

# Rethinking the Community of the Provincial North: Building Communities From the Inside Out

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**Abstract:** Community economic development, in the context of the Aboriginal community, is both culturally grounded and strength-based. It honours the values, the traditions, the language, and the Indigenous knowledge of the community and builds upon the human, social, cultural, and natural strengths of the community. It is asset-based community development, but asset-based community development that is culturally centred, value based, people oriented, and holistic in application. Founded on the seven sacred teachings, this culturally grounded, community economic development speaks to the capacity for caring; the maintenance of integrity; the generosity of sharing; the strength of character; the courage of conviction; the respect for knowledge and the gift of vision; and, finally, humility in all things.

## **Introduction**

In the book, *Living Rhythms*, Wanda Wuttunee speaks to what she calls “A Story of Hope” when she discusses what she calls “Lessons in Aboriginal Economic Resilience and Vision.”<sup>1</sup> While Wuttunee acknowledges the many challenges facing the Aboriginal community such as high unemployment, poor technical and skill training, and/or the variety of health issues confronting the community, she also holds out hope for the future of the Aboriginal community. Part of her optimism is based upon the opportunity that is provided for the Aboriginal community through economic development. It is, however, economic development that measures success in more than the just the jobs created or the income generated. It is also economic development that honours the culture and the values of the Aboriginal community and, further, economic development that focuses on the balance of the physical, spiritual, emotional, and mental well-being of the community.

Until recently, economic development as applied in the Aboriginal community has largely been driven by Western values and a Western world

view. It has, for the most part, been about employment opportunities, skill enhancement or training, capital investment, partnership arrangements, and infrastructure development. It has also largely been coordinated by the two senior levels of government in Canada and while on occasion it has included private sector participants, such as the Royal Bank of Canada, Calmeadow, or CAPE Fund Management Inc., it is through initiatives such as the federal government's Community Economic Development Program or provincial government programs such as Ontario's New Relationship Fund that economic development has touched the Aboriginal community.

Beginning in the late 1980s, a slow but steady reassessment of the process of economic development and its application within the Aboriginal community began to occur. Through the work of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, the Council for the Advancement of Native Development Officers, the National Centre for First Nations Governance, the First Nations Development Institute, the Center for American Indian Economic Development, the Native American Institute, and even the Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development, as well as the efforts of Indigenous scholars such as Wuttunee, Sherry Salway Black, Dean Howard Smith, David Newhouse, Cynthia Wesley-Esquimaux, and Brian Calliou, new economic development paradigms evolved. These new economic development paradigms tended to be culturally centred, value based, people oriented, and holistic in application. They were also, as is argued by Newhouse in his paper "Modern Aboriginal Economies: Capitalism With a Red Face," founded on the seven sacred teachings or what are often referred to as the seven grandfathers or the teaching of the seven grandfathers.<sup>2</sup> Identified by Newhouse as kindness, honesty, sharing, strength, bravery, wisdom, and humility, the seven teachings speak to the capacity for caring, the maintenance of integrity in all relationships, generosity and sharing, strength of character, courage, respect for knowledge and the gift of vision and, finally, humbleness.<sup>3</sup>

As these new economic development paradigms came to be applied, and particularly as they were applied by the Aboriginal community, economic development focused on what the First Nations Development Institute has called "Native asset-building strategies."<sup>4</sup> Rather than "needs" based or "deficiency oriented" economic development, asset-building strategies are oriented to the strength of the community.<sup>5</sup> Recognizing that asset building in the Aboriginal community has a dual purpose, "assisting tribal nations in controlling and building their assets, and assisting tribal members with individual asset-building to support their families and communities," the First Nations Development Institute established "An Asset-Building

Framework” in 2004.<sup>6</sup> Within the framework, a typology of assets was developed to help facilitate the process. Reflecting “the holistic nature of Native communities and Native economies” as well as acknowledging the fact that assets are not just financial assets “but also cultural and human resources,” eight broad asset categories were defined.<sup>7</sup> From financial assets to cultural assets and social capital, the framework was intended to help provide for the establishment of asset-based, sustainable development strategies.<sup>8</sup> Eventually coordinated by the Native American Asset Watch Initiative, the asset-building strategy came to form the cornerstone of the new economic development paradigm.<sup>9</sup>

Asset building as it has come to be applied has focused on both the resiliency of the Aboriginal community and the social capital inherent in the same. Community resilience, which has been defined as “the capacity of a distinct community or cultural system to absorb disturbance and reorganize while undergoing change so as to retain key elements of structure and identity that preserve its distinctness,” and social capital, defined as “those features of social organization, such as trust, norms and networks that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions,” both factor large in the asset building equation.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, it is the trust, norms, and networks of the Aboriginal community that have helped the community to retain key elements of its structure and provided for community sustainability.

### **Economic Development: Building Communities from the Outside In**

In 1989, the government of Canada established the Canadian Aboriginal Economic Development Strategy (CAEDS) in an effort “to help develop and support the economic self-reliance of aboriginal (sic) people by providing them with the means to take advantage of economic development opportunities to achieve long term employment and develop their own businesses.”<sup>11</sup> The key elements of the strategy were, according to Department of Indian and Northern Affairs officials, “supporting labour market development, business development and community economic development.”<sup>12</sup> Working through the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development; the Department of Employment and Immigration; and the Department of Industry, Science, and Technology, the CAEDS was intended to consolidate a series of lesser economic development initiatives as well as to provide a focus to the federal government’s Aboriginal economic development programming. Eventually giving rise to the Commercial Development Program, the Aboriginal Business Development and the Joint Ventures Program, and a redefined Pathways to Success Program, the strategy helped to establish Aboriginal community economic development organizations

and/or Aboriginal capital corporations, but according to the *Report of the Auditor General* the three departments responsible for implementing the strategy “could not demonstrate that ... they were meeting the Strategy’s objectives.”<sup>13</sup>

In 1996, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples tabled its final report, which in five volumes and over 4,000 pages discussed the place of Aboriginal peoples in Canadian society. Touching on everything from treaty rights to the residential school program, the final report called for “sweeping changes to the relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people and governments in Canada.”<sup>14</sup> Its 440 recommendations in many ways laid out a blueprint for the future of that relationship. Included in the blueprint was everything from the creation of an Aboriginal Lands and Treaty Tribunal to the establishment of on-reserve youth centres. The final report also spoke to economic development. In what Fred Wien has called the “Nine Steps to Rebuild Aboriginal Economies,” the Commission attempted to lay out a very specific program of economic development.<sup>15</sup> The nine steps focused on the need for Aboriginal communities to regain control of the “levers” of economic change, the rebuilding of Aboriginal Nations, the development of institutional capacity, the expansion of the land and resource base of the Aboriginal community, the recognition of Aboriginal and Treaty rights, the building of Aboriginal businesses, the support of traditional economies, the overcoming of barriers to employment, and the development of new approaches to income support.<sup>16</sup> Responding to the Commission’s recommendation, the government of Canada in 1997 released its Aboriginal Action Plan entitled *Gathering Strength*. Including both a “Statement of Reconciliation” and a “Statement of Renewal” the document spoke to “Strengthening Economic Development.”<sup>17</sup> Strengthening economic development in terms of the Aboriginal Action Plan meant access to capital, increased market access, increased access to lands and resources, the adoption of innovative processes of production, establishing partnerships, and capacity building.<sup>18</sup> Arguing that *Gathering Strength* had put in place an “integrated framework” and the “building blocks of community and economic development,” then Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Robert Nault, released the *Gathering Strength* progress report in 2000.<sup>19</sup> Listing the benefits of such initiatives as the Resource Partnership Program and the Economic Development Opportunity Fund, the progress report maintained that “economic development in Aboriginal communities is key to their continued growth” and, further, that the so-called “broad and balanced” approach to economic development as was articulated in the Aboriginal Action Plan was “designed to further develop and strengthen

First Nation and Inuit community economic capacity, business development, and participation in major regional economic development opportunities.”<sup>20</sup> Develop and strengthen perhaps, but according to the *Report of the Auditor General of Canada* in 2003 and based upon 2001 Census data, many First Nations continued to “endure high unemployment, low incomes, and reliance on transfer payments” and still experience significant “gaps” in “key economic indicators, such as employment and income.”<sup>21</sup> While recognizing that many First Nations communities “have achieved levels of community income, individual income, and employment approaching non-Aboriginal society,” the Auditor General also maintained that First Nations “face barriers to accessing natural resources and capital, to accessing federal business support programs, and to benefiting from federal institutional development programs.”<sup>22</sup>

In November of 2004, the Standing Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples “agreed to undertake a study examining issues concerning Aboriginal economic development.”<sup>23</sup> Their report, entitled *Sharing Canada's Prosperity – A Hand Up, Not A Handout*, which was tabled in 2007, was based upon a series of public hearings in communities such as Millbrook First Nation and Lac La Ronge. Summarizing the standing committee’s findings, the Executive Summary stated that:

Aboriginal people share a common commitment to address the economic challenges facing their communities. Though not widely recognized, many communities throughout the country are beginning to experience economic success in areas ranging from small business development to larger scale commercial projects. Aboriginal people can, and have, succeeded on ‘their own terms,’ adapting mainstream business practices to their own strongly held values and cultures. For complex reasons, others continue to struggle.<sup>24</sup>

According to the report, the complex reasons included the legislative and regulatory aspects of the *Indian Act*, limited access to lands and resources and capacity to develop those resources, lack of institutional mechanisms to support economic interactions, insufficient education and training, limited access to capital, and the non-competitive physical infrastructure of the community.<sup>25</sup>

The framework that had been established by the Gathering Strength initiative was continued in the years 2006–2009 through the publication of *Advantage Canada: Building a Strong Economy for Canadians*, *Canada's Economic Action Plan*, and the *Federal Framework for Aboriginal Economic Development*.

All three reports spoke to economic development and each, like *Gathering Strength*, laid out a federal strategy of sorts for economic development and the Aboriginal community. *Advantage Canada: Building a Strong Economy for Canadians*, which was released in 2006, focused on workforce participation and highlighted programs such as the Aboriginal Skills and Employment Partnership Program as the best means of stimulating economic development.<sup>26</sup> *Canada's Economic Action Plan*, released in 2009, provided a more detailed strategy of economic development and itemized skill enhancement or job training through programs such as the Aboriginal Skills and Training Strategic Investment Fund, partnership development through programs such as the Aboriginal Skills and Employment Partnership initiative, and infrastructure revitalization through housing construction or community service development projects as the keys to economic development.<sup>27</sup> Also in 2009, the most detailed of the three reports, the *Federal Framework for Aboriginal Economic Development*, was released. Prefaced with the comment that the "first priority is economic development ... the most essential step to improving the lives of Aboriginal people and their families," the framework detailed government leadership, skill and training programs, investment and partnership arrangements, access to capital, and the removal of barriers to Aboriginal entrepreneurship as the keys to economic development.<sup>28</sup> Eventually defining "A New Federal Framework for Aboriginal Economic Development," the vision statement spoke to what was described as the four strategic priorities of economic development: strengthening Aboriginal entrepreneurship, developing Aboriginal human capital, enhancing Aboriginal assets, and forging new and effective partnerships.<sup>29</sup>

In 2005, the Conference Board of Canada published the results of a study that was undertaken to "examine the role of wealth and employment creation in Aboriginal economic development."<sup>30</sup> Although the report, *Creating Wealth and Employment in Aboriginal Communities*, did speak to the importance of incorporating "the values of sharing, community decision making and respect for tradition" in the economic development process, for the most part the Conference Board study focused on what was described as the "six key factors" of successful economic development.<sup>31</sup> Strong leadership and vision, a strategic economic plan, access to capital, markets and management expertise, good governance and management, transparency and accountability, and the so-called "positive interplay of business and politics," appeared in the document to be more critical to successful economic development than either culture or tradition.<sup>32</sup>

As the federal government's economic development strategy evolved, it came to be packaged in *Canada's Economic Action Plan*. Eventually becoming part of the budgetary process, the Economic Action Plan would become the federal government's blueprint for national economic growth. Indeed, the 2012 version, sub-titled "Jobs, Growth and Long-Term Prosperity," was intended to "help further unleash the potential of Canadian businesses and entrepreneurs to innovate and thrive in the modern economy to the benefit of all Canadians for generations to come."<sup>33</sup> In terms of economic development and the Aboriginal community, the Economic Action Plan strategy generally followed the model of economic development planning that was introduced in the three reports, *Advantage Canada*, *Canada's Economic Action Plan of 2006*, and the *Federal Framework for Aboriginal Economic Development*. In 2010, for example, this included training and skills development through the Aboriginal Skills and Employment Partnership program or the Aboriginal Skills and Training Strategic Investment Fund, the development of partnership initiatives through the Aboriginal Skills and Employment Partnership Program, increasing the employment opportunities for Aboriginal peoples through the Aboriginal Human Resources Development Strategy, and job creation/training through infrastructure funding.<sup>34</sup> By 2012, however, while the objectives of the strategy appeared to be similar, the approach to economic development had been refined. In 2012, the federal government's Aboriginal economic development strategy had come to focus on expanding opportunities for Aboriginal peoples to fully participate in the economy, investing in First Nations education, increasing on-reserve labour force access, improving economic potential on First Nations land, infrastructure investments, and supporting government-community partnerships.<sup>35</sup>

From 1989, with the introduction of the Canadian Aboriginal Economic Strategy, through to the 2012 Economic Action Plan, *Jobs, Growth and Long-Term Prosperity*, the federal government's economic development strategy, as was applied to economic development and the Aboriginal community, tended to focus on five priority areas—training and skill enhancement, capital access and/or investment, joint ventures or partnership creation, the elimination of employment barriers, and infrastructure investment. The federal government consistently pointed to its economic development successes, at various times citing examples such as Joey Farrar, a Moose Cree First Nation member who accessed the Aboriginal Skills and Employment Partnership trades training program to acquire apprentice training in the construction trades; or the British Columbia Minerals and Mining Training Employment Partnership wherein up to 220 Aboriginal men and women

were provided with training, certification, and job placement in the mining sector; or the partnership arrangement between the governments of Canada and the Birch River First Nation, which provided for the construction of 208 student capacity, kindergarten to grade 12 on-reserve school; or the Blood Tribe First Nation's housing retrofit, which according to the federal government not only improved housing conditions on-reserve through the renovation of forty-two units, it also provided for construction training and capacity building; or the Gull Bay First Nation health station, which was constructed with infrastructure money from the *Economic Action Plan*.<sup>36</sup> There were certainly successes and the economic development initiatives did indeed pay dividends for the Aboriginal community but, as was argued by the Standing Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples,

Ultimately, economic development must make sense to the communities undertaking, and affected by, that development. Economic development practices that do not resonate with the values and culture of Aboriginal communities will likely not be supported and are therefore not sustainable.<sup>37</sup>

### **Economic Development: Building Communities from the Inside Out**

In 1987, the Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development was founded with the objective of understanding and fostering "the conditions under which sustained, self-determined, social and economic development may be achieved among American Indian nations."<sup>38</sup> Spearheaded by Stephen Cornell and Joseph Kalt, the Harvard Project has become what Christina Dowling cited in the paper "The Applied Theory of First Nation Economic Development" as "something of a benchmark for current discussion of First Nations economic development" both in the United States as well as Canada.<sup>39</sup> Indeed, as was suggested in Tonina Simeone's 2007 parliamentary paper "The Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development," the Harvard Project "has become increasingly familiar in Canada over the past decade, particularly among government policy-makers and Aboriginal leaders."<sup>40</sup>

Arguing that "self-determined economic development is a major gamble," Cornell and Kalt maintain that the "dice are heavily loaded against economic development on Indian reservations" and, by association, First Nation reserves.<sup>41</sup> In "Reloading the Dice," Cornell and Kalt have attempted to "discover what it takes for self-determined economic development—development that meets tribal goals—to be successful."<sup>42</sup> Their conclusions, which have become the cornerstone of the Harvard Project's economic



development model, focused on what they have called the “key ingredients of development”: external opportunity, internal assets, and a functional development strategy.<sup>43</sup> More pointedly defined as the “determinants of economic success,” the Harvard Project would emphasize sovereignty, institutions of governance, culture, leadership, and strategic thinking as the basis of successful economic development. Of the five, culture was described “as the most important factor to economic development.”<sup>44</sup> Culture, however, according to Cornell and Kalt, meant the “cultural match between each First Nation institution of governance and economic development” as opposed to the “cultural appropriateness” of economic development.<sup>45</sup>

In 1990, the Council for the Advancement of Native Development Officers (CANDO) was established with the mandate to provide a forum for the discussion of development issues, to build the capacity of economic development officers, to establish a management and a delivery mechanism for economic development, and to encourage community based business development and employment.<sup>46</sup> While it would appear as though CANCO’s main focus has been training and the dissemination of information, a significant part of its contribution to the economic development discourse has been through the publication of the *Journal of Aboriginal Economic Development*. First published in the spring of 1999, the journal has featured articles on everything from the First Nations Bank of Canada to community based adult education; but it has also featured articles such as “Culturally Sensitive Development for Northern Peoples” and “Understanding Community Capacity” both of which speak to culturally sensitive economic development.<sup>47</sup>

Published in the first issue of the *Journal of Aboriginal Economic Development*, David Newhouse’s “The Development of the Aboriginal Economy Over the Next 20 Years” was in many ways a formative article in helping to establish a future direction for economic development. Not only does Newhouse provide a snapshot of economic development as it had been applied in the Aboriginal community, he also attempts to define a path for the future of the same. In the process, and while considering what he called “the Critical Factors for Successful Aboriginal Economic Development,” he discusses what he notes as the five integral components of success.<sup>48</sup> Including the restoration of power and control over lands and resources, the development of a positive and encouraging social/political/cultural climate for Aboriginal economic development, the creation of enabling instruments for use in overcoming barriers to Aboriginal economic development, and an acceptance and willingness to engage in economic activity by the mainstream in collaboration with Aboriginal people, Newhouse, too,

considers the importance of the culture and the values of the community to the economic development process.<sup>49</sup> In this regard, he argues further that economic development must “be consistent with the cultural norms of the community” and that development as it takes place, must “occur within the broad ethical guidelines of the culture.”<sup>50</sup> In a second paper published in the same journal, “Modern Aboriginal Economies: Capitalism With a Red Face,” Newhouse writes more pointedly about the “unique perspectives that Aboriginal belief systems have for development” and “how these can be preserved.”<sup>51</sup> In particular, Newhouse makes the case that Aboriginal “values should be interpreted and translated into community processes, institutions and codes of behavior” and that the blending of traditionalism and capitalism will give rise to a model of economic development that will be “uniquely Aboriginal.”<sup>52</sup> Important here is that the new model will be based on a broader concept of personal and social development, that it will be holistic, that development will be a process as opposed to a product, that development will be a joint effort between the individual and the collective, that development will be seen as a partnership between the individual and the world, that development will emphasize human capital investment, that wealth distribution will be determined by the values of sharing and kindness, that the economic development institutions will be appropriate to the community, and that traditional wisdom as is interpreted by the Elders will be used to guide planning and decision making.<sup>53</sup> Finally, in a paper published in 2004 entitled “The Challenge of Aboriginal Economic Development in the Shadow of the Borg,” Newhouse lays down a challenge to those involved in the economic development process when he posits the question “how do we begin then to move forward?”<sup>54</sup> In his conclusion, Newhouse suggests

We need to conceptualize Aboriginal development in positive terms, move it away from the language of deficit and move it away from the language of problem. Aboriginal thought requires us to pay attention to our strengths and to build upon that strength...<sup>55</sup>

In the end, he argues that economic development must “affirm Aboriginal cultural identity and the autonomy of Aboriginal cultures” and further sanction and support “Aboriginal social structures and values.”<sup>56</sup>

Sherry Salway Black, a member of the Oglala Lakota Nation and current director of the Partnership for Tribal Governance at the National Congress of American Indians, spoke (in the Richard Schramm paper on Community Development entitled “Refining Success in Community Development: A

New Approach for Determining and Measuring the Impact of Development”) to the establishment of a “newly evolving framework to define, plan for and measure development” for First Nations.<sup>57</sup> Growing out of the work of the First Nations Development Institute, which was founded in 1980 to “assist Native peoples to control and develop their assets, and through that control, build the capacity to direct their economic futures in ways that fit their cultures,” this framework was based on what Salway Black called the “Elements of Development”<sup>58</sup>—elements of development that reflected the Native American world view as well as the “historic problems” experienced by Native Americans and the “processes and principles of development.”<sup>59</sup> Consisting of the four “significant” elements as represented by assets, kinship, personal efficacy, and spirituality and the twelve “referencing” elements of environmental balance, hope/future orientation, choices/vision, cultural integrity, social respect, political and civic participation, health and safety, responsibility and consequences, vibrant initiative, productivity skills, income, and trade and exchange, the sixteen elements of development were part and parcel of what Salway Black called a “new paradigm for development” that is “culturally appropriate” and “values based”<sup>60</sup>—culturally appropriate and values based both in terms of its foundation and its implementation. Three keys are relevant here, the first is that this new paradigm is people-centred, providing the “balance necessary to improve the quality of life;” the second is that this new paradigm recognizes that development “cannot be done to people” but rather that it must come from people and, as a result, the elements of development model is intended as a guide to help in the development of locally determined measures; the third is the model must be seen in its entirety as a circle representing the “interconnection of all things and the balance of life.”<sup>61</sup>

The Center for American Indian Economic Development (CEIED) at Northern Arizona University, in an effort to address the economic development of the tribal communities in Arizona, has also attempted to incorporate a “holistic understanding of the importance of cultural integrity with the concepts of economic development and self-determination.”<sup>62</sup> To this end, CEIED has focused much of its activity on promoting economic development as a “pathway to cultural growth and economic self-sufficiency.”<sup>63</sup> It is perhaps captured best in the work of Mohawk scholar, Dean Howard Smith, a onetime CAIED associate, in his paper “Compatibility Between Cultural Integrity and Economic Development” when he argued that:

When economic development policies are compatible with cultural identity, they can be mutually beneficial. Once that happens,

Native Americans are poised to enter the global economy as the bearers of a philosophy that will contribute a great deal to the global environment.<sup>64</sup>

Citing examples like the Apache community wherein economic development initiatives are “profit driven but balanced with Apache values,” or the Navajo Nation where economic development has supported cultural activities, Howard Smith concludes that the “intertwining of culture and economic development in planning frameworks can lead to creation of a community of opportunity for each Native American tribe.”<sup>65</sup>

In the first of four articles authored or co-authored by Robert Anderson, it is argued that “First Nations are creating a new geography of development.”<sup>66</sup> Described by co-authors Anderson and Bone as “a contingency perspective on economic planning,” this new geography of development is based upon seven key characteristics.<sup>67</sup> Ranging from the “attainment of economic improvement as a necessary condition for the realization of self-government,” through to the “improvement of the socio-economic circumstances of the people of the First Nations,” the seven characteristics are seen to be rooted in a collective approach to economic development, the connectedness of the community to the land, and the identity of the community as a Nation.<sup>68</sup> At the heart of it all, however, is the “preservation and strengthening of culture, tradition, and values and the reflection of the same in development activities.”<sup>69</sup> In a follow-up paper published in *The Canadian Journal of Native Studies*, Anderson tested the contingency planning theory while working with seventy-one First Nations in Saskatchewan and concluded that “the vast majority of First Nations in Saskatchewan have established economic development goals” that did indeed provide for the “preservation and strengthening of traditional culture, values and language.”<sup>70</sup> Adding an eighth characteristic in 2001, Anderson, in the discussion of entrepreneurship, focuses more readily on building capacity through education and training as well as “the realization of the treaty and Indigenous rights to the land and resources” or the settlement of land claims. In the last of the four papers, Anderson along with co-authors Scott MacAuley, Warren Weir, and Wanada Wuttunee, reiterate the importance of culture in the economic development equation by arguing that “entrepreneurship can be and is shaped by cultural context.”<sup>71</sup> Culture is also an important part of the discussion in Anderson’s *Economic Development Among the Aboriginal Peoples in Canada*. Published in 1999, the book in many ways builds upon the contingency planning model and in speaking to what Anderson refers to as “a predominantly collective approach that is closely tied to each group’s traditional land, its identity” the

author underscores the importance of culture and tradition in the economic development equation.<sup>72</sup> Indeed in concluding that a “new approach to economic development is emerging among Aboriginal people in Canada” Anderson positions “the preservation and strengthening of traditional culture, values and languages” as an integral component of the new approach to economic development.<sup>73</sup>

Peter Douglas Elias, in his work on community development in the North, has also become something of a proponent of what he has called “the cultural model” of community development.<sup>74</sup> Arguing that the cultural model “uses indigenous ideas and knowledge to define the basic character of local economies and the process of change,” Elias maintains that it is local history combined with traditional knowledge that determines the success of the development initiative. Further, in his contribution to the volume *Northern Aboriginal Communities: Economies and Development*, “Northern Economies,” Elias highlights what he calls the “several characteristics of Northern cultures” that are “essential features of Northern community economies.”<sup>75</sup> Ranging from kinship to traditional knowledge, Elias makes the case that it is imperative that economic development take into consideration not only the political consequences but also the cultural consequences of the development process.<sup>76</sup>

Culture too was part of the discussion in the National Aboriginal Financing Task Force report of 1996. Entitled *The Promise of the Future: Achieving Economic Self-Sufficiency Through Access to Capital*, the report emphasized the importance of culture and tradition to the goal of achieving economic self-sufficiency within the Aboriginal community. It did so, however, within an economic development framework that included training and education, job creation, access to capital, and partnership creation.<sup>77</sup> According to Task Force Chair, Larry Sault, the mandate of the Task Force was “to find creative solutions to access capital to Native communities” and the twenty-one Task Force recommendations all to one degree or another, reflected this goal.<sup>78</sup>

In the paper “An Assessment of Native American Economic Development: Putting Culture and Sovereignty Back in the Models,” Diane Duffy and Jerry Stubben also focus on culture as the driving force of Native American economic development, but in the process by highlighting what they call “deficiency of economic development theories” they speak to “deeper structural and cultural problems” that in their opinion have hampered economic development.<sup>79</sup> With particular reference to ongoing government policy, Duffy and Stubben speak to investment policies that have made it difficult to attract capital, cultural barriers that have discouraged economic development, and the fact that many Native

American communities are “reluctant to adopt foreign concepts that are incongruous with their traditional value systems.” The authors make the case that economic development must be preceded by significant structural changes in the relationship between Native American governments/decision makers and non-Native American governments and decision makers.<sup>80</sup> Sovereignty that is not only defined by the authors as self-determination, but also, and perhaps more importantly, as a “way of life and culture on both a material and spiritual level,” is seen as the key to Native American economic development.<sup>81</sup>

Published in the *Canadian Journal of Administration Science*, Lindsay Redpath and Marianne Nielson, in the paper “A Comparison of Native Culture, Non-Native Culture and New Management Ideology,” “examine the connections between cultural values and management practice” of organizations.<sup>82</sup> Although not specific to economic development, Redpath and Neilson’s conclusions offer considerable insight into the place of culture when it comes to community well-being. Indeed, the authors argue that “economic activity in general is perceived as a means of increasing the social and material well-being of Native peoples,” but not at the cost of cultural values.<sup>83</sup> These values, which according to the authors “stem” from a spiritual core of wholeness “where all things are interconnected and interrelated,” include respect, sharing, kindness, humility, and harmony in relationships with others and “generates behaviour that is egalitarian, noninterfering, non-manipulative, co-operative and highly respectful of others.”<sup>84</sup> In the end, Redpath and Nielson conclude that by “more clearly identifying and understanding Native culture and the structures and processes for organization and problem solving, external agents will be better equipped to assist these communities along the road to development (when and if assistance is desired).”<sup>85</sup>

In a paper that attempts to provide for an “understanding of Aboriginal peoples’ place in today’s society and ultimately for the future,” Kelly Lendsay and Wanda Wuttunee provide a retrospective look at the “Historical Economic Perspectives of Aboriginal Peoples.”<sup>86</sup> Their discussion looks at everything from the fiduciary responsibility inherent in the Royal Proclamation of 1763 through to the impact of the *Indian Act* on the traditional ways of Aboriginal peoples. A portion of their paper focuses on what they refer to as “Negotiation and Renewal” or “Where We Find Ourselves Today.”<sup>87</sup> Emphasizing the fact that Aboriginal peoples have, amongst other things, “successfully established businesses,” “found innovative financing,” “provided income support,” and “delivered education and training,” the authors speak to the “Aboriginal approaches to economic development.”<sup>88</sup> Arguing that economic

development “is a broad concept that incorporates governance, culture and spirituality” but that also “reflects unique community requirements,” the authors maintain that one of the challenges of economic development is the integration of traditional teachings with western business.<sup>89</sup> Quoting Mark Wedge of the Yukon Indian Development Corporation, the pivotal question according to the authors is how “do we integrate these traditional values into the contemporary way of doing things, contemporary business components?”<sup>90</sup>

Prefacing their remarks in the paper “Making the Case for Culture in Economic Development” with the statement that “there appears to be general agreement among economic-development scholars that culture matters in American Indian economic development issues,” Kathleen Pickering and David Mushinski make a strong argument for the inclusion of culture in the economic development debate.<sup>91</sup> Not only do the authors maintain that “culture matters” but also that “different cultural characteristics” impact on the process of economic development in different ways.<sup>92</sup> Two important findings within their work are worth mentioning; one, that “the importance of culture lies in the influence it has over the way that development takes place” and two, that “generalizing about ‘Indian’ cultural traits is misleading and potentially detrimental to understanding the real values and priorities at work” in the community.<sup>93</sup>

Focusing on the concept of capacity and capacity building, scholars with the Community Economic Development Centre at Simon Fraser University published the results of a community capacity assessment report that was undertaken in British Columbia in 2001. A portion of their study, “Understanding Community Capacity,” addressed “Successful Community Economic Development,” which was defined as “those activities that bring more money and employment into a community, result in increased community control over planning and resources, or create resiliency to external changes.”<sup>94</sup> In their work with British Columbia First Nations, the authors identified four community economic development “Success Factors.”<sup>95</sup> Cited as human capacity, economic capacity, social capacity, and ecological capacity, the success factors included local attributes like sense of community, informal economic activity, and ecological amenities. Although neither culture nor values formed part of the discussion, “social relationships” within the community were very much a part of the equation.<sup>96</sup>

Cynthia Chataway in “Successful Development in Aboriginal Communities” maintains that successful development is most often attained when the process of development is “grounded in a commitment to mutually accepted cultural values.”<sup>97</sup> Part of a more general discussion of social capital,

mutually accepted cultural values are described by Chataway as integral to the “cohesiveness of the social system” within the community, which in turn is “crucial to successful development.”<sup>98</sup> Successful development, according to Chataway “begins with a collective definition of cultural values, creating the possibility for building social cohesion in the context of personal, social, and institutional empowerment, which provides the necessary base for economic and institutional development.”<sup>99</sup> The keys are cultural values, working relationships, and inclusiveness.

Reclaiming “a cultural identity” and “charting a culturally grounded development path” is what David Groenfeldt speaks to in his paper “The Future of Indigenous Values: Cultural Relativism in the Face of Economic Development.”<sup>100</sup> In arguing that the “most powerful obstacle to the viability of indigenous values is the promotion of Western-style economic development initiatives,” Groenfeldt focuses much of his discussion on what he calls “western paradigm of progress.”<sup>101</sup> At the same time and in acknowledging that there is “growing room for cultural maneuver[ing]” when addressing “Indigenous views of progress,” Groenfeldt attempts to show “how to transform traditional cultures—through policies and capacity building—to facilitate progress, defined as ‘movement toward economic and material well-being’.”<sup>102</sup> The central thrust of Groenfeldt’s culturally grounded development path is community defined development based upon the traditional and cultural knowledge of the community, which is rooted in Indigenous water and land rights and which speaks to the identity of the community as an Indigenous community.<sup>103</sup>

In the anthology *Native Pathways: American Indian Culture and Economic Development in the Twentieth Century*, editors Brian Hosner and Colleen O’Neil have brought together a collection of papers that provide an insightful overview of economic development in North America.<sup>104</sup> From Donald Fixico’s “Foreword” in which he states that “Native peoples [have] held on to their basic values as well as their hope, identity and integrity” when it comes to economic development, to O’Neil’s “Rethinking Modernity” in which she argues that American Indians have “blended their modern and traditional worlds” and in the process “have crafted alternative pathways of economic development,” through to Paul Rosier’s “Searching for Salvation and Sovereignty” in which he maintains that culture “provides standards by which to measure the goodness-of-fit goals, governing institutions and economic strategies,” much of the discussion demonstrates how “cultural values and economic development have been inextricably intertwined throughout the last century.”<sup>105</sup> Indeed, the majority of authors argue for the greater integration of culture and tradition in the economic development



process with some noting that “throughout Indian country the preferred way of proceeding with economic development is for political, community, and cultural values to guide economic decision making.”<sup>106</sup>

In 2004, the First Nation Development Institute, in the document *Asset Building in Native Communities*, established what it called “An Asset Building Framework” for First Nations communities.<sup>107</sup> Acknowledging “the value of not just financial capital but also cultural and human resources,” the framework was intended to introduce a so-called “era of asset control” in which Native communities would have increasing opportunity to “control, retain, leverage, utilize, or increase their assets.”<sup>108</sup> The framework included the “definition of eight broad types of assets, six strategies for using these assets, and then a framework for understanding what the impact of control of assets is for Native communities.”<sup>109</sup> The assets typology included financial assets, physical assets, natural assets, institutional assets, human capital, cultural assets, social capital, and legal and political assets.<sup>110</sup> Of particular importance in the typology were the cultural assets, as it is the cultural assets that, according to the framework, “underpin a community.”<sup>111</sup> Asset-building strategies as defined by the framework include “the ability to control, retain, increase, utilize, leverage and create assets.”<sup>112</sup> Finally, the evaluation component of the framework was largely based on Salway Black’s “Elements of Development,” which highlighted components such as social respect, cultural integrity, responsibility and consequences, kinship, and spirituality.<sup>113</sup> By 2007, the First Nation Development Institute had redefined the “Asset-Building Framework” as the “Elements of Development model” of economic development.<sup>114</sup> The “most critical observation of this development model,” according to the First Nation Development Institute was that “this view of development goes beyond economics to focus on the development of the people ... [focusing on economics alone] will never provide the balance necessary to improve the quality of life for all.”<sup>115</sup> Redefined a second time in 2009, as the Native American Asset Watch Initiative, the asset building framework was described as

... a comprehensive strategy for systemic economic change, which seeks to provide a range of support for efforts by Native communities to reclaim direct control of their assets and re-establish sustainable approaches to the use of land and natural resources.<sup>116</sup>

At the same time, the Asset Watch Initiative also underscored the importance of the “protection and revitalization of traditional resources and the environment as a whole” as part of the overall objectives of the asset building initiative.<sup>117</sup> The cultural and environmental components of economic development were still very much a part of the asset building initiative.

In a study entitled *Aboriginal Women's Community Economic Development* that was published by the Institute for Research on Public Policy in 2007 as part of its Aboriginal Quality of Life research program, authors Isobel Findlay and Wanda Wuttunee "explore innovation in Aboriginal women's community economic development."<sup>118</sup> Arguing that a "deficit paradigm" has made it not only difficult to recognize the socio-economic, cultural, political, and environmental achievements of Aboriginal peoples, but also that mainstream statistical and accounting measures have been "insufficiently respectful of Aboriginal values, the aspirations and needs of communities," the authors attempt to "unpack and displace outmoded conceptual boxes and unspoken assumptions by entering the circle of respect for Aboriginal ontologies and epistemologies."<sup>119</sup> Chronicling economic development success stories that range from the Great Bear Co-op, to Neechi Foods Co-operative Limited, to ET Development, Findlay and Wuttunee show how the women involved in the various initiatives "acknowledge and live the values of their culture as the basis for and measures of their enterprise successes."<sup>120</sup> Cited as "alternative economic strategies" by the authors, these types of Aboriginal community economic development honour the culture and traditions of Aboriginal peoples and in particular the values of "caring, kindness, hope, harmony, and co-operation."<sup>121</sup>

In his Masters of Environmental Design thesis entitled "Canadian First Nation Community Economic Development Planning: Key Factors of Success," Manuel Collette also addressed the topic of economic development. Suggesting that "many of the traditional planning techniques" normally applied in economic development "need to be replaced by more appropriated techniques," Collette argues for the "decentralization" of the planning process.<sup>122</sup> Part of the decentralization process, according to Collette, is providing for the greater consideration of community traditions and values. Indeed in quoting Hubert Campfens from *Community Development Around the World: Practice, Theory, Research and Training*, Collette maintains that community "development is a demonstration of the ideas, values, and ideals of the society which it is carried out in"<sup>123</sup>—the ideas, values, and ideals of the First Nation community.

In the spring of 2007, the Banff Centre, through its Aboriginal Leadership and Management program, brought together twenty-eight participants from across Canada and the United States to discuss the "current state of research in Aboriginal economic and business development."<sup>124</sup> Participants included the likes of Chris Rose, Acting Director of Public Policy and Research, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada; Manley Begay, Jr. of the Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development; Yale Belanger of the University of

Lethbridge; and Elder Tom Crane Bear of the Siksika First Nation. The final product of the gathering was the publication of a Final Activity Report, *A Forum to Explore Best Practices, Policy and Tools to Build Capacity in Aboriginal Business and Economic Development*. Highlighting conference discussions, the Final Activity Report spoke to everything from youth mentoring to inclusive planning activity as part of the best practice agenda.<sup>125</sup> It also included a “list” of capacity building themes, which featured partnership creation, education, and shared leadership. Important here as well, however, was spirituality, culture, tradition, and the stories.<sup>126</sup> As was articulated in the group sessions, economic development still needs “to respect and protect the culture and the values” of the community.<sup>127</sup>

In *Aboriginal, Northern and Economic Development*, John Loxley points to what he calls a “recurring theme” when he states that “economic development must be consistent with and help strengthen Native Culture and Tradition.”<sup>128</sup> Focusing on the land, social relationships, kinship, and the communal basis of the community, Loxley clearly makes the case for culture based economic development. Indeed, in arguing that “non-Native production relations and values are quite antithetical” to the production and distribution methods of the Native community, Loxley suggests that private ownership, hierarchical and bureaucratic labour processes, and the economic power or status of the individual, are in many ways counterproductive when introduced through economic development strategies to the Native community.<sup>129</sup> The whole process of economic development, he claims, needs to “be guided by Native ideals and cultural norms” if successful economic development is to be achieved.<sup>130</sup>

Although focused on leadership development, Cynthia Wesley-Esquimaux and Brian Calliou, in their report *Best Practices in Aboriginal Community Development: A Literature Review and Wise Practices Approaches*, also discuss the wise practices of economic development. Speaking to the building of a culture of positive practice, the creation of community based planning of community development, strength-based planning, and the need to acknowledge and honour the “core values” of the community, the authors highlight “ways of doing things that are fully Indigenous and sustainable “wise practice development.”<sup>131</sup> In the end, Wesley-Esquimaux and Calliou maintain that “culture matters and we need to find processes to bring culture back” into the community development equation.<sup>132</sup>

Arguing that the “integration of cultural, social, and environmental well-being is considered central to Aboriginal economic development,” the *Social Impacts of Aboriginal Economic Development* report, prepared by the Saint Francis Xavier Indigenous Peoples Research Cluster, presents three

case studies that offer a good overview of not only the process of economic development but also the components of successful economic development.

At Millbrook, for example, it was noted that “sharing and community” were important values of the economic development process, at Conne River where the authors maintain that the goal of the economic development department was “to enhance the economic, culture, social, and spiritual aspect” of the community while at Tobique they suggest that economic development initiative was intended to help build a “sustainable, culturally aligned” economy.<sup>133</sup> In the end, it was the recognition and incorporation of community values systems in the economic development process that helped to ensure successful program implementation.

Value systems were also the focus of the thesis work of Mary Jane Loustel at the University of Manitoba. Maintaining that the “idea of values grounding capitalist activity must be part of the vision for economic development,” Loustel, in her thesis entitled “Entrepreneurship: A Journey of Economic Self-Determination,” makes a strong case for value based, economic development.<sup>134</sup> Indeed, in aligning what she refers to as the seven traditional Aboriginal values of kindness, honesty, sharing, strength, bravery, wisdom, and humility with business values, the author demonstrates how not only Aboriginal values can be integrated into economic development strategies, but also the benefits of the same. Here, Loustel argues that kindness is corporate responsibility as well as social relationships, honesty is the business ethic of integrity, sharing is profit distribution and fair pricing, strength is human resource capacity building, bravery is entrepreneurial risk taking, wisdom is the “respect for that quality of knowing and gift of vision in others and humility is recognizing the equality of all things.<sup>135</sup> The seven traditional values that in many ways represent the identity and culture of the community, are according to Loustel, “foundational to economic success and prosperity.”<sup>136</sup>

## **Conclusion**

From the Canadian Economic Development Strategy of 1989 through to the 2012 Economic Action Plan, *Jobs, Growth and Long-Term Prosperity*, government-driven economic development has seemingly focused on five priority areas. Including training and skill enhancement, capital access and/or investment, joint ventures or partnership creation, the elimination of employment barriers, and infrastructure investment, economic development in this regard has come to reflect Western values and a Western world view. By the late 1980s, however, a new paradigm of economic development, one that more readily reflects Aboriginal values and world view came to the

fore. Growing out of the activity of organizations or agencies such as the First Nations Development Institute and the Center for American Indian Economic Development, and spearheaded by scholars such as Sherry Salway Black, Dean Howard Smith, David Newhouse, and Wanda Wuttunee, the new paradigm of economic development is culturally grounded and value driven. It not only acknowledges the culture and the values of the Aboriginal community, but it also attempts to incorporate the culture and values in the economic development process. Recognizing, as well, the unique circumstances of each community, the new paradigm of economic development builds upon the seven sacred teachings to articulate what Devid Groenfeldt has called a “culturally grounded development path.”<sup>137</sup>

The culturally grounded path of economic development is also a strength-based path. Incorporating asset-based community development objectives, the new paradigm of economic development focuses on the strengths of the community as opposed to the needs or problems of the community and allows community members “to identify, support, and mobilize existing community resources to create a shared vision of change.”<sup>138</sup> Indeed, as is maintained by John Kretzmann and John McKnight in *Building Communities from the Inside Out*, asset-based community development begins with “what is present in the community, the capacities of its residents ... not with what is absent.”<sup>139</sup> Rather than “deficiency-oriented” economic development, asset-based community development is strength-oriented economic development.<sup>140</sup> The strengths of the Aboriginal community as have been defined by the Native American Asset Watch include the financial, physical, natural, institutional, human, cultural, social, and political assets. Of particular importance in the asset typology is the land and natural resources; the “skills, knowledge, education, and experience of people within a community”; the customs, traditions, language, and the Indigenous knowledge of the community; as well as the social relations and networks.<sup>141</sup>

From Millbrook First Nation to the Osoyoos Indian Band, from Opaskwayak Cree Nation to Mnjikaning First Nation, from Meadow Lake Tribal Council to Walpole Island First Nation, from Alert Bay to Kahnawake, economic development does indeed offer “A Story of Hope.”<sup>142</sup> It is, however, a story of hope that is based on the culture and the values of the Aboriginal community, and while employment opportunities or skill enhancement are part of the equation, the story of hope is a culturally grounded story.

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## Notes

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