of victims in these cases were women and in 2003, approximately 70% of criminal harassment victims were women.
- Leadership is a very important aspect in achieving gender equity because in order to have women's issues acknowledged and addressed, women need to be at the decision making tables.
- Clearly, there is a need to engage more women in the political process. Within the federal government, less than 25% of elected representatives are women.
- Within the provincial government, the participation of elected women has grown from 17% in 1999 to just over 20% in 2003.
- The representation of women in municipal government is around 30%.
- In 2000, women earned approximately 65% of a man's salary. This actually dropped to 61% in 2001 and rose again to 67% in 2002.
- On average, women earn less than men in every occupational category. Part of the disparity between men's and women's earned income is the propensity for women to work in a more narrow range of lower paid employment. In 2003, women comprised only 5.5% of occupations in trades occupations, 15% of those employed in primary industries like forestry and mining and only 20% of occupations related to natural and applied sciences. These are the areas where there is the greatest wage disparity.
- Another reason for wage disparity is women's tendency to work part-time. Almost 70% of the part-time work force is comprised of women. Apart from attending school, the most common reason women don't work full-time is they could not find full-time work. Only 30% of women who worked part-time did so as a personal preference.
- Approximately 58% of public sector employees are women.
- Approximately 46% of private sector employees are women.
- Approximately 35% of those who are self-employed are women.

**Presentation by
Heather MacLellan,
Women's Policy Office**

Canada and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)

In January of 2003, over 20 years after Canada ratified the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the UN over-sight body which reviews countries' compliance with CEDAW expressed serious concerns about Canada's progress toward women's equality and issued 26 recommendations for change.

The committee found Canada was not living up to its obligations to women. It found poverty rates of 54% for single mothers, 43% for Aboriginal women, 37% for women of colour, and 48% for female recent immigrants unacceptable in a country as wealthy as Canada. The UN group was concerned that government cuts to social programs were deepening women's social and economic vulnerability, since these cuts eliminate good jobs, increase the burden of unpaid work, and make women less able to leave abusive relationships. Other criticisms included the following:

- Canada's Fifth report submitted in 2002, covering the period from 1994-1998, was five months late, did not comply with the reporting guidelines and did not provide integrated information between federal, provincial and territorial levels of government.
- The federal government does not seem to have the power to ensure provincial/territorial governments establish legal and other measures to fully implement the Convention.
- The transfer of federal funds to provinces and territories since 1995 is no longer tied to conditions that ensure national consistent standards for health and social welfare.
- Gender-based analysis is not mandatory at all federal/provincial/territorial levels of government.
- Women are under-represented in all areas of political and public life.
- There is a lack of employment-related measures for women, increasing numbers of non-standard work arrangements for women without benefits.
- The serious persistent, systematic discrimination faced by Aboriginal women in all aspects of their lives.
- The high percentage of women living in poverty, in particular: single, senior women; female lone parents; Aboriginal women; older women; immigrant women; and women with disabilities.

- Strategies to eliminate poverty are mostly directed toward children, and not these vulnerable groups of women.
- Equal pay for equal work as a principle is not implemented in practice by all provincial/territorial governments, and progress is too slow.
- The provision of social housing is inadequate.
- Women lack adequate access to the justice system, including services and programs such as legal aid.
- The Committee also criticized Canada for not working with non-governmental women's organizations in preparing its report.

Despite the clear message from the United Nations that Canada has serious homework to do, the federal government has not yet indicated how it will respond to the UN recommendations, or how it will work with the provinces and territories.

The adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1979 by the United Nations signalled the acceptance by the international community of the necessity of an international bill of rights for women, and an accompanying agenda for action that would guarantee women's enjoyment of these rights. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) is one of seven United Nations human rights treaties.

CEDAW provides the basis for realizing equality between women and men through ensuring women's equal access to - and equal opportunities in - political and public life, as well as education, reproductive health, employment, family law, child care, and social security. Countries (i.e., states parties) that ratify CEDAW agree to take all appropriate measures, including legislation and temporary special measures, so that women can enjoy all of their human rights and fundamental freedoms. Many of the 178 countries that have ratified the treaty have used it for guiding the passage and enforcement of national laws.

The Convention stipulates that signatory countries submit reports every four years to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, an international body charged with reviewing the measures taken by countries to honour their obligations under the Convention. Canada has submitted five reports, in 1983, 1988, 1992, 1995, and 2002. Canada intends to submit both its sixth and seventh report to the Committee in 2007. At this point in time, the information Canada has submitted to the CEDAW Committee is already seven years out of date, ending with the 1994-1998 period.

In October 2002, Canada ratified a new treaty that creates additional procedures to enhance compliance with CEDAW:

- < Communications Procedure. Individuals and groups can submit a formal complaint to the United Nations about alleged violations of CEDAW by their country.
- < UN Inquiry. The UN Committee can demand information and an explanation from a country where grave or systematic violations of CEDAW may be occurring.

Many women in Canada are not familiar with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, in part because the Canadian government has not publicized its own obligations under this international treaty.

When Canada made its decision to ratify CEDAW back in 1981, it did so after securing the full agreement of provincial and territorial governments, who assumed responsibility for implementing the Convention in their areas of jurisdiction. So far, no government in Canada has mapped out a process for implementation, nor have governments jointly done this. Canada has an intergovernmental process for ratifying treaties, but appears to have no meaningful inter-governmental process for implementing them or for monitoring compliance with them.

Living up to Canada's human rights commitments matters. Canadian women need to be able to hold federal, provincial and territorial governments fully accountable for the implementation of these commitments. They also need a chance to work with governments on the practical challenges of realizing their human rights. Without concrete steps, Canada will continue to promise equality to women but fail to make good on that promise. And in unmistakable terms, the U.N. expert body on discrimination against women has sent a message to Canada: to be a credible international leader on women's human rights, you have to be a leader at home.

Cited/adapted with permission from the Canadian Feminist Alliance for International Action. FAFIA (2004). *Commitments Abroad, Inequalities at Home: The UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women; what it is and why it matters*. Ottawa: FAFIA, p. 17-18

**Presentation by
Michelle Smith,
Provincial Advisory Council**

Guidelines for Panellists

Roundtable: Challenges and Strategies Toward Women's Equality and Inclusion

Panel I (a.m.)

Thank you for agreeing to be a panellist at our roundtable discussion on women's equality in Newfoundland and Labrador. We would like for you to speak for approximately 5 - 7 minutes. When you have reached the six minute mark you will be gently reminded that you have a minute to conclude your remarks. We ask that you consider the following and present your thoughts on any or all of these questions:

- & What is happening to our agenda for the social, economic, legal and political equality of women? Are we making progress? How?
- & Are women's concerns being heard by politicians / decision-makers? Locally/ provincially / nationally?
- & Any examples of issues / concerns which indicate that a woman's agenda for equality and social justice is making or not making an impact?
- & Any ideas / advice to women's organizations working on issues of equality?

Panel II (p.m.)

Thank you for agreeing to be a panellist at our roundtable discussion on women's equality. We ask that you speak for 5 - 7 minutes on the following:

- & Considering what we have heard today, what would you recommend in our quest to ensuring that women's issues are on the agenda of decision-makers within community / organizations / province / nation?

Facilitators' Guidelines Roundtable Discussion

Facilitators should start with a quick round of re/introductions. Participants can begin with a discussion on the challenges to moving forward on issues of equality. Everyone should be encouraged to think about the challenges facing women within their community/region/province/country, the challenges in workplaces, the challenges to us as mothers and caregivers and the challenges facing women who work on issues of social and economic equality. These challenges should be named and flip-charted.

When this list begins to grow, it is time to move to a discussion on the strategies for addressing these challenges. "Think outside the box." Imagine a community, society, world where women's voices counted, where women's experiences are used to shape policy and guide the direction of decision-makers. These strategies/suggestions should be named and flip-charted.

Panel Presentation I January 28, 2005

The opening panel consisted of four women: Susanne Ingram, Coordinator of the Gateway Women's Centre; Juanita Brake, Women in Resource Development Committee; Terry LeDrew, Special Programs Producer, CBC Newfoundland and Labrador; and Susan Hollett, Vice President of the Provincial Advisory Council on the Status of Women.

Each panellist was asked to consider and provide their thoughts on the following four questions:

What is happening to our agenda for the social, economic, legal and political equality of women? Are we making progress? How?

Are women's concerns being heard by politicians / decision-makers? Locally/ provincially / nationally?

Any examples of issues / concerns which indicate that a woman's agenda for equality and social justice is making or not making an impact?

Any ideas / advice to women's organizations working on issues of equality?

The following points were raised by the panellists as challenges and strategies for moving a women's equality agenda forward.

Challenges and Strategies

- Women, in particular those who live in rural communities, have very few resources to draw upon. They have nowhere to turn, therefore Women Centres are very much the focal point for obtaining assistance. This leaves little time for lobbying, advocating and working on advancing the equality agenda at a political and policy level.
- With all the government cutbacks in services, Women Centres are having to do more service delivery work, which could range from assisting women with income support application papers and legal aid to actually trying our best to put out fires due to the lack of mental health services. Women's organizations are spending time dealing with poverty and violence, and we are doing government's work.
- Women's Centres are also expected to do outreach to other groups and organizations, as well as go into schools to talk about issues such as dating violence, sexual harassment....the list goes on. We are also requested - and want - to sit on various municipal, regional and provincial committees and boards to ensure that the "women's voice" is heard, and to use opportunities to put forward a gender-based agenda.

- There is a lack of services and supports from the Department of Human Resources, Labour and Employment for referring victims to proper resources or counselling them at the lowest point in their lives. We have already asked that social workers be put back within that department, particularly in rural areas.
- There is a lack of empathy or awareness around issues facing people living in poverty, as demonstrated when the present government closed 20 income support offices and contracted a call centre to direct calls from clients.
- Mental health is another big concern. In Port aux Basques region there is one mental health counsellor to serve a population of 10,000 people, and the wait list is eight to ten months. We have raised this issue with government leaders. Given the recent consolidation of Health Boards throughout the province, we are worried that this problem may worsen.
- Unemployment and out-migration have a huge impact on women. Many two-parent families are now living a single parent life, as one partner has had to leave the community to seek employment. In some cases, both parents are working away, leaving the children in care of relatives or friends. This is very stressful for women and families. Many senior women are left to care for themselves, as their families have had to leave to find work. They are left with no one to rely on.
- Many women who are working need to have a second income simply to survive financially.
- Women throughout our province continue to voice their concerns regarding the status of women in Newfoundland and Labrador. It appears policy makers are not listening.
- The province's social and economic issues are not seen as connected by government officials.
- Government needs to apply gender based analysis to all policy and programs as they develop. Ignorance of women's issues and concerns is unacceptable.
- Employment insurance eligibility criteria impact women. The reality of women needs to be included in the employment insurance program.
- Minimum wage is not a living wage; the majority of minimum wage jobs are held by women.
- Women still have the most responsibilities within families and communities, such as care giving to children and elderly parents or volunteering. Women and women's organizations need resources and programs to support them.
- Government public relations people are using our words and general terms about equality without any real plan.

- The justice system is failing women. Offenders who commit violent or sexual assaults against women receive minimum sentencing terms, house arrest or conditional sentencing. This leads to the trivialization and decriminalization of violence against women.
- Women have to develop a plan of action that all women's equality-seeking groups can connect and become involved with, i.e., the formation of a provincial women's coalition.
- We need to focus on strategies for a unified and cohesive plan around a women's equality-seeking agenda.
- We all know that federal and provincial levels of government are presently involved in program and departmental reviews. It is more important than ever that individual women and women's organizations make our voices heard to ensure policies and programs explicitly reflect our concerns and recommendations.
- We have to continue to ask Ministers and Members of the House of Assembly, regardless of political affiliation, to hear what we have to say.
- We need to work collaboratively with the Advisory Council to advance and address the needs of women in our communities, province and country.
- We need to insist on gender balance on all government-appointed boards and commissions.
- We need to address the wage gap between women and men.
- We need to be supportive of women and encourage them to run in the upcoming municipal elections. 30% of individuals who run for municipal elections are women, and we need to increase this percentage.
- Awareness of gender equality issues needs to start earlier. The development of school curricula should be done in a gender inclusive way. Women's equality issues need to be introduced into curricula as early as junior high.
- More outreach work needs to be done to educate and raise awareness of women's equality issues.
- The Advisory Council is so important to the Women's Centres, especially to those who are located in rural areas. We cannot move our agenda forward without them; they are our voice and guidance.
- There needs to be more "radical feminist" work.
- Feminists and women's equality-seeking organizations need to continuously promote our belief in equality.

Roundtable Discussions
January 28, 2005
11:00 - 12:00

During the roundtable discussions, participants worked in facilitated small groups to talk about the challenges and strategies for setting a women's agenda.

Participants were encouraged to think about the challenges facing women within their community/region/province/country, the challenges in workplaces, the challenges as mothers and caregivers and the challenges facing women who work on issues of social and economic equality.

Next, participants were invited to "think outside the box" and imagine a community, society, world where women's voices count, and where women's experiences are used to shape policy and guide the direction of decision-makers.

The following challenges and strategies were flipcharted during the roundtable discussions and presented back to the large group.

Challenges (Roundtable)

Lack of support and awareness

- Women's organizations are constantly having to defend their purpose to Government. Government needs to be already aware of, support and resource the work provided by organizations such as Women's Centres, Status of Women Councils, the Advisory Council, Family Resource Centres, Shelters, Transition Houses and Anti-Violence Coalitions.
- There is a general silence of senior officials and government leaders when it comes to advancing women's issues.
- Women are not equally represented or included in public policy and decision making.
- Many men and women do not realize the past and present realities that contribute to the unequal status of women in our province.
- The participation of feminists and lobbyists on boards within the women's community is declining due to family and community demands.
- The work of feminist organizations is constantly being overlooked. Women Centres are an example of this, as over the last 20 years conditions have not improved, yet there is a noticeable increased demand by community.

- Many women do not realize what resources or services are available to them within community. Even women who do know may not access the service because they do not feel comfortable doing so.

Inadequate social system

- Social housing is inadequate, inaccessible and unaffordable for women who require it.
- Access to adequate child care is a problem, especially for single mothers with low incomes.
- Some women have had to terminate their employment due to other barriers, such as transportation, low wages and lack of benefits. This is stressful for women, particularly in rural and remote areas.
- Services such as mental health and addictions counselling are lacking in community.
- Social issues need to be a priority.

Additional Challenges

- Women's work is undervalued and underpaid. Women with highly specialized skills often work for low pay and no benefits in jobs that require university degrees. An example of this is therapy for autistic children. Although employees must have a minimum of 2 years completed in psychology at the university level, Health and Community services pay \$9 per hour for a maximum of 30 hours per week. High student loan debt often intensifies the economic hardship of these situations
- Women's under-representation is a problem in some industries as employers do not often want to hire women, and women may be hesitant to enter a traditionally male-dominated industry. This hesitation is largely because feminist guidance and awareness is not incorporated in the secondary or post secondary curriculum, thus women do not feel that it is okay to work in a "man's job."
- There is great difficulty in gathering data on women and the justice system in the province. In this environment of public accountability and evidence-based decision making, what are the measures for the status of women in NL? How do we measure our status from a judicial context to understand whether women are being served by the judicial system?
- We need current statistics that reflect the true reality of the status of women in Newfoundland and Labrador collected by front-line, equality-seeking women's organizations, such as Women's Centres / Councils, Transition Houses, Shelters, etc.
- We must reinforce the link between women, work and literacy.

- Many women live in poverty and isolation. Some women are not involved in programs and groups because they are isolated by barriers of poverty, self-esteem, and lack of power.
- Women need better access to education, a safe, healthy environment, economic security and opportunities equal to those enjoyed by men in all areas of our lives.
- Women need to speak our minds freely and listen with respect to women across differences in age, political affiliation, ethnicity, education, ability, sexual orientation, geographical and economic background and other differences.
- There is a constant struggle to keep feminism on the table and to get women who believe in feminist principles to acknowledge they are feminists.
- As feminist women, our challenge is to continue to be involved in equality work while also balancing our lives as mothers, workers and spouses and practising self care.
- We need to be concerned with gender roles and stereotypes portrayed in the media, and the negative impact they have on children, particularly girls.

Strategies (Roundtable)

Increase education and awareness

- This could be accomplished by holding monthly empowerment events that allow women to share stories and shout! These events could be mobile or recorded on radio or TV to reach women and generate interest within other communities.
- Provide opportunities for women to expand their skill sets by providing low cost, short term workshops/courses on issues such as health, self esteem, self defense, etc.
- Get feminism into educational institutions. This could be achieved in a number of ways:
 - < getting more feminists on school boards;
 - < advocating for the inclusion of women's equality issues in the curriculum of schools and universities, and specifically the MUN Faculty of Education where new teachers are being trained;
 - < implementing job shadowing programs for young women in secondary schools;
 - < implementing mentoring programs between secondary schools and women in non-traditional jobs;
 - < enhancing collaboration between secondary / post secondary schools and community-based, equality-seeking organizations.
- Government leaders need to be educated and made more aware of women's reality in Newfoundland and Labrador. Educating them about equality, justice and democratic processes would increase the amount of gender inclusive analysis being conducted at various levels of government, thus leading them to make better, sound decisions about women's issues.

- Government should provide adequate funding for Women’s Centres, Status of Women Councils, the Advisory Council, Family Resource Centres, Shelters, Transition Houses, Anti-Violence Coalitions, etc.
- Society needs to be educated on equality and justice issues. This would allow people to have a better knowledge and grasp of women’s issues and also increase their understanding.
- Women themselves need to become more knowledgeable about equality issues so they can make informed, educated decisions.

Challenge more

- Women need to start breaking the rules by challenging those in authority, and doing this publicly so they will be more inclined to respond.
- Women need to take a stand on decisions that are hurtful to women, families and communities. It is felt that problems stemming from decisions made by Government need to be challenged. This means showing low tolerance for inequality and changing the political process by bringing to light problems such as the lack of government accountability.
- Women also need to start challenging themselves and others on issues of equality and inclusion.

Strengthening the Women’s Movement

- One way to add strength to the women’s agenda is by bringing back feminist language, making it more familiar and gender inclusive, allowing people to feel more comfortable with it.
- Women need to be more supported regarding family care giving. For example, women need to have family friendly work places and policies, to provide more support to single and working mothers.
- Women’s organizations should build relationships with groups who do not always see a connection between feminism and community, meaning groups not normally associated with the feminist community. This would assist in understanding the links between women’s equality and the issues that face families and communities.

- Women need to support each other. This could be accomplished by creating a women’s agenda in NL dealing with what is most important to women and what would enable the most women to improve their lives and prospects. It should include:
 - < equality under the law;
 - < more opportunities to expand the roles women play in society;
 - < as much respect and recognition as men have in those roles while maintaining the respect in the traditional roles as well. Not only women involved in the feminist community, but also those in public positions, such as government or those wanting to run for office.
- Governments could work towards the advancement of women by doing more gender analysis and ensuring equal representation of females in position of authority.

Additional Strategies

- Statistics never tell the whole story of women’s inequality. Women’s Centres and Victim Services gather statistics around clients and service users and report these regularly to Government. This type of information and reporting is often perceived as “soft” data due to its qualitative nature. A mechanism must be found to value the qualitative information in addition to the quantitative data.
- Statistical data must be accessible to community-based organizations and reflective of women’s social and economic reality.
- The entire women’s community needs to share its data better. Building evidence-based arguments is important for drawing attention to the issues and advocating for policies and resources.
- We need to develop innovative ways of working with the community to determine what strategies and best practices work for all women and the whole province. It is a fundamental issue to the ability of women to participate in the work force and other roles in the community.
- We need to organize more gatherings of women from diverse backgrounds.
- We should ensure lifelong learning is available for all women by providing opportunities and jobs where women teach other women.
- We need to find ways to support women who wish to access meetings and learning events by ensuring transportation, childcare, honoraria and other benefits are available to all who need them.
- We need to provide opportunities for women to meet on a regular basis, share experiences and strategize through annual pan-provincial women’s conferences.

Panel Presentation II
January 28, 2005
Corner Brook

The closing panel consisted of three women: Heather Davis, Coordinator of the Corner Brook Women's Centre; Holly Pike, Vice Principal, Sir Wilfred Grenfell College, Memorial University of Newfoundland; and Joyce Hancock, President of the Provincial Advisory Council on the Status of Women.

Panellists were asked to reflect upon the days events, including the challenges and strategies identified by participants in the roundtable discussions, and respond to the following question:

Considering what we have heard today, what would you recommend in our quest to ensuring that women's issues are on the agenda of decision-makers within community / organizations / province / nation?

The following points were raised by the panellists as strategies and recommendations for moving a women's equality agenda forward.

Key Recommendations and Strategies

- We need to continue to work to get women's issues on Governments' agenda now.
- Women must be equally represented in decision-making roles.
- We need to continue to challenge all levels of government to implement the *5 Demands for Women's Equality in Canada*.
- Women should work collaboratively to decide on actions and strategies that can be employed on our collective behalf as a provincial women's community.
- Things haven't improved for the status of women in the last decade. The same issues keep arising over and over, and some conditions for women are, in fact, becoming worse.
- Women need to be politically astute and look at every issue with an eye to how government decisions impact women's equality. The Atlantic Accord discussion is a good example of government and media garnering and managing public sentiment. Although everyone agreed with our province's position, few people questioned the plan for the extra revenue and how women's equality, social issues or rural Newfoundland and Labrador would benefit.

- For every positive statistic that speaks to the progress being made in the quest for women's equality, there is a negative statistic showing how unequal women still are in this province and country.
- Women's Centres are delivering more and more of the services that used to be provided by Government. They are increasingly unable to carry out critical policy/advocacy work because they are consumed with service delivery. Yet, the services that the Women's Centres provide daily is not captured or reflected in Government's statistics.
- It is extremely upsetting to see women, who are the most vulnerable of our population, bearing the brunt of government cutbacks.
- Governments silence women by cutting or controlling funding to women's organizations.
- The provincial women's community needs to set our own agenda, not have an agenda imposed on us or predetermined by governments.
- Women need to be aware that governments have big "communication machines" at their disposal. This type of message managing can make the general public believe that "things are fine." It is critical that equality-seeking women's organizations name the everyday reality of women's lives and the impact government decision making has on women, families and communities.
- We need to expect a commitment to moving forward on women's equality issues from federal and provincial governments.
- We know that the on-the-ground work of grassroots organizations is extremely important, and we expect governments to respect and resource this important role.
- Women need to continue to network, build coalitions, and find ways to continue to support each other as women.
- We need to advocate for the United Nations Committee's recommendations around the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) to be implemented at all levels of government.
- We need to encourage and support more women to be in leadership roles. As women, we need to recognize that we have power, and use it to advance women's equality in our province.
- More women need to speak out and avoid being silent on issues of women's equality and inclusion.

- Women need to publicly identify themselves as feminists, and find ways for young women to learn about feminism and find their place/role within the feminist movement.
- As feminists, we have to take our personal beliefs and politics and make them a part of our everyday feminist perspective. Women need to think in terms of, “what could be better because of my feminism?”
- We need to get more women into politics and more women in decision-making roles.
- It is important to ask both federal and provincial Status of Women Ministers about their women’s equality agenda and how they intend to move forward on the social and economic equality of women in our province and country.
- As individual women, we need to be individually responsible for our respective roles in advancing women’s equality.
- Women need to identify consultations which are true collaborative processes (i.e., women’s experiences of the pre-budget roundtables were very negative).
- Women need new mechanisms (without the restrictions of government funding and service provision) to bring forward a women’s equality agenda, i.e., a Newfoundland and Labrador Feminist Coalition.

Appendix I