

Promoting Progress: Making it Happen

Presented at:

**OECD World Forum on
Measuring and Fostering the Progress of Societies**

By

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Speaking Notes

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1. INTRODUCTION

I am honoured to speak to you today at this important Conference. And congratulations to our hosts—thanks for ensuring the success of this meeting in this beautiful city, Istanbul!

Permit me to also congratulate the organizers of this groundbreaking conference for your vision and initiative - the OECD, the European Commission, the Organisation of the Islamic Conference, the UN, the World Bank and the Turkish government's State Planning Office.

Friends, you have succeeded in bringing together a remarkably impressive array of participants with the common goal of advancing our understanding and commitment to measure and foster genuine progress in our societies.

The speakers of the past three days have shown a vision for our shared destiny that gives hope for all our nations and our world.

As we know, the genesis of why we are here today, is due to the OECD's groundbreaking *Measuring the Progress of Societies* Project. It has shined the world's spotlight on the central role that key indicators can play in underpinning democratic debate and promoting effective government policy-making.

This is a vision that we all share. Everyone in this room understands that solid evidence, taking into account all aspects of societal progress, must play an increasing role in guiding us down a genuine path towards a better world.

The good news, as we have heard throughout this conference, is that there are already many initiatives that advance our overall societal progress.

Today I want to draw on my own personal experience with one such pioneering project that is trying to “connect the dots” between social aspirations, public policy, and hard evidence. This particular Canadian-based project is by no means alone in its aims. But it is one example, perhaps, from which we may draw additional important lessons about the way forward.

2. BUILDING ON VALUES

Now this having been said, I would like to begin with the matter of values.

I realize that in a room full of scientists, researchers and academics who place a great emphasis on objectivity, this may sound like a perilous beginning. It may prove to be so.

But let me explain.

Looking at the world today, I sense that in many cases public policy is seemingly losing its ability to connect and resonate with the core values that are shared by its citizens.

Our nations face new challenges everyday that require us to clarify and question who we are, what we aspire to be and what we must do to build a better future.

Challenges such as climate change, health and wellbeing, diversity and inclusion, the social, cultural and economic impacts of globalization...

What all these challenges have in common is that their resolution ultimately requires tough trade-offs and a reconciliation of the sometimes deeply held but competing values and aspirations of citizens and other actors in society. More to the point, they require values-based choices.

As indisputable as it is that solid evidence is a major component of good decision-making, perhaps we have not taken careful enough stock, even at this Conference, of how that evidence must be linked to the values of our respective societies and how together these propel us forward.

Indeed, as someone whose own political career was galvanized serving on the front-lines of the battle for universal health care in my home province of Saskatchewan, I can attest first-hand why values matter in public policy. Why collective values, such as a belief in equity and social justice, must sometimes take precedence over individual values- such as limiting the ability of doctors to work outside the publicly-funded health care system.

Over the past three days, of this exhilarating Conference, we have debated and learned much about how to measure and foster the progress of societies.

And if the goal for us is to increase the impact that our research is going to have on public discourse--if we seek to make complex statistics, indicators, mathematical models and formulas meaningful—then we too must tie our efforts to social values.

I would venture to say that the cornerstone value that we share is the belief that our society is often best shaped through collective action. That there is a limit to how much we can achieve as individuals acting alone. That the sum of a good society and what it can achieve is greater than the remarkably diverse parts which constitute it.

I invite you for a moment to think about my own home, Canada. Two things that you might immediately think of are its sheer size on the world map along with its very long shared boundary with our American neighbours. And, secondly, perhaps, Canada's celebrated tradition of inclusion, diversity and peaceful co-existence.

Both are true. But building our nation was and remains a challenge.

In a land so vast, in a terrain so rugged, in a climate so harsh, the very notion of Canada as one nation would not have lasted very long had the earliest settlers not embraced the idea of compromise and collective action.

I came of age in Canada's vast prairie lands where enormous grain farms grow a wide variety of cereal crops as well as hard wheat.

But life on the prairies, as wonderful as it is, is not always easy. The harsh, often snow-blown conditions, droughts, distance from neighbours and isolation, the small populations... forced us together, like poplar trees huddled on a windswept prairie plain.

And so it is with other regions in Canada, where the geography and demographics may vary, but where we all learned to see survival and progress as a test of our ongoing ability to organize collectively and to remain united around shared values.

In fact, I have argued that it is this notion of a "shared destiny" that is the essential narrative that has bound Canadians through years of nation-building across regional, economic, cultural and ideological divergences.

And I am also sure that this notion of "shared destiny" is not distinct to Canada. If we reflect on the history of other nations, we would safely conclude that, in their unique ways, "shared destiny"—or some other such term—can be found in many other national narratives as well.

In recent times, however, we have all witnessed a noticeable drift away from this rich and successful legacy.

Perhaps, new international trading arrangements have ushered in an era of globalization of commerce that has weakened our capacity and our appetite and resolve for progressive national enterprises (such as nation-building). Perhaps the recent era of fiscal challenges has sowed the seeds of doubt about our capacity to meet our nations' future challenges. Perhaps the contemporary challenges of diversity and inclusion have tested our commitment to a shared citizenship.

But one thing is clear: in Canada, as in many other societies, there is a palpable momentum toward decentralization, individualism, and privatization, all presenting themselves as the so-called "new ways" to deal with our most pressing common challenges.

But do these so-called "new ways" really provide answers that resonate with the values and concerns of citizens?

Consider that when the ordinary citizen looks around--whether in Toronto, Paris, Istanbul, Tokyo or Sydney-- he or she is likely to see the human face of poverty, disparity and inequality.

They might ask: how is it possible that in the midst of such economic progress, there are still so many children living in poverty? That the income gap continues to grow between the rich and the poor?

Why has the water we drink and the air we breathe been taken for granted for so long?

Why does it seem that so many poorer nations are still facing intolerable living conditions despite the abundance of wealth in others?

Why is it that the indigenous people of so many nations often face living conditions that are so much poorer than those of other citizens?

And faced with these fundamental questions that call out for decisive action from our leaders, why is there such a disconnect between the harsh reality and the vision to which we aspire as a society?

And so here we are, in Istanbul, asking fundamental questions about how we can bridge these gaps. How societies can better measure their progress in ways that tap into the values of their citizens and motivate decision-makers to action. How we can better use evidence to benefit democracy, build a stronger civil society, empower individual citizens and stimulate a global debate on what progress really means?

Well, in my view, we start by asking the right questions- those I raised earlier in my remarks: who are we, to what do we aspire and what must we do to build a better future?

And as we answer these questions, we can then begin to put practical policy in place that resonates with the values of citizens. From there, we must ask: how do we know if we are on the right track?

3. THE CANADIAN INDEX OF WELLBEING

One Canadian project, which I have the privilege to Chair, may perhaps offer some insights how we can start to assess whether we are indeed on the right track.

It's called *The Canadian Index of Wellbeing*, or CIW, and it's based on the premise that what we count matters.

The CIW is an initiative that over the long haul has the potential to change the political discourse in our country, and to re-shape the direction of public policy- for the better.

In this room, we are all quite aware of the power of indicators.

We know that what we count, measure, and report often drives our understanding of whether we are better off than we used to be, whether we are creating a better world for ourselves and future generations, and what we need to change.

But too often, we gauge our society's wellbeing according to a narrow set of strict economic indicators.

Everyday, we are bombarded with information about whether the stock markets have gone up or down. Every quarter we hear about shifts in our gross domestic product – the GDP. Even small changes in the GDP send an adrenaline rush down the veins of policy makers, and editorial writers who scurry to their keyboards.

The Institute for Economic Research and the International Chamber of Commerce recently surveyed 700 economic experts from over 80 countries and found that "while main economic indicators, such as GDP, inflation and public finance statistics are usually well established, the political debates on environmental aspects, research and education, as well as social conditions tend not to be well grounded on statistical evidence around the world."ⁱⁱ

In the consequence, a balanced and objective point of view is understandably compromised when the single most influential lens that we use to measure our progress and wellbeing is confined to a narrow set of economic indicators- as important as these may be.

As we have learned over these past 3 days, our natural environment is becoming depleted... the gap between the rich and poor is growing... chronic disease rates are skyrocketing... the incidence of stress is driving us to distraction. Is it any wonder, then that so many of our citizens feel that the rosy economic picture they see in the news seems oddly disconnected from the reality of everyday life?

To this point, we haven't had a clear, coherent and compelling alternative to the dominance of economic measures. But what would happen if every time my fellow Canadians heard about their GDP, they also heard the results of another new and important index – an Index of Wellbeing?

A new Index that measures the variables that really contribute to, or subtract from, the health, wellbeing, and prosperity of Canadians.

An index that actually links the economic reality and prosperity of our nation with the social, health and environmental conditions that defines our communities. An index:

- That distinguishes between good things like good health and clean air, and bad things, like sickness and pollution;
- That recognizes volunteer work and unpaid care-giving as social goods, and overwork and stress as social deficits;
- That attaches a value on educational achievement, early childhood development, economic and personal security, a clean environment, and social and health equity; and, an Index
- That creates a better balance- as Dr. Chan noted in her remarks yesterday, between the imperative for investing more in prevention and health promotion in the upstream, rather than in treating often preventable illness

downstream.

We believe that CIW can be such a tool. It is still under construction, but we are making significant progress.

We are currently assembling data that we hope will eventually be capable of regional and provincial disaggregation to best capture wellbeing trends in Canada.

More importantly, we have set out to monitor progress in seven areas, or domains. Each domain will be backed by rigorous Canadian and international peer review and many of the criteria to be included in the domains will be informed through consultations with ordinary citizens- to ensure we are measuring what really matters to them- on the ground and in their communities.

The domains are:

1. **Living Standards**, including data on secure and meaningful employment, adequate income, low-income rates, and related indicators;
2. **Time Allocation**, examining the balance between paid work, unpaid work, and free time;
3. **Healthy Populations**, such as self-rated health, life expectancy, overall satisfaction with health care services, and other factors;
4. **Ecosystem Health**, including good air and water quality, healthy forests and environmental sustainability.
5. **Educated Populations**, measuring literacy, numeracy, indicators of educational attainment, and quality of formal and informal learning;

6. **Community Vitality**, tracking community safety, cohesion, trust, sense of belonging, inclusion and identity,
7. And **Civic Engagement**, including indicators of individual and collective actions to identify and address issues of public concern.

We believe that these domains are an appropriate starting point for building a robust CIW and represent a true expression of the kind of values that Canadians hold dear. Core values such as fairness, equity, compassion and responsibility.

We know that the goal of creating a Composite Index is fraught with many hurdles, and there is heated debate about its attainability. But we are pursuing it because if we succeed, it can be the doorway to a new way of collecting, aggregating and communicating statistical knowledge about what matters to Canadians in a way that enables them to hold their decision-makers to account for why things are getting better or worse, and why.

To say this is an ambitious project is to understate it. But learning from others as we have in this Conference, it's a worthy goal to pursue.

4. CIW: LESSONS LEARNED

As I look back on all the work that we have done to get us to this stage, what key lessons might inform other like-minded projects?

I believe that there are five. A connection to values. Collaboration. Solid evidence. Public engagement. And, finally, communications.

I have already discussed the importance of being grounded, at all times, on the core values of citizens.

So let me touch on the other four key themes briefly, starting with **collaboration**.

Collaboration

In this conference, we have a shining example of the kind of cross-sectoral partnerships that are needed to measure genuine progress.

Similarly in Canada, collaboration has been to produce the right mix of people and partnerships to strive for our goals.

But, it has not been easy.

Before the idea of the CIW came along, many Canadian indicator researchers and practitioners had been working in relative isolation.

There were many excellent individual projects at both the national and regional levels, each doing their part to report on the dynamics of genuine progress. But for the most part, these initiatives remained detached from each other.

The CIW has proven a catalyst and a conduit for much of this collaborative work.

And just as you have done here at this Conference, we have brought together leading indicator practitioners with a cross-sectoral partnership of leaders from government to business, social, health and community sectors.

Solid Evidence

The third point is that assembling measures based on solid evidence is essential to establishing credibility and progress.

As this Conference has clearly demonstrated, the integrity of our work demands the greatest statistical and methodological rigour.

In Canada, fortunately along with our esteemed national treasure, Statistics Canada, we have some of the best thinkers and practitioners leading the technical development of the CIW around accurate indicators.

Public Engagement

Fourth, just as a rock-solid evidence-base is crucial to our credibility, so is public engagement.

Tools that seek to inspire citizens cannot remain locked in the halls of academia or within the security of government agencies.

If we are going to be successful in ensuring our citizens, and in turn our governments, will pay attention to the latest research, then we must engage with the public at all stages of development.

So citizen engagement is an integral component of our work.

Early on, when the experts were just beginning to conceptualize possible ways for moving forward, we decided to open up the discussion to ordinary Canadians.

We asked Canadians questions about what mattered to them and their families. About their aspirations for their communities. About the types of information they felt

would help them understand whether things were getting better or worse, and who to hold to account for this.

In a world where we often seem to take the voices of common citizens for granted, what we heard was truly remarkable. We heard a deep desire by citizens to be engaged in a dialogue about what it means to have a good quality of life.

We heard about the need for greater accountability and transparency- just as we have over these past 3 day- for the decisions and actions that are taken by policy makers.

And we heard about the imperative for new tools like the CIW that can provide policy shapers with a compass calibrated to Canadian values.

We remain committed to public engagement because we have realized that this is key to the eventual acceptance and success of the CIW.

Communications

Which brings me to my final point, regarding the importance of **communications...**

Friends, a good statistical tool, even the most valid and reliable one in the world, will have no impact on decision making if it cannot speak to a variety of audiences.

So the CIW team has, from the beginning, applied a communications lens to everything that it does.

Here too, there are challenges, as the spheres of academia and indicator development do not always mix easily with the lives of citizens and the world of everyday communications.

So we are working with communications experts and partners from across the country to till the soil for the growth of the CIW and to ensure its relevance to everyday issues. Only in this way can we ensure our impact on the policy making process.

In time, we hope the CIW will be a major influence on daily discussions around the water cooler, in media coverage and on policy development and implementation.

So, the lessons? They are a combination of collaboration, solid evidence, public engagement and effective communications, all underpinned by values.

The past 3 days have been spent collaborating, sharing and testing evidence, engaging with participants from a variety of sectors, and figuring out new ways to communicate so that our work can indeed become more relevant and so that we can all move closer to a vision of a better world.

If we all commit to carry on the work that we have accomplished here... If we all commit to engage our colleagues in our respective countries to keep talking to each other... If we all commit to hold each other accountable for advancing this cause... Then, we will all be closer to the goals of empowering citizens, stimulating a debate on genuine progress, and advancing democracy.

5. CONCLUSION: A RETURN TO VALUES

Let me conclude with values and by quoting Judith Maxwell, former President of the Canadian Policy Research Networks, who earlier this year wrote in the British Medical Journal that:

“The legitimacy and sustainability of any major policy decision increasingly depends on how well it reflects the underlying values of the public.”ⁱⁱ

As one who has had the privilege of being elected to public office, of serving as a Premier of a Province of Canada, I have been truly blessed to have been involved in a good number of initiatives---large and small, and I have learned throughout that, as Judith Maxwell writes, being anchored on values is essential.

My friends, values provide the guideposts for how we can move forward, how we can orient ourselves during challenging times, how we can inspire our citizens and how we can be confident that the programs we recommend and the path we choose will reflect the vision of our citizens.

My hope is that we can leave here today with a renewed commitment to produce many more improvements to the wellbeing index and thus continue to bridge the gap between policy and values.

With the right kind of leadership, success, for this is a daunting task, can be within our reach. But it requires, as I say, leadership; the kind of leadership assembled here:

- Leadership that reflects the core values of a nation and its people.

- Leadership that inspires diverse partners to work collaboratively.
- Leadership that is informed by the best available evidence.
- Leadership that embraces transparency and accountability.
- And, above all, leadership that dares to dream no little dream. That recognizes the basic truth that economic progress and social justice go hand-in-hand. That you cannot have one without the other.

Good luck and all the best in your continuing contributions to building a more progressive and just world.

ⁱ Institute for Economic Research and International Chamber of Commerce. (February 2007). "Statistical information in public and political decision making," *CEifo World Economic Survey*. (WES 1/2007).

ⁱⁱ Judith Maxwell, Steven Rosell, and Pierre-Gerlier Forest. (2003) "Giving citizens a voice in healthcare policy in Canada," in *British Medical Journal*. May 10; 326(7397): 1031–1033.