The Effects of Governance on Economic Development in Indigenous Communities

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Abstract

Governance is a critical element in economic development. Economic growth cannot occur without policies that promote and support this. This central theme was highlighted at the roundtable at the 2019 EDCO conference through a discussion among Economic Development Professionals (EDPs). The issues EDPs were facing were mainly regarding policy affecting their municipalities ability to move forward economically. The consensus around the table was that the issues within indigenous communities exist due to policy decisions at all three levels of government. These policies create barriers to the growth of their economies. However, a concerning factor is that the report "Future Ready: Preparing for Tomorrow's Economy" does not mention northern areas or Indigenous communities specifically. Indigenous communities will be compared to the recommendations within the Future Ready report to highlight the inconsistencies in growth within these communities when compared to the rest of Canada.

Introduction

The roundtable discussion at the EDCO conferences discussed that Indigenous communities were governed by overall policy set forth by the Provincial and Federal government (Indigenous). According to the Canadian government website, this is true in most cases; however, some Indigenous communities do have a minimal say in the governing of their communities and in a few instances, they have full control (Indigenous). Each of these communities has differing needs and therefore should not be governed by the same policy as the rest of Canada. In Canada, Indigenous communities have the highest growing population at 20.1 % as opposed to the rest of the population that is growing by 5.2 % (Aboriginal). Due to this, it is essential to build effective governance that will foster growth in these unique areas in Ontario and Canada as a whole.

In Ontario, there are three main types of Indigenous groups First Nations, Metis and Inuit, which all have their own unique culture and communities, that are different from one another (Indigenous). In this paper, the term Indigenous will be used as a respectful term to refer to all three communities. Most Indigenous communities suffer from isolation, lack of infrastructure, low economic investment and little support from other municipalities (McMahon). To accomplish economic progress in these areas all levels of government will require collaboration, in addition, to support and innovative ideas from EDPs.

Future Ready Report

Many Indigenous communities lack infrastructure, proper education and technological advances that might allow them to partake in the programs highlighted in the Future Ready report (McMahon). One of the programs listed in the report to create economic growth was automation. Automation is the process in which machinery would do most of the work in terms of production with little assistance by people (Potts 11). This process may improve job quality and drive future growth; however, it would add to job loss (11). A gig economy was another project that was stated in the future ready report. This program is meant to help people find part-time work through an internet framework; it would aid in giving people the chance to save up for things such as furthering their education (11). Additionally, the report discusses that hospitals are moving to a more online-based system; this would allow them to monitor a patient online (12). Although all three of these practices seem to be an effective way to increase one's economic progress, the fact remains that they are not possible in Indigenous communities. Since these communities lack the broadband infrastructure and accessibility to accommodate these plans (McMahon). Indigenous communities have been doing their part; however, they will need federal assistance to create a sustainable policy that will foster broadband access and infrastructure (McMahan). This is a governance issue since all the above stem from policy decisions that act as roadblocks towards the growth of indigenous communities. The results is that it prevents Indigenous communities from growing with the rest of Canada.

A connected area in the Future Ready report deals with education as it pertains to the workforce; this is a predominant issue within Indigenous communities. Many of these communities do not have schools in their vicinity and children must resort to long and strenuous bus rides to reach their elementary and high schools (Freeland). This lack of accessibility leads to stress and a lack of motivation for these young individuals. Post- Secondary education is another hurdle for indigenous communities. There are Funding options available through Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) and programs such as the Post-Secondary Student Support Program (PSSSP). The PSSSP program is aimed at bettering the employability of indigenous people, it does this through funding college and CEGEP certificate or diplomas programs, undergraduate degrees and professional degree programs. However, the majority of INAC programs only provide funding to status Indian people. This leaves non-status Indian and Metis people without this option (Usher 7). To rectify this situation, there needs to be more accessible education and the federal and provincial government must provide more funding for education to these communities.

Although the financial roadblock is significant, there are also non-financial reasons that indigenous people are less inclined to go to a post-secondary institution (Usher 6). They must move to larger urban centers to receive an education; this creates fear as they are leaving behind their family, culture and communities. There is a lack of knowledge on most campuses regarding indigenous people; this can sometimes lead to racist attitudes (6). Additionally, indigenous people have a fear of educational institutions forcing them to assimilate as they have in the past (6). These issues contribute to the indigenous population being less inclined to continue their education. The lack of education prevents them from attaining well-paying jobs; it is an endless cycle.

The future-ready article also highlighted tips to build a better healthcare sector (Potts 80). They discussed having better-trained nurses in home care and other areas to provide service. These professionals in Indigenous communities will in most cases be from outside of the community based on the education issues discussed earlier (Freeland). To this end, it does not help build their workforce which is one of the essential ways to produce economic growth (Potts 80).

Policy Issues

The article "Maintaining Accountability Between Levels of Governance in Indigenous Economic Development: Examples from British Columbia, Canada," highlights issues in building economic development in Indigenous communities. One of the critical ideas in growing the economy in Indigenous communities is that there must be a separation of business and politics (hotte et al. 525). The reason for this is that in many cases local governance can interfere with people being able to start and run a business and this can hurt their ability to grow. The author suggests that there is an apparent lack of unison between policy and economic development at all levels of government, this was a topic that was addressed during my round table discussion (Hotte et al. 525).

Another disconnect between policy and Indigenous communities is they have a fundamental difference in ideals from the rest of Canada (Hotte et al. 528). The article addresses an instance in the forestry sector in which British Columbia provided a few Indigenous communities with the right to cut down their forests (528). There was a difference between the way that outside areas and indigenous communities used their areas. The province's focus was on maxim production and profit, and the Indigenous community's concern was on the preservation of the forest. This example sheds light on another factor that limited this community from economic development and created an uneven playing field (528).

 At the EDCO conference, an EDP pointed out that government intervention is something she must consider in a different context. She works in North Bay which is right beside wetlands. Although she is not a planner, she believed from her knowledge of the area that it might be a good idea to use the land for development purposes. The provincial government has overall jurisdiction in this matter and they usually have specific reasons for the decisions that are made. The province of Ontario is working to preserve wetlands as they are an essential part of our ecosystem. They help to provide fresh water, they prevent flooding and assist in decreasing the effects of climate change (Wetlands). This highlights how policy and development must go hand in hand to ensure that effective progress is being made.

Land Rights

One of the critical issues that have created a barrier towards economic development in Indigenous communities is that they did not have full ownership of their land. Therefore, it was difficult for them to generate growth within their community as their actions were restricted (Christopher 423). After 1999 the federal government passed the First Nations Land Management Act (FNLMA). This act was meant to allow Aboriginal communities to create codes for their land

and have administrative ownership over this with minimal interference by the Federal government (424). However, it was still difficult to attain this type of land ownership, many applied and only a few are granted permission.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) helped to create a more reasonable condition on land claims. This commission was created as a part of the agreement to the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement. The purpose of the commission was to find the truth of what happened to Indigenous people and come up with a report outlining how reconciliation could be achieved (Truth). In terms of land claims the federal court now allows for Indigenous people to have full control over land if they can prove their occupation of set land during a specified period. The TRC believes that sometimes this cannot be confirmed since their elders were sometimes unable to record this evidence before they passed away. The Indigenous people maintain that they should be able to attain land based on assertions made and if there is an objection that opposing party should then have the burden of proof (Truth). The fact that these land rights are a newer development, starting closer to 2008 and onwards it is difficult for this community to keep up with other parts of Canada. The Indigenous community have only begun to have control over their land and thus their economic development efforts.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the EDCO conference, future-ready and other resources have provided a positive outlook for economic development when it comes to the role governance plays. There appear to be many theories on the way in which municipalities can grow and build their economies, with policies promoting education, automated workforce, a digital economy, more funding and the list goes on. However, it is concerning that within this economic plan for growth the Indigenous communities within Canada, are not considered. The future of this community is looking brighter, as an EDP officer who spoke at the conference was also concerned with this matter; meaning it is still something that could be included in the future. A plan for economic growth in these unique communities must involve help from the government on all levels.

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