Aboriginal Quality of Life

Aboriginal
Women's
Community
Economic
Development

Measuring and Promoting Success

Isobel M. Findlay
Wanda Wuttunee

IRPP

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Aboriginal Quality of Life / Qualité de vie des Autochtones

Research Director/ Directeur de recherche

F. Leslie Seidle

With this publication, IRPP continues its research program Aboriginal Quality of Life, which will include a series of studies examining recent innovations in public policies, programs and partnerships involving Aboriginal people. This program builds on research on Aboriginal issues carried out as part of the institute's Art of the State III project, notably the contributions of Evelyn Peters, Joyce Green and Ian Peach, and John Richards to the 2007 IRPP volume *Belonging? Diversity, Recognition and Shared Citizenship in Canada.*

The situation of many of Canada's Aboriginal people is one of the country's most pressing public policy questions. Based on a range of measures, from income and unemployment levels to health indicators, there are significant gaps in life chances between many Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians. There has been progress in some areas — for example, in the proportion of Aboriginal people who have completed post-secondary education. Nonetheless, measures such as the United Nations Human Development Index continue to underline the unacceptable disparities between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in Canada. Self-government agreements signed during the past 30 years or so, particularly in the North, hold promise of a better future for the First Nations who have acquired greater community autonomy. But the majority of Aboriginal people, notably those who live in cities, are not covered by such agreements; for them, there is a need for other approaches and — above all — renewed political will.

In this study, Isobel Findlay and Wanda Wuttunee explore innovation in Aboriginal women's community economic development (CED) in Canada. Their research is centred on three case studies of successful CED in urban, rural and remote settings. The stories of the dedicated women who have made a significant mark within their communities show that it is possible to pursue business objectives while living the values of their culture and assuming their rightful place in the community. In this context, the authors critique current approaches and tools for measuring the impact of CED. In their view, there continues to be an over-reliance on quantitative measures that are largely focused on inputs and outputs, and insufficient weighting of factors such as the social and cultural costs and benefits of doing business in Aboriginal communities. As a result, those responsible for evaluation and policy making "often leave Aboriginal women's work out of the accounting." The authors conclude that the full potential of Aboriginal women's enterprise will be realized only if policy and program decision making can be redesigned to recognize, learn from and leverage the investments of Aboriginal women's labour, leadership and creativity; respect the cultural values at the heart of their enterprises; and understand the importance of collective as well as individual well-being.

IRPP plans to publish a number of other studies as part of this research program. The authors will present case studies of innovations in public policies and programs in a given policy sector, including how the innovations were developed and implemented; and assess the results — including the impact on outcomes and lessons learned. The studies will be situated within a broader context, including historical and constitutional factors, and will outline policy directions for further improvement within the policy field. It is hoped that, consistent with IRPP's mandate, this research studies will inform citizen understanding and policy making in this important domain.

Cette publication représente une étape de plus dans le programme de recherche de l'IRPP sur la qualité de vie des Autochtones, qui comprendra une série d'études consacrées aux innovations récentes apportées aux politiques et programmes publics ainsi qu'aux partenariats avec les Autochtones. Le programme de recherche s'inspire des travaux menés dans le cadre du projet de l'IRPP sur l'art de l'État, volume III, et en particulier des contributions d'Evelyn Peters, de Joyce Green et Ian Peach, et de John Richards à l'ouvrage *Belonging? Diversity, Recognition and Shared Citizenship in Canada*, publié par l'IRPP en 2007.

La situation d'un grand nombre d'Autochtones est l'une des questions les plus urgentes auxquelles doit s'attaquer la politique publique au Canada. Plusieurs indicateurs, depuis les niveaux de revenu et de chômage jusqu'aux indicateurs de santé, soulignent l'écart important qui existe entre de nombreux Autochtones et les non-Autochtones du point de vue des chances d'épanouissement. Certes, des progrès

ont été enregistrés dans certains domaines – en ce qui a trait à la proportion des Autochtones qui ont achevé leurs études postsecondaires, par exemple. D'autres indicateurs, tel l'Indice de développement humain des Nations Unies, continuent néanmoins de mettre en lumière les disparités inacceptables qui persistent entre Autochtones et non-Autochtones au Canada. Les ententes d'autonomie gouvernementale signées depuis une trentaine d'années, en particulier dans le Grand Nord, renferment la promesse d'une meilleure qualité de vie pour les Premières Nations qui ont pu acquérir leur autonomie communautaire, mais la majorité des Autochtones, en particulier ceux qui vivent en milieu urbain, ne sont pas présents dans ces accords. Dans leur cas, il faudra envisager d'autres formules et, surtout, faire preuve d'une volonté politique renouvelée.

Dans la présente étude, Isobel Findlay et Wanda Wuttunee examinent l'innovation dans le contexte de la participation des femmes au développement économique communautaire (DEC) au Canada. Leur recherche est centrée sur trois études de cas faisant état des réussites remportées en matière de DEC dans des milieux urbain, rural et éloigné. Ces exemples de femmes résolues qui ont fait leur marque au sein de leurs communautés montrent qu'elles peuvent poursuivre des objectifs commerciaux tout en vivant les valeurs de leur culture et en assumant la place qui leur revient dans la communauté. Dans cette perspective, les auteures font un examen critique des approches et outils employés pour mesurer l'impact du DEC. Elles estiment qu'on continue d'accorder trop d'importance à des indices quantitatifs portant principalement sur les données d'entrée et de sortie, et pas assez à des facteurs comme les coûts et bienfaits sociaux et culturels rattachés à l'activité commerciale au sein des communautés autochtones. Étant donné l'importance qu'ils attachent à ces indices, les responsables de l'évaluation et de la formulation des politiques excluent souvent de leurs calculs le travail accompli par les femmes. Les auteures ajoutent que le potentiel que recèle le travail des femmes ne pourra se réaliser intégralement que lorsqu'on reformulera les processus décisionnels relatifs aux politiques et aux programmes dans le but de reconnaître le travail, le leadership et la créativité des femmes autochtones, d'en tirer des enseignements utiles et de faire fructifier leurs investissements, de respecter les valeurs culturelles qui sont au cœur de leurs entreprises et de comprendre l'importance du bien-être collectif aussi bien qu'individuel.

L'IRPP se propose de publier plusieurs études additionnelles dans le cadre de ce programme de recherche. Les auteurs présenteront des études de cas axées sur les innovations apportées aux politiques et programmes publics dans des secteurs déterminés de la politique publique, signalant notamment comment ces innovations ont été élaborées et mises en œuvre, et analyseront les résultats de ces innovations, y compris leur impact sur la situation des Autochtones et les leçons tirées de ces expériences. Les études s'inscriront dans un contexte plus large, où seront notamment évoqués les facteurs historiques et constitutionnels, et proposeront des orientations destinées à améliorer la situation dans ce secteur de la politique publique. On espère que, conformément au mandat de l'IRPP, ces études de recherche contribueront à une meilleure compréhension au sein de la population et à la prise de décisions dans ce domaine important.

About the Authors

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While some Aboriginal women and men are successfully redefining and implementing new visions of sufficiency and success for their communities, for many the struggle to reclaim and retain rights over their lives, lands, labour and knowledge is ongoing. Indeed, the situation has been aggravated by globalizing processes that endanger Aboriginal women and children already disadvantaged by poverty-perpetuating inequality.

Drawing on our experience with Aboriginal women engaged in community economic development (CED), this research study aims to fill a gap in the literature on Aboriginal quality of life and Aboriginal CED by highlighting the hidden success stories involving the enormous and growing innovation and enterprise of Aboriginal women's CED in Canada. The full potential of such enterprise will be realized only if policy and program decision-making (and the evidence that shapes it) can recognize, learn from and leverage the formidable investments of women's labour, leadership and creativity; respect the cultural values at the heart of their enterprises; and understand the importance of collective rather than solely individual well-being.

If aggravated inequalities within and across regions (Milanovic 2005; World Economic Forum 2005) are underplayed in celebrations of economic globalization *and* obscured by the abstractions of aggregate data, a "deficit paradigm" (associating Aboriginal peoples with deficiency and dependence) purveyed by social science research on Aboriginal peoples (Ponting and Voyageur 2005) has similarly made it hard to recognize the socio-economic, cultural, political and environmental achievements of Aboriginal peoples. The gendered effects of economic globalization (sustained by insufficiently considered economic measures imposed by First World institutions, such as the World Trade Organization and International Monetary Fund) both add to the burdens on Aboriginal women and activate their resourcefulness, although their achievements

continue to slip below the radar. If their roles are often invisible, they are nevertheless vital to the quality of life of Aboriginal communities across Canada. Our study aims to (1) interrogate measuring tools that continue to leave Aboriginal women's work out of the accounting and (2) highlight Aboriginal women's contributions (as typical as they are exceptional) in case studies representing their voices and experience in urban, rural and remote settings.

Ten years after the Beijing World Conference on Women and five years after the UN Millennium Development Goals were set, the gap between women and men remains largely undiminished: notably, women represent two-thirds of the world's poor and illiterate (World Economic Forum 2005). Despite the gendering of inequality, Aboriginal women remain important stewards of the world's linguistic and biological diversity (Lertzman and Vredenburg 2005), active promoters of social change and vital economic players where gender equality is promoted (Jones, Snelgrove, and Muckosy 2006). Recognizing that "social ills within our communities are not because of who we are but because of what has been done to us" (Muise 2004, 36), Aboriginal women in Canada accept their own and their communities' responsibilities to make a difference. In the United Nations Second International Decade of the World's Indigenous People, focusing on Aboriginal women is critical "because gender inequality is an obstacle to progress, a roadblock on the path of human development. When development is not 'en-gendered' it is 'en-dangered'" (UNDP 2002, v). While statistics suggest that challenges often come from within their own communities, the traditional way is to devote energies to strengthening communities, providing support for men in healing and showing leadership as family members. Resilient, healthy communities need the full participation of each member. In other words, revaluing Aboriginal women does not mean devaluing Aboriginal men.

This study focuses on success stories as well as the persistent barriers Aboriginal women face in their quest for resilience and equity. We draw on publicly available quantitative measures of the gaps and trends and on qualitative case study measures as well as holistic measurement tools that stretch bottom-line accounting. Mainstream statistical and accounting measures of success have proven powerful drivers of public policy. They are widely understood to be objective measures of self-evident realities in the socio-economic and other domains and hence the best guides when making decisions in the public interest. However, they have also been insufficiently respectful of Aboriginal values, the aspirations and needs of communities on and off reserve, and the particular contributions of Aboriginal women. Indicators of cultural sustainability, for example, are important considerations in community development yet find no place in mainstream indicators. In promoting indicators that will better serve policy-makers and communities making CED choices, we aim to unpack and displace outmoded conceptual boxes and unspoken assumptions by entering the circle of respect for Aboriginal ontologies and epistemologies (Stewart-Harawira 2005). In addition, we use a gender lens, refuse to uncouple excellence from equity and seek to build on the work with performance measures that put community values at the heart of things (Findlay and Russell 2005; Wuttunee 2004).

Quality of Life of Aboriginal Women

If it is not clear that the right questions have been asked, it is also the case that the concepts of "quality of life" and "well-being" are not as simple or self-evident as they might appear. Designed to supplement gross domestic product (GDP) as measures of development, they aim to capture human and social dimensions of development and allow comparisons across national and other differences (Cooke 2005). Yet both remain contested terms despite efforts to render them "more measurable and more reliable" in predicting individual and social development (Salée 2006, 6). Salée discusses approaches that variously consider the role of the state, the capacity of individuals and communities or social capital, psychological or emotional measures of healing and control, and holistic notions of balance associated with the medicine wheel in Aboriginal world views — all of which might impact policy to address Aboriginal quality of life. Overwhelmingly, despite good intentions and talk of equal partnerships, research and resulting policy on Aboriginal quality of life continue to favour positivist, universalist and individual measures that regard Aboriginal people as objects of study, while undermining Canada's claims to value diversity, undervaluing Aboriginal world views, eliding "the politics of Aboriginal quality of life" and "the social processes of exclusion," and leaving policy and other paradigms unchanged (Salée 2006, 6-26).[1]

The limits of current efforts to rethink Aboriginal quality of life are clear in the ambivalent way that Aboriginal people figure in Canadian consciousness.

Inuit art and Aboriginal symbols (inukshuks, canoes, moccasins, totem poles) often represent Canada to the world in marketing campaigns and souvenir consumer goods, while Aboriginal histories and current realities often remain largely invisible to mainstream Canadians (Ponting 2000). A 2003 Centre for Research and Information in Canada (CRIC) survey, for instance, reported 75 percent support for strong Aboriginal cultures, while 49 percent (62 percent on the Prairies) felt that Aboriginal land claims are not valid and 42 percent (54 percent on the Prairies) would get rid of Aboriginal rights entirely. The CRIC survey also reported that 51 percent of Canadians think Aboriginal people are as well off as or better off than other Canadians, and only 48 percent think that poverty is beyond the control of the Aboriginal people affected.

This pattern of simultaneous visibility and invisibility, valuing and undervaluing, marking mainstream Canada's relation to Aboriginal people has proven a stubbornly contradictory conceptual box. It has also had a significant effect on the quality of life of Aboriginal people in general and Aboriginal women in particular — and on their capacity to effect meaningful change. Framing public policy on the well-being of Aboriginal people within public expenditures adds to the problem (Cooke, Beavon, and McHardy 2004). Quantifiable costs and benefits obscure qualitative measures, perpetuate the "deficit paradigm" and obstruct a "strength paradigm" that might properly replace it.

Poverty

Canada enjoys a high standing in the United Nations Human Development Index (UNHDI), while the Aboriginal population would rank 48th, behind Panama, (Stavenhagen 2004) or as low as 78th by some accounts (Anderson 2003). If poverty and its effects are distributed unequally on a global level, they are also indigenized and felt disproportionately by Aboriginal women: 42.7 percent (double the rate for non-Aboriginal women) live in poverty (UNPAC 2006). While Aboriginal people (those claiming "some ancestry") represent only 4.4 percent of the Canadian population, the proportion of Aboriginal people in most of western Canada is higher: 13.6 percent in Manitoba, 13.5 percent in Saskatchewan, 4.4 percent in BC and 5.3 percent in Alberta. And while the economic situation for Aboriginal people is consistent with the larger economic picture in the East, the socio-economic situation of Aboriginal people in the West is unique: in western cities, four times as many Aboriginal people as other Canadians live below the poverty line (INAC 2006).

These huge disparities persist despite repeated government commitments to close the gap in socio-economic and educational attainment between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. Although between 1981 and 2001 the gap in overall UNHDI scores between registered Indians and other Canadians narrowed, the gap in real average annual income increased. In addition, although women within the registered Indian population had higher educational standards and longer life expectancy than their male counterparts, they continued to earn less ($9,395 compared with $10,849) (Cooke, Beavon, and McHardy 2004).

Moreover, Aboriginal women are often victims of violence. The Native Women's Association of Canada's Sisters in Spirit campaign reminds us that Aboriginal women are five times more likely to die as a result of violence than any other group of Canadian women. Like Amnesty International in its report *Stolen Sisters*, Aboriginal women remember, "honour and respect" the 500 or more indigenous women murdered or missing in Canada over the last 20 years — a number that understates violence so routine that it is underreported and underinvestigated (Native Women's Association of Canada 2006). In Canada the violence against Aboriginal women is made worse by official and unofficial responses focusing on women's "characters" and so-called lifestyle "choices," rather than the characters and choices of (usually) white men inside and outside the justice system.

Despite Aboriginal women's increasing educational attainment and participation in governance, employment and self-employment (Mendelson 2006), statistics continue to depict a stark reality of Aboriginal women (and men) more likely to endure lives marked by deficiency and dysfunction.

Undoubtedly, such standard social indicators provide some useful knowledge, but averages have a habit of obscuring important differences among communities. For instance, Chandler and Lalonde's 1998 study of suicide rates among Aboriginal youth in British Columbia shows some communities with rates 800 times the national average while others that are actively engaged in maintaining collective practices and strong cultural continuity (within which youth can develop a sense of self) had few or no incidents.

Paternalism and other colonial presumptions

Aboriginal women's roles as primary sources of cultural continuity (Hull 2006) remain largely invisible. While in 2001 the "dependency ratio" — a measure of those considered dependent because of age (under 15

Experience of violence

- Sixty percent of violent crime against Aboriginal people goes unreported.
- Approximately 25 percent of Aboriginal women (compared with 7 percent of non-Aboriginal women) experienced spousal violence, 1999-2004 (Brzozowski, Taylor-Butts, and Johnson 2006).

Life expectancy

- Aboriginal women's life expectancy is 6.9 years shorter than that of the average non-Aboriginal Canadian woman (74 as opposed to 80.9; for men, 66.9 compared with 74.6).
- Reserve residents have an even lower life expectancy (62 years for men and 69.6 years for women) (INAC 2006).

Suicide

- Suicide is eight times more common among registered Indian young women (15-24) and five times higher for registered Indian males than for non-Aboriginal youth (INAC 2006).

Incarceration

- Aboriginal women represent 35 percent of women in adult correctional services (Aboriginal men represent 28 percent of men).
- Aboriginal adults in corrections are younger, less educated, less likely to be employed and more likely (90 percent compared with 70 percent of non-Aboriginal people) to have substance abuse issues (Brzozowski, Taylor-Butts, and Johnson 2006).
- Eighty percent of federally sentenced women report being victims of abuse (Canadian Human Rights Commission 2003).

and over 65) divided by the working-age population – was markedly higher in the Aboriginal population (.59) than in the non-Aboriginal population (.46), this overlooks the resilience of Aboriginal women in the over-65 age group of whom 35 percent (50 percent for registered Indian women) maintain an Aboriginal mother tongue (Hull 2006).

The current minister of Indian affairs and northern development, Jim Prentice, convinced that "government will never be able to meet the [housing] needs of an entire segment of society," is pressing his vision of a brighter future: an end to collectivist understandings of property and the privatizing of reserve land and property. "It's important for any citizen in Canada to have the ability in their community to buy and invest in property, mortgage it, service the mortgage and move forward...Many First Nations are sitting on extremely valuable property that is not achieving its highest and best use" (Warick and Pacholik 2006, D7). What makes eminent sense to a federal minister widely experienced in negotiating land claims reads differently for those who value traditional ways and the right to make their own decisions and who fear alienation of their lands, the extinguishment of title and the loss of spiritual and cultural ties to the land, in the interests of "progress."

A Canadian Human Rights Commission study in 2003 analyzed the damaging effects of male correctional norms, "gender neutral" systems and procedural equality on Aboriginal women offenders (2). Despite skills, experience, knowledge and the education and

workforce participation achievements of Aboriginal women (Luffman and Sussman 2006), Aboriginal workers are often characterized as "unskilled labour," when the problem is in job opportunities and patterns of discrimination and social exclusion rather than in the Aboriginal worker (Calliou and Voyageur 1998). The persistently colonial constructions of Aboriginal cultures as sources of poverty and obstructions to progress in themselves obscure the economic and other achievements of Aboriginal women and men and the ways Aboriginal culture can enrich us all (Silver et al. 2006).

The media contribute to such misconstructions by giving unusual visibility to Aboriginal perpetrators of crime while leaving Aboriginal victims and achievers largely invisible. The media have likewise been slow to abandon spectres of a massive youth underclass and witness the rich resource of a youthful Aboriginal population — 43 percent of them under 20 years old, compared with 26 percent in the aging non-Aboriginal population (Hull 2006). Nor have the media done enough to explode myths that the poor do not work or do not work hard, or to promote understanding that the world's working poor are overwhelmingly "small business owners" (Jones, Snelgrove, and Muckosy 2006) and that 40 percent of working poor Canadians are self-employed (HRSDC 2006). Similarly, the media have not reported the massive inequities in federal spending aimed at welcoming and facilitating settlement of immigrant populations ($247 per person) as opposed to the $34 per urban Aboriginal person allocated to Native Friendship Centres for much the same functions (Silver et al. 2006).

Even when studies tell positive stories about Aboriginal people's capacities, the mainstream media have a habit of translating them into alarming messages. For example, Mendelson's 2006 study of Aboriginal peoples and post-secondary participation was described as "A bleak choice for young Indians" by *Globe and Mail* commentator John Ibbitson, who advised any "Indian living on a reserve...to leave right now...This is the only chance you have to rescue what is about to become your wasted life." At a stroke, Ibbitson erased all signs of educational achievement by those who have overcome language and cultural difference, left their home communities to attend university and succeeded.

Based on quantitative data from the 2001 census and Aboriginal People's Survey, Mendelson (2006) presents a balanced and constructive picture, arguing that all Canadians can gain from increased educational levels and workforce participation of Aboriginal people. He also argues that we cannot afford a situation where all Aboriginal identity groups have much lower incomes than the general population (on-reserve incomes, at 49 percent of average total population income, are the lowest). Although the educational picture is improving, especially for Aboriginal women, Aboriginal women who graduate from high school are still half as likely to go to university as women in the general population (13 percent compared with 26 percent). The fact that 43 percent of Aboriginal young people (ages 20-24) have less than high school education remains shocking. As was the case with the general population, the numbers of Aboriginal people gaining university degrees fell in 2001, maintaining a gap that will not be bridged at current rates. According to Mendelson, both the gap and absolute levels of participation matter for levels of social cohesion, personal self-esteem and perception of economic opportunity.

Understanding the demographic data used by Mendelson and others means understanding the mobility of Aboriginal people: one in five moved in the 12 months before the 2001 census (as opposed to one in seven in the general population), and one in 10 moved to or from urban centres (Standing Senate Committee 2003). Mobility and migration patterns of Aboriginal people in turn aggravate jurisdictional barriers to programs and services. For policy-makers, net migration statistics leave an impression of "mass exoduses" from reserves and mask the reality of movement within and between urban centres. Likewise, the statistics obscure the challenges to the younger demographic group and to lone parents in

this urban migrant group – threats to culture, family and income, as well as high victimization and crime – that contribute further to cycles of movement and isolation (Standing Senate Committee 2003).

However, this is only part of the story of the urbanization of Aboriginal people. Identifying "much more continuity in the social environment" than many commentators have assumed, Ponting and Voyageur (2005, 428-29) point to "a small net inflow of Registered Indian migrants to the reserves," offering human capital, critical mass and economies of scale favourable to entrepreneurship. Similarly, Peters (2007) argues for the reconstruction of culture and community within urban centres and an increasing sense of belonging. There are positive signs too that women's economic participation is being supported by program and other changes. Together with cultural revitalization, child care, distance learning facilities, Aboriginal Headstart promoting school readiness, housing and other infrastructure on reserves, and healing programs to address institutional and family violence are all playing a role in building human capital (Ponting and Voyageur 2005).

Aboriginal Women's CED Contributions

If the World Economic Forum (2005) is clearly focused on narrowly economic measures of the "global gender gap," it nevertheless offers an appropriate caution about wasteful practices: "Countries that do not capitalize on the full potential of one half of their societies are misallocating resources and undermining their competitive potential" (1). It points to the systemic barriers in a value system and accountability index that count what is quantifiable and discount elements (including air, water and soil quality) that do not fit the "'economic necessity' tunnel" and the "gospel of efficiency." Such a measurement system works by "compartmentalization and concretization of these complex connections [of social, economic and environmental dimensions] into digestible bundles of information," with the result that the World Bank's goal of halving world poverty in a sustainable way is undermined by its financially biased performance indicators (Saravanamuthu 2003, 295-9). As Waring (1999) has shown, the institutionalizing of invisibilities means that women's contributions have a habit of "counting

for nothing." To end such institutionalized inequity and injustice, Waring (2003) demystifies economics and makes visible women's realities and their rich contributions – through their production and reproduction – to challenge national employment and occupation data and the United Nations System of National Accounts (UNSNA).

In these circumstances, some data on Aboriginal women's economic participation are easier to access than others – especially those for labour market activity defined in terms of paid employment. According to the 2001 census, the labour force participation rate of Aboriginal women was 57 percent (61 percent among non-Aboriginal women), although the average obscures differences among Aboriginal women: registered Indian (52 percent; 47 percent on reserve and 55 percent off reserve), Inuit (60 percent) and Métis women (65 percent). The unemployment rate for Aboriginal women, at 17 percent, was more than double the 7 percent rate for non-Aboriginal women – with registered Indian women and Inuit women the highest (20 percent and 19 percent, respectively) – though women's rates in all Aboriginal identity groups were lower than those for men (Hull 2006). Labour force participation rates correlate with higher education levels (44 percent of

Aboriginal women have some post-secondary education), and Aboriginal women's participation rate exceeds that of non-Aboriginal women at each educational level in part because, in a younger Aboriginal population with fewer financial resources, there is a great need of employment (Hull 2006). In Table 1 we report the occupations of the experienced labour force by gender, Aboriginal identity and area of residence.

The 2000 average income for Aboriginal women was $16,519, compared with $23,065 for non-Aboriginal women; Inuit ($18,700) and Métis women ($18,100) earn the highest incomes and on-reserve registered Indian women the lowest, at $14,000 (Hull 2006).

Identifying contributions to CED is harder given the emphases of the data, though some statistics are suggestive. In response to census questions about unpaid work in the "reference week" (May 6–12, 2001), more than 90 percent of Aboriginal women reported housework duties, 59 percent reported child care and 24 percent reported elder care. On housework, the women closely matched the experience of non-Aboriginal women, but Aboriginal women (59 percent versus 41 percent) were more involved in child care (54 percent spending 30 hours or more per week); Inuit and registered Indian on-reserve women were the most engaged, at 75 percent and 72 percent, respectively (Hull 2006).

Table 1
Occupations of Experienced Labour Force by Gender, Aboriginal Identity and Areas of Residence, Canada 2001 (percent)

Gender and occupation (NOC)	Total Aboriginal	Registered Indian			Métis	Inuit	Other Aboriginal	Non-Aboriginal
		Total	On reserve	Off reserve				
Women (*N*)	212,945	111,730	45,815	65,910	66,555	9,315	25,340	7,806,070
Level A	17.9	18.8	20.0	18.0	16.5	22.2	15.6	24.8
Senior managers	0.9	1.2	1.9	0.8	0.6	1.0	0.5	0.7
Middle managers	4.7	4.2	4.0	4.4	5.3	3.9	5.4	7.0
Professionals	12.3	13.3	14.0	12.8	10.7	17.3	9.7	17.2
Level B	25.2	25.7	27.6	24.4	24.9	24.9	24.3	25.9
Semi-professionals and technicians	10.2	11.0	13.3	9.4	9.1	11.6	9.3	8.5
Supervisors	1.3	1.2	0.7	1.4	1.4	1.2	1.5	1.5
Supervisors: trades	0.6	0.5	0.3	0.6	0.9	0.2	1.0	1.3
Administrative and senior clerical	7.5	7.4	7.7	7.3	7.7	7.6	6.9	9.7
Skilled sales and service	4.4	4.3	4.1	4.4	4.8	3.4	4.4	3.9
Skilled crafts and trades	1.2	1.3	1.4	1.3	1.0	0.9	1.3	1.0
Level C	36.5	34.8	32.4	36.5	39.7	27.2	38.9	36.1
Clerical personnel	13.0	12.7	11.3	13.7	13.6	11.8	13.3	14.6
Intermediate sales and service	18.9	17.7	17.2	18.1	21.4	12.9	19.5	16.3
Semi-skilled manual	4.6	4.4	3.8	4.8	4.7	2.5	6.1	5.1
Level D	20.4	20.7	20.0	21.1	18.9	25.8	21.1	13.1
Other sales and service	17.6	17.6	16.7	18.3	16.3	24.2	18.1	11.1
Other manual	2.8	3.0	3.3	2.8	2.6	1.7	3.0	2.1

Source: Hull (2006), Table 5.5, p. 70.

Where cooperative enterprise is the CED approach of choice for Aboriginal people, the data are compelling, though not disaggregated on gender lines. According to Hammond Ketilson and MacPherson (2001), there are 133 cooperatives in Canada with predominantly Aboriginal membership, the largest number of which are in the Arctic regions. In 2005, in addition to reporting $130 million total revenue for member cooperatives, consolidated net savings increased to $5.4 million and $3.7 million in patronage refunds to member cooperatives, Arctic Co-operatives Limited (representing 33 member cooperatives in Nunavut, Northwest Territories and northern Manitoba) worked proactively with the Government of Nunavut to develop a new Language Act (Arctic Cooperatives Limited/Arctic Co-operative Development Fund 2005, 3-7). In the history of Arctic co-operatives and the development of enterprises sustained for over 45 years, Inuit women have played a key role in formal and informal, paid and unpaid labour (Smith 2004).

The cooperatives also return profits or surpluses to their member-owners, while being major employers of Aboriginal people (18 people on average per cooperative), offering training and education opportunities and honing leadership skills. Indeed, Aboriginal people are more likely to be members of cooperatives than other people in Canada. Interestingly, more than half of the members of the Nunavut legislature have had leadership training in their local cooperatives. In other words, as we discuss further below, cooperatives have made valuable contributions to the physical, social and personal infrastructure of their communities (Hammond Ketilson and MacPherson 2001).

The 1996 census identified over 20,000 North American Indians, Métis and Inuit who now have their own businesses in primary and traditional industries as well as the knowledge economy. Between 1981 and 1996, the Aboriginal business sector grew 2.5 times faster than all business nationwide, with marked growth among Aboriginal youth and women. This growth generated 48,502 new jobs (Industry Canada 1998). According to the 2001 census and the 2002 Aboriginal Entrepreneurs Survey, Aboriginal women represent 37 percent of 27,195 self-employed Aboriginal individuals. Of these 9,930 individuals, almost 60 percent live in urban areas and 88 percent live off reserve. These entrepreneurs, largely college- and university-educated, are more likely to be in partnership and less likely to incorporate; more likely to run businesses that are fewer than five years old and that required less start-up financ-

ing; less likely to have employees; and more inclined to see barriers to growth. Typically, they operate in professional, scientific and technical, education, health and social services rather than in construction (Statistics Canada 2004).

Despite such levels of accomplishment recorded in statistical accounts, Aboriginal women's CED achievements remain largely invisible in the media, or they are seen as exceptional rather than typical of Aboriginal women's innovation. Nor do the statistics explain why Aboriginal women's engagement in the economy takes the forms it does: whether opportunity or necessity is a factor or whether necessity promotes opportunity, for instance. There are problems in both the availability of data and the predisposition to misread the evidence.

Finally, in devolving certain responsibilities to local communities, governments have reinforced perceptions of a reserve of unproductive, underemployed (women's) capacity ready to take over (Waring 1999), while adding to the informal work of Aboriginal women. They become the unrecognized and unrewarded "shock absorbers" mitigating the burdens of change (Elson 2002). If we are ever to reduce barriers to their participation and do justice to the contributions Aboriginal women make in difficult circumstances, we need to change mainstream measures to promote new understandings of Aboriginal women's CED performance in Canada.

Measurement Tools

As indicated earlier, the gross simplifications of aggregate data have tended to misrepresent the Aboriginal "problem" and obscure the capacities and successes of Aboriginal women, men and youth — with profound implications for policy. To counter these reporting trends, we draw on qualitative measures to supplement the statistics with stories that Aboriginal women tell about the barriers and opportunities they face, and the achievements in which they take pride.

When financial accounting measures dominate the data, a range of benefits (less tangible but no less real in people's lives) fail to register in the cost-benefit calculus. In particular, indigenous women (and men) are calling for new development models and new measures of poverty, rejecting United Nations and World Bank versions that focus on poverty as subsistence on

less than a dollar a day and on development as a matter of increasing incomes, while condemning development that alienates indigenous peoples from their lands and resources and data collection that fails to disaggregate indigenous people from the general population (Kyriakou 2005). Similarly, they reject World Bank assumptions about gender equality being a by-product of economic liberalization and growth. They are equally clear that economic globalization aggravates inequalities and that gender inequality outlasts improvements in education and occupation (Molyneux and Razavi 2005). Policy-makers must thus evaluate the range of available qualitative as well as quantitative measures, related to particular women and places, so as to better identify areas and means of change.

Mainstream accounting has been a powerful technology in the history of colonial oppression — as powerful an instrument as any military hardware (Neu and Therrien 2003). If people suspect the seductive rhetorical power of words, they typically respect numbers as objective measures of our realities, our responsibilities to one another, our successes and failures. Relying on such associations, accounting has proved "central in maintaining the imbalance of power between settler society and Indigenous peoples, while allowing bureaucrats to govern from afar" (Neu and Therrien 2003, 31). Such bureaucratic practices have thus had a devastating impact on Aboriginal communities, isolating them geographically and destroying communal and cooperative practices.

Ironically, this empiricist system, which is invested in observation as knowledge — in the value of quantifying, verifying, standardizing and predicting — renders so much invisible. Missing from traditional accounts, for instance, are non-economic costs — those that are "not directly quantifiable in money terms" (Boyce 2000, 27-28). Similarly invisible are the economic contributions of "nonmarket work," which the 1995 United Nations Human Development Report estimates at $16 trillion worldwide, with the official total global output being $23 trillion (Quarter, Mook, and Richmond 2003, 1). Thus, there has been growing recognition in development studies that improved GDP or gross national product (GNP) does not equate with higher quality of life and that development cannot be measured by production and consumption patterns (Cooke, Beavon, and McHardy 2004).

Such restrictive accounting measures actively construct "realities" (Chew and Greer 1997; Collison 2003; Gibson 2000), entrenching the "deficit paradigm" by leaving the public feeling Aboriginal groups are unusually advantaged as well as insufficiently accountable (Gibson 2000). These views persist even though, as Ivanitz (2001) has shown in the Australian context, 95 percent of Aboriginal organizations were cleared for funding, while "roughly half the 490 Australian companies surveyed had experienced significant fraud in the last two years" (15). In Canada, an Assembly of First Nations (2004) report showed that following 557 financial management audits of First Nations for 2002-03, only 3 percent of the organizations required remedial action. Even the Auditor General of Canada, Sheila Fraser, has argued that an undue (overlapping and duplicated) reporting burden on First Nations (and a lack of outcome-based performance measures) means that resources are used that "could be better used to provide direct support to the community" (Office of the Auditor General 2002, chap. 1, 1.3).

Moreover, accounting not only reduces inputs and outputs to those exchanged in the market, it also preserves Western assumptions about human identity and society and especially the individualist assumptions of what counts for success and happiness (Findlay and Russell 2005). The result is that it puts GNP or GDP above systems that others prefer to promote: for instance, new measures of well-being such as the Genuine Progress Indicators developed in 1995 by Redefining Progress (a San Francisco think tank), Alberta's Genuine Progress Indicators (GPI) Sustainability Circle and the Genuine Progress Index Atlantic (Bakshi 2005). Herman Daly and John Cobb's Index of Sustainable Welfare likewise measures costs (of water, air and noise pollution and resource depletion, for instance) as deficits, not benefits (as in the UNSNA), in production and consumption (Waring 2003). As the Maori scholar Graham Smith (2000) has argued, neoclassical economics has been especially threatening to indigenous ways of knowing because it "begins to switch our thinking from the circle to square boxes. It initiates a positivist worldview that is fundamental to the New Right economic thinking that puts emphasis on competition rather than on cooperation, on the individual rather than on the collective, on regulations rather than on responsibility" (211).

In this context, current efforts to expand and refine accounting models and practices can learn from New Zealand experience and incorporate Aboriginal values and views on governance, markets, community development and the land (not as a commodity but as a spiritual connection that supports a respectful, responsible understanding of relations between humans and their environment). Canada can learn from the Maori experience of the impact of the Treaty of Waitangi within the New Zealand public sector and from the resulting

accountability measures, including obligations to "develop policies and procedures that lead towards closing the economic and social gaps between Maori and non-Maori" (Jacobs 2000, 366).[2] Following the New Zealand lead might help Canada and its public policy-makers live up to constitutional obligations; respect Aboriginal norms, expertise and perspectives; and address barriers to economic development (First Nations Fiscal Institutions Initiative 2005).

In this work, such standard-setting bodies as the Canadian Institute of Chartered Accountants can usefully build on the work of the First Nations Financial Management Board (FNB) on financial management and accountability. The FNB is working toward developing financial management standards and administrative capacity within First Nations. It is but one of four institutional innovations — a finance authority, a tax commission and a statistical institute are the others — associated with the *First Nations Fiscal and Statistical Management Act*, which received royal assent on March 23, 2005. The FNB is designed to add credibility and achieve "greater integration of First Nations governments and their organizations into the Canadian fiscal framework" (FNFII 2005).

Women's Community Economic Development: Three Success Stories

So what are the realities facing Aboriginal women engaged in community economic development? What are the effects of current measures? If statistics reinforce women's disadvantage and associate them with deficiency and dependence, qualitative measures, including the particular stories women tell, give a strong sense of women's capacities to identify and address a range of barriers they face:

- Invisibility of women's work
- Gendering and undervaluing of formal and informal labour
- Lack of cultural acceptance of strong women leaders
- Under-resourcing of women's initiatives
- Conflicting demands on women to satisfy a range of community and family needs

When we talk to the women themselves, they speak, write and research in multiple ways, producing "counter-stories" that promote women's contributions while challenging dominant institutions (and their

privileges) and constructing more flexible and sustainable measures of success in the name of justice for all (Smith 1999). Like the indigenous entrepreneurs interviewed by Hindle and Lansdowne (2005), Aboriginal women entrepreneurs tell us of the ways that they resist those who fear their strength and draw on their rich heritage in pursuing innovation and enterprise in the name of community success and not the individual success measures of program requirements (Newhouse and Peters 2003). Reframing public discourses, they tell *Strong Women Stories* (Anderson and Lawrence 2003) and overturn the "deficit paradigm" (Ponting and Voyageur 2005).

For some Aboriginal women, CED success means struggling from one short-term project grant to another, cobbling funding together from different sources with different reporting requirements, and creatively negotiating the terms of government program and funding requirements — across 11 federal departments and agencies delivering 27 different economic development programs targeting Aboriginal people (Standing Senate Committee 2007). It means stretching the terms and categories to make space for their own visions. It means educating those in administrative silos about the value of cultural knowledge and the importance of culture in socio-economic development. As it did for Francine Parent, an 18-year-old Aboriginal woman trained as a community researcher in inner-city Winnipeg, it means learning to see the world differently: "I just thought seeing poverty it was something that was just normal...that it was the parent's fault" (McCracken 2006). It means challenging federal policy that considers Aboriginal economic development funding discretionary and that spends 92 percent on social programming and only 8 percent on economic development. Moreover, this low level of federal investment is delivered through uncoordinated and often duplicated programming. To avoid the enormous costs of a growing underclass of young and disenfranchised Aboriginal people, the Standing Senate Committee recommended working with provincial and territorial governments to establish regional economic development funds, renewing policy frameworks and establishing a central economic development agency (Standing Senate Committee 2007, xi).

In addition to teaching and motivating, reaching and radicalizing, it means building on the work to achieve a just society of groups such as the Aboriginal Women's Action Network, a Vancouver-based grassroots organization (Blaney 2003). For some (especially charitable organizations), it means

facing persistent barriers (despite 2003 clarifications of Canada Revenue Agency rules) to acts of advocacy (Canadian Women's Foundation and Canadian Women's Community Economic Development Council 2004). For yet others it means investing time in relationship building and skills training on a scale that is not matched by the short cycles of government programming or that is disallowed by conditions of welfare support for disadvantaged women.

The case studies here are selected to demonstrate the real challenges and responses to successful CED in Aboriginal communities. Like the examples above, they are exceptional, though also typical of Aboriginal women in their capacities and commitments to community. Whether in rural, remote or urban settings, on or off reserve, the women find opportunities to recreate not individual success but resilient communities through a sustaining "web of institutions" (Newhouse 2003, 252). In these examples, we aim to underline what Aboriginal women share while respecting their many differences. Women play a vital role in each of the cases, as we shall see from the achievements of the Great Bear Co-op in Déline (Northwest Territories), Neechi Foods in Winnipeg and ET Development, a trucking company operating in northern Manitoba.

Great Bear Co-op
Cooperatives began to be formed in northern Canada in the late 1950s as the first locally owned and controlled businesses. Local leaders and missionaries immediately recognized the potential synergy between local values of sharing and goals of ownership, control and employment. Early cooperatives were built on the traditional ways of life of arts and crafts production, fur harvesting and commercial fisheries. Retail stores were added to meet the consumer needs of member-owners, while tourism has meant opportunities in hotel ownership and tour businesses. Facing obstacles of remoteness, high shipping and food costs, and economic leakage to the south, the cooperatives have helped keep the opportunities where their community is, adding services to meet community needs, including construction, cable television, post offices, airline agencies and coffee shops.

As co-ops grew, they needed technical support for the success of their expanded operations, and in the mid-1960s a federation called Canadian Arctic Producers was formed to market art and craft products created by members (Arctic Co-operatives Limited 2006). This was followed in 1972 by the Canadian Arctic Co-operative Federation, which allowed local co-ops to consolidate their buying power and access services such as accounting, audit, education and management support to promote business efficiency. These two federations joined together in 1981 to form Arctic Co-operatives Limited (ACL), whose mission is in part "to develop and safeguard the ownership participation of our member owners in the business and commerce of their country, to assure control over their own destiny" (ACL 2006). To achieve this mission, local employment opportunities are critical, as are partnerships and joint ventures, effective technical support services and clear communications. Lobbying efforts with government and governing organizations focus on culture, customs, the law and environmental and socially responsible behaviour.

The contribution of cooperatives to their communities can be seen in the words of a woman member and former board member of the Great Bear Co-operative Association in Déline, Northwest Territories: "Co-ops are good in Aboriginal communities since they provide benefits when the communities run their own businesses. Co-op values work well together with Aboriginal values but there is a need for more information and education. Schools should teach about co-ops. In a kindergarten class, there was a big lesson plan where all the examples were based on the Northern Store [the retailing division in the North of the North West Company]. 'I can go to the Northern and buy such and such, for example.' The co-op should be substituted for that."[3]

Cooperatives also provide the power to make choices (based on one person, one vote). ACL, one of the largest cooperative federations in Canada, and its 33 northern-based member-owned cooperatives subscribe to values of self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity and solidarity. Honesty, openness, social responsibility and caring for others are the ethics that bind cooperatives together, according to ACL. The cooperatives are significant contributors to the northern economy and contribute importantly to the socio-cultural health of their communities.

The importance of these contributions can be seen in the activities of the Great Bear Co-op. Established in 1963, by 2006 it had 323 members (Déline's total population is 570) and assets of some $2.7 million. Of particular interest here are the perspectives of its women members with diverse and long-standing associations with the co-op. One is a former board member who lives in a community where many follow a traditional Dene lifestyle. She is proud of her community, including the fact that the people can hunt and trap and fish

together. Her elders are important for sustaining culture, and women play a vital role in the community as homemakers and caregivers.

She takes pride in her work with the co-op, which sponsors cultural events and sports teams, trains board and staff members, builds physical infrastructure (including telecommunications) and increasingly engages the youth in ownership of their co-op. Her commitment goes well beyond the annual dividends: "We need to explain to people that the co-op is not just a store. If you put your money where your mouth is and shop there, then you can bring profits and benefits that would be reinvested to create new things...Despite a number of price comparisons, community members perceive the Northern Store as having lower prices. Every annual general meeting, we explain to the members, it's their store, and if they buy, then all will benefit."

Education is one of many challenges facing Great Bear Co-op. This member's perspective is that the whole community leadership should support the co-op's survival by purchasing supplies from the co-op. She is supportive of a proactive board going to speak to individual members and non-members about supporting the co-op. This attitude can permeate many important issues, with some community leaders even describing it as a form of self-government.

Such commitment and the example of the generation that built the co-op inspire another woman member: "My dad passed away a long time ago, and I saw his name on a board of directors on a paper, and I thought, Gee, my dad's name is on there and he worked for the co-op. My dad probably worked so hard to have this place open and continuing to promote the community...I should be following his footsteps and trying to do the same thing for my community. And so I joined the board of directors...and we only shop at the co-op."

ACL member co-ops employ women as staff, as elected board members and as board presidents; they attract women as members and thus consumers and decision-makers. Their contributions are immeasurable and are illustrated by these women members' dedicated approach to their co-op. The personal link to the community is strong and clear, and the co-op benefits are identified over and over for family members and the community. These attitudes conquer challenges and are integral to co-op (and community) survival and strength. In this and other cases described here, we need to ask how the qualitative aspects of these contributions can be included in the success scorecard, and how we can better measure the range of outcomes of co-ops' CED.

Neechi Foods Co-operative Limited

Neechi ("friend" in Cree and Ojibway) Foods, a worker co-op based in the North End of Winnipeg, started in 1989. It built on Aboriginal economic development training in 1985 and subsequent community projects, planning and pilots conducted by volunteer labour in the inner city. Louise Champagne has been involved since the beginning, first as a support person and then as manager and president. She is proud to walk into Neechi Foods and be greeted by Aboriginal staff.[4] From the start, the co-op received help and support from the community. For example, St. Boniface Co-op, true to the principle of cooperation among cooperatives, sold products to Neechi and stored them until Neechi could use them. Many young people have been involved over the years as volunteers and have seen the ethic promoted by Neechi, which balances commercial viability with social responsibility and economic and social well-being. Helping stabilize community by serving residents, reducing income leakages and lessening dependence on external markets, Neechi promotes healthy living, contributes to economic development, nourishes a supportive workplace, encourages member participation and strengthens Aboriginal pride.

In particular, Neechi workers define their CED contributions according to these principles:
• Use of locally produced goods and services
• Production of goods and services for local use
• Local reinvestment of profits
• Long-term employment of local residents
• Local skills development
• Local decision-making
• Public health
• Physical environment
• Neighbourhood stability
• Human dignity
• Support for other CED initiatives

Each is in turn further defined. Public health stretches the categories within which health is typically conceived to include physical and mental health, healthier community residents, more effective schooling and a more productive workforce; while physical environment speaks to a healthy, safe and attractive neighbourhood and ecological sensitivity. Human dignity is understood in these terms:
• Self-respect
• Community spirit
• Gender equality
• Respect for seniors and children
• Social dignity regardless of physical, intellectual

or psychological differences and regardless of national or ethnic background, colour or creed.

In other words, people are at the heart of Neechi. Many come and go as sickness, family responsibilities and personal burdens affect them. A core of workers stay, but Champagne notes that readiness to deal with each person and his or her situation is part of the liberation process from the oppression Aboriginal people have suffered. Peer counselling is key as is consensus decision-making (Tupone 2001). When people enjoy increased self-confidence and go on to other employment, Neechi counts it not as a loss but as a success in its efforts to support its community. One woman started soon after Neechi opened and was so shy that she would do her work and then leave quickly for home. Over the years, she gained self-assurance and was able to act as the operations manager for several years until ill health required her to take a leave of absence.

The challenge of balancing the quality of social relationships with business profitability is delicate but one Neechi regularly engages in as its members work to encourage consensus and people's involvement in the business, dealing inevitably with costly mistakes that may be made. Champagne suspects the oppression of Aboriginal people makes them much harder on one another than on outsiders who have not had the same experience. The oppression is acted out as people work out their built-up distress, and this behaviour causes conflict and undermines projects. Champagne sees part of the answer in an alternative economy that nurtures Aboriginal people as individuals, which means the pain people feel has to be taken on and not ignored. For example, where some businesses might let workers go because of sickness, intrusive family responsibilities or personal burdens, Neechi supports and encourages them to become or continue as fully participating members.

Neechi's wide-ranging impact on the inner-city community includes employment, business ownership opportunities through co-op membership, and stimulus to other small businesses as well as organization of community meetings and neighbourhood activism to combat prostitution, gang activity and poverty. From Neechi's "kids only" fresh fruit basket sold at cost (Rothney 2001) to unique features such as its egalitarian work culture, Champagne is proud of the co-op's nurturing of leadership in the broadest sense: "Every human being is capable of leadership. Big things get in our way and prevent us demonstrating our leadership so we have to know how to help each other. Helping is leadership. Getting healthy is leader-

ship. Groups of people are 'targeted for destruction' by statistics that support expectations that I will, for example, smoke, be diabetic and die young. I take leadership over my health and fight those statistics." Neechi has been recognized with a national award for a program that combines a consciousness-raising campaign against diabetes with a fun education program on the illness (including store signage educating about diabetes and good dietary choices).

While Neechi has not had the resources to conduct a systematic analysis and record of performance along the lines of its 11 principles, it is possible to use the principles to identify indicators of success. This is the kind of evaluation that is and can be most useful for planning, according to Champagne. Neechi Foods regularly uses locally produced goods and services wherever it can, with spinoff benefits to the local producers. Making sure that local people are using Neechi products means that Neechi is developing many linkages that support consumers and producers in a beneficial continuous cycle of activity. The third principle, reinvestment of profit locally, guides Neechi's reinvestments in its own business to continue to support and offer community benefits in the inner city. Employment and training opportunities build confidence and skills: "You build a co-op and it is really about learning to work together. That is what Neechi employees gain," Champagne notes. These impacts benefit the larger community as workers move from Neechi to other employment opportunities. Steady employment opportunities are offered in the community and a number of Neechi employees have chosen to stay on, with impressive years-of-service records.

Indeed, participatory decision-making has been a key to success. As worker co-op members, workers are in control of the quality of their work life and their contributions are respected. Within the co-op form of association, Neechi Foods has successfully operated in a context of social crisis for the past 18 years. "It's a building-community process because people work together," notes Champagne. While the worker members of the co-op make the decisions, they make better decisions that suit the local business. Where another business might decide to close in poor business conditions, these members decided to take a pay cut so they could maintain the employment opportunities offered by Neechi to the overall benefit of the community. Neechi worker members benefit from a long-term communication strategy to educate and involve them in the process of understanding all aspects of Neechi success in a consensus-building environment. And participation on the board is encouraged by, for example, alternating those who read the

minutes at meetings and assessing financial reports in small-group discussions (Tupone 2001).

Public health campaigns have included choosing not to sell cigarettes, in order to combat the youth health problem. The community reacted, since the store was in their community, and many smokers had issues with the initiative. Champagne met with these community members and explained the grounds for the policy, and the community came to support Neechi's efforts − as they have in educating store customers about diabetes and proper eating.

When many businesses moved to the suburbs and abandoned the inner city, Neechi Foods offered a cost-conscious alternative to the choices that were left. Contributing to neighbourhood stability, Neechi provided options for better quality food at reasonable prices. Indeed, Neechi has become an institution for inner-city residents who cannot afford high-priced food. Neechi buys blueberries from regional CED-based businesses on reserves and wild rice from Kagiwiosa Manomin, an Ojibway cooperative in northwestern Ontario, thus supporting other CED and cooperative enterprise (UNPAC 2006).

Financial health is critical to Neechi Foods' future, but each of the other elements discussed above also constitutes a form of success, according to Neechi members. When a retired human resources person from Canadian Executive Service Organization interviewed each employee and developed job descriptions, her major comment was how jovial and happy each employee was. With all her years in the field, this stood out for her as impressive, and that uniqueness flows from the work environment.

The impact of Neechi CED principles on other organizations − for example, Assiniboine Credit Union, Supporting Employment and Economic Development (SEED), the general Manitoba CED community and the government CED secretariat − has been significant (Sheldrick 2005). Indeed, some organizations have adopted the Neechi framework to assess their own initiatives. Similarly, others have been inspired to create their own enterprises consistent with Neechi values: a security company, a catering business and a business that makes and sells star blankets (Loxley and Wien 2003). The principles were even adopted by the Manitoba government in its 2006 budget (Manitoba 2006).

Despite all its difficulties in securing financial support and especially in meeting the criteria for grants (Tupone 2001), Neechi remains an excellent example of how community in all its facets is at the heart of a for-profit co-op. It has remained true to its principles even when it meant turning down government money for a pilot project because it excluded Aboriginal economic development officers who had helped formulate the Neechi philosophy in favour of arm's-length consultants producing feasibility studies (Rothney 2001). While women on the board and staff are integral to the success of the co-op, community support has allowed Neechi Foods to survive while practising employee empowerment and consensus building and fostering in turn a healthy, resilient community in the workplace and in the inner city.

ET Development

Pat Turner and her family have operated ET Development, a family-owned trucking company, in Grand Rapids and northern Manitoba for 23 years.[5] The Turner family has diversified the company, and now ET Development also does road building, small salvage operations and community infrastructure construction. Pat Turner's business is 97 percent staffed by Aboriginal people (Wuttunee, Loustel, and Overall 2007). She makes every effort to hire people in the community first, but because of the very specific skills in heavy equipment that are required as a core-certified company in the construction industry, she regularly hires from the larger community in her area. This helps build a strong positive relationship and opens the door to the type of employees she needs to be successful. She encourages training since young people are the future for the business and its continuing activity. Policies accommodate the needs of her staff in ways that are not common in mainstream business. For example, time off for a funeral of a cousin might not be possible in some businesses, but Turner's company acknowledges intertwined and extensive family relationships and the need for flexibility in this company policy.

Turner is also willing to make room for people who are not typically employable. She has hired several workers who had not held steady jobs. One employee was given a challenge when he said to Turner that she should hire him even though he had been drinking; she told him to come back when he was in better shape. One year later he did, and he has worked for three years without missing a day. He has gained new skills, and his eagerness to work is obvious.

Turner balances her sensitivity to her employees with a no-nonsense attitude about the level of attention to quality service she expects from her staff. Another example of her visionary practice is the training of

community people to service a piece of equipment that the community has purchased or that is left after a job is completed. She makes sure that at least two people from that community understand how to operate the equipment before ET Development leaves the community. This is good business sense but uncommon practice within the industry. Too often, communities are left feeling powerless and abandoned by corporate interests that have moved on to other territory. Turner notes: "I feel that it is very important that communities start relying on and depending on themselves."[6]

Turner measures her own success by how well her employees do on the job.[7] The impression they leave in the communities that they work in must be positive. She pursues success by making surprise visits to her employees while they are completing projects. It has not been an easy road. Turner recalls that when she started the business, the other company presidents were cautious with her; it was as if they expected her to say that they owed ET a living. This never happened and Turner worked very hard to build the company. Such care with relationships and reputation has paid off. Now these same company presidents treat Turner as an equal, as ET completes contracts on budget and on time. They let her know when contracts are coming up or they offer to share a plane.[8]

It is also important that clients return to use company services regularly. This is a key indicator that ET is getting the job done properly. Manitoba Heavy Construction Industry sends auditors twice a year to review the practices of ET Trucking (part of ET Development) and ensure that the company meets certification requirements. This attention to standards ensures accountability and credibility are maintained.

Financial statements reflect one aspect of the success of her private company and are shared only with Turner's business partners, her husband and son, her lawyer, her accountant and ET's bonding company. Success goes beyond financial measures. The impact of her company in the local community and in the broader community includes employment, modelling entrepreneurial behaviour for the young people and making opportunities available to unemployable people — all of which are important qualitative indicators of success consistent with a number of Neechi's CED principles. Such success is nourished by regular — and highly personal — conversations with chief and council as with mayor and council about business impacts. Pride in having jobs and in the community builds significantly as people feel good about the economic activity and its broad impacts.

Turner takes another important role in the community when she encourages people to take ownership of the new buildings in their community. These buildings are theirs but they need to feel it and tell their children and grandchildren to respect the buildings, because that is their grandparents' legacy to them. Turner makes this effort because often leaders do not take positive action on matters of importance in the community. The company is taking a stand on environmental protection by having a waste oil management program that is a voluntary effort but one that will benefit the people of Grand Rapids and their grandchildren — and beyond.

Turner shares the ET Development success story in a number of ways. A co-sponsored two-day career fair for children was one valuable means of telling the company's story and creating new opportunities for employment. ET invited a number of local organizations and businesses, and several participated from the region. Turner had a booth and spoke about her business to the young people and warned about employment and economic leakage: "I told them that jobs were being held by people outside the community so the money left too. ET Trucking paid $400,000 in salaries, of which only $100,000 to $150,000 stayed in the community. They needed to get the training so that more money will stay in the community." Building positive attitudes in young people is a challenge and so Turner took the common label "youth at risk," translated it into much more positive terms as "youth with potential" and put it on T-shirts to remind the young people that they are winners. Such acts of recognition are themselves low-cost yet hugely motivating.

When the Aboriginal Chamber of Commerce was started in Winnipeg on December 10, 2004, Pat Turner became its first president: "I think we need an Aboriginal Chamber of Commerce as I feel the Canadian public at large does not realize that there are many Aboriginal businesses and entrepreneurs in Manitoba and across Canada. I think that it is time for people like myself to step forward and say I am Aboriginal, I am an entrepreneur, and I am proud of it."

Such visibility is important to Turner: "It is important for our future to know that Aboriginal people have succeeded in the mainstream business world. Canadians need to be educated about how much we have contributed to the economies of our provinces and it is up to us to educate them. I hate being brushed with the same brushstroke every time they call down our people and say that we are nothing but a hindrance on their taxes. We pay as much tax as any Canadian does. We are taking care of our own, but we have to educate

taxpayers and the public. We are proud to be Aboriginal." Her message to new businesspeople is to be honest, be accountable to yourself and reinvest money in order to ensure ongoing business success.

When considering the role of community leaders in supporting business, Turner firmly believes they can only do so much. She says that it is time for business leaders to take up challenges in ways they have never done before. Otherwise, there will be many missed opportunities for new business.

ET Development has made a positive impact in northern Manitoba despite early challenges in the construction industry. Success is judged by the impact its employees leave in communities striving for independence. They are judged on their record and on their principles, including honesty. Giving to the community is important, and Turner is supporting Aboriginal business success through her work with the Aboriginal Chamber of Commerce. Government's role is to support successful businesses and acknowledge when grant recipients actually provide returns equal to or greater than the original grant. The business community and policy-makers have to rise to the challenge of achieving self-sufficiency.

Lessons learned

In summary, these case studies demonstrate that like the Mi'kmaq woman Gertie Mai Muise (2003), Aboriginal women put faith not in government but in themselves and their communities: "Nothing will change the condition of our lives until we educate ourselves, change our attitudes and continue to heal ourselves" (30). But they could do so much more with the right kind of help, the right policy environment, the right value system that accords with rather than offending their own holistic values. The women acknowledge and live the values of their culture as the basis for and measures of their enterprise successes.

Those values, articulated in numerous ways, include "caring, kindness, hope, harmony and cooperation...Caring and sharing are shown to one another with an ethic of generosity, collective/communal consciousness and cooperation, while recognizing the interdependence and interrelatedness of life. Recognizing the valuable gifts of the individual, the community and all nations leads to harmony and cooperation. Honoring the individual and the collective by thinking for yourself and acting for others. Courage and bravery is demonstrated in facing challenges with honesty and integrity...The goal is to protect the quality of life and inherent autonomy of

oneself and others. Life may then be lived in an atmosphere of security, peace, dignity and freedom" (Wuttunee, Loustel and Overall 2007, 22). These values are qualitative, culturally integrated measures of success that are at the heart of their enterprises. The Standing Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples (2007) similarly acknowledges that Aboriginal economic successes, "driven almost entirely by the people and communities themselves," are "for the most part hidden from the broader public domain," adding that such successes need to be better known because they are "a benefit to the overall Canadian economy" (4).

Articulating and acting on their values are, as these cases show, the beginning of reclaiming "authority and rightful place in the community" and achieving "a sense of belonging" that some had "long forgotten" (Muise 2003, 35). Like Inuit communities building their cooperatives, these enterprises bear witness to Aboriginal people's transformation from unheralded victims to agents of community development: "The Co-operatives...were great places where Inuit could express their aspirations, their profound wishes for their communities and their region...There was a very definite seed that was planted in the first Co-op meetings where people started talking about doing things for themselves, running the show, expressing self-determination...People were becoming aware of their identity, and their rights as a collective" (Hammond Ketilson and MacPherson 2001, 219).

Like the urban Aboriginal women with the vision to be involved in the birth of the Aboriginal Healing Movement despite "terrible experiences," the women whose stories we have related meet the challenge with their creativity; through activities such as beading and quilting, bake sales and volunteering, those urban women have helped create Friendship Centres, places where their families could belong. What began with "tea and talk" developed into the "sophisticated counseling and referral agencies" we know today (Maracle 2003, 72).

These cases also provide important evidence of the cultural dimension of both CED success and quality-of-life indicators. These women succeeded not because they abandoned traditional cultural values for economic progress but because they used their values to define economic participation and prosperity in their terms. New Zealand, a world leader in well-being reporting, has been working to incorporate Maori diversity into its measures of quality of life, to recognize that well-being has different meanings within and across its diverse populations. Similarly, the Canadian Index of Wellbeing is attempting to develop

a more thoroughly representative measure by recording what well-being means to Aboriginal people and building on work by Mark Anielski for Nunavut (Landon 2005). This work can profit from the women's examples and their enterprising commitment to cultural continuity and equity, while refusing mainstream economic development's entrenching of inequity. The women's stories make clear that culture is a prerequisite to economic and other success.

Similarly, the cases highlight the ways in which Aboriginal women's CED is not only an alternative model of development but also what Sheldrick (2005) calls "an alternative model of state-community relations" (7), one that underlines the productivity of local democratic decision-making and partnerships in building healthy communities and sustainable economies. While policy emphasizes education, training and income support for individuals to compensate for labour market failures, the women's examples show the potential for new state-community relationships that are less about enabling people to adjust to the market and more about empowering them to participate as full citizens.

Likewise, policy-making typically depends on social science expertise and methodologies applied to "problems," reducing people to objects of policy discussion rather than enabling them as active participants. Neechi's principles and commitment to active participation have not only inspired other enterprises but also shaped the policy tools of the Community and Economic Development Committee of Manitoba's cabinet. However, traditional policy frames have proven hard to dislodge (with some notable exceptions, including those of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs), and practices have often continued to emphasize traditional economic development while claiming benefits for local communities (Sheldrick 2005).

Conclusion

Mainstream fields of inquiry and action are being challenged from many fronts, exposing the historical privileges of First World capital and economic individualism. Although conventional measurement frameworks have undermined indigenous peoples and communities, the Aboriginal renaissance (the political, cultural, legal and economic resurgence of Aboriginal peoples since the 1960s) and growing Aboriginal participation in the economy

(increasingly on Aboriginal people's own terms) are changing the ways to do business and measure success. New tools better attuned to indigenous and local knowledge are assisting those involved in Aboriginal community economic development to adopt alternative economic strategies – such as cooperative approaches – and make clearer "what counts" (Quarter, Mook, and Richmond 2003) in a fuller range of social, environmental, cultural and economic costs and benefits.

New forms of social accounting and social auditing, including triple bottom-line (Elkington 1998), quadruple bottom-line (External Advisory Committee 2006) and even multiple bottom-line approaches (Canadian Women's Foundation and Canadian Women's Community Economic Development Council 2004), offer another set of tools to measure performance. These tools allow community development "change agents" a way to value and bring into the equation "externalities" that would otherwise be left unaccounted for – including the environmental, social and cultural costs and benefits of doing business in Aboriginal communities.

New measures need to recognize Aboriginal rights and relevant laws and build on the Maori successes in making treaty obligations auditable (Jacobs 2000). They need to account for the value of women's enhanced roles in cultural and political revitalization; in resistance and radicalization; in healing and health, as well as economic development; in the traditional, treaty and social economy; and in land claims agreements, self-government and self-determination. Indigenous knowledge can expand the accounting discourse, so that Aboriginal enterprises and decision-makers can "see" opportunities and value hidden from sight when viewed from a mainstream perspective.

Aboriginal measures rightly value relationships and local and experiential knowledge, and work to reconnect what has been disconnected or fragmented by colonial thinking. In developing indicators that will better serve policy-makers and communities making CED choices, we have worked to unpack and displace outmoded conceptual boxes by entering the circle of respect for Aboriginal ways of knowing and doing, for the visions and values that count in the lives of communities. That means learning from and promoting the work of the First Nations Development Institute, the First Nations Statistical Institute, Alberta's GPI Sustainability Circle, and Genuine Progress Index Atlantic, among others.

Through our work in and with Aboriginal communities and institutions, it is clear that many of the valuable human resource practices, features of

organizational culture, Aboriginal traditions and relationships with their broader communities need to be brought to the heart of the measurement toolbox to support and not subvert their vision. It nevertheless needs to be recognized that refining and using those tools effectively will, in the short term, add to the burdens faced by Aboriginal women who juggle responsibilities inside and outside their CED enterprises — unless they are adequately resourced to evaluate and document performance by these measures.

As Yalnizyan (2006) has argued, women have agitated, increased their education and workforce participation, created businesses, worked longer hours and entered non-traditional professions; yet many of them still live insecure lives, earn less and receive fewer rewards than men. In this context, reframing policy that will make a difference in Aboriginal women's CED means recognizing the responsibilities of mainstream Canada and economic globalization for disadvantaging and impoverishing Aboriginal communities. Expanding policy-making capacities means the following:

- Using a gender lens
- Respecting and internalizing in policy and programs Aboriginal world views in all their diversity and engaging Aboriginal people in decision-making
- Recognizing and supporting CED organizations as key players in employment and economic development
- Learning from Maori successes in making treaty obligations auditable and thus increasing the visibility of Aboriginal actions and perspectives
- Exposing the overinvestment in outside expertise and the underinvestment in the valuable resources of Aboriginal women's knowledge and CED practice
- Supplementing quantitative measures with qualitative measures of success that put community values at the heart of things
- Recognizing that improving Aboriginal quality of life will require political commitment (Salée 2006)

Attending to what quality of life means for Aboriginal women is integral to rebuilding relationships, to following their leadership and learning about the needs they regard as fundamental to sustainable, healthy communities. Drawing on the lessons learned from Aboriginal women supporting CED innovation across the country, we recommend that policy-makers address the following to enable further capacity building, recognize barriers specific to women's experience (including access to financing) and help share their stories in order to promote further successes:

- Coordinate Aboriginal economic development programming; streamline application and reporting procedures
- Ensure legislative and regulatory requirements are sensitive to the broad range of CED outcomes
- Ensure long-term core funding rather than short-term project support
- Support network building and infrastructure sharing beyond silos such as urban-rural, cultural-economic
- Amend employment insurance and welfare policies that bar training or asset building and impede the transition to independence
- Remove legal barriers to charitable organizations engaging in advocacy
- Support accessible, affordable child care and elder care

By promoting these changes and dismantling colonial structures that distort or devalue our legitimate differences and reproduce disadvantage, we can all gain from a truly knowledgeable economy. We — and the Seventh Generation — cannot afford the economic, social, cultural, environmental and other consequences of the status quo. We cannot afford to perpetuate myths that damage us all while continuing to indigenize and feminize the face of poverty. We cannot afford to favour positivist, universalist and individual measures that leave policy and other paradigms unchanged.

We can all benefit from new tools to expand capacities to evaluate effectively, from new standards of evidence and new ways of reading the evidence. We can all benefit from learning from and leveraging the formidable investments of Aboriginal women's labour and leadership. We can all benefit from Aboriginal ways of being, knowing and doing and becoming as self-sufficient as Aboriginal communities once were. By renewing relationships, understanding our interdependence and working together to reframe issues, we can reconstruct a truly just society, a Canada in which the capacities and contributions of all citizens count.

Notes

1   In his excellent analysis of the issues, Salée makes clear that concepts of quality of life (and what they are made to legitimate) remain problematic. Just as claims about "common sense" and what is or is not "natural" have been shown to conceal narrow and competing interests, so the contested definitions of quality of life (and the subtle and not so subtle exercises of exclusionary practices) reveal the political and ideological interests that have an impact on public debate, political will and policy intervention. Definitions and debate reflect and reinforce the state's capacity and willingness to provide for all its citizens. Disinterestedness in this domain is too often a fiction damaging to those who lack the resources to counter the claims of the powerful.

2   Reviews of service delivery to Maori and the review by the Office of the Auditor General helped emphasize departmental (though not parliamentary) obligations to Maori in health, education, employment and resource development, while enhancing the visibility of Maori perspectives, challenging existing departmental cultures and focusing on process rather than on quantifying outcomes (Jacobs 2000).

3   Permission to quote this member as well as the other woman member was given so long as anonymity was protected. Interviews were conducted from 2004 to 2006 by Isobel Findlay and Wanda Wuttunee in the context of research on Co-operative Membership and Globalization: Creating Social Cohesion through Market Relations, a project supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council and hosted at the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives, University of Saskatchewan (Professor Brett Fairbairn, principal investigator). Special thanks to members, board members and staff who participated in interviews.

4   Unless otherwise noted, quotations and summaries of Louise Champagne's comments come from an interview for this project and from research interviews conducted from 2004 to 2006 by Dr. Wanda Wuttunee in the context of research on Co-operative Membership and Globalization: Creating Social Cohesion through Market Relations, a project supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council and hosted at the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives, University of Saskatchewan (Professor Brett Fairbairn, principal investigator).

5   Quotations and summaries of Pat Turner's comments come from interviews conducted by Wanda Wuttunee in 2007.

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Aboriginal Women's Community Economic Development
Measuring and Promoting Success
Isobel M. Findlay and Wanda Wuttunee

D ans un contexte où les disparités continuent de s'aggraver dix ans après la Conférence mondiale sur les femmes tenue à Beijing et cinq ans après l'adoption par l'ONU des Objectifs du Millénaire pour le développement, cette étude de recherche se penche sur les succès méconnus remportés par les femmes autochtones grâce à l'énorme esprit d'innovation et d'entreprise dont elles font preuve dans le cadre du développement économique communautaire (DEC) au Canada. L'accentuation des inégalités entre les sexes engendrée par la mondialisation, si elle accroît les fardeaux spécifiques auxquels les femmes autochtones doivent faire face, a en même temps stimulé leur esprit d'initiative. Bien qu'on continue d'attacher trop d'importance aux faiblesses et à la dépendance plutôt qu'à la vigueur, à l'autonomie et à la viabilité, le leadership manifesté par les femmes continue d'améliorer la qualité de vie des communautés autochtones à travers le Canada.

L'étude vise à combler une lacune dans les recherches sur la qualité de vie et le DEC des Autochtones en attirant l'attention sur des exemples concrets de la réussite des efforts de DEC de femmes autochtones dans des milieux urbain, rural et éloigné, et en remettant en question les indicateurs quantitatifs employés à l'heure actuelle, qui souvent ne tiennent pas compte du travail des femmes autochtones. Ces exemples concrets du leadership exercé par les femmes autochtones démontrent que les valeurs propres à leur culture sont à la fois le fondement et le résultat mesurable du succès de leurs efforts d'entrepreneurship. En s'inspirant de ces valeurs, les dirigeantes d'entreprise et leurs employés assument la place qui leur revient au sein de la communauté, laquelle se trouve du même coup renforcée par leur apport. Par ailleurs, ces exemples montrent également que le potentiel que recèle l'esprit d'entreprise des femmes ne pourra se réaliser pleinement que lorsqu'on aura reformulé le processus décisionnel relatif aux politiques et aux programmes (et les données qui alimentent ce processus) dans le but de reconnaître le travail, le leadership et la créativité des femmes autochtones, d'en tirer des enseignements utiles et de faire fructifier leurs investissements considérables, de respecter les valeurs culturelles qui sont au cœur de leurs entreprises et de comprendre l'importance du bien-être collectif plutôt que du seul bien-être individuel.

Faisant valoir la nécessité de recourir à des indicateurs susceptibles de mieux servir les responsables politiques et les communautés qui doivent choisir une stratégie de DEC, et de tirer des innovations les plus fructueuses les leçons qui s'imposent, l'étude dit qu'il faut :

- déconstruire et rejeter les cadres conceptuels dépassés et les postulats implicites qui passent pour des manifestations de bon sens (avec tout ce que ce terme peut dissimuler) ;
- respecter les perceptions des Autochtones relatives à la réalité ainsi que leur approche de l'apprentissage et leur façon de faire les choses ;
- adjoindre aux indicateurs quantitatifs des indices qui évaluent le succès en donnant la priorité aux valeurs communautaires ;
- employer une lentille sexospécifique tout en refusant d'établir des oppositions entre excellence et équité, et entre valeurs économiques et valeurs humaines, sociales, politiques, culturelles, écologiques et autres valeurs communautaires ;
- montrer en quoi la société canadienne au sens large et la mondialisation de l'économie contribuent au défavorisement et à l'appauvrissement des communautés autochtones et continuent de dépendre massivement du manque de ressources consacrées aux compétences des femmes autochtones ;
- tirer des enseignements des succès remportés en Nouvelle-Zélande par les Maoris, qui ont obtenu que soient vérifiées les obligations souscrites en vertu des traités, ce qui a accru la visibilité des actions et des perspectives maories ;
- dénoncer l'insuffisance des investissements dans les ressources précieuses que représentent les connaissances et l'expérience en DEC des femmes autochtones ;
- conseiller les décideurs au sujet des pratiques coûteuses, des généralisations et simplifications dommageables et de la nécessité d'accroître les capacités en élaboration des politiques.

En encourageant l'adoption de tels changements, en rejetant les postulats paternalistes et en démantelant les structures coloniales qui déforment ou dévaluent nos différences légitimes et perpétuent les privations, nous pouvons tous tirer profit d'une économie véritablement basée sur le savoir. Nous pouvons tous bénéficier de nouveaux outils qui peuvent accroître l'aptitude à évaluer de manière efficace les nouvelles normes relatives aux données et les nouvelles façons d'interpréter ces données. De plus, nous pouvons tous bénéficier des leçons qu'offrent les investissements considérables en DEC que représentent le travail et le leadership des femmes autochtones et faire fructifier ces investissements. Nous pouvons tous bénéficier des façons autochtones d'être, d'apprendre et de faire qui ont soutenu les communautés pendant des générations. En renouvelant les relations, en comprenant les liens d'interdépendance qui nous unissent et en travaillant ensemble pour réexaminer les problèmes, nous pouvons reconstruire un Canada dans lequel les capacités et les contributions de tous les citoyens comptent.

Summary

In the face of aggravated inequality ten years after the Beijing World Conference on Women and five years after the UN Millennium Development Goals were set, this research study focuses on the hidden success stories involving the enormous and growing innovation and enterprise of Aboriginal women's community economic development (CED) in Canada. The gendering of inequality under globalization both adds to the special burdens on Aboriginal women and activates their resourcefulness. Although too much attention is still paid to deficiency and dependence rather than strength, self-reliance and sustainability, women's leadership continues to improve the quality of life of Aboriginal communities across Canada.

This study aims to fill a gap in the literature on Aboriginal quality of life and Aboriginal CED by showcasing case studies of successful Aboriginal women's CED in urban, rural and remote settings and questioning current measuring tools that often leave Aboriginal women's work out of the accounting. These concrete examples of the leadership of Aboriginal women show that the values of their culture are both the foundation for and the measures of their enterprise success. Acting on their values, the women leaders and their employees assume their rightful place in the community, which, in turn, is strengthened as a result of their contribution. At the same time, these cases demonstrate that the full potential of women's enterprise will be realized only if policy and program decision-making (and the evidence that shapes it) can be redesigned to recognize, learn from and leverage the formidable investments of Aboriginal women's labour, leadership and creativity; to respect the cultural values at the heart of their enterprises; and to understand the importance of collective rather than solely individual well-being.

In arguing for indicators that will better serve policy-makers and communities making CED choices and for learning from successful innovations, the report focuses on the need for

- unpacking and displacing outmoded conceptual boxes and unspoken assumptions that enjoy the status (and practise the concealments) of common sense
- entering the circle of respect for Aboriginal understandings about the nature of reality and for Aboriginal ways of knowing and doing things
- supplementing quantitative measures of success with qualitative ones that put community values at the heart of things
- using a gender lens, while refusing to uncouple excellence from equity and the economic from human, social, political, cultural, ecological and other community values
- demonstrating the responsibilities of mainstream Canada (and economic globalization) for disadvantaging and impoverishing Aboriginal communities while massively depending on and yet under resourcing the skills of Aboriginal women
- learning from the successes of the New Zealand Maori in making treaty obligations auditable and thus increasing the visibility of Maori actions and perspectives
- exposing the underinvestment in the valuable resources of Aboriginal women's knowledge and CED practice
- educating policy-makers about wasteful practices, damaging generalizations and simplifications, and about the need to expand policy-making capacities

In promoting changes such as these, discarding paternalistic presumptions and dismantling colonial structures that distort or devalue our legitimate differences and reproduce disadvantage, we can all gain from a truly knowledgeable economy. We can all benefit from new tools to expand capacities to evaluate effectively, new standards of evidence and new ways of reading the evidence. Moreover, we can all gain from learning from and leveraging the formidable investments of Aboriginal women's labour and leadership in CED. We can all learn from Aboriginal ways of being, knowing and doing that have sustained communities for generations. Renewing relationships, understanding our interdependence and working together to reframe issues, we can reconstruct a Canada in which the capacities and contributions of all citizens count.