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BUILDING THE CASE
for an Explicit Social Policy Framework in British Columbia

A Simon Fraser University School of Public Policy Report in partnership with BoardVoice

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Executive Summary

This report builds upon *Making the Case: A Social Policy Framework for British Columbia* (2014), which set the foundation for our research by highlighting the benefits of adopting an explicit framework of values, societal objectives, and social benchmarks to guide the creation, administration, and evaluation of social policy across government ministries. Building upon *Making the Case*, our team sought to determine whether or not social policy ministries in British Columbia operate through a shared set of principles and objectives that could be interpreted as an *implicit* social policy framework.

To investigate the presence of an implicit social policy framework in BC, our approach was to conduct a textual analysis of the 2015 mandate letters from the Office of the Premier and service plans of 15 ministries involved in the creation of social policy. Utilizing a coordinated coding framework, we thoroughly analyzed each document with the express purpose of highlighting the societal objectives and performance measures present in the service plans, as well as their consistency with the mandate letters. The results of our textual analysis are framed within an overview of the role of social policy and the current 'social condition' of British Columbia, which was assessed through relevant statistical data on poverty rates and social outcomes. The relatively high rates of child poverty, the working poor, and other negative social outcomes highlighted in our background research points towards a significant gap between a high level of economic growth throughout the recent history of BC, yet a declining or stagnant 'social condition'. In particular, despite continued economic growth, BC has experienced an increase in the level of poverty and the working poor, in which racialized groups, First Nations, children, and women continue to be overrepresented.

Consistent with our observation of a gap between economic growth and the overall social condition of BC, our textual analysis revealed two overarching findings. Firstly, our investigation did not reveal evidence of an implicit *social policy* framework integrated across social policy ministries. Nor did our analysis find consistent social policy objectives between the mandate letters and service plans. Secondly, however, our analysis did reveal a coherent *economic policy framework* present, to varying degrees, across all 14 social policy ministries, as well as the mandate letters. The economic policy framework was evidenced through underlying economic directives that guided priority setting, pinpointed stakeholders, and framed, to a large degree,

how both ministry performance and societal progress were measured. Our analysis revealed that these broad economic directives were principally established in the mandate letters from the Office of the Premier, and were more specifically set out in the service plans in reference to the *BC Jobs Plan*, which was discussed frequently throughout social policy ministries as a guiding policy document. While we did not find any such guiding documents for the creation of social policy across ministries in a comparable manner, there was evidence of efforts to integrate and collaborate towards addressing and improving social outcomes between ministries closely involved with social service delivery--namely, Health, Children and Family Development, Education, and Social Development and Social Innovation.

Our recommendation is geared towards achieving greater balance between economic growth and an improved overall social condition for BC through the adoption of an explicit social policy framework to complement the existing strategic plan for economic growth. Our research suggests four primary best practices for formulating an explicit social policy framework:

- Consult with front line workers and elicit feedback from the public

- Set clear benchmarks for social outcomes

- Develop a comprehensive poverty reduction strategy

- Establish social policy goals to allow ministries to set relevant priorities for action

The evidence of an integrated economic framework across BC's social policy ministries, and the continued growth of the BC economy, is indicative of the success of an explicit policy framework. We believe that these successes can be equally realized in the delivery of social policy through the use of an explicit social policy framework.

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SECTION 1: BACKGROUND

Introduction

Broadly defined, social policies seek to respond to complex social, economic, and political pressures with the aim of improving the wellbeing of individuals and communities. In the administration of social policy, governments walk a fine line between the efficient provision of services through specialized and relatively siloed ministries, and the effective coordination of objectives and strategic plans towards common ends. The purpose of this report is to explicate the merits of adopting an explicit 'social policy framework' (SPF) as a tool for bridging the gap between the compartmentalization of, and uniformity between, social policy ministries.

In this report we build upon a 2014 document, *Making the Case: A Social Policy Framework for British Columbia*, which provided a comparative analysis of social policy frameworks across Canadian provinces and internationally, and set the context for how and why the government of British Columbia could benefit from adopting an explicit social policy framework (McLean, Rabinovitch, Rai, Rogerson & Wiley-Shaw, 2014). Furthering their previous work, this report is presented in two sections. In the first section, we outline the findings of *Making the Case*, and give further contextualization of how a social policy framework could be of benefit to the provincial government of BC. To this end we review the literature on social policy and its objectives, then give a synopsis of the statistical indicators of social wellbeing of British Columbian residents. In the second section, we outline and present the results of our own research project, which set out to find the current level of cohesion across social policy ministries, or if BC operates through an implicit social policy framework. Our primary research was conducted through a textual analysis of the 2015 mandate letters and service plans from 15 social policy ministries in BC. In our concluding section, we end with a set of recommendations— most of which were analyzed in *Making the Case*—that our textual analysis shows can help move the province toward better social outcomes and greater integration and coordination in social policy making.

Lessons from Making the Case: A Social Policy Framework for British Columbia

In 2014, a team of graduate students from the School of Public Policy at Simon Fraser University, in collaboration with BoardVoice, published a report that investigated and established the need for a social policy framework (SPF) in British Columbia. *Making the Case: A Social Policy Framework for British Columbia* (McLean et al., 2014) surveyed examples of policy creation, program delivery, and policy assessment in the province, looking specifically at reports that assessed the extent of intergovernmental coordination, collaboration with community service partners, and transparency with the public. Through a comparative analysis it explored efforts by other jurisdictions to coordinate social policy processes through explicit social policy frameworks or similar intra-governmental structures. In particular, the report presented evidence from the provinces of Newfoundland, Alberta, and Saskatchewan, as well as from City of London, Ontario, and internationally from New Zealand.

The analysis concluded that the primary benefits of a social policy framework include: more clear, consistent, and transparent guidelines for government consultation; greater collaboration in the decision making processes across ministries; greater consistency in policies within and across government; and a more coherent set of principles and shared values for the allocation of government resources. Thus, a social policy framework is presented as a mechanism by which to increase the effectiveness of addressing ongoing social issues including poverty, inequity, and social marginalization. Additionally, a social policy framework would address existing concerns about public and stakeholder confidence in government through the establishment of common data reporting standards. Indeed, setting measurements for policy outcomes is directly linked to the success of a social policy framework, as it allows for objectives to be measured consistently over time, and in turn for outcomes to inform the policy process (Spoonley, Peace, Butcher & O'Neill, 2005).

The Role of Social Policy

Social policies focus on addressing issues that affect the quality of life and wellbeing of individuals, and are often associated with redistributive politics and social welfare. Founder of the academic discipline of social policy, Richard Titmuss (1974), observed that social policy is "beneficent, redistributive and concerned with [the] economic as well as non-economic wellbeing

of society" (pp. 145). Through this perspective social policy is concerned with government intervention for the achievement of the public good, and hence implies a significant interventionist role by government in the provision of a wide range of community services, facilities and safeguards (pp. 145). Titmuss (1974) and other early social policy thinkers posit that social policies are action and problem-oriented reflections of the 'general will' of the people, which seek to bring about social change and directly impact citizens through the provision of services or income.

Social policy interventions inevitably entail the use of scarce government resources, and the questions about who benefits, who pays, and the process through which these trade-offs are determined are central to the distributive aims of social policy. Indeed, addressing poverty is a primary concern of social policy. Public policy scholars, Guzman, Pirog, and Seefeldt (2013), contend that social policies and programs aim to address fundamental issues of economic and social vulnerability through the provision of financial and/or in-kind support for low-income and other potentially vulnerable populations. Such interventions to address poverty have attempted through social policy interventions include the following: means-tested income support and social insurance programs; physical and mental health programs; food security and housing security programs; policies to mitigate the consequences of crime and domestic violence; health policy; education policy; and policies that intervene in the welfare of vulnerable children.

Equity concerns are central to social policy making, despite being elusive, vague and sometimes conflicting. According to August Osterle (2002), "equity is widely accepted as an objective in social policy. Explicitly or implicitly social policy definitions at their core often include notions such as equity, justice, equality or fairness" (pp. 47). In other words, equity objectives are concerned with a fair distribution of resources and burdens across economic and social dimensions. Osterle (2002) identifies at least four sets of equity objectives: guaranteeing minimum standards; supporting living standards; reducing inequality; and, promoting social integration. At the same time, equity concerns reach beyond pure monetary dimensions of redistributing income and wealth, and involves the broader conceptualizing of poverty and disadvantage in terms fundamental rights and accessing key services. Similarly, policy interventions may also focus on different aspects of equity, for example: vertical equity (e.g. redistribution between rich and poor); or horizontal equity (e.g. redistribution between the employed and the unemployed) (Osterle, 2002).

As outlined in *Making The Case*, an explicit social policy framework is a means to facilitate the development of social policy with an overarching goal of improving equity across the province (McLean et al., 2014). Social policy covers a number of mutually constituting policy areas including health, education, children and families, employment, multiculturalism, poverty, and so on. Therefore, if social policy's goal is to create more equitable outcomes—in the form of increased human capital, better health outcomes, and equity within the labour force, for example—siloing social policy ministries creates barriers to addressing structural issues, such as poverty reduction, by narrowing their scope and realm of influence. Thus, greater collaboration between social policy ministries through a social policy framework can facilitate the creation of comprehensive policies that meet the needs of a diverse British Columbia.

British Columbia's Social Condition

Social policy in British Columbia has been widely discussed in both academic literature and the media due to the persistence of poor social outcomes throughout the province, despite strong economic performance relative to the rest of Canada (Richards, 2010). While economic growth is closely associated—and often seen as a precursor—to social prosperity, this appears to be a paradox in British Columbia. Statistical data on the wellbeing of British Columbians bears out the contradiction of poverty and prosperity in the province:

20.4% of children in BC live below the poverty line (2015), sitting above the national average of 19%.	BC has the highest rate of poverty in Canada at 12%.	Despite economic growth, BC's median earnings are falling at the fastest rate in the country

British Columbia has the highest poverty rate in Canada at 12%, according to both the Low-Income Cut-Off (LICO) and the Market Basket Measure (MBM) (Cohen & Klein, 2011). Unfortunately, since 1989 the child poverty rate for children between the ages of 0 and 17 has been steadily increasing from 15.5% to 20.4% (First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition, 2015). This percentage represents 1 in 5 children in the province, and accounts for almost 170,000 children (First Call, 2015).

All the while, BC has been experiencing steady economic growth and low unemployment rates, especially between 2000 and 2008. However, during this time the province has also faced, "growing economic insecurity, rising homelessness, and declining real wages" (Cohen & Klein, 2011, pp. 61). In fact, the province's median earnings fell 2.4% between 2000 and 2005 (Richards et al., 2008). The only other province that experienced a reduction in median earnings during this time was Quebec, with wages that fell by 0.3 percent (Richards et al., 2008). Additionally, the rates of the working poor in BC have increased steadily despite continued economic growth.[1]

In 2001, BC accounted for 23.1% of Canada's working poor, at approximately 150,000 people

The working poor in BC accounts for approximately 10.2% of the total workforce, nearly double the national average of 5.6%

(Fleury & Fortin, 2006)

More recently, the City of Vancouver and BC's most densely populated region, identified that 40% of Metro Vancouver's low income population were employed, working on average 36 hours per week, but struggling to make ends meet due to low median incomes. For example, Metro Vancouver tax filers reported a median income of $28,220 in 2012, the lowest of census metropolitan areas (CMAs) for over 200 000 persons, which is the fourth lowest of all CMAs in Canada (City of Vancouver, 2015).

Poverty is not only indicative of poor economic conditions, but more importantly is closely related with higher levels of vulnerability, marginalization, and insecurity. It is associated with experiences of: inadequate living conditions; precarious housing; poor nutrition and health outcomes; social isolation; and physical, mental, and emotional strain. We know that certain population groups, particularly single parent households, especially those led by women, Aboriginal peoples, recent migrants and refugees, and people living with disabilities experience higher incidences of poverty (Ivanova, 2011). Marginalized social groups face significant disadvantages in earnings and structural inequities, which lead to higher levels of poverty (Richards et al., 2008; Family Service Toronto, 2015). Estimates from the National Council of Welfare suggest that in Canada there were 1.1 million racialized persons living in poverty in 2006,

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[1] The working poor are defined as income recipients working at least 910 hours per year (Employment and Skills Development Canada, 2016; Fleury & Fortin, 2006)

representing 32% of all persons living in poverty (ESDC, 2013).[2] Research by Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC, 2013) confirms that employment incomes are lower for racialized persons than non-racialized persons, compounding the potential for poverty among such groups. British Columbia is home to 20% of Canada's racialized persons living in poverty, second only to Ontario, where the Metro Vancouver region was home to 18% of the overall total (ESDC, 2013).

These statistics demonstrate that there is a dire need for social policy that addresses poverty, vulnerability, and marginalization, both to improve the wellbeing of British Columbians and to address the costs of poverty to the BC government. The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, in their 2011 report *The Cost of Poverty in BC*, found that while the direct costs of poverty to the BC government is $2.2 to $2.3 billion annually (or close to 6% of the provincial budget) the true cost of poverty to BC society is much higher—estimated to be between $8.1 billion and $9.2 billion annually. This is due to the indirect costs of poverty, including higher incidence of crime and costs to the justice system, higher costs on health care and reliance on emergency services, loss in productivity and foregone earnings, and loss in social capital through, for example, lower educational attainment (Ivanova, 2011). Together, these and other factors result in a loss of collective wealth to our society.

It is clear that some of BC's poor results in social indicators of poverty, marginalization, and vulnerability have been compounded by broader shifts in the priorities of government at the federal level. For example, the changes to the federal budget in 1995 significantly restricted social and health transfers to provinces, resulting in reductions in provincial funding for social programs (Richards, Cohen, Klein & Littman, 2008; Cohen & Klein, 2011). It is our belief, however, that British Columbia can do more to address social and economic inequities. Despite cuts to social and health transfers, BC's economic growth record places the provincial government in a favorable position to increase the allocation of resources towards social programs and social policy initiatives.

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[2] Racialized groups refers here to persons, other than Aboriginal peoples, who self-described as a visible minority on the 2006 Census (ESDC, 2013).

Section 2: Analysis

Textual Analysis

Making the Case established that British Columbia does not currently utilize a social policy framework as a guiding tool for front line workers, policy analysts, and decision makers (McLean et al., 2014). Recognizing that within any social group, institution, or bureaucratic organization the absence of a formal structure of values and objectives does not preclude the emergence of informal structures (Freeman, 2013), our research question asks:

> Is there evidence of an implicit social policy framework embedded across social policy ministries, despite the absence of an explicit guiding document?

If so, what does this look like? If not, are there coherent themes that emerge across the ministries, or perhaps conflicting objectives? An implicit social policy framework is defined as a set of underlying values and objectives that shape government action, guide priority setting, identify key stakeholders, and give definition to their interests. In other words, an implicit social policy framework is a connecting theme that is witnessed in the broad objectives and goals that ministries set, as well as their performance measures (or what is defined as societal progress) and the segments of British Columbia's society that are recognized to either benefit or be negatively impacted by policy decisions.

Research Design

The means by which we sought to answer the research question was through a textual analysis of the mandate letters and service plans of the following 15 social policy ministries:

- Ministry of Social Development and Social Innovation
- Ministry of Children and Family Development
- Ministry of Health

- Ministry of Education
- Ministry of International Trade and the Minister Responsible for the Asia Pacific Strategy and Multiculturalism
- Ministry of the Environment and the Environmental Assessment Office
- Ministry of Jobs, Tourism and Skills Training and the Minister Responsible for Labour
- Ministry of Advanced Education
- Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation
- Ministry of Justice
- Ministry of Community, Sport, and Cultural Development
- Ministry of Natural Gas Development and the Minister Responsible for Housing
- BC Housing Management Commission
- Ministry of Transportation
- Ministry of Finance

The mandate letters are documents from the Office of the Premier delivered to each ministry on an annual basis, which are designed to be a 'work plan' for the ministry. The service plans more specifically set out the objectives, the specific goals, and the performance measures of the ministry, and are drafted within the ministry itself, typically in reference to the objectives of the mandate letter.

Government bureaucracy is facilitated, to a significant degree, through a variety of 'active texts' that coordinate action across space and time (Peräkyla, 2005). Our study aims to gain a greater understanding of the ways in which textually-mediated relations enable and/or constrain social policy ministries at the highest level of organization, through broad overarching frameworks of values, assumptions, and objectives. Our research is informed by the observation that people participate with texts in a way that informs and shapes everyday working life (Smith, 2002). In particular, text-based communication, such as mandate letters and service plans, organizes and smooths social relations across geographical sites (Carroll, 2004; Campbell & Gregor, 2004, pp.172).

Methodology

In the qualitative analysis of interviews and textual documents, researchers typically employ an inductive method to code each line of text and develop sets of themes that 'emerge naturally' out of the data. Qualitative research methods often eschew a defined coding protocol (pre-determined codes) in the analysis of empirical materials (Peräkyla, 2005). However, as our analysis set out towards a specific end (to investigate the objectives, goals, and values present across social policy ministries) we utilized a deductive framework to guide our analysis and to coordinate efforts between four researchers. Our framework for analysis was informed by a set of 'societal objectives' often used by policy analysts and theorists to frame policy issues (Bardach, 2012). The six primary societal objectives (defined in Appendix 1) are:

- Equity
- Efficiency (Economic Growth)
- Development (Human Capital)
- Protection & Security
- Sustainability
- Freedom & Liberty

Along with these societal objectives we also coded the texts through a set of six governmental objectives (see Appendix 1):

- Budgetary Issues
- Administrative Complexity
- Public and Media Acceptance
- Stakeholder Acceptance
- Communications Ease
- Compliance Issues

Along with societal and governmental objectives, we coded each service plan for 'measurable indicators', which point to concrete performance measures set out by ministries to define social progress and determine the extent to which societal and governmental objectives are being achieved.

The analysis of the mandate letters and service plans was done through an iterative group process, broken into 4 steps:

1. First, each line of text from each document was coded for a corresponding societal or governmental objective, or as a measurable indicator. Codes were not treated as mutually exclusive, and lines of text that referenced multiple objectives were coded accordingly. When multiple codes were applied, they were supplemented with annotations to make note of how multiple objectives intersected, or were framed.

2. Out of the codes and annotated notes, we looked for common themes across ministries. Themes were based not merely on the frequency of a particular code, but the context in which it they took place. Overlapping codes were of particular importance in examining the nuanced ways in which societal objectives were defined.

3. Specific attention was given to the coherence of themes between the mandate letters and service plans.

4. After general themes started to emerge, we went back to the original documents to corroborate and elaborate upon the themes. This final step added greater contextualization of the themes that formed into our analysis.

Findings

On whether BC operates under an implicit social policy framework

As previously stated, our textual analysis sought to determine whether or not there exists an implicit social policy framework across the 2015 BC service plans and mandate letters from social policy ministries, despite the lack of an explicit guiding social policy document. To answer our research question: our textual analysis did not find an implicit social policy framework in the form of a government-wide overarching vision with defining principles, common goals, and coordinated strategies amongst social policy ministries.

Social policy goals were not consistently defined across ministries and references to disadvantaged groups were irregular and fluctuating. Goals defined in ministry service plans were diverse in determining which social policy objectives ought to be addressed, and precisely how to address them. For example, references to lone-parent or single income families, newcomers or immigrants, or visible minority groups who may be more prone to poverty were present in some ministries, but which groups were referenced or defined as either marginalized or equity-seeking were inconsistent when looking at the provincial government as a whole.

There is evidence to indicate that some ministries, however, particularly those closely involved with social service delivery--namely, Health, Children and Family Development, Education, and Social Development--are making efforts to integrate and collaborate towards addressing and improving social outcomes. In 2013, the Ministry of Health partnered with the Canadian Institute for Health Information (CIHI) to collaborate with the ministries of Children and Family Development, Education, and Social Development to produce a framework on child and youth health and wellbeing, in addition to negotiated measures, that would be used by the ministries involved to report on social outcomes (BCPHO & CIHI, 2013). As *Making the Case* (2014) states, "the summary document from this process walks through many considerations, presents a framework, and develops related indicators" (pp. 32).

Our textual analysis found signs of the integrated approach outlined in the resulting *Child and Youth Health and Well-being Indicators Project* (2013) amongst the participating ministries, as they were the mostly likely to have incorporated social policy goals into their objectives, strategies and measures. An example can be found in the Ministry of Health's first goal, strategy,

and measure. Goal 1 is set as: "Support the health and well-being of British Columbians" (pp. 7), while Performance Measure 2 is stated as the following:

- The percentage of B.C. students in grades 3, 4, 7, 10 and 12 who report that at school, they are learning to stay healthy (pp. 8).

Performance Measure 2 points to collaboration with other ministries—in this case, the Ministry of Education—and a comprehensive approach that is explained and justified in the "Discussion" section for the measure:

> This is a new performance measure for the Service Plan but is part of BC's Guiding Framework for Public Health. Evidence suggests that over time, a primary prevention and health promotion agenda can help improve the overall health of the population. Accordingly, Healthy Schools BC, a key initiative of Healthy Families BC, aims to improve students' awareness of healthy lifestyles and healthy environments. The Ministry, in partnership with health authorities and school districts, supports a number of targeted programs, which provide comprehensive health resources for teachers and schools (pp. 8).

Although other social policy ministries undoubtedly collaborate, these four ministries have guiding documents (BC's Guiding Framework for Public Health, Healthy Schools BC, Healthy Families BC) that focus on comprehensive health and wellbeing outcomes, in addition to indicators that track their progress. The same consistency and emphasis on social policy goals, as opposed to economic goals, was not found for the other social policy ministries. In fact, our analysis found that while there was no evidence of a government-wide implicit social policy framework, there is evidence to support that the provincial government operates under a coherent economic framework.

Economic Framework

The primary result of the textual analysis is the finding of clear evidence of an economic policy framework throughout all of the 2015 mandate letters, and to varying degrees throughout the 2015 service plans. An economic policy framework (EPF) exists insofar as an overarching economic vision is outlined with defining principles, common goals and coordinated strategies

amongst the social policy ministries of the provincial government. The framework was evidenced through underlying economic values and assumptions that guided priority setting, pinpointed stakeholders and how their interests were defined, and framed how both ministry performance and societal progress were measured. Our analysis concludes that there does not exist a similar overarching and integrated framework that focuses on social policy goals in the manner that the mandate letters and service plans demonstrate towards economic goals.

The EPF is principally established in the directives of the provincial mandate letters, and is more specifically set out in the service plans through the *BC Jobs Plan*, which is referred to frequently throughout social policy ministries as a guiding policy document. Additionally, there are several other guiding economic plans (i.e. BC's Skills for Jobs Blueprint, BC Provincial Nominee Program, Worksafe BC), but no explicit guiding social policy documents referenced in the mandate letters or service plans applied across ministries in a comparable manner.

A coordinated and integrated economic policy framework and strategic action plan to grow an economy is a common and necessary goal of most governments. The goal of this report is not to disparage a set of economic goals, or to display them as, in every case, mutually exclusive from social policy objectives. At the same time, it is often recognized in policy studies that trade-offs often exist between 'efficiency', defined broadly by economic growth (GDP), and substantive equity (Banting & Myles 2013). While 'efficiency' is centered on growing the overall size of the economy, equity is more concerned with the even distribution of wealth and resources across society. Undeniably, tensions between desired economic and social policy objectives can arise, but it is necessary for governments and bureaucratic agencies to make decisions about such trade-offs, and to constantly weigh the benefits and costs of any government goals and strategies that pertain to economic growth and distribution. Social policy makers are burdened with the tough decision of choosing when and where government interventions are necessary to redistribute the burdens and rewards of society in a more just, fair, or equitable way. Within the economic framework for BC there is a fundamental assumption that economic growth will be for the benefit of all residents of British Columbia. Yet while an economic strategy is a necessary condition to maintain the provision of services throughout government ministries, it is not proving to be sufficient in addressing the social conditions of British Columbians in terms of concrete and measurable outcomes, as the background of this report outlined.

The Shape of BC's Economic Framework

The economic policy framework found in most 2015 service plans can be characterized as an overarching set of government objectives for growing BC's economy. In particular, there is a consistent focus on 'maintaining a strong fiscal position', ensuring a strong economy, and increasing the overall quantity of jobs, primarily through growing the natural resource sector. Furthermore, part of the strategy to increase economic growth is through maintaining balanced budgets and a triple A credit rating, and 'keeping government lean' through the reduction of bureaucratic red tape. The ubiquity of these strategies is exemplified by the fact that a balanced budget was the number one priority in every mandate letter and that each letter ended by restating the government's commitment to reducing bureaucratic red tape.

To explicate our findings of an economic policy framework, and the lack of a coherent implicit social policy framework, the analysis is presented in the following 3 sections:

1. Evidence of an economic policy framework is broken into the following subsections:

    1.1 Economic Framing

    1.2 Aboriginal Relations

    1.3 Liquefied Natural Gas and Resource Extraction

    1.4 Increasing Employment in BC

2. Inadequate social benchmarking

3. The relationship of mandate letters to service plans

1. Evidence of an Economic Policy Framework

1.1 Economic Framing

As previously stated, both the mandate letters and the service plans set out to achieve social policy goals through a framework of economic growth. The following example from the mandate letter to the Ministry of Jobs, Tourism, and Skills Training and the Minister Responsible for Labour is common throughout social policy ministries:

> *Living within our means is demonstrating our respect for the people of our province and the tax dollars they send to Victoria. By keeping government lean and reducing the cost of administration, we can make significant investments in people and the infrastructure on which they depend to succeed in a strong and growing economy.*

> *As a result of our strong fiscal position, we have been able to provide new assistance to single parents as they return to the workforce, greater income exemptions for single parents on income assistance and continued record investments in funding for public health care, education and transportation--services on which families depend* (pp. 1).

In the second section in the quote above, economic goals and strategies ('living within our mean') are offered as a way to achieve the mentioned social policy goals ('new assistance to single parents', etc.). However, the social policy goals outlined here—equity concerns for single parents—are not consistently outlined throughout the mandate letters or service plans for all social policy ministries unlike the economic objectives of economic growth, a strong fiscal position for the government, keeping government lean, and reducing red tape. Social policy goals differ between most ministries, and which equity-seeking groups are mentioned is irregular. When equity-seeking groups are mentioned in either type of government document examined, they are regularly couched within the broad economic goals and growth strategies of the BC government.

The Ministry of Finance, while not directly engaged in the creation of social policy goals and its delivery, is nevertheless integral in its role in establishing fiscal management strategies and taxation policies. And while much of the Ministry of Finance is focused on the technical management of B.C.'s budget and credit rating, their 2015 service plan has a dedicated section for the 'BC Public Service Agency' with a clear focus on human resources and social services.

Throughout the Ministry of Finance service plan, including the B.C. Public Service Agency, the language of economic growth as a means towards social policy outcomes has also framed their stated goals, objectives, and measures. The 'Strategic Context' for the Ministry's Service Plan is, unsurprisingly, set on economic growth, with GDP and 'Fiscal Responsibility' being the primary concerns. The only sentence coded for 'equity' in the overarching context for the ministry is dual-coded for 'efficiency' as well, which highlights the theme of achieving more equitable outcomes through economic growth in the assertion that "[e]nsuring a fair, effective, and competitive tax, benefit and regulatory environment that increases confidence in government, attracts and retains personal business investment, and funds provincial programs and services for British Columbians" (MoF, pp. 6-7). Without concrete dedication to substantive equity goals, it is only possible to *infer* that 'fair, effective and competitive tax, benefit, and regulatory environment' refers to substantive equity in taxation as a means to funding the provision of social services;

however, it is equally possible, and indeed more coherent with the overarching themes of the 2015 B.C. government, to interpret a 'competitive tax, benefit, and regulatory environment' as a dedication to lower business taxes, with more loose regulatory guidelines (i.e., "cutting red tape"), as to attract investment for companies operating in B.C.

The priority of economic growth through non-redistributive means is clearest in the Ministry of Finance's Performance Measures 6, 7 and 8, which leaves no need for inference as to its meaning:

Performance Measure 6, 7 and 8:   Provincial Income Tax Ranking

Performance Measure	2014/15 Forecast	2015/16 Target	2016/17 Target	2017/18 Target
Provincial ranking of corporate income tax rates	Second lowest	Remain in the lowest four	Remain in the lowest four	Remain in the lowest four
Provincial ranking of personal income tax rates for the bottom tax bracket	Second lowest	Remain in the lowest two	Remain in the lowest two	Remain in the lowest two
Provincial ranking of personal income tax rates for the second-from-bottom tax bracket	Lowest	Remain in the lowest two	Remain in the lowest two	Remain in the lowest two

Data Source: Published legislation and budgets from all 10 provinces.

(MoF, pp. 12)

Maintaining some of the lowest tax rates for the bottom tax brackets is an equitable policy direction, while maintaining some of the lowest corporate tax rates also demonstrates the strong prioritization of economic growth over the equitable redistribution of government resources. Discussion of Performance Measures 6, 7 and 8 emphasizes the claim of our analysis:

> The two measures of the provincial ranking of personal income tax rates provide a comparison of British Columbia's personal income tax rates for the bottom two tax brackets, as of March 31 each year, with those of the other nine provinces. These targets demonstrate government's commitment to maintaining low tax rates for individuals and families living and working in British Columbia (MoF, pp. 12).

Low personal income and corporate taxes as a means to facilitating economic growth is used as a way to providing prosperity for low-income families. As stated previously, however, poverty rates have not been decreasing with the overall economic growth of the province. To the contrary, as

the province has continued to have a positive economic growth rate, it has witness a concomitant increase in the level of the working poor, with the lowest minimum wage and second highest cost of living in the country.

In addition to the economic framing embedded in the mandate letters and service plans, some social policy ministries have been combined with what are traditionally more economic focused ministries. For example, the Ministry of Natural Gas Development is combined with the Minister Responsible for Housing, and the Ministry of International Trade is combined with the Minister Responsible for Asia Pacific Strategy & Multiculturalism. While it is intuitive to combine international trade with an Asia Pacific Strategy, the inclusion of Multiculturalism within this ministry implies that the cultural mosaic of British Columbia is framed within a broad economic trade strategy rather than a social strategy for cultural inclusion within BC. Indeed, our analysis of the service plan for the Ministry of Trade & Multiculturalism shows a significant focus on international trading plans to help achieve GDP growth. This is evident particularly in the stated purpose of the ministry:

> *Specifically, the ministry works to:*
> - *open and expand priority markets for B.C. goods and services, particularly in Asia, Europe and the United States, and engage B.C. exporters in new opportunities;*
> - *attract strategic investments to B.C.'s priority sectors;*
> - *leverage investment capital programs (venture capital and infrastructure) to support a competitive business environment;*
> - *and promote the value of diversity and inclusiveness in B.C. communities (pp. 5).*

The economic priorities of the ministry take precedence throughout both the mandate letter and service plan, as evidenced by the relatively small portion of the service plan that focuses on multiculturalism, which entails one goal, objective, and performance measure out of four. Importantly, and as will be mentioned in a following section on inadequate social benchmarking, the Ministry's one measure is an example of process focused measures as opposed to social outcome based measures. The underlying implication throughout the service plan for this Ministry is that international and economic trade gives rise to, or is a defining characteristic of,

multiculturalism. Ultimately, there is a relatively small focus on strategies to increase cultural diversity or the integration of the traditions and customs of foreign born Canadians into Canadian society, or increase the social wellbeing of racialized citizens into British Columbia's social fabric and workforce.

1.2 Aboriginal Relations:

A key aspect of the economic policy framework is a lack of recognition to the trade-offs between the 'efficient' management of the economy, and the equitable distribution of societal goods. The assumed unity of economic, social development, and equity goals is perhaps most apparent in the Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation. Specifically, these ends are framed largely within the pursuit of natural resource projects. Equity and social development for First Nations people is an inherent goal of the Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation, as the history of colonialism, residential schools, and institutional racism against First Nations is explicitly recognized in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). Under an economic policy framework, however, the means through which First Nations and Aboriginal communities are to achieve social development and equity outcomes is through ensuring they have a "share in the economic benefits of mining, forestry, and tourism" and the Clean Energy Business Fund, and to "secure opportunities and benefits related to liquefied natural gas" (MoARR, pp.7). One of the main progress measures of the Ministry is the "number of completed revenue sharing agreements with First Nations" (pp. 7) which are intended to "enable greater process certainty for the Province, First Nations, and industry, *shifting all parties into a partnership around development and solidifying support for project success."* (pp. 7).

Through an economic policy framework, the Ministry is directed to engage in negotiation and collaboration with First Nations with a set of economic assumptions about the benefits of natural resource industries to First Nations (as well as the rest of BC), which can preclude alternative means of achieving economic growth, and mask the negative externalities, particularly the environmental costs, of resource development projects on First Nations communities. For example, while Grand Chief Stewart Phillip of the Union of B.C Indian Chiefs has recognized that continued engagement with B.C First Nations represents a "new era of cooperation between First Nations, resource industries, and [the] government" he has also come out in opposition to projects that can be particularly damaging to the environment and disruptive to First Nations

communities (Hume, 2016, para. 1). Such projects include the Pacific Northwest LNG project and the construction of the Site C dam, which will provide clean hydroelectric energy to a number of LNG and mining operations. The Treaty 8 First Nations have also declared that "the current system [of resource development] is broken [as it] tears apart aboriginal communities, [and] denies economic benefit to all British Columbians" (Martens, 2015, para. 1).

To be clear, it is not that an economic policy framework is inherently at odds with the values and objectives of First Nations communities; rather, it assumes that First Nation's communities are a homogenous entity with shared objectives and approaches to economic development. An explicit social policy framework, focused on social development and equity outcomes along with economic objectives, could account for varied cultural standpoints towards economic and social wellbeing.

1.3. Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) and Natural Resource Extraction

The pursuit of liquefied natural gas projects was often a key component of the economic framework witnessed throughout the 2015 service plans. As discussed above, and addressed further in following sections of this report, LNG agreements is a strong focus of the Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation. But the pursuit of LNG projects as a means to grow the economy and bring greater prosperity to British Columbians is consistent throughout: the Ministry of Community, Sport, and Cultural Development; the Ministry of the Environment; the Ministry of Jobs, Tourism, Skills Training and Minister Responsible for Labour; and of course the Ministry of Natural Gas Development and the Minister Responsible for Housing[3]. The employment opportunities of LNG projects is also referenced in some social service delivery ministries, and in particular, the Ministry of Advanced Education. The economic direction of the provincial government is very clear in the pursuit of primary resources, LNG especially, with little evidence of an attempt to transition away from fossil fuels and into the renewable energy market. This is particularly important in the Ministry of Advanced Education, where the renewable energy sector shows great promise both in job creation and economic growth, as well as ecological sustainability. In addition, the natural resource extraction industry provides

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[3] The Ministry of Natural Gas Development and the Minister Responsible for Housing is included as a social policy ministry primarily because housing is a key social policy issue. The Minister assigned to the Ministry of Natural Gas Development has a long background in overseeing the provincial housing portfolio, which is why housing and natural gas development were built into one ministry.

relatively stable and well-compensated employment but is heavily disproportionate in the hiring of men over women contributing to the ongoing, structurally gendered nature of Canada's labour market (Cohen, 2014). While LNG is a sunset industry, the relative newness of the renewable energy sector shows promise in embedding more equitable hiring practices. Providing equity through employment is an important part of lifting marginalized women out of poverty in BC, and would aid BC in achieving economic fairness.

The optimistic outlook towards the future of the LNG market is indeed central to the economic framework witnessed in the 2015 service plans and mandate letters. In the Ministry of the Environment, for example, sustainable economic growth *of the LNG and other natural resource industries* is listed as a top priority for the Government of BC, stating that with "environmental management comes the opportunity to sustainably develop our natural resources, such as liquefied natural gas, mining, and forestry" (pp.5). The 'strategic context' of the 'Environmental Assessment Activity' highlights the strategy of the BC Jobs Plan to increase the number of proposed LNG projects in BC.

Similarly, the "Strategic Direction" of the Ministry of Community, Sport, and Community Development is to "grow the province's economy and workforce" and to work with key partners to plan for the impacts of LNG facilities that "will benefit BC's communities" (pp.5). The Ministry of Jobs, Tourism, and Skills Training and Minister Responsible for Labour is also strongly guided by the *BC Jobs Plan*, as well as the *BC Skills for Jobs Blueprint*, with a goal "...to implement the Resource Sector Labour Strategy Accord with the federal government and secure flexibility in accessing the skilled labour that will be required to successfully deliver expanded LNG and other resource industries in B.C." (pp.8).

Long term strategies for economic growth and the expansion of BC's resource sector do not preclude the incorporation of more social outcome and equity focused directives and performance measures across these ministries. In the absence of such social policy objectives, however, there is a missed opportunity for a more socially inclusive economic growth strategy with explicit measures of how British Columbians share in the economic benefits of our natural resources.

1.4. Increasing Employment in BC

As previously stated, increasing the overall quantity of jobs in BC is a top priority for the government, and this is particularly evident in the service plan for the Ministry of Jobs, Tourism, and Skills Training and the Minister Responsible for Labour. The five stated goals of the ministry include the following:

- *Goal 1: British Columbia has a skilled workforce that is ready to meet the challenges of our expanding industries.*
- *Goal 2: British Columbia is recognized globally as a preferred place to invest and do business.*
- *Goal 3: Investment potential in each of British Columbia's regions and communities is maximized.*
- *Goal 4: British Columbia's small business, tourism, and creative sectors are thriving.*
- *Goal 5: Safe, healthy and fair workplaces, where employers and workers prosper, and contribute to British Columbia's economic growth and prosperity (pp.6).*

Strategies to achieving these goals largely encompass the following: increasing the overall number of jobs, with particular reference to the anticipated creation of 1 million jobs by 2022, skills training for the types of jobs being created, and facilitating major investments in the province. Undoubtedly, securing employment for BC residents can raise the social condition standards, but there is little focus paid to the quality of jobs in either the mandate, service letter, or *BC Jobs Plan* with instead a much higher priority placed on the overall number of jobs. The quality of jobs refers to the type of employment—full-time, part-time, permanent, temporary, casual, skilled, unskilled, etc.—which arguably plays an important role in determining the social condition of BC residents and how BC rates on poverty indicators, including the low-income cut-off (LICO) scale. BC is not facing high rates of unemployment, however high rates of those who are employed, and even working full-time, are living under the LICO, which points to the need to not only create employment, but bring employed people out of poverty. A social policy framework could include a strategy to address BC's high rates of the working poor.

Inadequate Social Benchmarking

Each ministry's service plan includes four to eight key performance measures that are tied to goals referenced throughout the document. These performance measures reflect the ministry's mandate for the year and their strategic direction until 2017/18, thus provide meaningful insight into each ministry. Our analysis found that ministries lack adequate performance measures that are focused on social outcomes. Instead, measures tend to focus on government processes and are not framed with a multidimensional understanding of wellbeing.

Economic Framing

The economic framework was found to have a strong bearing on the performance measures that ministries chose to highlight and the assumptions included within each measure. For example, the first goal outlined in the Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation service plan is to "create immediate opportunities for improved Aboriginal participation in the economy and increased certainty for development" (MoARR, 2015b, pp. 7). Under this goal, three of the five listed performance measures refer to the natural resource industry:

- *Performance Measure 2: Clean energy business fund agreements*
- *Performance Measure 3: Forest consultation and revenue sharing agreements*
- *Performance Measure 5: Liquefied natural gas benefit agreements*

These performance measures frame the relationship between the provincial government and First Nations as one that is built on economic motivations and a belief that opportunities for Aboriginal participation in the economy comes directly as a result of resource development. Further, the Ministry's focus on social development, namely through reconciliation, exists as a second major goal of the ministry. However, the performance measures that are included within this goal are fixed with no targets for increasing reconciliation initiatives beyond what currently exists. The contrast that exists between the two goals outlined in the Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation service plan implies that reconciliation has been achieved and that a need exists for future initiatives to address resource development projects as a means to engage First Nations communities.

Economic development as a means for engagement was also a theme found in other social policy ministries, with an emphasis on participation in the labour market. For example, the Ministry of

Social Development and Social Innovation includes a performance measure that measures the "percent of Persons with Disabilities with declared earnings" (MoSDSI, 2015b, pp. 11) which is couched under an objective to "engage British Columbians across sectors to enhance community inclusion for Persons with Disabilities" (Ibid.). This infers that the Ministry defines community inclusion primarily through employment instead of other forms of social participation, despite Accessibility 2024's emphasis on twelve key building blocks to achieving accessibility for people with disabilities[4].

As previously stated, the ministries included in our analysis varied greatly in their comprehensiveness. Where some ministries, such as the Ministry of Health, had a singular area of responsibility, other ministries, such as the Ministry of Jobs, Tourism and Skills Training and the Minister Responsible for Labour had a much more breadth in their scope of responsibility. As a result of this variability, our analysis found that ministries without an exclusive social policy mandate tend to focus disproportionately on revenue generating initiatives. For example, the Ministry of International Trade and the Minister Responsible for the Asia Pacific Strategy and Multiculturalism has a twofold purpose, one of which emphasizes economic growth for the province while the other addresses social issues within BC. The goals outlined in the Ministry's service plan reflects these diverse goals, however there was a disproportionate focus on international trade over multiculturalism. Multiculturalism is an important consideration for social policy in the context of BC, as "one quarter of BC's population identifies as visible minorities" (MoIT, 2015b, pp. 6). As previously stated, BC also has the second highest rate of racialized poverty in Canada (ESDC, 2013). However, of the Ministry's four performance measures only one reflected the Ministry's goal of valuing diversity and inclusiveness:

- *Performance Measure 1: Total number of international business agreements facilitated by ministry programs*
- *Performance Measure 2: Foreign direct investment facilitated by ministry programs*
- *Performance Measure 3: National and international offices located in BC*
- *Performance Measure 4: Number of participants engaged in the EmbraceBC network to promote multiculturalism and challenge racism*

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[4] Accessibility 2024 is a 10-year strategic action plan introduced in 2014 which aims to make BC the most progressive province in Canada for people living with disabilities. The strategic plan is designed around 12 building blocks which represent themes that emerged through a community consultation process.

Performance Measure 4 is aimed at improving multiculturalism in BC through engagement with the EmbraceBC network[5]. However, this performance measure focuses purely on the policy process of the quantity of individuals or community groups connected to the EmbraceBC program without measuring, concretely, the levels of racialized poverty or discrimination in BC. It should be noted that the Ministry of International Trade and the Minister Responsible for the Asia Pacific Strategy and Multiculturalism updated their performance measure addressing multiculturalism in their 2016 Service Plan. This new performance measure takes a more active approach to multiculturalism by attempting to increase the number of communities who are members of the Organizing Against Racism and Hate network (OARH) (MoIT, 2016). The OARH measure differs from the 2015 measure because it strives to, "allows communities to prepare for a racially motivated incident early, and before it becomes a major issue," by, "encouraging local solutions for local issues" (pp. 13). Additionally, the "OARH community membership ensures that British Columbia communities are able to identify and respond to incidents of racism and hate"—reflecting a more dynamic and integrated approach to reducing incidences of race-related acts of oppression in BC communities (pp. 13).

Process-Focused Measures

Our analysis found that, across ministries, there was an overrepresentation of process based instead of outcome-based performance measures. For example, one performance measure from the Ministry of Natural Gas Development and the Minister Responsible for Housing measured the "number of households benefiting from affordable housing programs" (MoNGD, 2015b, pp. 14). This performance measure evaluates the success of affordable housing programs, which is important for the Ministry to monitor, but such a measure only addresses the process through which policies are implemented and delivered rather than the impact of these policies on social outcomes (i.e., the median level of income spend on housing). This attention to process-based outcomes is also present in the Ministry of Social Development and Social Innovation, which measures the "Expected to Work caseload as a percentage of the population aged 19-64" (pp. 8). The Ministry "tracks the percent of British Columbia's working age population receiving temporary assistance with employment related obligations" (pp. 8) using this measure, however, it makes the assumption that the number of employment obligated clients will decline as the temporary assistance caseload falls.

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[5] Embrace BC is a provincial initiative which funds anti-racism and diversity programs and projects across the province.

Process-based performance measures are important, as the assessment of existing policies provides avenues to keep government accountable. However, the overemphasis on process-based measures across all ministries reflects the need for more measures that evaluate the impact of policies on social outcomes and address the social aspects of how policies are delivered. For example, the Ministry of Children and Family Development and the Ministry of Advanced Education measure the number of licensed childcare spaces and the total number student spaces in public post-secondary institutions, respectively. The inclusion of these performance measures in their ministerial service plans implies that increasing licensed childcare spaces and post-secondary spaces for student are priorities for each respective ministry. However, such measures fail to frame the issue of childcare space or post-secondary attainment within the current levels of need and makes the assumption that the ability to access these services are equal across the province.

Conversely, our analysis found examples of ministries focusing performance measures on social outcomes, but this was not a consistent and integrated practice across social policy ministries. An illustration of a socially inclusive measure is found in the service plan for the Ministry of Education. As part of the Ministry's goal to have "an effective, accountable and responsive education system" (MoEd, 2015b, pp. 10), the percentage of students who complete high school within six years is included as a performance measure. However, it is important to note that within this performance measure, the Ministry of Education has chosen to divide the measure further so that high school completion can be measured both across the total student population and amongst Aboriginal students and students with Special Needs. Aboriginal students and students with Special Needs have, on average, lower graduation rates compared to BC's student population as an aggregate. The Ministry's choice to divide this performance measure by sub-populations who may experience different challenges within the education system means that these challenges can be addressed through policy initiatives rather than ignored.

We recognize that performance measures that address social outcomes may be more challenging to set, as the data to support such a measure may not be currently available. As such, it is arguably easier for ministries to focus on process-based performance measures because they are in a position of greater control to collect that data related to the provision of services that they are responsible for. However, strong benchmarking of social indicators are essential in measuring

the impacts of policy on those they are created for and to frame the direction of future policy initiatives.

Social wellbeing encompasses multiple social outcomes and it is understood that each social policy ministry has a set jurisdiction of responsibilities. The BC Progress Board was introduced in 2001 and measured both social and economic indicators in BC and used this information to compare the social outcomes of BC relative to other provinces in Canada. As a result, the BC Progress Board had the ability to set social benchmarks independently from government ministries and highlight key challenges for social policy in BC with the intention of setting priorities for future policy initiatives. However, the BC Progress Board was dissolved in 2012 and since then there has not been any government body explicitly overseeing BCs social outcomes.

Relationship between Mandate Letters and Service Plans

As was previously addressed, the primary finding of our analysis is the existence of an economic framework that guides strategic policy decisions across social policy ministries of the provincial government with the lack of a comparable implicit social policy framework. This economic framework was clearly present in all of the 2015 mandate letters but only to varying degrees throughout the ministerial service plans. It became evident from our analysis that a disconnect exists for some ministries between the goals stated in their mandate letter and the priorities outlined by the ministry in its respective service plan.

A tension appeared most clearly in mandate letters and service plans where the former requires budgetary constraint and the latter seeks to improve accessibility of services by the ministries' various clients. For example, a balanced budget is the top priority listed in mandate letters across each ministry. In contrast, the service plan for the Ministry of Children and Family Development focuses first and foremost on the key role the Ministry plays in providing services to vulnerable children, youth and their families, and as such, in improving these support services and making a difference in their lives. As a result, emphasis on a balanced budget, keeping government lean, and reducing the cost of administration may constrain the ability of ministries to deliver the type, quantity, and quality of services needed by their clients. This is evidenced by Objective 2.1 of the Ministry of Children and Families, which focuses on "Implement[ing] the Early Years Strategy to better support families with young children" (MoCFD, 2015, pp. 8). In particular, the Early Years

Strategy involves a significant expansion of services and education, which may be at odds with budgetary objectives. As a result, this contradiction between the goals outlined by the Office of the Premier and those stated by the ministry implies that ministries, which have a focus on social service delivery may face challenges in setting priorities.

Another example of disconnect between provincial and ministerial goals was found within the Ministry of Health. The Ministry of Health states that their goal is to ensure "that quality, appropriate, cost effective and timely health services are available for all British Columbians" (MoH, 2015, pp. 5) and their service plan outlines a number of initiatives that aim to improve health outcomes as a main priority. This includes educational initiatives to teach children to stay healthy, changing the health care model to a patient-centered and community-based approach, and increasing coverage of prescription drugs into the Fair Pharma Care program to ensure accessibility to all British Columbians. Though the Ministry does still emphasize reducing spending through streamlining processes, this was for the improvement of health outcomes rather than to meet budgetary spending. One example of this is the Ministry's call for "improved coordination between hospitals, primary care and other providers in communities to develop patient pathways for frail seniors that avoid hospitalization" (Ibid., pp. 11). The Ministry's motivation for making this process more efficient is to improve health outcomes for seniors, but in doing so it also reduces ministerial spending because seniors make up the majority of inpatient hospital beds in use, which are currently at capacity. By reducing the number of hospital beds filled by seniors, the Ministry of Health can allocate those resources elsewhere but also improve the health and wellbeing of a key demographic.

Priorities that are framed around economic growth may compete with those framed around the equitable distribution of resources, and a central concern is that economic and budgetary priorities may easily trump social concerns and preclude action in support of costly social programs. In the presence of an economic framework, an explicit social policy framework would allow for a consideration of both priorities to ensure the overall wellbeing of British Columbians.

Conclusion

Making The Case called for the BC government to adopt a social policy framework as a means to facilitate the development of social policy and increase the effectiveness of addressing ongoing social issues (McLean et al., 2014). Although BC does not operate under an explicit guiding social policy document, this report aimed to determine whether there was evidence of an implicit social policy framework across social policy ministries in the provincial government. Through a textual analysis of 2015 mandate letters and service plans of 14 social policy ministries, our analysis did not find an implicit social policy framework among these ministries. However, there was evidence of an economic framework throughout the analyzed government texts with an overarching economic vision outlined through the *BC Jobs Plan*, a guiding document that was referenced across multiple ministries.

Our analysis determined that both mandate letters and service plans use economic framing to achieve typical social policy goals and operated under the assumption that the benefits of natural resource development would best service British Columbians as a means to improve economic outcomes and, subsequently, social outcomes. Such an emphasis on economic achievement, primarily through increasing participation in the labour market by growing the number of available jobs, was present across social policy ministries.

The economic framework that was found during our analysis and that is further outlined in guiding documents, including the *BC Jobs Plan* and *The Skills for Jobs Blueprint,* have likely contributed to steady economic growth and low unemployment rates between 2000 and 2008 (Cohen & Klein, 2011). In fact, it is forecasted that the real GDP will grow 2.9% in 2016 and 2.7% in 2017 (Royal Bank of Canada). As outlined in the *Province of British Columbia Strategic Plan 2015/16 - 2018/19*, BC's economic strengths lie in "vibrant trade with emerging economies [and] our natural resources" which lead to greater employment opportunities for British Columbians (pp. 3). The economic vision included within the government's implicit framework ensures that these opportunities stay within the province, which has been done through establishing clear priorities to guide policy action across ministries. For example, the government's goal of "[ensuring] that British Columbians are first in line for the one million job openings forecast in B.C." (*Province of BC Strategic Plan 2015/16 - 2018/19,* pp. 8) has encouraged inter-ministerial

collaboration to concentrate education and skills development on the needs that are most relevant to the existing workforce.

The strong economic outcomes that result from such a framework, despite it being implicit, demonstrates the benefit that could come from BC adopting a social policy framework. There is some evidence to indicate that the Ministries of Health, Children and Family Development, Education, and Social Development and Social Innovation have attempted to integrate and collaborate towards improving social outcomes for British Columbians. However, salient policy issues currently affecting BC include high child poverty levels, declining real wages resulting in a steady increase in the rates of the working poor, and high rates of racialized poverty (Cohen & Klein, 2011; ESDC, 2013). Our analysis highlighted the variations in focus between social policy ministries. Those without a clear social policy mandate, such as the Ministry of Jobs, Tourism, and Skills Development and the Minister Responsible for Labour, tended to focus disproportionately on building a wealthy economy rather than initiatives designed to directly improve the wellbeing of British Columbians.

An explicit social policy framework—similar to those developed in analogous jurisdictions and outlined in *Making the Case*—has the capacity to go one step further and establish a government-wide overarching vision of social policy goals (McLean et al., 2014). An SPF is expected to integrate social policy goals across ministries in order to streamline priorities and produce better social outcomes. However, an explicit social policy framework need not replace an economic framework, but rather complement it to ensure that both economic and social policy priorities are being addressed across government. The inclusion of both frameworks would allow the provincial government to take a more comprehensive approach to wellbeing and quality of life dimensions that are essential considerations of social policies, programs and ultimately social outcomes.

Recommendations

We recommend that the BC provincial government develop and adopt an explicit social policy framework. While the government has clearly defined economic goals, our analysis found that the government does not employ the same cohesion across ministries to define, implement, and achieve social policy goals and outcomes. The disconnection between priorities outlined between ministries and the Office of the Premier demonstrates the need for a greater consensus of social policy goals to frame relevant priorities for action. High rates of child poverty, the working poor, and racialized low-income earners persist, even under the economic growth experienced in BC since the year 2000.

As a result of our analysis, we recommended that the BC provincial government employ the following best practices, as highlighted in both *Making the Case* and other social policy literature included in this report, when formulating an explicit social policy framework:

- Consult with front line workers and elicit feedback from the public
- Set clear benchmarks for social outcomes
- Develop a comprehensive poverty reduction strategy
- Establish social policy goals to allow ministries to set relevant priorities for action

The adoption of all four best practices through an explicit social policy framework is expected to complement the existing economic framework that was found to be present from our analysis, and lead to improved social outcomes across BC.

Our analysis found that the BC provincial government is working hard to improve the lives of British Columbians through an economic framework, which emphasizes a focus on economic growth. This is guided by a strong belief that a rising economic tide, in the form of greater opportunities for employment and skills development, more resource development projects, particularly of LNG, will improve the standard of living of all British Columbians. However, our analysis of mandate letters and service plans from social policy ministries has demonstrated that an economic framework is limited on its own and would be complemented by the creation and adoption of an explicit social policy framework which would consider the needs of vulnerable populations when setting priorities. ■　■　■

Appendix I: Coding Framework

As described throughout this report, our analysis sought to investigate the objectives, goals and values present across social policy ministries. In order to do this in a coordinated and cohesive manner, we utilized a deductive coding framework to guide our analysis and coordinate efforts across four researchers. The deductive coding framework set a general structure within which to interpret ministries' priorities, and assisted the research team in distilling themes and commonalities among the different documents analyzed, enabling us to sketch out government priorities as these became apparent.

Our coding structure was informed by a set of six broadly defined 'societal objectives' often utilized by policy analysts and theorists to frame policy issues and six commonly accepted 'governmental objectives' generally considered in setting government priorities (Bardach, 2012). Political scientist and renowned author on policy analysis, Eugene Bardach proposes that the use of 'societal objectives' as broad evaluative criteria can help the policy analyst understand the value judgments, subjectivity and social philosophy associated with different policy alternatives. He proposes that these serve as "evaluative standards used to judge the goodness of projected policy outcomes" (Bardach, 2012, pp. 32). The definitions of each of these six 'societal objectives' and six 'governmental objectives' are broad enough to not restrict our qualitative understanding of the documents, yet offer enough structure to extract meaning and make sense of our source material. They frame at a high level the role of government and the categories of consequences of government policy. Lastly, as part of our iterative coding process, the research team decided to include two additional codes in our analysis, 'measurable indicators' and 'process', to point us to cases where a focus on these existed in the texts.

It is important to note that the codes are not isolated categories and were not treated as mutually exclusive. Lines of text that referenced multiple objectives were coded accordingly, and when multiple codes were applied, they were supplemented with annotations to note how multiple objectives intersected. We developed a total of 14 codes, as defined below.

Societal Objectives

DEVELOPMENT

As a societal objective, development embraces a broad set of concepts regarding the enhancement of the human condition through both individual and collective self-realization. Development more specifically refers to policies that focus on maximizing individual or collective capacity, and the ability of individuals to reach their full potential. It entails a role for government in providing a supportive environment within which individuals can attain the full realization of their potential. As distinct from the societal objective of 'efficiency', 'development' is concerned with the human condition and thus looks beyond pure economic development and measures such as GDP.

EFFICIENCY (ECONOMIC GROWTH)

Efficiency is a criterion that is most commonly used in cost-effectiveness and cost-benefit analysis. We use efficiency as defined in the field of economics, for maximizing the aggregate welfare of individuals. Any policy that adds economic value, even if some individuals are worse off, is considered efficient. Likewise, any policy that is related to an increase in GDP is considered to increase efficiency. In our analysis, the efficiency objective reflects a prioritization, on the part of government, of economic growth. Efficiency is often synonymous with 'market efficiency' and is connected to concepts such as market liberalization, free trade, or competitiveness.

EQUITY & JUSTICE

Equity is used interchangeably with other terms that denote equal worth of all people and a concern with the equitable distribution of rights, resources, and burdens within society. Integral to equity are the concepts of equality, fairness and justice. Fairness is the perceived appropriate distribution of goods, benefits, or other outcomes of society. Justice is concerned with the rightful claims to the distribution of wealth, opportunities, and privileges within society, based on accepted procedures and norms. In this analysis, the equity objective was used to identify and code government priorities seeking to assist specific subsets of the population, in particular groups facing marginalization and economic, social and/or political disadvantage, or anything that aimed to promote social inclusion and diversity.

FREEDOM AND LIBERTY

Freedom and liberty refers to, in the most general sense, the sanctity of the individual and the power to do as one chooses. Policies may either enable or constrain individual choice. In some cases, infringements on individual freedom may be justified if one's freedom poses harm to others. In Canada, like most liberal democracies, the only legitimate authority with the power to proscribe freedom of choice is the government. Freedom and liberty refers to both positive and negative freedoms. While positive freedom refers to the responsibility of the government to act proactively in enabling individual or collective liberties, negative freedom refers to the appropriate limits of government action.

PROTECTION AND SECURITY

Protection and security refers to the societal value placed on the protection of people, and their states of being, from harm. This includes calls on the state to take proactive measures to protect life and ensure security of the person against bodily harm; protection from unreasonable jailing or seizure; or substantive harms associated with the exercised liberty of others. Protection and security also includes collective rights such as: community protection, Aboriginal rights, and national security.

SUSTAINABILITY

Sustainability refers to the societal value placed on the protection of natural resources so these meet our current needs without jeopardizing the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. A policy or activity is said to be 'sustainable' if its objective is to maintain the integrity of ecological processes indefinitely and preserve biologically diverse systems. Sustainability policies are temporally oriented policies that seek to avoid species degradation and protect the natural balance of non-human designed and managed systems.

Government Objectives

ADMINISTRATIVE COMPLEXITY

Refers to the level of inter or intra ministerial coordination referred to or required.

BUDGET (BUDGETARY ISSUES)

This code identifies matters that pertain to government expenditures and balancing the budget as a priority.

COMMUNICATIONS EASE

This code speaks to the complexity of a given policy and the challenges of communicating the policy and developing associated procedures and actions effectively.

COMPLIANCE ISSUES

Relating to the level of difficulty of achieving compliance with the policy direction by the public and/or public servants.

PUBLIC AND MEDIA ACCEPTANCE

This code refers to the anticipated or measured degree of acceptance by civil society and the media.

STAKEHOLDER ACCEPTANCE

Stakeholder acceptance refers to the degree of acceptability of a given policy and its outcomes by stakeholders. Stakeholders are defined as the communities that are impacted by a policy, as well as those who have a vested interest in its outcomes.

Additional Codes

MEASURABLE INDICATORS

This code points to concrete references to performance measures and other specific measurable indicators set out by ministries to determine the extent to which goals, whether societal or governmental, are being achieved.

PROCESS

This code points to instances where texts conflate end goals with the processes through which these may be achieved. The use of this code often indicated a lack of clear social outcome-based benchmarks.

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